



Sveigakot Midden Unit M Report 2001

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Summary: The 2001 summer season saw the conclusion of intensive excavation of the midden unit M opened in 1999. The unit has produced a very substantial collection of well preserved animal bone, , and over 75 registered artifacts of the Viking period. The final season involved the excavation of a major western extension of the original unit in order to trace more early “lower midden” material below the 007 tephra, and some renewed work along the edges of the eastern squares first opened in 1999. This work recovered useful quantities of bone from both areas and a range of additional artifacts, as well as an enigmatic pit structure in the W extension. A pattern of six test pits spaced approx 5 m apart in the area between M and the structure unit S found very little midden material in this area, but a seventh pit (Unit P) revealed a sequence of low density midden, turf collapse, and an apparent floor layer. While a great deal more remains to be done with the archaeology of Sveigakot, it appears that the great bulk of the stratified midden has been cleared and priority can be given to open area work aimed primarily at structural investigations.

Area M Extensions:



The back fill from profile edges is cleared and additional 2 x 2 m units laid out at the W and N sides of the 2000 western extension. At close of excavations in 2000 this area continued to produce animal bone from contexts directly upon the 009 tephra and below the 007 tephra (lower midden). A major objective is to recover more of this early material.



As the M unit is extended further W, the lower midden layer (context 0049) thins progressively and the midden breaks up into small pockets.



In the eastern end of the M unit, we extend the unit to the S and E to recover more stratified material from the upper midden layers above the surface formed by the 007 tephra. There is little or no midden material from the lower midden between the 007 and 009 (Landnam?) tephra sequence in this part of the M unit. Some of the accumulation that separates

these midden deposits is nearly sterile. Is it a natural wind deposit? Where did it originate?



The E extension rapidly runs into thinning upper midden covering an irregular 007 surface, but bone and artifacts are recovered in some numbers from these squares.



An extension in 896/312 produces thin layers of both upper and lower midden and concentrations of stones on the 009 "landnam" surface. Root casts begin to appear in many squares at the top of the 009 surface. These are spaced between 1 m and 75 cm apart, suggesting a fairly dense wooded cover for this part of the SVK ridge ca AD 871.



Close up shows an unusually well preserved root complex, with flecks of preserved wood (roots) as well as root casts. The midden material of the lower midden must have sealed these deposits rather rapidly to have allowed this degree of preservation (50 cm scale). Over a 4 sq m area, the root casts are between 100-75 cm apart.



View eastwards from the western extension provides overview of the M unit nearing completion.



In the NW corner of the W extension a semi-circular pit appears, filled with bone-rich midden material. Clayton widens the unit to better understand the feature.



The pit turns out to be very small and steep-sided, almost like a barrel pit, but with no (current) indication of any associated structure, and with the interior filled by a very large stone (which has additional midden material running underneath). We end work on this feature at this point as it is possible that it may be associated with something structural just to the N of the unit.

A series of ca 35 cm x 50 cm shovel test pits between



M and S at 905/327,330,332 and 900/327,330,332 produce no substantial midden and only thin culture layers. However, a seventh test pit at 895/327 encounters low density midden overlying structural turf collapse and apparent floor layers. Photo shows location of this new unit "P" relative to the M and T units to the S.



Test pit in unit T showing the depth to the apparent floor layer (ca 50 cm from modern surface).



Close up of test pit P showing major layers identified. Sterile wind blown silts, low density bone bearing midden, turf wall collapse, and hard compact black floor deposits .



Base of test pit P showing possible floor layers, turf collapse, and midden material.

Summary and Recommendations:

Additional midden material will probably be encountered in and around structure units T and S, and it seems likely that additional low-density midden (mainly lower midden) extends along much of the edge of the ridge between T and S (and taking in the structure or structures around unit P). It is also possible that bone middens may lie under the 1.5-2 m of later water borne sediments along the base of the medieval ridge. However, it appears that the major mid concentrations of upper and lower midden that we have excavated under unit M are now fairly completely removed and that there is no longer need for a permanent on site middens team. These midden layers in area M have been extremely productive, and their near contemporary dating to the midden deposits at HST present us with an excellent opportunity to compare farms in the same district.

We recommend that the teams continuing the excavations at SVK simply continue their current practice of documenting and excavating small midden deposits and bone concentrations as they are recognized (as per standard FSI recovery standards), while maintaining a sort of “watching brief” for any larger midden concentrations along the W edge of the SVK ridge.