CUNY Survey Log Mývatnssveit 2007

Data Structure: This report represents a narrative account of the 2007 FSI/CUNY Archaeological survey project in Mývatnssveit June 10-22nd 2007 (directed by Orri Vésteinsson, Adolf Friðriksson, and Tom McGovern, with the able assistance of George Hambrecht, Ramona Harrison, Konrad Smiarowski and Albina Palsdottir, and with invaluable aid from Árni Einarsson of the Mývatn Science Station). The digital record of this project also includes an MS Excel file with coring reports organized by site per worksheet, artifact registers (MS Word), digital photos of all artifacts, scans of all sketch maps and profiles, and digital photo archive containing all project photos (not only those selected to illustrate this narrative account). The written record includes the original site sketch maps, and profiles drawn on drawing film. The small collection of artifacts and bones has been deposited at Fornleifastofnun Islands along with the primary site archival records, written and digital. Separate reports have been prepared by Orri Vésteinsson and Adolf Friðriksson and are also curated at FSI.

Survey Project Narrative

June 10, 2007 was mainly spent in organizing gear and instruments, but a short trip was taken along the track from the Stong farm road south towards Arnarvatn, passing by Helluvaðstjörn. Along the track, just at the crest of the hill sloping down to Arnarvatn and the occupied farm complex at Gautlönd we photographed a small cairn in the center of a blown-out erosion patch (GPS N65.67787 W 017.35105). The cairn was small, but definitely the result of human activity, and
had old lichen patches all over it (but not beneath its stones)- possibly an old trail marker??.

On June 10, 2007 the field crew visited the old abandoned farm site of Bjarnarstaðir near the modern abandoned (but still maintained) farm at Heiði near the Viking age ruins at Hrisheimar. There were some ambiguous cultural traces (possibly structural or possibly simply turf cutting patches) close to the Heiði farm (GPS N65.51877 W 017.12756 elevation c 348 m), but the location of the main ruin at Bjarnarstaðir
seems to be in the SW end of a modern cultivated field (below, GPS N65.51711 W 017.12891 elevation c. 350 m). As noted by the visiting Heidi family in 2006, the Bjarnarstaðir ruin seems to have been completely flattened by bulldozing, and there were what appeared to be the remains of structural stones and other debris in the edge of the stream cut of Bjarnarstaðarlaekur (right). We did not carry out soil coring at the site, as it was not on our archaeological permit list and no landowner was present, but it seems very likely that there is not much left of this archaeological site.

**Beinistaðir Survey, June 11th 2007**

Beinistaðir is a ruined farm located on the western banks of the Laxá, and is clearly visible from Hofstaðir across the river.

*Beinistaðir seen from the east bank of the Laxá. The recent sheep house ruin is visible on the upper center side of the hay field.*
Beinistaðir is today marked by a large grass-covered home field (still with remnants of wire fencing and access by jeep trail) sloping down towards the Laxá. Soil acidity is low, with pH readings ranging around 6.25- very similar to Hofstaðir across the Laxá, and potentially very favorable to good bone preservation. Many Ptarmigan were observed nesting around the ruins.

The most prominent ruin is a recent (probably 20th c) sheep house, well built of stone and turf but today roofless and decaying but still providing shelter for several ewes and their lambs. The recent sheep house is built upon an earlier structure, now cleared as a platform. This area was designated area A (GPS east end N 65.60498, W 017.17683; west end N 65.60496, W 017.17664, elevation ca 278 m asl).

About 30 meters to the north of the area A structure was the remains of what appeared to be a much older ruin, multi-roomed with clear room depressions and some possibly later stone walling inserted into one room. This was designated area B (GPS east end N 65.60534 W 017.17687; west end N 65.60528 W
017.17719, same approximate elevation). During coring it was determined that this structure B was below the 1717 tephra, and thus belongs to an earlier phase than the recent structure A.

Down the slope to the east was another small structure (probably a small sheep house, as it has the characteristic central partition visible) was designated area C. This small structure also proved to be below the 1717 tephra, and thus is probably roughly contemporary with the larger structure B up hill.

The slope below the recent sheep house A had numerous linear features and steps, very reminiscent of the turf cutting features at Steinbogi nearby. A small spring appeared to have been improved into a rectangular basin, and was still filled with clear water. What could have been wall lines ran across the slope in
several areas, but it was unclear if these related to past agriculture or were simply the remains of turf cutting. We produced a pace and GPS sketch map of the area (Map Figure 1) and carried out both systematic and judgmental coring work in the possible midden area down slope from the area A platform. An initial transect running down slope from the A platform area was set out and cores were taken approximately 2-5 meters apart down the slope. The coring transect immediately suggested major disturbance had taken place over wide areas of Beinistaðir as whole sets of tephra layers were missing in many cores. The dark 1717 tephra was present ca 15-20 cm below the modern surface in nearly every core taken, but below this tephra often the next intact tephra encountered was the prehistoric H3- no 1477, no V950, no LNS present in many cores. In only one core was a probable 1477 tephra observed below the 1717. However, in several cores, the clear local manifestation of the LNS was observed, twice in near association with cultural layers containing charcoal and peat ash flecks. Given the apparent damage to the stratigraphy by probable turf cutting, it is not possible to firmly state that Beinistaðir was a Landnám farm, and in the observed cases it would appear that the first cultural deposits were slightly above the LNS. No V950 was observed in any core, so it seems that these early layers were probably laid down sometime in the early to mid 10th century- probably a Viking age foundation if not a first settler. In three cores outside of the areas A, B, C visible structures the cores encountered what appeared to be black, compact, charcoal rich floor layers. In two cases these cores showed some cultural material (charcoal, calcined bone flecks, peat ash) below the apparent floor layer, but further disturbance beneath which removed V950 and LNS. As the cores moved down slope, the amount of cultural material in the samples declined, in some cases simply resembling jumbled turf fragments rather than anything resembling a midden.

Interpretations and Assessment
Interpretations of these findings to some degree lean upon our prior experiences of the impact of turf cutting at the site of Steinbogi just upstream. As at Steinbogi, we have both surface and stratigraphic evidence of repeated, extensive episodes of turf removal from a rather richly growing but steeply sloping homefield. As at Steinbogi, we seem to see deliberate terracing and perhaps retaining walls designed to level the slope somewhat and probably retard erosion. As at Steinbogi, the thicker soils and prior amendment of a former homefield has been attractive to later farmers for both sheep feeding and for turf cutting. Unfortunately, it appears likely that the stratigraphic disturbance by turf cutting and leveling has had an even more intense effect on early deposits at Beinistaðir, including middens. There seem to have been multiple episodes of very large scale cutting from first settlement through the medieval period, but most intensely in the period between ca 1477 -1717. Many of these cutting episodes seem to have been carried to below the LNS, removing archaeological remains of earlier occupations from medieval and Viking age alike. It is even possible that the rather unusual farm name may be a comment upon the prior discovery of bone-rich midden deposits dating to the Viking or early medieval
period. Sometime before the fall of the 1717 tephra, the buildings associated with the early modern farm were abandoned, and large scale turf cutting seems to have halted at Beinistaðir, allowing a continuous and still largely undisturbed tephra layer to remain intact over the site.

Overall, while this site has some potential for structural investigation of early modern farm buildings, and it may be possible that some pockets of undisturbed early structures and middens have survived on site, Beinistaðir is not a high priority site for further excavations aimed at recovering a long or continuous stratigraphic sequence.

**Hofstaðir Survey**  
**June 12-13th 2007**

The survey team visited Hofstaðir June 12th, with the objective of attempting to locate undisturbed midden deposits dating to medieval-early modern phases of the farm. A consultation with the farmer confirmed that the large mounded midden depicted by Bruun 1908 had been spread over the home field in the 20th century, making use of both hand tools and bulldozer. He pointed out the area once occupied by the midden, which was still marked by two low mounds. We set out an 85 m transect which crossed both mounds and began a systematic coring survey of this area.
The cores taken along this transect produced somewhat varied results, but all demonstrated very disturbed stratigraphy. The V1717 and V1477 tephra horizons were virtually absent, as was the V950. The LNS was occasionally but rarely observed, and some cores indicated that disturbance had continued down to the prehistoric H3 tephra. While clearly cultural materials (peat ash, wood charcoal, and a few flecks of calcined bone were present in the cores, this material was almost certainly simply displaced midden material, and the absence of tephra horizons found in other parts of the site nearby serve to stress the degree of disturbance across this area. The midden deposits once present here have been completely destroyed. Note that substantial quantities of charcoal and some smithing slag were recorded in cores taken on the northern mound, repeating results of a 1999 coring run. This heavily disturbed area may in fact have the remains of a smithy or similar structure, but it would require a large scale excavation to confirm this. These coring results, combined with previous seasons’ unsuccessful attempts to find stratified midden deposits along the eastern and southern sides of the home field would seem to indicate that this area has been so completely modified by 20th century agriculture as to effectively remove midden deposits from the whole area.
The team observed and collected some bone fragments from the surface, along the modern access road to the farm house. These included a substantial worked whalebone rod (artifact) and several sheep metapodials showing bi-perforated marrow extraction (typical of medieval-early modern butchery practices. The bones seem to have been produced by a small utility trench running along the west side of the access road, suggesting possible midden deposits in this area. A series of corings along the western edge of the access road turned up very little cultural deposit, though the V1717 tephra and the LNS tephra (but not V1477).

We crossed the road to the eastern side (near the farm ruin area, now covered by small thufer formations) and carried out a series of cores just to the south of the thufer covered farm mound area, again without finding any significant amount of cultural deposits, but identifying some in situ tephra. We then moved northwards along the line of the access road, coring in an attempt to find any midden material between the road and the farm mound structures. In one core we encountered very deep cultural deposits extending to over a meter, and a 2 x 1 m test unit was opened around this core to investigate these deposits and attempt to determine bone preservation and concentration. This unit (test pit 2007-1) produced some well preserved bone, as well as fragments of window glass and recent glazed pottery, but despite use of a 4mm dry sieve, the bone recovery was very low for the area opened. A portion of the unit (0.5 x 1 m) was carried down to the top of what is probably the 1477 tephra, recovering few artifacts and only one or two pieces of bone. We halted work on the test pit at this stage, as it was clear that we were not in a productive midden area and might be on the edge of an early modern-late medieval structure which could be damaged by carrying this narrow excavation unit any lower.
We then concentrated on the grassy slope leading down towards the Laxá to the west of the access road, placing cores an area 25-30 m from the medieval/early modern structure to attempt to locate a more distant midden depositional pattern, downhill of the main building complex. This area did produce some cultural deposits, but these were fairly shallow and the absences of any tephra between the V1717 and occasional LNS again suggested disturbance. Several cores placed closer to the modern farm house on the west side of the road (nearest the location of the bone surface finds) produced little evidence of thick cultural deposits either. Further consultation with Orri and Adolf on June 13th resulted in a dual run of cores along both sides of the modern access road to try to positively confirm or deny the presence of midden beneath the roadway (see coring report). The result was somewhat discouraging, as along the lower side (west) side of the access road very little cultural material of any sort was recovered, with shallow cores reaching LNS within 20 – 40 cm. On the upper (east) side of the access road there were much deeper cultural deposits extending down well over a meter. These tended to contain extensive structural turf banding as well as different sorts of cultural deposit, but more closely resembled structural layers than midden. We concluded that another test pit in this area would be very likely to damage intact structures and very unlikely to provide much insight into midden distribution.

**Interpretations and Assessment**

Hofstaðir may still have rich and extensive medieval and post-medieval cultural deposits within the farm mound, and conditions of organic preservation remain outstanding. However, it would appear that midden deposits have not survived in either concentrated pit fill deposits or in situ sheet midden form anywhere in the home field area, along the modern access road to the west of the farm mound,
or down the slope still further to the west. While bone fragments in good condition seem to have been produced from the small utility trench excavation, these do not in fact seem to be associated with extensive or rich midden deposits in this area. While it is possible that midden deposits do exist within the farm mound area itself, the work done in 2006 and 2007 suggest strongly that there are no longer intact midden deposits easily accessible around the margins of the farm mound on any side. It appears that it will take a major open area excavation of the farm mound to recover significant amounts of stratified animal bone from later medieval-early modern Hofstaðir.

Graenavatn Survey June 13th 2007

On June 13th the survey team moved to the farm of Graenavatn, and met the elder farmer Helgi, who pointed out the area where refuse had been traditionally dumped over the edge of the large farm mound into the Graenavatn Lake. This area was approximately 15 x 5 m, and was marked by the growth of rich lyme grass (Elymus sp). A series of cores (see coring report) was taken along the edge of the farm mound (roughly east-west), and a second series was taken running north away from the edge into the farm mound area for a distance of 25 meters. The east-west coring transect (15 m) confirmed the presence of rich organic deposits along the erosion edge, probably midden material. The tephra identified in core included the V1717 (visible in nearly all cores) and a thicker grey-green tephra probably representing the 1477 tephra. In the north-south coring transect, V1717, V1477, and the LNS were all visible, with a possible presence of the V950 tephra remaining unconfirmed. The north-south transect produced multiple “turf block” bands suggesting that a substantial amount of the farm mound in this area may be composed of displaced structural turf. In four cores the LNS was reached, with what appear to be in situ cultural deposits just above. This would seem to confirm the antiquity of this settlement site, which certainly is in one of the most favorable locations in the region in terms of access to wild resources and good grazing.
At the base of the farm mound at the edge of the lake is a clear freshwater stream emerging from the lava substrate as a fast-flowing spring. This has been modified and developed as a well, clearly in use for a long time. A pathway leads down to the well from the top of the farm mound, and this pathway forms a marked depression in the cultural layers. The water in the lake is very clear, and many bones and artifacts were observed in the shallows.

Albina waded out and made a nice collection (mainly fairly recent glazed pottery, but including a ring-and-dot ornamented bone mount, possibly a center plate for a double sided comb) from the water (see artifact list and photographs in attached files). Excellent conditions of preservation, soil pH 6.25-6.5.

**Interpretation and Recommendations**

Graenavatn is certainly one of the most important farms in the region, and the large farm mound is definitely a major resource. The most accessible portion of the midden deposits are probably directly at the edge of the farm mound, and a trench could be opened along this edge without significantly destabilizing the deposit. A small crew excavation here would certainly recover modern-19th c materials in some quantity, and might well reveal a longer intact stratigraphic sequence. A very promising site overall, and well worth further investigation.
On June 14th 2007 the team moved to Geirastaðir in the lava area near the Mývatn lake side, where the farmer Finnbogi was able to positively locate the recent dumping area in a boggy depression just behind the modern house (Geirastaðir I). This area was also said to contain a possible medieval chapel and a later smithy. We made a sketch map of the boggy depression area, set out a coring transect, and excavated a small test trench (2 x 2 m, 0.5 m x 1 m taken to lava substrate. The coring transect began near the modern house, near the location of a historic smithy (according to Finnbogi), and the first two cores produced several deposits of structural turf probably associated with this building. Bird egg shell, bone fragments, and charcoal were recovered from these cores but tephra were not observed. Additional cores further from the modern house produced more indications of midden deposits (but no additional tephra), and we opened a 2 x 2 meter test pit in this area. Bone and relatively recent artifacts were immediately recovered during un-turfing, (contexts [001] and [002]). The surface of [002] (seen at right) had substantial amounts of bone as well as 20th century artifacts (wire, glass, probable porcelain electrical insulator).

The test pit 1 was extended to the lava substrate in a 0.50 x 2 m sondage.
In the sondage were two additional midden contexts [003] and at base [004]. Context [004] rested directly upon the lava substrate, but still contained some late 19\textsuperscript{th}-20\textsuperscript{th} c glazed pottery. This part of the Geirastaðir midden is apparently entirely modern-19\textsuperscript{th} century, but it is likely that older deposits are to be found nearby. Soil acidity was low (pH 6.25-6.5) and bone preservation was excellent. After backfilling the Geirastaðir test trench 1, we made one coring in the front of the modern house, near a small grassy mound which appeared to be cultural, but in fact showed no cultural deposits in the core.

**Interpretation and Recommendations**

Geirastaðir is a potentially very interesting site with early medieval / Viking age deposits probably present in the area. The boggy depression sampled by the coring transects and test pit 1 probably contains multiple phases, but the area excavated in 2007 seems to be entirely recent-early modern. This is an excellent source of data on these periods, and with the cooperation of Finnbogi (who was extremely helpful and knowledgeable) this could be an interesting study in itself. For a wider understanding of the Geirastaðir deposits, it would probably be wise to consider a very large, open area unit approach to get the best possible view of what may prove to be a complex intersection of structures and middens of different periods.

**Litla-Gautlond June 15\textsuperscript{th} 2007**

The site of Litla-Gautlond was occupied in medieval times and again occupied briefly in the 1820's. The ruins of both phases of occupation are visible as ruins (N 65.33998, W 017.08681), with patches of grass cover showing around the more recent ruins. Black fly activity was intense during the visit. Coring around these 19\textsuperscript{th} c ruins produced little or no cultural deposit, with only a few
patches of turf and peat ash appearing in the cores. Perhaps significantly, the widespread V1477 tephra (very thick in other parts of the site) is largely absent in cores around the later structures, suggesting disturbance by turf cutting and other activities. Coring by the lakeside also produced only isolated flecks of cultural material, with very little evidence for any prolonged 19th c occupation.

About 100 m to the south of the main 19th century structures and apparent activity area are ruins which seem to relate to the earlier medieval occupation (GPS N65.56573 W017.14272). These ruins (G) did show more consistent tephras, with the V1717 and the locally thick V1477 very clear above the cultural deposits in all cores. Perhaps due to medieval disturbance, the LNS was not generally present. Cores running down hill from the area G ruins produced what appeared to be substantial cultural deposits below the V1477 tephra.

A small shovel test was opened on this coring, producing about 50 cm of natural and cultural deposit above sterile subsoil. All the cultural materials were below both the V1717 and the V1477 tephra. The cultural deposit appeared to be a short segment of turf wall construction (perhaps a yard wall??) above a sheet midden about 10-15 cm thick. The sheet midden contained ash and charcoal and a few flecks of bone and bird egg shell. GPS N65.56573 W017.14272 Acc. 5m.

Further down hill, a larger ruin lies near the shore of the lake. This appears to be a multi-room structure, and might represent a dwelling house. Coring along the edge of the structure facing the lake produced very little in the way of cultural deposits, and no clear indication of an associated midden (the midden material may well in fact have been thrown in the lake). A core in the center of a room depression produced a floor layer well below the V1477 tephra, some cultural deposit below, and then subsoil followed by the H3 tephra (LNS apparently removed). This would appear to date this lake side structure to the medieval occupation. GPS N65.56584 W01714184 Acc. 5m

Interpretation and Recommendations

Litla Gautlond would appear to have little zooarchaeological potential for its 19th c occupation period- this may have simply been too short to produce much in the way of stratified deposits. There is greater potential for recovery of information and bone material from the earlier medieval occupation, which seems to have ended well before 1477 but lasted long enough to generate several phases of deposit, and which may have an associated sheet midden. This should be kept in
mind for future investigations, but overall the site does not seem to have a strong potential for a long term record.

**Thorleifstaðir Survey Report June 16th 2007**

The site of Thorleifstaðir (THR) lies south of Baldursheimar, just off a track that begins with a hard left near the corner post of the southwestern-most tree plantation enclosure at the modern Baldursheimar farm complex and which continues south to approximately GPS N 65.50101 W 17.0811. The Thorleifstaðir ruin complex represents a substantial number of buildings, several of which may be still unidentified in the low willow and birch scrubland which surrounds the two main grass-covered ruin areas (provisionally area N [north] and area S [south]). The site today is fully covered with vegetation, and no major erosion (such as has impacted Hrísheimar so heavily) is visible. The ruins include at least two known phases of occupation, one “early” and long abandoned by Jarðabók, and the other an apparently short-lived sel. The upper structures were below the V1717 tephra but had obliterated the V1477 tephra. The visible earlier buildings and wall lines were below intact V1717 ,V1477, and probably H1300 tephras (see coring report), and as we discovered were probably above the V950 and LNS tephra horizons. The later (early modern?) buildings were inserted into the older structures, as was commonly done on many re-occupied sites. The outlines of the earlier buildings were far less clear, but the area S structures appear to be the main dwelling house, which may well have been a long-hall in form, possibly with associated out-shot rooms to the north and east. This structure seems to have had two small ca 50 x 50 cm pits dug into it quite some time ago, possibly by an earlier archaeological visitor.
Structure wall in area S seen from the southeast corner, with the original wall line to the photo left (southeast) and the cut of the inserted later structure in photo center. Flag marks core in early wall which showed intact V1717 and V1477 tephra.
South of the area S structure was a grassy slope stretching approximately 15-20 meters to the south-east from the apparent walls of the main area S structure. This slope was tested with two coring transects running approximately N-S and E-W. Cores struck intact V1717 and V1477 tephra consistently and at base hit what appeared to be both V950 and the LNS (with apparent cultural material between). It is likely that other tephras are present on site, including H 1300, possibly H 1158 and K 1262, but see report by Magnus Sigurgeirsson for final results. These initial results showing cultural deposits in association with early tephras prompted two test trenches along the two coring transects (1 and 2), one (2) approximately 1 x 3 meters, the other (1) approximately 1.5 x 3 meters (with long axis running across the slope). The test trenches were intended to provide a better view of potentially complex midden stratigraphy and to test for bone preservation and abundance. The two test pits were shovel excavated through the upper culturally sterile layers and trowel excavated in the cultural layers. Test pit 1 was carried to sterile subsoil in a 0.50 x 3 m sondage but otherwise left just above the cultural layers, while test pit 2 was halted before reaching sterile subsoil to avoid damaging emerging stratigraphy. The test trenches both showed regular stratigraphy with bedding angles generally following the modern slope (see profiles 1 and 2), but at the base of both test trenches upcast soil with flecks of the distinctive H3 tephra were encountered. This sort of deposit is so closely associated with early sunken featured structures (pit houses) that we halted work and carefully cleaned up to be able to document the relationships of tephra, upcast, and fill.

In the upper (north) end of test trench 1 it became clear that we had clipped into the outside corner of a pit house that had cut through the LNS, and which had both intact walling of turf blocks holding substantial amounts of grey-green tephra and the upcast subsoil mixed with H3. Running above these in situ structural elements but below some turf and soil “melt” from the pit house weathering was the grey green V950 tephra (see Test Trench 1 Profiles 1-2). This pit house had been constructed soon after Landnám (and making use of turf blocks holding substantial amounts of LNS) and had been abandoned and stood roofless when
the V950/930 tephra fell. This sequence is strongly reminiscent of the stratigraphic situation at Hrísheimar a few kilometers away, where pit houses were dug directly into the Landnám ash horizon and in-filled before the fall of the V 950/930 tephra.

In the south end of the same test trench 1, more patches of mixed subsoil and flecks of H3 was encountered, above the LNS but below the V950 tephra. This second upcast deposit cannot be the same as the structure cut into in the north side of the unit, so this must represent another pit house with a similar occupational sequence. In the base of test trench 2, patches of the same sort of mixed subsoil and H3 tephra were encountered, possibly deriving from a third pit house in this area. All of these three (?) pit houses are stratigraphically below the wall fall deposits apparently associated with the long rectilinear structure just to the north at the top of what now appears to be a small farm mound. Given the clear indication of multiple structural phases and pit houses just outside the limits of the 2007 test pits, we decided to cease excavations before damaging any key stratigraphic connections. Profiles were drawn and photographed (see photo archive and drawn profiles) and the two test trenches were temporarily left open for inspection by trained tephrochronologist Magnus.
A small number of bones were recovered (mainly from test trench 2), but these were well preserved and included an artifact recovered near the lowest excavated portion of test trench 2 made from a horse metacarpal bone (not a ice skate, but carefully prepared and showing marks of cord-binding along the distal end cut into a V-notch). Bird egg shell was recovered in several cores, and fragments were present in the profiles as well. Soil pH was high, running 6.75-7.0 and should provide excellent conditions for organic preservation. Fire cracked stones were also encountered at the lower levels, apparently part of a midden deposit.

**Interpretation and Recommendations**

Thorleifstaðir is certainly a very important site, with multiple phases of occupation dating from first settlement down to early modern times. The site is very reminiscent of Hrísheimar, in the combination of multiple closely spaced pit houses established directly after the LNS but abandoned well prior to the ca. AD 930 tephra, and the association with a larger (and somewhat later) “long hall” ruin. Like Hrísheimar, the site also faces a wet meadow which in the Viking Age/early Middle Ages was probably far wetter, and may well have had small streams and even minor ponds (at present there is no nearby source of water). The major difference is that unlike Hrísheimar, Thorleifstaðir is not largely eroded away, but remains beneath an intact soil cover whose in situ tephra horizons indicate that there has not been the same sort of devastating post-medieval erosion impact as at Hrísheimar. Structures, yard walls, and potentially multiple midden deposits thus remain more or less intact, with only the normal damage caused by successive occupations at the same site. This is an excellent site with great potential for further investigation, and could form the basis for a long term project.

**Baldursheimar Survey Report June 17th 2007**

On June 17th the team visited the farm of Baldursheimar, and carried out two coring transects between the modern Baldursheimar 1 farm (on the older farm mound) and the small lake fronting the old farm area. The lake was full of ducks and small waterfowl, and the rich wet meadows around the margins were still being grazed by the modern dairy herd. The edge of the farm mound was very distinct on the surface, and cores taken on its edge (transect 1, 17 m from farm mound to lake shore) revealed structural turf construction/demolition debris as well as charcoal and peat ash deposits.
The deposits further away from the farm mound also showed significant amounts of cultural deposit, and it would appear that an extensive sheet midden extends from between the farm mound and near the edge of the lake. Coring directly at the lakeshore produced the least cultural deposit, and it would appear that the
greatest potential midden concentration is within 10-15 m of the farm mound. In several cores, layers of what appear to be wind-deposited sand are present, and the base of the cores all end in very dark, wet, peaty sand. Cores regularly retrieved cultural material from between V1717 and V1477, but the lower tephras were hard to see due to the darkening and increasingly peaty character of the soils. Soil pH ranged from 6.0-6.25, slightly more acid than the Mývatn average but still in the range for good bone preservation. What appeared to be bird egg shell was recovered in two cores.

Interpretation and Recommendations
While much of the Baldursheimar holding has been heavily impacted by land reclamation and modern farming, there is clearly a cultural deposit extending over something like 20x15 m in the area between the modern farm mound edge and the lakeside. This definitely dates to late medieval/early modern times, and may well extend into earlier periods, but one suspects that the wet and peaty conditions near the base (probably reflecting the former lake shore deposits before they were filled in by midden deposition). While we did not test pit to check for bone concentration, this area would seem to be extremely promising for further investigation, as it may fill in a blank spot in the Mývatn zooarchaeological record, and would certainly be an important record from a major farm.

Grímstaðir Survey Report June 18, 2007

On the morning of June 18th the team visited the site of Grímstaðir on the shores of Mývatn. Coring by the lake side and on mounded features outside the wire fence enclosing the modern garden area around Grímstaðir 1 farmhouse produced little or no cultural material, and no intact tephra down to H3.
Coring just below the farm mound with modern house inserted. This core produced a small amount of what may be midden material below turf collapse.

This suggested substantial field flattening and disturbance had taken place in the recent past (the v 1717 tephra was also absent) over a fairly wide area. Soil acidity was low (pH 6.25-6.5) and as in most other Mývatn sites conditions of bone preservation should be good. While most cores produced little or no archaeological material, two cores in the wire-enclosed modern garden area did produce some possible midden / cultural material (charcoal, wood and peat ash) below a probable turf collapse layer. It is probable that some intact earlier cultural deposits do survive in the wire enclosed garden area, but these are fairly thin and restricted in area. While it is possible that deeper deposits are to be found on the site, opportunistic coring of green mounds around Grimstaðir 1 uniformly produced only faint traces of cultural layers, and most showed evidence of major disturbance (missing tephra).

**Interpretation and Recommendations**

Grimstaðir is known to be an early settlement site, but the area around the modern structure of Grimstaðir 1 has very limited cultural deposits, and no apparent deeply stratified midden. If the farm has been moved in fairly recent times (as has been suggested) these spotty and shallow cultural deposits make good sense, but there seems to be too little material for a long-lasting farm site dating back to Landnám. Either this material has been removed by flattening
activity or the modern farm buildings are not on the older settlement area. While a more systematic survey of the whole Grímstaðir holding might prove productive, there seems to be little prospect of recovering a deeply stratified deposit around the modern farm building.

**Skutustaðir Survey Report June 18th 2007**

On June 18th, the survey team carried out sketch mapping and coring at the midden deposits first discovered by Árni Einarsson on the south east side of the modern farm and church buildings. At the top of a grass covered hill just 20 m from the modern farm building are an indistinct group of structural ruins (in the legendary area of the tunnel built by Killer Skuta). This area was designated area A. A small exposure had been opened by a path from the modern farm buildings down slope to a barn and tractor shed, and this showed what appeared to be rich midden deposits full of charcoal, peat ash, and fire cracked stones as well as bird, fish, mammal and shellfish remains. The surface collection made by Arni included cod, trout, charr, cattle, sheep, and unidentified mammal bone, and suggested a rich midden deposit. No glass, ceramic or pipe stems were visible in the exposure. The
deposit seemed to be part of a larger fill of the edge of one of the lava craters, running down into the crater on an E-W axis. Green grass also extended downslope to the S, running into what appears to be a second crater. These midden deposits along the crater rim area were designated area B.

Still further down slope, near the small pond that runs eastwards to the Mývatn Science Station were the “ash peninsula” and a small mound showing green grass growth was clearly evident. This area was designated area C.

Coring in area A around the probable structures revealed cultural deposits both above and below the probable V1717 tephra, but not any great depth of deposit. In area C, both the small ash peninsula and the mound revealed some ash and charcoal indicating cultural deposits, but boggy soil and fairly thin deposits suggested limited midden accumulation. By contrast coring down both the south and east slopes of area B produced extraordinary results. Transect 1 running along the apparent upper edge of the crater rim Transect 2 running Southeast down past the exposure indicated the presence of between 40-75 cm of exceptionally rich midden (rock was hit in all cores below, possibly reflecting the crater bottom). Bone fragments (including half a seal metapodial) were present in every core, and the density of deposit seems impressive.

Still more impressive was the results of cores taken on the southern end of Transect 2 (running roughly N-S). While relatively shallow cultural deposits were
present right at the crater rim, deposit depth increased dramatically as cores were moved southwards, down the slope towards the pond in area C. The deepest core hit rock at about 255 cm from surface, with rich midden present right to the bottom (egg shell, fish and mammal bone, clam shell fragments). One tephra (grey green possibly the V950/930 tephra) was observed in this core, but in the rest of the midden cores tephras were difficult to observe, and the LNS was not firmly identified in any of the deposits.

Full 2.75 m core with all extensions being used to test the Skutustadir area B midden depth

Apparently the exceptional midden depth reflects infilling of a crater, and this early “landscaping” effect may account for the survival of this amazing deposit. While phasing is still somewhat unclear, it is certain that the Skutustadir midden deposit must reflect a long period of accumulation, and it provides a potentially unique opportunity to investigate long term change through time at a major farm in Mývatnssveit.
Interpretation and Recommendations
The deep and very rich midden deposits at Skutustadir represent a major archaeological resource, with potential significance on the national and international level. If deposits are as extensive and as rich as the coring work and the small exposure suggest, this could be a key reference site for both bones and artifacts spanning a long time period. These deposits represent a major find, and should definitely see further investigation in the near future.

Overall Assessment

While some archaeological midden deposits in Mývatnssveit have been effectively erased, there is clear evidence of widespread preservation of bone and organic material, and several deposits that seem to present the opportunity for extending the Viking Age economic picture upwards in time. While many factors will influence the course of future fieldwork in Mývatnssveit, from the standpoint of midden investigations a possible priority list would be:

1) Skutustaðir area B middens- rich, deeply stratified and not apparently associated with structural remains. Potential for the long stratified sequence needed to connect different periods in Mývatnssveit. Can be excavated with a relatively small crew, and can be sampled rather than 100% excavated.

2) Graenavatn farm mound edge- also rich, and probably deeply stratified, certainly extending into the near past, also not directly intermixed with structures. Also a good target for smaller scale sampling excavation.

3) Thorleifstaðir- there is great opportunity for a combined structures/midden investigation of a Viking Age- Medieval farm similar to Hrísheimar, but with largely intact stratigraphy providing a much more complete picture of farm layout and phasing of deposits. This would be a larger scale undertaking, but could be extremely productive for a wide range of interests.

4) Baldursheimar- While test pits are needed to confirm deposits, the area near the lake seems to have a good collection of late medieval-early modern material.

5) Geirastaðir, Grímstaðir, Litla Gautlund : some potential for bone recovery, and probably some undisturbed midden deposits dating to useful time periods, but not extremely favorable targets for large scale excavation.

6) Hofstaðir, Beinistaðir: probably do not warrant further midden investigations except in the context of a large scale structural project being taken on for other primary objectives.