ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT, HÖFÐAGERÐI, NÚPAR 2002

Framvinduskýrsla/Interim Report

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With Contributions by

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SUMMARY

The archaeological investigations at Höfðagerði are part of an integrated approach to the study of archaeological remains in the Mývatn environs. A comprehensive survey of the archaeology using intrusive and non-intrusive techniques were used to assess the potential for future and further investigations at the site.

Preliminary survey of the area by field walking, both for field survey and topographic survey, identified a number of well preserved and visible structures and features including a possible long house, byre, and other numerous semi-circular structures; furthermore the survey identified several phases of linear features, perhaps field boundaries. Further survey using geophysical prospection identified possible anomalies that could be interpreted as archaeological in nature.

Building on the non-intrusive surveys within the site, it was decided to trial trench in two areas, through two structures, as well as a partially open section across what had been interpreted as the homefield boundary. An opportunity to assess the character, nature and chronological sequence through tephra dating of the archaeological remains was made.

The results indicated that the two structures had gone out use before the V-1477 tephra fell and that prior to this, a period of collapse had taken place in both structures. One of the structures was constructed after 1300, as the H-1300 tephra was found within the turf wall and another was found to have been abandoned before 1300, with the collaspe episodes sealed by H-1300. The homefield boundary also potentially dated to before V-1477 and the 1300 tephra was also within the rebuild of the turf. A possible farm mound was partially observed during the excavation of a test pit.

1. INTRODUCTION

The archaeological investigations at Höfðagerði, in the vicinity of Núpar farm, and east and south of the lower Laxá river, took place during the 5 weeks excavation season in the Mývatn environs for the Landscape of Settlements (LML) project 2002.

During the perod between July 23rd and August 8th 2002 a few trial trenches were opened at the site of Höfðagerði at Núpar. The objective was to establish the age and function of some of the structures there. The site is located on the eastern slope of Ytri-Höfði, which is one of two hills situated on the eastern bank of river Laxá, some 800 m SW of Núpar farm. Despite dense vegetation cover consisting mainly of dwarf birch and willow, the archaeology there is clearly visible on the surface, as soil formtion appears to have been very slow. There are at least 12 subrectangular structures that can be detected in the landscape, as well as 3-4 enclosure walls. In addition, there is a small rise some 75 m N of the Laxá riverbank, which probably constsitutes an ancient farm mound (see Figure 6).

The archaeological investigations formed a part of an integrated study of the archaeological remains in order to assess their character and nature. This entailed a number of archaeologists and specialists within the fields of archaeology and geography grouped under the organisations of Fornleifastofnun Íslands, CUNY Northern Science & Education Center, North Atlantic Biocultural Organization, NERC and Department of Archaeological Sciences, University of Bradford.

The investigations were directed by Adolf Friðriksson, Fornleifastofnun Íslands.

AIMS AND METHODS

The aims of the archaeological investigations were primarily to assess the character and nature of the archaeological remains at Höfðagerði, in order to establish whether there was potential for further archaeological investigations at the site. During the course of the

assessment, specific aims about the character of the archaeological remains were to take place. These involved a comprehensive arcaheological survey program using both intrusive and non-intrusive methods.

The first stage was to assess the historic background of the site in relation to the nearby farm at Núpar and the wider environs. ‘

Following the svæðisskráning (regional, documentary survey) an intensive field assessment of the features, aðalskráning (field survey), highlighted during svæðisskráning was undertaken.

From the identification of several visible and substantially preserved remains, further assessment of the extent of the site was carried out. This was achieved by conducting a GPS survey of the site, as an interpretative feature plan, with selected more intensive survey of the best preserved features.

From establishing the extent, visible character and nature of the archaeological remains, further non-instrusive prospection was caried out. A geophysical survey was conducted across a selected area of the site in order to ascertain evidence for below ground anomalies, that may be interpreted as part of the archaeological features.

Following the survey of the site using non-intrusive methods, a trial trenching and test pitting investigation was carried out . This was to be used to establish relative chronologies within the site to each of the features investigated, and to compare depositional events. It was also carried out so as to understand the context of the site in relation to the wider Mývatn environs and the tephra chronology sequences currently being researched through the Landscape of Settlements project. Excavation was carried out by Birna Lárusdóttir, Elín Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir, directed by Adolf Friðriksson. Additional coring and test pitting was carried out by Tom McGovern and his team.

The trial trenching and test pitting involved small scale excavation through two structures, as well as further evaluation outside these structures and in other features, to determine the presence of midden-like material as signs of continued activity on the site.

The excavation was carried out using the single context planning and recording system primarily used by MOLAS and in England, but adapted for Icelandic archaeology (Spencer 1994 *Archaeological Site Manual, Museum of London 3rd ed*; Lucas 2003 *FSÍ Archaeological Field Manual 3rd* ed; http//www.instarch.is/utgafa.htm). Contexts formed the main unit of recording and were excavated stratigraphically, in sequence, within the excavation areas. Each find, environmental sample and record related to the unit that it was found within/taken from/being described. Trenching was hand-dug.

Coring was carried out using a 2m auger, with a 0.05m diameter core. The locations were determined by the proximity of the features and in relation to potentially the best preserved sequences of depositional events. Subsequent test pitting was carried out, and all contexts were sieved.

2. FIELDWORK RESULTS

AÐALSKRÁNING (FIELD SURVEY)

Birna Lárusdóttir and Elín Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir, FSÍ

Extract from Birna Lárusdóttir & Elín Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir 2002 LML: Fornleifaskráning, FSÍ unpublished report

Núpar eru yst í Aðaldal, austan við Laxá en vestan við Hvammsheiði. Ennþá er búið á bænum og nokkur uppbygging í tengslum við ferðamennsku er norðvestast í landi jarðarinnar. Bærinn var um aldir í þjóðleið og var ferja á Laxá við bæinn.

Merkustu leifarnar í landi Núpa eru þó án efa leifar þriggja býla frá fyrri öldum sem enn eru greinilegar og að miklu leyti óraskaðar. Eru þetta leifar Höfðagerðis, Maríugerðis og Litlu-Núpa. Öll býlin gætu án efa orðið spennandi viðfangsefni frekari rannsókna.

Höfðagerðis er getið í Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns frá 1712 en þá er býlið löngu komið í eyði og þeir félagar segja það ekki aftur byggilegt sökum heyskaparleysis. Í Höfðagerði eru a.m.k 13 tóftir og miklir vallargarðar.

TOPOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Oscar Aldred & Garðar Guðmundsson, FSÍ

A topographic survey was carried out at Höfðgagerði in preparation for archaeological investigations. A number of visible features could be seen on the surface, including several possible structures, a curvilinear boundary, several other boundaries, and a slightly raised mound. No site plan or interpretative plan of archaeological features exists. The site covers an area of approximately 170,000m^2, within a perimeter of 1.7 km.

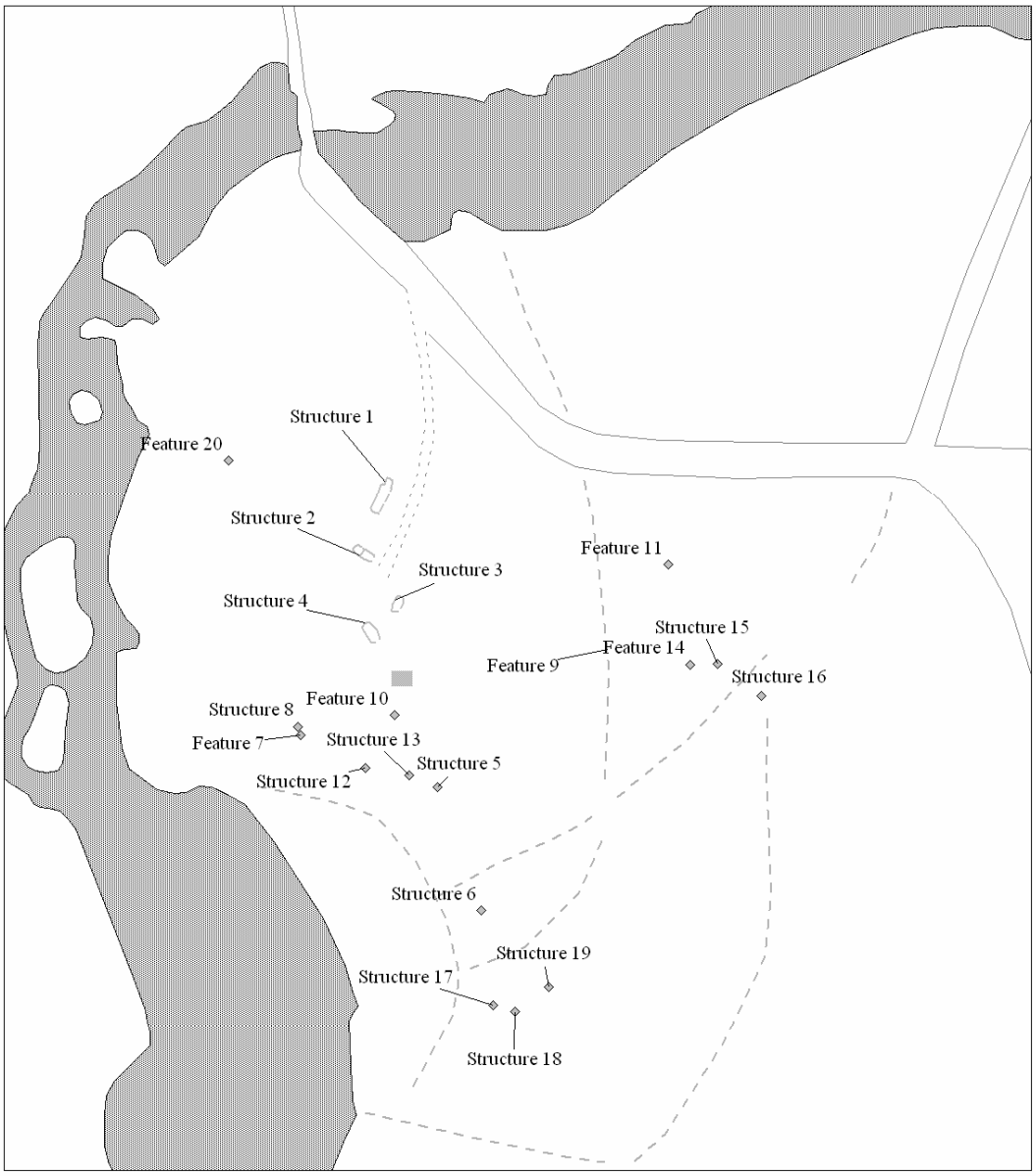
Structure 1
Feature 20
Structure 2
Feature 11
Structure 3
Structure 4
Structure 15
Feature 14
Feature 9
Structure 16
Structure 8
Feature 10
Feature 7
Structure 13
Structure 5
Structure 12
Structure 6
Structure 19
Structure 17
Structure 18
Archaeology
Feature
Structure outline
Possible structure outline
(Curvi-) linear feature
Topographic features
Road
Track
Modern structure/summer house
Island
River
N
0
100
meters

Figure 1. Topographic plan of the major archaeolgical features; addtional features and areas are preserved in the archive (after Guðmundsson)

Objectives

1. To obtain an accurate interpretative plan of the visible archaeological features
2. To establish the character and extent of the visible archaeological features
3. To identify areas for targeted survey in the following seasons.

Methodology

The survey was carried out using 2 Trimble 4600LS GPS units to track GPS satellites on the L1 frequency. A TDC1 Survey Controller was used. A Base Station Receiver was set up over a free station point (i.e. not known) and was initialised with the Rover. The poisiton of the Base Station Receiver was calibrated. The accuracy of the survey x, y, z was to +-1 m.

Once the baseline was established a Kinematic Survey, using both stop-and-go and continuous surveys, was undertaken of the survey area. Post survey processing was carried using GPSurvey 2.35 to calculate baselines and recalibration of the height with respect to the NKG96 Geoid Iceland. WGS84 datum and Geodetic format was used and converted to ISN93 local co-ordinate system.

The data collection was focused on each visible structure. The survey consisted of both an interpretative plan of the earthworks and a continuous line of points, using continous stop-and-go survey, on selected structures/archaeological features. Each area demarcated natural limits within the survey.

Results

The survey showed several areas of earthworks that were identified during the ground truthing. The results of the survey established both the extent of the visible archaeological remains as an interpretative plan, as well as targeted contour survey of several structures that can be used for 3D modelling of individual structures.

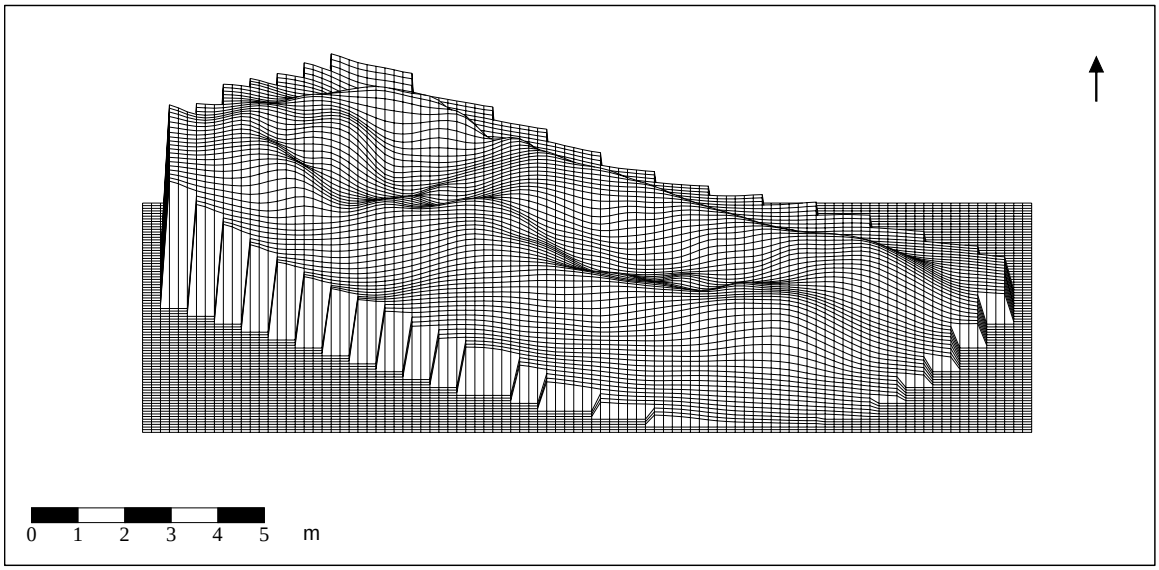

Figure 2. 3D model of structure 2/ruin B; nearest neighbour interpolation, with a gaussian low pass filter (3x3), spline smooth every 2 nodes

A number of structures and features found during the initial ground truthing were confirmed during the more detailed survey and field walking. The structural remains were preserved to a relatively high height, but were relatively indistinguishable from the surounding area, due to considerable inundation by *þúfur*. A small complex of structures, 1-4 (see Figure 1), were surveyed both as an interpretative plan and for contour/3D model (see Figures 2 & 3). Additionally several other structures were surveyed, but they were less substantial and less well preserved than structure 1-4.

A raised and possibly banked area was also surveyed; further investigations by coring and test pitting revealed a possible midden deposit similar to that frequently found in association with farm mounds. Several other smaller features/enclosures were surveyed, but will need further clarification through additional survey. By far the most extensive features were the boundaries, both those associated with the homefield and other

additional enclsoure areas; the number and differing alignments of these suggest several phases of use. These features will merit further survey and possible excavation. See Conclusions for an assessment of the surveyed structure and features.

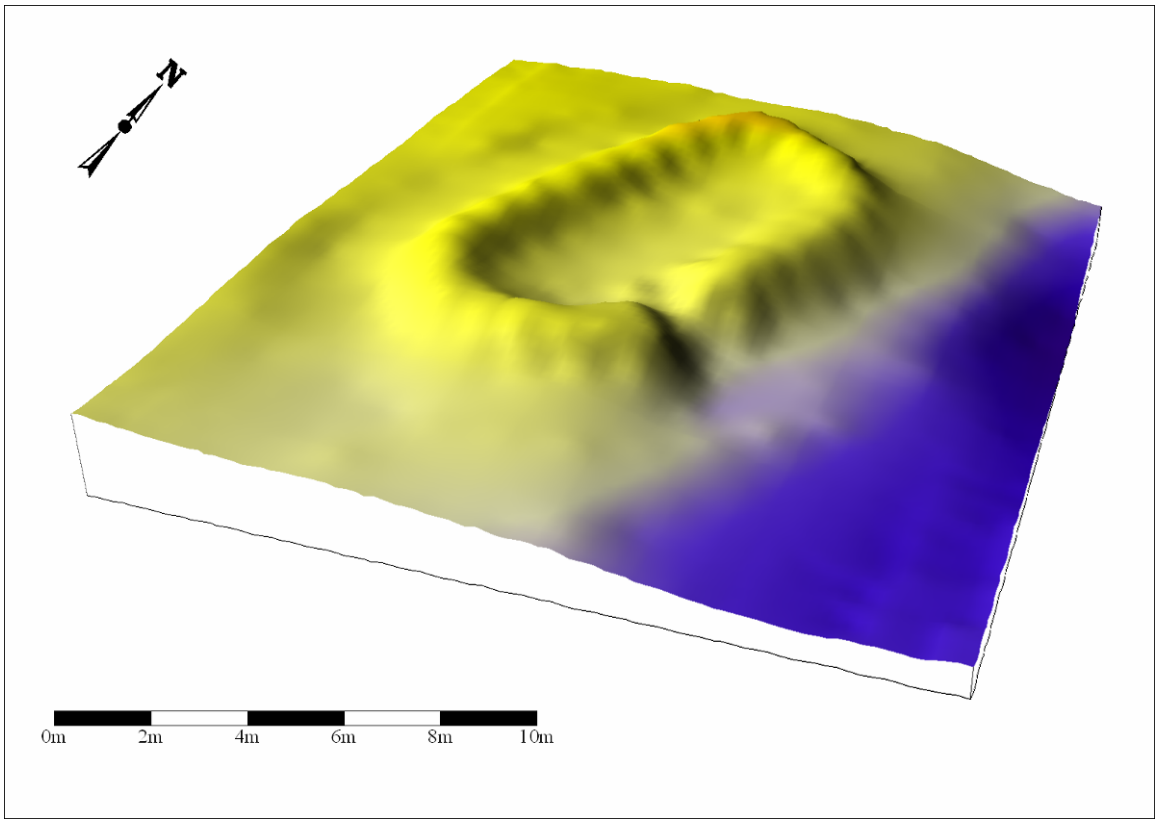

Figure 3. 3D model of structure 3 /ruin C; nearest neighbour interpolation, with a gaussian low pass filter (3x3), spline smooth every 2 nodes

Further work

On the basis of the 2002 GPS survey it is possible to visualise both in 2D and in 3D the character and extent of the archaeological remains at Höfðagerði. This will be further supported by continued archaeological investigation and survey of the site in order to establish in greater detail the internal dynamics, spatial distribution and temporal framework of the archaeological remains.

It is suggested that a further GPS survey, i.e. of the landscape features such as fences, buildings, car park areas be carried out, using either, or both, the GPS and the Total Station, so as to create a base map for the excavation and to orthorectify aerial photographs. It is also suggested that further work be carried out over selected areas of the homefield in order to establish subtle but otherwise invisble to eye archaeological features; this will be surveyed systematically.

GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

Extracts from T. J. Horsley 2003 HÖFÐAGERÐI, S-ÞINGEYJARSÝSLA.
Preliminary report on geophysical surveys, August 2002; appended to this report.

Introduction

Geophysical surveys were carried out at Höfðagerði on 1st August 2002 as part of an ongoing assessment of the potential of archaeological prospection techniques in Iceland. A number of ruined structures and field boundaries are visible as earthworks at this abandoned farm site, and two of these structural remains, structures 1 and 2, were targeted here for survey.

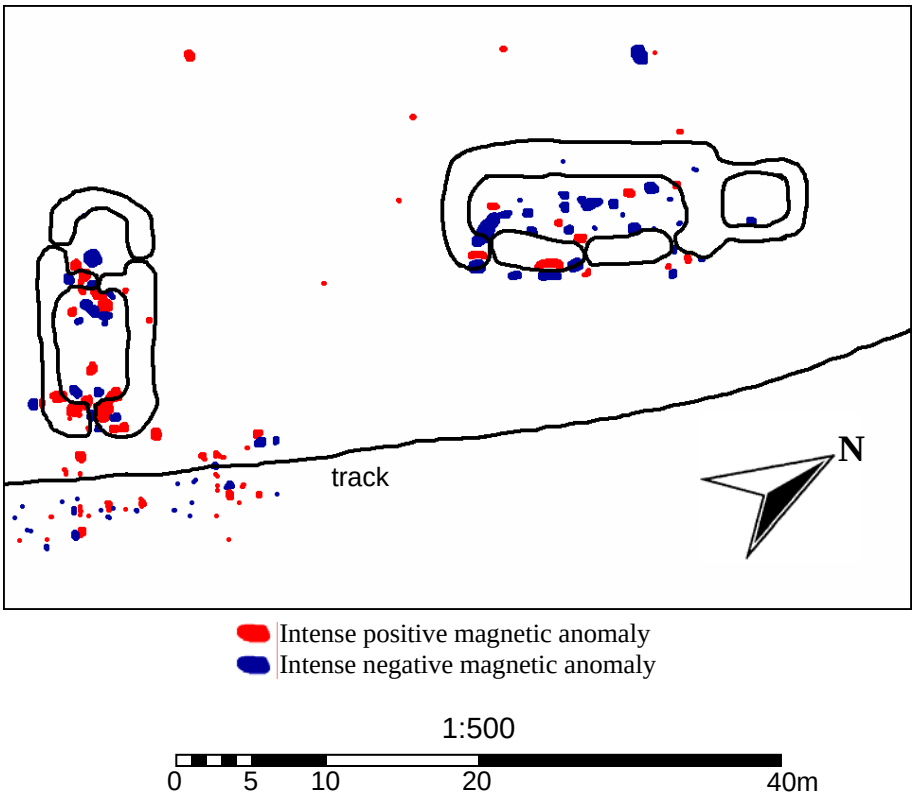

Figure 4. Summary of significant anomalies with visible features overlaid (after Guðmundsson); structure 1 (right) and structure 2 (left).

Since there is an intense coverage of frost hummocks (*thufur*) over much of the site it was decided to conduct only a fluxgate gradiometer survey at Höfðagerði. These natural features have been shown to produce geophysical anomalies (Horsley 1999); (Horsley 2002), the effect of which can dominate the results of earth resistance surveys and reduce the archaeological information obtained.

Results

The results of the fluxgate gradiometer survey at Höfðagerði are dominated by the intense thermoremanent effects due to igneous geology. This implies that the bedrock here is fairly shallow, probably not much deeper than 1.0m, and shallower in places due to undulations in the surface. Consequently these geological anomalies overwhelm any more subtle anomalies of archaeological origin.

Despite this, it is still possible to identify a number of discrete intense anomalies due to near-surface buried rocks, clearly visible as positive and negative spikes in the traceplot of the data (See Appendix, Figure 1a). The orientation of a buried rock determines whether the resulting anomaly is positive, negative or dipolar, although even with the high resolution of data collection adopted here, it probably not possible to distinguish individual rocks from these results.

The first point of interest is that the walls visible on the surface are not accompanied by these intense discrete anomalies, indicating that they are constructed primarily out of turf. Stone foundations may be present, however no associated anomalies can be distinguished from the background geological noise.

Instead, three clusters of these discrete anomalies can be identified in the data and are associated with the two structures visible on the surface (see Figure 4 and Appendix, Figure 2b). Two of these clusters appear to be closely related to what appear to be doorways in the southern structure (structure 2). They might either relate to now-collapsed stones used in construction of the walls around the doorways, or to stone paving in these areas.

In the northern structure these rock anomalies are more spread throughout the interior and southeastern wall (structure 1), and again may relate to construction elements (stone foundations, stone facing on the turf walls), or stone paving. The anomalies in the centre of the structure might indicate such features as post pads, or possibly a hearth.

An additional area of small-scale magnetic noise coincides with rocks in the track. Other isolated intense discrete anomalies also indicate buried rocks, however it is not clear whether these relate to archaeological features or occur naturally in the soil.

GJÓSKULAGARANNSÓKN (TEPHRA ANALYSIS)

Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson

Dagana 7.-9. ágúst og 29. ágúst 2002 voru gjóskulög könnuð á nokkrum stöðum í Mývatnssveit og Aðaldal í tengslum við fornleifarannsóknir. Um er að ræða Steinboga í Laxárdal, Brennu við Sandvatn, Oddastaði í Sellöndum og Núpa í Aðaldal. Einnig voru gjóskulög skoðuð nokkuð í Sveigakoti og Hrísheimum í Mývatnssveit.

Greining gjóskulaganna byggir á fyrri rannsóknum á gjóskulögum á Norður- og Norðausturlandi (Guðrún Larsen 1982, Guðrún Larsen 1984, Árni Einarsson o.fl. 1988, Karl Grönvold o.fl. 1995, Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson 1998, Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson o.fl. 2002). Við greiningu gjóskulaganna var beitt hefðbundnum aðferðum, þ.e. lýsingum á einstökum gjóskulögum í mörkinni og síðan smásjárskoðun þegar ástæða þótti til. Þau gjóskulög sem best nýtast aldursgreiningu fornleifa í Mývatnssveit og nágrenni eru: Landnámslag frá því um 870 e.Kr., V~950, H-1104, H-1158, H-1300, V-1477 (einnig nefnt “a-lagið”) og V-1717.

Núpar (“Höfðagerði”) í Aðaldal

Mæld voru fjögur snið á Núpum (Figure 5). Í rúst B liggur gjóskulagið V-1477 yfir torfvegg (snið I-II). Við nánari skoðun kom í ljós að í torfinu eru slitrur af gjóskulaginu H-1300. Draga má þá ályktun að veggurinn hafi verið byggður eftir árið 1300 og að byggingin hafi farið úr notkun fyrir árið 1477.

Í rúst C er gjóskulagið H-1300 yfir torflagi, sem staðfestir að rústin er nokkru eldri (snið III). Hversu mikið, er erfitt að segja til um.

Skoðað var þversnið í túngarð á Núpum (snið IV). Torfið í garðinum hefur í sér slitrur af gjóskulaginu H-1300 og yfir honum er gjóskulagið V-1477. Ljóst er því að garðurinn var byggður eftir 1300 og kominn úr notkun, allavega að mestu leyti, fyrir árið 1477.

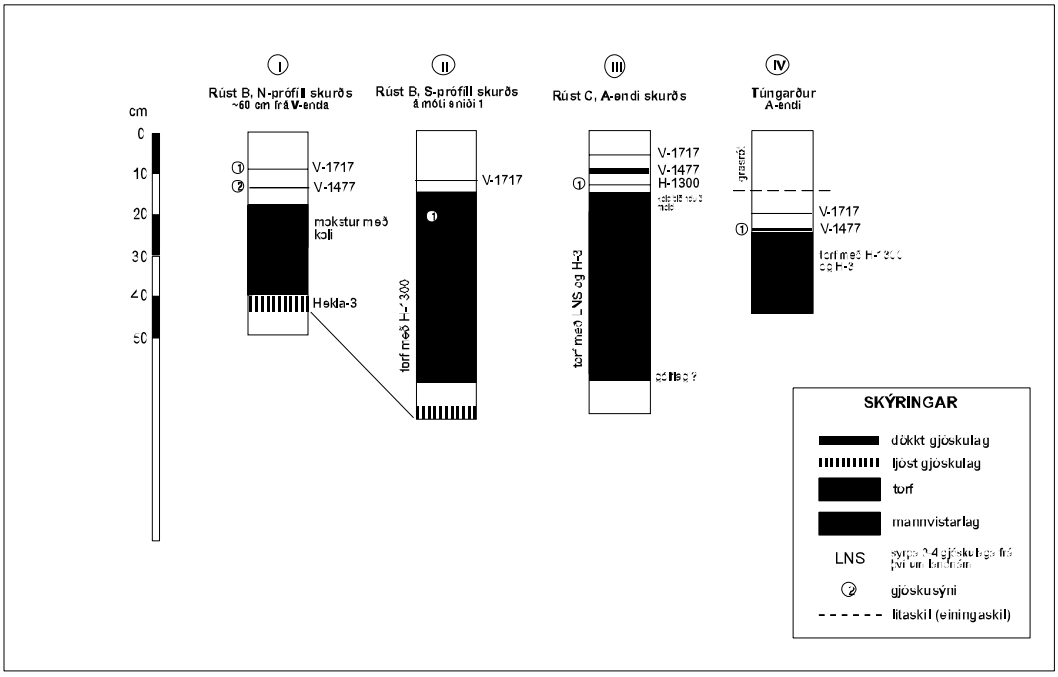

Figure 5. Mynd 2 extracted from Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson 2002 Gjóskulagarannsókn Mývatn 2002; Ruin B = Structure 2, Ruin C = Structure 3, Tún garðar = homefield boundary.

Afstaða rústanna til gjóskulaga staðfestir að mannvirkin á Núpum eru í öllum tilvikum eldri en gjóskulagið V-1477 og að hluta eldri en lagið H-1300.

EXCAVATION

Oscar Aldred, FSÍ, extracts Adolf Friðriksson, FSÍ

Excavation by trial trenching took place at two locations, Structure B (structure 2) and Structure C (structure 3). Also, a section was cleaned and partially excavated through the homefield boundary where the present-day road had truncated it. Although the trial trenches excavated were small, they were specifically targeted to find evidence of the tephra sequence in order to establish the possible dates of abandonment and use. They were also used to further understand the material type and construction method of the structures, and to the assess the potential preservation of the archaeological remains and material culture.

The excavations of the farm ruins revealed a stratified sequence of deposits that relate to the tehpra sequence. As a result a preliminary phasing is suggested; bearing in mind that this is to demonstrate the potential of the site for understanding further the settlement pattern and dynamics both within the site itself and within the wider Mývatn environs. It is likely with further excavation that this phase sequence will change for the site as a whole as more of the site is investigated archaeologically. The preliminary phasing is:

Phase	Date Range
1	Post 1717
2	1477-1717
3	1300-1477
4	c. 870-1300

The results discussed below will refer to this phasing only broadly, but its main function at this stage is to provide a framework for finds analysis and stratigraphic control.

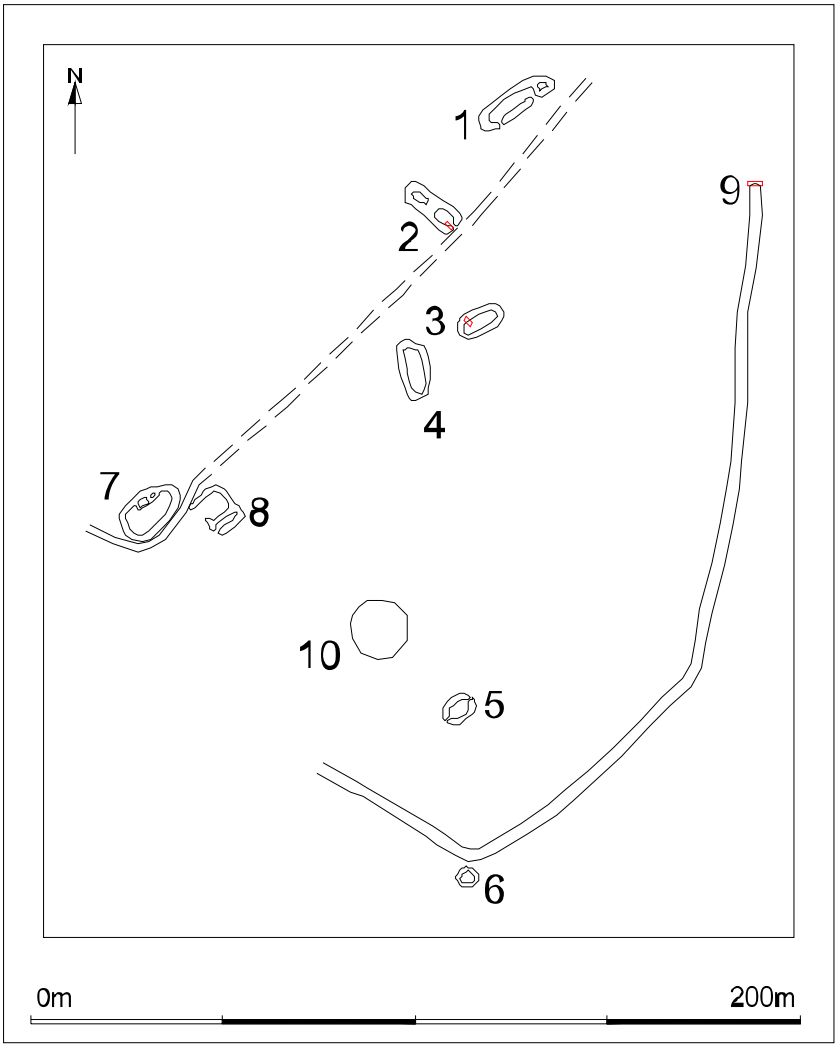

Figure 6. Location plan of the structures and the excavation areas within structures 2, 3 and feature 9, and the test pitting in the southern area of feature 10.

In summary the results of the trial trenching produced a clear comparable tephra sequence within the 2 structures (2 and 3) on the site and the homefield boundary, as well as comparable with the wider Mývatn environs' archaeological investigations.

Additional to the main archaeological investigations, an attempt to locate and assess the character and extent of midden deposits. This was primarily carried out by coring, with follow-up test pitting where indications from the coring suggested possible midden material. A number of test pits were excavated both localised and associated with the

structures 1, 2 and feature 10. This part of the report follows the results from the main archaeological investigations.

Structure 2 – Ruin/Structure B (BL)

This ruin is 17x7 m, lying northwest - southeast, and divided into two rooms. The walls are c. 2 m thick, and 40 cm high, with a doorway on the southeast gable end. The southeast end is considerably lower as the hillside slopes down towards the southwest. The test trench was put in the southeast half of the structure, 2.6m by 0.8m, streching from the centre towards the inner side of the doorway. The deposits were excavated in sequence and stratigraphically; in situ derived deposits such as floors and walls were left unexcavated during this evaluation stage.

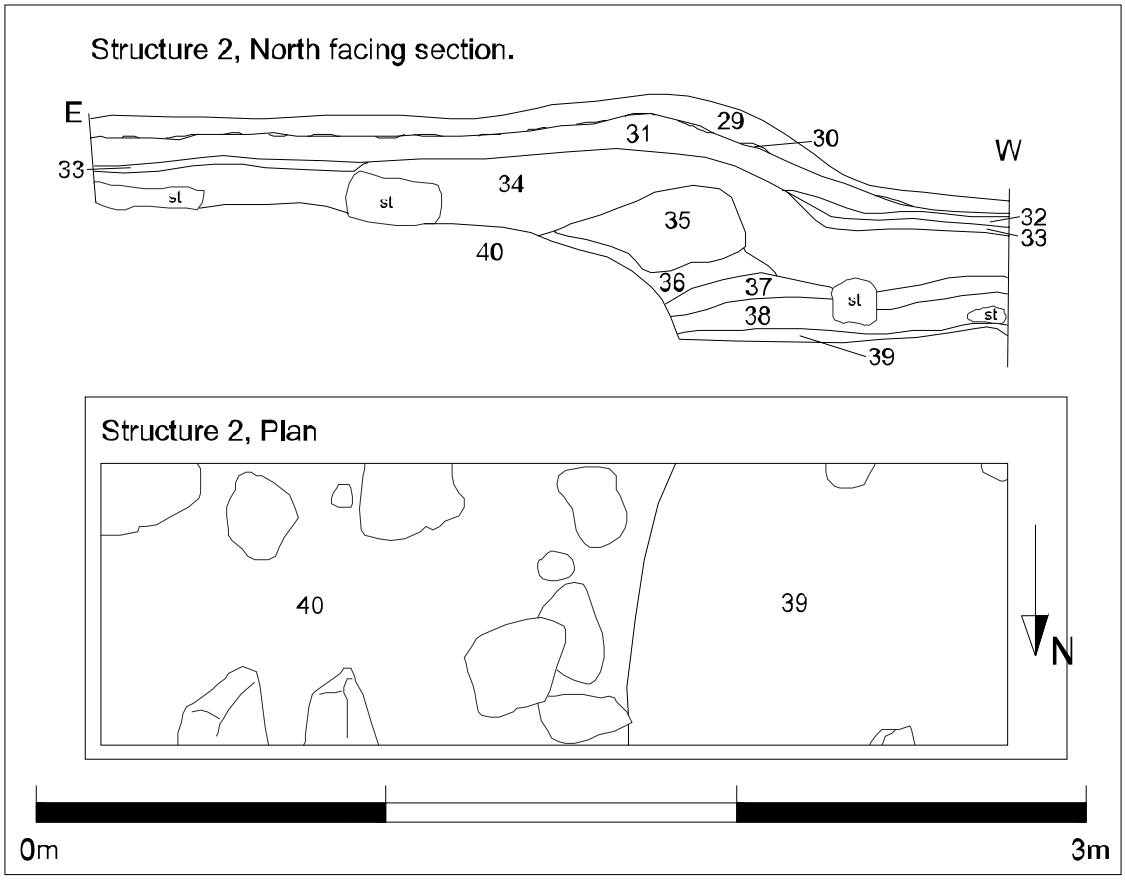

Figure 7. Structure 2: north facing section and plan

A topsoil, grass rooted deposit was removed [20], revealing the V-1717 tephra [30] in situ over all remaining deposits. A further sequence of light and dark windblown deposits [31, 32] over the V-1477 tephra [33], again in situ, though partially eroded over the highest point of the underlying turf wall that was capped by a further deposit of windblown material [34]. Under [34] the collapse sequence of structure 2 was apparent; [35]. This turf deposit, with at least 2 visible layers of whole turves, consisted of H3 and Landnám tephra. This was further interleaved by another windblown deposit [36] that sealed a further collapse episode [37]; again with the tephra sequence of H3 and Landnám present in the turves. Underneath [37] the surface of a floor was apparent, [38], consisting of a compacted mixed silts deposit with flecks of charcoal and possible upcast resulting from disturbance of H3. The wall of structure 2, [40], within the exposed trench, stood to a height of approximately 0.3m and was constructed of interleaved layers of cut turf which contained small traces of the H-1300 tephra and stones. Further investigation of the wall will reveal the precise construction. Under [38, 40] another windblown deposit sitting over the H3 tephra was found [39].

This structure revealed a relatively complex sequence of windblown deposition and erosion, interleaved by tephra deposits dating from to 1717 and 1477. All archeological deposits within this trench were approximately 0.12m below and sealed by the V-1477 tephra, suggesting that it was some time since the collapse of the building had occurred and the use of structure. The collapse episodes [35, 37] were separated by a deposition of windblown deposits suggesting that 2 phases of collapse had occurred over some period of time. The occupation of the structure was limited to a thin floor, c. 0.05m and the wall construction. The turf in the wall contained H-1300. No finds were found. The therefore dates from between 1300, as suggested by the H-1300 in the turf wall and abandoned before 1477, as suggested by the V-1477 that sealed the collapse deposits.

Structure 3 – Ruin/Structure C (EÓH)

This structure measures 12m by 7m, lying northeast - southwest, persumably with a doorway on the eastern longwall, near the southeast corner. The test trench was put in the

southern end of the ruin, 2.4m by 0.6m, streching from the top of the western longwall towards the centre. The deposits were excavated in sequence and stratigraphically; in situ derived deposits such as floors and walls were left unexcavated during this evaluation stage.

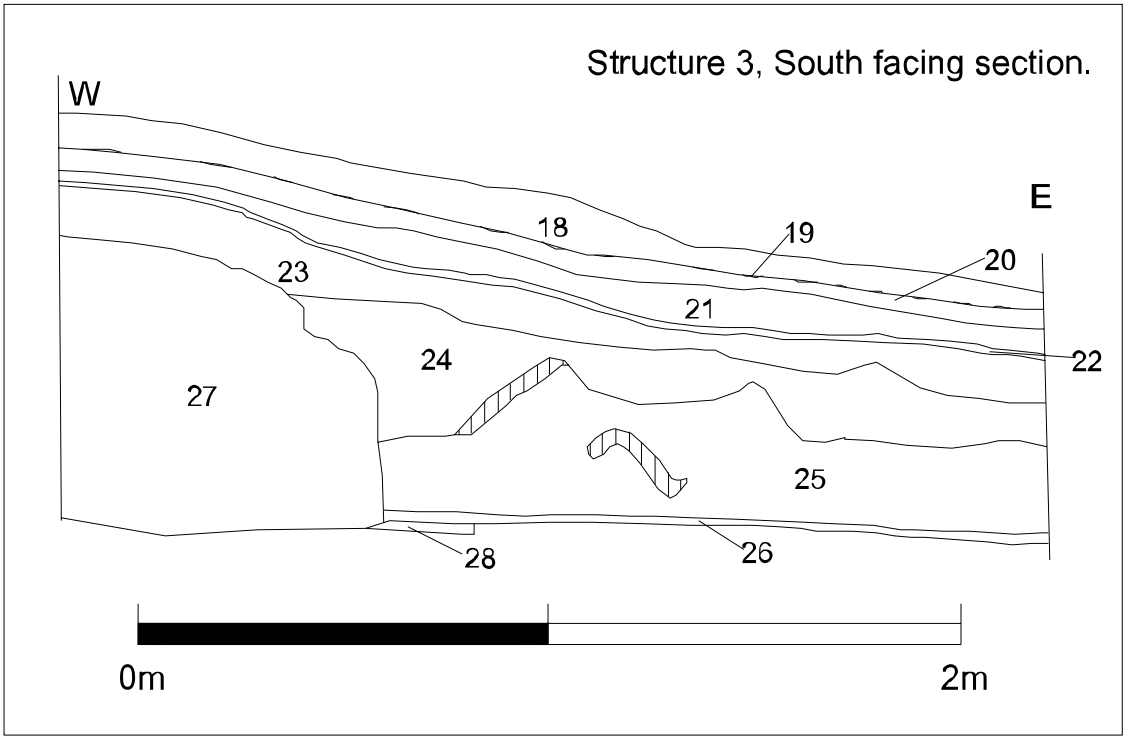

Figure 8. Structure 3: south facing section

Like structure 2, structure 3 displayed a similar sequence of depositional events. The topsoil [18] capped the V-1717 tephra [19]. Under these two windblown deposits, one light [20] and one dark [21], were found. These windblown deposits overlay the V-1477 tephra [22]. A slightly greyish deposit [23] was observed immediately below [22], possibly derived from leaching of the dark and rich V-1477 tephra. This layer [23] contained traces of the H-1300. Under [23] the first episode of turf collapse was seen [24]. Unlike structure 2, the primary collapse [25] was not interleaved by a windblown deposit. Immediately below the turf collapse the floor of the structure was observed, [26]; it consisted of a slightly compacted surface with peat ash and possible upcast deposits

from H3 (like structure 2). The turf wall was not investigated. Initial investigation under the floor suggests a windblown deposit sitting over the H3 tephra.

The excavation by trial trench, like structure 2, suggested a sequence of windblown deposition events intervened by tephras V-1717 and V-1477. Furthermore, like structure 2, a period of secondary and primary collapse sealed the use of the structure. However tis collaspe episode was sealed by H-1300. Landnám was found in the turf in the wall. Therefore the structure was constructed, used and abandoned before 1300. Further excavation will establish whether H-1300 seals the entire structure or if the H-1300 was disturbed.

Feature 9 – Ruin I (BL, EÓH, MS)

The enclosure wall lies from north to south, fencing off the whole of theYtri-Höfði area, from the northern bank of Laxá to the south, up to the southern bank of the river north of Ytri-Höfði. The track leading to Núpar farm has cut through the northern end of the wall, exposing a section, which was cleaned and recorded.

The exposed section though the homefield boundary gave an opportunity to investigate the possible use and re-use of the linear feature that enclosed the homefield, immediately surrounding the masjority of the visible structures. Like the trial trenches in structures 2 and 3, the exposed section, after cleaning and partial excavation, revealed a similar tephra sequence for V-1717 and V-1477, with subsequent windblown depositional events. However, evidence of the H-1300 was present, albeit disturbed, both within turf fragments [9], part of a possible rebuild and the turf in the boundary wall [12]. Also the Landnám tephra [16] was present underneath the boundary wall.

This section and feature merits further assessment as there was some confusion over the possibility of 2 tephras both displaying the V-1477 type [5, 7] but interleaved by a windblown deposit [6]. Also there was a possibility that the in situ Landnám tephra [16] may have been disturbed; a suggestion of the H-1300 tephra in turf fragments [16b] underneath a wind blown Landnám deposit [16a]. Further investigation will clarify the

date of construction, which the current results suggests must be post 1300, because of the presence of H-1300 tephra within the turf wall.

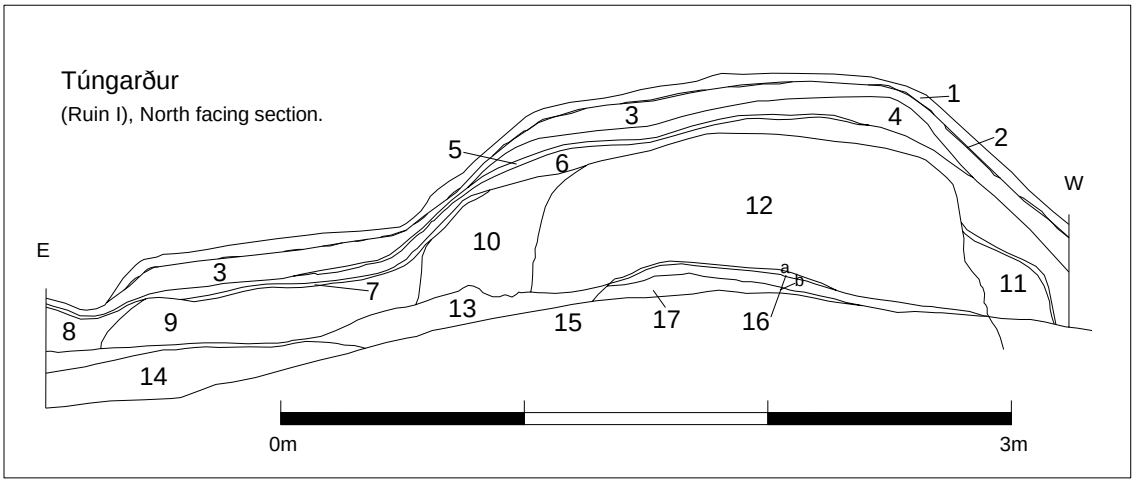

Figure 9. Feature 9 (Ruin I): north facing section

Midden investigations

Extracts from Tom McGovern 2002 Midden Investigations at Höftagerði [sic Höfðagerði] N Iceland 2002 in Landscape of Settlements field report, unpublished report, FSÍ, CUNY & NABO. The full report can be seen in annex of this report.

A programme of coring and test trenching was carried to attempt to localise midden deposits at the site of Höfðagerði. Coring established a preliminary assessment of the occupational history of the visible archaeological features. The northern-most ruins (structures 1-4) appear to be very early, with occupation beginning shortly after the LNL [*following tephra analysis of structure 2 and the homefield boundary, construction dates from after 1300 and abandonment begins before 1477; only structure 3 may possibly date to before 1300, though given the nature of H-1300 this may need to be considered further with excavation*]. They also appear to be briefly occupied, with only 5-10 cm of cultural deposit around them. The farm mound (Figure 1, feature 10) deposits are much thicker, and coring demonstrated up to 80 cm of stratified cultural deposit in the margins of the farm mound area.

Following the coring programme several smaller test pits were dug, as well as one larger test pit, 1m by 3m (test trench (L)). In test trench L multiple layers of peat ash, charcoal, non-diagnostic artifacts, and some animal bone were encountered. However, it became apparent that this deposit was mainly ash overlying an earlier phase turf structure. No *in situ* tephra were observed, and the excavated material is undated. Excavation was stopped at this point to avoid damaging the structural remains. There is definitely midden material around the farm mound, and the site appears to have considerable promise for further work.

3. FINDS

The amount of finds recovered from this season was not substantial, especially given the localised and limited trial trenching. The finds came from the additional archaeological investigations in the area of test pit L (below the area demarcated by feature 10; see Figures 1 & 6) excavated by Tom McGovern and his team.

From test pit L the total number of finds totaled 14 individual objects from only 3 contexts [43, 45, 48] all of which probably relate to the occupation layers of feature 10. From context [43] 1 iron object possibly a knife <6>, 2 iron nails <8, 9>, and 4 iron objects, undiagnostic before x-ray <4, 5, 10, 11>. From context [45] 1 iron object possibly a staple <7>, 1 stone <13> and 1 schist whetstone fragment <11>. From context [48] 1 copper alloy object, possibly a coin <1>, 1 iron object <14> and 1 stone <3>.

4. DISCUSSION

INTERPRETATION

Structure 2, in which a depositional sequence involving windblown material interleaved by tephra dating from 1717 and 1477, with 2 episodes of collapse, sealing a floor surface, dates from phase 3, 1300 - 1477 as indicated by the presence of the disturbed H-1300 within the turf wall. The shape of the overall structure suggests a possible byre/animal

house function, though further excavation and closer investigation of the form and type of deposits and structural remains will clarify this. The geophysical survey over this structure suggests some stone construction, possibly identifying an entrance consisting of stone blocks on the south-east side of the structure.

Structure 3, in which a similar depositional sequence as structure 2 was found but sealed by H-1300, suggests a possible date from at least phase 4, 870 - 1300. The form of structure suggests a small shelter, a further interpretation of its function is not possible. Further excavation will clarify this.

Feature 9, is the inear feature interpreted as the homefield boundary. It contained a turf core, with collapse and windblown depositional events, with a tephra sequence of sealed by V-1717 and V-1477, and disturbed H-1300 in an interpreted rebuild turf, with the original core that sat possibly over the Landnám. However, there was some uncertainty over the Landnám and further excavation of this feature will clarify this.

Feature 10, which was investigated by the midden team suggests that this is possibly a farm mound. No tephra deposits, or good dateable objects (the coin is undiagnostic) can support this interpretation without further excavation. However, due to the nature of the deposits that were evident in test pit L it is likely that some occupation of this feature occurred, but is as yet undateable. A suggestion is that the features represent a slightly later phase of use of the site. Further work will clarify this.

Other features found during the GPS survey are briefly mentioned here but will require additional investigation to further understand their interpretation.

Structure 1, may be interpreted as a farm building, with a longhouse/skáli character. This is suggested by its shape, as well as the long body form and annex structure on the northern end. The interpretative plan suggests some erosion areas on the eastern side, although it is feasible that these are entrances into the structure. The geophysical survey hints at this latter interpretation but is not wholly supportive of it. Anomalies in the

central area of the structure were interpreted by the geophysical surveyor as a possible hearth; further investigation is needed to support this interpretation.

A number of other features, which will be further investigated in the following years work were identified (see Figure 1; some of these features are marked: 5-8, 11). They include 8 small features, possibly structural in form. Also a number of (curvi-)linear features were found, that are remnants of earlier boundaries within the site. These suggest at least 3 phases of activity, and are possibly demarcating land use areas within the farm. They may also be a number of chronological phases within these features that will require further clarification through continued archaeological investigations.

The preliminary results indicate that the Höfðagerði site probably dates back to the 12th century the latest, and that it was still occupied in the 14th or 15th century

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

The assessment of the archaeological remains at Höfðagerði used an integrated approach to the study of the archaeological remains. The approach identified a site that has considerable potential for further archaeological investigations. These are outlined below:

1. A relatively undocumented site which without archaeological investigations the pre-1712 site would be not be understood
2. A number of substantially preserved and visible features, which suggest a complex history and occupational use; there is good preservation, though some erosion and some recent activity has damaged the archaeology
3. Potentially viable for geophysical prospection, though natural soil formation and þúfur may hamper further attainable survey results
4. A good tephra sequence that is comparable with other sites in the region
5. A site chronology that identifies it as either an early settlement, secondary or tertiary colonisation, and at least 2 structures sealed by the V-1477 tephra And possibly one by H-1300

6. Good soil depth within the excavated trial trenches suggest archaeological remains that are well preserved and are of sufficient character and nature for further excavation
7. A large number of features and possible structures within a homefield boundary, with evidence for several phases of linear constructions and demarcation – potential for the study of a farm which has structures abandoned before 1477.

FUTURE WORK

Future work will depend on resources, both funding and time allocation, but the archaeological investigations carried out in 2002 suggest that the site has great potential for further work.

Within the broader aims of the Landscapes of Settlement project, Höfðagerði has great potential for archaeological investigations and research relating to an entire farm site. The preliminary results indicate that the Höfðagerði site probably dates back to the 12th century the latest, and that it was still occupied in the 14th or 15th century, supported by good tephra sequences. Also, possibly, further coring should be taken within the homefield to assess the environmental conditions and potential for studying land use modelling.

The broad aim will be to further understand the archaeological remains at Höfðagerði with continued intergrated approaches, including field survey, topographic survey, excavation, evaluation and test pitting. This will be carried out between 2003 to 2004, with the aim to:

1. Continue topographic survey of the features and identify areas within the site for more intensive systematic survey
2. Excavate structure 3, in order to assess the preservation and type of archaeological deposits and understand further structures of this form and shape

3. Excavate structure 2, to further understand the character and nature of the archaeological remains and to determine further the form and function
4. Evaluate through trial trenching structure 1, to assess the potential for further excavation within this structure, and ascertain depositional events, tephra sequences and material culture for comparison with other structures
5. Further assess through trial trenching other visible features within the general site area, including the homefield boundary and other curvi-linear features
6. Assess the potential for environmental modelling within the homefield, as part of the on-going research activities within the Landscape of Settlement project

5. APPENDICES

EXCAVATION UNIT INFORMATION

Units

Unit	*Area*	*Type*	*Material*	*Process*	*Notes*
1	9	Deposit	Topsoil	Undefined	
2	9	Deposit	Tephra	Aeolian	1717
3	9	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
4	9	Deposit	Mixed silts	Surface	Old surface
5	9	Deposit	Tephra	Aeolian	1477
6	9	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
7	9	Deposit	?Tephra	Aeolian	1477
8	9	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
9	9	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	with disturbed 1300 tephra
10	9	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
11	9	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
12	9	Deposit	Turves	Wall	Turf with H3
13	9	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	disturbed
14	9	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
15	9	Deposit	Unknown	Undefined	
16	9	Deposit	?Tephra	Aeolian	Landnám in situ, possibly windblown; ?turf frags with 1300
17	9	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	Archaeology natural
18	3	Deposit	Topsoil	Undefined	
19	3	Deposit	Tephra	Aeolian	1717
20	3	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
21	3	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
22	3	Deposit	Tephra	Aeolian	1477
23	3	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	with 1300 found in situ
24	3	Deposit	Turf fragments	Collapse	
25	3	Deposit	Turves	Collapse	
26	3	Deposit	Composite	Floor	Peat ash fragments, mixed silts
27	3	Deposit	Turves	Wall	
28	3	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
29	2	Deposit	Topsoil	Undefined	
30	2	Deposit	Tephra	Aeolian	1717
31	2	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
32	2	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
33	2	Deposit	Tephra	Aeolian	1477
34	2	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
35	2	Deposit	Turves	Collapse	2 visible tephra - H3 and Landnám
36	2	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
37	2	Deposit	Turves	Collapse	2 visible tephra - H3 and Landnám
38	2	Deposit	Composite	Floor	Mixed silts, H3, small charcoal inclusions

39	2	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
40	2	Deposit	Turves	Wall	1300 in turf
41	10	Deposit	Topsoil	Undefined	
42	10	Deposit	Mixed silts	Aeolian	
43	10	Deposit	Composite	Dump	
44	10	Deposit	Composite	Dump	
45	10	Deposit	Turf fragments	?Collapse	
46	10	Deposit	Composite	Surface	
47	10	Deposit	Composite	Surface	
48	10	Deposit	Composite	Undefined	large embedded stones

Finds

FindsNo	*Unit*	*Object*	*Material*	*General description*	*Count*
NUP02_1	48	Coin	Cu	POSSIBLE COIN	1
NUP02_2	43	Unknown	Stone	MANUPORT PEBBLE	1
NUP02_3	48	Unknown	Stone	MANUPORT PEBBLE	1
NUP02_4	43	Object	Fe	FE OBJ	1
NUP02_5	43	Object	Fe	FE OBJ	1
NUP02_6	43	Knife	Fe	FE OBJ, KNIFE?	1
NUP02_7	45	Object	Fe	FE OBJ, STAPLE?	1
NUP02_8	43	Nail	Fe	NAIL	1
NUP02_9	43	Nail	Fe	NAIL	1
NUP02_10	43	Object	Fe	FE OBJ	1
NUP02_11	45	Whetstone	Stone	WHETSTONE FRAG, SCHIST	1
NUP02_12	43	Object	Fe	FE OBJ	1
NUP02_13	45	Unknown	Stone	MANUPORT PEBBLE	1
NUP02_14	48	Object	Fe	FE OBJ	1

EXCAVATION REPORT

Höfðagerði at Núpar, S-Þing. 2002 Excavation Report.

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Introduction

During the perod between July 23rd and August 8th 2002 a few trial trenches were opened at the site of Höfðagerði at Núpar. The objective was to establish the age and function of some of the structures there. The site is located on the eastern slope of Ytri-Höfði, which is one of two hills situated on the eastern bank of river Laxá, some 800 m SW of Núpar farm. Despite dense vegetation cover consisting mainly of dwarf birch and willow, the archaeology there is clearly visible on the surface, as soil formtion appears to have been very slow. There are at least 12 subrectangular structures that can be detected in the landscape, as well as 3-4 enclosure walls. In addition, there is a small rise some 75 m N of the Laxá riverbank, which probably constsitutes an ancient farm mound (Fig 1).

The Excavation

A detailed site map was made of all visible features, and these features named with letters from A to Æ. Test trenches were made in three features, ie. B, C and V.

Structure B (Fig 2). This ruin is 17x7 m, lying NW-SE, and divided into two rooms. The walls are c. 2 m thick, and 40 cm high, with a doorway on the SE gable end. The SE end is considerably lower as the hillside slopes down towards the SW. The test trench was put in the SE half of the structure, 2,6x0,80m, streching from the centre towards the inner side of the doorway. The structural remains were covered by a 8-12 cm thick top soil (1) with dense roots and the 1717 tephra, and brown (windblown) soil (2 and 4), intersected by dark grey tephra, the “a” layer (3). Below, there was a wall made of turf and stone (10) and turf debris (7). The wall was not cut through, but within the structure and below the turf debris a compact brown-grey layer (8) was detected, covering fine, orange-brown soil, undoubtedly natural (9). This compact layer appears to be a trodden floor, rich in organic remains but without charcoal. A study of the tephra deposits reveals that the site had been long abandoned before the 1477 eruption, but no other tehpra layers, such as the 1300 layer, could be detected.
No artefacts were found during the excavation, and the function of the structure remains unknown. However, the layout of the ruin, and the doorway on the lower gable end suggests that this may have been a byre.

Structure C (Fig 3). This structure measures 12x7 m, lying NE-SW, persumably with a doorway on the eastern longwall, near the SE corner. The test trench was put in the southern end of the ruin, 2,4x0,60 m, streching from the top of the western longwall towards the centre. Below the topsoil (1), which included the 1717 tephra, there was a darkbrown (2) windblown soil, covering the 1477 tephra. Below it there was a grey-brown, windblown soil, including the 1300 tephra in situ. Below the grey-brown layer

was a turf wall (8) in the western end of the trench, and turf debris (5), with patches of the Landnám tephra inside the turf, in the eastern part. Mixed with the turf debris was upcast including the white H3 tephra. The turf wall was not removed. Below the turf debris, strenching from the wall and covering the whole of the excavated area, there was a thin layer, dark-brown, with patches of light grey peatash and charcoal, possibly the remains of a floor (8). Below the floor was orange-brown, natural soil.
No artefacts nor bones were recovered.

Structure V (Fig 4). The enclosure wall lies from N-S, fencing off the whole of theYtri-Höfði area, from the northern bank of Laxá to the south, up to the southern bank of the river north of Ytri-Höfði. The track leading to Núpar farm has cut through the northern end of the wall, exposing a section, which was cleaned and recorded. Inside the topsoil (1) the 1717 tephra could be detected. Below, there was a brown layer with the 1477 tephra, and below that, a turf wall. Inside the turf is the H3 tephra (and the landnám seqence). Below the wall there is the landnám seqence (11) in situ, and natural soil (8). On the eastern and western side of the wall there was a layer with turf which had the 1300 tephra inside it. It appears that the original turf wall was erected before 1477, and possibly before 1300, but then repaired, after 1300. This interpretation is uncertain, and more sections need to be examined to determine the age of this structure.

Conclusions and Summary.

In 2002 test trenches were excavated in three locations (B,C and V) on the Höfðagerði site at Núpar. The excavation revealed well preserved turf structures, and well detectable tephra layers. The preliminary results indicate that the Höfðagerði site probably dates back to the 12th century the latest, and that it was still occupied in the 14th or 15th century. While V was obviously an enclosure wall, further research is needed to determine the function of the two subrectangular structures. It is however reasonable to suggest that B was a byre and C probably a dwelling.

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