Environmental and land use change in Vatnahverfi

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Vatnahverfi: a green and pleasant land?

“... A rich landscape of lakes and rivers... A countryside lush in many places, rich in grass... the people of Vatnahverfi must have done well” (Ingstad, 1966)
“The vegetation is very rich. Large areas are covered with good grass and much willow scrub... Vatnahverfi was a rather rich part of the country with good conditions for Norse farmers” (Vebæk, 1992)
Vatnahverfi: a green and pleasant land?

“the fertile inland region of Vatnahverfi”
(Seaver, 2010)
Evidence from archaeology

Woodland?

• Large stoves interpreted as bath houses or grain drying ovens found at 4 farms. Perhaps suggesting an abundance of woodland?

• Slag and iron bars found in excavation at 4 ruin groups – suggesting iron production

Arable agriculture?

• Find of a millstone at Ø64a and Ø66
Pre-landnám environmental baseline
Woodland, perhaps making the area attractive?

Timing of landnám
Early (c. AD 985) dates may be indicative the area being attractive

Abandonment
Is there evidence of a declining viability associated with a shift away from terrestrial food?
Methods & Proxies

- Pollen – vegetation history
- Microscopic charcoal – fire history
- Coprophilous fungi – grazing history
- Radiocarbon dating and age-depth modelling
Vatnahverfi: study sites
Pre-landnám environment

- Herbs dominant at the coasts at up to 80% TLP
- Scrub and woodland reaches up to 58% in the inland valleys
Identifying *landnám*
Identifying landnám
Age-depth modelling

![Diagram showing age-depth modelling with depth in centimeters and year cal. AD on the x-axis, and different plant species and charcoal influx on the y-axis. The diagram includes a red vertical line indicating a point of interest.](image-url)
Timing of *landnám*

- The Mountain Farm (n=6)
- Atikilleq (n=4)
- Lake Vatnahverfi (n=7)
- Nimerialik (n=7)
- Saqqaa (n=6)

Year cal. AD: 750 to 1200

AD 985
Conclusions

1. Evidence for extensive (up to 58% TLP) woodland and scrub resources in central Vatnahverfi prior to landnám.

2. Farms established within the decades of AD 985 suggesting that Vatnahverfi was viewed favourably.

3. Abandonment of the region in the late 14th century – comparable with elsewhere in the Eastern Settlement