

Archaeological investigations at Sveigakot 2001

With reports on preliminary investigations at Hrísheimar, Selhagi and Ytri
Tunga

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Orri Vésteinsson:

Introduction

Thanks to continued support from the Icelandic Research Council (Rannís), NSF and The National Geographic society excavations continued apace at Sveigakot in 2001. As before the project was directed by Orri Vésteinsson with Karen Milek supervising the excavation of the structures in Area S and Tom McGovern supervising the excavation of the sheet midden M. The Sveigakot team was joined by a contingent from the Polish Academy of Sciences under the leadership of professor Przemysław Urbańczyk who has undertaken to supervise excavations of sunken features revealed by midden excavations in 2000 in Area T at the southwest margins of the site.

While considerable headway was made in 2001 it is becoming more and more clear that Sveigakot is a site full of surprises, containing much more extensive archaeological deposits than originally believed. Area S can realistically be expected to be fully excavated in 2002 – the earlier phase of the skáli revealed in 2001 clearly is not predated by any more structures. Area T has on the other hand been revealed to contain a complex sequence of sunken featured buildings which clearly will take longer to investigate fully. In 2000 structural evidence was found a short distance south of Area S and in 2001 further evidence of buried structures was revealed between areas S and T (P). These await investigations which hopefully will reveal the stratigraphic relationship between the features and deposits in areas S, M and T. At present it seems clear that the structure in area S is the most recent building at the site – occupied well into the 12th century. It has an earlier phase which post-dates ~950 and may be contemporary with or later than the midden deposits in area T, which have radiocarbon dates suggesting they may have been deposited in the early 11th century. They in turn cap a series of pit houses, the latest of which excavated in 2001 clearly has a long history of use and repairs. These pit houses are the earliest structural remains so far examined at Sveigakot and they may be contemporary with the upper midden in area M. Below the tephra layer, tentatively dated to ~950 AD, there is the lower midden, as yet not associated with any structural remains, representing the earliest animal bone collection so far excavated in Iceland.

Based on the incomplete stratigraphic sequence and a number of radiocarbon dates obtained from areas M, S and T a tentative sequence can be suggested for the site.

	S	M	T
12 th c.	Phase V structures (smaller farm)		
	Phase IV reuse (sheiling ?)		
11 th c.	Phase II structures		midden
		Upper midden	Last pit-house
			Earlier pit-houses
AD ~950	Upper midden		
AD 871	Lower midden		?

Table 1. Tentative sequence of structures and middens at Sveigakot.

	context	comment	material	13C/12C ratio	radiocarbon age	calibrated intercepts (means)	calibrated 1 sigma	calibrated 2 sigma
Beta 134146	SVK M 011	M	Cattle bone	-21,00%	1110+/- 40 BP	AD 965	AD 890-990	AD 870-1005
Beta 134144	SVK M 002	M	Cattle bone	-21,00%	1120+/- 40 BP	AD 910,920,955	AD 885-980	AD 815-1005
Beta 134145	SVK M 012	M	Sheep bone	-19,30%	1090+/- 40 BP	AD 980	AD 900-1000	AD 880-1015
Beta 146583	SVK T 055	upper fill of pit house T	Cattle bone	-22,70%	1040+/- 40 BP	AD 1000	AD 980-1020	AD 910-1030
Beta 146584	SVK T 055	upper fill of pit house T	Cattle bone	-21,50%	1010+/- 40 BP	AD 1020	AD 1000-1030	AD 980-1140
Beta 154783	SVK S 558	upper floor layers Str. 1	Cattle bone	-21,40%	930+/- 40 BP	AD 1050,1100, 1140	AD 1030-1170	AD 1020-1200
Beta 154784	SVK S 558	upper floor layers Str. 1	Cattle bone	-21,10%	840+/- 40 BP	AD 1210	AD 1180-1250	AD 1060-1270
Beta 154785	SVK S 558	upper floor layers Str. 1	Caprine bone	-21,40%	930+/- 40 BP	AD 1050,1100, 1140	AD 1030-1170	AD 1020-1200

Table 2. Radiocarbon dates from Sveigakot.

A problem that still needs to be resolved is the identification and dating of the Veidivötn tephra at Sveigakot. In this report the upper olive-green tephra is ascribed the date ~950 following the results of work by geologists Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson and Hafliði Hafliðason but while a case is building for this identification there is still room for doubt. The question is

also being examined by a team from the University of Edinburgh lead by Andrew Dugmore and their research may yet shed new light on the matter.

By 2001 it had become abundantly clear what enormous difference the additional material from Sveigakot had made to the understanding of the archaeology of Hofstaðir and to the objectives of the Landscapes of settlements project. The clear temporal relationship provided by the two olive green tephras (irrespective of their absolute age) has for the first time in Icelandic archaeology allowed comparison of two neighbouring sites occupied in the same period. The results have not only been surprising but also surprisingly important. The apparently smaller and more marginally located Sveigakot is an older settlement than Hofstaðir, a fact that has far ranging implications for our understanding of the settlement of Mývatnssveit and the sequence of events in the process of the *landnám*. It suggests that Hofstaðir was not a pioneering settlement which grew to importance as a result of its seniority, but on the contrary a fundamentally political foundation, an attempt to create a power base *after* most of Mývatnssveit had been settled. The signals for social status coming from Sveigakot are also in some ways unexpected. While the small size of the phase V skáli seems to be consistent with the marginal location of the site, the artifact and animal bone assemblages suggest little or no difference in status from Hofstaðir. This is no doubt partly explained by the fact that the animal bones and large parts of the artifact assemblage come from the middens in areas M and T which are – at least in part – significantly earlier than the structures in Area S. The earliest midden deposits suggest that Sveigakot started out as a very “healthy” farm, with many pigs and a high cattle to sheep ratio. Unlike Hofstaðir Sveigakot seems then to have set out on a course of gradual decline until its eventual abandonment in the 12th century.

These results raise a number of new questions, some of which may be best answered by looking at more sites from the same period. In 2001 it was decided to put test trenches in three potential sites in order to see if they are from the Settlement period/Viking age and if they merit further investigations. Two sites in Mývatnssveit had been identified as possible early settlements during the regional survey that was carried out in 1996-1999 and one coastal site in Tjörnnes had been identified during a regional survey there in 1999. The site in Tjörnnes turned out not to be a settlement site at all but the other two, Selhagi and Hrísheimar, are clearly medieval with occupation levels dating to the Viking age as well as the high middle ages. Both sites have large and well preserved bone assemblages which were partially excavated in 2001. The results of the analysis of the bone assemblage from Selhagi are



Map showing the sites investigated in Mývatnssveit in 2001

included in this report but preliminary results from Hrisheimar suggest that its bone assemblage conforms to the general pattern seen at Hofstaðir and Sveigakot, with significant variations which may be related to site location and status. The Hrisheimar collection has for instance the highest percentage of pig bone in any Icelandic site.

These preliminary investigations are clearly promising and it is expected that in 2002 more potential sites will be test trenched in order to assess their age and preservation of animal bone. One of these sites is Oddastaðir, some 5 km south of Sveigakot, where Ian Simpson carried out investigations in the homefield in 2001. His geological trenches show significant improvement to the Oddastaðir homefield below the 1477 tephra, clearly marking this out as another

medieval settlement site. Unlike Sveigakot Oddastaðir is not eroded and represents a complete set of farm house, animal sheds and pens, homefield boundaries and a possible church.

Sveigakot 2001. Area S – Long House

Introduction

In 2001, excavations in Area S at Sveigakot continued to focus on the domestic building, Structure 1, and the surrounding buildings and midden deposits. Structure 1, represented on the surface by two parallel lines of stones, had been discovered during a surface survey in 1998, along with two other tentative buildings (named Structures 2 and 3), which were identified on the basis of lines of stones running north and east of Structure 1. An assessment excavation conducted in Structure 1 in 1999 determined that the slightly sunken building had well preserved floor deposits below several layers of turf collapse and aeolian silt, and that the original cut for the building could be dated tephrochronologically to the second half of the 10th century.

The first major field campaign in Area S took place in 2000, when a 13 x 7-10 m excavation area was opened up over Structure 1 and the putative building to the north, Structure 2. The excavation revealed that Structure 1 was a domestic building with at least two major occupation phases, the final of which was a narrow, straight-walled, stone-lined, rectangular building measuring 10 x 3.5 m. The uppermost occupation deposit in Structure 1, which was sealed by turf collapse, has been radiocarbon dated to 1020-1200 AD. The main floor layer in this final occupation phase was associated with a central hearth, four central post pads, and a row of small post-holes. The removal of this floor surface at the end of the 2000 field season exposed layers of turf collapse, some of which had showed signs of trampling and occupation, a variety of ashy and organic occupation deposits, and the end of a stone pavement extending from the eastern end of Structure 1.

In 2001, the lines of stones north of Structure 1, which had appeared on the surface to represent the walls of an additional small building, turned out to be floating in aeolian silt, but there were several thin spreads of turf and a black charcoal- and ash-rich surface, which could represent structural remains. East of Structure 2 was an extensive midden deposit, which turned out to be capping a barrel pit, indicating that there was an additional structure in this area that had not been visible on the surface. In addition, two small test pits were excavated in the region of Structure 3, which showed that a probable floor layer of compact ash and

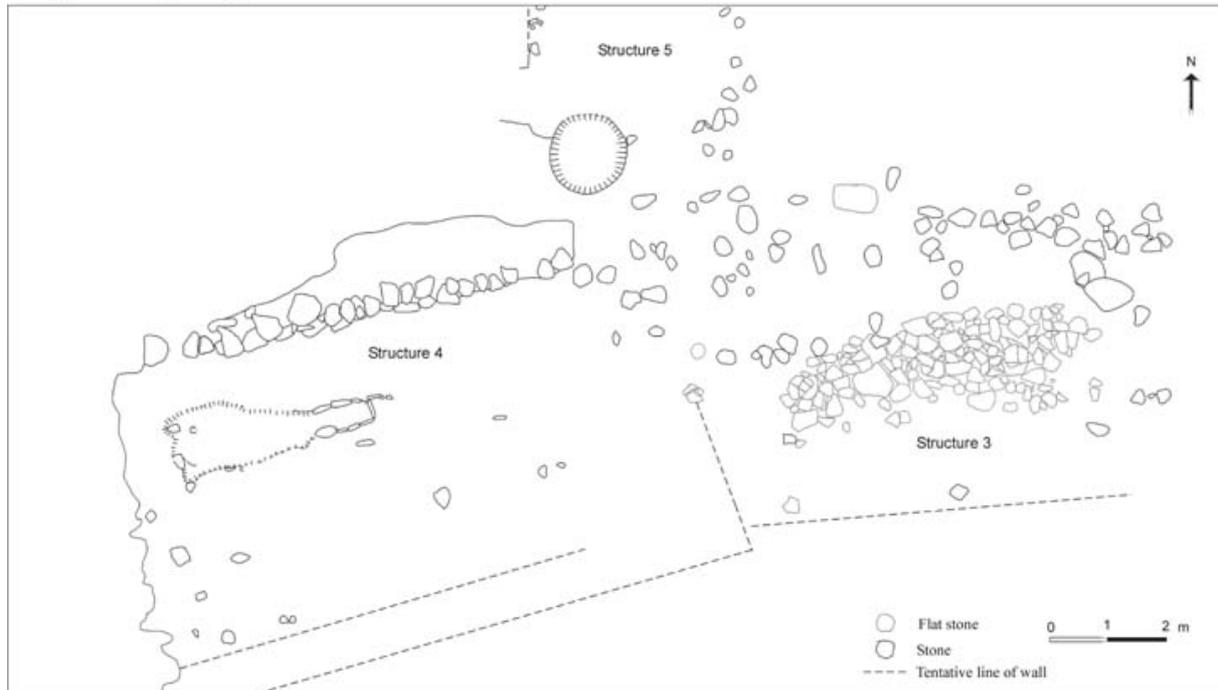
charcoal was located to the south of, but not to the north of, the row of stones. The excavation in 2000 therefore revealed that Area S was the site of a complex of buildings belonging to three or more phases, the sizes, relationships and in some cases the functions of which, remained to be determined.

The excavation of Area S continued in 2001, with the goal of clarifying these problems. In addition, there remained a number of broader questions about the site that could only be answered with further investigation of the structural remains. The first of these issues was the status of the site. It is clear from both the faunal assemblage and the structural remains that Sveigakot was a permanently occupied farm, and a comparison of the faunal and artefactual assemblages with those from Hofstaðir and other settlement sites suggests that the farm was not particularly impoverished. Nevertheless, Structure 1 is a very small domestic building by Icelandic standards, and it is possible that earlier phases of the building were significantly larger, in addition to being a part of complex of contemporaneous structures. The changing size and numbers of buildings could give an indication of the changing status of the farm. Also, it was clear that Structure 1 had gone through a number of phases of rebuilding, and further excavations would clarify whether these phases were part of a continual process of occupation, or whether they represented periods of site abandonment. If there were periods when the main dwelling structure went out of use, it is also possible that the site was used as a shieling between major occupation phases, and further excavation was required to clarify this. More information about the functions, phases and dates of the buildings, and the relationships between them, would therefore provide important insights into the changing function and economic status of the site, as well as an understanding of the environmental changes that took place in this region between the 9th and 12th centuries, and the affect of these changes on human activity in the area.

Methodology

In order to fully expose the earlier phases of Structure 1 (Structure 4), as well as Structures 2 and 3, and the building associated with the barrel pit (Structure 5), Area S was extended in all directions to encompass a total of 21 x 12 m, or 252 m². As before, the excavation strategy involved the removal of all soil and sediment by hand and the use of single context recording. Occupation deposits and midden deposits were sampled and the remainder dry sieved on site with 4 mm mesh. All of the contexts excavated in 2001 are summarised in Table 1, while

Figure 1. Area S, showing Phase II structures.



some of the contexts referred to in this report were excavated in 2000, and are summarised in an earlier report.¹ This interim report presents the results of the excavation in a sequence of phases from the most recent to the earliest, and it should be noted that, in the light of the new excavation results, the numbers of these phases differ slightly from the sequence outlined in the interim report for 2000. The phases outlined in this report should still be considered preliminary, and can be applied only to Area S.

Excavation Results

Phase VII: Natural aeolian accumulation from the 12th century to the present. After its abandonment, Area S was covered with a series of windblown sand and silt deposits (contexts 549-551, 571-573, 677, 683, 685, 708, 746). These consisted of medium to dark brown very fine sandy silt, and were often very homogenous and easily distinguished from the occupation deposits below. The occasional charcoal fragment or artefact – such as the gaming piece found in context 685, or the spindle whorl fragment found in context 708 – in these otherwise homogenous layers, indicates a degree of working of the sediments by cryoturbation and/or bioturbation. These aeolian deposits were thickest in the slight depression within the sunken-featured building, Structure 1, and south of its southern long

¹ Milek, K. (2001) Area S Interim Report. In O. Vésteinsson (ed.), *Archaeological Investigations at Sveigakot 1998-2000*. Unpublished excavation report No. FS134-00211. Reykjavík: Fornleifastofnun Íslands.

wall. Elsewhere, they had been seriously eroded by the wind, which has unfortunately meant that no tephra layers survive above the archaeological deposits in Area S. Deflation has been especially drastic in the region of Structure 3, at the top of the low rise on which the ruins are situated, where loose, sandy aeolian deposits and sparse vegetation sit directly on top of the yellow, silty subsoil and the dark grey and black tephra of the *Landnám* tephra sequence. Down-slope erosion in addition to the wind has also truncated the aeolian silts and archaeological deposits on the western edge of the low rise.

Phase VI: Site abandonment and structural collapse in the 12th century. During the late 12th century, Structures 1 and 2 were abandoned, and their roofs and walls collapsed. The area within and around Structure 1 was covered by various layers of turf collapse, most of which were excavated in 2000 (contexts 554-557, 575, 585, 590; see Milek 2001). Two of these layers had extended past the edge of the excavation in 2000, and were completed in 2001. The southern edge of turf collapse 554 was excavated as context 724 – a dark brown fine sandy silt containing lenses of reddish oxidised iron and dark grey tephra. The western extent of context 590, which probably represents the collapse of the eastern wall of Structure 1, was excavated in 2001 as context 728, which also contained dark grey tephra in reddish to dark brown very fine sandy silt. Abutting the northern side of the collapsed north long wall of Structure 1 (context 607) were several small dumps of turf that were distinguished on the basis of colour and organic content (contexts 603, 605, 739, 741).

North of Structure 1, in the region of the putative Structure 2, were three layers of turf collapse overlying a black, laminated layer that may represent a floor deposit (context 646; see Phase V, below). Over the eastern edge of the black deposit was a layer of very dark greyish brown and reddish turf collapse, which was excavated in 2000 (context 576). Over the western edge of the black deposit, aligned north-south on the edge of the low mound, was a layer of dark brown turf containing grey tephra (possibly the ~950 AD tephra) and the black tephra of the LNL sequence (context 710). Overlying the central part of the black deposit was very distinctive layer composed of firm, reddish, orange and cream-coloured peaty or very organic turf (context 577). The excavation of this context began in 2000, but it extended to the western edge of the excavation, and was completed in 2001. The colour and composition of this deposit is very like context 556, a peaty turf layer above the floor within Structure 1 (excavated in 2000), context 682, which capped the paved floor within Structure 3 (see Phase III, below), and context 721 in Area T, which was above the floor within the pit house, all of which are thought to represent roof collapse. This interpretation, which should

also be applied to context 577, is based on the recurring position of these peaty turf layers immediately above the floor layers, and the fact that they are within the centre of the buildings only. This is a pattern that has been observed in 19th century turf houses, where the roof tends to be the first structural component to collapse; it falls into the building and is confined by the still standing walls. If the interpretation of these distinctively organic turf layers is correct, it must be significant that they were recurrently chosen as roofing material. Perhaps the wettest turf available was chosen for the roof due to the fact that the dense root mat, and the higher proportion of organic matter relative to silt or sand, would make the turf more impermeable to rain water.

Phase V: Occupation of Structures 1 and 2 in the 11th and 12th centuries. Radiocarbon assays on sheep and cattle bone found in the uppermost occupation deposit in Structure 1 (context 558) have confirmed that the building was in use until the mid- to late-12th century.² The central floor layer, a finely laminated black deposit containing abundant soot, charcoal, and humified organic staining, was excavated at the end of the field season in 2000 (context 559; for a detailed description of this context and the occupation deposits that overlay it, see Milek 2001). In 2001, the excavation of this phase of the building continued, with the removal of coterminous occupation deposits immediately north of the central floor layer, and therefore just outside of the main area of traffic in the centre of the building. Between and north of the central post pads on the northern edge of context 559 (context 656 b and c), was a thin lens of firm, compacted light brown silt, and yellowish brown and pinkish brown organic matter, which may represent a deposit of hay or straw (context 653). Slightly overlapped by this layer was a small occupation deposit that had accumulated on the north side of post pad 565 b, a dark brown silty sand containing bone charcoal and an iron nail (context 810). On the northern edge of the building, abutting the northern long wall, was a firm layer of yellowish brown sandy silt that contained some pieces of charcoal (context 805).

² Cal AD 1020-1200 at 2 Sigma range, on a Bos t. neonatal phalanx 2 (Beta 254783); Cal AD 1060-1080 and 1150-1270 at 2 sigma range, on a Bos t. neonatal phalanx 2 (Beta-154784); Cal AD 1020-1200 at 2 sigma range, on Ovis/capra rib (Beta-154785).



Figure 2. Earlier Hearth, context 642.

It contained more than the usual number of artefacts, including a whetstone, a bone pin, small, engraved copper alloy fitting, and iron objects, all of which can be attributed to this phase.

The excavation of this phase was completed in 2001, with the removal of the structural elements that had been installed prior to the re-occupation of the structure as a domestic building. Hearth 669, a rectangular hearth with a V-shaped section, had been constructed of flat basalt stones leaning back against the upright stones of an earlier hearth (context 796; see Phase II, below). A shallow rectangular cut measuring 130 x 50 cm had been placed around the south and east sides of the earlier hearth (context 803), and the tilted stones had been supported with rounded cobbles packed around the outside. All of these stones had then been packed in, and the cut infilled, with a mixture of yellowish brown silt and ash that may have originally been the debris accumulated around the earlier hearth (context 642; see Fig. 2). This mixed packing material contained small calcined bone fragments and a broken bead. Three flat stones had then been placed on the north, south and east sides of the hearth, forming a triangle that could have been used to support a cooking tripod.

The earliest occupation of Structure 1 took place on top of context 611. This layer extends over most of the eastern and southern parts of the building, and is primarily composed of mixed brown turf and windblown silt, with patches of lighter pinkish brown organic matter, occasional charcoal flecks, and small lenses of black soot or humified organic staining. The original deposition of this layer can be attributed to the collapse of the earlier phase of this building, Structure 4, and will be discussed again under Phase III, below. However, the layer had clearly been trampled during the later re-

Other internal structural elements removed during the excavation in 2001 were the four central post pads that were radially cracked and had clearly borne roof-supporting posts (context 656 a-d). In addition, there were a series of small post impressions, which appeared to have been formed by the accumulation of the black floor deposit 559 around timber posts resting directly on top of, or penetrating very shallowly into, the ground surface (contexts 597, 593, 621, 626, 638, 667). A row of stones placed between post pads 656 b and c, and which had been slightly overlapped by floor deposit 559 on its northern edge, may delineate the location of a bench or some other type of furniture. Two of these stones were embedded in a small deposit of dark brown fine sandy silt (context 807). Finally, the remains of the southern long wall of Structure 1 were removed (context 609). This consisted of a single course of stones, 10 m long, that was slightly disturbed and discontinuous, and had clearly been damaged by erosion or some other disturbance. These stones probably represent the inner lining of a turf wall that has since eroded away. The stones rested directly on top of an accumulation of aeolian sand and turf collapse, and their weight had created depressions in the soft sediments (contexts 610, 778 and 817; see Phase III, below).

Abutting the north long wall of Structure 1, and therefore later than the construction of that wall, was a deposit that may represent the floor layer of Structure 2 (context 646). This deposit, which extended approximately 3.7 x 1.7 m, was composed of alternating layers of fine charcoal/soot and dark brown silt mixed with ash, charcoal and small fragments of burnt and unburnt bone. Although the composition of context 646 would suggest that it was a floor surface, the deposit was fairly loose rather than compact, and an alternative interpretation is that it was a midden deposit associated with the occupation of S1. In order to obtain as much information as possible about the composition and structure of context 646, and to help clarify its interpretation, the deposit was excavated in opposing quarters, and was extensively sampled for micromorphological and bulk sedimentary analyses. Whether this layer is to be understood as a midden or a floor deposit, it had accumulated on a fairly uneven surface (context 658), and over a small pit of unknown function (context 745), which contained slag and charcoal at the bottom and was otherwise filled with homogenous yellowish brown silt.

A series of midden deposits east of Structure 2 and north of Structure 1 are also thought to be contemporary with the occupation of these buildings. The midden deposits infilled and capped Structure 5 and its associated barrel pit, which will be discussed further under Phase II, below. The largest and most heterogeneous midden layer excavated in 2000, context 579, was split in 2001 into its component layers of charcoal, ash, turf, decomposed organic matter, sand, stones and fire-cracked rock, many of which were themselves fairly

heterogeneous (contexts 690, 692, 695, 760, 767, 806, 812, 814, 819, 820, 825, 827, 828). These midden layers were 100% dry sieved, and produced the largest assemblages of charcoal, bone, burnt bone and artefacts in Area S, including loom weights, a whetstone, an iron nail, and a copper alloy fitting. This material is interpreted as domestic waste, and is most likely to have accumulated during the occupation of Structure 1 and putative Structure 2.

Phase IV: Use of the domestic structure between major occupation phases. Between the major occupation phases represented by Structures 1 and 4 respectively, a number of deposits accumulated, which indicate that the building, or the ruins of the building, were occasionally used for some type of domestic activity. All of the deposits associated with this phase are restricted to a small space north and east of the earlier hearth, 796, while the entire southern half of the building contained only turf collapse and aeolian deposits associated with the earlier abandonment and collapse of Structure 4 (see Phase III, below). There is no evidence of turf collapse or aeolian accumulation along the inner edge of the north long wall, and it may be assumed that this wall remained basically intact throughout the use of both Structures 1 and 4, and provided shelter, or the means of constructing a temporary shelter, for the intervening period. It is therefore possible that during this intervening phase, the ruins were used as a temporary shelter or shieling.

Two contexts exhibited evidence of *in situ* burning in the form of reddened soils, which had been altered by exposure to heat and oxidising conditions. Context 780, on the north side of the earlier hearth 796, was a small, rounded patch of burnt soil below a pile of stones embedded in light greyish brown silt, ash and charcoal (context 650). This feature is believed to have been a small hearth. It had been abandoned and collapsed before the re-occupation of the structure, and although it had later been covered by the floor deposit 559, some of the stones of context 650 had protruded through the floor. Approximately 2 m east of the earlier hearth, was a deposit of soft greyish brown and yellowish brown ash and charcoal (826), which infilled a shallow cut (813) that had been made through the mixed turf collapse and aeolian silt of context 611. This ashy deposit is also thought to represent an *ad hoc* hearth rather than a dump, since the sediment below it and surrounding its edges showed the reddening typical of *in situ* burning in oxidising conditions.

Above context 826 were a series of small, thin occupation deposits consisting of brown and yellow silt containing charcoal and a few bone fragments (823), reddish brown organic matter (822) and mixed ash and charcoal (821). Just east of the hearth was another series of small, thin occupation deposits that had ultimately been sealed by floor 559 during

the later occupation of the building. These deposits consisted of dark reddish brown organic matter (809), charcoal-stained silt and a white organic residue (816), fine dark brown sand (815) and ash and charcoal (811). This phase also contained a couple of discrete turf dumps closer to the eastern end of the building (contexts 616 and 617), one of which had been capped by a small dump of mixed turf, ash and charcoal (763). There is some evidence for the accumulation of homogenous aeolian silt and sand prior the restructuring of the building and the re-occupation of Structure 1 (context 818).

Phase III: Abandonment and collapse of Structures 3, 4 and 5. Following the earlier occupation phase in Area S (Phase II), there was a period of structural collapse marked by the accumulation of turf debris and aeolian silts and sands. The most extensive layer made up of mixed turf collapse and wind blown silt, context 611, was located within Structure 1. As discussed above, it was subsequently cut for the construction of a temporary hearth during Phase IV, and later used as the primary occupation surface for Structure 1. Below and west of context 611, within Structure 1, were other layers of turf collapse belonging to this phase, which have yet to be excavated (contexts 643 and 867). On the southern edge of Structure 1, and below its southern long wall (609), was a layer of medium brown aeolian silt and very fine sand with occasional patches of pinkish brown organic matter and the rare charcoal fragment (context 610). This layer was generally more sterile than context 611, but frequently had an indistinct boundary with it, and the two layers may have had similar origins.

Below context 610, but continuing to follow the line of the later wall, were two coterminous layers of turf collapse. To the west was context 778 – reddish turf containing greenish grey tephra, which grew increasingly sandy towards its eastern end. To the east was context 817, which consisted of very sandy brown turf containing greenish grey tephra, lenses of yellowish brown and pinkish brown organic matter, and some charcoal flecks. These two layers of turf debris are thought to represent the collapse of an earlier building in the same general location as Structure 1 (Structure 4), and may themselves represent two different phases of building construction. Why the extent of these layers remained so confined to the extent of the later stone wall 607 is not certain. For some time it was believed that they might have represented packing or levelling material intentionally deposited prior to the construction of the later wall. However, the soft, sandy nature of these layers makes this hypothesis unlikely, and it is more plausible that their southern extent has been somewhat truncated by erosion or human activity. One small dump of mixed turf debris with occasional charcoal flecks lapped up against the south side of the turf layer 778. There



Figure 3. Pavement, context 624.

are a number of turf collapse and silt deposits south of these layers that have yet to be fully excavated and understood.

To the east of Structure 4, the collapse of Structure 3 left several layers of turf debris scattered over and around the stone paving and floor deposits. Most of the stone paving was capped by contexts 625 (excavated in 2000) and the continuation of this context, 682 (excavated in 2001). This was a very distinctive layer, consisting of firm, plastic, red and cream-coloured peaty or very organic turf. Like the other peaty turf deposits found capping interior floor deposits in Structures 1, 2, and the pit house in Area T, this layer is interpreted as the collapsed roofing material. Context 679, a layer of dark brown turf collapse with lenses of oxidised iron and grey tephra, surrounded and partially overlapped the edges of the stone pavement (context 624; see Phase II, below), and is thought to represent the remains of the turf walls of Structure 3. The removal of context 679 revealed a number of other turf debris layers belonging to this phase, the excavation of which will continue in 2002.

Phase II: Occupation of Structures 3, 4 and 5 in the late 10th and 11th centuries. At the end of the excavation in 2001, the structures belonging to this phase had only been partially exposed, and the relationships between them are not yet fully understood. Nevertheless, it is possible to make a few preliminary comments about the size of the buildings, their function, and some of the key features within them.

Structures 3 and 4 meet at the very top of the low rise on which the ruins are situated, and from there the floor of Structure 3 slopes downwards very gently towards the east. The central feature of this floor is the impressive stone pavement (context 624), which is 5 m long and just a little over 1 m wide, and is oriented east-west. The pavement was constructed mainly of flat basalt and lava stones, but also some smaller, subrounded stones, all of different sizes, which were fitted together to create a fairly even surface. There is a black, charcoal-rich and ashy floor deposit associated with this pavement, which has so far only been exposed on the north and east sides of it (context 676). On the south side of the pavement there are still several layers of turf collapse to be removed, but since there is a stone-free space 1.5 m wide on the south side of the pavement, as there is on the north side, it is highly likely that the floor deposit extends to the south side of the pavement as well (see Fig. 1). These stone-free spaces must have been intentionally cleared, since the natural yellowish brown subsoil that has been exposed in the north-eastern and south-eastern corners of Area S contains an abundance of subrounded stones (context 675). The row of stones that had been visible on the surface of the ground since 1998 are, in fact, all that remains of the north wall of Structure 3. This wall is on a slightly different angle from the north wall of Structures 4 and 1, tilting slightly south of grid east, but is nevertheless an extension of the same linear feature. No line of stones remains on the south side of Structure 3, but the stone-free clearing around the pavement gives an indication of where the southern wall might have been, and therefore the dimensions of the building. It appears to have been approximately 7 m long by 5 m wide. This building may have been a cattle byre, but this will have to be verified in 2002, when the floor is completely exposed, and its composition can be studied in further detail.

Structure 4 is an earlier building phase of Structure 1, and appears to have been slightly larger. The same cut (context 645) and north long wall (context 607) were used for both buildings, but the south long wall of the earlier structure, as shown by the southern limit of a blackened occupation surface (context 648; only partially exposed) appears to have been one metre further south. This south wall has yet to be clearly defined, but a series of turf collapse layers situated 4-5 m from, and parallel to, the north wall, are likely to have been derived from the collapse of this wall. Likewise, Structure 4 seems to have extended further



Figure 4. Earlier Hearth, context 796.

to the west than Structure 1. Erosion has truncated the western edge of the mound, and a charcoal-rich layer that may be a floor has been exposed on the erosion face (context 716).

Only a few of the occupation deposits within Structure 4 were exposed during the 2001 field season. So far, the most notable internal feature is the hearth (context 796), which was situated directly below the hearth belonging to Structure 1, and was partially reused in the later construction (see description of hearth 669, Phase V, above). Hearth 796 was rectangular in shape and square in section, was oriented east-west, and was lined on its north, east and south sides with flat, upright basalt slabs (see Fig. 3). These slabs had been placed within a cut which, at least on its north side, was through natural subsoil (cut 804; only partially exposed). On the north side of this cut, just west of the hearth, the greenish grey tephra attributed to ~950 AD, and the black and grey tephtras of the *Landnám* sequence could be seen. The silts within this natural sequence, which are normally yellowish brown, had been reddened by exposure to high temperatures in oxidising conditions. The cut, 804, extends 2.2 m further west than the hearth itself, which is only about 1 x 0.5 m in size. The fill of this cut appeared to be disturbed hearth debris, consisting of very mixed yellowish brown silt, orangey and light pinkish brown peat ash, charcoal, and numerous stones (context 640). The base of the cut contains a series of depressions that have probably been created by the removal of subrounded stones. It would appear, therefore, that hearth 796 had once extended further to the west, but that it had later been deconstructed. Considering that the stones of the later hearth, 669, were packed in with very similar hearth debris, it seems likely that the disturbance of the earlier hearth occurred when the later one was being installed.

Few other occupation deposits within Structure 4 were exposed during the excavation in 2001. The hearth was filled with white ash (probably wood ash) and small calcined bone fragments (context 797). A post hole that was 18 cm in diameter and 6 cm deep, with two stones on its eastern edge and a dark grey silty fill, was found just north of the hearth. Along the inner edge of the north long wall was a multi-laminated, pinkish-brown organic layer, which may be decomposed hay (context 569), but this was left unexcavated. A black, charcoal-rich floor deposit, which is expected to be the main occupation surface within Structure 4, was only partially exposed (context 561). Although most of Structure 4 remains to be excavated, it is clear that it was a domestic building.

Structure 5, which is north of Structure 4, had not been visible on the ground surface. It was discovered during the 2000 field season, when the removal of midden deposits north of Structure 1 exposed the southern part of a barrel pit (606), which had an inner lining of dark grey fluvial sand (589), and contained a ring-shaped white organic residue at the bottom (602). Most of the 2001 field season was devoted to the excavation of the complex midden deposits north of the barrel pit, but at the end of the field season, it was possible to distinguish the western and southern edges of a cut for Structure 5. So far, this cut does not appear to have been very deep, but it had vertical sides and it truncated at least the greenish grey tephra layer (~950 AD), and the silts above it. It may therefore represent the removal of the upper turf horizon (i.e. the ground surface) from the floor of the structure when it was being built. The cut begins in the middle of the western side of the barrel pit, and extends west and then northwards, so that the southern half of the barrel pit's circumference still contains both the greenish grey tephra and the *Landnám* sequence below it. The black, charcoal-rich deposit exposed at the end of the 2001 field season (context 854) infills the shallow cut, and a short tongue that extends through the western edge of the cut may indicate an entrance to the structure. However, since context 854 has yet to be fully exposed, it is not yet possible to determine whether it represents a black floor layer or another midden deposit dumped inside the building after it had gone out of use. Further excavation in this area is needed to clarify the nature of the floor deposits and the full size of the building. The actual construction of the building also remains to be clarified, since there are no remains of stone or turf walls anywhere around the barrel pit. The barrel pit makes it clear that the structure functioned as a storage building or pantry.

Phase I: Pre-structural anthropogenic deposits. The cuts for Structures 4 and 5 truncated a layer which, by the end of the excavation in 2001, had been widely exposed in the north-

western part of Area S (context 658). This layer, which was situated immediately above the greenish grey tephra attributed to ~950 AD, was about 2 cm thick, and was composed of laminated, pinkish brown organic layers and medium brown very fine sandy silt. It also contained occasional flecks of charcoal. The high organic content and laminated structure of this deposit suggests that it represents the uppermost grass or sod layer on the surface of the site, which had been rapidly sealed by the anthropogenic deposits. The charcoal flecks and occasional signs of disturbance in this layer indicate the human presence at the site prior to the construction of the buildings in Area S.

Conclusion

The 2001 field season confirmed that the main domestic building in Area S, Structure 1, did have an earlier domestic occupation phase, and that the late 10th- to 11th-century phase of the building was slightly larger than the later one. The excavation also confirmed the presence of a small storage building associated with the barrel pit discovered in 2000, and it revealed that Structure 3 contained a significant stone paving and is therefore likely to have been a cattle byre. The reduction in the size and number of buildings between the 10th/11th-century phase and the 12th-century phase, would suggest that the size of the household, and possibly the economic status of the farm, had been somewhat diminished. There may, of course, be other contemporary buildings elsewhere at Sveigakot, and this issue can only be resolved with the further investigation and dating of all of the buildings discovered in Areas P, N and T.

This year's field season also revealed that the occupation sequence in Area S had not been continuous, but that there had been a complete break at some point – probably during the 11th century – during which there was time for Structure 4 to partially collapse, and for aeolian silt and sand to accumulate inside and outside of its southern wall. The excavation also showed that there had been sporadic activity in the main domestic structure between the major occupation phases represented by Structures 1 and 4. This activity, which took the form of small, temporary hearths and the dumping of small ashy and organic layers in the northern and eastern parts of the building, may indicate the site had been occasionally used as a temporary shelter or a shieling after the partial collapse of Structure 4. The changing status of Sveigakot from a permanently occupied farm to an abandoned settlement, and from a temporarily occupied shieling to a smaller, but permanent farm again, has implications for the changing environment, economics, and/or politics of the region.

Further work at the site is needed in order to confirm whether or not Structure 3 was indeed a byre, and to clarify the physical relationships between Structures 3, 4 and 5. The precise size and construction of Structures 4 and 5 has yet to be determined as well. In the meantime, laboratory work continues on the internal occupation deposits of Structure 1 in order to extract as much information as possible about the organisation and use of space inside the building. It is also hoped that micromorphological and sedimentary analyses of the black deposit in putative Structure 2 will help to confirm or negate the hypothesis that it was a floor layer, and in the event that it was a floor, that these analyses will provide more information about the function of the building.

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Table 1. List of excavated contexts.

Context	Type	Description	Notes
577	Layer	Firm, red-orange and pale yellowish brown peat / very organic turf.	Turf collapse, probably from the roof of S2; turf came from a very wet source, and has such a high organic content that it can be classified as peat; very similar to [556].
609	Structural element	One course of stones, slightly disturbed and discontinuous, running in a straight line 10 m long, parallel to wall 607.	South long wall of S1; probably the inner stone lining of a turf wall that has been eroded away, or the footing for a timber wall.
610	Layer	Firm, friable, medium brown silty very fine sand with occasional patches of pinkish brown organic matter; rare charcoal and bone fragments. The weight of stones from wall [609] had made depressions in this layer.	Aeolian sand and silt accumulation with a minor anthropogenic component that indicates that there was some type of activity on the site while the layer was accumulating; subsequently the base of wall [609]; its boundary with 611 was difficult to distinguish, particularly on the eastern end of S1, and the two deposits may have had a similar origin and/or are coterminous.
611	Layer	Very firm, friable, mixed brown, very fine sandy silt, and patches of lighter pinkish-brown organic matter; turf fragments; contained occasional charcoal fragments and lenses of black charcoal staining, as well as more than the usual number of artefacts, including a whetstone, bone pin, copper alloy engraved object, and iron objects.	Originally consisting of turf (probably turf collapse contemporary with context [643]) and wind blown silt, this layer was subsequently trampled and stained during its use as an occupation surface, prior to the accumulation of floor layer [559].
616	Layer	Friable, pale yellow brown silt, containing rare charcoal; turf fragments.	Patches of peaty turf under floor layer [559], and above the trampled surface [611], within S1. Like [617] and [767], this lens of turf was deposited between the major occupation phases of the house.
617	Layer	Friable, mixed brown silt; turf fragments.	Patch of turf debris, coterminous with [616]; situated between two stones, and forms a small bump; deposited between the major occupation phases of the house.
621	Cut	Shallow rectangular cut; 17 x 13 cm wide.	Cut of post-hole in S1.
622	Fill	Greyish brown silt filling cut 621.	Fill of post-hole [621], in S1.
624	Pavement	Pavement of flat stones (basalt and lava) in S3.	Paved floor of what is probably a byre (S3). This building is east of and contemporary with S4 (earlier phase of S1), the dwelling structure.
626	Cut	Shallow circular cut, with a flat base; 22cm diameter.	Cut of post-hole in S1.
627	Fill	Loose, dark brown/black silt loam, containing pebbles.	Fill of post-hole [626], in S1.
640	Fill	Very mixed yellowish brown silt, orangey and light pinkish brown peat ash, and charcoal, and stones filling cut 804, and slightly overlapping turf debris 802.	Ash and soil infilling the cut of the earlier rectangular hearth, 796, and probably accumulated during the use of this hearth. Disturbed, apparently by the removal of stones on the western end of this earlier hearth.

642	Fill	Very mixed yellowish brown silt, grey and pinkish peat ash, and charcoal, filling cut 803, and packed around the stones of hearth 669. Contained small calcined bone fragments, and half a bead.	Mixed ash and soil packing around the stones used to construct the later V-shaped hearth 669. This material is itself clearly derived from hearth debris, and was probably removed from 640 (which had accumulated around earlier hearth 796) during the construction of the later hearth.
646	Layer	Loose, friable, dark grey and black fine silt and ash layers, with occasional charcoal fragments and rare small calcined bone fragments.	Does not feel compact, but is nevertheless probably the floor surface of S2.
650	Layer	Pile of stones embedded in a loose, friable, light greyish-brown silt and ash deposit containing occasional charcoal and charcoal staining.	Probably a small, temporarily used hearth. The soil below (context 780) showed the discoloration (oxidation) typical of in situ burning.
653	Layer	Thin lens of firm, compacted light brown silt, and yellowish brown and pinkish brown organic matter, just north of floor 559, between post pads 656 b+c.	Probably a deposit of hay or straw that accumulated north of the main area of traffic/trampling in the centre of the building (represented by floor 559), possibly underneath a bench.
656	Post pads	Four flat basalt post-pads, located in a square in the exact centre of S1. All are radially cracked.	Pads for roof-supporting posts, around which floor 559 accumulated.
659	Layer	Thin spread of mixed medium brown very fine sandy silt, light greyish brown organic matter, red oxidised iron, and occasional charcoal flecks. Contains some bones and charcoal.	Thin spread of organic midden material on the north edge of the excavation area, north of S1. Closely resembles context 678.
669	Hearth	Rectangular hearth with a V-shaped section, constructed of flat basalt stones, supported on the outside by rounded, fist-sized cobbles, packed in with a mixture of ash and soil (context 642). Three flat stones were placed horizontally just outside of the hearth, on its north, south and east sides.	Central hearth of Structure 1. The three flat stones form a triangle that could have supported a cooking tripod.
677	Layer	Firm to soft, friable, homogenous dark brown fine sandy silt.	Aeolian silt / soil accumulation above turf collapse over building S3.
678	Layer	Mixed dark brown fine sandy silt, yellowish and greyish brown organic matter, and charcoal.	Thin spread of organic midden material on the north edge of the excavation area, north of S3. Closely resembles context 659.
679	Layer	Very firm, friable, dark brown silt, with abundant lenses of red oxidised iron and grey tephra; turf fragments.	Turf collapse from the walls and/or roof of S3, surrounding and partially covering pavement 624, especially on its NE edge.
682	Layer	Firm, plastic very light greyish brown and pinkish brown organic matter, mottled with lenses of reddish brown oxidised iron.	Peaty turf over the pavement 624 and probably representing the roof collapse of S3. The high organic content of this layer is very unusual, and closely resembles context 556, which was interpreted as the peaty turf roofing material of S1.
683	Layer	Firm to soft, friable, dark brown with a few light brown mottles of very fine sandy silt	Soil and aeolian silt accumulation above turf collapse over building S3.
685	Layer	Firm, friable, fairly homogenous, medium brown very fine sandy silt, containing a few patches of turf (containing oxidised iron), and occasional charcoal fragments, and small pieces of badly decayed wood.	Mainly soil and aeolian silt accumulation around and above the collapsing building S1.

690	Layer	Firm, friable, very mixed deposit of medium brown very fine sandy silt, containing abundant flecks of yellowish brown organic matter and reddish brown oxidised iron. Contained some bone and charcoal.	Small dump of mixed midden material and turf, possibly to level a small hollow between two stones just east of the barrel pit, in S5.
692	Layer	Very firm, friable strong brown silt containing 40-50% organic matter in the form of sticky, pinkish brown lenses.	Layer of dumped plant matter (possibly hay) and/or other organic matter within the midden deposit infilling the barrel pit and S5.
695	Layer	Firm, friable, mottled dark brown and yellowish brown very fine sandy silt; turf fragments.	Layer of dumped turf debris within the midden deposit infilling the barrel pit and S5.
708	Layer	Firm to soft, friable medium brown fine sandy silt, containing occasional charcoal, bone and 1/2 a sandstone spindle whorl.	Mainly soil and aeolian silt accumulation, containing some reworked midden material, above the midden infilling the barrel pit and S5.
710	Layer	Loose, friable, dark brown sandy silt with grey tephra (possibly ~950 AD) and flecks of black tephra from the LNL sequence.	Turf collapse, aligned north-south on the western edge of the low rise on which the ruin is situated; possibly the turf collapse of western wall of S2.
724	Layer	Friable, firm, dark brown fine sandy silt containing lenses of reddish oxidised iron and dark grey tephra; turf fragments.	Turf collapse south of S1. Probably the continuation of context 554, which was excavated in 2000.
728	Layer	Firm to loose, friable, reddish brown and dark brown very fine sandy silt, mottled with dark grey tephra; turf fragments.	Turf collapse east of S1. The continuation of context 590, which was excavated in 2000. This layer may represent the collapse of the eastern wall of S1.
733	Layer	Small layer of very firm, yellowish brown turf fragments.	Layer of turf collapse within a very mixed deposit of turf, soil, aeolian silt, and wood fragments south of S1.
739	Layer	Friable, light brown fine silt and abundant organic matter, with rare charcoal fragments.	Small deposit of turf abutting the north side of the north wall of S1 (context 607).
740	Layer	Friable, dark brown sandy silt containing turf fragments and occasional charcoal and ash.	A discreet midden dump abutting the north side of the north wall of S1 (context 607).
741	Layer	Friable, brown silt; turf fragments.	Small deposit of turf abutting the north side of the north wall of S1 (context 607).
742	Fill	Homogenous yellowish brown silt.	Fill of cut 745.
745	Cut	Sub-circular cut, c.40 cm in diameter and 8cm deep, with a flat base sloping gently to the east.	Cut through context 658 and filled with context 742. Small pit of unknown function on the south side of S2.
746	Layer	Friable to loose dark brown and brown sandy silt.	Aeolian silt / soil accumulation above the midden deposits infilling the barrel pit and S5. Very similar to 708. The continuation of 551 (excavated in 2000).
760	Layer	Loose dark grey sand (fine to medium-sized) containing occasional fragments of yellow and brown turf.	Aeolian sand accumulation in a cavity created by sharply vertical stones in a midden deposit creating a sand trap. Mixed into the bottom 5-10 cm of the layer were some bone and charcoal fragments.
763	Layer	Friable brown sandy silt, containing turf debris, small pebbles, ash and charcoal.	Mixed turf debris and midden material inside of S1, north of and slightly overlapped by floor 559.

764	Layer	Firm, friable, mixed medium brown, dark brown and light brown very fine sandy silt, with light greyish brown organic matter; contains some charcoal flecks, red iron nodules and rare bone fragments.	Mixed turf debris in a small dump lapping up against the south side of context 778.
767	Layer	Firm to loose, friable, medium brown and dark brown fine sandy silt, with pockets of sand; contains charcoal, fire-cracked stones, turf fragments and bone.	Heterogeneous midden deposit infilling S5.
778	Layer	A long, narrow deposit of firm to soft, friable, yellowish red sandy turf, containing lenses of dark reddish brown oxidised iron and dark greenish grey tephra; more firm towards its western end; increasingly sandy towards its eastern end; a few bones and a very large whetstone were found on its northern (inner) edge.	Turf collapse below wall 609 (the south wall of S1) and aeolian sand/silt deposit 610; probably represents an earlier phase of S1.
779	Fill	Friable, black to dark grey fine silt and charcoal.	Fill of post hole / post depression 784.
780	Layer	Firm, friable, medium brown, dark brown and strong reddish brown very fine sandy silt, containing some charcoal and two patches of ash at the edge of the layer.	Soil burnt in situ below the collapsed hearth, context 650.
784	Cut	Circular cut, 18 cm in diameter and 6 cm deep, with gently sloping sides and a rounded base; contained two small stones on its eastern edge.	Post hole or a shallow post-impression north of the hearth in S4.
796	Hearth	Hearth, about 1 m long and 50 cm wide, oriented east-west, lined with upright basalt slabs.	Hearth belonging to S4, an earlier phase of S1. The hearth stones line cut 804, which cuts into the natural subsoil. The length of this cut suggests that hearth 796 used to extend further towards the west, but was disturbed or dismantled during the construction of the later hearth, 669.
802	Layer	Firm to compact dark brown silt containing lenses of dark reddish brown oxidised iron, pinkish grey organic matter, charcoal and occasional bone; turf fragments.	Small dump of turf or turf collapse, containing a small amount of midden material; on the south edge of cut 804; may have been slightly truncated on its northern edge during the removal of the stones and ash that created the disturbed deposit, 640. 802 therefore appears to have been deposited between the major phases of the building, S4 and S1.
803	Cut	Shallow rectangular cut, 130 x 50 cm, with a flat base.	Cut around the south and east sides of rectangular hearth 796; infilled with 642, the mixed ash and silt layer used as packing around the stones of the later, V-sectioned hearth, 669.
805	Layer	Firm, friable, medium yellowish brown fine sandy silt, containing some charcoal fragments.	Small occupation deposit under a stone that had fallen from wall 607, on the northern edge of S1.
806	Layer	Friable, dark brown sandy silt with lenses of red oxidised iron (turf fragments), charcoal, and fire-cracked stones.	Midden deposit infilling S5.

807	Layer	Two stones embedded in a small deposit of firm, friable, dark brown fine sandy silt.	Stones are in line with three others placed between post pads 656 b and c, on the north edge of floor 559 (S1), and are slightly overlapped by that layer. These stones may delineate a bench or some other type of substantial piece of furniture, since there were no trampled deposits north of this line of stones.
808	Layer	Friable, mixed very dark greyish black silt, containing lumps of dark brown and reddish brown silt and small flecks of charcoal.	Small, thin charcoal-rich lens below floor 559, in S1.
809	Layer	Soft, plastic, dark reddish brown organic silt, with charcoal flecks.	Thin lens of organic matter (possibly decomposed hay) between major occupation phases S1 and S4.
810	Layer	Firm, friable, dark brown very fine silty sand containing bone, charcoal, and an iron nail.	Small occupation deposit that accumulated north of post pad 565b, and was slightly overlapped by the organic/hay lens 653. Both 810 and 653 were north of floor 559, and probably contemporary with it, although they formed outside of the main area of occupation/trampling within S1.
811	Layer	Friable, light greyish brown sandy silt containing light brown and light grey ash and abundant pieces of charcoal.	Lens of mixed silt, ash and charcoal between major occupation phases S1 and S4.
812	Layer	Friable, dark brown sandy silt with reddish brown and yellowish brown lenses; contains some bone and charcoal.	Turf dump / midden deposit infilling S5.
814	Layer	Firm, reddish brown organic-rich silt; 'bog turf' rich in oxidised iron; contains some bone and a few artefacts (whetstone and an iron nail).	Either a turf dump infilling S5, or turf collapse from the north/east wall of S5.
815	Layer	Firm to loose, friable, dark brown, homogenous fine sand.	Small, thin lens of sand below major occupation phase S1.
816	Layer	Firm, friable, mottled very dark greyish black sandy silt, and very light grey/white organic silt; contains small charcoal flecks.	Small, thin lens of charcoal-stained silt and white (possibly organic) residues; deposited between major occupation phases S1 and S4.
817	Layer	Firm, friable, mixed medium brown and strong brown very fine sandy silt, lenses of yellowish brown and pinkish brown organic matter, and lenses of greenish-grey tephra; turf fragments; slightly sandier on its eastern end; contains some small flecks of charcoal.	Sandy, mixed turf collapse on the eastern end of context 778, and apparently coterminous with that layer; below wall 609 and the aeolian silt/sand deposit 610, contexts 778 and 817 may represent the collapsed walls of an earlier phase of S1.
818	Layer	Soft, dark brown silty sand; homogenous and without inclusions.	Small, thin lens of aeolian silt accumulated below floor 559; deposited between major occupation phases S1 and S4.
819	Layer	Firm, dark grey and greyish brown sandy silt, containing charcoal and a whetstone.	Silt layer below 814; could either represent a silt lens within a midden deposit, or a floor within S5. Will be investigated further in 2002.
820	Layer	Firm, friable, brown sandy silt containing fire cracked stones, bones, and charcoal.	Midden deposit infilling S5.
821	Layer	Soft, mixed very dark brown and black sandy silt, ash, and pieces of charcoal.	Ash and charcoal layer between major occupation phases S1 and S4.

822	Layer	Soft very dark grey brown sandy silt, containing lenses/patches of reddish brown organic matter; organic matter was especially highly concentrated in the upper part of the layer.	Organic-rich occupation deposit between major occupation phases S1 and S4.
823	Layer	Firm, medium brown fine sandy silt, with flecks of red oxidised iron, yellow silt subsoil, charcoal, organic material, and a few bone fragments.	Mixed occupation deposit between major occupation phases S1 and S4. In the later phase of the building, post pad 656c was placed onto this layer, and was subsequently surrounded by floor 559.
824	Layer	Cluster of flat stones embedded in firm, friable, brown sandy silt.	Aeolian silt/sand accumulation around stones, just below the ground surface above what appears to be the eastern wall of S5.
825	Layer	Firm, friable, medium brown silt, dark grey ash, charcoal, bone, and fire-cracked stones.	Midden deposit infilling S5.
826	Fill	Soft, mixed greyish brown and yellowish brown ash, with red silty sand (oxidised iron) and many pieces of charcoal. Traces of in situ burning of sediment were visible on the edges of the layer.	Hearth debris and in situ burning within the shallow cut 813. Appears to be a temporary hearth between major occupation phases S1 and S4.
827	Layer	Very firm and friable medium brown and dark brown silt, with lenses of pinkish brown organic matter, fire-cracked stones, bone, and charcoal.	Midden deposit infilling S5.
828	Layer	Firm, friable, layers of brown fine sand and fine sandy silt, pinkish brown organic matter, and charcoal; contains pieces of charcoal and occasional stones, as well as one loom weight.	Midden deposit and aeolian silt / sand infilling S5.

Przemysław Urbańczyk:

Sveigakot 2001. Area T – pit house

Introduction

In 2001 area T was given to the Polish team invited to take part in the Landscapes of Settlement project. The members were: Katarzyna Skrzyńska and Robert Żukowski (both MA) under the lead of Przemysław Urbańczyk – all representing the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw.

It was the second excavation season of area T as an extensive midden deposit had been discovered there and largely excavated in 2000 by a team of zooarchaeologists under the leadership of Tom McGovern. In an effort to define the southern and western limits of the sheet midden (M) – which covers much of the southern part of the site – a square test-pit had been placed at 893/303 meters of the coordination grid. Excavation quickly indicated that the undersurface layering was different from what should be expected at a midden site. In order to get a wider perspective for stratigraphic observations a regular 5x5 m trench was laid out. Deturfing and subsequent clearing of the subsoil layers showed a distinct depression in the centre of the trench. Further shallow test pitting of the adjacent area indicated the presence of a sunken structure that had been levelled with a series of filling layers. This structure clearly stretched behind the northern and southern edges of that trench. At this stage exploration of the trench was halted and the area was given a separate code “T”. In 2000 a very rich midden layer was excavated in area T and cleared off the earlier deposits which now awaited the attention of the Polish team.

Recording, sampling and excavation routines

The aim of this excavation was to achieve a clear stratigraphic sequence with all identified contexts/units recorded so that post-excavation reconstruction of the stratification process would be possible. Special emphasis was laid on regular sampling of layers that might yield environmental data.

Thus, a typical set of routines, commonly used at multi-strata sites, was applied. According to the standard procedures each layer/context was treated separately. Every time

attention of the excavators concentrated on the youngest of all the visible contexts. The first step was to draw a plan of the freshly exposed surface of a unit in its full extent. In result, a series of single-layer plans was produced. Every one records the visible extent and characteristic elements of the upper face of a context that was also levelled and photographed. All contexts were sampled following the advice by T. McGovern and K. Milek.

Recording and sampling was followed by excavation. Each layer was removed by trowelling out square (1x1 m) after square. All the removed soil was sieved and number of buckets counted.³ Finds retrieved from the sieve (mostly mammal and fish bones) were localised by coordinates of a particular grid square, while artefacts found *in situ* were given precise three-dimensional coordinates.

After the surface was scraped clean again, a new context was identified and the same sequence of routines followed: photo, drawing and description, levelling, sampling, excavating. The pace of daily work depended on the extent and volume of identified layers, complexity of its outlook, texture of soil and weather conditions. Results of every day activities were described in a diary illustrated by colour photographs taken with a digital camera “SONY Cybershot”.

Strategy

In a non-rescue situation there is no need to attempt pre-designing a “complete” and rigid strategy of excavation because it is usually difficult (if not impossible) to accommodate all unforeseen circumstances. The strategy has to be adjusted in face of the surprises that often await the archaeologist trying to have a look under the turf.

The most common problem is a feeling that the trench so cleverly designed at the beginning always appears too small. Apart from very small sites that may be excavated as a discrete whole, there are always some layers or features that extend outside the limits of the excavation. However, the temptation to enlarge our trench every time something happened at its edge would have resulted in the excavated area growing infinitely. Therefore, one has to compromise between the will to answer “all” questions and the necessity to end excavation in a reasonable time. It is up to the intuition of the supervisor to decide which questions are “the most important” ones. And such a decision may always be the subject of post-excavational questioning.

³ Unfortunately the counting routine sometimes failed due to the human factor.

Another strategic decision that has to be made is: How detailed should the excavation, recording and sampling be? There is hardly any limit to the precision of archaeological observation which can possibly be attained while in the field. However, the obvious price to be paid for increasing the accuracy is a deceleration of the progress of our work. A balance between the two should be decided upon in advance of excavation but, again, it is the structure of subsurface stratification that may be decisive in finding the final solution. Usually, there is no time in the field to apply complex analysis of all circumstances and the supervisor has to rely on his/her own experience and intuition. And there is no objective way to evaluate such a decision making process.

The third important level of strategic decisions to be taken refers to the professionalism of work while in the field. Usually it is difficult to engage highly experienced staff only. Leaving aside the problem of how to measure field experience, it is advisable to have a team consisting of archaeologists of different backgrounds. This is because of the necessity to make the decision-making process more objective. However, the duty to train new cadres should not be forgotten. Anyway, the ideal situation is when people of different experience and abilities work together. Once more, it is up to the supervisor to decide the price to be paid for the training of adepts of field archaeology. And his/her subjective judgement will have a substantial impact on the quality of the work carried out.

The final of these considerations of the excavation strategy takes into account the problem of the decision making itself. Excavation is a process of permanent deciding. It consists of an infinite chain of taking decisions of varying importance. Some of them may have a strategic value while others are hardly noticeable. Some are easy while others need serious consideration of a number of pros and contras. Some decisions are reversible while others may have serious consequences. There are no universal rules of decision making for an excavation supervisor and they often have to face post excavation criticism. However, in the field decisions must be taken even if they may appear risky because avoiding decisions introduces chaos and may obscure stratigraphic information.

The above-mentioned observations imply that archaeological excavation is a very complex process that involves serious procedures of a strategic importance. The most important aspect of this process is that its consequences may cause irreversible loss of valuable data because archaeological evidence is always unique and it undergoes total destruction in result of our research activity. This basic fact puts a heavy burden upon our shoulders because there is no way to avoid some mistakes. This should make us alert in order

to minimise eventual loss. Unfortunately there is no universal instruction how to do it effectively in real time and every supervisor has to bear this responsibility in their mind.

Stratigraphic data

During the three weeks of the 2001 excavation 35 horizontal contexts and a number of post-holes were identified and recorded on plans listed below⁴.

Excavation started within the limits of the trench begun in the previous summer. It was a 5 x 5 m. square (SE coordinates 892/302) designed after the above-mentioned first test-pit revealed a structural stratigraphy underlying the midden.

After all the plastic sheets and soil covering the trench had been removed the surface exposed in 2000 was uncovered. Along the eastern edge of the trench there was flattish surface of natural gravel. In the centre, where the upper sandy layers had been removed, there was a depression with several filling layers visible.

The depression visible in the centre apparently continued beyond the N and S profiles. Therefore, before stratigraphic excavation started, the trench was enlarged in both directions (3 metres towards N and two metres towards S) and these extensions were deturfed and scraped clean. The exposed situation is recorded on the general multi-context plan (Fig. 1).⁵

⁴ Katarzyna Skrzyńska prepared the register.

⁵ Digitised plans that illustrate this text were prepared by Robert Żukowski who used field documentation drawn by himself and Katarzyna Skrzyńska.

Inv.	Context No	Loc. in the trench	m.a.s.l.	Scale	Drawing date
1	Cumulative	S	-	1:20	25.07.01
2	Cumulative	N	-	1:20	25.07.01
12	671	NW	284,70 – 284,95	1:20	26.07.01
41	671	NW	284,65 – 284,73	1:20	02.08.01
13	672	N	284,73 – 284,83	1:20	26.07.01
9	673	NE	284,80 – 284,86	1:20	26.07.01
11	674	N	284,59 – 284,74	1:20	26.07.01
10	680	SW	284,54 – 284,59	1:20	26.07.01
8	681	W	284,57 – 284,73	1:20	26.07.01
34	684	N	284,59 – 284,77	1:20	27.07.01
19	700	N	284,45 - 284,74	1:20	27.07.01
20	703	NW	284,62 – 284,74	1:20	27.07.01
21	709	NE	284,62 – 284,81	1:20	30.07.01
22	711	NW	284,65 – 284,72	1:20	30.07.01
23	712	S	284,24 – 284,79	1:20	30.07 – 03.08.01
31	720	N, NE	284,41 - 284,76	1:20	31.07.01
30	721	N	284,46 – 284-51	1:20	31.07.01
44	721 + 732	N, NE	284,41 - 284,69	1:20	03.08.01
29	723	NE	284,57 – 284,79	1:20	31.07.01
38	725	NE	284, 51 – 284,75	1:20	01.08.01
39	727	NE	284,49 – 284,66	1:20	01.08.01
43	730	NE	284,66 – 284,75	1:20	02.08.01
42	731	NW	284,63 – 284,70	1:20	02.08.01
53a	734 (hearth)	N	284,41 – 284,52	1:10	03.08.01
53b	734 (hearth)	N	284,41 – 284,52	1:10	03.08.01
60	738	NE	284, 29 – 284,70	1:20	06.08.01
61	743	NE	284,49 – 284,68	1:20	06.08.01
52	744	S	284,24 – 284,48	1:20	07.08.01
68	758	N	284,29 – 284,89	1:20	07.08.01
97	758 (hearth)	N	284,41 – 284,67	1:10	10.08.01
69	759	S	284,16 – 284,58	1:20	07.08.01
95	761 + 762	N+NE	284,35 – 284,67	1:20	08.08.01
96	765	N	284,37 – 284,60	1:20	08.08.01
94	766	N	284,47 – 284,62	1:20	08.08.01
100	782	N	284,35 – 284,62	1:20	09.08.01
101	795	NE	284,66 – 284,67	1:20	10.08.01
99	800	N	284,33 – 284,77	1:20	10.08.01
98	801	NE	284,44 – 284,71	1:20	10.08.01

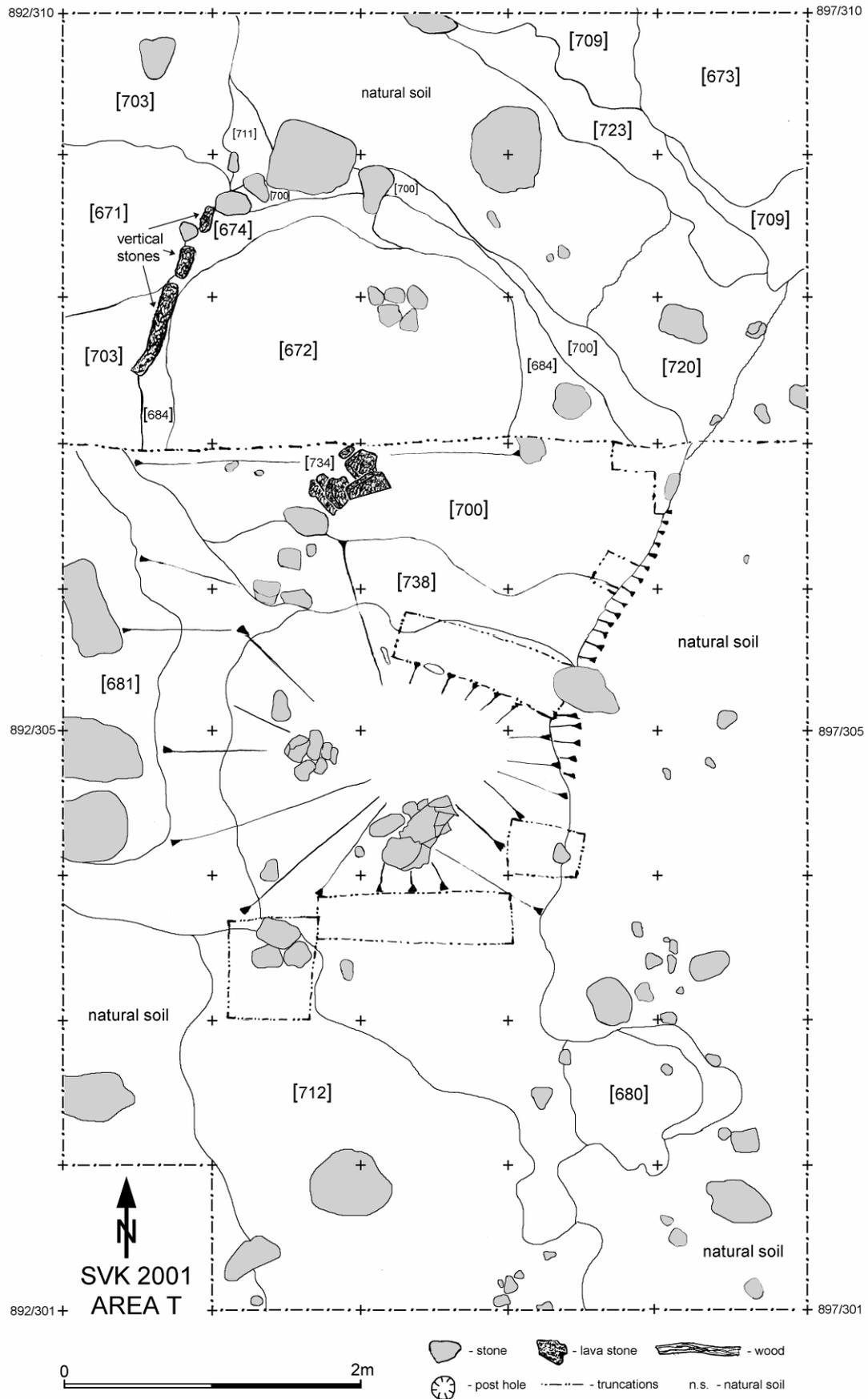


Figure 1. Area T at the start of excavation.

It was obvious that the northern extension had to be excavated first in order to achieve stratigraphic synchrony all over the trench. This was accomplished when the context 700 was exposed (see Fig. 7). However, further excavation still concentrated in the northern half of the trench where a sequence of layers filling a large sub-rectangular depression had to be removed. After three weeks we still did not manage to empty this basin of stratification where an “independent” stratigraphic sequence had accumulated. Two other relatively separate basins of accumulation were recorded in the NW and NE corners of the trench.

The stratigraphic matrix (Fig. 2) cumulates basic information on the relative chronology. The main axis of this scheme refers to the sequence of contexts identified within the sunken hut depression where interchangeable floor accumulations and levelling layers were recorded.

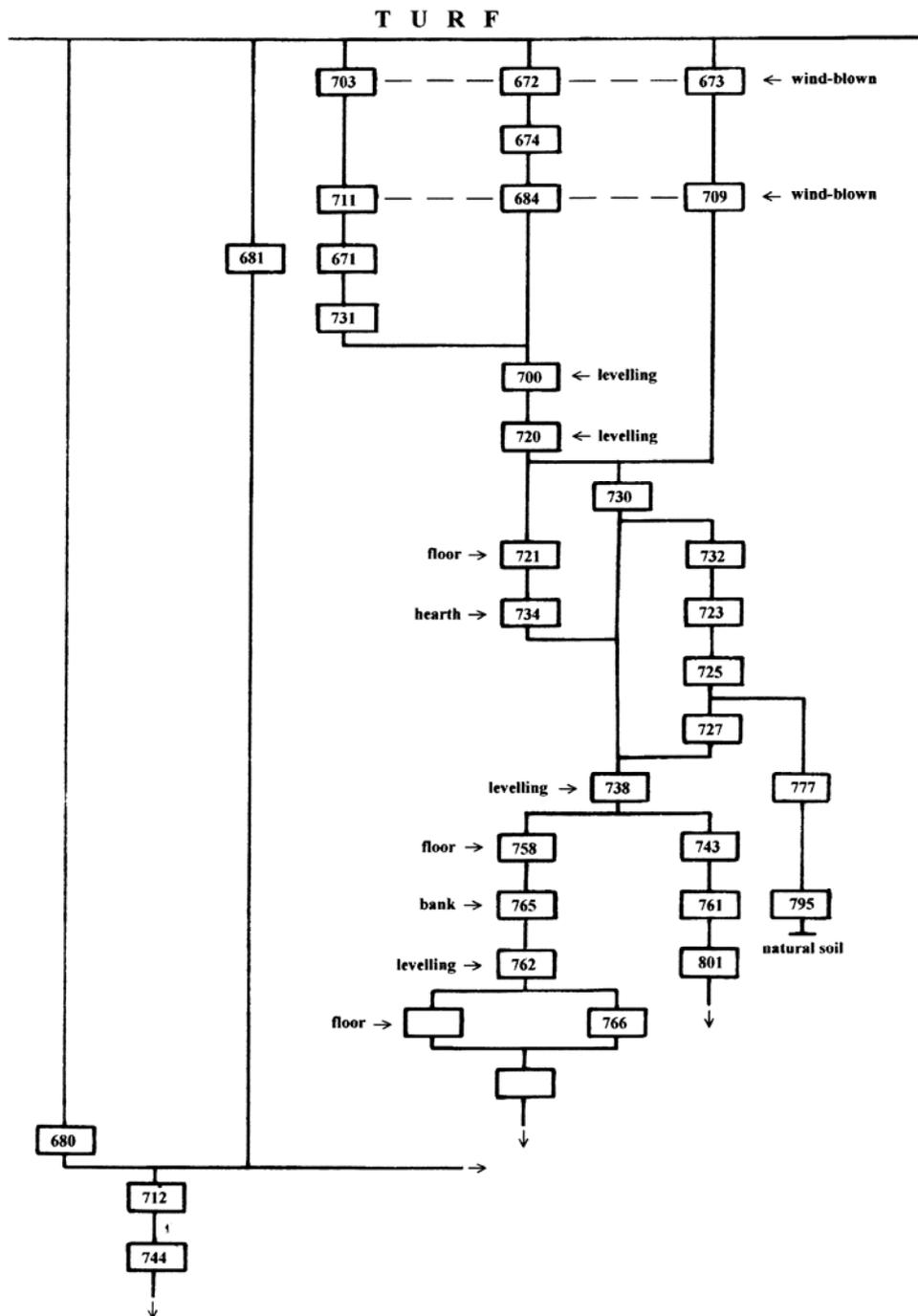


Figure 2. Stratigraphic matrix of contexts excavated in area T in 2001.

The stratigraphic story

Relying on data collected so far, it is possible to reconstruct the fairly simple stratigraphic story of the excavated part of the area T. Until this sequence has been revealed completely by

further investigations in 2002 this story will have no beginning as it starts only with the earliest of the contexts uncovered so far.

The earliest observable feature is a sunken building which has been constructed around a sub-rectangular depression with its collapsed turf roof and/or walls covering the ruins. Of this we managed to partly uncover a ca. 1,8 m wide strip of thin brown silt [744] seen in the southern part of the trench (see plan 52/01). However, the main part of that collapse consisted of thick layer of mixed turfs [712] that covered most of the studied area (see plan 23/01 and Fig. 3). It contained also lenses of greyish-green tephra.

Some time later a new house was constructed at the northern edge of the ruin so that it cut through the collapse of the former building (Figs. 3 and 4). It was a small structure with a sub-rectangular sunken floor (ca. 2,8 x 3,6 m) oriented ca. NW-SE. This orientation might have been decided by the topography of the area itself. The constructors purposely made use of two boulders that were visible on the surface. They served as ready-made elements of the corners of the building. Near the boulder left in the W corner a fireplace was placed. It was made of three vertical lava slabs: the longest one (ca. 75 cm) leaned against the wall of the sunken floor while two others (50 and 55 cm) were placed perpendicularly forming a small

space (ca. 35 x 50 cm) open towards the centre of the hut (see plan. 97/01).

The door opening was placed opposite of the hearth, i.e. in the east corner (Figs. 3-6). It was a 60 cm wide and 120 cm long passage leading to a deep depression discovered in the NE corner of the trench, where a separate stratigraphic sequence accumulated. This entrance had a separate construction supported by three pairs of side posts. With one of the many floor layers [721] a wooden threshold was uncovered (see Fig. 6 and plan. 44/01) indicating the position of the door.

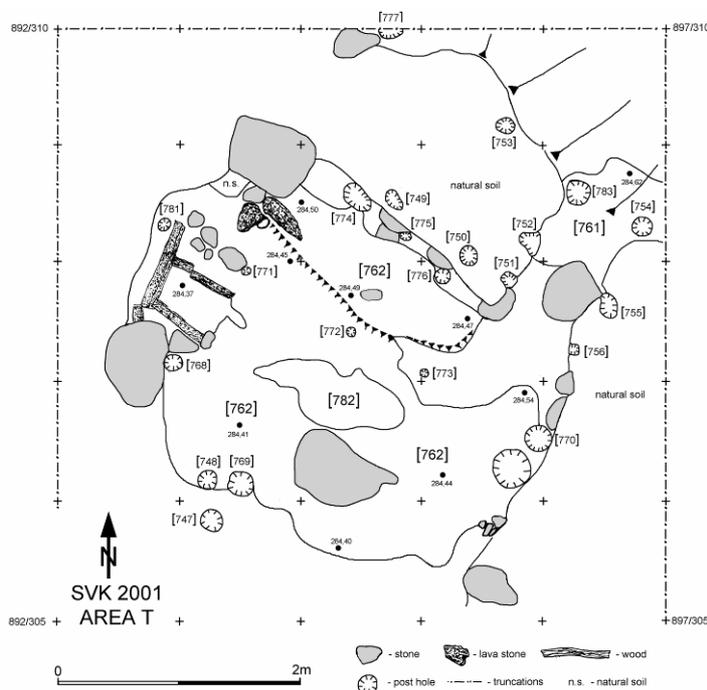


Figure 4. Pithouse in the northern part of Area T.

There is not much evidence to discuss the superstructure of the house as it had undergone an almost total postdepositional destruction. The roof was supported by posts placed at the edges of the sunken floor (see Figs. 3 and 4). The only well preserved part of the house, i.e. the NE half shows a row of regularly spaced posts [774, 775, 776] that stood 50 cm one from another. The fourth corner post must have stood on the boulder at the N corner of the house. Two post-moulds [749, 750] visible on the upper edge of the floor depression may be evidence of additional reinforcement of the turf wall there. By the opposite heavily destroyed SW wall only a cluster of three post-holes [747, 748, 769] survived. Such a concentration may indicate some repairing of the ageing house. There must have been a corner post resting on the natural pedestal of the large boulder visible in the W corner. So far, only one post-hole [770] was identified by the SE wall. All these posts belonged to different phases, which will be explained below.

We do not know what the original design of this house was because excavation of the floor layers is not finished yet. Therefore, the following description of the stratigraphic events starts sometime after the building was constructed.

The earliest deposit inside the hut excavated so far is a living-floor layer [782] which covered the centre of the house (see Fig. 3). It consisted of dark silt containing pieces of charcoal and burnt bones. The surface was black and trampled. Being greyish-brown near the SE wall it turned black near the fireplace and reaching inside it as an ash-and-charcoal deposit. There was a 3-5 cm high elevation stretching along the SW wall, which may indicate the position of a bench for sitting or sleeping, which included the flat surface of a large boulder protruding through the floor. Full-bag samples were collected from every quarter square metre.

Next there was a thin gravelly layer [800] which had accumulated along the NE wall (see plan 99/01). It is visible as an irregular strip spread from the outer wall of the stone fireplace, stretching along the edge of the floor and reaching the door opening. It may represent a levelling made to even an earlier floor level.

To the same stratigraphic phase belong three post-holes [774, 775 and 776] forming a row along the NE wall. Yellow sandy soil [766] removed from these holes was spread along the edge of the floor (see plan 94/01).

After this repair(?) the interior of the house was rearranged (Fig. 4). The floor was covered with brownish silt [762] so that the low bank that was earlier visible along the SW wall was levelled (see plan 95/01). A new "bench" was constructed along the NE wall where 7-10 cm of brownish sand [765] made a low "platform" ca. 80 x 180 cm. It stretched from the

entrance to the boulder occupying the NW corner (see plan 96/01). The fact that the three post-holes were not visible at the surface of this layer suggests that, they have either never been used to put posts in, or that eventual posts had been quickly removed to make space for the new bench. During this phase two posts were placed in the middle of the SW wall [769] and near the fire-place [768]. Some of the material used for levelling the floor was thrown outside the entrance [761].

A black trampled layer of sandy silt with charcoal and bones [758] indicates intensive occupation of this newly designed interior. The layer accumulated over the central portion of the floor and it directly joined ashes and charcoal that filled the stone fire-place⁶ (see plan 68/01). At this stage a light linear construction divided the room as indicated by a row of four stake-holes [771, 772, 773 and 781] making a straight line with a post [770] dug into the floor near the SE wall (see Fig. 4).

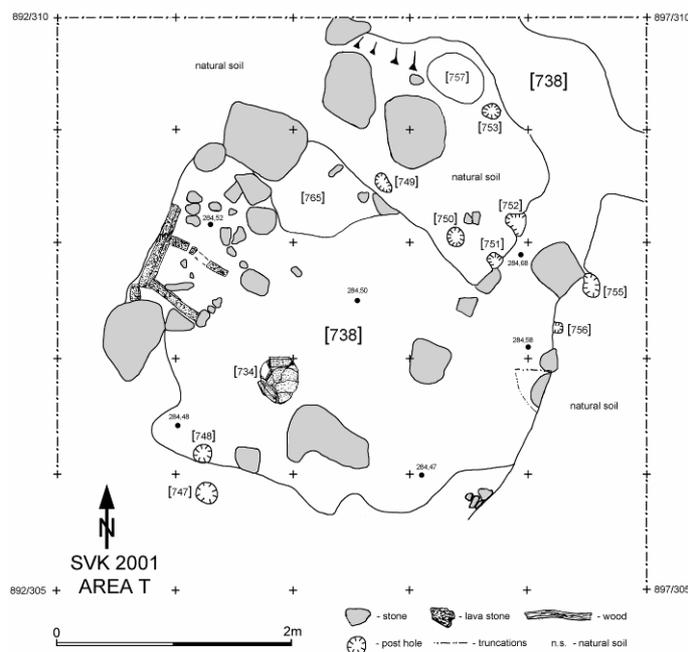


Figure 5. Late phase of pit house in Area T.

x 30 cm made of thin lava slabs (see plan 53A/01) standing vertically on some lava stones (see plan 53B/01). Two posts [747 and 748] were put by the SW wall. There was also change in the entrance passage because the outside pair of posts were removed.

A new floor layer [721] accumulated between the small hearth and the door where a wooden threshold created a barrier (see plan 44/01). This layer consisted of soft reddish-

near the SE wall (see Fig. 4).
 Some time later the house was rearranged again (Fig. 5). A layer of soft dark greyish-brown sandy silt [738] covered the floor, the entrance passage and the area adjacent to the house (see plan 60/01). It was probably a levelling layer used to change the function of the building. The whole interior was made even with no banks along either of the longer walls. The fireplace made of the lava slabs was also filled with sand and abandoned. A new hearth [734] was placed near the centre of the building. It was a simple box of ca. 20

⁶ A large sample of ashes was taken for flotation (see plan. 97/01).

brown silt with some bones. A thin-section sample was taken from the surface of the floor east of the hearth. An irregular patch of the same material had accumulated outside of the entrance passage. Two large stones were placed there and a post-hole was dug at the outside edge of the turf wall that was 100-120 cm thick at the ground level. The entrance passage was covered with ashes [730] containing pieces of charcoal and burnt bones that might have been removed from the hearth (see plan 43/01).

A new levelling action took place when the whole area under discussion was covered by dark brown sandy silt [720] with some charcoal, burnt bones and pieces of decomposed wood. This stratigraphic moment indicates the terminal point of the building. There were no more standing posts, the entrance passage was filled up to the ground level and lava slabs from the fire-places were spread over the floor (Fig. 6). Remains of the roof and wall collapse survived in the then existing depression.

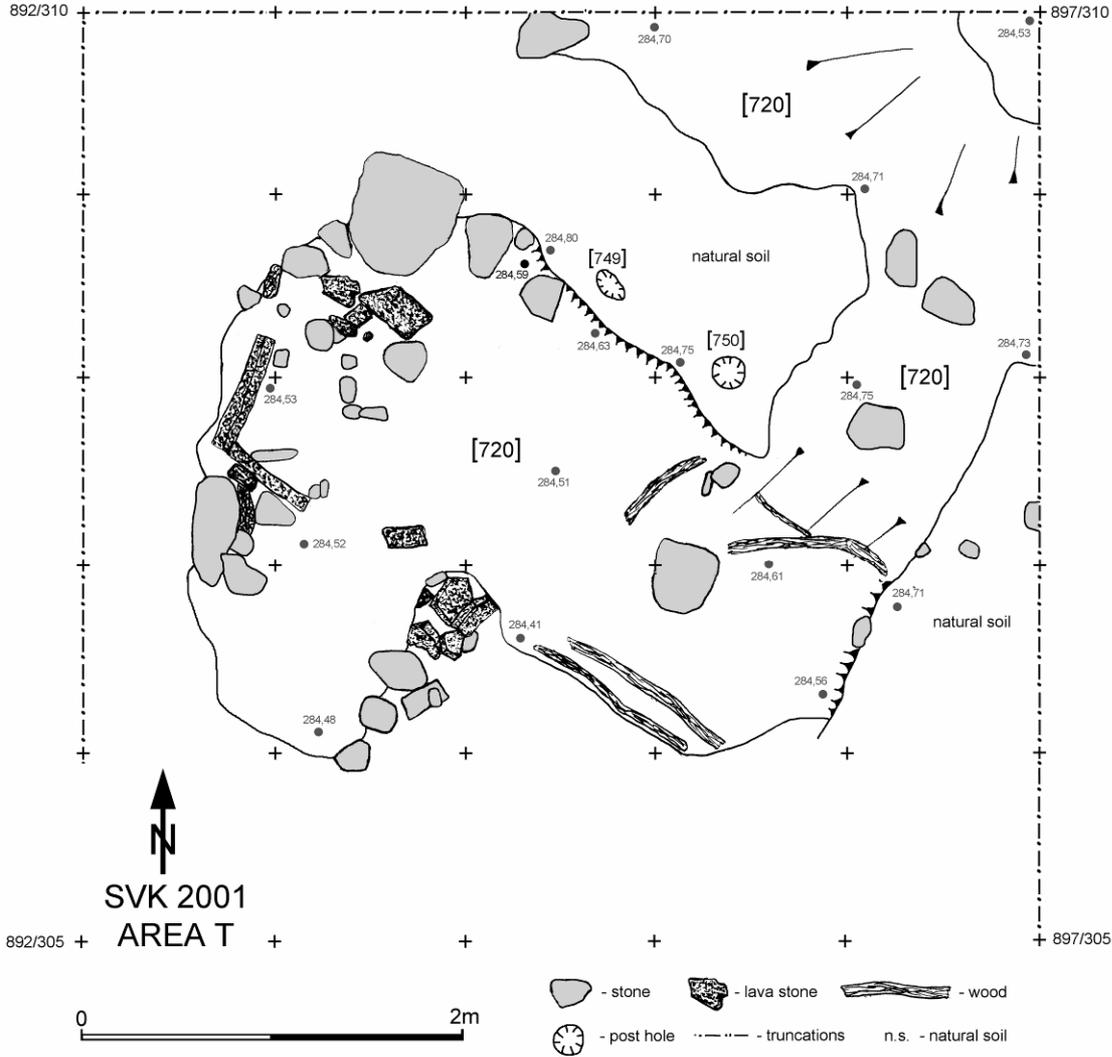


Figure 6. Abandonment phase of pit house in Area T.

Soon some further ordering of the area took place. The upper parts of the lava slabs used for construction of the original fire-place were snapped off and put in a row behind the fire-place. They marked a limit for some activities that left two midden(?) deposits [731, 671] in the NW corner of the trench (see plans 42/01, 41/01, 12/01). On the other side of these slabs a layer of greyish-brown sandy silt [700] with some bones and pieces of wood was thrown in the depression left over the former house interior (Fig. 7).

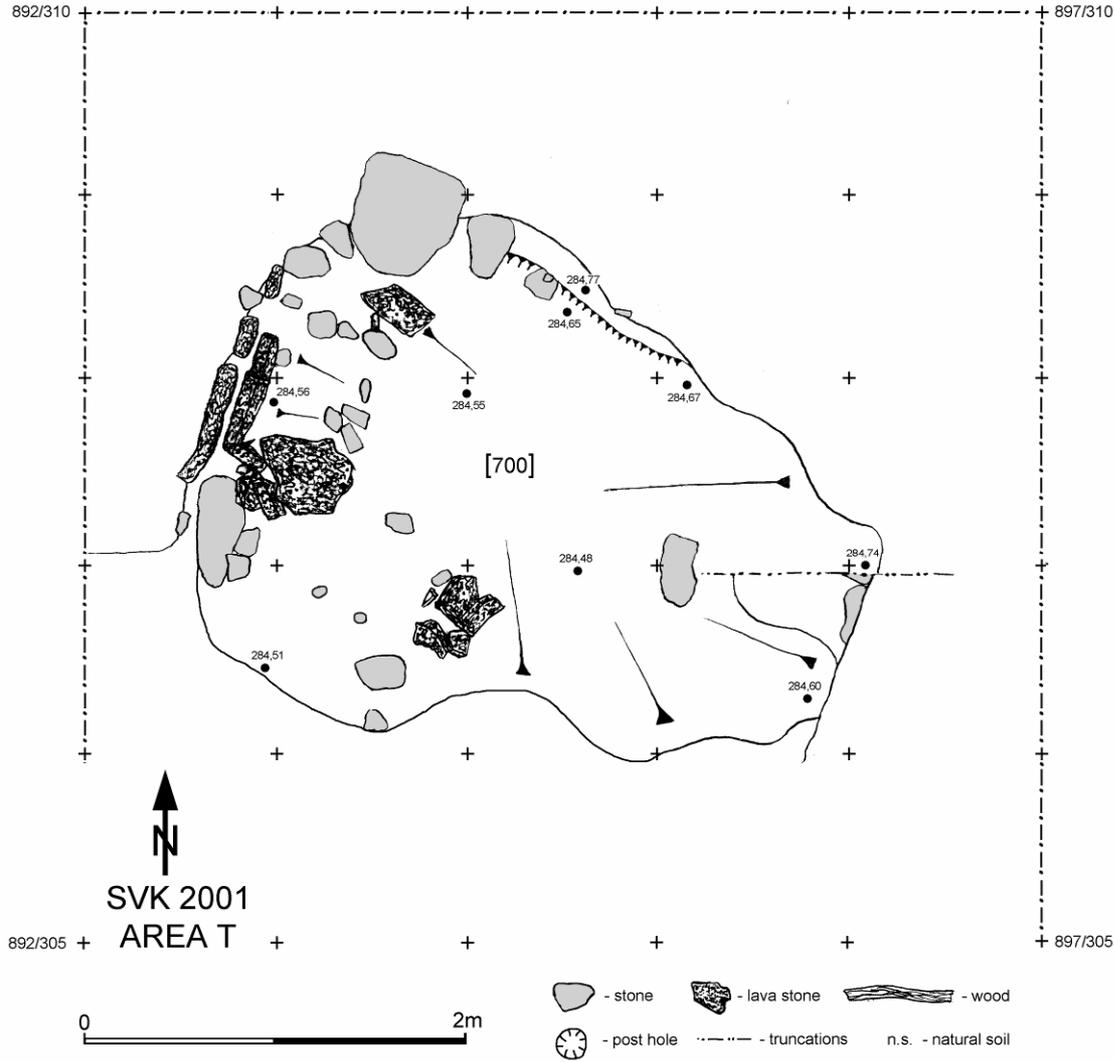


Figure 7. Surface remains covering the abandoned pit house in Area T.

Subsequently this part of the site fell out of direct use and was left open, which led to substantial decomposition of bones laying in layer 700. The process of natural levelling soon started. It left layers of greyish-brown wind-blown sand at the bottoms of all three

depressions: in the NW corner [711], over the house [684] and in the NE corner [709]. At one point of time some organic material [674] was thrown in the post-house depression.

Final levelling of the area was accomplished when layers of wind-blown sand [703, 672 and 673] filled all three depressions to form the surface observed under the contemporary turf (cf. northern part of Fig. 1).

Table 1. SVK 01, area T – Catalogue of Finds

No	Context	Material	Description	Level	Grid	Date
3	672	slag	A piece of slag	284,79	894/308	26.07.01
4	672	Iron	A piece of iron	284,80	893/307	26.07.01
5	700	slag	A piece of slag	284,51	893/307	30.07.01
6	700	bronze	Bronze bell (?)	284,48	893/307	30.07.01
84	712	Stone	Tool: polishing stone	284,51	895/304	08.08.01
86	712	Iron	Boat nail	284,36	893/302	08.08.01
77	720	iron	Boat nail	284,73	895/307	08.08.01
85	721	slag	A piece of slag	284,51	894/305	08.08.01
8	723	slag	A piece of slag	284,79	896/309	01.08.01
76	738	metal	Not identified	284,39	893/307	08.08.01
78	738	Iron	Fragment of knife	284,48	892/307	08.08.01
79	738	Stone	Spindle whorl	284,47	893/308	08.08.01
80	738	slag	A piece of slag	284,41	893/307	08.08.01
81	738	Stone	A piece of whetstone	284,46	893/308	08.08.01
82	738	Metal	Not identified	284,43	893/307	08.08.01
83	738	slag	A piece of slag	284,40	893/307	08.08.01
87	738	slag	A piece of slag	284,68	896/308	08.08.01
89	758	Iron	Boat nail	284,46	895/306	08.08.01
90	758	iron	Nail			08.08.01
91	744	Iron	Boat nail			08.08.01
88	761	Iron	Boat nail	284,64	896/308	08.08.01
92	762	bone	Fragments of comb			08.08.01
97	782	Bone	Fragment of comb			10.08.01
98	782	Flint	Flint flake			10.08.01
99	782	Iron	Nail	284,42	895/307	10.08.01

Table 2. SVK 01, area T: Catalogue of animal bones

No	Context	Grid	Quantity	Date
32	671		1 med. bag	02.08.01
2	672		1 bag	26.07.01
3	673		1 bag	26.07.01
1	674		1 bag	26.07.01
4	680		1 bag	26.07.01
51	680	896/302	1 sm. bag	06.08.01
5	681		1 bag	26.07.01
9	700 (by the oven)		1 med. bag	30.07.01
10	700		1 med. bag	30.07.01
15	700		1 bag	31.07.01
16	700		1 bag	31.07.01
17	700		1 sm. bag	31.07.01
7	703		1 med. bag	30.07.01
11	703		1 sm. bag	30.07.01
12	703		1 sm. bag	30.07.01
8	709		1 med. bag	30.07.01
22	711	892/307	1 sm. bag	01.08.01
23	711	893/309	1 sm. bag	01.08.01
24	711	892/309	1 sm. bag	01.08.01
25	711	892/308	1 sm. bag	01.08.01
52	712	892/304	1 med. bag	06.08.01
58	712	895/304	1 med. bag	06.08.01
94	712	893/305	1 sm. bag	10.08.01
26	720	896/307	1 sm. bag	01.08.01
33	720		1 med. bag	02.08.01
34	720		1 med. bag	02.08.01
35	720		1 sm. bag	02.08.01
36	720		1 sm. bag	02.08.01
37	720		1 med. bag	02.08.01
38	720		1 med. bag	02.08.01
39	720		1 med. bag	02.08.01
49	720	897/307	1 med. bag	06.08.01
50	720	893/308	1 med. bag	06.08.01
43	721		1 med. bag	03.08.01
44	721		1 med. bag	03.08.01
45	721		1 sm. bag	03.08.01
46	721		1 sm. bag	03.08.01
47	721		1 sm. bag	03.08.01
27	723	895/309	1 sm. bag	01.08.01
28	723	896/308	1 sm. bag	01.08.01
40	730		1 sm. bag	02.08.01
53	738	893/308	1 med. bag	06.08.01
54	738	895/307	1 sm. bag	06.08.01
57	738	893/307	1 med. bag	06.08.01

59	738	894/307	1 med. bag	06.08.01
60	738	893/307	1 med. bag	06.08.01
61	738	893/306	1 med. bag	06.08.01
62	738	892/307	1 sm. bag	06.08.01
63	738	894/308	1 sm. bag	06.08.01
55	744	894/303	1 med. bag	06.08.01
65	744	893/303	1 med. bag	08.08.01
56	758	896/308	1 med. bag	06.08.01
66	758	893/307	1 med. bag	08.08.01
67	758	895/306	1 med. bag	08.08.01
68	758	895/305	1 med. bag	08.08.01
69	758	893/306	1 med. bag	08.08.01
85	761	896/308	1 sm. bag	09.08.01
76	762	893/307	1 sm. bag	09.08.01
77	762	895/307	1 sm. bag	09.08.01
78	762	893/308	1 med. bag	09.08.01
79	762 - bench	894/308	1 med. bag	09.08.01
80	762 - bench	894/305	1 sm. bag	09.08.01
81	762	895/305	1 sm. bag	09.08.01
82	762	893/308	1 sm. bag	09.08.01
83	762	894/307	1 sm. bag	09.08.01
86	762	893/306	1 sm. bag	09.08.01
84	765	895/307	1 sm. bag	09.08.01
87	765	894/308	1 sm. bag	09.08.01
88	766	894/308	1 med. bag	09.08.01
92	782	895/307	1 sm. bag	10.08.01
93	782	893/307	1 sm. bag	10.08.01

Table 3. SVK 01, area T: samples

No	Context	Grid	Level	Quant.	Description	Date
1	671	892/308	284,71	1 buck.	Midden	26.07.01
3	674	893/307	284,65	1 buck.		26.07.01
36	712	895/304	284,21	1 bag	Tephra	06.08.01
9	720	895/307	284,47	1 bag	Wood	31.07.01
10	720	895/306	284,53	1 bag	Wood	31.07.01
24	721	892/305	284,51	1 tin	Micromorph. of org. floor layer	02.08.01
25	721	892/305	284,50	1 bag	Sample of organic floor layer	02.08.01
27	721	894/306	284,50	1 buck.	Sample of organic floor layer	02.08.01
26	730	895/307	284,71	1 buck.	Layer in the entrance of the pithouse	02.08.01
34	734	893/306	284,43	1/3 buck.	Stone hearth fill	03.08.01
40	738	892/307	284,42	1 buck.	Sec. fill of stone oven	07.08.01
59	744	893/303	284,41	1 bag	Flotation	08.08.01
41	758	893/307	284,40	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
42	758	893/307	284,40	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
43	758	893/307	284,38	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
44	758	894/307	284,37	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
45	758	894/307	284,39	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
46	758	893/306	284,44	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
47	758	894/307	284,39	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
48	758	895/306	284,46	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
49	758	895/306	284,50	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
50	758	895/306	284,56	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
51	758	895/306	284,52	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
52	758	894/306	284,44	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
53	758	894/306	284,44	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
54	758	894/306	284,39	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
55	758	893/306	284,44	1 bag	Floor layer	07.08.01
57	758	892/307	284,40	1 tin	Micromorph: ashes from hearth	08.08.01
58	758	892/307	284,42	1 bag	From oven for I. Simpson	08.08.01
60	758	895/306	284,46	1 bag	Flotation	08.08.01
61	758	893/307	284,39	1 bag	Flotation: outside the oven	08.08.01
62	758	892/307	284,38	1 bag	Flotation: inside the oven	08.08.01
66	762	895/305	284,50	1 bag	Charcoal	09.08.01

67	776	895/307	284,48	1 bag	wood	09.08.01
70	782	893/306	284,35	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
71	782	894/306	284,35	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
72	782	894/307	284,35	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
73	782	894/306	284,38	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
74	782	894/307	284,42	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
75	782	894/307	284,37	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
76	782	893/306	284,35	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
77	782	893/307	284,35	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
78	782	894/306	284,38	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
79	782	895/307	284,42	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
80	782	895/307	284,48	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
81	782	893/307	284,36	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
82	782	895/306	284,49	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
83	782	895/306	284,53	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
84	782	895/306	284,45	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
85	782	892/307	284,35	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
86	782	895/306	284,45	1 bag	Chemistry	10.08.01
87	782	892/307	284,35	1 bag	From the oven for I. Simpson	10.08.01

Table 4. SVK, Area T: catalogue of contexts

Number	Type	Description	Date
671	L	Dark, gray-brown silt	25. 07. 01
672	L	Dark, gray-brown silt with sand	25. 07. 01
673	L	Dark, gray-black sand	25. 07. 01
674	L	Mixed, orange-gray-black, silty sand	26. 07. 01
680	L	Soft, dark, grayish-black silt	26. 07. 01
681	L	Soft, dark, grayish-black silt	26. 07. 01
684	L	Very dark, grayish-brown sand	26. 07. 01
693	L	Fairy, dark reddish-brown and strong brown, silty sand	27. 07. 01
700	L	Interior of the pithouse	27. 07. 01
703	L	The fill layer of the pithouse	27. 07. 01
709	L	Dark brown mixed with brown silty sand	30. 07. 01
711	L	Soft, dark, mixed silty sand and tephra	30. 07. 01
712	L	Soft, silky silt in three mixed colours with inclusions of gray tephra	30. 07. 01
720	L	Soft, very dark, reddish-brown sandy silt	31. 07. 01
721	L	Clayish, dark, reddish-brown silt	31. 07. 01
723	L	Soft, med. grayish-brown sandy silt	31. 07. 01
725	L	Slightly soft, very dark, reddish-brown sandy silt	01. 08. 01
727	L	Friable, pale, reddish-brown silky silt	01. 08. 01
730	L	Friable, very dark, grayish-blackish-brown sandy silt	02.08. 01
731	L	Light firm, dark, yellowish-brown sandy silt	02.08. 01
732	L	External part of [721], separated by [738] – entrance of the pithouse	02.08. 01
734	Hearth	Fireplace built with lava-stones	03. 08. 01
738	L	Floor-layer of the pithouse	03. 08. 01
743	L	Soft, very dark, grayish-black silky sand	06. 08. 01
744	L	Layer outside the pithouse – older than it	06. 08. 01
747	P. hole	Soft, dark, gray silt	06. 08. 01
748	P. hole	Very soft, dark, grayish-brown sandy silt	06. 08. 01
749	P. hole	Soft, very dark, gray sandy silt	06. 08. 01
750	P. hole	Soft, very dark, gray sandy silt	06. 08. 01
751	P. hole	Soft, very dark, grayish-brown sandy silt	06. 08. 01
752	P. hole	Soft, very dark, grayish-brown sandy silt	06. 08. 01
753	P. hole	Soft, very dark, grayish-brown sandy silt	06. 08. 01
754	P. hole	Friable, very dark, brown and brownish-black sand	06. 08. 01
755	P. hole	Soft, very dark, grayish-brown sandy silt	06. 08. 01
756	P. hole	Soft, very dark, grayish-brown sandy silt	06. 08. 01
757	Pit	Soft, med. brown mixed with fair reddish-brown silt	06. 08. 01
758	L	Floor-layer inside the pithouse	07. 08. 01
759	L	Light firm, dark, yellowish-brown silty sand	07. 08. 01
761	L	Silt and gravel with charcoal-ashes	08.08. 01
762	L	Med. brownish-gray silt-layer inside the pithouse	08.08. 01
765	L	First layer building “the bench” in the pithouse	08.08. 01
766	L	Layer partly building “the bench” in the pithouse	08.08. 01
768	P. hole	P. hole near the lava-stone oven in NW part of the	09. 08. 01

		pithouse	
769	P. hole	Soft, very dark, grayish-brown silty sand	09. 08. 01
770	P. hole	Soft, very dark, grayish-brown silty sand	09. 08. 01
771	P. hole	Soft, very dark, brown silty sand	09. 08. 01
772	P. hole	Soft, very dark, brown silty sand	09. 08. 01
773	P. hole	Soft, very dark, brown silty sand	09. 08. 01
774	P. hole	Soft, grayish-brown sandy silt	09. 08. 01
775	P. hole	Soft, grayish-brown sandy silt	09. 08. 01
776	P. hole	Soft, grayish-brown sandy silt	09. 08. 01
777	P. hole	Friable, very dark, grayish-black sand with gravel	09. 08. 01
781	P. hole	Soft, very dark, grayish-brown sand	09. 08. 01
782	L	Second floor-layer inside the pithouse	09. 08. 01
783	P. hole	Soft, very dark, gray sandy silt	09. 08. 01
795	L	Soft, brown sandy silt	10. 08. 01
798	P. hole	Soft, very dark, gray sandy silt	10. 08. 01
799	P. hole	Appeared in the layer next to [801] (?)	10. 08. 01
800	L	Third floor-layer in the pithouse	10. 08. 01
801	L	Friable, mixed yellowish-brown sandy silt	10. 08. 01

Sveigakot 2001. Area M - Midden

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, charcoal, 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 (Landnám?) 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 “landnám” 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 north of the unit.



A series of ca 35 cm x 50 cm shovel test pits between units 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 P 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 midden 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 FSÍ recovery standards), while maintaining a sort of “watching brief” for any larger midden concentrations along the W edge of the SVK ridge.

Sveigakot 2001 – the artefacts

Find

no	Area	Context	Description
1	S	685	Gaming-piece made of stone
2	S	630	Iron knife handle
3	T	surface	Slag
4	T	672	Slag
5	T	700	Slag
6	T	700	Folded object of thin copper-alloy
7	S	646	Slag
8	T	723	Slag
9	S	726	Slag
11	S	728	Broken iron object
12	S	685	Worked bone
13		surface	Complete iron nail
14	M	049	Iron rove, complete
15	M	049	Complete iron clench nail/rove
16	M	049	Iron fragment
17	M	049	Complete iron ring
18	M	049	Iron nail
19	M	049	Iron object, blade?
20	M	049	Worked bone
21	M	049	Worked bone
22	M	049	Cut/worked bone
23	M	049	Worked bone
24	M	049	Worked bone
25	M	049	Probable whetstone fragment
26	M	049	Whetstone
27	M	049	Whetstone fragment with perforation
28	M	049	Iron object
29	M	049	Iron nail
30	M	049	Iron nail
31	M	049	Iron nail (shank?)
32	M	049	Iron nail
33	M	049	Iron object (sheet?)
34	M	049	Iron nail (2 pieces)
35	M	049	Iron nail (shank?)
36	M	049	Iron nail
37	M	049	Steatite spindle-whorl, edge
38	M	049	Fragment of non-local stone. Not steatite
39	M	049	Bead fragment - not steatite
40	M	045	Iron rove with 2 perforations
41	M	045	Steatite vessel rim
42	M	003	Steatite spindle-whorl fragment
43	M	003	Incised stone - burnishing stone or gaming piece
44	M	002	Bone pin shank fragment
45	M	002	Bone pin shank
46	M	002	Iron tool-punch
47	M	002	Iron tool (?)

48	M	002	Complete bone pin
49	M	002	Iron nail head
50	M	002	Iron nail head/shank
51	M	002	Iron nail head
52	M	002	Iron nail head/shank
53	M	002	Iron nail head/shank?
54	M	002	Iron rove
55	M	002	Iron scrap
56	M	002	Steatite vessel - handle fragment
57	M	002	2 fragments of steatite spindle-whorl
58	M	002	Whetstone fragment
59	M	002	Steatite bead/weight
60	M	002	Copper tube with 2 perforations - attachment?
61	M	046	Iron nail shank
62	M	046	Iron sheet
63	M	046	Iron object, fitting?
64	M	046	Steatite vessel fragment
65	S	708	Sandstone spindle-whorl, half
66	S	726	Iron nail
67	M	049	Whetstone fragment
68	M	046	Flat, round headed iron nail
69	M	046	Slender iron nail - 2 parts?
70	M	002	Part of conical steatite spindle whorl
71	M	002	Fragment of horn/antler object
72	M	002	Iron nail, fragment
73	M	002	Chip of steatite
74	M	002	Iron knife fragment
75	S	679	Red sandstone object with 2 perforations
76	T	738	Unidentified metal object
77	T	720	Iron rivet
78	T	738	Iron knife fragment
79	T	738	Stone Spindle-whorl
80	T	738	Slag
81	T	738	Whetstone fragment
82	T	738	Unidentified metal object
83	T	738	Slag
84	T	712	Burnishing stone
85	T	721	Slag
86	T	712	Iron rivet
87	T	738	Slag
88	T	761	Iron rove
89	T	758	Iron rivet
90	T	758	Iron nail
92	T	762	Seven fragments of antler comb.
91	T	744	Iron rivet
93	S	764	Small piece of iron - broken nail?
94	S	624	Half of a mellon shaped stone bead
95	S	767	Whetstone
96	S	767	Composite fitting of Copper-alloy and iron.
97	T	782	Bone comb fragment

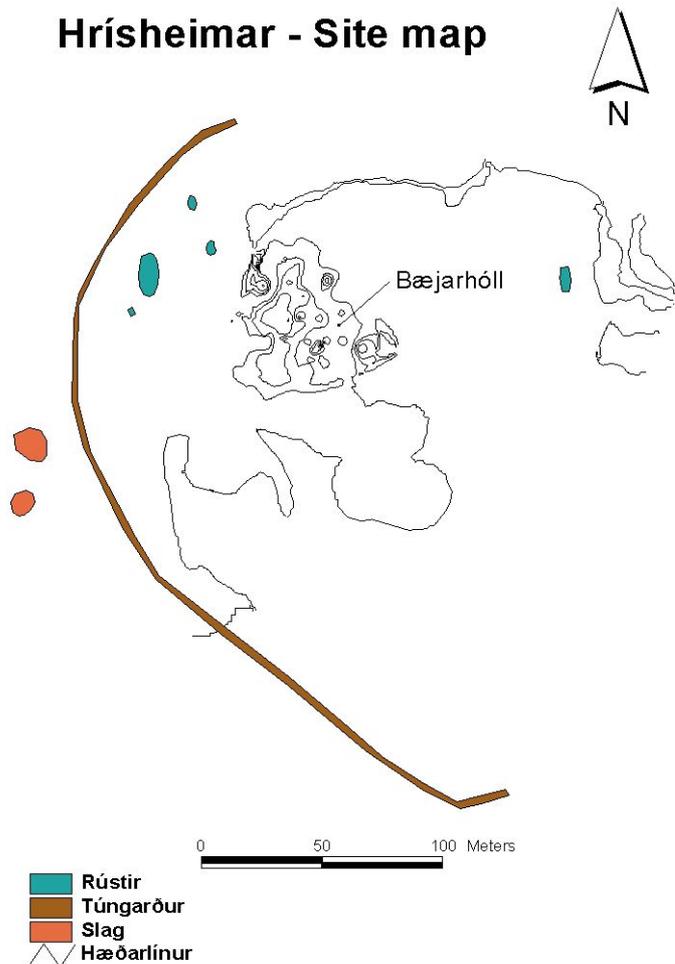
98	T	782	Flint flake
99	T	782	Iron nail
100	M	046	Steatite spindle-whorl. Reused vessel fragment?
101	S	776	Large whetstone
102	S	806	Iron nail
103	S	806	Loom-weight
104	S	778	Cluster of differently coloured pebbles
105	S	810	Iron nail
106	S	778	Small worked stone
107	S	814	Iron nail
108	S	814	Whetstone
109	S	819	Whetstone
112	S	809	Iron object
113	S	816	Iron nail
114	S	611	Whetstone?
115	S	828	Loom-weight
116	S	561	Burnishing stone
117	S	611	Complete bone pin
118	S	611	Possible iron nail head
119	S	611	Engraved copper alloy fitting
120	S	611	Iron object
121	S	826	Iron hook or clinch nail
122	S	745	Slag
123	M	002	Slag
124	M	002	Iron object. Slightly tapered - possible handle
125	M	002	Iron object
126	M	002	Iron rivet
127	M	002	Iron knife blade, broken
128	M	002	Broken iron nail
129	M	002	Quern-stone fragment
130	M	002	3 burnished water-worn pebbles

Hrísheimar – the structures

The site Hrísheimar is on the property of the farm Baldursheimur, the southernmost of the farms presently occupied in Mývatnssveit on the western side of river Kráká. The site is some 2,5 west of Baldursheimur and 6,5 km south of lake Mývatn, at 65°30.817 N 17°06.452 W. It is 10 km from Hofstaðir and some 4,5 km from Sveigakot but while it is about the same distance from Lake Mývatn as Sveigakot it is at a somewhat higher elevation, at 313 m a.s.l. compared to 286 m a.s.l. at Sveigakot.

Hrísheimar is only some 100 m south of the river Gautlandalækur which separates the properties of Baldursheimur and Gautlönd. On the northern side of that small river is the present farm Heiði, founded in 1958 a short distance from the earlier farm site Bjarnastaðir. Bjarnastaðir is mentioned in the land register of 1712 as a long abandoned farm on the property of Gautlönd (JÁM XI, 224). Bjarnastaðir was occupied again shortly before 1850 in a wave of new farm foundations on the moorlands inland from Mývatnssveit and Bárðardalur but was abandoned in 1945. The site of the 19th century farm is still recognisable in a levelled hay field belonging to Heiði (65°32.045 N 17°07.775 W). It presumably covers the remains of the pre-1712 dwellings. Bjarnastaðir is another potential early site and may have been occupied at the same time as Hrísheimar. With Baldursheimur and Þorleifsstaðir to the south these two sites represent a potential settlement cluster of medieval date. The proximity of Bjarnastaðir and Hrísheimar is potentially significant although the two settlements are clearly separated by Gautlandalækur and a low ridge which obscures view between the farm sites.

Hrísheimar - Site map



Vörpun: WSG84

Map of Hrísheimar. Ragnar Edvardsson 2001.

says that the burial was originally discovered in 1860 some 200 fathoms (c. 375 m) due east of the farmhouse of Baldursheimur. Arngrímur was not a resident of Baldursheimur and was not present when the discoveries were made so it is conceivable that he got the location wrong. It seems however a bit far fetched that he was mistaken about both the direction and the distance as he was a mapmaker of some distinction, had clearly interviewed the people of Baldursheimur and his description of the finds is quite accurate. In fact the present inhabitants of Baldursheimur believe that the grave was some 180 m east of the old farm house, just outside the old homefield on the edge of a bog. That does not however square with Arngrímur's description that the grave was exposed by erosion on a hill so it seems that there will always be doubt as to the location of this burial. On presently available evidence it cannot be considered likely that the grave was located at Hrísheimar but the possibility cannot be ruled out.

Hrísheimar is nowhere mentioned in historical sources until the mid-20th century. The place name inventory of Baldursheimur mentions the ruins and the place name and it is also mentioned in a deiscription of the county published in 1954. Its author claims that the infield became eroded in the mid-19th century and that the erosion revealed the remains of a pagan grave, the famous Baldursheimur burial, the artefacts from which formed the initial donation to the Antiquities collection (later National Museum of Iceland)) in 1863.⁷ A report of the find written by Arngrímur Gíslason in 1862

does not mention Hrísheimar and

⁷ Jón Sigurðsson: *Lýsing Þingeyjarsýslu I. Suður Þingeyjarsýsla*, (Ritsafn Þingeyinga II), Rv 1954, p. 251.

Hrísheimar is an unusual place name. In Iceland the farm name ending “-heimur/heimar” occurs only X times but it is quite common in Scandinavia, particularly in Norway (“heim”). The ending denotes “dwelling, a place/area of occupation”. In Iceland the ending is found several times in plural with Sól- (“sun-“) and Vind- (“wind-“) on the one hand and in singular with Baldur- (the pagan god – 2 cases) and Meðal- (“middle-“) on the other (also 2 cases). Myrkheimar, Gandheimur, Blíðheimur also occur, once each. There is a pattern here where the plural forms have descriptive elements denoting natural conditions (i.e. sunny, windy, dark) whereas the singular forms have connotations with pagan religion (Baldur, Gand). Hrísheimar seems to belong to the former category, with “heimar” in plural and a descriptive element preceding it. Hrís means “shrub” and the place name therefore indicates a shrubby place/dwelling. As the ending is a rare form, normally regarded as reflecting earlier place-naming tastes than “-staðir” (which essentially means the same thing and predominates Icelandic farm name endings), it may be tempting to suggest that the place name Hrísheimar was the name of the farm when it was occupied and that it describes the vegetation of the site when it was first settled. Considering the rarity of heimur/heimar names the proximity of Hrísheimar with Baldursheimur cannot however be overlooked. The place name Hrísheimar may well be coined long after the abandonment of the site: “the dwelling of shrubs” as opposed to the inhabited Baldursheimur. According to that line of reasoning the place name must at least predate the erosion of the site – the largest part of which is now and has long been more or less completely denuded.

The ruins are located in a nook created by a ridge which extends far to the south and a row of hills at right angles to it, extending eastwards. These hills are called Selhólar, literally “sheiling hills”, indicating a possible later reuse of the site as a sheiling.

The earliest description of Hrísheimar is by Jón Sigurgeirsson, dated to 1990. He and geologist Sigurður Þórarinsson visited the site in 1975, when they found a honing-wheel (hverfisteinn) broken in two lying on the ground by the main farm ruin. He also says that shortly after 1980 a spread of smelting slag was revealed by erosion. This suggests that parts of the site at least have been covered by soil and vegetation until quite recently. Furthermore Jón says that earlier in the 20th century children from Bjarnastaðir and Baldursheimur were wont to go to Hrísheimar to scratch the surface to collect beads, sea shells and sea pebbles. In his description Jón refers to a sketch map he seems to have made on one of his visits to the site but in 1999 he had two of his nephews go and measure the site. Their drawing is dated to

July 19 1999 (initialled “HTr/SBP”) and was kindly made available to Fornleifastofnun Íslands by the late Jón Sigurgeirsson along with his 1990 description.

The site was first visited by members of the Landscapes of Settlement project in 2000. They collected on several occasions 20 objects lying on the surface, mostly on and around the small farm mound. These finds, particularly the beads, were thought to indicate an early date, and that as well as the poor condition of the site was the reason it was decided to initiate excavations on a small scale at hrísheimar in 2001.

The site consists of the following features:

- 1) Small mound a few m upslope from the edge of the dry bog which marks the eastern edge of the visible archaeological remains. The mound itself is 18 m long (N-S), 15 m wide (E-W) and 1,5 m high above ground. It has vegetation on top but its sides are eroded revealing many courses of stones, suggesting a number of construction phases. A low rise southeast of the main mound was identified as a possible midden in 2001 and a 2x2 m test trench was dug into that revealing midden deposits infilling a possible sunken feature. It suggests that there may be buried archeology associated with the mound, in a considerably larger area than occupied by it, especially on the southern side, with a total area of approx. 45x30 m. The majority of surface finds has come from this mound and its immediate surroundings.
- 2) Some 45 m west of mound 1 another large structure, approximately 26 m long (N-S) and 8 m wide, is found on somewhat higher ground. This is much eroded and the remains are represented by two piles of rocks, the more southerly clearly a fireplace with large vertical slabs. Judging by the surface remains this location has much fewer construction phases than mound 1, possibly only the one.
- 3) A more or less continuous row of stones represents the NW and SW sides of infield boundary, stretching some 400 m from a cairn on the hill north of mound 1, in a wide arch north and west of structure 2. It can be traced on the slope south of the two main structures and ends some 190 m south of mound 1. Where it disappears at the edge of the now mostly dry bog it is starting to curve back northeast. If that side was more or less straight – as the NW and SW sides, the area enclosed by the boundary will have been about 250x200 m or 5 ha. Half of that area is now dry bog with no discernible differences in vegetation where the boundary would have been. The boundary is everywhere on denuded land except due west of mound 1 where there is a small patch

of soil partially covering an enclosure attached to the boundary on the outside, measuring 12x10 m.

- 4) On the edge of the slope, overlooking structures 1 and 2 there are two sub-circular rows of stones which clearly are man made and may represent burials.
- 5) Some 15 m outside the homefield boundary, 75 m south of structure 2 there are two concentrations of smelting slag which have trickled down the slope. There are no structures associated with these concentrations which are clearly evidence for iron extraction. In his description of the site Jón Sigurgeirsson talks about a smelting slag concentration inside the homefield boundary, much closer to structure 2, but this is not apparent anymore.
- 6) 70 m NE of structure 1 there is a recent structure of very different character from the rest of the ruins at Hrísheimar. It is a stone built rectangular house or fold ruin, 13 m long and 5,5 m wide on the outside. It has a possible entrance on the southern long side. While quite distinct it is only 0,3 m high. Jón Sigurgeirsson suggests that this may be the ruin of the sheiling which gave the hills immediately to the north their name.
- 7) Some 18 m SE of structure 6 there is an oblong pile of stones, 12 m long and 3-6 m wide. This is clearly manmade but does not resemble any known type of structure and is tentatively identified as a burial.

Jón Sigurgeirsson describes all these structures except no. 7 and they are shown on his nephews' plan. The plan also shows a circular row of stones, 5 m wide at the edge of the bog 11 m from the boundary wall where it begins to turn east and disappears into the bog. Also on the edge of the bog but closer to mound 1 they show a scatter of slabs, 4 m wide, and another scatter of broken lava slabs on the southern side of the water course which runs east south of structures 1 and 2.

In 2001 Ragnar Edvardsson made a rough plan of the site but a more detailed analysis of the surface remains at Hrísheimar awaits further seasons of fieldwork.

Report on Midden Investigations at Hrísheimar

Summary: Investigations at the abandoned farm site of Hrísheimur revealed well stratified midden deposits up to 60 cm thick. These deposits apparently fill a semi-subterranean structure with partially intact floor layers and some surviving structural elements. Conditions of bone preservation are good to excellent, and potential for coordinated investigation with geological and structures teams seems considerable.

Objectives

The objectives of the 2001 archaeological and environmental investigations at Hrísheimar (HRH) were:

- Determine conditions of organic preservation
- Determine if stratified midden deposits remained intact anywhere on site
- Collect small samples of bone for zooarchaeological analysis
- Collect any datable artifacts
- Cooperate with geo teams in assessing tephra and geo-archaeology potential
- Set up grid, begin mapping structures and land contours.

Investigations 2001

Beginning work July 25th with a preliminary inspection and finishing concentrated work August 6-10, a small team consisting of Clayton Tinsley, Tom McGovern, Anthony Newton, Eric Seadale, and Eliza McGovern carried out a first stage investigation of the midden area of the site. Surface collection on July 25th revealed a concentration of bone and ash in and around a series of semi-stabilized erosion dunes to the SE (generally lee-ward) side of the mounded farm ruin. This area seemed to offer the best potential for surviving stratigraphy on

this very heavily eroded site (see attached illustrations). We laid out a N-S major grid axis with a center point at 1000/1100. We used this point as the SW corner for a 2 x 2 m test unit (Unit H) approximately centered on the exposed bone and charcoal. Beneath a layer of wind deposited sterile silt (001) we rapidly encountered bone bearing midden deposits. We cleared off the sterile, then (when full scale work resumed Aug 6th) began excavation of the Eastward two meter squares (1001 line). All excavated material was put through 4 mm mesh dry sieve and major whole-soil samples were saved for flotation as per NABO/FSÍ recommended practice. These two squares turned up an impressive amount of well preserved animal bone, fire cracked stones, wood charcoal, and ash. Species immediately identifiable included haddock, cod, salmonid fish, bird (probably ptarmigan), cattle, sheep, and pig (including several maxillae). No biperforated metapodials were noted (a butchery practice common only after ca AD 1100). Below these upper midden layers (002-004), we encountered a widespread layer of displaced structural turf fragments in random orientation. These contained large amounts of a gray tephra superficially resembling the 007 deposit at Sveigakot across the Kraká. Below these deposits we encountered more midden layers with quantities of slightly less well preserved animal bone and much wood charcoal and fire cracked rock. Below these lower midden deposits we again encountered a layer of displaced turf debris (with extensive inclusion of gray tephra). C14 samples (cattle bone) were collected from midden layers above and below the turf collapse layers. As we began to cut into this lower turf collapse surface, we rapidly discovered patches of what appeared to be highly compacted, hard dark surfaced material similar to floor layers seen on other sites nearby. After cutting into these layers in a small area along the 1102 E-W profile (HRH drawing 2) we stopped excavation in the eastern side of the H unit. We then expanded the excavation area, taking in the remaining (Western) 2 meters. These excavations revealed the same sequence of layers, while demonstrating that they sloped sharply from a high point near the 1000/1102 grid point. This point rapidly revealed what appears to be upcast tan sterile soil flecked with patches of white tephra, very much like the upcast bank around feature G at Hofstaðir. This upcast was covered by the lower turf collapse and the midden layers above. We did not excavate into this layer, but instead followed the contours of the top of the lower turf collapse layer. Near the W wall of the unit H, we encountered what appears to be a small post mould filled with loose brown soil. This was not emptied but marked with red pins and left intact for investigations by the structures team. Finds include slag, some small fragments of gray schist whetstone (and a large complete whetstone surface collected by Arní Einarsson and donated by him), and a complete steatite spindle whorl (low bun-shaped). In combination with the glass beads

surface collected last year, these finds suggest a date broadly comparable to the occupation of Sveigakot nearby. Major N-S and E-W profiles were drawn and extensive digital and film photography took place throughout (see illustrations). Corings (Oakfield tube type soil corer) indicated variable depths of organic material around the H unit area, with deepest concentrations apparently to the N (upslope, see coring report). We aided the geo team in excavating profiles off site, and they were successful in identifying a full range of tephra close to the site area. We did not map the site, as it seemed more time-efficient and more likely to produce consistently high quality data to have the FSÍ GPS survey team carry out this task separately.

Conclusions

There is certainly excellent organic preservation at Hrísheimur, and while it is hard to estimate the extent of the surviving midden deposits it seems that there is a substantial amount preserved within and around a sunken feature structure. The parallels with associated midden and sunken structures at Hofstaðir and Sveigakot seem clear, and it would seem that a full scale open area investigation will be needed to effectively remove the midden infilling and multiple turf collapses from the apparent floor layers below. Despite its heavily eroded condition, this early site has considerable potential for multi-disciplinary investigation.

Recommendations

- Expansion of midden excavations in the unit H area, open area with temporary baulks or alternate square approaches to combine vertical and horizontal exposures. Continue systematic sieving and whole soil sampling programs.
- Attempt to identify tephra held in displaced turf fragments.
- Attempt to connect tephra in geo trenches to the site excavation units.
- Full scale mapping and documentation of the many wall lines, cairns, and other features visible in the eroded areas.
- Investigation of two large concentrations of smithing debris eroded out to the NW of the main ruin.
- Eventual excavation of the exposed sunken feature in H.

Coring Report HRH Aug 7th 2001

A series of cores were taken with an Oakfield tube-type soil corer (with peat head) in the immediate vicinity of the Midden unit H. As usual, a number of cores were stopped by stones before showing much stratigraphy, and as ever one should be careful of over-interpretation of such small exposures. However, it would appear from these results that while there is substantial midden material present around H (esp to the N and E) there is not a continuous band of midden in this area. I suspect multiple erosion events and some complexity. NB Grid locations approximate.

Core 1 (within the H unit) 1001/1101

Surface – 10 cm windblown sterile silt

20 – 30 cm stratified midden deposit

30-35 cm (approx) gray tephra and turf mix

35-58 cm gray ash and midden material

Core 2 1003/1102 (E of H)

Surface- 25 cm organic deposit, possibly midden

25-45 cm sterile natural layers and tephra

Core 3 1001/1101

Surface- 15 cm organic deposit possibly midden

15-35 cm natural layers.

Core 4 998/1100

Surface-20 cm organic deposit possibly midden

20 cm- rock natural layers

Core 5 1001/1105

1-30 cm organic deposit possibly midden

rock at 30 cm

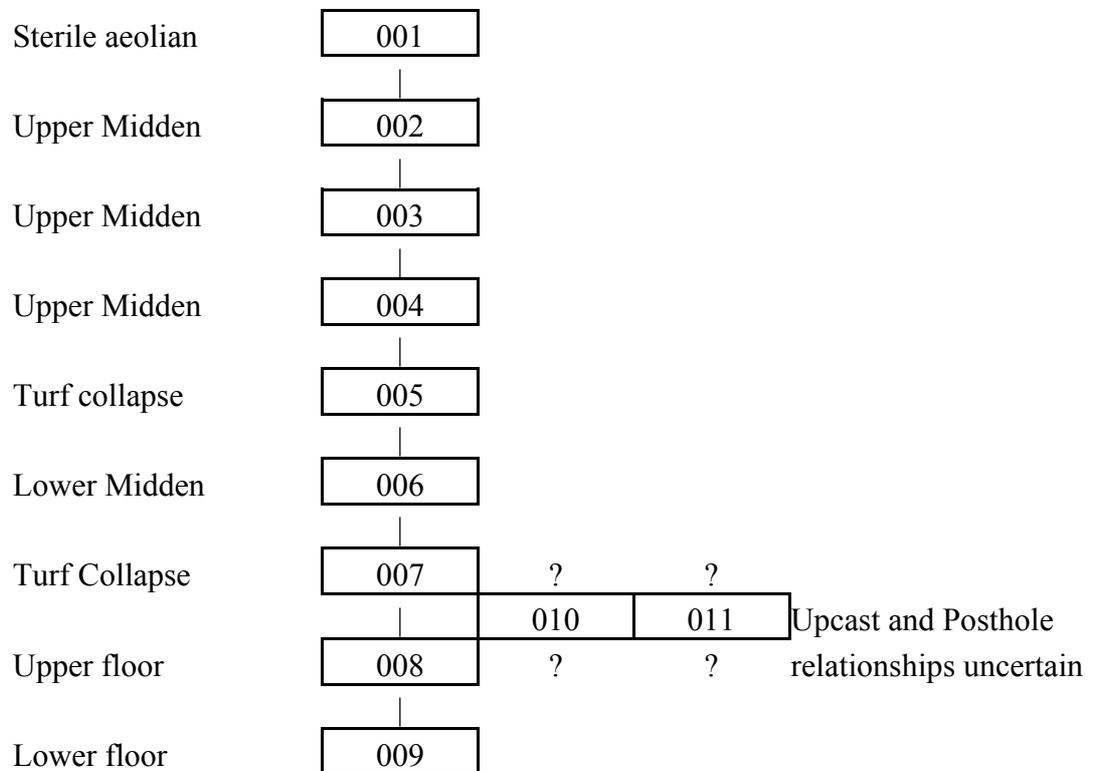
Core 6 1006/1103

Surface-65 cm banded organic possibly midden

65 cm H3 tephra.

Hrísheimar 2001

Harris Matrix



Hrisheimar 2000 and 2001 – the finds. Preliminary Report

The archaeological investigations at Hrisheimar (HRH) undertaken in the summers of 2000 and 2001 revealed a total amount of 68 artefacts, recorded with 34 find numbers: most of them were collected by surveying the site surface in 2000, and some others were found during the test-trench excavation of a midden deposit in august 2001. All finds were numbered in a field finds list, and after cleaning registered in an excavation master-database including both field seasons. The finds are made of various materials: glass, metal, stone and bone. Preservation was good to excellent. Conservation was only needed for the whetstone fragments HLH 029. All determinable objects such as hone fragments and beads are of Viking age. Iron artefacts of more general Viking age and medieval character. The composition of the material culture and the absence of certain artefacts such as ceramic can be considered typically for Viking age sites in Iceland.

Metal objects

33 Metal objects were found and recorded with 14 numbers. Some indicate that iron production has taken place at Hrisheimar. Several slag fragments were found, both smelting and smithing slag. Five dark grey and rather heavy smelting slag pieces are recorded under HLH 00-001, three little dark grey smelting slag pebbles under HLH 00-016. HRH 01-013 lists three small fragments of smithing slag and two fragments of iron. HRH 01-026 is another lump of smithing slag.⁸ Two other dark grey smelting slag fragments (HRH 00-015) are shaped in a special way: the form looks like a rim fragment of a vessel. In- and outside bear seams crossing in a 90° angel. Nine small iron fragments of unknown purpose were found (HRH 00-012 and HRH 01-032), two of them could be part of a little knife blade (HRH 00-012). HRH 00-011 seems to be the bent stem of a nail. HRH 01-030 is the fragment of a flat iron sheet with a central hole. The object could be part of a clench bolt or a fitting. HRH 00-010 are two fragments of a small knife or a shear. Blade and tang are partly preserved, both ends are broken. HRH 01-033 is a little iron hook in rather good condition. HRH 01-028 is a well preserved iron handle of 15.2 cm surviving length, possibly belonging to a wooden

⁸ The piece is listed in the field find list with number HRH 01-026 and has been photographed, but is missing; see picture.

vessel. The long and thin handle is made of twisted metal, one end is hook-like bent, the other end is missing. HRH 00-014 is a long and pointy object of iron with a surviving length of 12.4 cm. One end is slightly bent and the other end is rectangular shaped. The artefact could be part of a tool, maybe an awl. HRH 00-002 is the only non-ferrous metal find, a rectangular fitting made of lead, now whitish corroded. The metal is folded on two sides and has been pierced afterwards. Also this object could be part of a vessel.

Stone objects

32 objects of stone were recovered and recorded with 17 numbers. Stone types include quartz, slate, schist, jaspis and sandstone which are often found also in other Icelandic Viking age sites such as Aðalstræti.⁹ The stone objects represent domestic utensils as well as personal belongings. Six stones are unworked. HRH 01-022 is a broken piece of most likely basalt type that appeared to be man-worked when collected, as it is the case with HRH 00-006, a fragment of red unworked sandstone. HRH 01-027 is a small round orange to beige pebble of yet unknown stone type. HRH 01-024 and HRH 01-034 are two small and round yellowish to opaque quartz pebbles. HRH 00-005 is another unworked piece of yellowish quartz. All quartz examples seem to be man transported to Hrisheimar. Their purpose is unknown, they could have been used as gaming pieces or toys.¹⁰ HRH 01-025 is a well preserved complete spindle whorl made of grey sandstone. With its diameter of 3.8 cm and a weight of 36 g it is similar to other Viking age sandstone spindle whorls known for example from Hofstaðir.¹¹ Its shape is hemispherical with a flat base and a maximum diameter at the base, the central hole has a diameter of 1.0 cm. Two sides bear scratch marks. Due to the slightly inwards bent base, the whorl appears to be a re-used fragment of a sandstone vessel. This is also supported by the fact that most of sandstone spindle whorls found in Iceland so far are made of greenish-greyish rhyolite.¹² Two flaked fragments of dark jaspis were found as well. HRH 00-003 is of dark grey colour, HRH 00-004 is slightly lighter and greenish-greyish in colour. Jaspis is often found in Viking age contexts and has been used as a fire starter.¹³ The remains of at least six different hones were found, made of slate, fine and medium coarse schist. HRH 00-009 is the only slate whetstone fragment. Two surfaces have survived, the colour is dark grey,

⁹ Mehler 2001, 69 f.

¹⁰ Most of the unworked stone objects found in Viking age contexts at Aðalstræti are of quartz as well. Mehler 2001, 70.

¹¹ Bredenberg 1999, 98 f.

¹² For example HST 98-115 and AST 01-739, AST 01-740, AST 01-743; see also Mehler 2001, 69.

¹³ Smith 2000, 217.

its shape flat rectangular. Whetstones made of slate appear more seldom compared to those made of schist. A similar whetstone fragment of slate was found at Hofstaðir.¹⁴ Four of the schist whetstone fragments are rather well preserved. They appear in various sizes and shapes. The largest one, HRH 00-008 is a long rectangular barr-shaped whetstone fragment made of medium-coarse and grey schist. Its surviving length is 10.1 cm, all surfaces are intact, one end is broken off. Somewhat more fine and elaborate is HRH 01-021, a rectangular spindle shaped whetstone made of light grey and fine schist. The object is thickest in the middle and tapering towards both broken ends. All surfaces are intact, the length is 11.7 cm. Two other whetstone fragments represent personal belongings rather than domestic utensils and are part of hone-pendants. HRH 01-031 is the end of a rectangular shaped small whetstone made of light grey and fine schist, all surfaces intact. HRH 00-007 is the end of a flat whetstone with a triangular cross section, made of fine and light grey schist, as well all surfaces complete. As comparative material from the Viking age town Haithabu has shown, schist whetstones with a triangular cross section are rather seldom.¹⁵ HRH 00-020 and HRH 01-029 are several fragments of hones made of fine and light grey schist. The material is very fragmented, thus their original form remains unknown. Another personal belonging is HRH 00-019, a small fragment of a bead of red sandstone. Its shape seems to have been cylindrical. Beads made of sandstone are rarely found since they were difficult to produce.

Glass objects

Two artefacts of glass were found, both of them very well preserved monochrome glass beads. HRH 00-017 is a triple-segmented bead of dark blue colour with a half segment missing. HRH 00-018 is a barrel shaped bead of dark blue colour, with a rather large hole diameter of 0.5 cm. Both beads are macroscopically very similar in material and colour and it is likely, that they were made together. The form types are rather common in the Viking world and can be found at many sites in Northern Europe.¹⁶ Icelandic comparative material is known for example from the viking burials in Vatnsdal, Mjóadal, Sílastaðir and Hrífunes, whereas barrel shaped blue glass beads seem to be much more common than segmented blue glass beads.¹⁷

¹⁴ Find number HST 98-118.

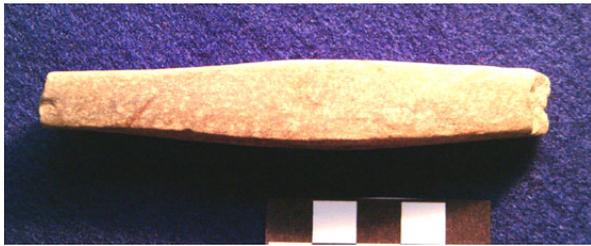
¹⁵ Resi 1990, 27.

¹⁶ The glass beads found in York were grouped according to their forms. HRH 00-017 corresponds with Type 7, HRH 00-018 with Type 5. See Mainman & Rogers 2000, 2591 f.

¹⁷ Kristján Eldjárn 2000, 103, 116, 180 and 247.

Bone object

One bone fragment was recorded as HRH 01-023. During the excavation it appeared to be an artefact, but it is an unworked piece of burnt bone, probably mammal long-bone.



HRH 01-021



HRH 01-022



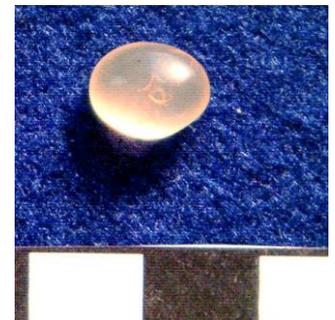
HRH 01-023



HRH 01-024



HRH 01-027



HRH 01-034



HRH 01-025 top



HRH 01-025 base



HRH 01-026



HRH 01-028



HRH 01-030



HRH 01-032



HRH 01-033



HRH 01-031



HRH 01-029

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List of Finds

No	Area	Context	Material	Description
00-001		Surface	Metal	Slag, 5 lumps, 410 g
00-002		Surface	Metal	Lead, fitting with hole, 9 g
00-003		Surface	Stone	Jaspis, dark grey, worked, 1 piece, 5 g
00-004		Surface	Stone	Jaspis, grey, worked, 1 piece, 5 g
00-005		Surface	Stone	Quartz, unworked, 1 piece, 5 g
00-006		Surface	Stone	Stone, reddish, type unknown, unworked, 1 piece, 4 g
00-007		Surface	Stone	Whetstone fragment, light grey schist, 5 g
00-008		Surface	Stone	Whetstone fragment, grey, 124 g
00-009		Surface	Stone	Whetstone fragment, dark grey slate, 7 g
00-010		Surface	Metal	Iron, 2 fragments, knife or shear, 5 g
00-011		Surface	Metal	Iron, hook or nail, 1 fragment, 3 g
00-012		Surface	Metal	Iron, 4 fragments, straps, 7 g
00-013		Surface	Metal	Iron and slag, 5 small fragments, 4 g
00-014		Surface	Metal	Iron, tool, complete, 11 g
00-015		Surface	Metal	Slag, 2 fragments, 6 g
00-016		Surface	Metal	Slag, 3 small drops, 3 g
00-017		Surface	Glass	Bead, blue, damaged, 3 g
00-018		Surface	Glass	Bead, blue, complete, 3 g
00-019		Surface	Stone	Bead fragment, red sandstone, 2 g
00-020		Surface	Stone	Whetstone, 11 fragments, light grey schist, 27 g
01-021		Surface	Stone	Whetstone, 1 fragment, 72 g
01-022	H	002	Stone	Stone fragment, unworked, 2 g
01-023	H	002	Bone	Burnt bone, 1 fragment, unworked, 2 g
01-024	H	006	Stone	Quartz, 1 piece, unworked, 2 g
01-025	H	006	Stone	Spindle whorl, complete, sandstone, 36 g
01-026	H	004	Slag	Lump of slag
01-027		Surface	Stone	Small stone, unworked, 1 g
01-028		Surface	Metal	Iron, part of a bucket handle, 21 g
01-029		Surface	Stone	Schist, 6 fragments of a whetstone, 16 g
01-030		Surface	Metal	Iron, fragment with central hole, rivet? 1 g
01-031		Surface	Stone	Whetstone fragment, schist, 5 g
01-032		Surface	Metal	Iron, 5 small fragments, 7 g
01-033		Surface	Metal	Iron hook, 1 g
01-034		Surface	Stone	Small quartz, unworked, 1 g

The structure at Selhagi

The farm Haganes occupies a peninsula sticking out into Lake Mývatn from its southern shore. On this peninsula's western side the River Laxá has its outlet from the lake, flowing inbetween a number of islands before its channel narrows and turns to the north past Hofstaðir. While Haganes is one of the smaller farms in Mývatnssveit in terms of area, it had a relatively high taxation value, at 20 hundreds, higher for instance than Arnarvatn to the southwest and Geirastaðir across the lake to the west, both valued at 16 hundreds. The land of Haganes is almost entirely lava, the younger Laxárhraun, from around the birth of Christ, the lava that created Mývatn in its present form (Kristján Sæmundsson 1991, 78-81). At the tip of the peninsula there are some large pseudo-craters, the sides of which provide the only arable land within the property.

While Haganes was obviously a rich farm on the Mývatnssveit scale – in 1712 it was one of 5 richest farms in the region in terms of livestock - it was not so for conventional reasons. The homefield was small (slightly below Mývatnssveit average in 1919) and entirely artificial, created by dumping soil on the sparsely vegetated lava. Some meadow hay was to be had in between and on the sides of the pseudo-craters, in the island Sviðinsey which belongs to Haganes and by the outlet of river Kráká on the southern border of the property, but these are tiny areas compared to the extensive meadowlands belonging to Haganes's neighbours to the south, Skútustaðir and Arnarvatn. Haganes's principal benefit seems to have been plentiful and secure winter grazing – as suggested by the place name which means “pasture-peninsula”. While the grazing area is not large it is rarely or ever so completely submerged in snow that sheep cannot graze and this meant that the farm did not have the same need for winter fodder as others with much better summer pastures. Another important asset of Haganes was its position on the lake, with dense concentrations of trout to be had at the outlet of Laxá on Haganes's western side. Egg collecting is also mentioned as an important resource. While slightly out of the way in terms of the modern road system Haganes was before the advent of the automobile very centrally placed in Mývatnssveit. The principal track from Skútustaðir to the regions north of Mývatnssveit passed by the farmhouse and crossed shallows in the lake in front of the Laxá outlet. Haganes is also easily reached by boat from any part of the lake. Haganes was the site of the Mývatnssveit local assembly

where the householders of the commune would meet thrice every year to declare their assets for taxation assessments, to make decisions on poor relief and other communal matters.¹⁸

Haganes is therefore a substantially different farm from both Hofstaðir on the one hand and Sveigakot or Hrísheimar on the other. It occupies a location which would have been ideal for the earliest settlers on the lake – one of several sites where people could have survived a first winter without much preparation in terms of stored food or animal fodder. Judging from its location it should be expected to have been settled before either Sveigakot or Hrísheimar, let alone Hofstaðir. It was a medium-sized farmstead in a very stable environment, probably representing middle-class comfort rather than the more marginal conditions at Hrísheimar and Sveigakot or the ambitious pretensions of Hofstaðir.

The present farm site at Haganes is on the eastern side of the peninsula, on a narrow strip of land between the lake and a large pond (Blátjörn). About 700 m to the southwest of the present farmhouses is the site Selhagi. This is 15 m from the shore of Mjósund, one of three major channels of the outlet of River Laxá. Selhagi is the name for a small grassy area demarcated by Laxá on the western and northern sides and the brook Selhagalækur on the eastern and southern sides. The brook is apparently partly manmade as a mill race although the mill is not supposed to be associated with the medieval ruins. The place name means literally “sheiling-pasture”, no doubt given because of the small but rich piece of grassland which is in clear contrast to the more poorly vegetated lava fields surrounding it. The grassy vegetation is mostly limited to the ruins and their immediate surroundings, suggesting that the grass is growing there as a result of human effort, either directly as an improved field or indirectly from the fertilising effect of the anthropogenic deposits. This suggests that the place name may be secondary and that it combines an attempt to explain the ruins (sheiling) and to describe the quality and usefulness of the land (pasture).

There are no pre-20th century references to the site or place-name Selhagi. The place-name is mentioned in the place-name inventory of Haganes, compiled in the mid 20th century but reference is not made to the ruins as such. In his overview of archaeological sites in Skútustaðahreppur from 1975 Helgi Hallgrímsson mentions the place-name but says that he is not aware of ruins there. He mentions that there are speculations that Selhagi could have been the original site of the farm Haganes.

Just before 1990 Jón Sigurgeirsson, a local amateur archaeologist, excavated a 1-2 m deep trench through a midden at Selhagi. The exact location of this trench is not known. He

¹⁸ Ívar Stefánsson pers. comm.; *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalín* XI, 228; *Lýsing Þingeyjarsýslu* I, 253-54.

found great quantities of animal bone, both trout and bird bones as well as some egg shell. He describes the soil as dry and says the bones were well preserved. Jón Sigurgeirsson was of the opinion that Selhagi was the original site of the farm Haganes, which he thought would have been an apt name for the location of Selhagi.

The site was surveyed on August 12th 1998 as a part of the general survey of archaeological sites in Skútustaðahreppur. A sketch drawing was made and the site's position measured as 65°35.292 N 17°04.281 W.¹⁹

Following the 2000 season of excavations at Hofstaðir and Sveigakot it was decided to attempt to identify more early sites with good preservation of animal bone in the Mývatn region which could provide comparative material for the Hofstaðir and Sveigakot collections. The comparison of the two sites had proved enormously fruitful but it was felt that a higher number and greater range of sites was needed to provide control and context for the Hofstaðir and Sveigakot collections. A large number of sites was identified and from them two were selected as first targets, Hrísheimar and Selhagi. Selhagi was selected because of its location, a contrast to both Sveigakot and Hofstaðir and in many ways more typical of settlement around the lake, and also on account of the late 1980s excavation there by Jón Sigurgeirsson which gave reason to believe that the preservation of animal bone was good at Selhagi.

Investigations at Selhagi commenced on August 13th. With the help of Ívar Stefánsson, the farmer of Haganes, the midden was located on the northwestern edge of the multi-room structure which is the principal archaeological feature at Selhagi. During the next 4 days a 2x2 m trench was dug into the midden, described by Thomas H. McGovern and Clayton Tinsley in the following chapter. On the first day of investigations a new sketch drawing was made of the structure (Fig. 1) and a number of cores were examined for tephra and depth of deposits.

The structure measures 22 m in length (N-S) and 19 m in width (E-W) and comprises of 6 rooms and a seventh unclear one. The walls stand to a height of 0,7 m. The rooms are arranged in a "L" shaped double row and do not seem to be interconnected except for a doorway between nos. 4 and 6. Only no. 10 has what appears to be a door to the outside but otherwise the walls are everywhere of equal height. The rooms are all 3-3,5 m wide on the inside but range in length from 3 to 9 m. While the ruin looks of an age it cannot be precluded that it is the result of building activity in different periods as well as re-use of older structures. The arrangement of the ruins appears unlike any farmhouse structure known from

¹⁹ Elín Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir & Orri Vésteinsson: *Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahreppi III: Fornleifar við sunnanvert Mývatn, milli Haganess og Garðs*, Reykjavík 1999, pp. 19-20.

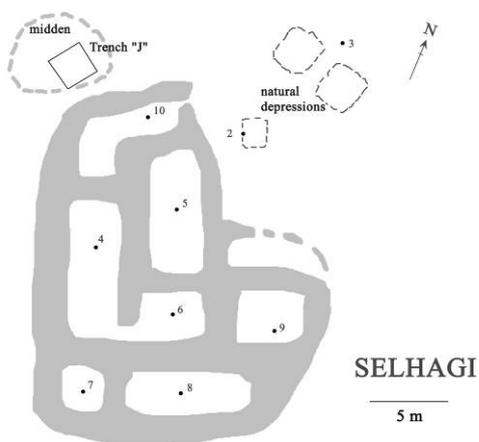


Fig. 1. Sketch drawing of surface features at Selhagi



Fig. 2. Aerial photograph of the site, from the south. Taken by Árni Einarsson in 2000.

Iceland and if they are all of an age the closest parallels are to be found in Norse Greenland and possibly among multi-room structures in Arctic Norway. The closest parallel in Iceland would be the 11th century ruins in Herjólfsdalur in Vestmannaeyjar off Iceland's south coast, but there the individual buildings are more clearly separated than at Selhagi.

A handheld soil corer was used to investigate the depth of soil and the presence of tephras and anthropogenic deposits. The locations of the corings are shown on map X except for no. 1 which was 12 m due east of the easternmost extremity of the ruin. This had the "a" tephra, dated to AD 1477, at 50 cm below the surface and an olive-green tephra, the landnám tephra (LNL) or the slightly later V~950 tephra at a depth of 86 cm. Below that were the black bands of the landnám sequence and lava at a depth of 108 cm. No anthropogenic deposits could be seen in this core.

Core 2 had the "a" tephra at 58 cm, but at a depth of 80 cm a thick layer of turf collapse overlaid a 3 cm thick midden layer with burnt bone at a depth of 122 cm, directly on top of the lava.

Core 3 had the "a" tephra at 50 cm and at 72 cm a speck of white tephra was observed, presumably one of the 12th century Hekla tephras, 1104 or 1158. The black tephra bands of the landnám sequence were at depths of 84 and 92 cm and lava at 110 cm. No anthropogenic deposits could be seen in this core.

Core 4 had the "a" tephra at 18 cm and a reddish brown very coarse tephra at 28 cm. This tephra was widely seen in the cores at Selhagi and is suggested to be the H-1300 tephra although this awaits confirmation by a tephrochronologist. This tephra is hereafter referred to

as (H-1300). Below that were two bands of what looked like the same white tephra, at 34 and 38 cm, but these are probably not in situ, but embedded in collapsed turf (roof?). At 44 cm was a 2 cm thick layer which looked like a floor, and at 61 cm another one, some 10 cm thick. A third possible floor layer was at 82 cm below the surface, some 17 cm thick. The lava was 4 cm below this floor, separated by what looks like natural accumulation.

Core 5 had the “a” tephra at 30 cm and the (H-1300) at 34 cm. Turf debris was visible at 45 cm, including specks of the white tephra (H-1104/H-1158), lying directly on top of a 2 cm thick floor layer at 65 cm. Another floor layer was observed at 74 cm, at least 14th cm thick.

Core 6 had the “a” tephra at 28 cm and the (H-1300) at 34 cm. 2 cm below that a 47 cm thick layer of turf debris overlaid a two 2-3 cm thick floor layers separated by 7 cm of brown earth. The lower floor layer was on top of a 9 cm thick anthropogenic layer which in turn was on top of a stone at 107 cm. This stone was clearly not lava and therefore not indigenous to this location.

Core 7 had the “a” tephra at 28 cm and the (H-1300) at 38 cm. That was directly on top of an anthropogenic layer including at a depth of 50 cm two bands of identical white tephra, presumably either the H-1104 or H-1158 embedded in turf. The same layer continued down to 88 cm where a stone (not lava) was hit. Towards the bottom the anthropogenic layer became almost completely turf debris. No floor layer was observed in this core.

Core 8 had the “a” tephra at 19 cm and the (H-1300) at 29 cm. This was directly on top of an anthropogenic layer which included at a depth of 44 cm a band of white tephra. This tephra band was at a steep angle in the core and therefore probably not in situ but rather embedded in turf. The same layer continued down to 57 cm where a stone (not lava) was hit. No floor layer was observed in this core.

Core 9 had the “a” tephra at 28 cm but no trace of the (H-1300) could be seen in the core. A white tephra was at a depth of 44 cm overlying a thick layer of turf debris, down to 89 cm where lava was hit. No floor layer was observed in this core.

Core 10 had the “a” tephra at 29 cm but no trace of the (H-1300) could be seen in the core. At 41 cm two white tephrae overlay a 9 cm thick anthropogenic layer, clearly not a floor but not turf debris either. This was on top of a stone (not lava) at 53 cm. No floor layer was observed in this core.

Some preliminary observations can be made based on these corings as well as the sequence seen in unit J (described in the following chapter).

- The site seems to have been occupied no later than the 10th century.

- There is clearly building activity there after H-1104/H-1158 and this had only just ceased by the time of the deposition of (H-1300) and certainly long before the deposition of the “a” tephra dated to AD 1477.
- Rooms 4-6 seem to have the longest/most complex history of use and probably represent the actual dwelling.
- Rooms 7, 8 and 10 are probably paved and may represent animal shelters or storage rooms.
- Room 9 did not have any surface layer and may therefore be interpreted as a barn or storage area for hay, peat or other expendibles.
- Some midden formation has taken place immediately east of the structure – in front of the entrance still visible on the gable of room 10 – but the principal midden is by the northwestern corner of the structure.

Results

The site of Selhagi appears to have been occupied from the 10th century to the end of the 13th. It seems to have been – at least initially – used as a year-round dwelling and should be considered as a farmstead. It is nevertheless possible that the function was changed to a sheiling sometime in the aforementioned period.

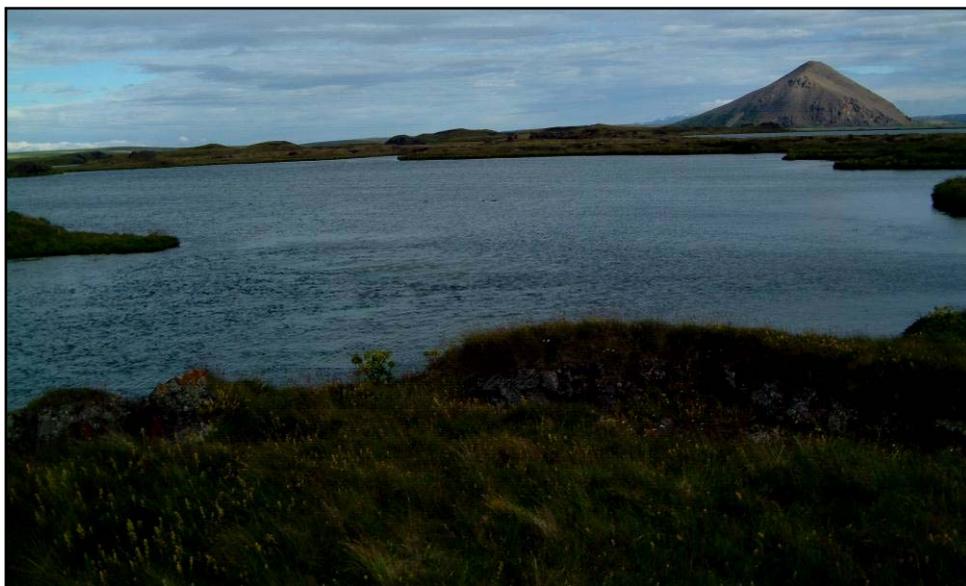
Many questions remain unanswered about this site – questions that can only be answered by a large scale excavation.

Report of First Stage Midden Investigations at Selhagi

Summary. Initial excavations at a midden deposit at the abandoned site of Selhagi near Haganes at Mývatn have produced substantial cultural layers between a tephra provisionally identified as H-1300 and probable Landnám sequence tephra. The deposits are clearly stratified and have produced substantial amounts of animal bone (fish, bird, domestic mammal) and show great promise for more extensive investigation.

Site Area

The site of Selhagi is a small, multi-roomed ruin (see Fig 1 in the preceding chapter) located on a lava platform at the edge of the outfall of Lake Mývatn near the juncture of the Kráká with the Laxá. The modern site area is lushly vegetated, with a thick moss, grass and sedge groundcover and stands of angelica along the water. Large numbers of ducks (several species) are present in the watercourses immediately around the site (which is on a small island), and the small embayment directly NW of the site is a famous trout fishing spot.



View from farm ruin towards the NW.



At the suggestion of the farmer of Haganes, on August 13th we placed a small shovel test near the crest of a mound just north of the main structure's room depressions. Immediately bone and charcoal was encountered below what appears to be the 1477 tephra. Cultural deposits extend well over 50 cm below the turf layer.



A 2 x 2 m unit (Unit J) is laid out and unturfed. Note shovel test hole in SW corner and the unbroken surface of the 1477 tephra emerging directly after cleaning following unturfing.



Coring (Oakfield tube type corer) revealed nearly 1 m of cultural deposit rich in bone and charcoal. The core ends on what appears to be the local manifestation of the Landnám sequence, with bone and charcoal resting close to the tephra layers.



Unit J is carried down to the first midden layer (context 004). Note that the bedding angle of this midden layer follows the contours of the modern slope. The midden layers appear to thicken down slope (N).



A frost hummock (þúfa) is visible in the 1477 stratigraphy on the N side of unit J at the 004 midden layer. Note the slope of the midden layer roughly paralleling the modern surface.



A set of four partially articulated large salmonid vertebral segments in situ in the 004 context. The coin scale is an Icelandic 10 kr. piece.



Location of midden unit J, from the north near the level of the lakeside. Note the steep sided mound and the ca 1.5-2 m accumulation of deposits above what is probably a lava platform.



View across the house-mound from the SE showing the relation of unit J to the cluster of room depressions.



The base of the lava platform visible along the shoreline. Note depth of soil and deposit above the gravel and lava base.



Top of the 005 midden context, from the south. Note continued drop in bedding angle, and articulated caprine vertebra in the profile base.



The J unit carried to sterile subsoil, in this case the top of the presumed Landnám ash sequence. Contexts have been marked with aluminium tags for later recognition.



Close up of the base of the unit at the SW corner, cut slightly into the tephra sequence below the lowest midden layer (008).

SW corner of the J unit carried to tephra .



- Contexts:
- 001 med brn topsoil
 - 002 tephra (1477)
 - 003 mainly sterile med brn layer
 - 004 Gray brown midden
 - 005 Midden w/charcoal
 - 006 Mottled tan midden
 - 007 Gray brown midden
 - 008 Gray midden
 - 009 LNS tephra (?)



August 16, 2001,
Unit J is prepared
for backfilling.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Selhagi midden is well stratified, datable, and has excellent bone preservation. It definitely represents a major archaeological resource, and deserves far more extensive investigation by a multi-disciplinary team including tephra and soils specialists. While all the objects retrieved in 2001 were non-diagnostic in terms of dating, it seems likely that a more extensive excavation will turn up datable artifacts to supplement tephra and radiocarbon dating. The midden appears to be directly overlying the Landnám tephra, and seems to terminate some time before the 1477 ash fall. In fact it terminates just before the fall of a tephra, putatively identified as the H-1300. This suggests that we may have deposits spanning the period from ca. 871 to the late 13th century, overlapping in time with the Sveigakot, Hofstaðir, and (probably) the Hrísheimar middens but also extending the record into the 12th-13th c. It will be extremely valuable to get both more early material and a longer archaeological record that can come closer to linking to contemporary documentary resources. The Selhagi midden appears to be of a fairly standard bone density, which is to say far lower in bones/cu m than the fill deposits at HRH and SVK T. This will require a larger excavation area to get a usable archaeofauna from each major layer (esp given the longer apparent occupational period), and we would anticipate a prolonged excavation effort. It may eventually be productive to combine a major midden excavation with some systematic excavation of the structures. We recommend a major multi-season effort.

Preliminary Report of Animal Bones from Selhagi

Abstract

In 2001 the FSÍ / NABO project *Landscapes of Settlement in Northern Iceland* collected animal bones from a stratified midden deposit associated with the abandoned site *Selhagi* on the property of the modern farm Haganes. Selhagi is located in the lushly vegetated lakeshore zone and its environmental setting presents a strong contrast with the eroded uplands to the S of the lake where the early sites at Sveigakot and Hrisheimur are under excavation. Close to both major migratory waterfowl nesting areas and some of the best trout fishing in Iceland, the site would appear to be optimally located for exploitation of wild species. The Selhagi site had produced well preserved animal bone during small scale avocational excavations in the 1970's and the major objective of the 2001 FSÍ / NABO investigations was to map the site and locate possible midden deposits for further work. The fully turf covered site appears to be a small multi-roomed structure with clearly defined room depressions and an apparent mound of midden material to the NW of the structure complex. Coring within the structure indicated that it was abandoned some time before the widespread AD 1477 ash fall and show the presence of the 1104 and 1158 tephtras as well. The midden team carried out a small-scale (2 x 2 m) stratigraphic test excavation which found well preserved animal bone in clearly stratified midden deposits that were definitely capped by the AD 1477 ash fall and probably also by a thinner 1300 tephra. At base, the midden deposits directly overlie the local variant of the "Landnám" tephra of c. AD 871. While radiocarbon dates are pending, it would appear that Selhagi has a long occupational history extending from settlement times perhaps until the later 13th century. A preliminary analysis of the animal bones recovered indicate the normal range of domesticates (cattle, sheep, goat, pig), substantial amounts of freshwater fish (trout and charr), and a few migratory birds (duck and swan) as well as bird egg shell. More surprising is the presence of marine fish (cod family) and sea birds (Guillemot/Murre and Razorbill). Despite the lakeshore setting, the Selhagi archaeofauna thus far does *not* indicate any intensive exploitation of adult migratory waterfowl. This small initial sample does indicate that the site participated in a social and economic network that provided regular access to distant marine resources. While larger samples are needed to better understand possible trends through time, the present sample shows an apparent reduction in cattle relative to caprines (sheep & goat) from lower layers to upper that parallels a general reduction in domesticates relative to wild species. Further investigations at this promising site are needed to better document these apparent trends and better understand the economic changes at Selhagi during its period of occupation.

Selhagi Excavations 2001

The site of Selhagi is a small, multi-roomed ruin located on a lava platform at the edge of the outfall of Lake Mývatn near the juncture of the Kraká with the Laxá drainage. The modern site area is lushly vegetated, with a thick moss, grass, and sedge groundcover and stands of angelica along the water. Large numbers of ducks (several species) are present in the watercourses immediately around the site (which is on a small island), and the small embayment directly NW of the site is a famous trout fishing spot. On the advice of the farmer of Haganes we shovel tested a small mound to the NW of the cluster of room depressions visible on the surface. Immediately we encountered the 1477 tephra below the modern turf (context 001), and below that a concentration of well preserved bones. We set up a 2x2 m unit

with the shovel test in one corner (SW, corner is 400/800 in new grid), and deturfed. The unit (J) was cleaned down to the 1477 surface (5 – 8 cm thick here) over the whole surface, demonstrating that that the deposits beneath are intact. We clean up the sides of the shovel test (which extends about 40-50 cm below the 1477 surface) to establish initial contexts, and then put two cores down through the base of the shovel test. Both cores penetrate about 1 m from surface with what appears to be continuous midden material. They both cut into what looks very much like the Landnam tephra sequence, and in both cases bone and charcoal fragments are found directly above the LNL sequence. The cultural deposits reach close to the 1477 tephra (context 002), but are separated from it by a variably thick layer of medium brown largely sterile soil that varies in thickness from about 5 to nearly 15 cm (context 003). It would appear that deposition halted in this area at some period before the fall of the 1477 ash, but that it extends back to settlement times. Midden layers below the 003 tephra contain wood charcoal, ash, both burnt and unburnt animal bones, concentrations of smashed bird egg shell, and a few non-diagnostic artifacts (mainly small iron objects but including an obsidian flake and quartz pebble manuport). We were able to excavate stratigraphically six major layers (contexts 003-008), the 008 context resting directly upon the Landnám tephra



Figure 1 . Test pit J stratigraphy

sequence. Several patches of cream-light green egg shell were recovered from all contexts investigated in 2001, indicating egg collection was a significant activity throughout the period of occupation. Layers appear to thicken to the NW of unit J as the midden deposit moves downhill. We suggest a major expansion of this unit and a large scale investigation of the midden deposit in future seasons.

Laboratory Methods

Analysis was carried out May-June 2002 at Hunter College Bioarchaeology Laboratory by Thomas McGovern (mammals and birds), while fish bones were studied at Brooklyn College's Zooarchaeology Laboratory by Sophia Perdikaris. Extensive use was made of the major comparative collections of N Atlantic fish and birds housed at the CUNY laboratories, with some assistance from the collections of the American Museum of Natural History (for which the authors are very grateful). All fragments were sorted by family (mammal, fish, mollusca, bird) and all fragments were identified as fully as possible with current methods (no sub-sampling or restricted-element-range approaches were employed). All measurements follow the metrical standard of Von Den Dreisch (1976) unless otherwise noted, measurements taken with digital calipers (Mitoyoto CD 6BS) to the 0.10 mm. Quantification in this report follows NABO ZWG recommendations by making NISP (number of identified specimens) the basic quantitative measure, as this simple counting technique has proven robust in numerous sampling experiments and is easily replicable across investigators. Basic data was recorded through the NABO Zooarchaeology working group NABONE system (7th edition, see NABO website www.geo.ed.ac.uk/nabo for updates and sample data sets) which combines Access database with specialized Excel Spreadsheets. As this is only a working paper based on ongoing analysis, we will hold extended discussions of taphonomy, element distribution, age assessment, and metrical analysis until a more complete report is possible.

Overview of Species Present

Table 1 provides an overview of the present Selhagi archaeofauna (all contexts) including both identified (NISP) bone fragments and those that could only be identified by family and general size range. "Large terrestrial mammals" are cattle/horse sized fragments, "Medium terrestrial mammals" are sheep/goat/pig/large dog sized fragments, while "unidentified mammal fragments" are completely unidentifiable bits of bone scrap.

Table 1 Selhagi 2001 (whole collection)

Domestic Mammals	281
Birds	26
Fish	431
Mollusca	5
<i>TOTAL NISP (Identified fragments) =</i>	743
Medium Terrestrial Mammal	297
Large Terrestrial Mammal	64
Unidentified Mammal Fragments	1321
<i>TOTAL TNF (all fragments) =</i>	2425

Table 2 provides a complete breakdown of the identified and unidentified fragments by context.

SELHAGI 2001

Table 2

Contexts	NISP						
	Sh. Test	003	004	005	006	007	008
<i>Domestic Mammal</i>							
Cattle		3	34	1	32	18	2
Pig							
Goat			1				
Sheep		7	6		6	5	
Caprine		40	45	7	25	46	3
total Caprine		47	52	7	31	51	3
total Domestic		50	86	8	63	69	5
<i>Bird</i>	1	1	1	1	17	5	0
<i>Fish</i>							
Gadid	1		12	1	5	4	0
Salmonid		30	66	45	14	5	4
Fish sp	16	14	86	22	48	44	14
total Fish	17	44	164	68	67	53	18
<i>Mollusca</i>							
Clam sp			3		1		

Mollusca sp

1

NISP total	18	95	254	77	149	127	23
Large Terrestrial Mammal		1	28		17	18	
Medium Terrestrial Mammal	11	20	88	8	71	85	14
Unidentified		87	497	183	301	241	12
TNF total	29	203	867	268	538	471	49

At present, none of the individual contexts provides enough bone to reasonably quantify beyond a simple species list, but if we provisionally aggregate the individual contexts (stratigraphic units) into two broad preliminary phases (analytic units), it may be possible to make some tentative statements about patterning and changes through time (inevitably subject to extensive revision with additional data). In this case we make use of a bedding angle change at context 005 to broadly divide the upper contexts (shovel test, 003, 004) from the lower contexts (006-008) while holding out the 005 layer as an intermediate divider. These aggregated contexts are presented in table 3.

SELHAGI 2001 Table 3

UNIT J Aggregated Contexts

	Lower 006-008	Upper 003-004
Domestic Mammal		
Cattle	52	37
Pig	0	0
Goat	0	1
Sheep	11	13
Caprine	74	85
total Caprine	85	99
total Domestic	137	136
Bird	22	3
Fish		
Gadid	9	13
Salmonid	23	96
Fish sp	106	116
Mollusca		
Clam sp	1	3

Mollusca sp	1	
NISP total	299	367
Large Terrestrial Mammal	35	29
Medium Terrestrial Mammal	170	119
Unidentified	554	584
TNF total	1196	1324

Note that this division is somewhat arbitrary and is intended to allow a preliminary working view of the collection as a whole. Pending C14 analyses now underway, it seems premature to attempt to assign date ranges to these analytic units, but their relative stratigraphic position is clear. More complete excavation will certainly allow more refined stratigraphic correlation and effective dating.

Table 4 presents the aggregated contexts as NISP % , allowing for clearer comparison between analytical units.

Selhagi 2001 Table 4
Major taxa aggregated

UNIT J	%	Lower 006-008	Upper 003-004
Domestic Mammal			
Cattle		17.39	10.08
Pig			
Goat			0.27
Sheep		3.68	3.54
Caprine		24.75	23.16
total Caprine		28.43	26.98
total Domestic		45.82	37.06
Bird		7.36	0.82
Fish			
Gadid		3.01	3.54
Salmonid		7.69	26.16
Fish sp		35.45	31.61
total Fish		46.15	61.31
Mollusca			
Clam sp		0.33	0.82
Mollusca sp		0.33	

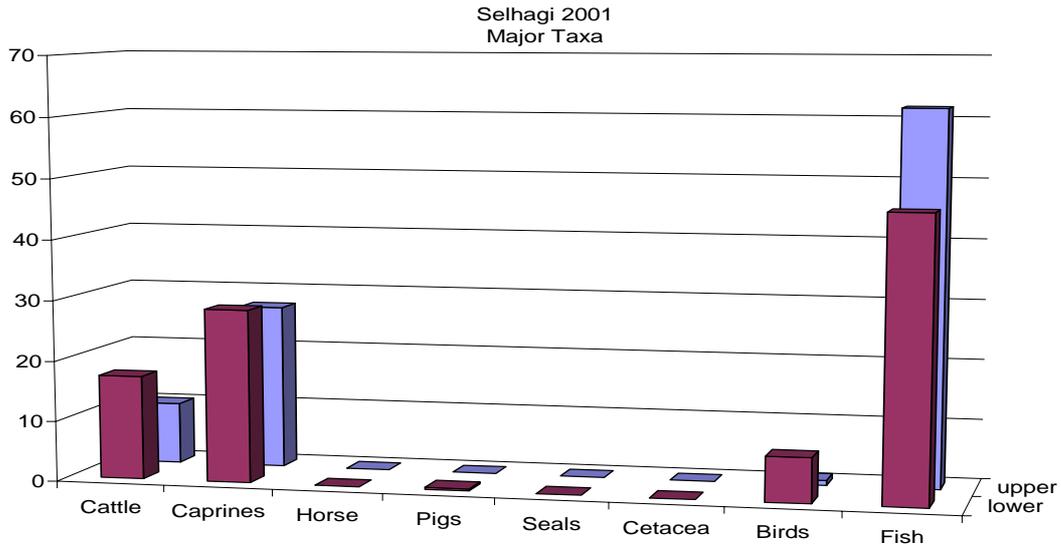


Figure 2 illustrates the relative abundance of major taxa in the two analytic units.

Domestic Mammals

Table 5 presents a breakdown of the relative percent of domestic mammals identified in the Selhagi 2001 collection, aggregated into upper and lower analytic units.

Table 5 Selhagi 2001

Domestic Mammal Aggregated % of Identified Bones

UNIT J		006-008	003-004
<i>Scientific name</i>	<i>Common English name</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Bos taurus	Cattle		27.21
Sus scrofa	Pig	37.96	
Capra hircus	Goat		0.74
Ovis aries	Sheep	8.03	9.56
Ovis/Capra	Caprine	54.01	62.50
	total Caprine	62.04	72.79

Selhagi Domestic Mammals Aggregated Contexts

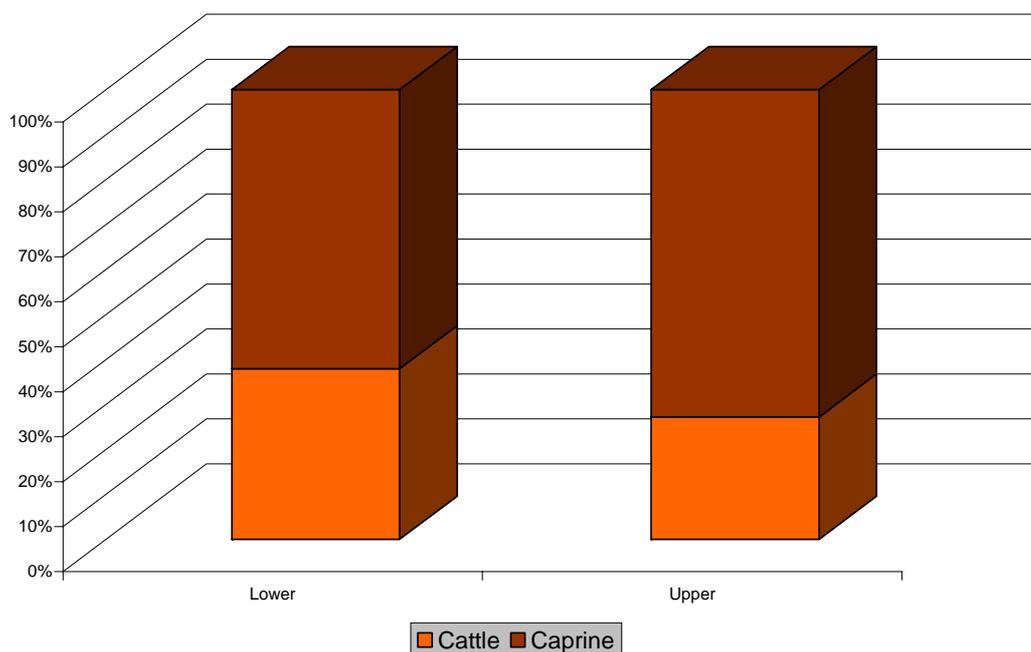


Figure 3 presents the relative percentages of domestic mammals.

All the major Icelandic domestic mammals are represented with the exceptions of pigs (not uncommon in some early Mývatn contexts) and horse, which normally makes up only a small percentage of even pre-Christian contexts in Iceland. While no dog bones were found, marks of dog gnawing are present on several elements of other species. The closely related sheep and goat are impossible to distinguish on many elements and thus analysts make use of the more inclusive *Ovis/Capra* or “Caprine” taxonomic category to refer to both. Where they can be clearly distinguished to species level, sheep at Selhagi appear to greatly outnumber goat (represented at present by a single bone in the upper layers). The sheep/goat ratio is strongly conditioned by sample size, and it is probably unwise to put much weight on these numbers at present.

However, the current Selhagi sample is large enough for slightly less speculative investigation of the ratio of all caprines to cattle bones. The ratio of caprine to cattle bones in the lower layers is one cattle to 1.67 caprine bones while the ratio for the upper layers is one cattle to 2.68 caprines. This shift from an approximate 1:2 ratio to an approximate 1:3 ratio suggests a relative increase of caprines to cattle through time. At present, these caprine/cattle ratios fall within the range of other known Mývatn area settlement period sites (Sveigakot range is 1:1.13 to 1: 3.2, Hofstaðir range is 1: 6.73 to 1: 2.55, Hrísheimar 003 is 1:3.98 see

Tinsley 2000,2001, McGovern & Perdikaris 2002). Our usual assumption is that a high ratio of cattle to caprines tends to be associated with a combination of higher status and access to higher quality pasture, and it is possible that these ratios (based on modest sample sizes) reflect better access to wet meadow grazing, but again larger samples will be needed to go further.

Butchery Marks

Table 6 presents the distribution of butchery marks on the domestic mammal bones. As at Hofstaðir, Hrísheimur, and Sveigakot, many heavy chopping marks left by axes or heavy cleavers were evident, probably mainly reflecting primary dismemberment of the animal carcasses. Splitting longitudinally was the dominant method of bone marrow extraction, and the later (post ca 1100) Icelandic practice of biperforation of the caprine metapodial was not seen in the collection. Chopping marks in the Selhagi collection are mainly on horn cores, while splitting was applied widely to long bones. At present there is no clear indication of change through time in patterns of butchery at Selhagi.

Table 6 Species	Butchery Marks	
	Chopping	split
Cattle	3	5
Goat	1	
Sheep	3	3
Caprine	2	22

Age at Death

Standard measures of the age of death of domestic mammals (used to reconstruct herding strategy) include the fusion of long bones (epiphyseal fusion), eruption and wear of teeth, and the presence of newborn (late fetal or neonatal) animal bones. All of these approaches are strongly subject to sample size and a full analysis is thus best left until a more complete excavation has been carried out, but a few observations may be noted here. Table 7 presents the fetal (newborn) and neonatal (less than 3 months) bones recovered from the, both as counts and as percentages of their respective species.

Table 7	Mammal Age	Selhagi 2001		
		NISP	Fetal	total
Cattle		neonatal	adult and older juven.	89
Caprine		8	158	166

As in most Icelandic collections, cattle show the highest percentage of neonates, almost certainly reflecting a dairy economy (see Halstead 1999 for discussion).

Birds

Table 8 presents the breakdown of bird remains from the 2001 Selhagi contexts. In addition to the bones listed, concentrations of pale blue-pale green egg shells were present in all contexts.

Table 8 SELHAGI 2001 Birds *UNIT J*
NISP

Scientific names	Engl. Common	Sh. Test	upper		Intermed.		lower		
			003	004	005	006	007	008	
Sea Birds									
<i>Uria sp.</i>	Murre or Guillemot			1			2		
<i>Alca torda</i>	Razorbill		1						
Non-Migratory Terrestr.									
<i>Lagopus mutus</i>	Ptarmigan						3		
Ducks									
<i>Anatidae</i>	Duck Sp. ?							1	
Swan									
<i>Cygnus sp.</i>	Swan Sp. ?							4	
<i>Aves sp.</i>	Bird sp. ?	1				1	12		
total			1	1	1	1	17	5	0

Despite their limited numbers the Selhagi bird remains present several surprises, particularly given the lakeshore location of the site:

- 1) Despite the proximity of tens of thousands of annually nesting migrants and their young in the immediate area, bird bones make up a very small fraction of the total sample. This is by no means a bird hunting station.
- 2) The bird bones present are not dominated by ducks or other migratory water fowl. Ptarmigan (grouse) and sea birds are at least as common as the nearby freshwater birds.
- 3) The egg shells cannot yet be identified to species level, but they could all be from migratory ducks. They cannot be Ptarmigan or sea bird eggs.
- 4) This pattern of possible duck egg shells but few or no duck bones is apparently widespread in the Mývatn area in settlement and early medieval times. Figure 4 below illustrates the present distribution of identified bird bone at Hofstaðir, Sveigakot, Hrísheimur, and Selhagi. Note that Ptarmigan bone absolutely dominates three of four, and that none have significant numbers of migratory waterfowl bones (though all have produced egg shells in quantity).

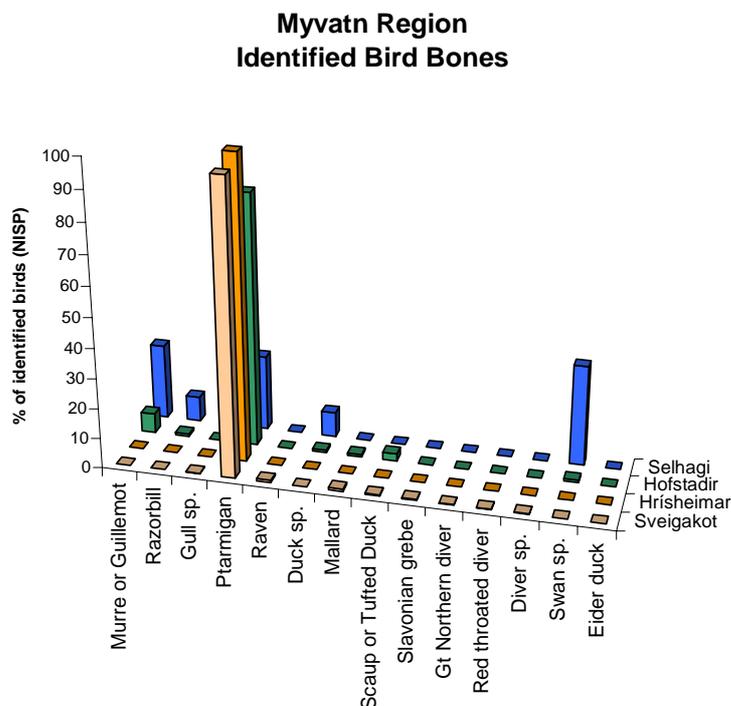


Figure 4. Identified bird bones from four sites in the Mývatn region

We suggest that this pattern is strongly suggestive of a sustained yield exploitation of eggs combined with some sort of social prohibition on taking nesting adults. The current pattern of local level bird conservation in the Mývatn region thus appears to have deep historical roots. This pattern raises interesting questions about the social organization of landscape and allocation of rights to “natural capital” in the Settlement Period and early Middle Ages, especially in light of the very different long term outcome of pasture management strategies.

Fish

At present, we can make some observations on fishing at Selhagi:

- 1) As at the other early Mývatn area sites, Salmonid family (trout and charr) are the most common fish.
- 2) Some trout from Selhagi are very large, and several articulated trout vertebral segments (remains of filleting?) were identified *in situ*.
- 3) However, *marine fish* are also present at Selhagi in some numbers. These include haddock and cod, and the elements present strongly suggest the import of cured fish rather than whole animals (as at other Mývatn sites).
- 4) Selhagi’s optimum location for fresh water fishing was certainly not ignored by the Viking age settlers, but the farm nevertheless consumed imported preserved marine fish in much the same way as the other early sites documented (Hofstaðir, Sveigakot, Hrísheimur). Despite locally available freshwater fish, the people of Selhagi continued to obtain significant amounts of cured marine fish products through some sort of social or commercial network.

Directions for Further Research

While the Selhagi archaeofauna is currently too small to support a full analysis and to fully realize its potential for documenting economic change through time, it has already provided

some thought-provoking interpretive challenges. The patterning in fish and bird remains is particularly intriguing and deserves further investigation. Additional excavations to recover larger stratified bone collections are certainly warranted.

Acknowledgements:

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Selhagi 2001 - the finds. Preliminary Report

Introduction

Eight artefacts were retrieved during the archaeological excavation at Selhagi in August 2001. All the finds were numbered in a field finds list, and after cleaning registered in the excavation database. Where appropriate, conservation was undertaken by Jannie Ebsen. Six objects are of metal, now corroded but in average to good condition, two are of indigenous stone types. As the site was covered by the (H-1300) tephra all these artefacts date before that time. None of them shows any typological criteria. Similar stone and metal artefacts are known from other Icelandic sites and appear in times of the settlement and middle ages. The most interesting find is SLH 01-002, a small nail made of composite metal.

Stone objects

Two stone artefacts were found. SLH 01-003 is a piece of black worked obsidian. Black obsidian (*hrafntinna*) is indigenous to Iceland and occurs for example south of mount Krafla close to lake Mývatn²⁰, from where it could have been transported. SLH 01-005 is a small round unworked quartz pebble of whitish to yellowish colour, also indigenous to Iceland. Neither stone type occurs naturally at the site. Unworked quartz and worked pieces of black obsidian have also been found at the Viking age sites in Hofstaðir and Reykjavík, Aðalstræti, where quartz pieces form the largest group of transported stones.²¹ The purpose of quartz pebbles found in Viking age and medieval contexts is unknown. They could have been used as gaming pieces.

²⁰ Kristján Sæmundsson & Einar Gunnlaugsson 1999, 67.

²¹ Mehler 2001a, 70; Mehler 2001b, 79 and 82.

Metal objects

Six finds are of metal, mostly iron but also copper alloy. They are fragmented and most of them appear to be structural. The best preserved metal artefact is SLH 01-001, an almost complete clench bolt, 2.8 cm long. The head is rectangular. Clench bolts appear in Iceland since the time of settlement and were used to join overlapping timbers.²² SLH 01-002 is a small 1.3 cm long nail/rivet made of composite metal: the short stem is made of iron, the rounded and bent head is made of copper alloy. Conservation has shown that this nail had been inserted into another object of iron, the under side of the nail's copper alloy head shows iron corrosion. This rather unusual nail type was most likely a part of furniture or decoration rather than of a structure. Three iron straps of unknown purpose were found as well. Their length varies, from 4.1 cm (SLH 01-004) to 7.4 cm (SLH 01-006) and 8.1 cm (SLH 01-008). Each of the two latter mentioned straps has a bent end. SLH 01-007 could be the fragment of a small horse bridle.

References

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²² Similar clench bolts are known from Viking age and medieval contexts at Hofstaðir. See Mehler 2001b, 44 and 48.

List of Finds

No	Area	Context	Material	Description
01-001	J	004	Metal	Iron, 1 clenched bolt, 8 g
01-002	J	004	Metal	Iron, 1 small nail with rounded head, 2 g
01-003	J	007	Stone	Obsidian, 1 piece, worked, 8 g
01-004	J	006	Metal	Iron, strap fragment, 4 g
01-005	J	006	Stone	Quartz pebble, unworked, 2 g
01-006	J	006	Metal	Iron, 3 fragments: one bent strap, two unknown fragments, 8 g
01-007	J	006	Metal	Iron, 1 fragment, 7 g
01-008	J	006	Metal	Iron, 1 fragment, long strap, 6 g



SLH 01-001



SLH 01-002



SLH 01-004



SLH 01-003



SLH 01-007



SLH 01-006



SLH 01-005



SLH 01-008

Gjóskulagarannsóknir við Mývatn - aldursgreining elstu byggðar²³

Á undanförunum áratug hafa staðið yfir umfangsmiklar fornleifarannsóknir á Hofstöðum og Sveigakoti í Mývatnssveit (Adolf Friðriksson og Orri Vésteinsson 1998, Orri Vésteinsson 2001). Við aldursákvörðun rústanna hefur einkum verið stuðst við gjóskulagatímatal og aldursgreiningar með geislakoli (¹⁴C). Gjóskulagatímatalið hefur reynst mjög notadrjúgt þar sem í jarðvegi á Mývatnssvæðinu er fjöldi gjóskulaga sem fallið hafa eftir að land byggðist fyrir 1100-1200 árum (Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson 1998). Næst undir torflögum skálans á Hofstöðum er gjóskulag sem í gegnum tíðina hefur verið greint sem Landnámslagið. Það er talið vera frá því um 870 e. Kr (Grönvold o.fl.1995). Nýverið hafa komið fram vísbindingar um að þetta gjóskulag sé ekki Landnámslagið heldur nokkru yngra lag.

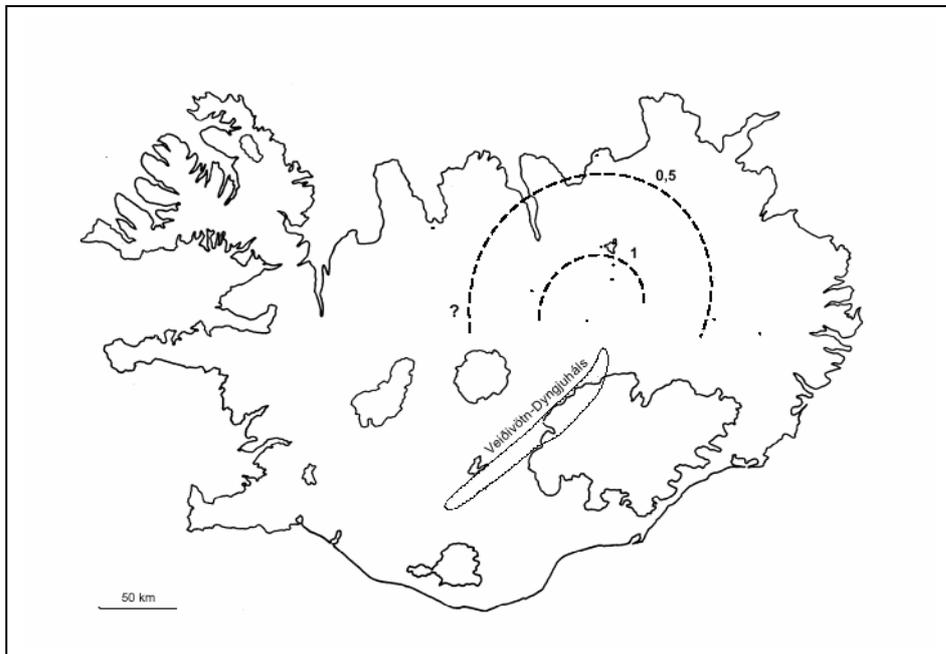
Við rannsóknir á fornbylí í Sveigakoti sumarið 1999 fundust tvö sorplög, mestmegnis bein og sót, aðskilin af þunnu jarðvegslagi sem inniheldur grágrænt gjóskulag. Ennfremur kom í ljós að undir neðra sorplaginu var annað gjóskulag með svipað útlit. Sökum langvarandi jarðvegseyðingar á bæjarstæðinu voru engin yngri gjóskulög varðveitt. Vegna mikilvægis gjóskulaganna við aldursgreiningu mannvistarlaganna var farið í sérstaka rannsókn á þessum tveimur lögum. Kom fljótlega í ljós að gjóskulögin voru frá því um landnám og að annað þessara laga væri að öllum líkindum Landnámslagið. Hins vegar var ekki ljóst hvort þeirra væri Landnámslagið og því mikilvægt að fá úr því skorið. Greint verður stuttlega frá niðurstöðum þessara athugana hér.

Byrjað var á að kanna gjóskulög í rofabörðum í nágrenni Sveigakots en á bæjarstæðinu sjálfu er jarðvegur nánast með öllu eyddur. Gott viðmiðunarsnið fannst undir NV-hlíð Sellandafjalls, um 10 km sunnan Sveigakots. Gjóskusýni voru tekin til efnagreiningar úr þessu sniði og auk þess frá Hofstöðum og Sveigakoti. Efnagreiningar á aðalefnum benda til að upptök gjóskulaganna beggja séu í sama megineldstöðvakerfi, þ.e. Veidivatna-Dyngjuhálskerfinu. Lausleg könnun á útbreiðslu efra gjóskulagsins leiðir í ljós að það er heldur þykkara á Mývatnssvæðinu en neðra lagið. Bráðabirgðakort af útbreiðslu þess hefur verið gert (mynd 1). Þykkt neðra gjóskulagsins er í betra samræmi við útbreiðslu Landnámslagsins (Larsen 1984). Litur þess er heldur ljósari en á því efra og líkari lit dökka

²³ Þessi grein hefur áður verið birt sem veggspjald á vorráðstefnu Jarðfræðafélags Íslands í Reykjavík 15. apríl 2002.

hluta Landnámslagsins í öðrum landshlutum. Meira er af kristalbrotum í neðra gjóskulaginu en hinu efra, en hátt hlutfall kristalbrota er eitt helsta einkenni Landnámslagsins. Aldursgreiningar með geislakoli á beinum úr báðum sorplögum benda til að aldursmunur þeirra sé lítill, marktækur munur er ekki á greiningunum, og að sorplögin hafi hlaðist upp á tímabilinu 860-990 e.Kr. (leiðrétt miðað við 1 sigma) (Orri Vésteinsson 2001). Jafnframt þýðir þetta að aldursmunur á gjóskulögum tveimur er ekki mikill.

Í ljósi þessara athugana er dregin sú ályktun að efra gjóskulagið sé ekki Landnámslagið heldur nokkru yngra gjóskulag, orðið til við gos á Veiðivatna-Dyngjuhálskerfinu á 10. öld. Í botnseti Mývatns hefur fundist gjóskulag frá því um 970 e.Kr. komið frá Veiðivatnakerfinu (Árni Einarsson o.fl. 1988). Sennilega er hér um sömu gjóskulög að ræða. Gerð var tilraun til að nálgast aldur lagsins frekar með útreikningi á þykknunarhraða jarðvegs á milli Landnámslags og Heklugjóskunnar frá 1158. Bendir útkoman til að gjóskulagið geti frá því um 950 e.Kr., með 1.-2. áratuga skekkjumörkum. Þrátt fyrir að aðferðin sé ekki nákvæm er niðurstaðan í góðu samræmi við kolefnisaldursgreiningar og verður stuðst við hana þar til nákvæmari aldurstölur fást. Lagið hefur verið nefnt V~950 til bráðabirgða.



Mynd 1. Útbreiðsla gjóskulagsins V~950. Þykktir eru í sentimetrum.

Heimildir

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English summary

In the summer 1999 a basaltic tephra layer was identified sandwiched between two Viking age midden deposits at Sveigakot in Mývatnssveit, NE-Iceland. Based on geochemical analysis this layer has a composition with a character of the Veidivötn-Dyngjuhals volcanic system. According to a preliminary isopach map which has been compiled its main axis of distribution is to NE-Iceland (Figure 1). The eruption is assumed to have taken place in ca. 950 AD, based on ¹⁴C dating and stratigraphy. The Settlement Layer, dated to 870-880 AD and of similar geochemical composition, was found next below the midden. These two tephra layers are the most important in dating early settlement remains in the Myvatn area.

Orri Vésteinsson:

Skýrsla um uppgröft við Höfða í landi Ytri Tungu á Tjörnesi

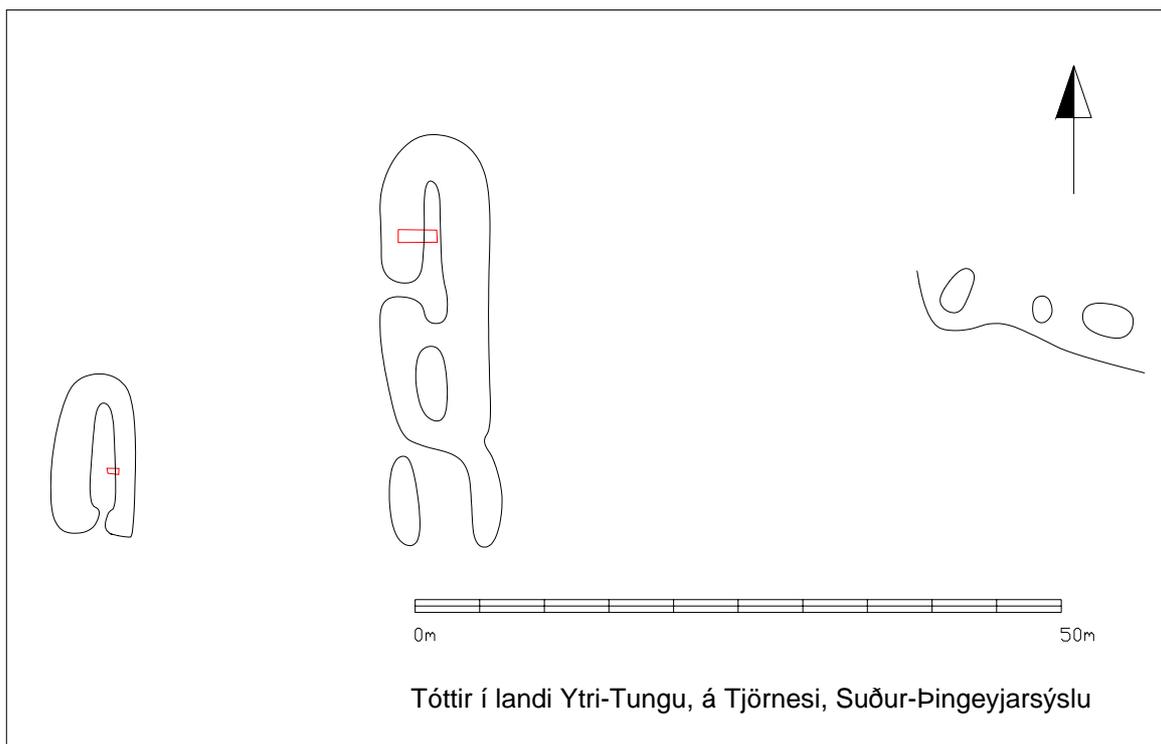
24. ágúst 1999 skráði Oddgeir Hansson, sem þá vann að aðalskráningu fornleifa í Tjörneshreppi, sérkennilegar rústir við Hallbjarnarstaðagil nyrst í landi Ytri Tungu. Rústanna er getið í örnefnalýsingu Ytri Tungu og Tunguvalla (bls. 9): "Örskammt austan Höfðans sér fyrir mörgum fornum rústum, lengsta tóftin um 40 m á lengd." Ábúendur á Ytri Tungu þekkja rústirnar vel og hafa lengi velt fyrir sér hlutverki þeirra.

Í skýrslu um fornleifaskráningu á Tjörnesi er rústunum lýst svo:

Lengsta rústin (SP-304:042 á 66°08.506 N 17°14.851 V) er um 150 m austur af nyrsta rafmagnsstærnum út við Hallbjarnarstaðagil. Tóftin er mjög óskýr en virðist þó vera um 38x8 m að stærð og er hleðsluhæðin mest um 0,2 m. Hún er í lægð milli tveggja hóla en í hólnum 40 m austan við hana eru 3 litlar dokkir sem gætu verið tóftir (SP-304:041 á 66°08.474 N 17°14.843 V). Þær eru sunnan til í hólnum. Vestasta tóftin er um 5x4 m að stærð. Miðtóftin er um 3x3 m að stærð. Austasta tóftin er um 6x4 m. Um 5 m eru frá miðtóftinni að þeirri vestustu og um 2 m að þeirri austustu. Hleðsluhæðin eða dýpt dokkana er víðast um 0.3 m. Um 24 m vestur af löngu tóftinni er annar hól og í honum regluleg dokk um 12x4 m að stærð og um 0,3 m á dýpt (SP-304:040).

Í ágúst árið eftir sýndi Oddgeir Mjöll Snæsdóttur og Orra Vésteinssyni staðinn og í kjölfarið var ákveðið að gera forkönnun á þessum stað til að varpa ljósi á aldur og eðli rústanna. Sú athugun er liður í yfirstandandi fornleifarannsóknunum í Mývatnssveit en um nokkurt skeið hefur staðið yfir leit að heppilegum vikingaaldarbústað við sjávarsíðuna sem gefið gæti samanburð við Hofstaði og Sveigakot í Mývatnssveit.

Að fengnu leyfi landeigenda, Jóns Heiðars Steinþórssonar og Guðrúnar Jóhannesdóttur, og fornleifanefndar, var ráðist í uppgröft á þessum stað þann 5. ágúst 2001. Að rannsókninni unnu Orri Vésteinsson og Howell M. Roberts fornleifafræðingar og lauk henni samdægurs.



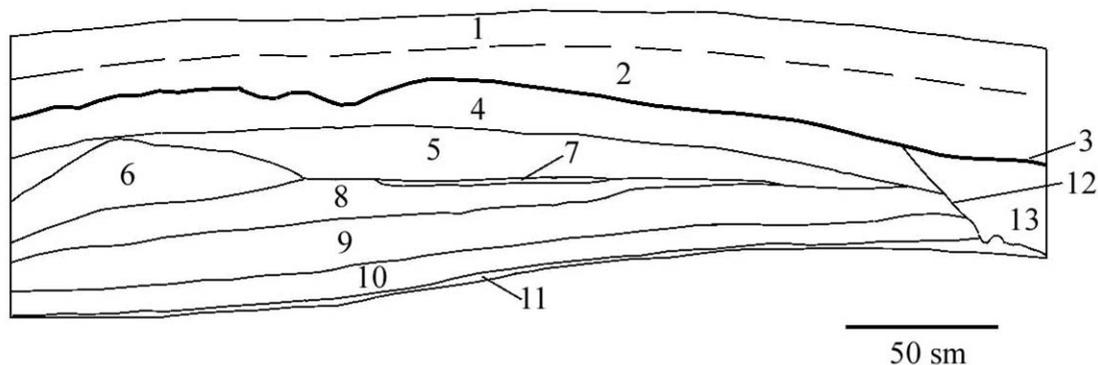
Lýsing tóftanna

Byrjað var á að gera afstöðumynd af rústunum en þær eru eins og fram kemur í skýrslu um fornleifaskráningu á Tjörnesi á þremur stöðum. Lagt var út staðbundið hnitakerfi með alstöð og mæld hnit á út- og innbrúnum tóftanna. Vestast er einföld aflöng tóft, grafinn inn í lága hálbungu og hefur dyr í suður. Hún er dýpst allra tóftanna en að utan rísa veggir hennar lítið sem ekkert yfir landið. Austan við þessa er aflöng tóft sem lítur út eins og langhús. Það er alls um 33,5 m langt og 7,5 m breitt. Það er þrískipt og eru dyr á miðjum vesturlangvegg og úr þeim gengið í um 12 m langt hólf. Sunnan við það er annað, um 6 m langt en ekki sjást dyr úr því yfir í hitt eða út. Þessi tvö hólf virðast mynda samstæða byggingu, alls um 24,5 m langa. Hólfir eru bæði unarlega mjó að innan, einkum hið nyrðra, sem er víðast innan við 1 m á breidd. Þar sunnan við eru tveir veggir sem líta út eins og viðbygging eða jafnvel eldri bygging sem gengur undan hinni. Enginn suðurgafli er fyrir því hólfum en þar er djúp kindagata sem gæti hafa eytt gaflinum. Norðan við norðurgafli er þúfnarimi sem gæti verið eldri bygging sem gengur undan hinni. Um 35 m austar eru þrjár litlar dokkir grafnar inn í hólbrún og virðast þær hljóta tengjast hinum tóftunum tveimur. Allar þessar minjar eru mjög sokknar og fornlegar og líta út fyrir að vera frá svipuðum tíma. Engin önnur ummerki eru í nánd, garðlög eða annað sem stutt gæti þá hugmynd að um leifar býlis væri að ræða. Tóftirnar eru á

suðurbakka Hallbjarnarstaðagils og er það mjög dúpt og bratt niður í það að sunnan. Sunnan við eru flatir móar allt að túnnum Ytri Tungu og eru það gróðurrýrir lyngmóar sem að hluta hafa verið ræktaðir upp í tún. Á tóftunum sjálfum er einungis lyng og mosi en nær enginn vallendisgróður. Hólaröðin á suðurbarmi Hallbjarnarstaðagils er oft snjólaus á vetrum og þar hefur því verið vetrarþétt þegar snjór bannaði annarsstaðar. Það gæti stutt þá hugmynd að tóftirnar séu fjárhús, beitarhús frá Ytri-Tungu.

Uppgröftur

Grafinn var 3x1 m skurður í nyrðra hólfið í stóru tóftinni og náði hann frá miðjum vesturvegg og inn í miðja tóft. Hann er 3 m norðan við dyrnar á vesturvegg. Við uppgröftinn var fljótlega komið niður á gjóskulag, svart og um 1 sm þykkt sem greinilega er svokallað “a” lag, frá 1477. Nálega beint undir því var torf í öllum skurðinum (4), sem lítur meira út eins og hrun en eiginleg hleðsla. Það er úr brúnni mold með gráblárru gjósku. Ákveðið var að grafa niður í gegnum þetta lag í austurenda skurðarins til að freista þess að finna gólf eða yfirborðslag sem fylgja mætti að veggnum. Í stað þess var komið niður í niðurgröft (13) sem náði niður að ljósu forsögulegu gjóskulagi, sennilega H3 fremur en H4 á 60 sm dýpi – lag þetta er þó gulleitara en það sem greint hefur verið sem H3 í Mývatnssveit. Niðurgröfturinn (12) byrjar um 40 sm frá austurenda skurðarins en vestan við hann fundust engin gólflög eða yfirborðslög sem sannfærandi geta talist. Undir torflaginu sem nær um allan skurð er annað torflag (5), mun blandaðra og marglitara en það efra. Undir því vestast í skurðinum er bunki af brúnni mold með flekkjum af H3/H4 – greinilega uppgröftur af einhverju tagi (6). Þessi bunki virðist vera uppistaðan í veggjum hússins. Austan við hann – innan í húsinu – er þunnt lífrænt lag, gráleitt og virðist samanstanda af rotnuðum jurttaleifum (7). Það er aðeins um 65 sm langt í sniðinu, og innan við 1 sm þykkt, og nær því ekki yfir allan gólflötinn innan veggja. Það getur vel hafa myndast á sama tíma eða skömmu eftir að uppgröfturinn var gerður og eru þessar tvær einingar það eina sem gæti verið hlutar af húsi á þessum stað. Undir þessum lögum tveimur var hreyft lag, ljósbrún mold með viðarkoli og dökkbrúnum rákum sem gætu verið rotnaðar jurttaleifar (8). Þetta lag virðist benda til mannvistar og rasks á þessum stað áður en “húsið” var byggt. Undir þessu var svipað moldarlag en óhreyft (9) og í því miðju, eftir endilöngum skurðinum, dökkbrún rák sem gæti verið gamalt yfirborð. Undir þessu var dökkbrún mold (10) niður að H3/H4 (11).



Norðursnið skurðar í tóft við Höfða í landi Ytri-Tungu á Tjörnesi. / Section in structure at Höfði in Tjörnes.

Skýringar / Legend:

1. Grasrót / Topsoil
2. Dökkbrún fokmold með slitróttu svörtu gjóskulagi – V-1717? / Dark brown sandy silt. Aeolian with traces of dark tephra – V-1717?
3. “a” lagið frá 1477 / “a” tephra from 1477
4. Torfhrun, með linsum af blágrárrí gjósku (H-1300?) / Turf debris with blueish-grey stripes of tephra (H-1300?)
5. Torfhrun, ljósleitara og meira hrært en 4./ Turf debris. Lighter brown and more mixed than 4.
6. Uppmokstur. Gulbrún mold með dílum af H3 (eða H4). / Upcast. Yellowbrown silt with flecks of H3 (or H4)
7. Gráleitt lífrænt lag – yfirborð. / Grey organic layer – surface.
8. Lítillega hreyft lag með dökkbrúnum lífrænum linsum. / Slightly mixed anthropogenic soil with dark brown organic lenses.
9. Óhreyft – grábrún mold m. dökkbrúnni lífrænni rák, e.t.v. gamalt yfirborð. / Natural – brownish grey silt with dark brown organic stripe – old land surface?
10. Óhreyft – gulbrún mold. / Natural – yellow brown silt.
11. H3 (eða H4). / H3 (or H4).
12. Skurður. / Cut.
13. Fylling í skurði, grábrún mold, sennilega fokmold. / Fill of 12 – homogenous greybrown silt, probably aeolian.

Þegar ljóst var að í þessum skurði væri ekki að finna ótvíræðar vísbendingar um mannabústað var ákveðið að grafa minni holu í vestustu bygginguna, enda gæti þar verið um að ræða skepnuhús eða a.m.k. skýrari leifar sem gefið gætu vísbendingar um hlutverk þessara tófta. Sú hola gaf þó ennþá minni upplýsingar. Undir “a” laginu var þar annað gjóskulag, blágrátt lag sem sést í torfi í hinum skurðinum. Undir því er lítillega hreyfð mold en þar undir óhreyft um 90 sm undir yfirborði.

Niðurstöður

Tóftirnar við Hallbjarnarstaðagil eru eldri en 1477 og sennilega mun eldri. Í þeim eru engin gólfög eða yfirborðslög sem gefið gætu til kynna hvert hlutverk þeirra var. Ekki eru

eiginlegir hlaðnir veggir í stóru tóftinni, heldur aðeins moldarhrúga og ofan á henni torf sem hugsanlega hefur verið jafnað út. Vestari tóftin er sennilega að mestu niðurgrafin en könnunarholan í henni náði ekki út á vegg. Ekki er heldur útilokað að stóra tóftin sé niðurgrafin en skurðurinn í henni náði ekki útfyrir “vegginn” svo að ganga mætti úr skugga um það. Ljóst er að mannvist hefur hafist á þessum stað áður en byggingaframkvæmdir hófust, hugsanlega ræktun af einhverju tagi. Síðan hefur verið mokað upp í lágan og mjóan vegg og mjúkt yfirborðslag myndast innan hans. Annaðhvort hefur verið torfhleðsla ofan á þessu sem síðar var rutt niður og jafnað yfir tóftina eða að einhverskonar framkvæmdir með torf hafa átt sér stað eftir að notkun “hússins” lauk. Skömmu fyrir 1477 hefur svo verið gerður skurður í miðri tóftinni – hugsanlega eftir henni endilangri og má vera að það séu merki hans sem nú sjást á yfirborði sem innanmál tóftarinnar.

Óhugsandi er að þessar byggingaleifar séu eftir mannbústað og ólíklegt að um skepnuhús sé að ræða. Eina skýringin sem gengur upp er að stóra tóftin a.m.k sé upphaflega heystæði. Lágum veggjum hefur verið hróflað upp og heyið skilið eftir lífrænu rákina innan við þá. Torfið þar ofan á er þá heyturf sem skilið hefur verið eftir ofan í tóftinni eftir að hætt var að nota hana – og ósennilegt er að það hafi verið mjög lengi. Það skýrir þessa tilgátu að staðurinn er á berangri, stendur hátt og er opinn fyrir vindum. Eftir að hætt var að nota staðinn sem heystæði hefur síðan verið grafinn skurður eftir því endilöngu og er það hann sem gefur tóftinni útlit fyrir að vera hús.

Sama skýring getur tæplega átt við vestustu tóftina, enda eru á henni að því er virðist mjög skýrar dyr, og enn síður hvompurnar þrjár austan við. Þessar leifar eru því ekki fullskýrðar og verða að teljast með þeim sérkennilegri sem rannskaðar hafa verið á Íslandi.

Summary

By the ravine Hallbjarnarstaðagil, in the property of Ytri-Tunga in Tjörnes, north of the modern town Húsavík, a set of ancient ruins was surveyed in 1999. The site consists of three structures, one of which looks like a long-house partitioned into three units, in all 33,5 m long and 7,5 m wide. It was the unusual size and shape of this structure which prompted a preliminary investigation carried out in August 2001 with the aim to establish whether this was in fact a Viking age/medieval dwelling.

A trench placed on the inside of what looked like the structure's western wall revealed that it was overlaid by the "a" tephra, dated to AD 1477. Underneath this was a layer of turf debris and underneath that a thin organic layer, interpreted as decomposed hay. Sometime after 1477 a trench, presumably running along the centre of the ruin had been dug into these layers. This was all that was found in this trench. A smaller trench dug into the side of a neighbouring structure was even less revealing with only a trace of anthropogenic deposits underneath a tephra (not seen in the larger trench) which was under the "a" layer.

The large hall shaped structure is clearly not a building and it is suggested that it is the remains of a place where hay was stored. The location is on a high ridge, which is windy and often free of snow during the winter. It makes sense that hay was stored there as it would dry in the wind and could be used to supplement the fodder of the animals grazing the bare parts during winter. The layer of turf is then the remains of the turves laid on the hay stack to protect it and left after the last stack had been removed. This leaves the later trench and the other structures unexplained, but it is clear that this is not an early settlement site.

Fornleifarannsóknir í Sveigakoti og víðar í Suður Þingeyjarsýslu sumarið 2001 – Ágrip

Uppgröftur á Sveigakoti í Mývatnssveit stóð yfir dagana 23. júlí til 17. ágúst 2001. Grafið var á þremur svæðum:

Uppgrefti á svæði M, öskuhaug, var lokið. Þar hafði verið grafið frá 1999 og stærsti hluti haugsins fjarlægður árið 2000. Nú var grafið mest til vesturs og var þar allþykkt lag undir ólívugrænu gjóskulagi sem talið er vera frá um 950. Náðust um 50 l af beinum úr því lagi en í allt var dýrabeinafengur þessa árs mun minni en fyrri ár. Beinin hafa ekki verið talin en af rúmmáli að dæma er þó marktækt magn bæði úr lögum yfir og undir ólívugrænu gjóskunni og frá svæði T, sem grafið var upp sumarið 2000 og er yngra en hin tvö.

Uppgröftur á svæði S hélt áfram og kom í ljós að skálabygging sú sem grafin var upp sumarið 2000 var umbygging á stærra húsi sem náð hefur lengra til austurs og suðurs. Sá eldri skáli hefur verið um 20 m að lengd og um 4,5 m að breidd, en suðurmörk hans eru mjög óljós. Í austurenda er flórlögn í miðju húsi og kolagólf sitthvorumegin við hana. Hugsanlegt er að um leifar fjóss sé að ræða. Einnig komu í ljós merki um eldra eldstæði sem hefur verið skemmt af því yngra. Þessu eldra stigi skálans tilheyrir einnig sáfarið sem að hluta kom í ljós sumarið 2000. Í ljós kom að milli þessara tveggja aðalbyggingarskeiða eru ýmis mannvistarlög sem hafa orðið til eftir að eldri skálinn var yfirgefinn en áður en sá yngri var byggð. Svo virðist sem eldra húsið hafi verið yfirgefið, en síðan notað um stutt skeið á meðan þakið hékk ennþá uppi og eins hefur verið þar einhver mannaferð og eldar tundraðir eftir að þakið hrundi. Þetta bendir til að Sveigakot hafi verið yfirgefið um hríð, e.t.v. á 11. öld, og verið notað um skeið sem sel eða beitarhús en síðan hafi byggð hafist á ný á 12. öld en aðeins varað um skamma hríð. Grafið var niður að gólfögum eldra skálans en þau ekki fjarlægð og bíður það sumarsins 2002.

Hafinn var uppgroftur á svæði T, þar sem lítill öskuhaugur frá 11. öld var grafinn upp sumarið 2000. Undir öskuhaugnum kom í ljós mjög lítið (2,5x2,5 m) jarðhús, með eldstæði og torfbekkjum. Hús þetta hefur verið notað um alllanga hríð en það er sjálfst byggt ogan í eldri jarðhús, tvö eða þrjú, sem liggja hlið við hlið á suðurenda bæjarstæðisins. Þessar byggingar eru mun eldri heldur en skálinn á svæði S og tilheyra tímabilinu 950-1050.

Gerð var könnun á útbreiðslu mannvistarleifa milli S og T og kom í ljós að undir svæði M eru ekki neinar byggingar, en nær S var komið niður á gólflog á tveimur stöðum og er ljóst að þar eru samfelldar byggingaleifar á svæði sem er um 15x40 m frá norðri til suðurs.

Auk uppgrafter á Sveigakoti sjálfu voru gerðar jarðvegsathuganir í nágrenni bæjarstæðisins. Skoðuð voru 8 jarðvegssnið í Sellöndum sunnan við Sveigakot, flest í túni Oddastaða, en þar eru talsverð ummerki um ræktun upp að “a” gjóskunni frá 1477. Einnig var ólívugræna gjóskan kortlögð á Mývatnsheiði og suður um Bárðardal. Í kringum Svartárvatn sást gjóskan í sniðum ofan við hina eiginlegu landnámsgjósku og styður það þá túlkun að um sé að ræða áður óþekkt lag frá 10. öld, þó nákvæmari tímasetningu vanti enn. Litur gjóskunnar er heldur dekkri en landnámsgjóskunnar og hún hefur minna af kristalbrotum en það og má nú telja öruggt að um tvö ólík lög er að ræða, það neðra sé landnámsgjóskan en hið efra frá miðri 10. öld og hefur það verið nefnt V~950.

Ennþá hafa ekki komið í ljós byggingaleifar sem með vissu er hægt að tengja elsta ábúðarskeiði Sveigakots, þ.e. á 9. og 10. öld, en þá var blómatími bæjarins ef marka má dýrabeinagreiningar. Byggingaleifar þær sem grafnar hafa verið fram eru frá 11. og 12. öld og undir það síðasta viðrist byggðin hafa verið orðin stopul. Hugsanlegt er að Sveigakot hafi um 1100 orðið að seli og síðan byggst á ný um stutt skeið um miðja 12. öld en eftir það hefur staðurinn verið yfirgefinn endanlega.

Hinn skýri tímarammi sem fengist hefur af gjóskulögum og C14 greiningum varpar nýju ljósi á þróun húsagerðar. Ný tegund jarðhúss frá 11. öld hefur komið í ljós, og yngsti skálinn er af gerð sem komið hefur í ljós annarsstaðar, m.a. í Herjólfssdal og á Snjáleifartóttum í Þjórsárdal. Þessi gerð, sem einkennist af beinum grjóthlöðnum veggjum og mun mjórri rýmum (<3 m) en tíðkuðust í víkingaaldrarhúsum, hefur þróast um allt land á 11. og 12. öld og er greinilega “týndi hlekkurinn” milli eldaskála víkingaaldar og íslenska torfbæjarins.

Allt bendir til að búskapur hafi staðið með blóma á Sveigakoti á 9. og 10. öld en um 1000 fer að halla undir fæti þó enn hafi þar verið búið – e.t.v. með hléum – í um 200 ár. Ekki er hægt að rekja hnignun Sveigakots beint til umhverfispáttu, a.m.k. ekki stórfellds uppblásturs því hann hófst ekki á þessu svæði fyrr en eftir 1500. Settar hafa verið fram tilgátur um að hnignun Sveigakots eigi sér félagslegar og pólitískar orsakir og tengist valdasamþjöppun í Mývatnssveit á 11. öld.

Með rannsóknum á Sveigakoti hefur fengist mun skýrari mynd af upphafi íslensks samfélags. Verkefnið er að upplagi hugsað til að afla samanburðarefnis fyrir Hofstaði og hefur það eitt skilað raunhæfara mati á gögnum frá Höfstöðum og að mörgu leyti sýnt þau í

alveg nýju ljósi. Svo vel vill til að byggð í Sveigakoti stóð mun lengur en notkun Hofstaðaskálans, Sveigakot var stofnað fyrr og þar var enn búið eftir að Hofstaðaskálinn var yfirgefinn. Þar með fæst lengri tímalína, en líka innsýn í önnur viðfangsefni en Hofstaðir varpa ljósi á, einkum hvað varðar húsagerð og þróun hennar, búskap á meðalbýli og um hnignun og byggðaröskun sem víða um land fylgdi í kjölfar landnámsaldar. Rannsóknir á samspili manns og náttúru á Sveigakoti benda til að þar sé um að ræða mun flóknari ferli en hingað til hefur verið talið. Þegar er ljóst að uppblæstri verður ekki kennt um eyðingu byggðarinnar en vera má að rýrnun jarðvegs og gróðurs sem leiddi til byggðaeýðingarinnar hafi einnig verið undanfari uppblástursins þó að allt að 300 ár skilji að í tíma. Ef það reynist réttur skilningur þá hefur það í för með sér alveg nýja sýn á orsakir jarðvegseyðingar á Íslandi.

Sumarið 2001 voru gerðir könnunarskurðir á þremur stöðum til viðbótar: Hjá Höfða í landi Ytri Tungu á Tjörnesi, í Selhaga í landi Haganess við Mývatn og í Hrísheimum á Mývatnsheiði. Í ljós kom að rústin á Höfða var ekki mannabústaður en í Selhaga og Hrísheimum fundust ótvíræð merki um heilsársbúskap á miðöldum. Í Selhaga hefur verið byggð frá 10. öld og fram á þá 13. en ekki verður fullyrt að þar hafi verið heilsársbyggð allan þann tíma. Tímasetning Hrísheima er ekki jafnvel afmörkuð en gripir þeir sem þar hafa fundist benda eindregið til Víkingaaldar en mannvirkjaleifarnar sýna að þar hlýtur að hafa verið búið sýnu lengur en í Sveigakoti – ef til vill fram á seinni hluta miðalda. Á báðum stöðum var grafið í öskuhauga og fannst mikið magn af vel varðveittum dýrabeinum. Fyrstu niðurstöður greininga á þeim benda til að þessi staðir fylgi sama munstri og komið hefur í ljós á Hofstöðum og Sveigakoti og vekur einkum athygli að á öllum þessum stöðum er talsvert magn af sjófiski og sjófugli saman við viðiskap í heimahögum, silung og rjúpu. Í Hrísheimum er mikið magn svínabeina, hið hæsta hlutfall sem enn hefur fundist á Íslandi, en á óvart kom að í Selhaga var sáralítið um endur og raunar meira af sjófulgi en öndum, þó aðstæður til andaveiða séu óvíða betri á landinu en einmitt þar. Það bendir ótvírætt til að öndum hafi meðvitað verið hlíft við veiðum til að varðveita eggverin, en eggjaskurn finnst í miklum mæli á öllum stöðunum fjórum sem nú hafa verið rannsakaðir í Mývatnssveit.