# Archaeological investigations in Mývatnssveit, Reykjadalur and Svartárkot 2010

*Orri Vésteinsson ed.*

*With contributions from Frank Feeley, Gísli Pálsson, Thomas H. McGovern & Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson*

Fornleifastofnun Íslands
FS454-02264
Reykjavík 2011

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***Front page:*** Trenching at Mýnesás, looking west. June 25th 2010.

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Orri Vésteinsson

# *Introduction*

Although major excavations in Mývatnssveit wound to a close in 2006 fieldwork has continued there every season since. The largest single component has been the midden excavation at Skútustaðir from 2008[1] and in 2010 excavation of the Christian cemetery in Hofstaðir resumed after a break of several years. In 2007 a number of sites were targeted for minor interventions both to identify midden deposits suitable for further investigation but also in order to obtain dating for the settlements.[2] The results confirmed earlier indications that a very large number of farm sites in Mývatnssveit were abandoned in the 12th and 13th centuries,[3] but they also brought to light clear evidence of very early – pre ~940 – occupation of a surprisingly high number of sites. The fieldwork in 2010 was planned to follow up on these indications; to increase the sample size by obtaining dates from more sites in Mývatnssveit and to extend the survey area by including sites in the upper reaches of Reykjadalur, which adjoins Mývatnssveit on the western side. Seven sites, four in Mývatnssveit and three in Reykjadalur were investigated by trenching but in addition Viking age dates were obtained for a boundary wall in Sellönd at the SE margins of Mývatnssveit and a probable farm in Svartárkot. The latter site is in the highland interior some 27 km south of Lake Mývatn and belongs to the district of Bárðardalur. It was targeted partly on rescue grounds, to assess the rate of erosion from lake Svartárvatn, but also to see if sufficient midden deposits remained for further investigation.

Also reported here are trenches dug at four shieling sites as a part of a research project directed by Professor Ian A. Simpson of the University of Stirling into grazing

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[1] Ágústa Edwald ed. 2009, *Öskuhaugsrannsóknir á Skútustöðum í Mývatnssveit 2008. Framvinduskýrsla* I, FS419, Reykjavík. Ágústa Edwald ed. 2010, *Öskuhaugsrannsóknir á Skútustöðum í Mývatnssveit 2009. Framvinduskýrsla* II, FS447, Reykjavík. Report on 2010 season in prep.

[2] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2008, *Archaeological investigations in Mývatnssveit 2007*, FS386, Reykjavík.

[3] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2003, *Landscapes of settlement 2002. Reports on investigations at five medieval sites in Mývatnssveit*, FS218, Reykjavík.

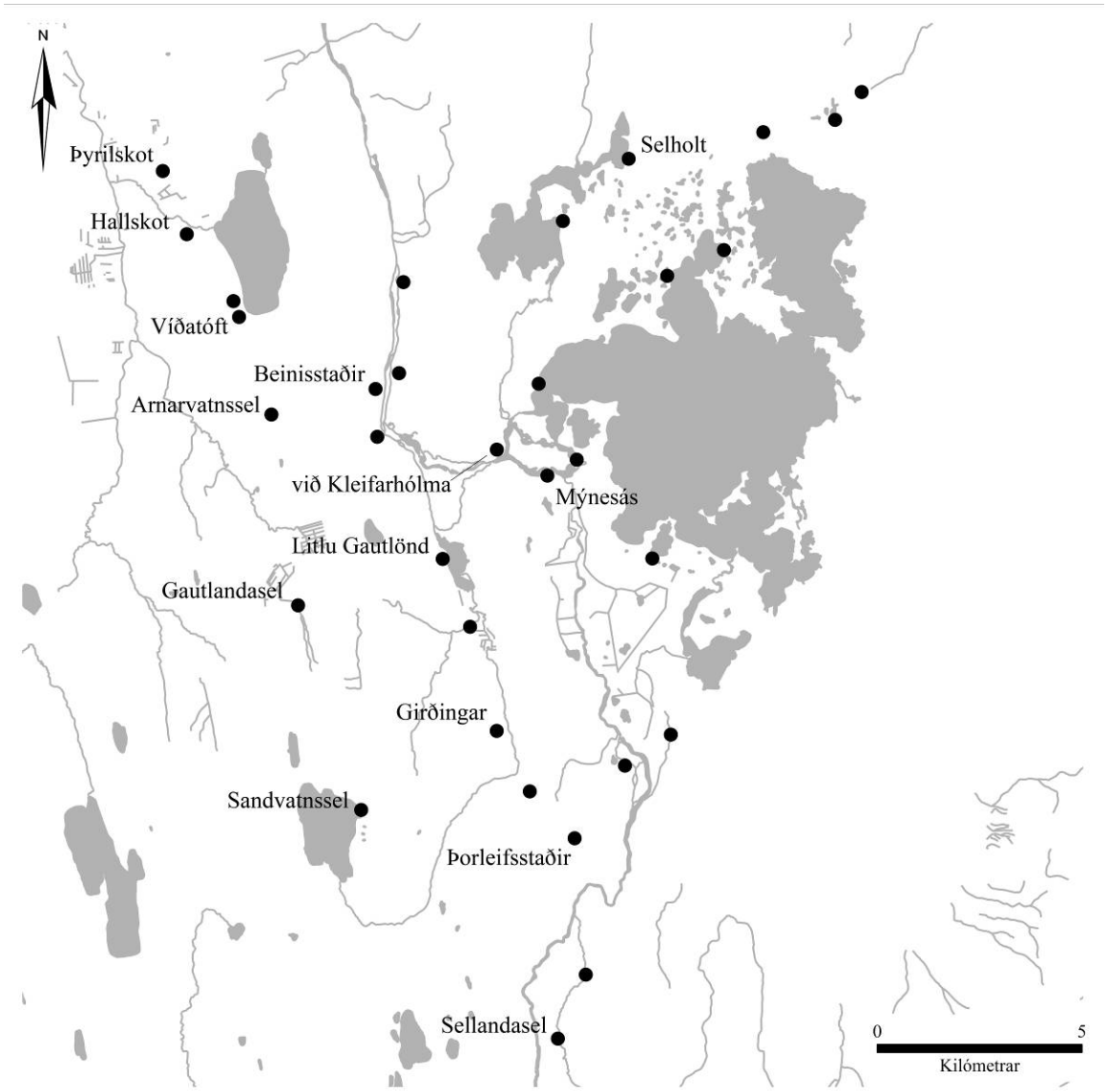


**Fig. 1. Sites in Mývatnssveit and Reykjadalur discussed in this report. The unlabelled points mark other Viking age sites known in the area.**

impacts of shielings in NE-Iceland. The aim here was primarily to build a chronological dimension to the soil analyses already carried out but this trenching also complements the settlement history data obtained from the farm sites in interesting ways.

Alongside the trenching most of the sites were mapped with a GPS station as were three of the sites trenched in 2007 for which only sketch maps had existed previously.

In addition to the fieldwork reported here, and the excavations at Hofstaðir and Skútustaðir, the 2010 season in Mývatnssveit saw a preliminary excavation of an alleged

pre-Christian boat burial in Kumlabrekka which will be reported separately although the tephra analysis is included in Magnús Sigurgeirsson's report published here. The same applies to a trench dug in a ruin called Þórutóftir in Seljadalur. This investigation was a part of a project commissioned by Hið þingeyska fornleifafélag but the tephra analysis is included in Magnús's report.

The fieldwork was conducted between June 25th and July 15th 2010. The project was made possible by financial assistance from NSF and Nýsköpunarsjóður námsmanna as well as the participating institutions: Fornleifastofnun Íslands, Háskóli Íslands, City University of New York and the University of Stirling. Most of the trenches were dug and recorded by Orri Vésteinsson but at the four shieling sites Prof. Ian Simpson, Eileen Tisdall and Huw Smith from Stirling also dug and recorded. CUNY grad students Frank Feeley and Megan Hicks helped out, Frank with a coring survey in Sellandasel and Megan with backfilling while Frank and Aaron Kendall took part with Orri Vésteinsson and Thomas H. McGovern in the fieldwork at Svartárkot. Gísli Pálsson carried out the GPS survey of the sites and produced the site-maps included in this report while Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson analysed the tephras. Birna Lárusdóttir and Oscar Aldred provided help with the preparation of this report. The landowners of Máskot, Víðar, Helluvað, Gautlönd, Arnarvatn, Geirastaðir and Grænavatn kindly gave permission for excavation and coring and special thanks are due to Finnbogi Stefánsson in Geirastaðir as well as Ásmundur Jónsson in Hofstaðir for their help. As ever Árni Einarsson of the Mývatn Research Station was a staunch supporter.

## *Results of trenching at seven medieval sites*

### *Þyrilskot*

Þyrilskot is on land belonging to the farm Máskot in Reykjadalshreppur. The site is some 700 m northwest of the modern farm, which is, as far as is known, also the site of the traditional farm, originally known as Másvatn and attested first in 1553.[4] Máskot was valued at only 5 hundreds which makes it one of the smallest holdings in the region.

Þyrilskot is first mentioned in a mid-20th century place name inventory for Máskot and the site was surveyed by Birna Lárusdóttir in 2002.[5] The name is derived from the hill Þyrill, which towers over the site and is a landmark in an otherwise relatively featureless hillside. Þyrill occurs as a farm name (in Hvalfjörður) and it may have been the name for this site when it was in operation, but it is equally likely that the original name is lost and that the ruins are simply named from the nearest landmark. The site is in a line of sites which lies diagonally up the hillside from River Reykjadalsá to Lake Másvatn, beginning with the traditional farm Hallbjarnarstaðir (now abandoned), through Hallbjarnarstaðasel (traditionally shieling from Hallbjarnarstaðir, now the site of the modern farm Brún), and Þyrilskot, Máskot and finally Hallskot which is described below. The pre-modern ruins at Hallbjarnarstaðasel may have been similar to Þyrilskot as the site is described as having been a farm before it was a shieling, an observation usually based on the presence of a field-enclosure. These ruins have now been levelled however so this will remain uncertain.[6]

The ruins at Þyrilskot consist of a sub-oval enclosure, defining an area of some 0,4 ha. Inside the enclosure there is a natural hill with at least two, rather indistinct ruins on top. The two rather small ruins may overlie a larger house or enclosure. At the foot of

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[4] *Diplomatarium islandicum* XII, 642.
[5] Birna Lárusdóttir 2002, *Fornleifakönnun. Vegarbætur á Mývatnsheiði*, FS176, Reykjavík, p. 13.
[6] Birna Lárusdóttir 2002, *Fornleifakönnun. Vegarbætur á Mývatnsheiði*, p. 14.

**Fig. 2. Þyrilskot from the air, looking southeast. Photo by Árni Einarsson**

the hill there is a small rectangular structure, much better preserved but judging from the condition of the walls and the vegetation of the same age as the enclosure. It is 7x5 m with a doorway at the SW-corner. There is a distinct gateway on the south-side of the enclosure and inside this, west of the gateway, a small weaning fold has been built against the enclosure wall. This structure is clearly more recent than the others at this site. 30 m east of the enclosure there is a 15 m long ruin, divided in at least two rooms and in between it and the enclosure a small hillock which may contain archaeological features.

The site is situated below a hill, Þyrill, now eroded on top, at the border between what is now dry open pasture, but likely originally to have been dominated by shrub if it was not wooded, and wetlands which slope gradually down to the river Reykjadalsá. Such sloping wetlands are believed to have been covered in shrub too at the beginning of settlement[7] and it may be that the significance of the location of the site at this border has

[7] Þröstur Eysteinsson pers. comm.

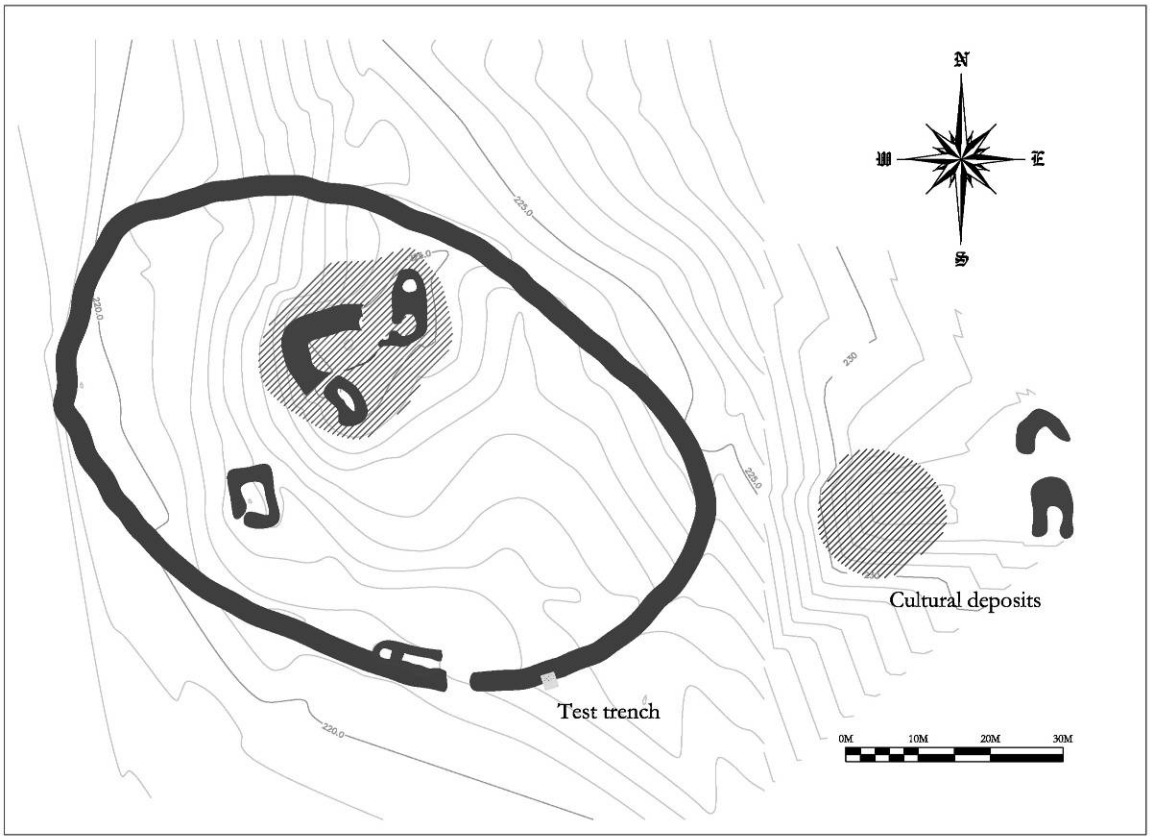


**Fig. 3. Þyrilskot. Plan by Gísli Pálsson.**

more to do with the springs of groundwater that emerge along it. There are several springs in the bog south and east of the site.

None of the ruins visible on the surface has the look of a dwelling and the small size of the enclosure more or less definitely precludes that this place ever was a farm. It seems rather to belong to the group of sites, referred to as the intermediate type in an earlier report,[8] along with Geldingatættur north of Hofstaðir and við Víðiker north of Reykjahlíð.[9] The question remains whether such sites represent shielings or outstations of some other sort or whether they should be seen as farms-to-be, sites where cultivation and building activity had started in preparation for the establishment of a fully-fledged farm. This issue will be reviewed in greater detail in the Discussion below.

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[8] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2008, *Archaeological investigations in Mývatnssveit 2007*, p. 5.
[9] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2008, *Archaeological investigations in Mývatnssveit 2007*, p. 12-15. Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2003, *Landscapes of settlement. Reports on investigations at six medieval sites in Mývatnssveit*, p. 80-83.

**Fig. 4. Klömbruhnaus in the wall at Þyrilskot. Looking NNW.**

A small trench was dug into the enclosure wall on the outside of its SE-side. This revealed a turf wall (4), unusually built of *klömbruhnaus*, with the dark tephras of the LNS embedded in the turf. H-1300 and V-1477 are on top of the wall, suggesting that it had been reduced to a height of less than 0,3 m before the 13th century. A chunk of H3 in the otherwise purely aeolian layer (7) t this site in the late middle ages. In the g the wall on the outside (5) both the H-1104 and V-1159 were found in situ suggesting that the wall had been built well before the end of the 11th century. The wall, associated with a cut (2) on the outside, is built on top of a cultural layer (3), made up of thin lenses of light brown organic silt with some charcoal. Towards the bottom of this layer the V~940 tephra is in situ, sealing a 1 cm thick cultural layer made of upcast (specks of H3) lying on the natural.

This shows that some digging had occurred at this site before ~940 and that a cultural layer had accumulated before the wall was built, which however must have been well before 1104.

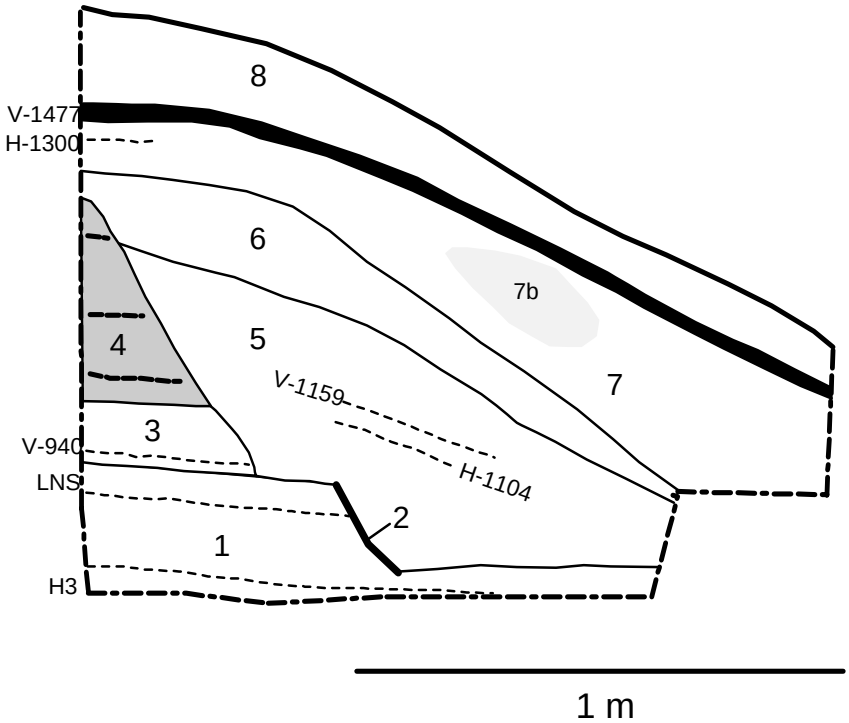


**Fig. 5. West facing section of the test trench in Þyrilskot. 1: Natural. 2: cut. 3. cultural layer w. V~940 in situ. 4. Turf wall. 5. Turf debris. 6. Aeolian mixed w. upcast. 7. Aeolian. 7b. Single chunk of upcast. 8. Top soil.**

**Fig. 6. Hallskot from the air, looking west. Photo by Árni Einarsson**

## *Hallskot*

Hallskot is on the property of the farm Víðar and is mentioned as a long-abandoned farm in the 1712 land register, where it is added that people thought the home-field too small to have supported a settlement.[10] The site was originally surveyed by Birna Lárusdóttir in 2002.[11]

The site is on the southern side of Máslækur, the brook that drains Lake Másvatn. Hallskot is some 300 m west of Lake Másvatn, 1 km south of Máskot and 2 km east of the site of Víðar farm, which is on much lower land down by Reykjadalsá. The brook is the present boundary between the farms Víðar and Máskot, but Hallskot is much closer to the lake than Máskot, originally called Másvatn, from the lake. This suggests that Hallskot is unlikely to have been in occupation at the time when the name Másvatn applied to the other farm, i.e. in the 16th century. Indeed both Hallskot and Víðatóft

[10] *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalín* XI, 188-89.
[11] Birna Lárusdóttir 2002, *Fornleifakönnun. Vegarbætur á Mývatnsheiði*, p. 8-9.

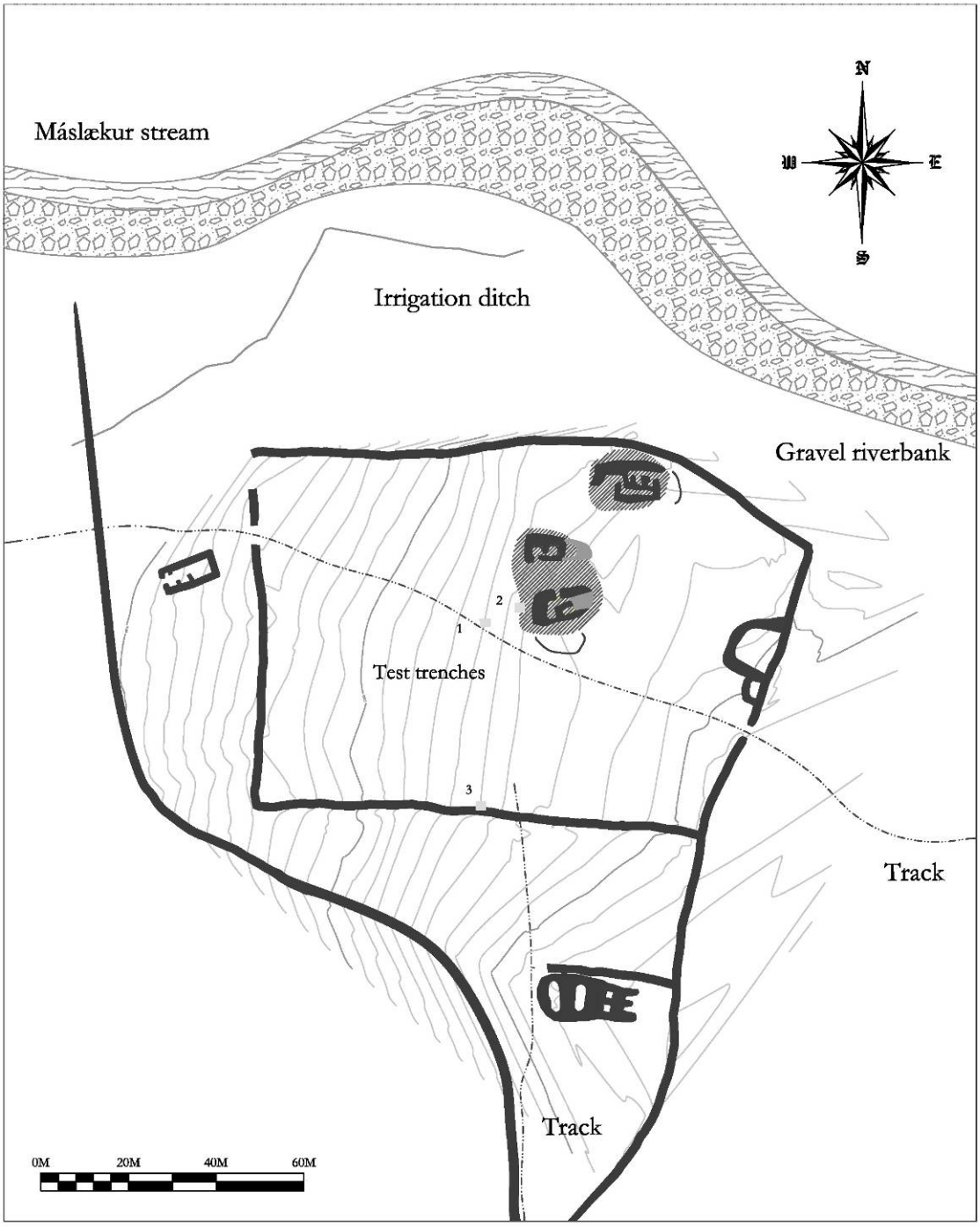


**Fig. 7. Hallskot. Plan by Gísli Pálsson**

(discussed below) would – on account of their greater proximity to the lake – have been more aptly named Másvatn than the farm which had that name in the 16th century. It is possible that Másvatn/kot was named from the lake because of seniority, that it was

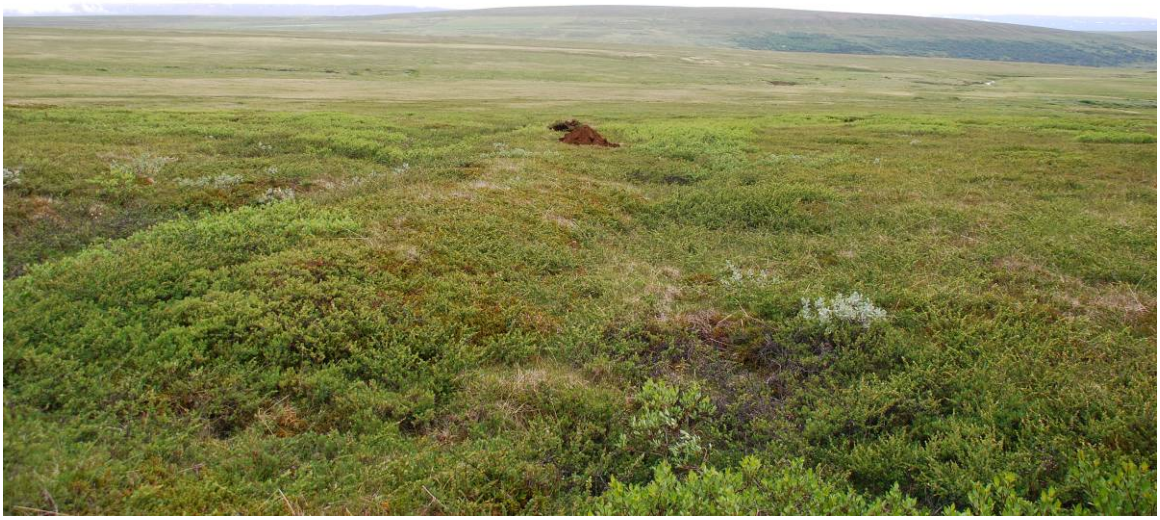

**Fig. 8. Trench 3 in the inner homefield boundary, looking west.**

occupied before the other two. The fact that it outlasted them by hundreds of years also suggests that is on better land, supporting the idea of seniority. But it is also possible that the name was transferred after Hallskot and Víðatóft had been abandoned, and even that Máskot is a later foundation.

The ruins at Hallskot consist of a sub-rectangular enclosure, some 0,9 ha in size. Within this there are two main ruin mounds, one close to the north side of the enclosure and a larger one on a slight rise nearer its centre. The latter has two elongated multi-cellular structures, but the former one. These three structures visible on the surface are, judging by the vegetation, more recent than the enclosures and other structures at this site and may represent reuse of the site after abandonment, e.g. as a shieling. They clearly cap earlier phases but in neither mound is the accumulation very great, 0,5-1 m, which is consistent with the view that this site was not used for very long. The only other structure visible inside the homefield is a pen which abuts the eastern side of the enclosure. This eastern side continues to the south where it joins a larger earthwork which curves around the homefield enclosure on the south and west. Although this larger

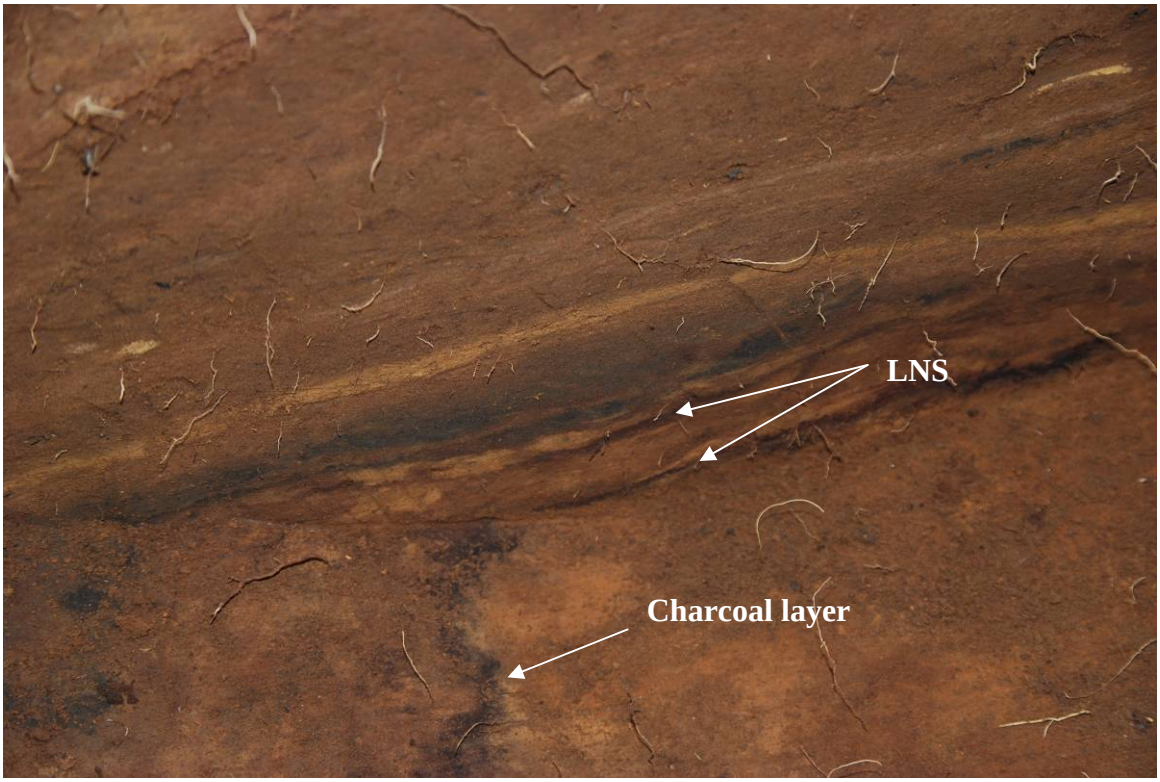

**Fig. 9. Prehistoric charcoal layer below the black bands of the LNS. Trench 2, north side.**

earthwork is more sunken and swollen than the homefield boundary, and has therefore been considered earlier, the fact that it swings around the site surely suggests the opposite. The difference in appearance more likely has to do with different construction, with the larger wall probably constructed in the same way as other great earthworks on the heaths of Suður Þingeyjarsýsla, mostly made of loose material, while the homefield enclosure is more solidly constructed. Inside the area between the earthwork and the homefield there is a ridge with an E-W direction with a indistinct multi-celled structure on top. This is adjacent to a short stretch of boundary wall which may have subdivided the space between homefield and the larger earthwork even further, but the western extension of this, which would have closed the gap, is not visible on the surface. West of the homefield wall there is an elongated structure, divided in 2-3 rooms with a door on the western gable facing down-slope, a structure with the characteristics and location of a byre. An irrigation channel has been built in the gully which Máslækur runs through north of the site. It has received water from the brook and channelled it westwards onto the bog on the slope downwards from the site. This structure appears to be later than the

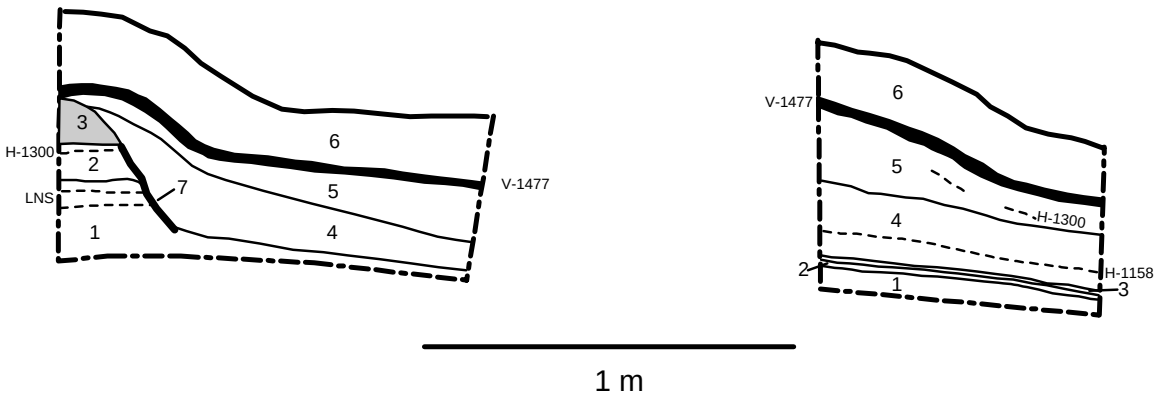


**Fig. 10. Sections from trenches 2 (right) and 3 (left) at Hallskot. Trench 3: 1: Natural. 2. Cultural layer w. H-1300 in situ. 3. Turf wall. 4. Turf debris. 5. Aeolian. 6. Top soil. Trench 2: 1. Natural. 2-4. Cultural layers. 5. Aeolian. 6. Top soil.**

other earthworks at this site and may be contemporary with the later ruins on top of the two mounds, although it may also be much more recent.

Hallskot is situated similarly to Þyrilskot and Máskot in that it is on the border between dry pastures, which will have been wooded at the time of settlement, and wetlands sloping down to Reykjadalsá. At Hallskot this is unlikely to have to do with a water source as the site is on the bank of a brook which is unlikely to run dry as it is the outlet of Lake Másvatn.

Three trenches were dug at Hallskot in 2010. Trench 1 is 10 m WSW of the SW corner of the more southerly ruin on top of the central mound. In this there were no unequivocal cultural layers, only the LNS without the two olive-green 9$^{th}$-10$^{th}$ century tephras – suggesting that they have been stripped off – and a 5-8 cm thick layer of light yellow organic silt between the upper black tephra and the V-1477. The organic silt may be indicative of wet conditions and may relate to home-field improvements. It is at any rate not ordinary aeolian soil.

Trench 2 is 1 m west of the SW corner of the more southerly ruin on top of the central mound, i.e. in the edge of the mound. Also here the olive-green tephras are missing from the LNS. Intriguingly there is a charcoal layer below the lowest black tephra ("c") in the sequence in the north side of the trench. This must be from before c.

500 AD and likely represents a natural fire. On top of the LNS there are two thin cultural layers (2) and (3), both inside 1 cm in thickness, differently brown organic silt with specks of H3 suggesting upcast. On top of this there is a thicker laminated cultural layer (4) with turf debris, ash and charcoal, interspersed with lenses of aeolian accumulation. About a third of the way up this layer the H-1158 tephra lies in situ. This layer has an indistinct border with the aeolian accumulation (5) above in which the H-1300 tephra is found. This suggests that occupation had started well before 1158 but had ceased well before 1300. Although this trench was only 1 m away from the structure visible on the surface no traces which could be associated with its use could be seen in the trench.

Trench 3 is in the northern side of the homefield boundary, SSW of Trench 2. Here the LNS with the 871±2 tephra (1) has been cut (7) on the inside of the wall, On top of this there is a cultural layer, turf debris with specks of H3 indicating upcast (2). This is sealed by a tephra which Magnús Sigurgeirsson has identified on the basis of microscopic analysis as H-1300. On top of this there is a turf wall (3) built of *strengur* with H-1300 embedded in it. The V-1477 tephra seals this and an aeolian accumulation (5) on top of turf collapse from the wall (4). These results do not chime with those from Trench 2 and would make Hallskot something of an anomaly, but they suggest that although some homefield improvement had taken place before 1300 the homefield boundary was built after that. It is possible that this issue would repay re-examination.

As it stands however the evidence seems to suggest that Hallskot was occupied at least from the 11$^{th}$ century to the 14$^{th}$, possibly with a hiatus in the 13$^{th}$ century.

**Fig. 11. Víðatóft from the air, looking south. Photo by Árni Einarsson.**

## *Víðatóft*

A second site on land belonging to the farm Víðar is by the SW-corner of Másvatn, some 2 k m south of Hallskot. This site is first mentioned in a mid-20th century place name registry where it is also reported that one informant had heard that the site had been called Einarsstaðir. This could conceivably be an echo of some proprietorial interest of the major farm Einarsstaðir in Reykjadalur in this area, but duplications of the names of major lowland farm on highland settlements is a recurring phenomenon – if a poorly understood one. The name by which the site is now commonly known, Víðatóft, is on the other hand with little doubt coined long after the site was abandoned and may signal assertions by the farm Víðar to ownership of this area.

Víðatóft was first surveyed in 2002 by Birna Lárusdóttir,[12] but in 1989 the ruins were noted in conjunction with the discovery of a human burial closer to the lake, just

[12] Birna Lárusdóttir 2002, *Fornleifakönnun. Vegarbætur á Mývatnsheiði*, p. 10.

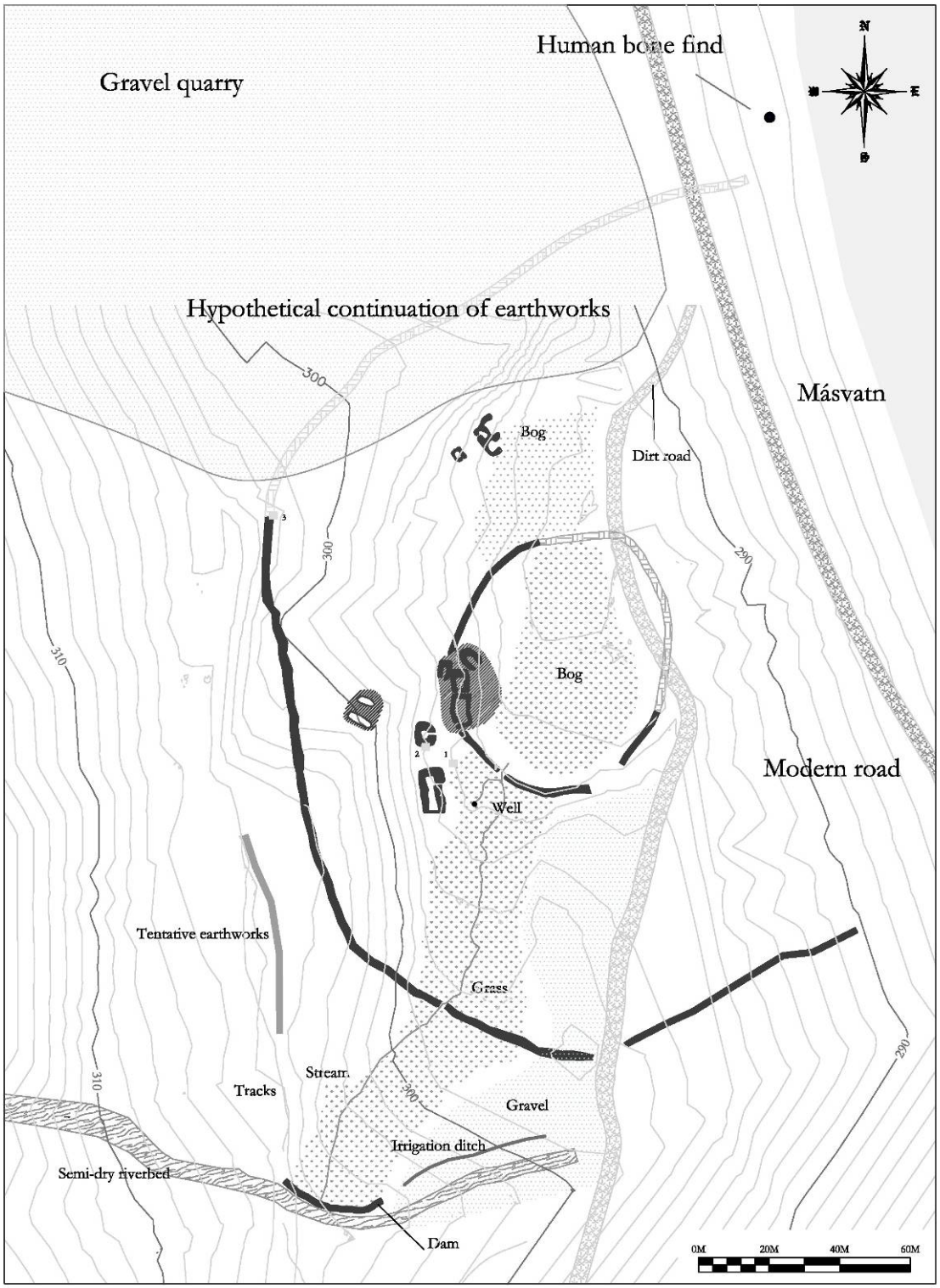


**Fig. 12. Víðatóft. Plan by Gísli Pálsson**

**Fig. 13. Trench 3 left of centre. Hall-like structure is a darker strip eto the right of it. Looking NE.**

outside the outer boundary belonging to the farm. The burial was aligned north-south and only traces of iron and wood might imply gravegoods.[13] A radiocarbon date of 430-650 AD (2σ)[14] suggests that it is very old although the high age no doubt needs to be seen in light of recent research on freshwater reservoir effects on radiocarbon dates from the Mývatn area.[15] This adult male was born in Iceland according to strontium isotope analyses.[16]

The site has been damaged, firstly by a track along its eastern side, secondly by the highway curving around the corner of Lake Másvatn and thirdly by a gravel quarry which has destroyed the northern side of the outer boundary. Nevertheless it seems that most of the site is still intact and a good idea can be had of its original extent.

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[13] Kristján Eldjárn 2000, *Kuml og haugfé úr heiðnum sið á Íslandi*, Reykjavík, p. 203-204.
[14] Hildur Gestsdóttir pers. comm.
[15] Ascough et al. 2010, 'Temporal and spatial variations in freshwater 14C reservoir effects: Lake Mývatn, Northern Iceland.' *Radiocarbon* 52, 1098-1112.
[16] Hildur Gestsdóttir & T. Douglas Price 2003, *The settlement of Iceland. A preliminary analysis of strontium isotopes in human remains*, FS202, Reykjavík p. 16.

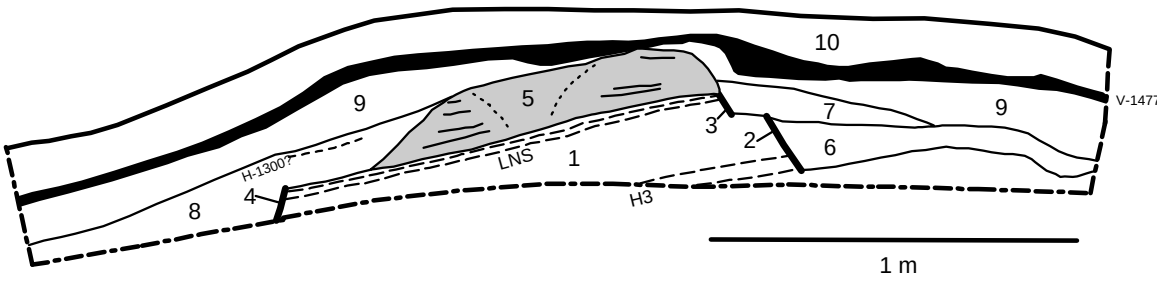


**Fig. 14. Trench 1. North facing section. 1. Natural. 2-4. Cuts. 5. Turf wall. 6. Upcast. 7-8. Turf debris. 9. Aeolian. 10. Top soil.**

The site consists of two more or less concentric enclosures. The inner one encloses an area less than 0,4 ha, but the outer one ca. 3,3 ha. There are hints of a third boundary on the west and south sides, but where this is most obviously a man-made feature it looks more like a dam across a waterway with an associated channel leading water away from the homefield. This makes sense because the inner boundary encloses what is now a very wet bog created by a brook draining into a depression. The damming of this brook upstream would have diverted most of the water downhill south of the site, draining the 20-30 m wide boggy channel which makes up a large proportion of the homefield. Both enclosures would have acted as further obstacles for water running down the channel. Although the bog is mostly fed water from upslope to the southwest there is also at least one spring in the bog, just south of the inner enclosure, ca. 7 m east of the hall-like structure. This may have served as the settlements water source.

There are no structures inside the inner enclosure except a cluster of small cells built on to the western side of the wall on a small rise. It is virtually the only dry spot within this smaller enclosure. The centre of the site is just a few metres further south, a small but deep structure with the characteristics of a SFB and south of that a very small hall-like building, only 10 m long, but with curved long walls and a doorway towards the northern end of the eastern long wall. A structure, possibly two rooms side by side, is on a small ledge in the hillside above this central cluster, and a collection of very small house-forms is at the foot of the same slope as it curves northeastwards around the bog, some 40 m north of the central cluster.

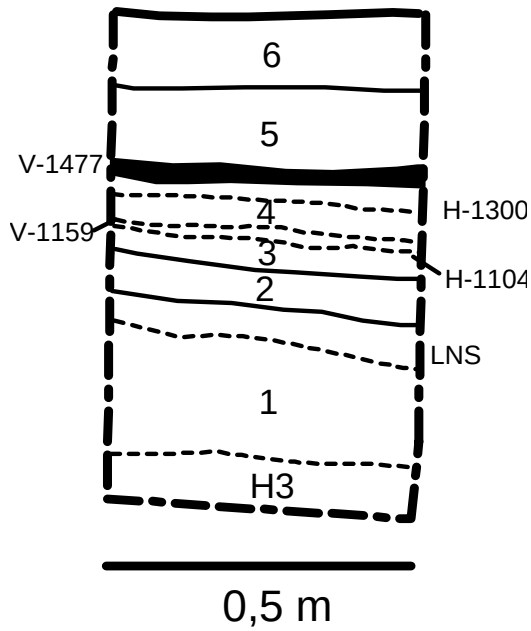


**Fig. 15. Trench 2. 1. Natural. 2. Cultural layer. 3-5. Aeolian. 6. Top soil.**

Trench 1 represents a cleaning of the section where the gravel quarry had cut through the outer enclosure at the northwestern end of the site. Here the LNS had been cut in at least two steps (2 and 4), while the turf wall (5) with two parallel rows of strengur turf had specks of H3 inbetween indicating that there was upcast in the soil where the turf was cut. The H-1300 may be in situ on top of the turf collapse (8) on the east side of the wall but the whole sequence is capped by a thick layer of V-1477.

Trench 2 is 2 m east of the doorway of the hall-like structure. Here the olive-green tephras of the LNS are missing, presumably stripped away, but above the black tephras (1) there is a 5-6 cm thick cultural layer (2), light brown organic silt with ash and charcoal. A thin layer of aeolian accumulation (3) separates the ccultural layer from the H-1104/H-1158 tephra which in turn is capped by the V-1159, H-1300 and V-1477 with no further sign of human activity above H-1104/H-1158.

Trench 3 was dug into the outside of the south wall of the sunken featured building north of the hall-like structure. Here a thick layer of upcast (2) is on top of the LNS (with the olive-green tephras missing). On top of this there is a layer of more compact turf (7) with the H-1300 on top, just below V-1477.

In Trench 2 there are 0,5-1 cm of aeolian accumulation between the white tephra H-1104/H-1158 and V-1159 suggesting that although the Hekla tephras could not be distinguished in the field it is more likely to be the earlier one, H-1104, as there would hardly have been time for such an accumulation in only one year. If this is true it can be suggested that this site was abandoned already by the mid- to late-11$^{th}$ century.

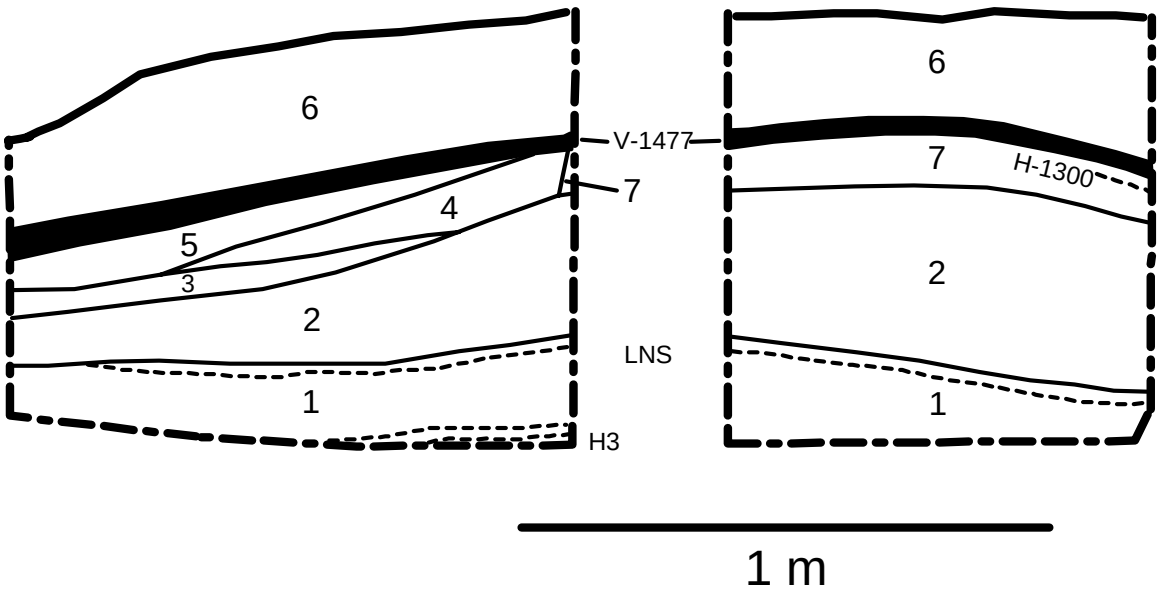


**Fig. 16. Trench 3. West (left) and north (right) sides of the trench. 1. Natural. 2. Upcast. 3. Cultural layer. 4. Turd debris. 5. Aeolian. 6. Top soil. 7. Turf.**

## *Beinisstaðir*

This site, across the river Laxá from Hofstaðir, was surveyed in 1996[17] and a small trench was dug there and a coring programme undertaken in 2007 (to which reports the reader is referred for descriptions of landscape context, structures and earlier research).[18] The coring failed to find any significant midden concentrations and the trench only revealed a building, probably a sunken feature, older than 1300.

In order to get a clearer idea about the occupation of this site another trench was dug here in 2010. This was placed 20 m due east of the entrance to the modern sheep house which sits on top of what presumably is the farm mound. The trench is some 3 m downslope and was placed so as to find the edge of the farm mound. This was successful in that ash and turf debris deposits were found between the V-871 and V~940 and between the latter and H-1300 when occupation seems to have been over. If these identifications are correct Beinisstaðir is the fifth site in Mývatnssveit with confirmed

[17] Orri Vésteinsson 1996, *Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahreppi* I. *Fornleifar á Hofstöðum, Helluvaði, Gautlöndum og í Hörgsdal*, FS022, Reykjavík, p. 30-31.
[18] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2008, *Archaeological investigations in Mývatnssveit 2007*, pp. 8-11.

**Fig. 17. The 2010 trench at Beinisstaðir, looking west, up-slope towards the ruin of the sheep house on top of the medieval farm mound.**

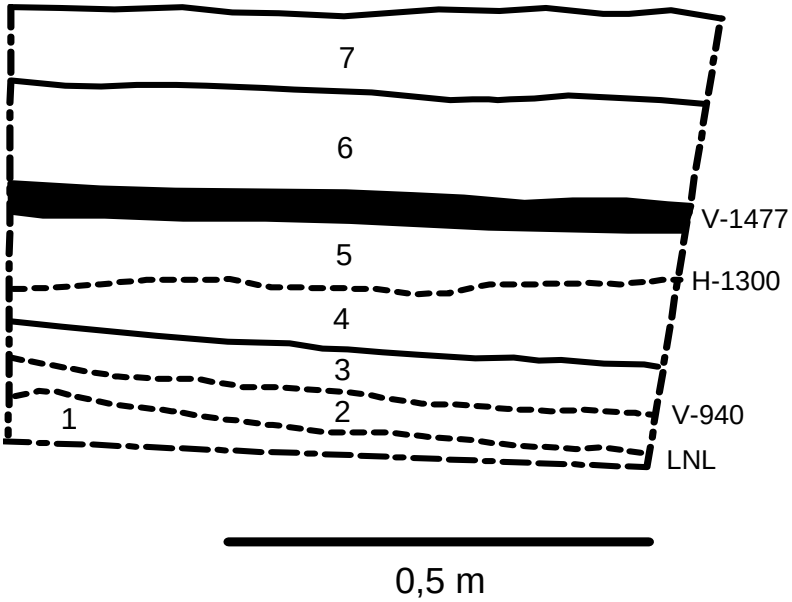


**Fig. 18. East facing section of trench in Beinisstaðir. 1. Natural. 2-4. Cultural layers. 5-6. Aeolian. 7. top soil.**

occupation before ~940. The trench also suggests that occupation was continuous, or at least without lengthy hiatuses, down to 1300, when farming ceased. This suggests that Beinisstaðir has a comparable time-frame to Þorleifsstaðir and was contemporary to the

occupation of Steinbogi which is only a kilometre further south, making this part of the Laxá valley very densely settled indeed.

### *Girðingar*

In 2007 a site called Girðingar, on land belonging to Gautlönd, was surveyed for this first time.[19] The name is first recorded in a mid-20th century place name inventory but in the 2007 report it was speculated that this might be the site of the abandoned farm Bjarnastaðir mentioned in 1712, and that the 19th century new farm of the same name had just borrowed the name, not the site of the earlier farm. Girðingar is at any rate not likely to be the original name of this settlement.

The structures at Girðingar were described in the previous report and more careful field survey in 2010 did not reveal any further structures or features to this site. The sub-rhomboidal enclosure is little less than 1,1 ha in size and thus on a par with the home-field at Hallskot.

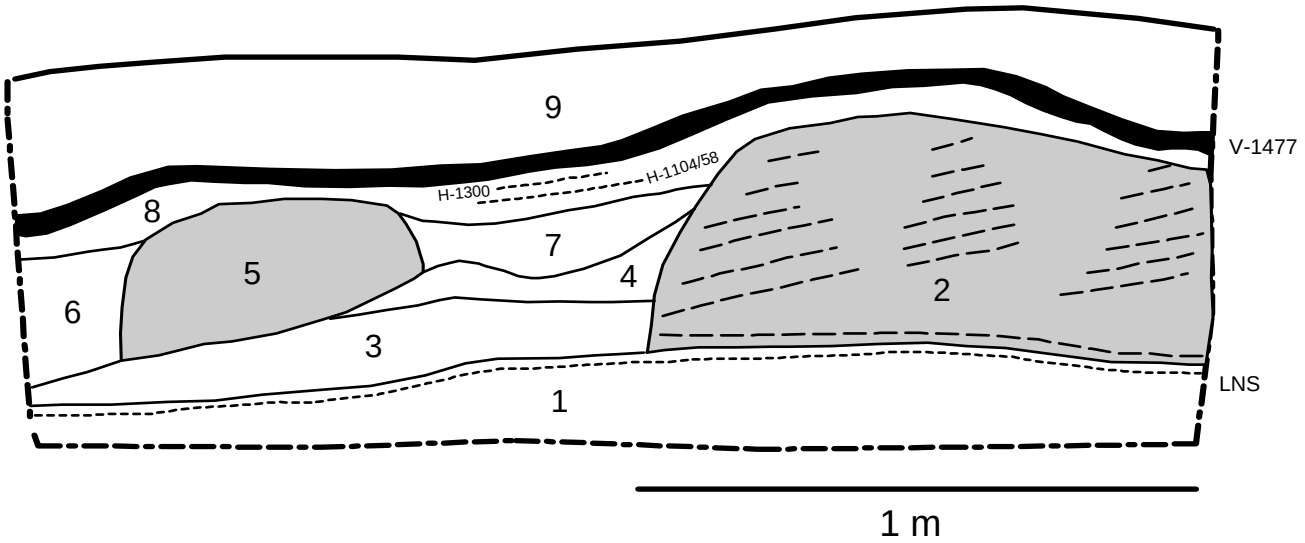


**Fig. 19. North facing section of trench at Girðingar. 1. Natural. 2. Turf wall. 3. Cultural layer. 4. Turf debris. 5. Turf wall. 6-7. Turf debris. 8. Aeolian. 9. Top soil.**

A single trench was dug into the outside of the eastern long wall of the hall, just north of what looks like a porch (forskáli). In fact it seems to nip the north wall of the porch. In this trench the whole LNS is preserved with the V~940 on top. Directly on this

[19] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2008, *Archaeological investigations in Mývatnssveit 2007*, pp. 53-54

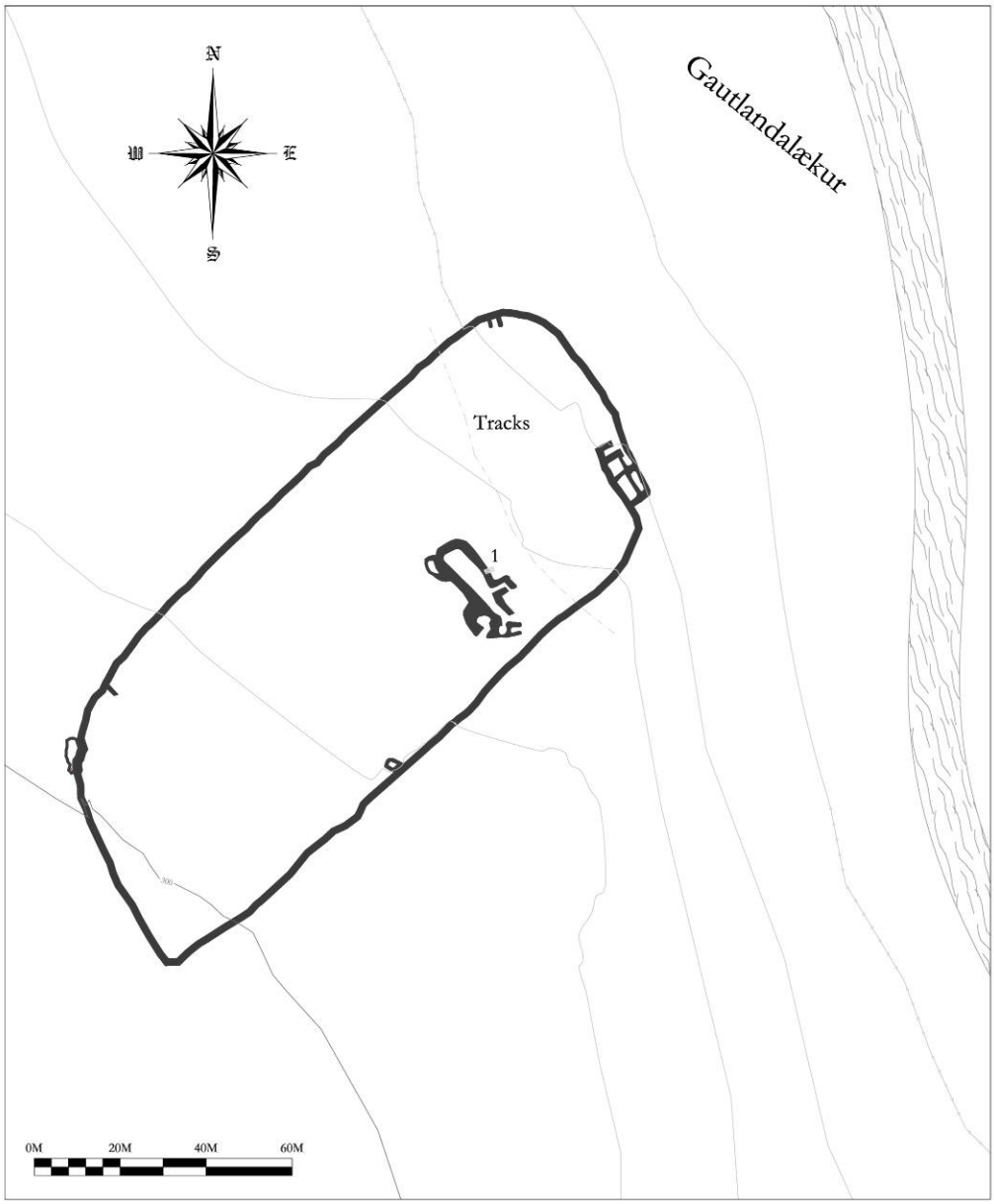


**Fig. 20. Girðingar. Plan by Gísli Pálsson.**

there is a thin (<0,5 cm) cultural layer of organic silt below a turf wall (2). This has continuous *strengur* turve at the bottom with the V~940 reversed, but smaller stacks of *strengur* turves are on top of this with lenses of upcast (specks of H3) in the turves, suggesting that this wall was not the first building activity on this site. Abutting the wall on the outside are cultural layers; (3) which is laminated with turf debris, upcast and ash, while (4) is turf debris mixed with ash. On top of this there is another turf wall (5), with

**Fig. 21. Trench at Girðingar, looking southwest.**

the LNS (including V~940) embedded in the turves. This later wall is presumably the northern side of the porch which has then clearly been added later to the hall proper. Identical turf debris layers (6) and (7) seem to represent the collapse of this structure and they are capped by Aeolian accumulation (8) with minor turf debris inclusions. This layer has the H-1104/H-1158 tephra in situ, below the H-1300 and V-1477.

At Girðingar therefore a tight timeframe for the hall can be suggested, between ~940 and the mid- to late 11th century. Although the hall is clearly built after the mid 10th century the traces of upcast in the turves suggest the possibility that yet earlier structures may be found at this site.

## *Mýnesás*

Despite several visits by archaeologists, by Brynjúlfur Jónsson in 1901, Kristján Eldjárn in the late 1940s or early 1950s[20] and Orri Vésteinsson in 1998, and being a scheduled

[20] Finnbogi Stefánsson pers. comm. 30 June 2010.

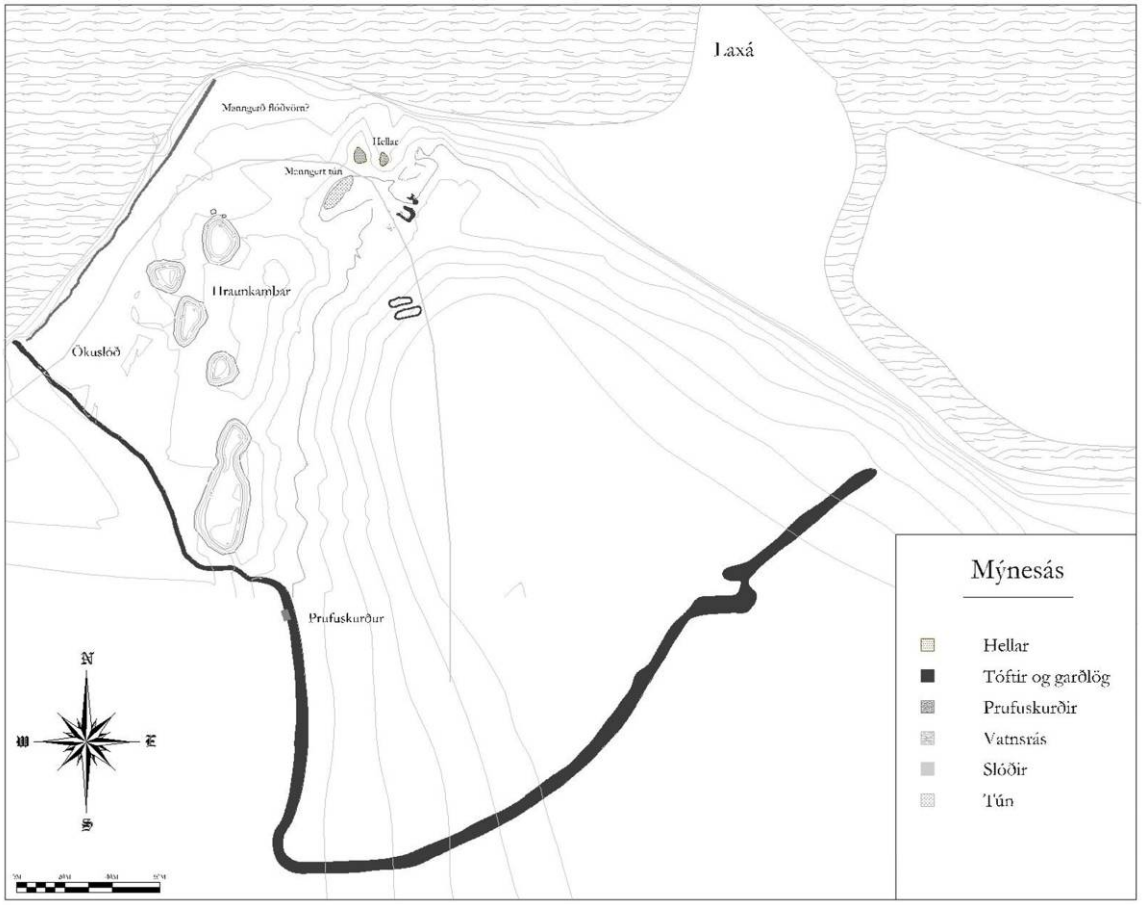


**Fig. 22. Mýnesás. Plan by Gísli Pálsson. Note that the riverbank is schematic.**

monument, the principal features of this site were only revealed in 2007 – and then only incompletely.[21]

This site is on land belonging to Arnarvatn, on the south bank of the southernmost channel of River Laxá where it drains from Lake Mývatn but fed mainly by water from River Kráká which drains into this channel just east of the site. It is at the northern end of a low ridge, Mýnesás (from which the site takes its name), now dry pasture but presumably covered in wood at the time of settlement. The banks of Laxá are made of the Laxá lava which spreads over the flatlands west of Mýnesás. In contrast to the present day vegetation of the ridge the lava along the river bank is covered in thick grass, benefiting from the fertilization of billions of flies which live and die around the river course. Mýnesás is one of three early settlements around the Laxá drainage, the other

[21] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2008, *Archaeological investigations in Mývatnssveit 2007*, pp.55-56.

**Fig. 23. Two elongated depressions in the northern tip of Mýnesás (in the foreground), looking west.**

being Selhagi, where excavations took place in 2001,[22] and við Kleifarhólma, discussed below. Selhagi was abandoned before 1300 and it has been speculated that these three sites may represent either a particularly early stage of settlement in the Mývatn region or some specialised utilisation of this biomass-rich area. The three sites have in common direct access to a spot unsurpassed in Iceland in terms of richness of freshwater fish and birdlife. But they also share a localisation on lava, which despite the fertilization effects of the flies, is not all that desirable for cultivation or farming in general. Of the three sites Mýnesás would seem to have had the greatest farming potential, with its location on the ridge-end where there was potential for cultivating hay-fields and with a short distance to potential wet meadows around Smiðjutjörn 500 m to the south.

The site as such does not have a name. Rather Mýnesás is a reference to the ridge on which it is located. Mýnesás in turn takes its name from Mýnes, a small peninsula extending northwards from the ridge, across the direction of the flow of Laxá. Brynjúlfur

[22] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2002, *Archaeological investigations at Sveigakot 2001. With reports on preliminary investigations at Hrísheimar, Selhagi and Ytri Tunga*, FS173, Reykjavík, pp. 77-106.

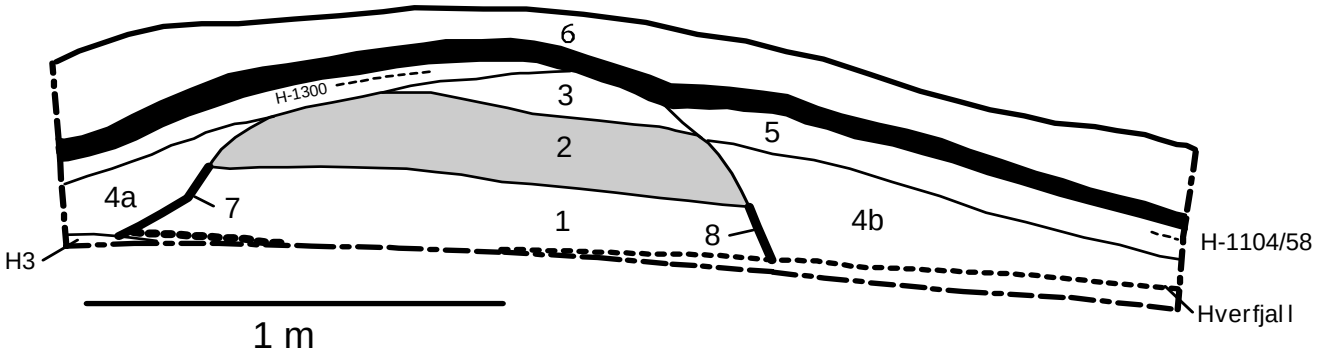


**Fig. 24. North facing section of trench at Mýnesás. 1. Natural with LNS incl. V~940. 2. Turf wall. 3. Turf (repair?). 4. Turf debris and Aeolian. 5. Aeolian. 6. Top soil.**

Jónsson suggested that this was the site of Hraunsás, a minor farm in this part of Mývatnssveit mentioned in Reykdæla saga.[23] Hraunsás would be an apt name for this place but the suggestion is unprovable. If true it would only suggest that in the 13th century, when the saga was written, people knew of this site as a probable saga-age farm.

The site is enclosed on the south-eastern and south-western sides by a turf wall, stretching from the bank of Kráká in the east, in a 300 m long curve across the ridge to the southwest and then turning 90° to the north, first following the base of the ridge for some 100 m, but then turning west onto the lava closing the remaining 150 m to the bank of Laxá with several bends. The area thus enclosed is ca. 6,5 ha, half of which is on the ridge and half of which is lava. At the very northern tip of the ridge, a few metres south of the lava edge are two ruins, appearing as elongated depressions. One is c. 12x6 m (inside measurements) and the other, adjacent to the north, is 8 x 6 m (also inside measurements). These seem the likeliest candidates for habitation structures at this site, but the lava to the north of them is uncharacteristically grassy and has several knolls which may contain structural remains. In addition there is a cave, Ásendahellir, known as a shelter for sheep, which is likely to have been utilised when the site was occupied.

A trench was dug through the homefield enclosure on its western side, X m south of where it turns west onto the lava field. Here the LNS – including the V~940 – has been cut (7 and 8) on either side of a turf wall (2) with strengur turves with the Hverfjall

[23] Brynjúlfur Jónsson 1901, 'Rannsóknir á Norðurlandi sumarið 1900.' *Árbók hins íslenzka fornleifafélags 1901*, pp. 7-27, here p. 11. *Íslensk fornrit* X, p. 165, 168 – on the map included at the back of this edition Hraunsás is marked on the site of Mýnesás..

tephra embedded. On top of the wall there is a separate layer of turf (3) which may represent a repair, but to either side are layers of turf collapse mixed with slope wash and increasingly aeolian towards its upper part (4a and b). This is sealed by an unmixed aeolian accumulation (5) with the H-1104/H-1158 tephra in situ on the western side and the H-1300 in situ on the eastern, on top of the wall. This in turn is sealed by the V-1477.

This wall is built after V~940 but well before 1104/1158.

### *við Kleifarhólma*

A ruin on the west bank of river Laxá was shown to the author by Ásmundur Jónsson from Hofstaðir in 2007. It was surveyed then and described as 18x13 m divided in three rooms, two of which had entrances to the east (facing the river).[24]

This ruin has no known name; it is not mentioned in the place-name survey of Geirastaðir on which property it is (for which reason it was not surveyed with the rest of the farm in 1998) and no traditions survive about its function. It is referred to here as 'við Kleifarhólma' as this is the way it is identified by the most knowledgeable locals, Ásmundur Jónsson and Finnbogi Stefánsson. Kleifarhólmi is a small island in Laxá, but the Kleif from which it is named refers to the narrowing of the rivercourse where lavablocks have piled up on both sides. The name Kleifarnes is mentioned in the place name inventory of Arnarvatn (south of the river) referring to the grassland on the riverbank east of the ruin, but this name is not used on the northern side.

At við Kleifarhólma there is a natural meadow along the riverbank, c. 70 m wide and 220 m long, equalling 1,5 hectares. It could have supported a milch-cow or two but there is more hay-making potential along the riverbank further north and on the opposing side in the island Geldingaey. It is possible that some anthropogenic hayfield development has taken place on the lava ridge on which the ruin sits, but this is limited to the area immediately around the ruin.

Further observations of the ruin at við Kleifarhólma suggest that the room in the northwestern corner may be built on top of the earlier and larger ruin. It has no entrance and is up to a metre higher than the other rooms. It may conceal a western part of the

[24] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2008, *Archaeological investigations in Mývatnssveit 2007*, pp. 62-63.

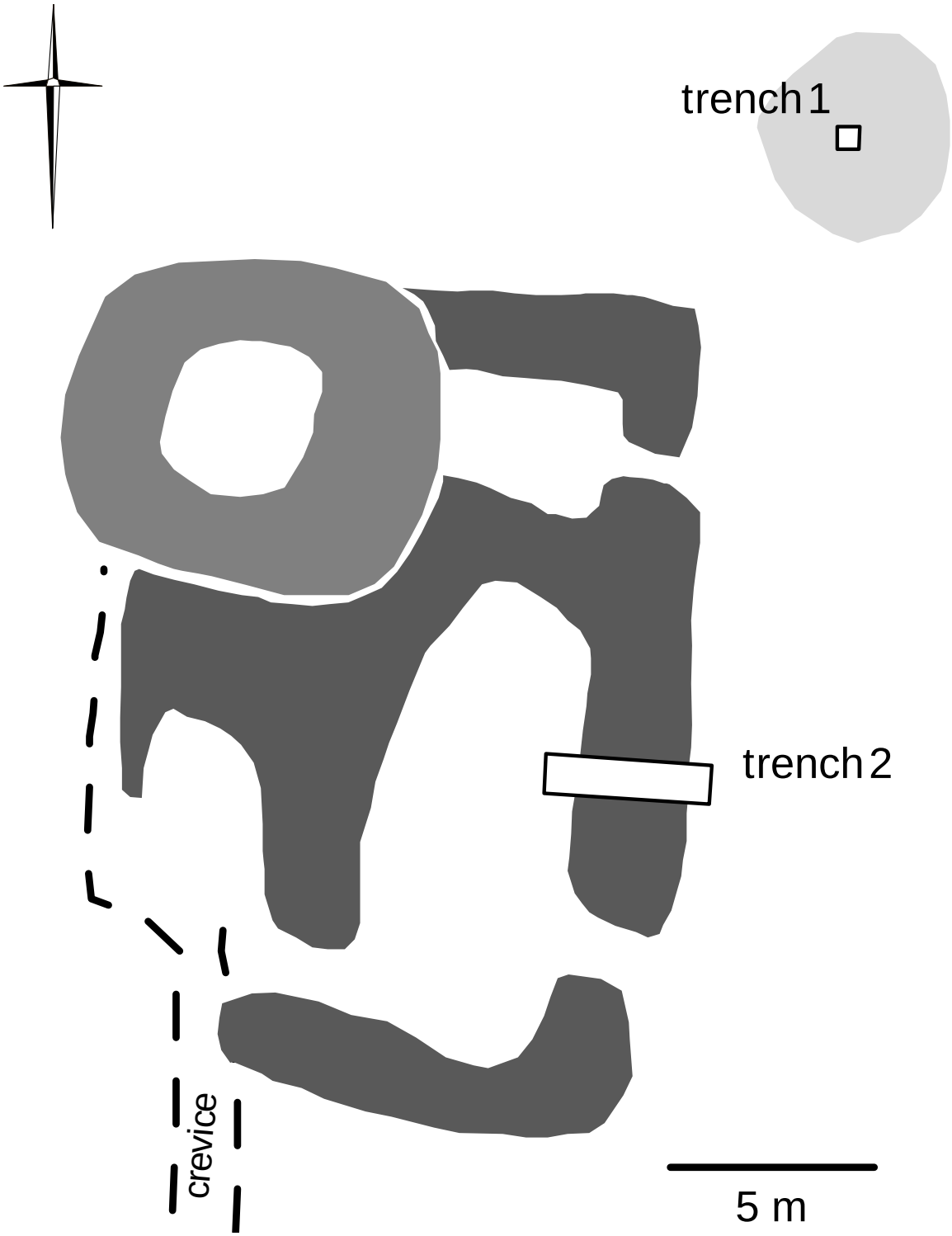


**Fig. 25. Plan of the ruins at við Kleifarhólma showing the approximate location of the trenches. Not based on accurate measurements.**

more northerly of the two rooms in the eastern part of the ruin. The other room, to the south may also have another door to the west and it is possible that it opens into another

**Fig. 26. The ruin at við Kleifarhólma, looking west. The spoil-heap from Trench 2 is the dark spot left of centre. Note the spread of buttercups on the slope in front of the ruin, possibly denoting midden deposits.**

back-room. Here however there is a partially overgrown crevice which may make this improbable, although other parts of this structure are clearly built on top of it.

6 m NNE of the northeastern corner of the ruin there is a midden on the edge of the same lava bank as the structure sits on. It is sub-circular, 5x5 m in extent. Trench 1, a test pit close to the centre revealed midden layers between the V~940 and V-1477, with a particularly rich layer, 12 cm thick, 9 cm above the V~940 and 17 cm below the V-1477. This produced a small collection of well preserved animal bone (from a test pit not more than 30x20 cm) including cattle, sheep and a cod cleithrum. A thin cultural layer of organic silt is between the V~940 tephra and the midden layer. Apart from this discrete midden a spread of buttercups on the slope in front of the structure indicates that midden material may have been dumped over the edge along the whole 30+ m eastern side of the site.

Trench 2, was 4,6 x 0,8 m, dug through the eastern wall of the larger, more southerly room of the structure. This revealed a turf wall (2), built of *strengur* with the

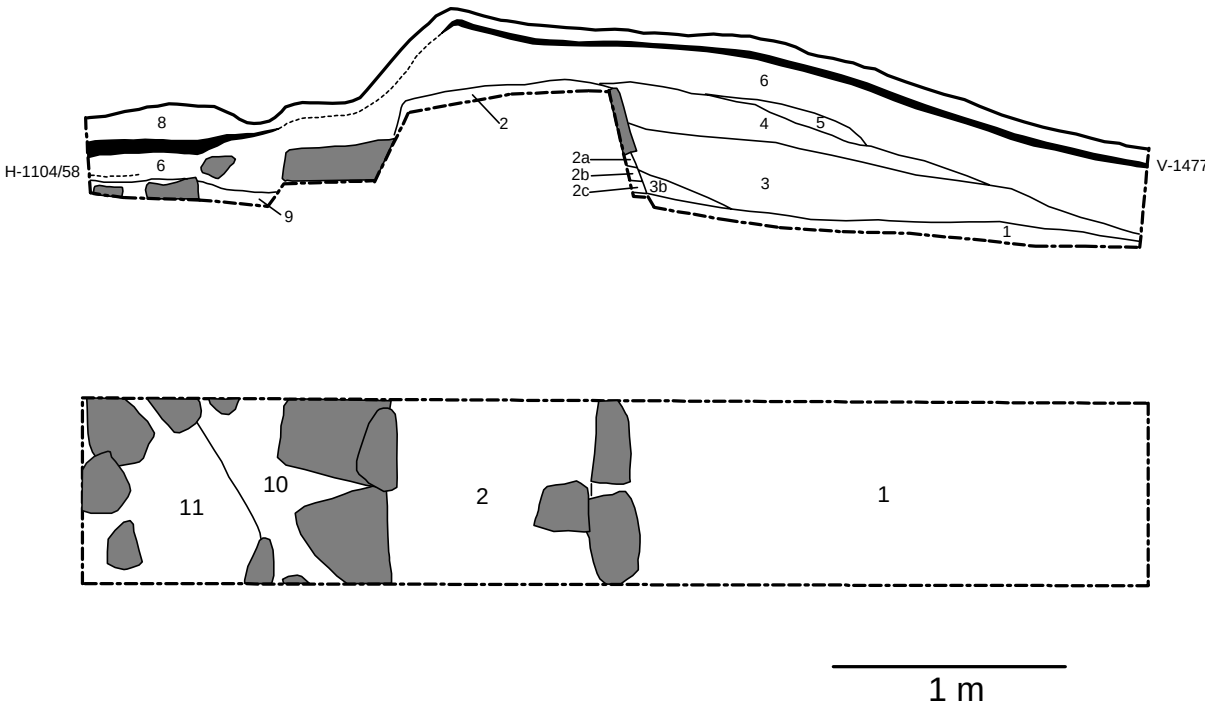


**Fig. 27. Section and plan of trench 2 at við Kleifarhólma. 1. Natural. 2. Turf wall (a and c: strengur turf. b: turf debris with ash and charcoal). 3. Cultural layer (3b: material identical to 2b). 4. Turf debris with charcoal lense. 5. Lump of turf. 6. Aeolian. 7. V-1477. 8. Top soil. 9. Turf debris. 10. Floor. 11. Fatty organic layer on top of floor.**

LNS and cultural layers – ash and charcoal – in the turves, built on the LNS with the V~940 on top. The wall, which is about 1 m in width, has what appears to be secondary stone facing both on the outside and the inside. On the outside ash and organic rich layers, finely laminated (3), have accumulated up against the wall to a thickness of 30 cm but on top of this there is more regular turf collapse (4) with some ash and charcoal inclusions, i.a. a charcoal patch and a couple of well preserved animal bones towards the bottom as well as a single lump of turf (5) on top. The ash and organic accumulation is not ordinary midden and it is not apparent what it represents. On the inside there are large flat lava slabs next to the wall. They may be collapsed from it but they may also be supports for wall posts or a floor beam. An earthen floor, hard-packed and fatty but with minimal charcoal content (10), extends upto 1 m from the wall but it is covered by a fatty organic layer (11), similar to layers observed in abandonment levels of buildings in Sveigakot and elsewhere. 1,4 m from the wall there are flat lava stones which may be a part of the floor. The floor layer is thin, 0,5-1,5 cm and sits directly on top of the bedrock which here is the Laxá lava. The floor and the fatty organic layer are covered by turf

debris (9) which in turn is sealed by aeolian accumulation (6) below the V-1477. Towards the base of (6), inside the ruin, the H-1104/H-1158 is in situ, 3 cm above layer (9)

The accumulation of cultural layers on the outside of this building may relate to some activity within or it may be the result of intentional soil formation. The trench did not give clear indications abbout the function of the room. It may be a habitation, but it could also be an animal stall, e.g. if the stones on the floor are the remains of a central paving.

It seems clear however that this site is a farm. The midden indicates this strongly as does the presence both of cattle and cod. This farm was in operation between ~940 and 1104/1158, probably the earlier part of that period and while the midden no doubt relates to the structure the presence of earlier cultural layers within the turf from which it is built, suggests that it is not the earliest phase of occupation at this site.

## *Note on a boundary wall in Heiðarsporðslaut*

90 m southwest of the ruin at við Kleifarhólma there is a possible dyke, some 15 m long closing a gap between a crevice and a lava hill. This could indicate the southern limit of an intended homefield, i.e. if it really is a dyke and if it really did continue on the eastern side of the hill to close the gap between it and the river.

An unequivocal dyke, however, encloses a much larger area around the site and can be plausibly associated with it. A section survives 900 m west of the ruin, close to the junction of the main road and the drive to Hofstaðir. This has a northeasterly direction and can be traced on old areal photographs taken before the fields were made east of the road.[25] Another 290 m long section survives in the lava field NNW of the site but it is not clear where exactly it joined River Laxá, althoug the general area can be surmised from the direction of the surviving parts. This dyke enlcosed an area of at least 35 ha, at least 12 of which are lava field. The western limit of the area enclosed by this dyke is unclear. There are no fields in this area and other development has been limited

[25] This structure (SÞ-214:055) is on land belonging to Hofstaðir and was surveyed in 1996 – Orri Vésteinsson 1996, *Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahreppi* I, p. 88.

**Fig. 28. The location of the two boundaries (unbroken lines) and the possible connection between them (broken line). Also indicated is the course of the brook Pollalækur giving shape to the hypothesis about the land belonging to the property of við Kleifarhólma mentioned in the main text.**

so if there had been a dyke with a southerly or southwesterly direction its remains would be likely to have survived. The fact that they do not may indicate that the dyke really ended where it does towards the southwest and that the brook by which it ends (Pollalækur) defines the limit of the farm's home-pastures (if this is what the function of the dyke was). If this is so another 50 ha or so of useful meadow and pasture would be added to við Kleifarhólma's land, creating a banana-shaped property in what is now the southeastern corner of the Hofstaðir property and a slice of the southern extremety of the Geirastaðir property.

# Mapping of three medieval sites

## *Selholt*

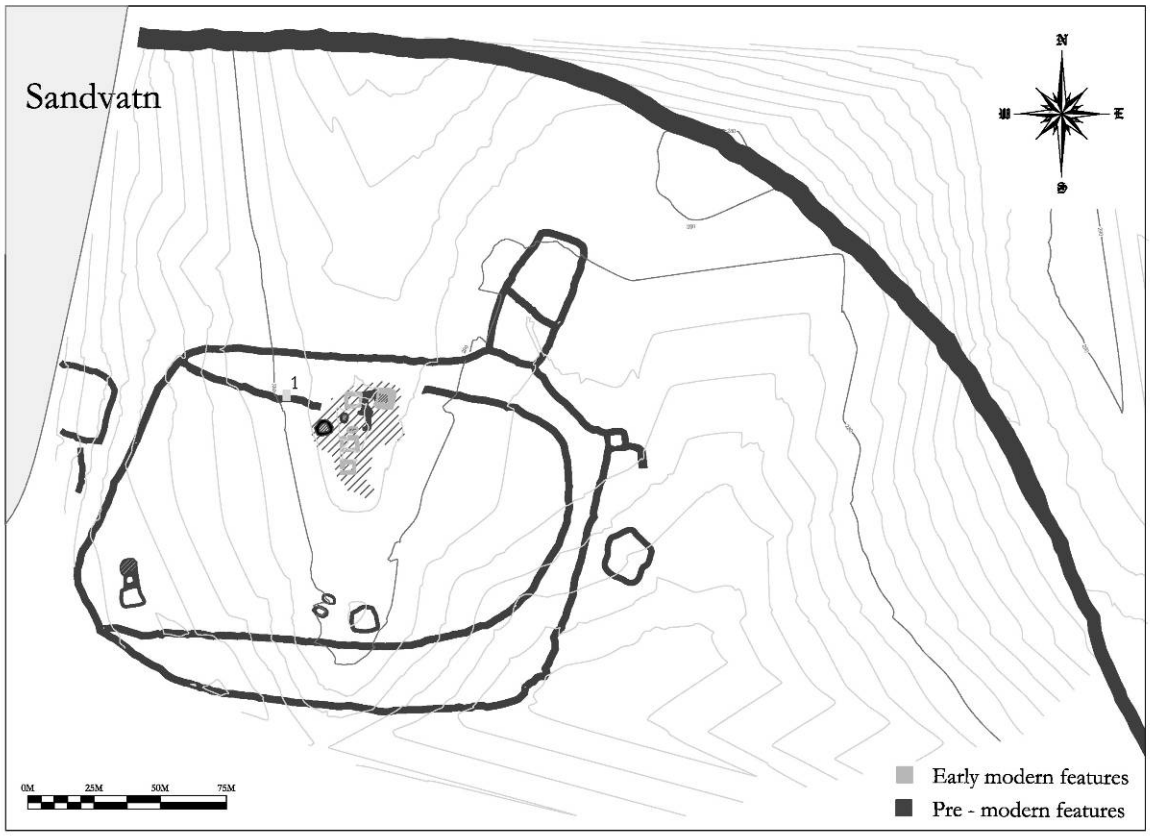


**Fig. 29. Selholt. The dark stripe in the upper and right side of the map is an earthwork which continues eastward for more than 800 m (SÞ-209:082). The number '1' indicates the location of the 2007 test trench.**

*Þorleifsstaðir*

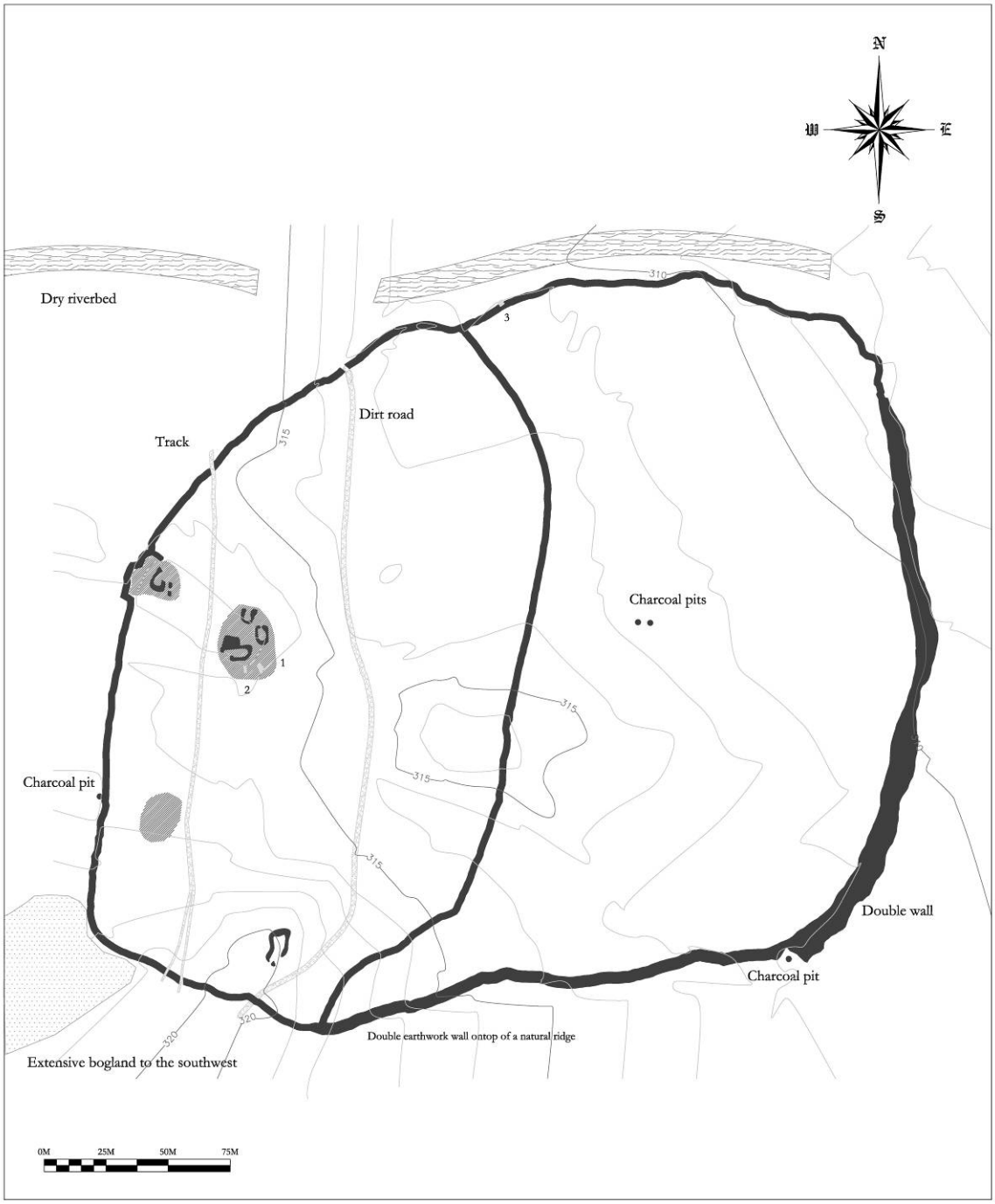


**Fig. 30. Þorleifsstaðir. The numbers (1, 2 and 3) indicate the locations of the 2007 test trenches.**

*Litlu Gautlönd*

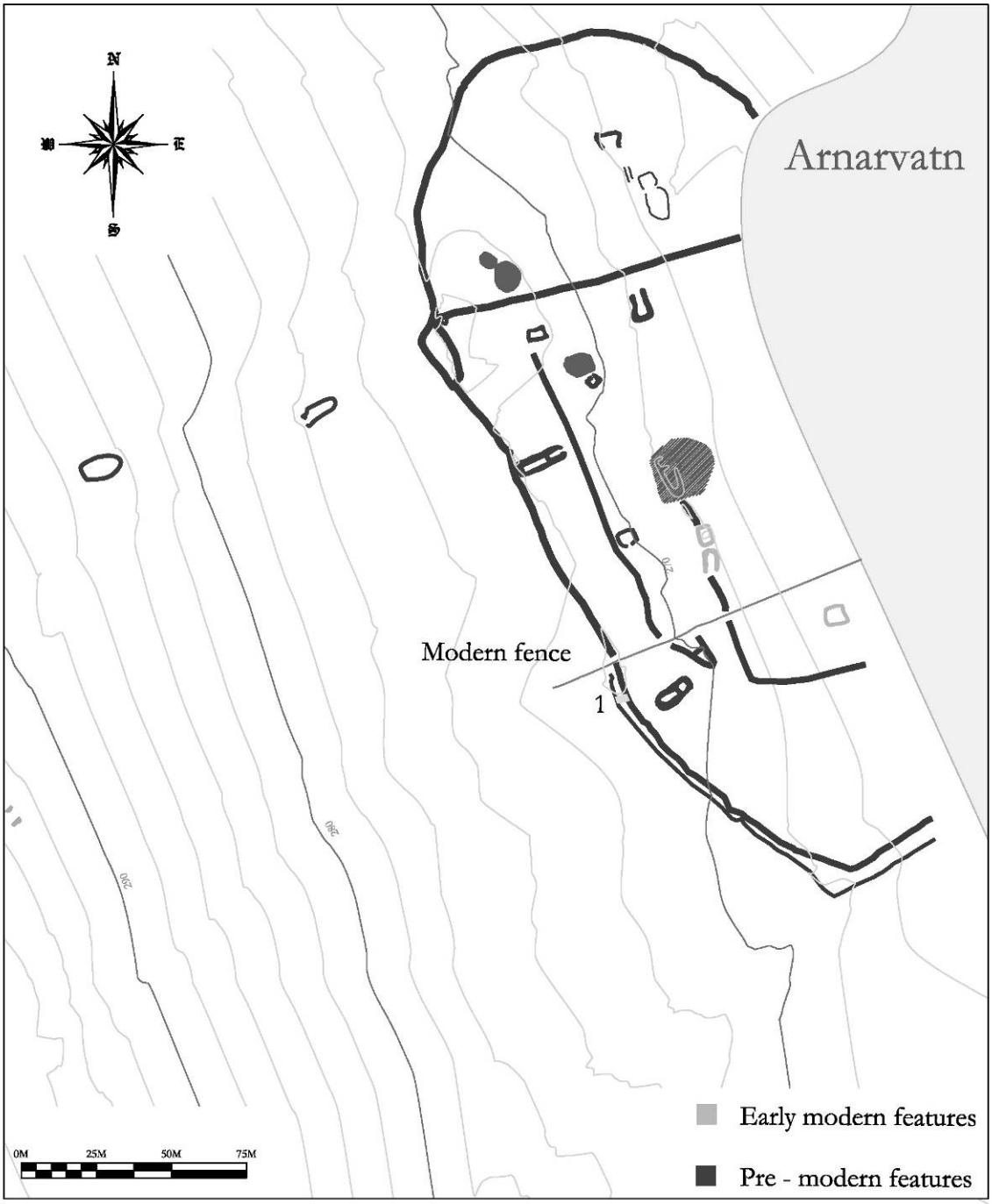


**Fig. 31. Litlu Gautlönd. The figure '1' indicates the location of the 2007 test trench.**

Orri Vésteinsson

# *Investigations at four shieling sites*

The research lead by Professor Ian A. Simpson of Stirling University into the grazing impacts of shielings in NE-Iceland prompted the trenching of four such sites in Mývatnssveit in 2010. The grazing impact studies will be reported separately but here a brief summary of the fieldwork will be presented, to provide context for the tephra analyses reported by Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson below and for the assessment of the significance of these sites for shieling studies in general and the discussion on settlement patterns and their development in the NE in particular.

All four sites were selected because they have clearly visible ruins and are known to have been used in early modern times. They are all associated with extensive pastures in wet and dry grassland, and represent only one of two distinct groups of shielings in Mývatnssveit, the other being shielings in lava fields, often with much more limited survival of structures.

## *Arnarvatnssel*

Arnarvatnssel is on land belonging to Helluvað, 2,4 km south of Másvatn, on the opposite (southeastern) side of the bog Kæfumýri to Víðatóft (above) on the northwestern side.

Arnarvatnssel was used as a shieling until shortly after 1890. It is also known as Ytrasel, contrasting with Syðrasel, a shieling site ca. 1 km further south also on the property of Helluvað. The name Arnarvatnssel implies that it was used from the farm Arnarvatn, which is Helluvað's neighbour to the east, but in 1712 Arnarvatn rented land in Hörgsdalur for its shieling[26] so the permanence of this arrangement is uncertain.

Unlike the other shieling sites Arnarvatnssel has a homefield enclosure and this is probably the reason it is identified as an early farm site in the mid-20th century place-name inventory of Helluvað. Local antiquarian Jón Sigurgeirsson visited the site and may have dug a test-pit there, probably in the late 1970s. A sketch map by him is dated to

[26] *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar* XI, 227.

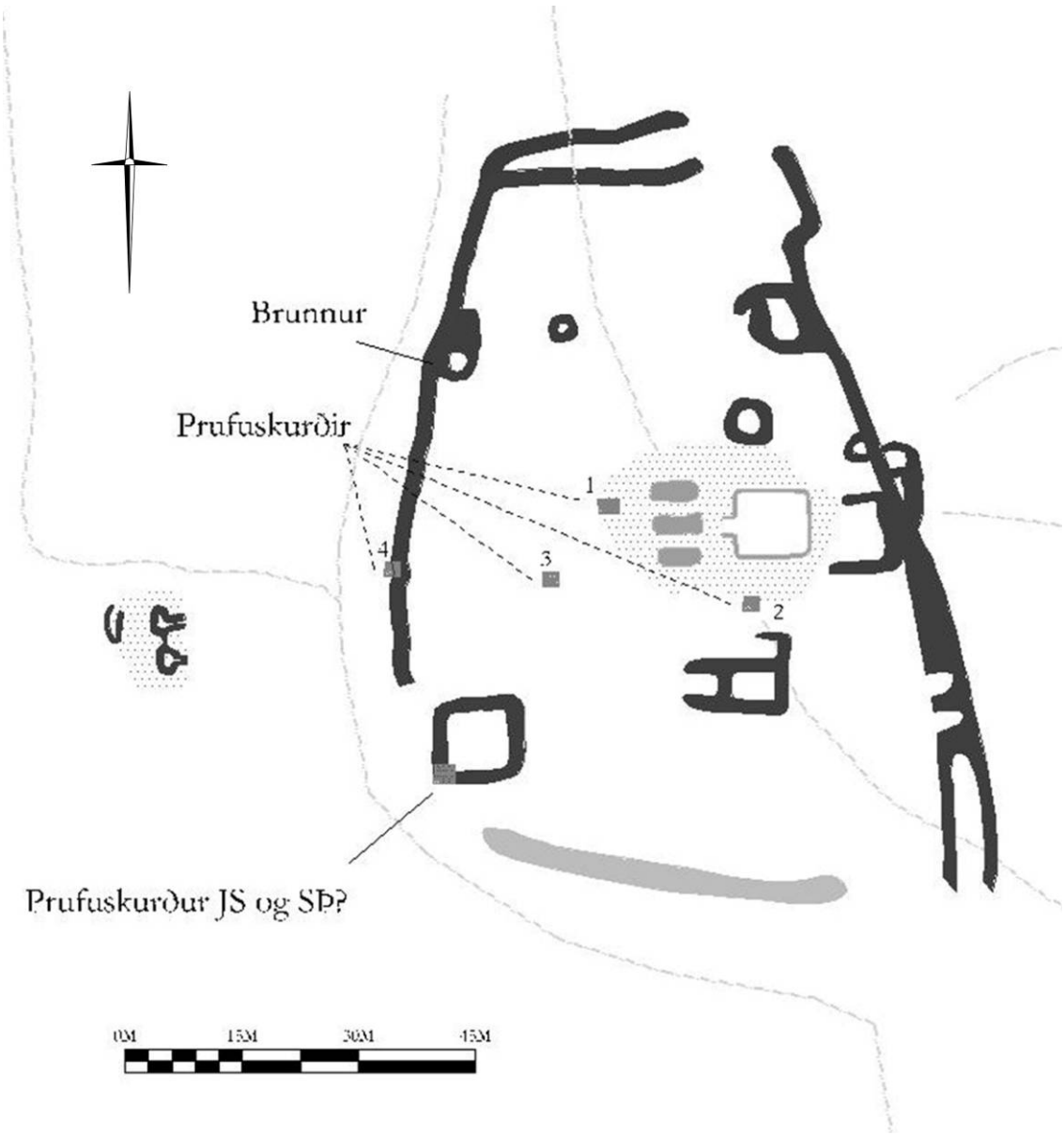


**Fig. 32. Arnarvatnssel. Plan by Gísli Pálsson. 'Prufuskurðir' = test trenches. The numbers refer to the trenches dug in 2010 but 'JS og SÞ?' is an earlier trench, possibly dug by Jón Sigurgeirsson and Sigurður Þórarinsson around 1980.**

c. 1980. In his description of the site he mentions that geologist Sigurður Þórarinsson had obtained a radiocarbon determination with the result c. 900 AD from one of the early farm sites on the heath, but it is unclear whether this refers to this site. It may be a reference to the dating of a site identified as Holt, in Laxárdalur some 7 kms further north, reported by Þórarinsson in 1977.[27]

[27] Sigurður Þórarinsson 1977, 'Gjóskulög og gamlar rústir. Brot úr íslenzkri byggðasögu.'

**Fig. 33. Arnarvatnssel, looking WSW. The mound with recent ruins on top dominates the sound but close inspection of the photograph will reveal numerous features around it.**

The site is enclosed by a double boundary, with only 1-3 m between the walls. In parts only one wall is visible (e.g. the south side) and even that is not completely continuous. The enclosed area is little less than 0,5 ha which makes it doubtful if this was ever a fully fledged farm. Rather the size indicates that this site belongs with the likes of Þyrilskot.. The site is dominated by a large mound with recent shieling ruins on top but this is surrounded by earlier structures, some built on to the enclosure wall. Only one ruin is outside the enclosure, 30 m to the west.[28]

Four trenches were dug at Arnarvatnssel in 2010. Trench 1 is at the western edge of the shieling mound, 14 m west of the entrance to the most recent ruin. In this no historic tephras were to be seen in situ, only a mixed layer at a depth of 51-73 cm made of upcast and turf-debris including the LNS. Below this was H3 in situ although the top

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*Árbók hins íslenzka fornleifafélags 1976*, pp. 5-38, here p. 26.

[28] A more detailed description in Orri Vésteinsson 1996, *Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahreppi* I, pp. 38-39.

of it may have been dug into. Trench 2 was at the southern edge of the same mound, 9 m south of the entrance to the most recent ruin. This had no in situ tephras either. At 11-16 cms there was a layer of dark-grey ash with charcoal flecks, below that a layer of upcast with traces of turf debris and some charcoal, and at 24-29 cms an accumulation of aeolian with traces of turf debris and some charcoal. Below this was undisturbed with H3 at -35 cm. Trench 3 was 8m southwest of Trench 1, 14 m east of the enclosure at Trench 4. Here there are traces of charcoal in the topsoil down to 12 cm where there is a black tephra, possibly V-1717. Below that there are 10 cm of turf debris above another black tephra, up to 1 cm thick in places but not quite continuous. This may be V-1477. Below that there is more turf debris mixed with upcast, down to 31 cm. Below that is undisturbed with H3 at -39 cm.

Trench 4 was dug into the western side of the western boundary wall. As in the other trenches the original topsoil had been stripped down to H3 and in parts of the trench this tephra (2) was churned by human action. Above this were thin layers of silt mixed with ash (3 and 4) and on top of those a thicker accumulation of upcast with ash (5). This had been used as a core for a wall visible in the south side of the trench, but in the north side (the recorded section) it had been levelled before the building a later wall (8). It seems therefore to represent the first generation of the enclosure. The second generation is represented by a turf wall (6), less than 0,5 further west than the original one. This is built of strengur turf with the LNS embedded. A layer of turf collapse (7) post-dates this wall but has been cut to level for a new wall (8) built on top of the initial one (5). This third generation wall is also built of strengur. On top of this is a layer of upcast (9) and on top of that another layer of turf (10), more collapsed than the lower section but probably strengur also. It is possible that these three layers represent one wall but it is also possible that each one represents a separate repair/rebuilding event. Above the turf walls there is a layer of aeolian (11) with no traces of human activity. This is capped by the V-1477 but above that the aeolian accumulation includes some turf debris, both below and above a black tephra which may be V-1717 in situ (unconfirmed).

Despite digging four trenches an unequivocal picture of the length and continuity of use of this site could not be established. It is clear that the site was occupied long before 1477, and three to five generations of turf wall before that date suggest that this

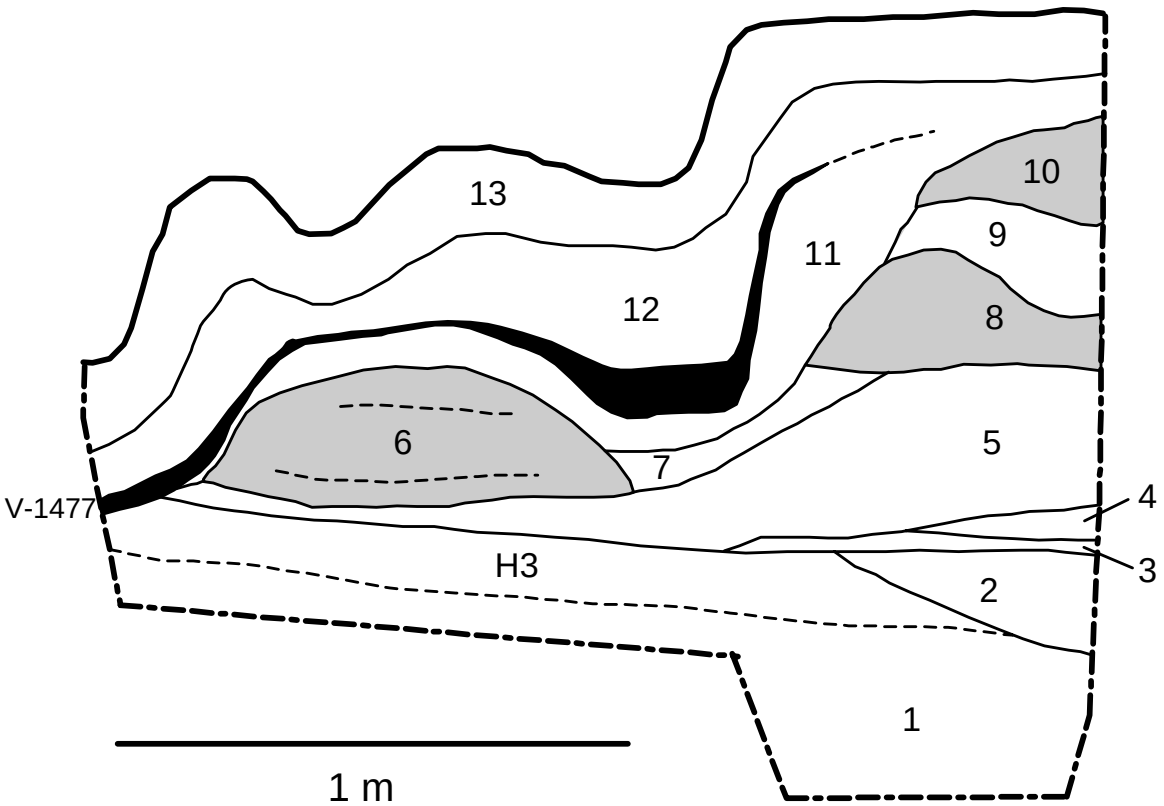


**Fig. 34. South facing section of Trench 4 at Arnarvatnssel. 1. Natural with H3 on top. 2. H3 churned by cutting. 3-4. Silt with ash. 5. Mixed accumulation, partly used as a core of a wall visible in the south side of the trench. 6. Turf wall. 7. Turf collapse. 8. Turf wall. 9. Upcast. 10. Turf wall. 11. Aeolian. 12. Aeolian with some turf debris. 13. Top soil.**

was a matter of several centuries. Activity was also noted above the V-1477, and possibly above the V-1717 as well. The evidence is consistent with more or less continued use at least from the high middle ages, but a Viking age start date can only be assumed at this point on the grounds that practically all other enclosed sites in this region were established in that period.

Judging from Trench 4 the outer enclosure is later than the original inner one – although that one was rebuilt still later. Stratigraphically it is quite possible that both walls were in use at the same time but it is difficult to see what the point would be with such an arrangement. At Litlu Gautlönd the other wall was the earlier of two similarly adjacent walls[29] so there does not seem to be any systematic chronological significance to the positions of the walls; outer walls are just as likely to be earlier than later. It seems rather, at least in those cases where walls are built within a few metres of each other that

[29] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2008, *Archaeological investigations in Mývatnssveit 2007*, p. 18.

this has to do with constructional preferences, i.e. that it was considered easier or better to build a new wall on fresh ground rather than build on top of an earlier one. The fact that there are many cases also of rebuilding on top of earlier walls suggests however that this was not a universal preference, or, perhaps, that it is a practice that is limited to the early period when wall-construction was a more regular, accepted, and perhaps cheaper, activity than later.

### *Gautlandasel*

Gautlandasel is the largest of three shieling sites along the brook Selgróf on the north side of Sandfell on the property of Gautlönd, 4,2 km west of the farm. Selgróf now marks the boundary between Gautlönd and Stöng, but the latter is a new farm, established in 1857 and so the shieling would have been strategically placed to make use of the pastures and meadows in the western part of the large original property of Gautlönd.

Gautlandasel was used until about 1900. The name implies that this was the main shieling of Gautlönd, rather than Sandvatnssel where however the structural remains are equal in size if not more substantial. In 1712 it is reported that the farm Álftagerði rented a sheiling from Gautlönd[30] and it may be that this was one of the smaller shieling sites up the brook (Hólssel and Nollssel). If these were rented out to other farms then the name of the larger, home-farm shieling makes more sense.

Gautlandasel was surveyed in 1996 and described as consisting of two main ruins.[31] In 2010 a third ruin inbetween the two was detected. There are no signs of an enclosing wall at this site which has excellent water sources, the brook which runs on the west sitde of it and a spring on the east side of the northwestern ruin. Two trenches were dug at this site. Trench 1 is about midway between the two structures originally surveyed. This had a sequence of very peaty layers down to the H3 at 63 cm below the surface. There is cultural material in the top 28 cm of the section but it was not possible to securely identify any of the tephras in this trench.

Trench 2 was dug into the eastern side of the largest, most southeasterly structure. Here the whole LNS is preserved, including the V~940. 12 cm above the 871±2 tephra

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[30] *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar* XI, 228.
[31] Orri Vésteinsson 1996, *Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahreppi* I, p. 55-56.

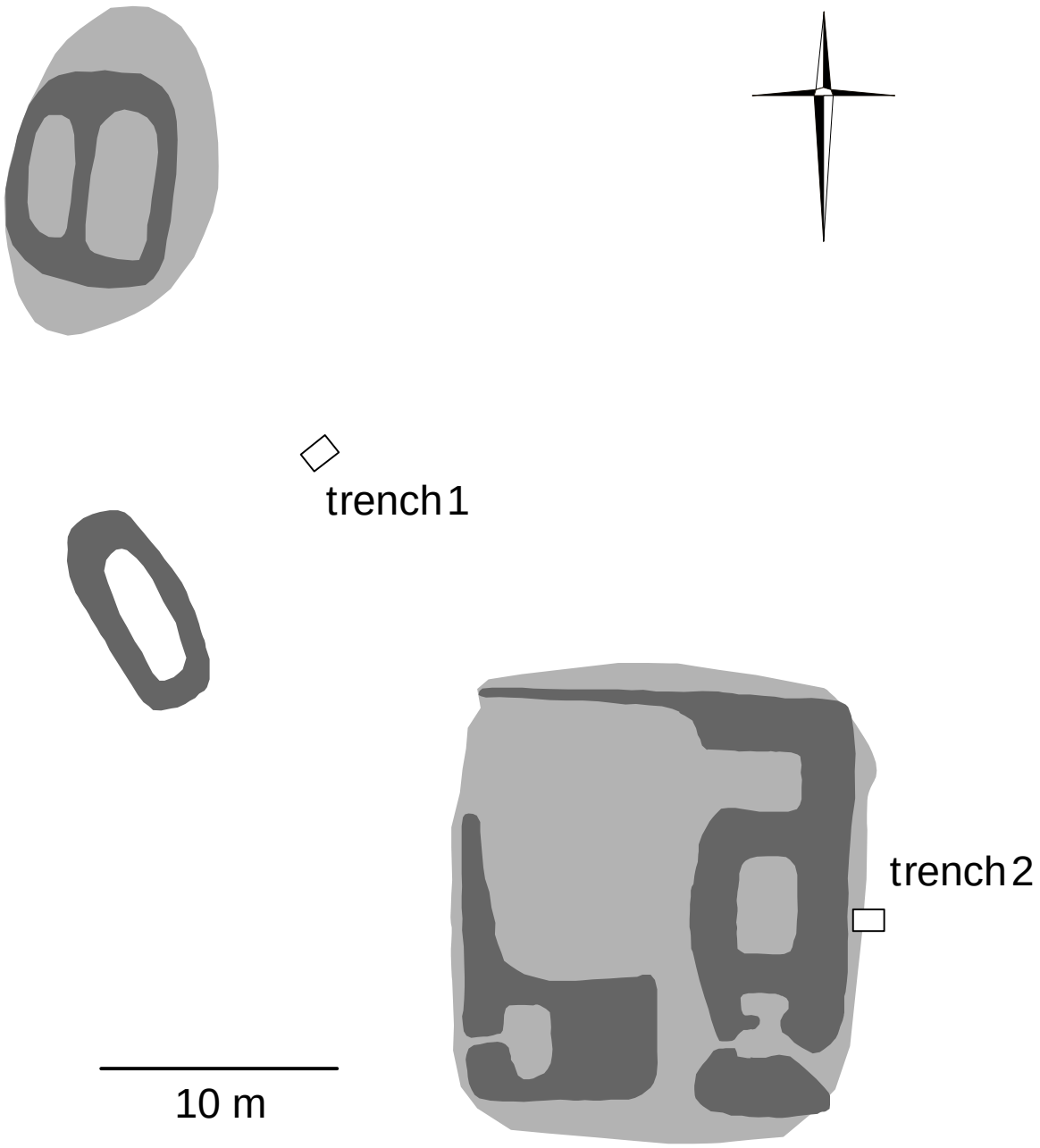


**Fig. 35. Plan of Gautlandasel showing the location of the trenches dug in 2010. This is a modified version of the plan published in the 1996 survey report and is not based on new measurements or analysis.**

there is a distinct change in colour of the peaty soil. At this junction there is a thin cultural layer below what looks like the V~940 in situ. On top of this is turf, probably in a wall construction, with the V~940 embedded in the turves. This was capped by the H-

1300 tephra (not reported by Magnús Sigurgeirsson below), and there was more turf debris between that and the V-1477 as well as above it.

It is possible that Gautlandasel had been built shortly before ~940, but the considerable distance between that and the LNL makes this questionable and further research is needed to confirm this. What can be said with certainty is that use of this site had begun well before 1300 and that it continues without any noticeable hiatus until the modern period.

### *Sandvatnssel*

Sandvatnssel is the other main shieling site on the property of Gautlönd, on the southern side of Sandfell, on the shore of Lake Sandvatn, 5,2 km southwest of the farm. It too is on the boundary with a new farm, Bjarnastaðir, now Heiði, established in 1850, but would before its establishment have been central to the extensive pastures and meadows in the southwest part of the property of Gautlönd. Unusually the location was also clearly chosen to make use of fishing for Arctic charr in Lake Sandvatn with a small inlet just south of the site where boats are to this day taken ashore.

It is not known when Sandvatnssel was last used but it will have been in the 19th century when the facility was rented out to neighbours of Gautlönd. The site was surveyed in 1996[32] and not much can be added to the description given then except that it is possible that a wall extends southwards from the hillside overlooking the site from the north, some 20 m east of the main ruin mound. It can be seen as a hump where the track passes over it but then quickly disappears into the bog south and east of the site.

Trench 1 was dug into the southwest side of the main ruin mound – the mound closest to the track with the most recent ruin on top. The trench is 5 m southwest of the southwest corner of the stone built structure. Here the LNS is at the base without the olive green tephras and the whole section is very disturbed without any in situ tephras. Towards the top there is turf with the V-1477 embedded.

Trench 2 is 6 m northeast of the so called weening-fold (Stekkur) on the bank of the lake. It was dug into a slight rise at the foot of the hill which overlooks the site. Here also the LNS lies in situ without the olive-green tephras. There is disturbance of cultural

[32] Orri Vésteinsson 1996, *Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahreppi* I, p.

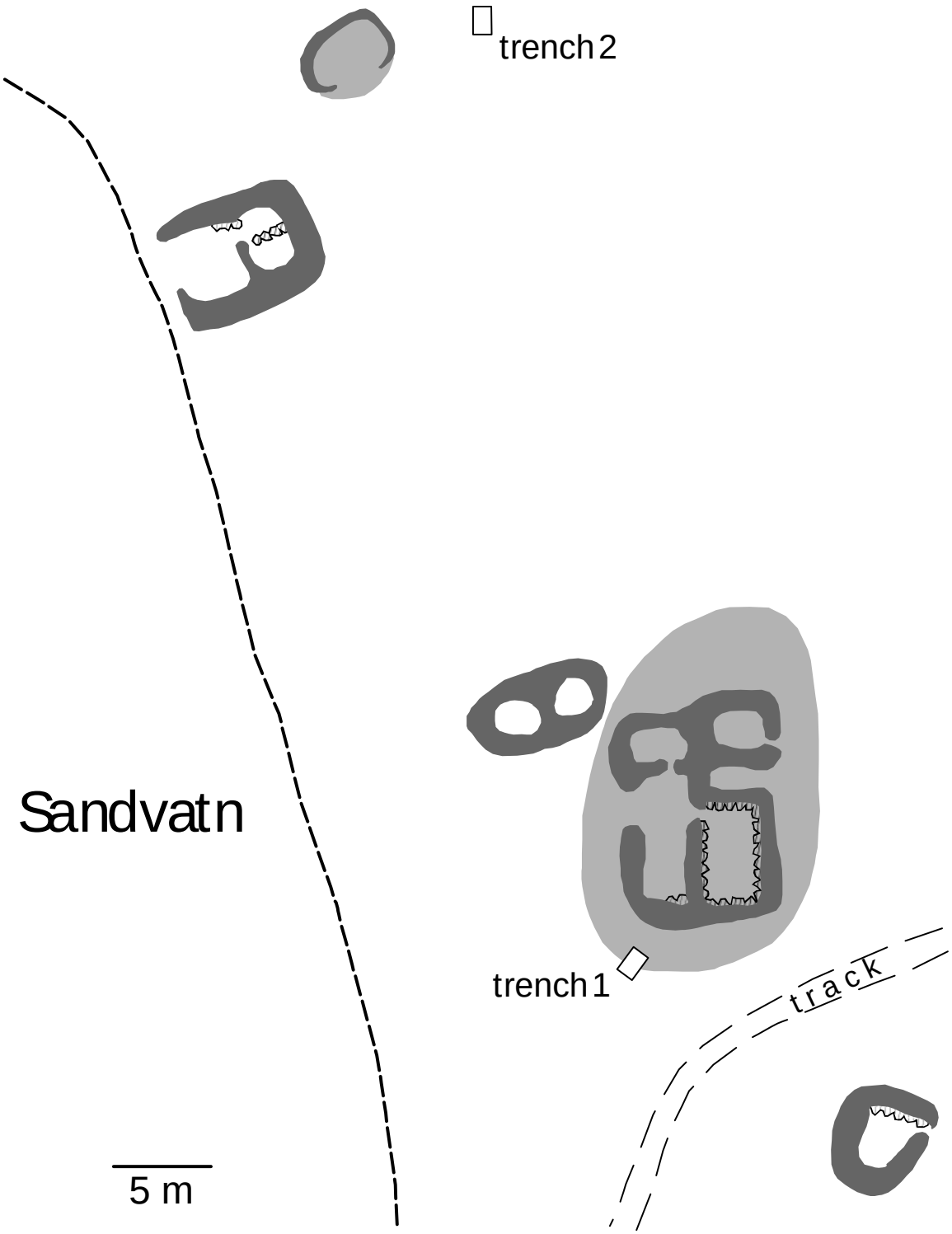


**Fig. 36. Plan of Sandvatnssel showing the location of the trenches dug in 2010. This is a modified (and composite) version of the plans published in the 1996 survey report and is not based on new measurements or analysis.**

origin below the H-1300 which is 21 cm below the surface, down to 29 cm. Above H-1300 and V-1477 (at -17 cm) there is however not unequivocal human presence.

Use of this site began well before 1300 and was probably continuous down to modern times although human presence between H-1300 and V-1477 cannot be demonstrated at present.

### *Sellandasel*

Sellandasel is on the property of Grænavatn, named from the area Sellönd, lit. "shieling lands". It is one of two shieling sites along the brook Sellandagróf (the other being Höllusel), in addition to the pre-1300 farm site Oddastaðir, investigated in 2002.[33] Sellandasel, also known as Sellandahús, was used down to 1904 and was definitely the principal shieling site of Grænavatn in later centuries. It is 10 km southwest of Grænavatn. The site was used for most of the 20th century as a base for the autumn round-up of sheep. From this final phase of activity there is a horse-stall adjacent to a fold still partly standing and an A-frame hut where the shepherds could sleep.

The site was surveyed in 1998[34] when four principal ruin mounds were recorded but in 2010 a fifth was added at the northwestern edge of the site. In addition to trenching a coring survey was conducted by Frank Feeley, reported in a separate chapter below. This revealed no midden concentrations but some cultural layers in the slope east of the horse-stall and a possible charcoal pit close to the break of slope. Two trenches were dug on either side of the most northeasterly of the ruins. Trench 1 is on the southern side. Here H3 is at a depth of 1,3 m with a thick layer of mottled organic silt (1) with small lumps of iron and much iron panning. This natural layer has an abrupt border with another natural layer (2), more banded grey-brown to pale brown silt, with lenses of very organic matter. The black tephras of the LNS lie in situ towards the top of this layer but the 871±2 could not be found. On top of this, again with an abrupt border, is a layer (3) similar in composition to (1), but more churned and without any of the lumps of iron.

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[33] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2003, *Landscapes of settlement. Reports on investigations at six medieval sites in Mývatnssveit*, p. 58-69

[34] Elín Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir & Orri Vésteinsson 1999, *Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahreppi* III. *Fornleifar við sunnanvert Mývatn, milli Haganess og Garðs*, FS086, Reykjavík, pp. 72-73

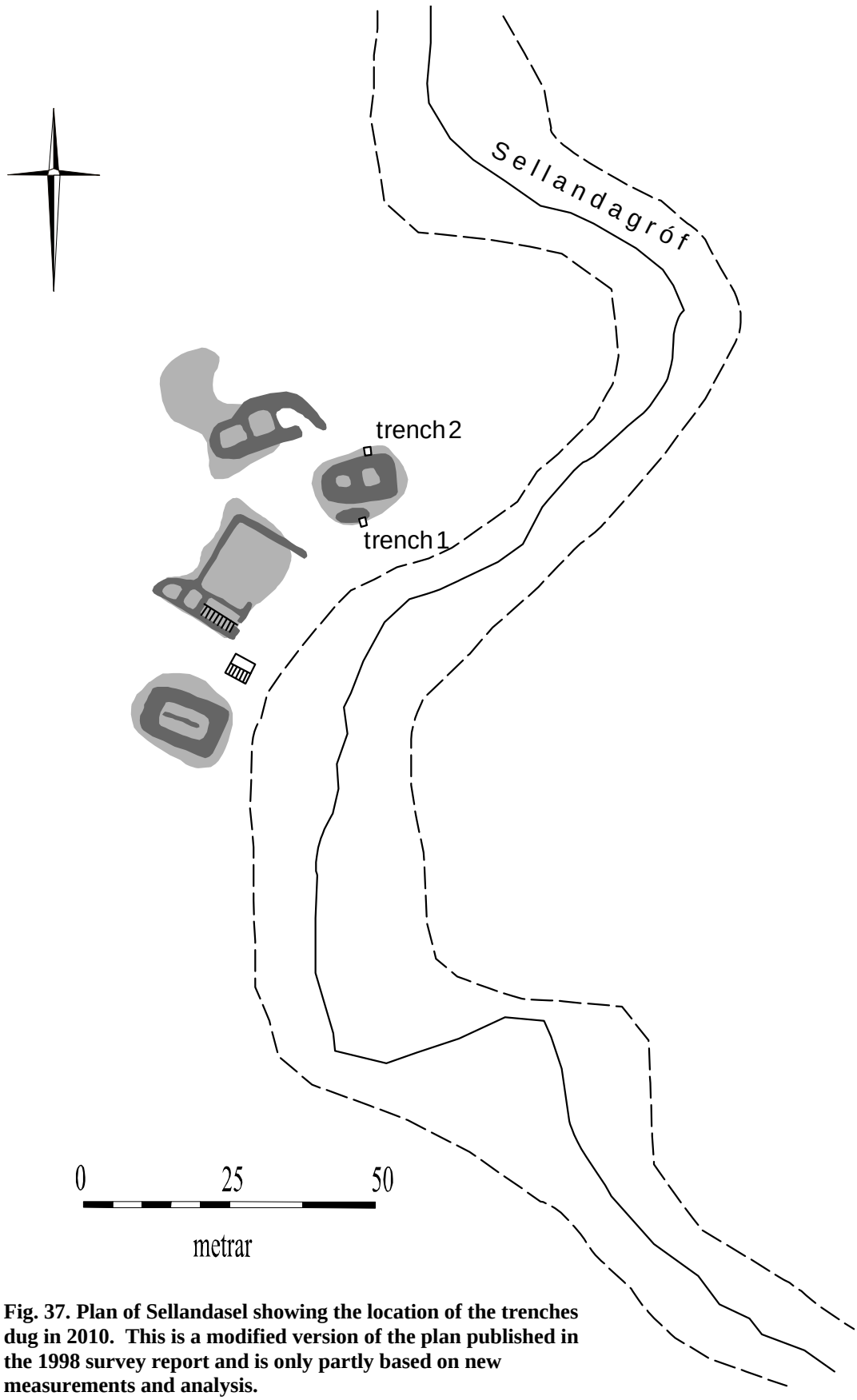



**Fig. 37. Plan of Sellandasel showing the location of the trenches dug in 2010. This is a modified version of the plan published in the 1998 survey report and is only partly based on new measurements and analysis.**

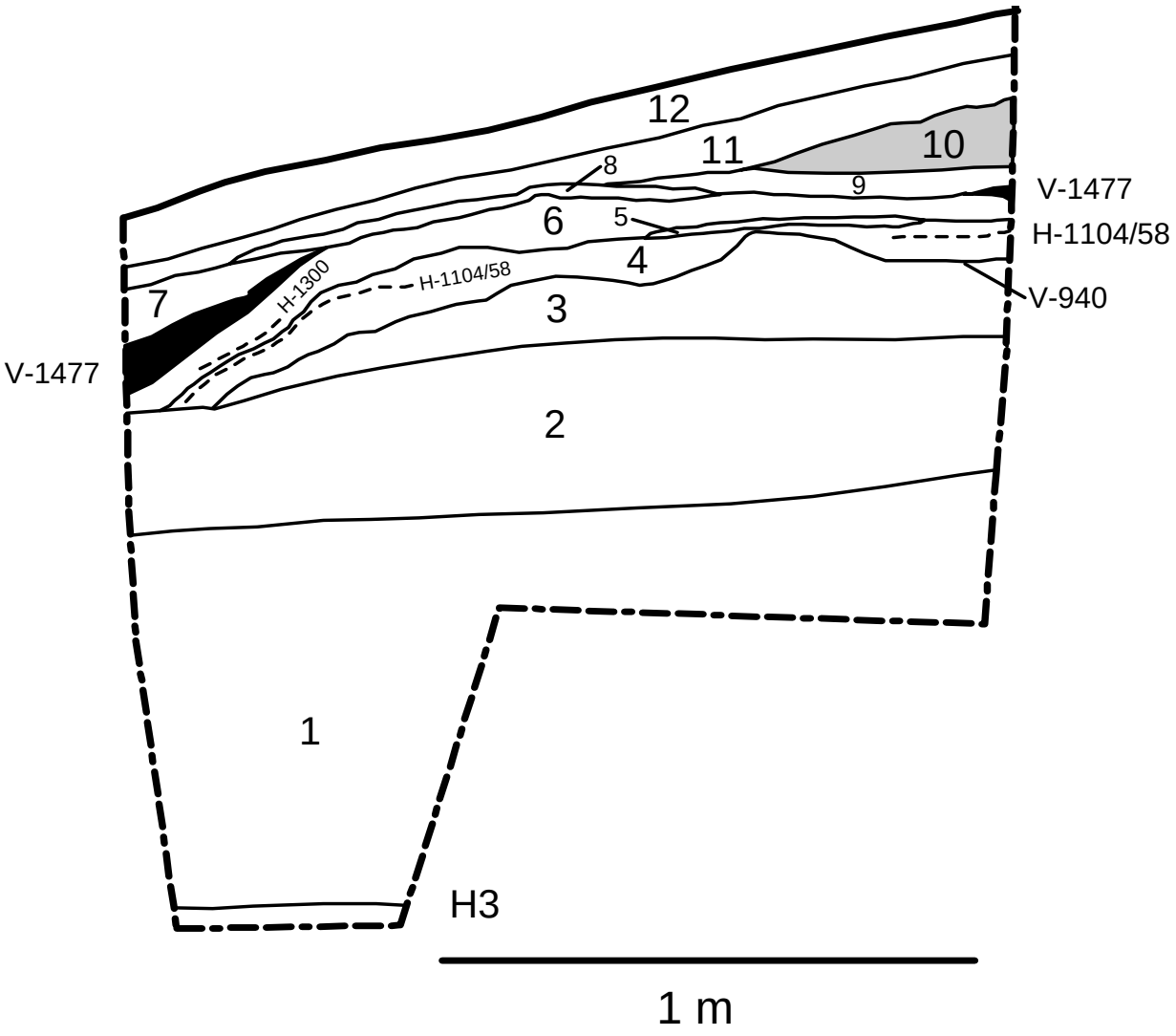



**Fig. 38. East facing section of Trench 1 in Sellandasel. 1. Natural. 2. Natural with LNS towards top. 3. Natural? Red loose silty sand with V~940 in situ on top. Same material as 2 but churned or disturbed. 4. Turf debris. 5. Lens of ash and charcoal. 6. Turf debris. 7. Aeolian with some disturbance. 8. Lens of ash and charcoal. 9. Turf collapse. 10. Turf wall. 11. Aeolian with considerable disturbance. 12. Top soil.**

The soil matrix however is red, loose silty sand. There are signs of disturbance in this layer which may be the result of digging into similar, but more homogenous, matter as represented by (1). This layer is capped by the V~940 tephra in situ. On top of this there is a layer of turf debris (4) with some aeolian accumulation under H-1105/H-1158. At the other side of the trench there is a single course of *strengur* turf in this position in the stratigraphic sequence. Directly on top of this there is a lens of ash and charcoal (5) but above that there is another turf debris layer (6) similar to (4). H-1300 is in situ in this

**Fig. 39. Sellandasel looking southwest. Trench 2 can be seen on the far left, Trench 1 just glimpsed left of centre while Frank Feeley is coring by the brook in the centre of the photograph.**

layer which is capped by V-1477. On top of that there is a layer of Aeolian accumulation with traces of disturbance (7) capped by a lens of ash and charcoal (8). On top of this there is a layer of turf collapse (9) under a more substantial lump of turf (10), possibly a wall. An aeolian layer (11) on top of this also has clear signs of disturbance.

Trench 2 was dug on the northern side of the same ruin mound and gave quite different results. Also here H3 was at a great depth, -146 cm, with 56 cm of natural between it and the V~940 in situ. Between that and V-1477 there were however only 6 cm which suggests stripping although the remaining material is quite natural. Immediately above the V-1477 there is a cultural layer, below a sheet midden (with poor bone preservation) which in turn is capped by a series of turf collapse layers under a turf wall which has the H-1104/H-1158 tephra in the turf.

Depending on the nature of layer (3) in Trench 1 it is conceivable that the use of this site started already in the early 10$^{th}$ century. If not it clearly pre-dates 1158 and shows every sign of continuous use down to modern time. The very unusual iron rich layer (1), its possible mining represented by layer (3) and the possible charcoal pit

reported by Frank Feeley below may suggest that this site was associated with ironmaking at the outset, but further research is needed to confirm this.

### *Note on a boundary wall in Grasaskarð*

When Sellönd were first surveyed in 1998 two sites were recorded that could possibly be identified with the place-name Höllusel reported for that area.[35] One was a small ruin inside a boundary in a half-circle, some 550 m north of Sellandasel, and the other a couple of ruins on the east bank of Sellandagróf, some 1250 m north of the shieling but 400 m south of Oddastaðir. Both sites were visited again in 2010 and at the former it was found that what had looked like a half-circle built up against a low bank (which can be seen as a straight side closing the circle) is in fact a continuation of a much longer boundary. This boundary can be traced some 400 m west of the site in the gap in the ridge between Sellönd and Kráká known as Grasaskarð. The boundary wall extends as far as the vegetation in the gap but along Kráká erosion has stripped away the soil (although closest to the river vegetation has re-established itself). Presumably the boundary extended all the way to the river. On the eastern side however it ends in a loop, the half-circle recorded in 1998, and has not apparently extended all the way to the brook Sellandagróf, although in antiquity its course may have been closer to the site than it is now. Even so there will have been at least a 10 m wide gap between the furthest eastward bend of the loop and the edge of slope above the brook, which makes it difficult to believe that this monument would have been useful for managing the traffic of livestock.

In 1998 a single ruin was reported in association with the half-circle but this could not be identified again in 2010. It may be a part of the eastern side of the wall where there is a dense thicket of birch and willow. There is a building however built in the corner where the loop closes on the northern side with the low bank. The building is 5x2 m

[35] SÞ-203:062 and 069 in Elín Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir & Orri Vésteinsson 1999, *Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahreppi* III, pp. 74 and 78.

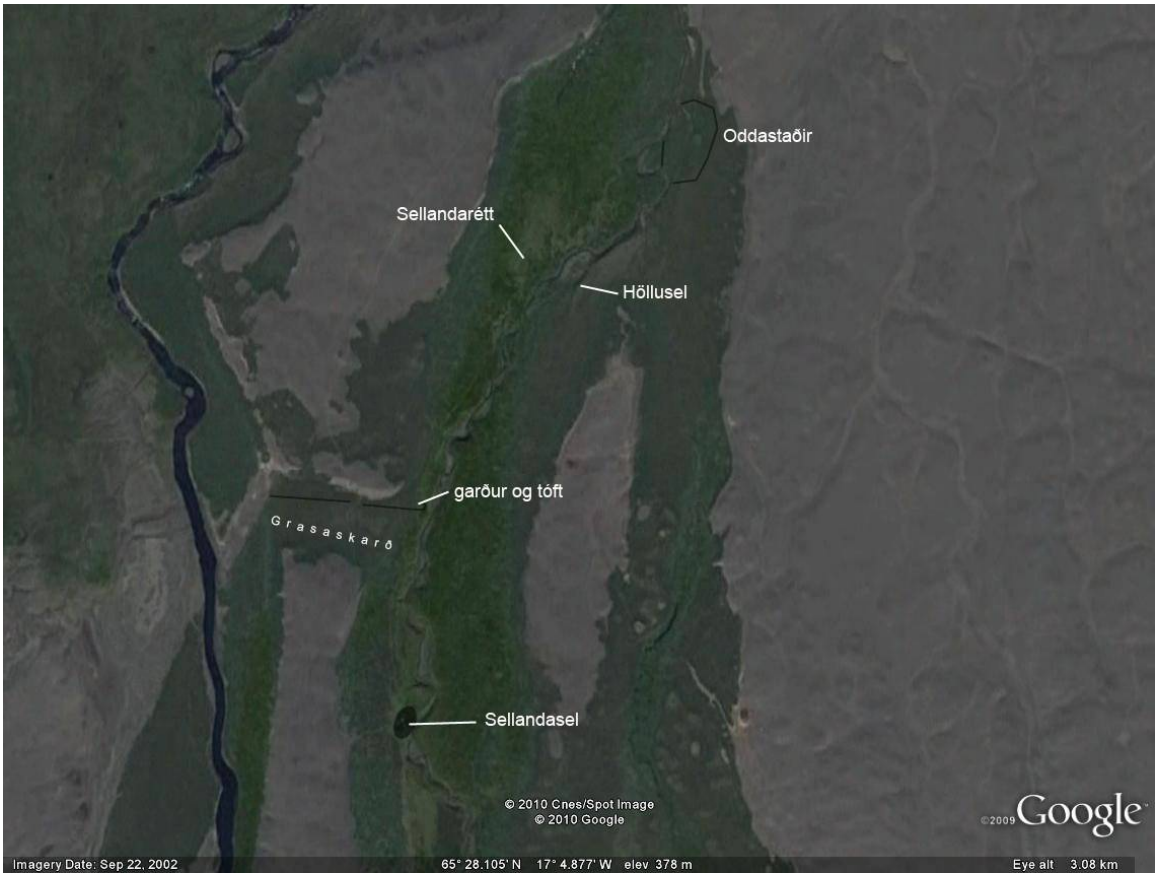



**Fig. 40. Sellönd, showing the locations of known archaeological sites in the area between Sellandasel and Oddastaðir. 'garður og tóft' refers to the boundary wall discussed in this chapter.**

internally with a doorway facing east. The loop is some 45 m from north to south and there are 35 m from its greatest eastward extent to the low bank that seems to make up the western edge of this feature. The area thus enclosed is ca 0,1 ha in size. Along the edge of the low bank there are deep tracks which may obscure a turf wall and one 10 m stretch, some 5 m west of the edge could be discerned as a possible wall, but this is uncertain.

A trench was dug into the outside of the south side of the loop, 11 m east of the low bank. This had the LNS in situ with the V~940 underlying a wall (2) with 3 courses of *strengur* turf with the V~940 embedded. A small layer of turf collapse with Aeolian had accumulated on the outside (3) but on top of this there was only Aeolian accumulation (4). In this, 13 cm above the wall there is a white tephra, presumably H1104/H-1158 and above that H-1300 and V-1477.

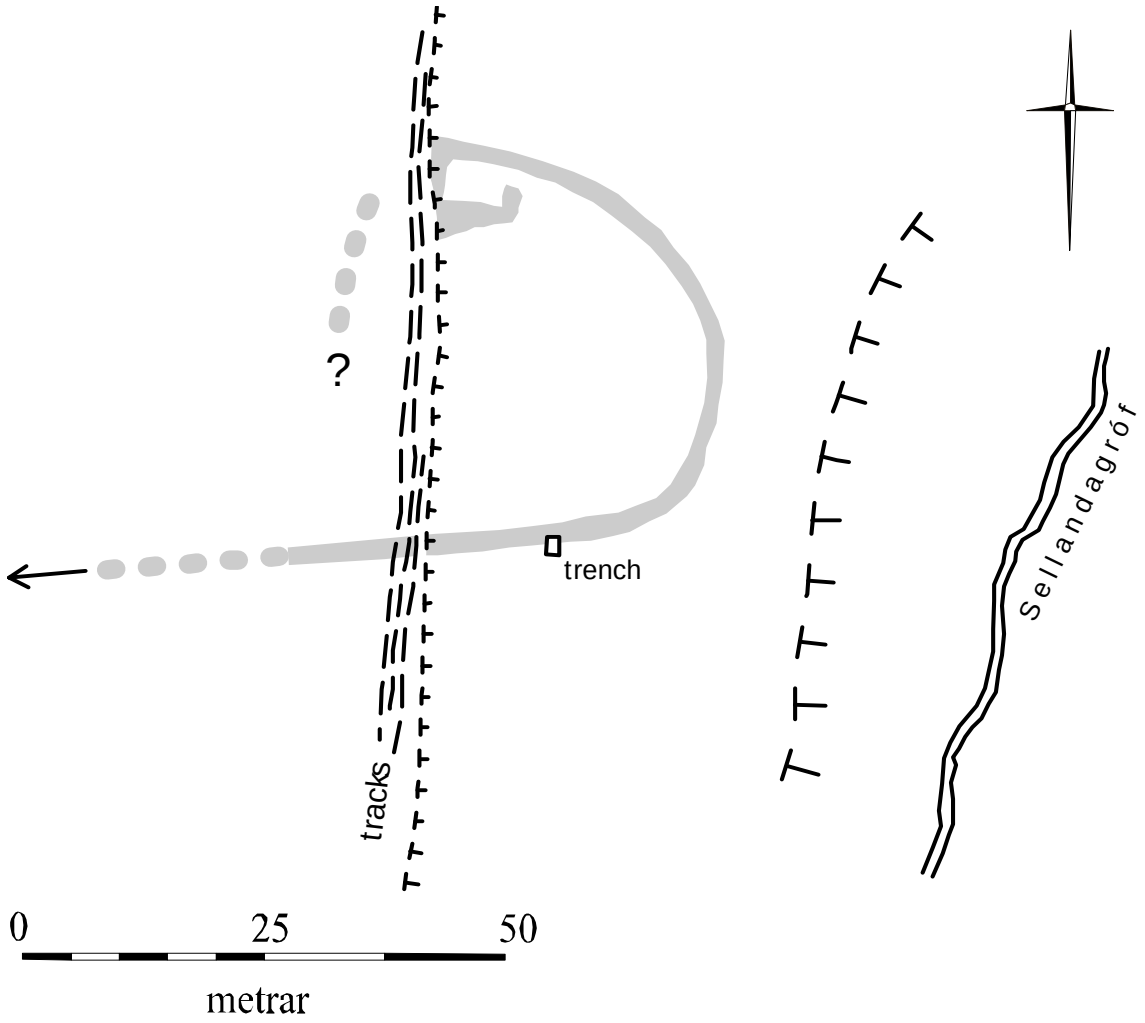



**Fig. 41. Plan of the eastern end of the boundary in Grasaskarð, showing the location of the trench dug in 2010.**

This wall was built shortly after ~940 but was not maintained and had become little less than a foot high long before 1104/1158. This, along with the fact that it cannot have been an effective block to the traffic of livestock suggests that it had a primarily symbolic function, perhaps as a property boundary. If that was so it served its purpose as long as it was visible – which it is to this day if one knows where to look for it. It is possible that the boundary marked the southern extent of the property of Oddastaðir, if it was an independent farm, or Sveigakot, if that was an independent farm or Grænavatn itself. The region to the south of it the boundary will then either have been commons or sheiling land or pasture (afréttur) belonging to a particular farm. The solution with fewest

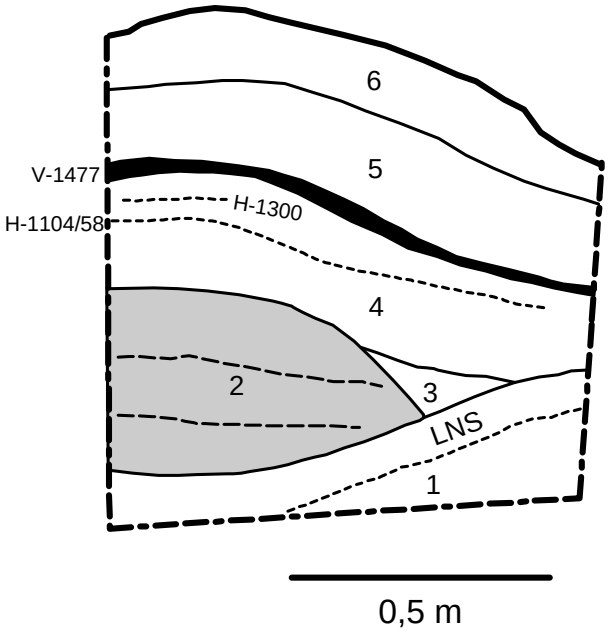



**Fig. 42. West facing section of the trench in the boundary in Grasaskarð. 1. Natural, LNS with V~940 in situ on top. 2. Turf wall. 3. Turf collapse. 4.-5. Aeolian. 6. Top soil.**

conflicts is that the boundary marks the southern extent of the property of either Oddastaðir or Sveigakot (which may not have been occupied contemporaneously[36]) which had been carved out of the more original and larger property of Grænavatn which then would have been the owner of the land south of the boundary.

Helgi Hallgrímsson who first surveyed archaeological sites in Mývatnssveit in the early 1970s identified this site with Höllusel and his lead was followed in the 1998 survey. However further examination and discussion with Hjörleifur Sigurðarson, farmer at Grænavatn, leads to the conclusion that Höllusel is rather the two more recent looking ruins on the east bank of Sellandagróf further north. That site may well have been a minor shieling, of the type that farms with extensive summer pastures like Grænavatn rented out to smaller farms in the region. For instance both Brjánsnes and Kálfaströnd rented shielings from Grænavatn in 1712.[37]

[36] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2003, *Landscapes of settlement. Reports on investigations at six medieval sites in Mývatnssveit*, p. 68
[37] *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar* XI, p. 234.

Frank Feeley

# *Report on coring survey at Sellandasel*


## *Summary*

This report presents the results of the coring of the ruins and possible midden locations around the Sellandsel shieling in the north of Iceland on the 9th of July, 2010. An Oakfield tube-type corer was used to prospect transects across three areas which either cut across ruins or were likely midden areas. Transect Alpha has layers flecked with charcoal and possible floor deposits, Transect Beta has clear indications of a repeatedly used charcoal pit and Transect Gamma uncovered no cultural deposits. Using material from a nearby trench dug by geomorphologists it was determined that bone preservation was very poor at the site. Soil Ph tests were not performed but this poor preservation may be due to the drainage patterns of the site.


## *Methods*

All cores were taken with a 12” (30.5cm) Oakfield tube corer. Three transects (Alpha, Beta and Gamma) were placed across areas deemed likely to yield cultural layers. Cores were taken at intervals of five meters. Another area was further cored at 1 and 2m intervals for further investigation. Changes in stratigraphic layers were noted and digitally compiled (see end of report). Cores were taken until natural soils were reached. Each core was geo-located via a handheld Garmin GPSmap 60CSx GPS unit which is accurate within ± 3 meters. This variance is responsible for the slight offset of some of the core's locations on the map below.

**Fig. 43. Google Earth generated map of the area along with the transects cored (as per the GPS locations taken at each core hole) as well as outlines of the standing structures on the site. The red points represent Transect Alpha, the blue Transect Beta and the green Transect Gamma. Other points were taken which cluster around some ash deposits in Transect Beta.**

## *Transect Alpha*

Transect Alpha was chosen because it cut across two ruins, the space between these ruins and down the slope towards the stream where midden material may have been deposited. It runs roughly NW to SE. The cores indicate that there are some cultural layers with flecks of charcoal and Core018 (see raw data below) contains some rather compact and dark layers which may indicate a floor layer. Core018 is associated with the second proposed ruin (see sketch plan of Transect Alpha below). Charcoal flecks continued to come up until Core021 but disappear completely as the deposited layers become more alluvial in nature.

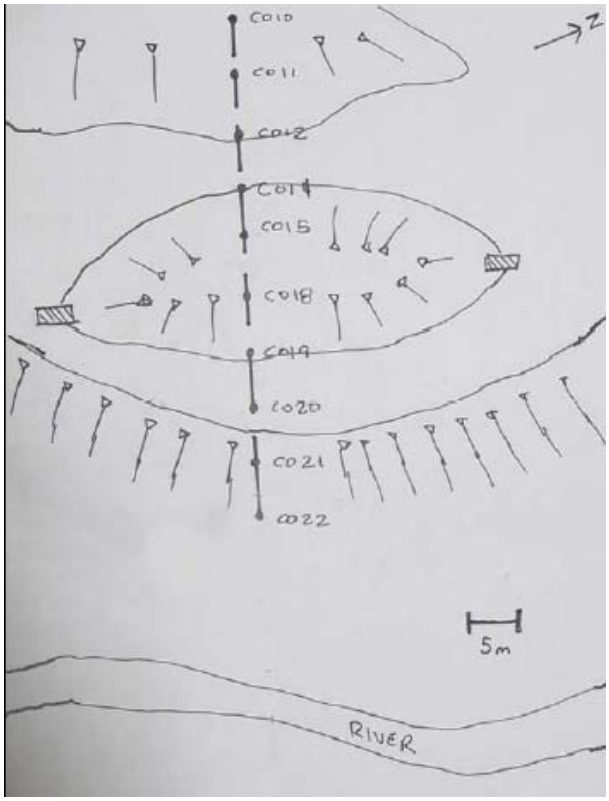



**Fig. 44. Sketch map of Transect Alpha. The ground features are not completely to scale and may be illustrated larger than they truly are. The two hash-marked boxes at either side of the middle mound represent the general location of Dr. Ian Simpson's geomorphology trenches. Each core location is noted with a C and the corresponding waypoint number from the GPS unit.Cores 010 through 019 had evidence of brown organic soils with charcoal flecks as well as structural turf collapse. At a depth of 75cm Core 15 had a dark colored, compact layer with flecks of charcoal which was interpreted as a floor layer. Cores 020 through 022 had no obvious cultural layers.**

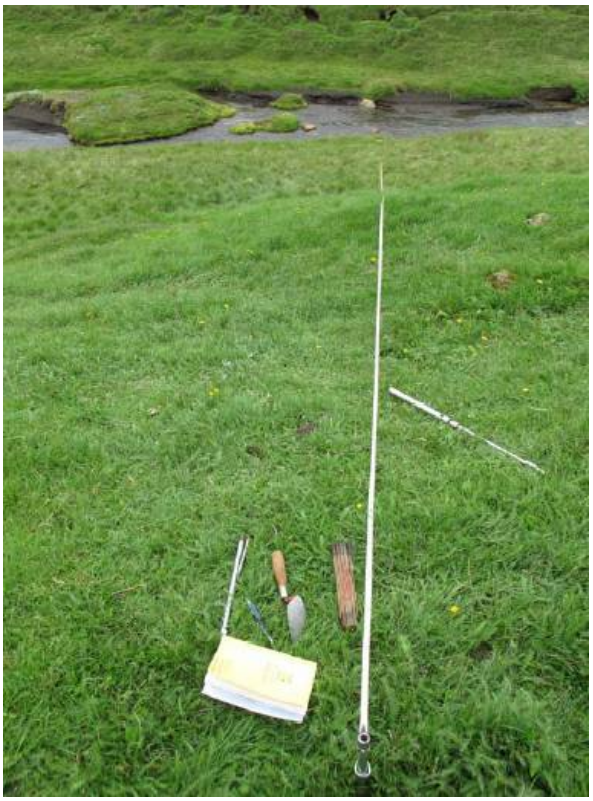


**Fig. 45. Photo of the middle area of Transect Alpha from roughly Core018 and downslope to Core022.**

## *Transect Beta*

Transect Beta was chosen as it is downslope from the standing turf structure as well as the more modern A-Frame style cabin on the site. There was a particular depression in the ground (see photo of charcoal pit) as well as a mound on the lower slope which were targets of this core.

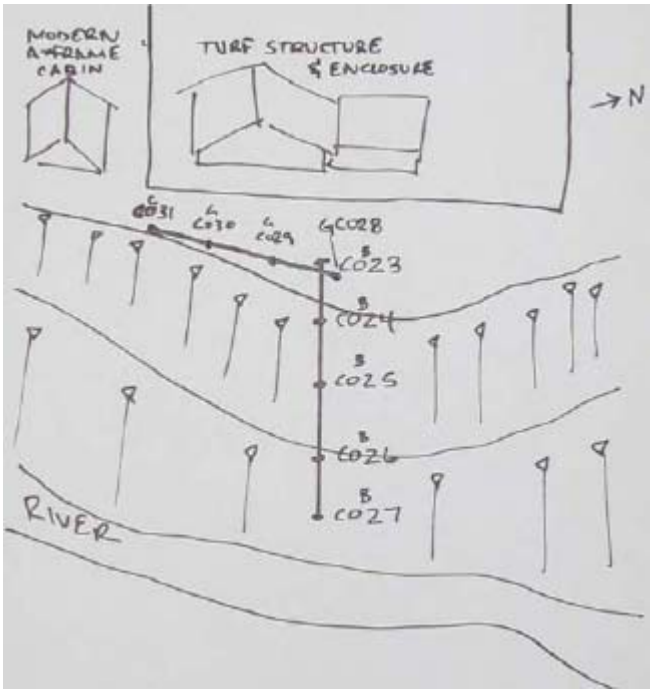



**Fig. 46. The sketch map is not to scale and Transect Beta is represented by the downslope line. All of the cores turned up layers of brown soil with charcoal flecks in them. Core 24, which was over the depression in the ground along the slope, revealed a layer of grey ash and charcoal at 36-76cm. Cores 026 and 027 were abandoned due to the muddy conditions of soil.**

**Fig. 47. Photo of the center portion of Transect Alpha with Sellandafjall in the background.**

**Fig. 48. Charcoal pit depression. Scale is 50cm long. Extra cores were taken near C024, 1m to the south west (to the left of this photo), 2m further and finally 4m further to the south west. Each core had clear episodes of ash and charcoal interspersed with layers of wind-blown, fine light brown soil. The pit was dug down to the level of the H3 tephra. Core 035 contains no ash or charcoal and is 2 meters out from Core 034, effectively delineating its south-western boundary.**

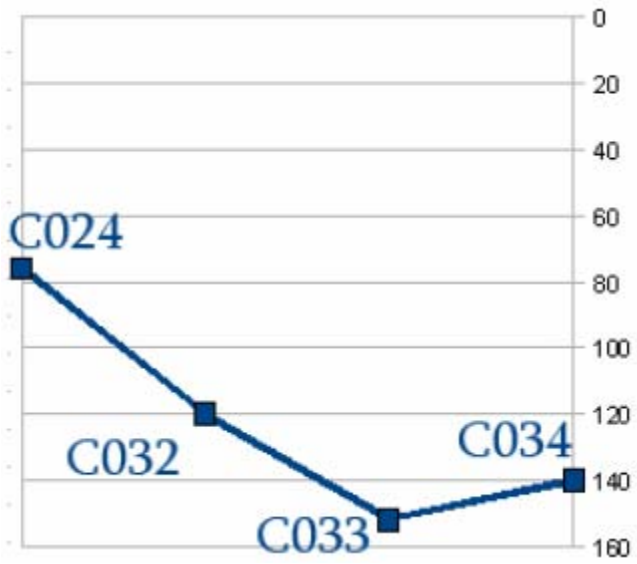



**Fig. 49. This graph below shows the terminal depth, in centimeters, of the ash layers and suggests a pit shape rather than a sheet deposit.**

**Fig. 50. A typical core from the ash pit area. Note the layers of brown soil between layers of ash.**

## *Transect Gamma*

This transect was run along the top of the slope to the north of the modern A-Frame cabin and to the east of the standing turf structure and enclosure. Only Core 031 uncovered any obvious cultural layers with a deep 41cm layer of brown soil mixed with flecks of charcoal resting on natural deposits. This core was close enough to the modern A-Frame building that this thick layer may have been fill from somewhere else used to level the ground around this A-Frame building.

**Fig. 51. Transect Gamma, looking south**

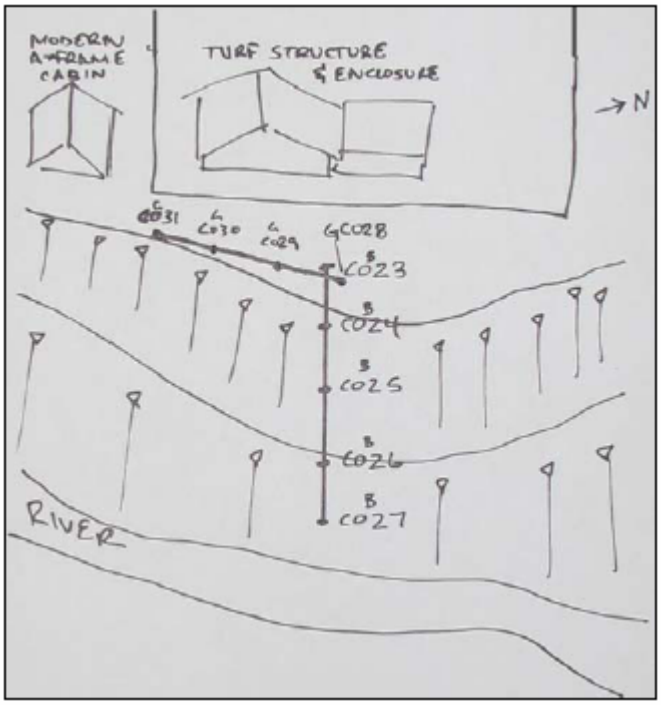



**Fig. 52. Sketch map showing the location of transect Gamma along the break of slope, and its intersection with transect Beta, running downslope.**

## *Note about bone preservation*

Concurrent with this investigation, Dr. Ian Simpson, Dr. Eileen Tisdall and Mr. Hew Smith, researchers with the School of Biological and Environmental Sciences at Sterling University, UK, placed two trenches to take samples of the build up of cultural sediments around the shieling. During the course excavating their north trench a small layer of ash was uncovered which contained small (<1cm) fragments of white burnt bone as well as a single fragment of a scapula about 10cm below the turf surface. The scapula was badly decomposed with the proximal and distal ends completely gone but it most likely came from a sheep or goat. From this evidence and considering the drainage patterns evident at the site it would seem that is unlikely that there is any well preserved bone.

Orri Vésteinsson

## *Field investigations in Svartárkot*

In 1897 a farm site on the southern side of Svartárvatn, 800 m SE of the present farm Svartárkot, was reported by Daniel Bruun. He says that wind erosion has stripped the soil off an old midden with much bone debris and from this he deduced that this was an old farm site.[38] He does not mention the ruin mounds, although they must have been quite visible then as now, so it is not entirely certain that this is the same site. The land south of the present ruins on the lake shore has been denuded and it is conceivable that there were other ruins there now completely disappeared. Bruun's midden cannot however have been far away from the extant ruins and it is safe to regard it as a part of the same site. An arrow-head with a Viking age date (Rygh 539) originates most likely in the same place as Bruun describes: "old eroded ruins where the farm stood formerly."[39]

By the mid 20th century this earlier farm site had begun to be eroded by the lake.[40] This was most likely caused by the raising of the lake-level, when the outlet was dammed in order to generate electricity for the farm.

The site was visited by Andrew Dugmore and Anthony Newton in 2003. They noted that the lake was eroding a soil profile with turf and bones, rreporting clearly visible turf between H-1104 and H-1158 and evidence of disturbance between LNS and 1104. They also saw animal bone in a collapsed bank (in the lake). Following up on this Orri Vésteinsson visited the site in 2004 and described the three mounds, defining the one in the middle (2) as a farm mound, and the lower two on either side of it as the sites of animal stalls. He found cultural layers above a white tephra (Ö-1362 or H-1158) in the easternmost mound (1) and the farm-mound (2) while in the westernmost mound (3) there were both early modern layers and a cultural layer just above the LNS. He reported

[38] Daniel Bruun, Árbók 1898, Fylgirit, 52, 69.
[39] KEKH, 349.
[40] Ö-Svartárkot, 5

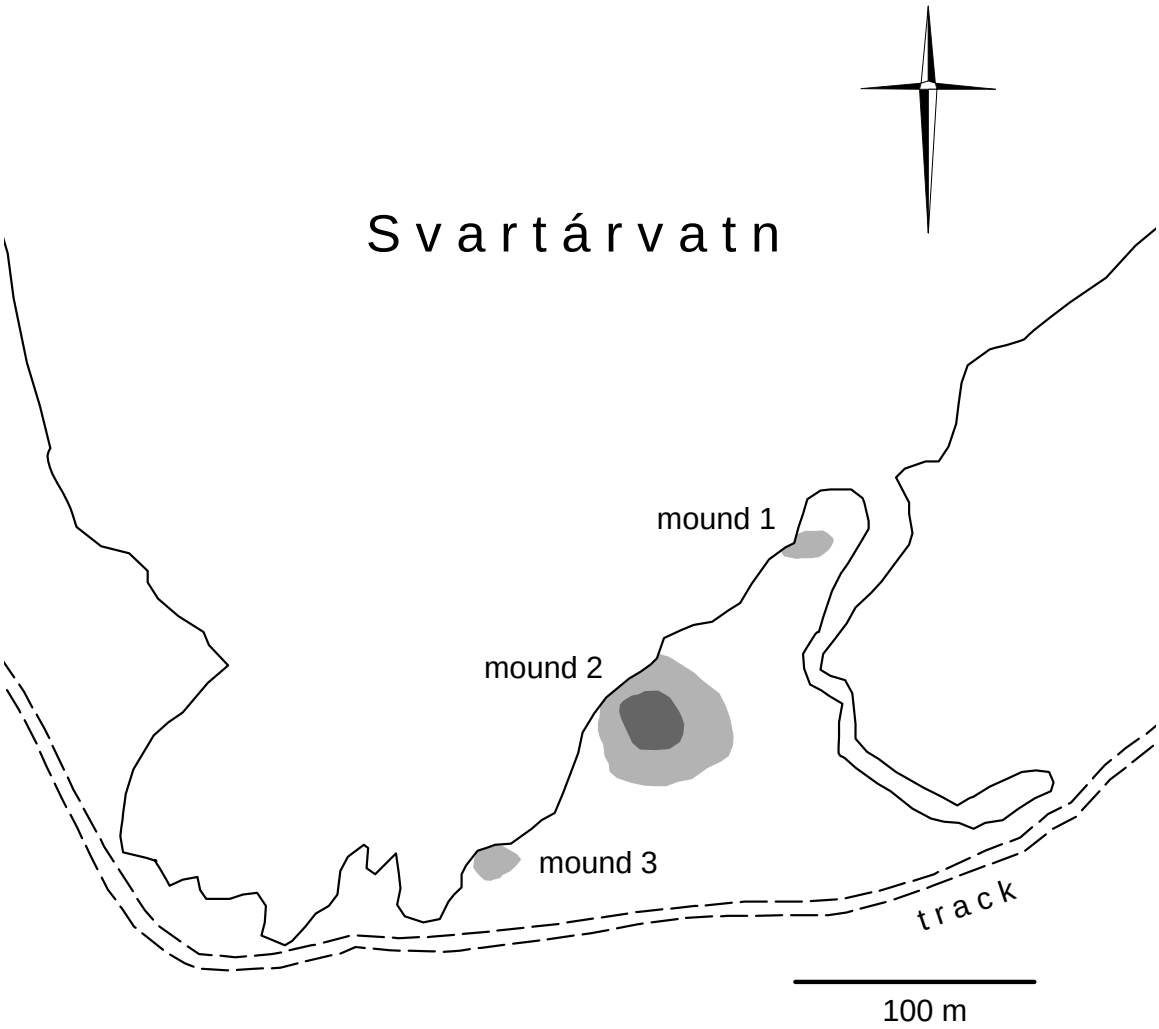



**Fig. 53. Plan of the Svartárkot site.**

animal bones sticking out of the section in farm mound (2), and photographs from both 2003 and 2004 show this clearly.[41]

In 2010 the site was visited again primarily to assess its potential for zooarchaeological investigations. This time hardly any bones were found (see Tom McGovern's report below) and it seems that whatever midden layers used to be on the northern edge of the farm mound (2) have now been completely washed away by the lake.

[41] Orri Vésteinsson 2004, *Krókdalur. Fornleifaskráning 2004*, FS258, Reykjavík, pp. 53-55.

**Fig. 54. The site looking northwest. The site of the modern farm on the other side of the lake.**

Cleaning of the sections allowed some further observations about the stratigraphy of the site, although specialist analysis of the tephras and more detailed recording of the eroding sections is recommended as this will definetely result in a fuller understanding of this site.

In mound 1 the ruins of an animal stall, visible on the surface, can be seen in the section on a 10 m stretch. This building has been cut through the historical sequence of tephras (esp. on the east side) but it is clearly younger than the 1477 tephra. 15-20 sm below the 1477 tephra there is a single white tephra layer (presumably either Ö-1362 or H-1158) and below this a cultural layer, up to 5 cm thick turf debris, some 4 sm above V~940.

In mound 2 the section is quite different on the northwestern and southwestern sides. In the former there are building remains sitting in a cut younger than V-1477. There are lava stones on both sides (some 4 m between them) as well as in the lake, where they have dropped from the section. In this part of the section three white tephra

layers are clearly visible (Ö-1362, H-1158 and H-1104) with a cultural layer below the lowest of these. This is very compact turf. The LNS is missing in this part of the section.

On the southwestern side the LNS is all there, with 15-18 sm between it and H-1104. There is some charcoal and disturbance in this layer, but also bone sitting on top of H-1158 (which is 0,5 cm above H-1104) but 20 cm above this there are further cultural layers, probably sitting in an early modern cut as the V-1477 is missing here.

In mound 3 there are remains of an early modern animal stall post-V1477. From the surface remains it seems that a substantial part of this building has already been lost to the lake. Just below the 1477 there are lava slabs which probably indicate a building. Just below them is a coarse tephra (or sand?) layer (1410 if tephra?). In this section there is only one of the white tephras and this has been cut some time before the supposed 1410 tephra was deposited. The white tephra is above a substantial and complex sequence of cultural layers (20+ cm), including upcast and fatty organic layers (floor?). This sequence starts some 5 cm above V~940. The lower cultural layers in mound 3 are just above the present water table, showing that this mound is entirely anthropogenic.

The location of the site may have been influenced by a water source just to the east of it, where water springs from under the lava field into a channel which leads into the lake, close by mound 3.

It is clear that while there does not seem to have been continuous occupation of this site it has been occupied sporadically from at least the late Viking age and into early modern times. The farm was deserted 1784-1823 but was moved to its present location in 1863.[42] It is likely that mound 2 was always the centre of the settlement but it is also possible that remains of habitation may be found in the earlier levels in mound 3. A sherd of a earthenware cooking pot found on the southern side of mound 2 is post-1600 and may well be from the 18th century.[43]

[42] Elín Baldvinsdóttir pers. comm. 28 June 2010.
[43] Gavin Lucas pers. comm. July 2010.

Thomas H. McGovern

## *Report on midden investigations at Svartárkot*

On June 28th our team (project leader Orri Vesteinsson Aaron Kendall, Frank Feeley, Tom McGovern) visited the ruin of ***Svartárkot*** to investigate reports of midden deposits weathering into the lake *Svartárvatn.* The site had been visited in the late 19th c by Daniel Bruun, who collected a Viking age arrowhead from deposits weathering into the lake, and subsequent visitors reported cultural materials and well defined volcanic tephra visible along a substantial erosion face. Our team mission was to locate bone bearing midden deposits in the erosion face or other farm area, and if possible to make small collections suitable for C14 and initial quantification work.

**Figure 55. Facing southwards from the main ruin mound towards eroding cultural deposits in the southernmost mound at Svartarkot.**

The farm ruin is clearly visible as a series of green mounds along the southeastern corner of the lake today. The highest is a central mounded ruin with lush green grass (GPS Farm Ruin Mound top N 65 20.183 W 017 14.105 elevation ca 400 m accuracy ca +/- 3 m). In at least three localities along the current erosion face multiple historic and prehistoric tephra and some cultural deposits were clearly visible among the slumping deposits which are still being undercut by wave action from the lake Svartárvatn (figure 53). The central erosion face was just below what appears to be the main farm ruin and is GPS located (=/- 2m) at N 65 20.189, W 017 14.120. This central erosion face extended for about 20 meters of continuous profile, and the smaller northern and southern exposures extended about 10-15 meters. For most of these profiles, a wide range of tephra were visible as continuous bands, and we cleared about 18 m of the central erosion face for observation. These deposits held multiple tephra, including many prehistoric tephra and the thick creamy band of H3 near the base of the deposit. The historic tephra include the

local Landnám Sequence (LNS), a thick band of the V~940 tephra above, and what appeared to be a full set of 1104, 1158, 1262, 1300, 1410, 1477 (unusually thin here) and 1717 (others may well be present and some identifications will need correction). A series of pH readings (bipolar soil pH meter) produced a narrow range of values from 6.25-6.5, similar to other values for Mývatnssveit and suitable for bone preservation. A few fragments of well preserved bone were observed both in the erosion slump and in situ in the erosion face, but these amounted to 3-5 fragments widely scattered across the exposure. We did not observe any concentration of bone, fire damaged rock, ash, charcoal or artifacts in any of the currently exposed erosion profiles, but cultural material including turf and stone walling was clearly visible in profile (see photo set below). It is entirely possible that midden deposits do exist deeper into the profile on the inland side, but it seems more likely that the bone rich deposits were on the lake (Western) side of the deposit (as at Grænavatn at Mývatn) and have washed away since Bruun's visit a century ago. At present the lake is being maintained by a dam at a significantly higher level (probably ca 1 m +) than its natural level, and this has probably contributed to the accelerated erosion of the lakeside deposits. We carried out a 10 m coring transect (at 1 and 2 m spacing) back from the central erosion face (westwards towards the farm mound) and encountered multiple tephras but no definite midden deposits. Investigation of the erosion face of the lake up to a km northwards produced no additional cultural deposits in the erosion face. We also sampled some of the recently collapsed soil that had fallen into the lake but recovered

**Figure 56. SAK test pit 1 N65 20.176 W 017 14.062 el 413m (+/-3 m)**

**Figure 57. Collapsing cultural deposits along the SE shore of Svartárvatn**

only a few chips of bone from these displaced deposits. While additional bone-rich midden deposits may exist in this area, there was no sign of them during our visit. This said, the exposed long profiles at SKU have huge potential for better understanding settlement and potentially erosion events in this area, and need intensive analysis by the soil science, tephra, and geomorphology teams. This will also be an excellent place to introduce students to tephra and landscape reconstruction.

We also investigated an area to the east (away from the lake shore) of the central farm mound ruin, as some weathered animal bones (including caprine, sheep, cattle, and horse, see report below) were visible on the surface scattered around small erosion features. We cleared three of these small profiles to investigate stratigraphy and find any intact midden on this side of the structure. In every case we saw only layers of natural wind deposited sand and silt overlying heavily reduced natural deposits- all historic tephra were missing and in most cases the deposit was cut down below the H3 prehistoric

horizon. This area seems to have been subjected to intense erosion and re-deposition and probably has only islands of intact stratigraphy at best.

**Overall Assessment**: The Svartárkot site has great potential for tephra, geomorphology, and geoarchaeology, and can shed considerable light upon the sequence of human occupation of this far interior high altitude site. However at present there are no good targets for intensive zooarchaeological investigation and the site appears to have only limited survival of midden deposits. We suggest intensive geoarchaeological work with a zooarchaeological "watching brief" in the event that bone rich deposits do turn up in the future.

**Fig. 58. Cleared profile in central erosion area. H3 prehistoric tephra is highly visible at base, above are a set of later prehistoric tephra . These are closely space and appear to have been deposited in a highly organic marshy/peaty environment. The LNS is visible in mid-profile, and closely above follows an unusually thick V~940 tephra. Above this tephra there is an abrupt transition to much less organic deposits dominated by silts and sand and with tephra far more widely spaced. This transition was visible across the whole profile and merits further investigation.**

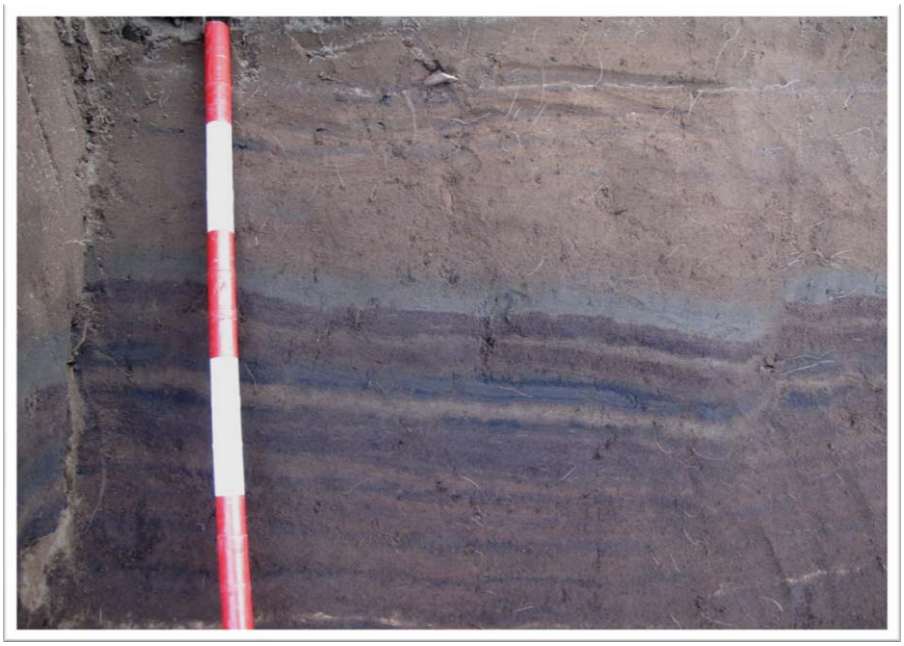


**Fig. 59. Close-up of transition zone above the V~ 940 tephra.**

## Appendix: Surface Collected Animal Bones

A very small collection of very weathered animal bones was made to the West (inland)of the main farm mound ruin near GPS coordinates N 65 20.175, W 017 14.063. Table 1 presents identification of these remains. Note the presence of cattle and horse bones as well as sheep and "caprines" (probably also sheep). These are all heavily weathered and may have been exposed for some time. One sheep metacarpal has evidence of biperforation; a method of marrow extraction normally not seen in Iceland before ca. 1100 AD.

Table 1. Svartárkot 2010 Surface

| Species | NISP Count |
|---|---|
| Cattle | 2 |
| Horse | 2 |
| Sheep | 11 |
| Caprine | 20 |
| | |
| Large Terr. Mammal | 2 |
| Medium Terr. Mammal | 5 |
| total | 42 |

Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson

# *Gjóskulagarannsókn*

## *Inngangur*

Dagana 13.-15. júlí 2010 var farin vettvangsferð á alls fjórtán minjastaði í Suður-Þingeyjarsýslu. Heimsótt voru forn sel og bæjarstæði við Másvatn (Þyrilskot, Hallskot og Víðatóft), í Seljadal (Þórutóftir), suður af Mývatni (Arnavatnssel, Gautlandasel, Girðingar og Sandvatnssel) og við Laxá (Beinisstaðir, Mýnesás og við Viðarhólma). Kumlateigur var skoðaður í Kumlabrekku suður af Vagnbrekku. Einnig voru kirkjugarðsminjar skoðaðar á Hofstöðum í Laxárdal og fornir sorphaugar á Skútustöðum. Tilgangur ferðarinnar var að aldursgreina fornminjar með hjálp gjóskulaga. Skoðuð voru jarðvegssnið á öllum ofangreindum stöðum, afstaða gjóskulaga til fornminja könnuð og gjóskusýni tekin til frekari skoðunar.

Rannsóknir hafa sýnt að talsvert er af gjóskulögum í jarðvegi á Norðausturlandi sem koma að notum við aldursákvarðanir fornminja. Þau gjóskulög sem mest hefur verið stuðst við eru, Landnámslagið (LNL) frá því um 870, V~940, H-1104, H-1158, V-1159, K-1262, H-1300, V-1410, V-1477 og V-1717. Í Mývatnssveit er svokölluð Landnámssyrpa (LNS) skýr en í henni koma fyrir allt að sex dökk gjóskulög sem mynduðust á rúmlega 200 ára tímabili. Yngsta lagið í LNS er V~940. Þykkt LNS er á bilinu 6-10 cm (Sigurður Þórarinsson 1968, Guðrún Larsen 1982; 1984; 1992, Árni Einarsson *et al.* 1988, Karl Grönvold *et al.* 1995, Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson 1998, Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson *et al.* 2002; 2008).

**Mynd 1. Minjastaðir vestan og sunnan Mývatns skoðaðir 13.-15. júlí 2010 (gps-punktar).**

## *Niðurstöður*

### Þyrilskot (13.7.2010)

Snið var mælt í vesturprófíl skurðar (mynd 2). Yfir torfi er H-1300, V-1477 og líklega V-1717. Í torfi er LNS með V~940 gjóskunni. Undir torfi er LNS *in situ*, vel varðveitt. Mannvistarlag er á milli LNL og V~940. Í hliðarbökkum skurðarins sást H-1104 liggja yfir torfhrun og einnig grátt (stálgrátt) lag nokkru ofar, mögulega V-1159, 8-10 cm eru á milli laganna (torfhrun). Bæði þessi lög liggja yfir niðurgröft, sem því er eldri. Elstu merki um mannvist í Þyrilskoti eru því frá upphafi 10. aldar en veggurinn er hlaðinn á seinni hluta 10. aldar eða 11. öld.

**Hallskot**

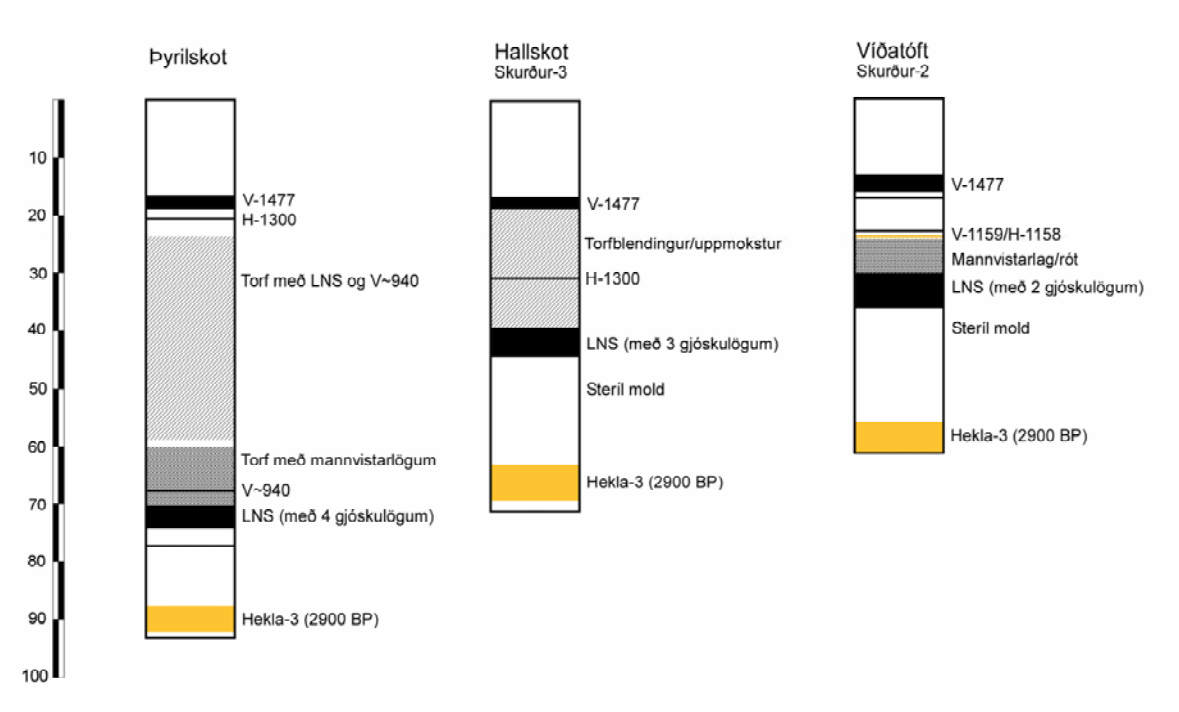
Snið var mælt í skurði-3 í innri túngarði (mynd 2). Næst yfir torfi er gjóskulagið V-1477. Tvö þunn dökk gjóskulög liggja í gegnum allt sniðið í torfi/torfblendingi. Samkvæmt smásjárskoðun eru um H-1300 að ræða í báðum tilvikum. Telja má víst að neðra lagið sé *in situ* en það efra í torfstreng. Undir þeim er torfblendingur. Undir mannvistarlögum er LNS með þremur gjóskulögum. Ekki er hægt að sjá V~940 gjóskuna í LNS. Elsti hluti garðsins er frá 10.-13. öld en yngsti hluti hans frá 14.-15. öld.

Tvö sýni voru tekin úr skurði-2 (bæjarhóll), úr meintu H-1104/1158 og svo úr mögulegu H-1300 lagi ofarlega yfir torfi. Smásjárskoðun staðfestir að þessi lög eru til staðar.

**Víðatóft**

Snið er mælt í skurði-2 norðan í skálatóft (mynd 2). Yfir mannvistarlagi eru V-1477 og mögulega V-1159 og H-1104/1158. Undir mannvistarlögum er LNS *in situ*, ekki er hægt að greina V~940 með vissu. Um 0,5 cm þykkur jarðvegur er á milli V-1159 og H-1104/1158. Mannvistarlögin eru að öllum líkindum frá 10.-11. öld.

Í skurði-3 (jarðhús) eru V-1477 og H-1300 yfir torfi og LNS undir uppmokstri.




**Mynd 2. Snið við Másvatn.**

## Arnarvatnssel

Skoða snið í garð vestan rústahóls (skurður-4). Um 1,4 m eru niður á svart 15 cm þykkt gjóskulag, líklega Heklu-5. Gjóskulagið V-1477 liggur yfir garðinn. Í veggnum, á 50-95 cm dýpi, er torf með Heklu-3 og LNS, blandað kolum. Á 95-110 cm dýpi er uppmokstur með Heklu-3 og LNS. Þar undir er steríl mold. Fremur erfitt er að sjá út aldur garðsins þar sem lítið er af gjóskulögum til að styðjast við. Ljóst er þó að hann er frá því fyrir 1477. Kjarni garðsins gæti verið mjög gamall.

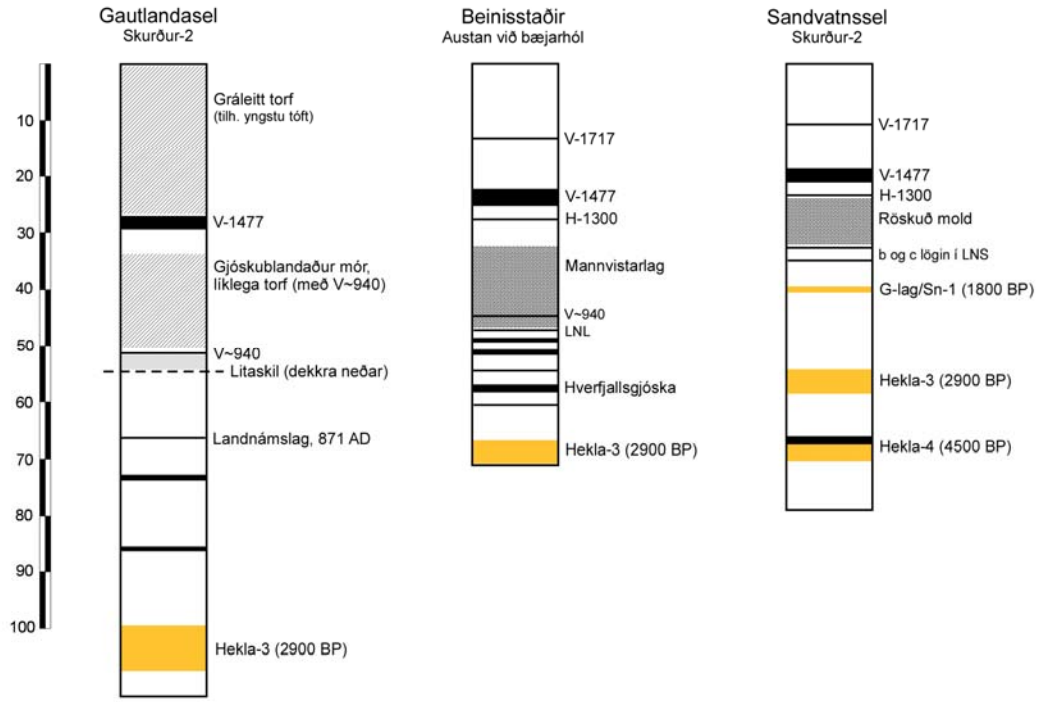
## Gautlandasel

Snið var mælt í skurði-2, utan í unglegri tóft. Undir unglegu torfi er V-1477, á 26 cm dýpi (mynd 3). Neðar tekur við 16 cm þykkur gjóskuríkur mór sem líklega er torf. Mór er í sniðinu niður að Heklu-3, sem er á 98 cm dýpi. Undir torfinu er grágrænt misþykkt gjóskulag, á 51 cm dýpi (gæti verið V~940 samkvæmt smásjárathugun). Litaskil eru á 54 cm dýpi, þar sem mórinn neðar dökknar. Þrjú dökk gjóskulög úr LNS eru neðan litaskilanna. Líklega er um mannvistarlag að ræða á milli V~940 og litaskilanna. Elstu

merki um mannvist í sniðinu eru frá fyrri hluta 10. aldar. Torfveggurinn (sá elsti) er líklega frá seinni hluta10. aldar eða 11. öld.

**Beinisstaðir**

Snið var mælt austan undir bæjarhól (mynd 3). Yfir mannvistarlagi, blandað kolum, eru V-1477 og H-1300. Neðarlega í mannvistarlaginu er líklega V~940 gjóskan. Þunnt mannvistarlag er undir gjóskunni, niður undir LNL. Elstu mannvistarlög á Beinisstöðum eru frá fyrri hluta 10. aldar eða jafnvel lokum 9. aldar.




**Mynd 3. Snið við Gautlandasel, Beinisstaði og Sandvatnssel.**

## Sandvatnssel (14.7.2010)

Snið var mælt í skurði-2, norðan við rústahól (mynd 3). Gjóskulögin V-1717, V-1477 og H-1300 eru yfir meintu mannvistarlagi (sem er óskýrt lag). Undir því er neðri hluti LNS varðveittur, en efri lög syrpunnar (V~940 og LNL) vantar (rofin burtu). Lítið er hægt að fullyrða um aldur meints mannvistarlags annað en að það er frá því fyrir 1300.

Í skurði-1 er mikið rask strax ofan við neðsta lag LNS, sums staðar vantar LNS alveg. Efst eru merki um torf með V-1477. Jarðlög eru verulega röskuð í sniðinu.

**Mýnesás**

Skurður í garðlag var skoðaður. Torfhleðsla liggur næst ofan á V~940 og gjóskulögin V-1477 og H-1300 liggja yfir garðinn. Um 3-4 cm af ljósleitri mold er undir H-1300 niður að torfi. Í torfinu eru LNS og Hverfjallsgjóskan en lítið af Heklu-3. Í vesturenda skurðar er mögulegt að H-1104/1158 liggi yfir torfhruni (slitrótt og þunnt). Garðlagið er frá því talsvert fyrir 1300 og líklega einnig 1104/1158. Líkast til er það frá 10.-11. öld.

**Girðingar**

Snið við skálatóft (mynd 4). Yfir torfi eru gjóskulögin V-1717, V-1477, H-1300 og mögulega ljósa Heklulagið H-1104/H-1158. Ljósa lagið er 2 cm neðan H-1300 og um 2 cm ofan við torf. Í torfinu er V~940 gjóskan áberandi ásamt þunnu mannvistarlagi næst ofan á gjóskunni. Undir torfinu er V~940 *in situ*. Þunnt ljósleitt mannvistarlag er ofan á því. LNS, með fimm gjóskulögum, er varðveitt undir torfinu. Rústin er frá seinni hluta 10. aldar eða 11. öld.

**Við Kleifarhólma við vesturbakka Laxár**

Skurður í tóft. Veggur er úr allstórum steinum og um 20 cm þykkum torfstabba þar undir. Ofan á grjótinu eru V-1477 og H-1300. Torf liggur alveg niður að V~940 gjóskunni. Torfið er með LNS. Í innanverðri tóftinni er H-1104/H-1158 um 3 cm yfir smágrjóti (sem liggur í gólflagi) og torfi með LNS. Í prufuholu í ruslahaug um 20 m norðar er V~1477 yfir sorplagi og V~940 undir því. Þunnt torfblandað lag er næst ofan á V~940 gjóskunni, undir sorplaginu. Rústin er frá seinni hluta 10. aldar eða 11. öld.

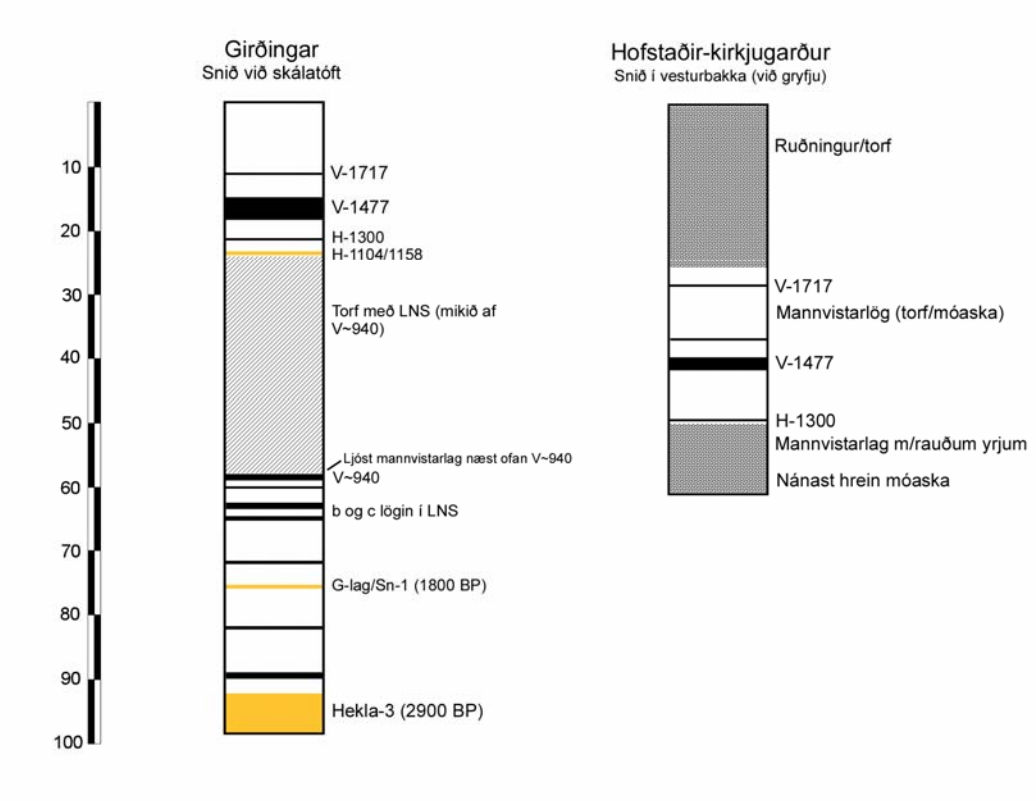
**Kumlabrekka**

Skoða meint bátskuml í Kumlabrekku. Uppmokstur liggur næst ofan á lífrænu lagi, en undir því er grænleit þunn gjóska, líklega LNL. Svo virðist sem V~940 gjóskuna vanti í LNS, en LNS er annars vel varðveitt undir uppmokstrinum. V~940 gæti því hafa fallið eftir að kumlið var grafið og lent í róti/raski sem fylgdi greftrinum. V-1477 liggur yfir

kumlinu. Kumlið er líklega frá fyrri hluta 10. aldar, sé gengið út frá því að V~940 hafi fallið um sama leyti eða skömmu eftir að kumlið var grafið.

### Þórutóftir í Seljadal

Yfir torfvegginn liggja V-1477 og H-1300 (sunnan megin í skurði). Torfið er með LNS og dálítið af Heklu-3. Torfveggur virðist sitja næst ofan á V~940 gjóskunni. Slitrur af H-1104/1158 liggja yfir torfhruni um 0,5 m vestan veggs inni í tóftinni. Tóftin er frá seinni hluta 10. aldar eða 11. öld.




**Mynd 4. Snið frá Girðingum og Hofstöðum í Laxárdal.**

### Hofstaðir – kirkjugarður (15.7.2010)

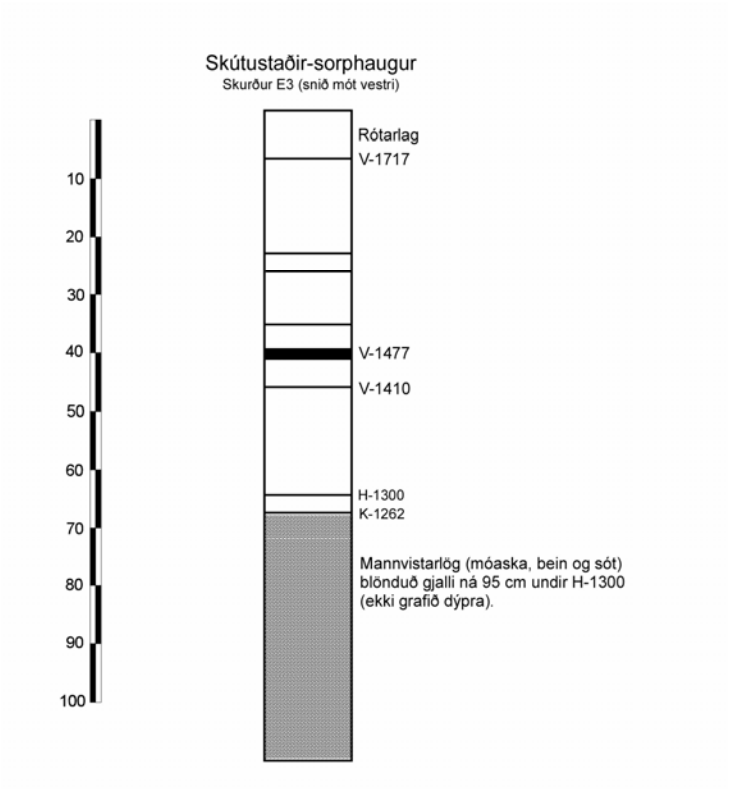
Mælt er snið í vesturbakka uppgraftarins, um 0,5 sunnan unglegrar sorpgryfju (mynd 4). Gjóskulögin V-1717, V-1477 og H-1300 eru allskýr í sniðinu. Á milli V-1717 og V-1477 eru tvö þunn gjóskulög. Undir H-1300 er rauðleitt mannvistarlag og móaska. Í gryfjunni

sést torflag (veggur) með LNS sem situr á um 5 cm þykku mannvistarlagi. Undir því er LNS *in situ*. H-1300 er um 25 cm yfir torfinu. Svo virðist sem gryfjan sé grafin eftir að V-1717 gjóskan féll, en lagið slitnar við gryfjubarminn. í holu-D sést mögulega H-1104/1158 um 16 cm neðan V-1477 og 9 cm ofan LNS.

**Skútustaðir – sorphaugur**

Skoða einkum snið í SK-E3, nálægt norðvesturhorni (þar sem lægð er í hrauninu). Í sniðinu koma fram allnokkur skýr gjóskulög, s.s. V-1717, V-1477, V-1410, H-1300 og K-1262 (mynd 5). Tvö þunn gjóskulög eru á milli V-1717 og V-1477. Ljósu gjóskulögin H-1104/1158 sjást ekki. Mannvistarlög ná a.m.k. 95 cm undir H-1300, en ekki var grafið dýpra. Móöskublandaður jarðvegur er í öllu sniðinu. Neðan H-1300 er áberandi mikið af gjalli í bland við jarðveginn.

Á syðra uppgraftarsvæðinu, SK-H, er V-1717 alláberandi ofarlega í sniðinu og einnig sést V-1477. Þunnt gjóskulag er um 1,5 cm ofan V-1477. Allskörp litaskil eru við V-1477, úr dökkgrárri mold fyrir ofan í rauðbrúna mold fyrir neðan (með beinum).




**Mynd 5. Snið frá Skútustöðum.**

## *Heimildir*


Árni Einarsson, Hafliði Hafliðason og Hlynur Óskarsson 1988: *Mývatn: Saga lífríkis og gjóskutímatal í Syðriflóa*. Náttúruverndarráð, fjölrit 17.

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Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson 1998: Gjóskulagarannsóknir á Hofstöðum 1992-1997. *Archaeologia Islandica* 1: 110-118.

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Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson, Ulf Hauptfleisch, Árni Einarsson 2008: Gjóskulög frá 700-1250 e.Kr. í botnseti Mývatns. Í: *Archaeological investigations at Sveigakot 2006* (ritstj.: Guðrún Alda Gísladóttir og Orri Vésteinsson). Fornleifastofnun Íslands, FS376-00217.

Sigurður Þórarinsson 1968: *Heklueldar*. Sögufélag, Reykjavík, 185 s.

Orri Vésteinsson

# *Viðbætur og leiðréttingar við fornleifaskrá Skútustaðahrepps*

Í skýrslu um fornleifarannsóknir í Mývatnssveit sumarið 2007 var kafli með viðbótum og leiðréttingum við fornleifaskrá Skútustaðahrepps sem tekin var saman á árunum 1996 til 1999. Hér verður með sama hætti getið staða sem komu í ljós við vettvangsathugun 2010, sem borist hafa ábendingar um og sem umtalsverðar breytingar hafa verið gerðar á skráningu á. Minniháttar breytinga á fornleifaskránni, mest uppfærslur á hnitum, er ekki getið hér.

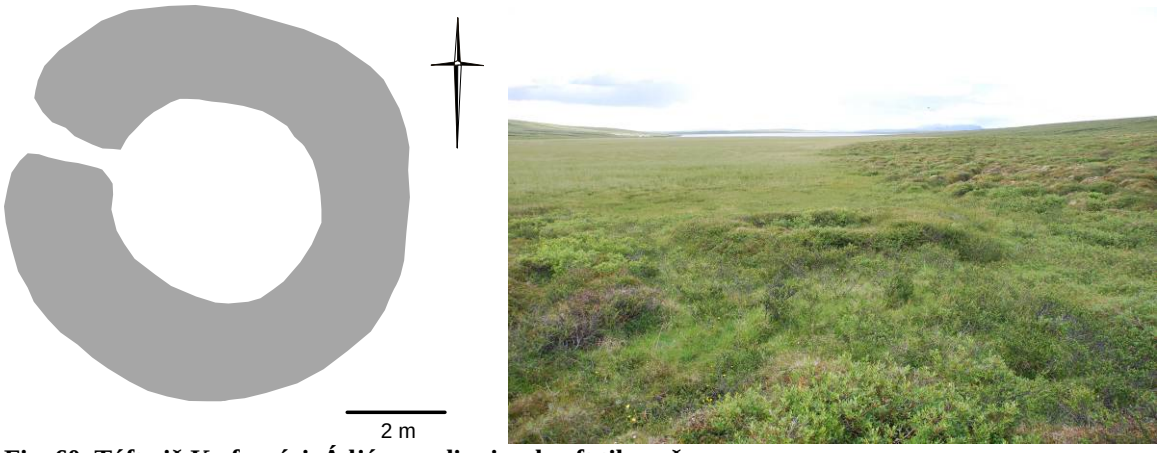


**Fig. 60. Tóft við Kæfumýri. Á ljósmyndinni er horft til norðurs.**

## Helluvað

**SÞ-193:058** tóft 65°36.631N 17°13.887V

1,07 km norður af Arnarvatnsseli 043 er tóft fast neðan við götuna sem liggur neðst í móanum meðfram brún Kæfumýrar. Tóftin er milli götunnar og mýrarinnar, 1,3 km suður af SA horni Másvatns.

Tóftin er neðst í geil sem skerst upp í móana frá Kæfumýri og eru aðeins 3 m frá tóftinni að störinni í mýrinni. Geilin hefur sennilega myndast af leysingavatni því hún virðist ekki vera regluleg vatnsrás. Víðáttumiklir lyngmóar eru ofan við og fara hækkandi til austurs. Kæfumýri vestan við er marflöt, teygist um 2 km suður frá Másvatni.

Alveg hringlega tóft, 8x8 m að utan en 4x4 m að innan. Veggir standa grónir, um 1,2 m háir en tóftin er engu að síður fornleg, með áþekkum gróðri og í móanum í kring.

Þó er heldur meira gras í botninum og þar vex gulvíðir, en fjalldrapi, lyng og mosi á veggjunum. Dyr eru til VNV,
**Hættumat:** engin hætta

**Fig. 61. Garðlag í Grasaskarði. Horft til vesturs frá gerðinu við Sellandagróf.**

**Fig. 62. Skurður í suðurhlið gerðisins, horft til austurs.**

## Grænavatn

**SÞ-203:062** tóft+garðlag óþekkt 65°27.999N 17°05.413V
Rúmlega 500 m norðan við Sellandahús 061, heldur norðar en beint austur af Grasaskarði, á vesturbakka Sellandagrófar er garðlag og óljós tóft, sem getur átt við lýsingu Helga Hallgrímssonar á Hölluseli, en það á skv. lýsingu staðkunnugra á að vera suðaustan við Sellandarétt (sjá 076). Garðurinn er eina augljósa mannvirkið en tóftin er á kafi í víði og því illgreinileg.

Stórþýfð valllendisflöt milli Sellandaáss og Sellandagrófar og er hún víðast komin á kaf í víðikjarr á þessum stað en norðar er meira af fjalldrapa og birki. Flötin er aðeins um 100 m breið á þessum stað, ofan við eru lyngmóar og svo blásinn ásinn, en um 150 m norðar víkka flatirnar mikið og hefur þar verið mikið graslendi áður en kjarrið tók að dafna.

Þessi vegsummerki eru alls ekki ótvíræð en þetta er þó eini staðurinn sem hægt er að koma heim við lýsingu Helga Hallgrímssonar. Norðar, nær Sellandarétt, gætu víða leynst tóftir á kjarri vöxnum flötunum. Tóftin er 10x4 m og snýr N-S en garðlagið hefst 10 m norðan við hana og sést greinilega á 5 m parti sem sveigir til NNV. Þar er um 1 m vik og næst kemur greinilegur 13 m langur kafli sem liggur beint í vestur. Þá er annað vik og síðan kemur 6 m kafli sem liggur til VSV. Þaðan má rekja garðinn í sveig til suðurs um 20 m en mjög er hann þó ógreinilegur og hverfur síðan alveg í lyngmóann. Það er því aðeins nyrðri hluti gerðisins sem sést og hefur það verið um 35 m breitt og varla minna en 40 m langt. 2010: Gerðið kemur nú fyrir sjónir eins og samfelldur hálfhringur út frá stalli, þar sem einnig gæti hafa verið garður en nú troðinn niður í fjárgötur. Ein greinileg tóft er við þennan stall norðantil og snýr A-V, grafin inn í brekkuna. Um 40 m eru innan garðs þar sem lengst er, N-S. Suðurhlið garðsins heldur

áfram til vesturs í móanum og má rekja hana á um 400 m kafla (þó stór eyða í kringum slóðann). Þessi garður hefur náð á milli Sellandagrófar og Krákár ef að líkum lætur. Einnig er mögulega á 15 m kafla garður sem gæti verið vesturhliðin á þessu gerði en það er ekki skýrt. Gerðið er hlaðið milli 940 og 1104/58.
**Hættumat:** engin hætta
**Heimildir:**AFSkút e HH

Sjá ennfremur bls. 53-56 í þessari skýrslu.

**Fig. 63. Höllusel í rigningu, horft í suðaustur.**

**SÞ-203:076** *Höllusel* 2 tóftir óþekkt 65°28.312N 17°04.971V
"Höllusel. Það er eitt af seltóttum Grænavatns suður í Sellöndum. Óljósar byggðasagnir eru við Höllusel tengdar." segir í örnefnalýsingu. "Höllusel er skammt fyrir innan Oddastaði "Hóll með kofarústum" (örnefnalýsing). Halda menn að þar hafi búið einsetukona með þessu nafni en trúlega er þetta gamalt sel (ekki skoðað) … Tóftir við Sellandagróf. Rústir og garður um 5 - 700 m norðan við Sellandahús." segir í söguminjaskrá. Beint austur af suðurenda Sellandaréttar, eða heldur sunnar er grænn hóll með hundaþúfu fast á austurbakka Sellandagrófar. Grynnri farvegur grófarinnar er austan við tóftarhól þennan og er hann því eins og á eyju í grófinni.

Á valllendishól sem nú er að mestu kominn á kaf í fjalldrapa og víði.

Nyrðri tóftin er aflöng, 4x2 m og skiptist í tvö hólf. Hún er austan við hundaþúfu en undir henni grillir í annað hólf. Þessar mannvirkjaleifar eru á eldri rústum. Hin tóftin er 3 m sunnar, 2,5x1,5 m að innanmáli, og er norðausturhornið alveg ógreinilegt. Ekki er

óhugsandi að þessar rústir séu af Hölluseli. 2010: Ein tóft á rústahól um 30 m austan við Sellandagróf. Tóftin snýr N-S, 7x4 m og er austanmegin á rústahól sem er 12x10 m og gæti önnur tóft verið samhliða hinni vestanmegin. Þar er hundaþúfa. Hleðsluhæð tóftar er 0,5 m en rústahóllinn sem hún er á er um 1 m á hæð. Kjarr og lyngmóar allt í kring. 85 m NNA við er stór náttúrulegur hóll, laus frá hlíðinni, um 4 m hár. Hann er flatur að ofan og þar á er grasflöt, að mestu slétt en þó dældir austan og norðan í. Ekki er skýrt tóftalag á neinu en rústalegt engu að síður.
**Hættumat:** engin hætta
**Heimildir:**Ö-Grænavatn, 253; AFSkút e HH

**Fig. 64. Hellukofi, horft í vestur. Birkir Fanndal tók myndina sumarið 2010.**

**SÞ-203:077** hús óþekkt
Hellukofi er í hrauninu um 1 km austan við Sveigakot.
Í gróðurlausu helluhrauni.
Kofinn er hlaðinn á hraungarði. Birkir Fanndal tók mynd af honum sumarið 2010 en af henni að dæma stendur hann enn, en er mjög lágur (um 1,5 m), með op við jörðu á austurhlið.

## Geirastaðir

**SÞ-213:036** *við Kleifarhólma* tóft 65°35.409N 17°06.709V
Geirastaðamegin á móts við þar sem Syðstakvísl og Miðkvísl koma saman, um 100 m vestan við árbakkann og um 50 m vestan við (Efra) Kleifarhólma, er tóft
50-100 m breiða grasengisræma milli árbakkans og hraunsins. Vel gróið hraun en mjög

sprungið og eru tóftirnar byggðar ofan á a.m.k. einni mjórri sprungu en ein stærri er austan við.

Tóftin skiptist í þrjú stór hólf. Það vestasta stendur hæst og hefur greinilegasta veggi. Úr eystri hólfunum tveimur er gengið út til austurs, að árbakkanum en ekki sjást merki um dyr á vestasta hólfinu. Grafið var í þessa tóft 2010 og reyndist hún vera byggð eftir 940 en vera fallin fyrir 1104/58. Einnig fannst öskuhaugur við norðausturhorn hennar með vel varðveittum dýrabeinum.

**Hættumat:** engin hætta

Sjá ennfremur bls. 35-36 í þessari skýrslu.

**Fig. 65. Varða frá miðöldum í landi Hofstaða, horft til VNV.**

## Hofstaðir

**SÞ-214:069** varða 65°37.336N 17°09.576V

660 m suður af Geldingatættum 021 er varða á dálitlum hól. Hún er 30 m norðan við vatnsfarveg, fast ofan (austan) við götuna milli Hofstaða og Geldingatótta. Varðan er í hvarfi frá Hofstöðum.

Í lyngmóa, efst í brekkunni ofan við Laxá. Varðan er á aflangri þúfu, náttúrulegri, um 4 m ofan við götu og 25 m norðan við þurran farveg, neðst í hvammi sem lokast sunnan við af leiti sem ber fyrir bæjarhólinn á Hofstöðum.

Varðan er ofan á þúfu sem er 7 m frá norðri til suðurs (snýr eins og gatan neðan við) og 3-4 m breið frá austri til vesturs. Hún er um 1,5 m há en í vörðunni eru 2 umför og hefur hún aldrei verið stór um sig. 12.7.2010 var grafið í þúfua sem varðan er á til að

ganga úr skugga um hvers eðlis hún er. Hún reyndist vera náttúruleg. Í skurði sem grafinn var 20 sm vestan við norðurhluta vörðunnar sást að botn hennar var á 30 sm dýpi og eru 1-2 umför alveg sokkin. V-1477 leggst yfir neðstu steinaröðina en H-1104/58 er undir (og undir því LNS án grænu laganna. Af vörðunni sjást nú fjórir steinar og er grunnflötur hennar 60x45 sm en undir sverði eru aðrir 80 sm til vesturs þannig að samtals er vörðubotninn 125x80 sm. Lengri hliðin er A-V, þvert á hlíðina.
**Hættumat:** engin hætta

**Fig. 66. Garðlagið þvert yfir Heiðarsporðslaut. Horft í austur**

**SÞ-214:070** garðlag vörslugarður 65°35.560N 17°07.003V
Grjóthlaðið garðlag er í hrauninu norðnorðvestan við tóftina SÞ-213:036 við Kleifarhólma

Í úfnu apalhrauni.

Garðurinn byrjar að sjást í hraunbrúninni austan við túnin sem eru austan við þjóðveginn norður með Mývatni. Sá staður mun vera í Hofstaðalandi en austurendi garðisins er í landi Geirastaða. Fyrst má rekja garðinn um 80 m í norður en síðan 173 m til viðbótar í austur. Á þeirri leið liggur hann yfir Heiðarsporðslaut sem er gróin geil í hraunið en annars er garðurinn hlaðinn á hrauninu og notast víða við nibbur og náttúrulega kanta. Hann er mjög hlykkjóttur í hrauninu en svo til beinn yfir lautina. Ekki tókst að rekja hann lengra til austurs en að girðingarundirstöðu sem liggur norður-suður austarlega í hrauninu. Af stefnu og samhengi að dæma er þessi garður framhald af 055
**Hættumat:** engin hætta

Sjá ennfremur bls. 35-36 í þessari skýrslu.

# *Discussion*

The new data collected in 2010 brings greater resolution to the picture that has been emerging of the development of settlement in Mývatnssveit for the last decade. There are now seven sites with evidence for occupation before ~940 and 18 sites which had been abandoned before 1300. Among the latter there is great variation in the length of occupation/use. At least seven sites had been abandoned before 1104/1158 – and of those at least three had been abandoned before 1104 – while a few sites show evidence of occupation throughout the 12th and 13th centuries and two (Steinbogi and Hallskot) a short period into the 14th. At present it is not possible to say whether there were waves of abandonment in particular periods or whether the abandonments were happening gradually in this 400 year period. Tentatively it can be argued that it was a bit of both. There is a sizeable group of sites with very short occupation. All seem to have 9th-10th century start dates but many do not seem to have been used for more than a few decades, few years even. A high proportion of these sites are not farms, sites like við Víðatóft and Þyrilskot, but there are also sites which clearly were farms, or were intended to be farms, which did not outlast the 11th century. Girðingar is an example of a site with only a single construction phase which looks like an experiment abandoned almost before it began. On the other hand there is a large number of sites with much longer occupation histories, some of which seem to have thrived for a while. Sveigakot had its heyday in the 9th-10th centuries but lasted, possibly with a lengthy hiatus, down to the second half of the 12th century. Selhagi, Beinisstaðir and Þorleifsstaðir all seem to have been in occupation down to the final years of the 13th century, and Þorleifsstaðir in particular seems to represent a substantial operation.

Among the very early sites, those with evidence for occupation before ~940 the whole range of site types and social status is represented. There is Gautlandasel which does not have an enclosure and may always simply have been a shieling. There is Þyrilskot which can hardly have been a farm and fell out of use very quickly. There is Sveigakot which was definetely a low status farm and lasted into the 12th century. There

is Beinisstaðir which was also probably a low stauts farm and lasted down to 1300. Then there is Hrísheimar which seems to have been a higher status site but was abandoned, possibly as early as the 11th century although the end date of this site has not been firmly established, and Þorleifsstaðir which was also a substantial farm but abandoned between 1262 and 1300. Finally there is Skútustaðir, the farm that was to become the centre of the southern part of Mývatnssveit and from its location can be argued to have been a high status site from the outset. Considering that only at Hofstaðir is there firm evidence that occupation began after ~940 (and that only applies to the site of the monumental hall – it is still possible that the farm mound 100 m away has earlier roots) and that at some of the sites which have evidence for construction work shortly after ~940 there is also evidence for earlier activity (e.g. at Girðingar, við Kleifarhólma and Geldingatættur), and considering also how often the V~940 has been stripped away making determination of the start date of the earliest archaeological layers impossible; considering all this it appears more likely than not that practically all these sites started before ~940.

What is clear is that the building of enclosures and boundaries only started after ~940. It also seems likely that the building of halls belongs to the mid- to late 10th century. Much fewer halls than boundaries have been dated but in addition to the well known Sveigakot case, small halls at Girðingar and við Kleifarhólma clearly post-date ~940. This of course begs the question what sort of activity took place at these sites before ~940 and what sort of structures they had. So far the pre ~940 evidence consists of middens (Hrísheimar, Skútustaðir), traces of cultivation (Þyrilskot and Beinisstaðir) and midden and SFBs (Sveigakot). At Þorleifsstaðir the pre~940 cultural layers consist of upcast plausibly interpreted as the result of digging for SFBs. The hypothesis to be tested by further work is therefore that the earliest phase of activy at these sites is charactrerized by sunken-featured buildings and cultivation but little or no positive architecture of any kind. If this is proven to be true it opens the possibility that there may be sites which were abandoned before the construction of enclosures and other positive features, the visibility of which is therefore liable to be extremely limited. Sites with halls but not enclosures, like Hali, Saltvík and possibly Raufarhóll, may on these grounds

be suggested to belong the the middle of the 10th century before the building of enclosures became commonplace.[44]

The hypothesis that the three sites (or four if Geirastaðir is included) around the river channels where Laxá drains from Lake Mývatn represent a particularly early stage in the settlement of Mývatnssveit is so far not supported by the results of the trenching. For one thing it has emerged that these sites are much less ephemeral than originally thought. Mýnesás in particular has turned out to be more like the numerous enclosed farms with substantial hay-making potential and the boundary associated with við Kleifarhólma suggests that this site owned not only some of the best fishing and fowling locations in Iceland but also had considerable meadows. It is still possible that these sites had particularly early roots but it is also clear that they were operating at least in the second half of the 10th century and possibly considerably longer. Við Kleifarhólma seems to have been the first to be abandoned, probably in the 11th century, while Selhagi may have been used until the 13th. If the reconstruction of the property of við Kleifarhólma is correct (and there are several ifs and buts in this) it is clear that it will have commanded some of the best lands later belonging to Hofstaðir and Geirastaðir. It is tempting to associate the demise of við Kleifarhólma (and possibly Brenna by Sandvatn further north[45]) with the rise of Hofstaðir as a centre in tha late 10th century. The fact that the structure at við Kleifarhólma is built after ~940, like the great hall at Hofstaðir, suggests that the reorganisation of the land holdings belongs to a later stage than the building of the hall. This may support notions that Hofstaðir was, originally at least, not a farm and that it only became one as a result of being a community centre. All this is of course based on the assumption that the three sites really were farms. The

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[44] Bjarni F. Einarsson & Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson 1996, *Forkannanir á fornbýlinu Hala í Hlíðardal í Þingeyjarsýslu 1994-95*, Fornleifafræðistofan, Reykjavík. Two hall-like structures at Saltvík post-date the V~940 tephra. Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2004, *Fornleifarannsóknir í Saltvík 2003*, FS246, Reykjavík, pp. 11-13. A hall-like structure at Raufarhóll, on the property of Vindbelgur, is associated with a pagan burial nearby, but has not been dated: Elín Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir, Orri Vésteinsson & Sædís Gunnarsdóttir 1998, *Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahreppi* II. *Fornleifar í Baldursheimi, á Litlu-Strönd, Sveinsströnd, Arnarvatni, Neslöndum, Vindbelg og Geirastöðum*, FS049, Reykjavík, pp. 63-64.

[45] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2003, *Landscapes of settlement 2002. Reports on investigations at five medieval sites in Mývatnssveit*, pp. 53-54.

animal bone assemblages from Selhagi and við Kleifarhólma do suggest this, depsite the lack of practically all other features normally associated with farms (enclosed home-field, outbuildings) as do the more substantial structures as Mýnesás. Nevertheless there are good reasons to wonder about the nature of these sites, which only further research can throw light on.

The relatively late appearance of the home-field enclosures raises some interesting questions about their nature and about the development of home-fields in the first decades of settlement. Interestingly a mid- to late 10th century date coincides with the calculation that home-field productivity increased rapidly for c. 80 years after the beginning of systematic manuring but levelled off after that.[46] In other words, if manuring started at these sites at the beginning of settlement in the late 9th century, a scenario supported by evidence for pre~940 cultivation at Beinisstaðir and Þyrill, then enclosure only happened once peak productivity had been reached. In this light it is possible to see the enclosures primarily as measures to preserve investment already made, and they may as such reflect an awareness of this change; that people noticed that the year on year increases in productivity were not happening any more and that they reacted by fencing in the manured areas. This can be seen as a conservation measure but it can at the same time have been associated with further expansion and the starting of manuring of larger areas. It is possible that the difference between small and larger enclosures has not so much to do with the size of the operation but the intensity of manuring, i.e. that there were different strategies where some preferred to intensively manure small areas while others spread their manure thinly over larger areas. It seems likly that the latter strategy was the more successful in the long run, and that the appearance of outer enclosures, like at Víðatóft, represents attempts to adjust to an extensive strategy once the intensive strategy had been shown to be the poorer bet. If this line of reasoning is not entirely off the mark then it opens up the possibility that the smallest sites, the likes of Þyrilskot and Geldingatættur, were in fact farms and that the absence of any hall like

[46] Adderley, Paul W., Simpson, Ian A. & Orri Vésteinsson 2008, 'Local-scale adaptations: A modeled assessment of soil, landscape, microclimatic, and management factors in Norse home-field productivities.' *Geoarchaeology. An International Journal* 23/4, 500-27.

structures only suggests that they are very early farms where people lieved in SFBs. The small size of the enclosed homefield then only reflects that an intensive manuring strategy was followed. The pitfall in determining site type from the size of these enclosures is that all sites would have had to start off with an unimproved home-field, i.e. no home-field at all. For the first years or decades they would have had to rely on meadows hay for much of their fodder and only gradually would the improved areas around the settlements have started to become important for the fodder provision. One issue is that at the outset it would not have been possible to know, at least with any accuracy, how large an area would be needed, i.e. whether half a hectare would be enough for a cow-fodder or whether a whole hectare would be needed. It might well have looked like a reasonable bet that a quarter or half a hectare, intensively manured, would be enough or, more likely, that it would yield the greatest returns in the shortest time. That may even have been the case and the exponential increase in the size of the homefield seen at sites like Víðatóft may relfect the success of such a strategy. There is much here to investigate.

If the conclusion is right that most or all the sites with medieval dates as well as the sites which were occupied in later times have a pre~940 start date then this has significant implications for our understanding of the settlement process. It means that there were about twice as many potential farm sites in the Mývatn region in the 10$^{th}$ century as there were in the 14$^{th}$. Most or all these sites were farms, or sites that were intended to become farms. A few of them may have been short-lived and could then be explained in terms of experimentation in a new land (Girðingar would be the prime candidate) but most of the sites that were eventually abandoned had life-spans of 150-400 years which suggests that in the 10$^{th}$ century context at least they can be considered as permanent fixtures in the landscape. It is possible that all these sites represent separate households and in fact it is difficult not to see sites like Hrísheimar, Þorleifsstaðir or Brenna as such. There is really only doubt about the intermediate types of sites, Geldingatættur, við Víðiker and Þyrilskot, which may not represent separate households. To that group may be added Arnarvatnssel, and the sites Þrælagerði and Geldingatættur on the boundary between Helluvað and Brettingsstaðir which have not been trenched so far. Because of their small size these sites are more likely to be underrepresented and

they may therefore have been something like 1/5 of the total (#10?).[47] However, even when they are disregarded there are nearly twice as many abandoned farm sites (18) as historic farms (22). It is possible that there really were 40 separate household/farm units and the fact that in 1703 there were 37 households in this area supports this.[48] It may suggest that the abandonment of nearly half the sites reflects not so much population decline and less intensive use of the land but rather a reorganisation involving nucleation of households on fewer sites and probably changes in the use of the outfields. The evidence from the shieling sites is equivocal but it may be that the decrease in the number of farm sites coincided with an intensification of shieling activity. It is certainly likely that the home-fields of the abandoned farms would have been used for decades or centuries afterwards and in shielings were in fact established on a high number of these sites, although it is at present not possible to say whether this followed directly upon the abandonement or was a much later development. At least 10 of the 18 sites have later reuse as shieling or winter-house for sheep and this is reflected in name-changes like Selholt and Selhagi.

At the very least it is possible to say that in the 10th century a much more extensive system of settlement was in place than in the 14th and that a high proportion of those early farms were very small, probably single family households like at Sveigakot. Although some of the farms, both those that were later abandoned and those who continued in operation down to later centuries, probably had larger, more complex, households, it seems that the 10th century system was characterised by a high number of very small units. It is possible that many or all of the smallest units, of the Sveigakot, type were not independent farms, but outstations or cottages from mpre substantial farms but such relationships will be difficult to demonstrate archaeologically. Rather it can be suggested that this extensive pattern reflects two related concerns which had currency when the settlement was planned. On the one hand the high number of sites can be seen

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[47] Place names ending in –gerði might indicate this type of site, i.e. Álftagerði and Rófugerði, as well as Graðungagerði also known as Höskuldsstaðasel. Other sites of uncertain original status, like Litlaströnd, Syðri Neslönd, Arnarbæli and Þuríðarnes also may have belonged to this group.

[48] *Manntal á Íslandi 1703*. There were 28 in 1712 after the small-pox epidemic – *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar* XI, 188-89, 222-44.

as a measure to assert ownership of land. This might be a particular concern in landscapes where large areas of pasture and meadow were need to support each unit and where resources where unevenly distributed. The sites that later became superfluous can then be seen primarily as place-holders, as assertions of ownership and/or use-right to land and resources. I have suggested such a scenario for Sveigakot[49] but it can be argued for most of the 18 sites except, perhaps, the very largest, like Brenna and Þorleifsstaðir. In particular such an explanation may be useful to understand the sites around the Laxá drainage. They may have been outstations from the farms slightly further away, Selhagi for Haganes, Mýnesás for Arnarvatn and við Kleifarhólma for Geirastaðir, but they can also be seen as access points to the riches of the lake for substantial farms further off, farms which did not themselves have direct access to it. The much later arrangement whereby Hofstaðir had a landing site on the property of Geirastaðir[50] may be a remnant of such a system. In this scenario the abandoned farms are seen as apertures to their neighbours, subject in one way or another and possibly not even separate properties. It is also possible to see all 40 sites as independent, at least of one another; as separate holdings with separate and divided use-rights but possibly nevertheless subject to a more distant landowner, either within the region or without. Deciding between the two scenarios will be difficult (and others can be imagined) but what they both reflect is ideas about the carrying-capacity of the land and the ideal sie of a farm unit. It may be that the people who first came to Mývatnssveit and organised its colonistaion overestimated the carrying-capacity of the land, probably by just a fraction, and that they under-estimated the size of the optimal household unit. The overall settlement pattern seems to reflect a desire to place as many small units on the land as possible. This may reflect the private desires of individual families but it is more likely to reflect the calculations of the people who intended to set themselves up as landowners and who wanted to get as much revenue from the land as quickly as possible and who wanted to make sure their claim to the land was indisputable. It is important to consider that what may have been a mis-calculation

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[49] Orri Vésteinsson 2010, 'Ethnicity and class in settlement period Iceland.' *The Viking Age: Ireland and the West. Papers from the Proceedings of the Fifteenth Viking Congress, Cork, 18-27 August 2005*, eds. John Sheehan & Donnachadh Ó Corráin, Dublin: Four Courts Press, pp. 494-510.
[50] *Diplomatarium islandicum* VI, p. 110.

in the long run may have been entirely reasonable and spot-on at the time the calculation was made. It may well be that before the improvement of hay fields for instance this was a highly effective way of utilising and controlling the land. Hopefully the analysis of artefact and animal bone assemblages from Sveigakot, Hrísheimar and Skútustaðir will throw light on these issues, but it also seems likely that further excavation will be needed to clarify them.

As already mentioned the results from the shielings are equivocal. At Gautlandasel and possibly Sellandasel there are indications of occupation before ~940 but at Arnarvatnssel and Sandvatnssel it can only be said at present that they were used in the middle ages, Sandvatnssel definitely before 1300. Unlike the abandoned sites these sites were more or less continuously occupied down to c. 1900 and later activity therefore is more likely to have disturbed the early contexts. This was particularly apparent at Arnarvatnssel where there was clearly considerable activity in the middle ages but where early tephras could not be found in situ. On balance therefore it seems that the shielings should also be considered among the 10$^{th}$ century sites. As the evidence from Sellandasel suggests it may be that they may initially have served other functions and Arnarvatnssel may originally have been a site of the same type as Þyrilskot (which may of course have had some sort of shieling function). The absence of enclosures at the other sites suggests that by the late 10$^{th}$ century at least home-fields had not developed at these sites or were not thought worth protecting, and on the whole it seems safe to interpret Gautlandasel, Sandvatnssel and Sellandasel as shielings from the outset. The relationship between Sellandasel and the 10$^{th}$ century boundary just north of it supports this. If it had been a farm it is more likely that the boundary would have been closer to mid-way between Sellandasel and Oddastaðir, or whichever farm further north it served, but a location just on the other side of a boundary is typical and logical for a shieling.

On aspect that still needs clarification is how representative the data from Mývatnssveit is. There are now 34 sites with confirmed or probable Viking age dates in the area which makes it by far the most densely covered in the country. Mývatnssveit is however atypical in many respects, in particular its high altitude and open landscape which can easily be seen as reasons for a particular, and peculiar, settlement structure. There is however data emerging from other regions which indicates that the picture of

much greater settlement density in the 9th-10th century with a gradual decrease in the number of farm sites until the 13th-14th centuries is not particular to Mývatnssveit and holds at least for the whole of the Northeast of the country.

The well known pattern of early highland margin settlement[51] may or may not be a part of this story. In Krókdalur six sites with Viking age dates are known and all but one seem to have been occupied for a very short period. None of those sites however seem to have been occupied particularly early. The sites that can be dated with higher resolution than just Viking age, Helgastaðir and undir Sandmúla, seem to have been established after c. 950[52] and so was Svartárkot. It is interesting that the earliest evidence for occupation in the highland area of Hólsfjöll also postdates the ~940 tephra.[53] It seems that apart from Svartárkot all the sites in the Krókdalur region were abandoned before the end of the 11th century. The difference between this area and Mývatnssveit is that the inland region was completely abandoned and the land can no longer have been used for farming in the same way as the abandoned farms in Mývatnssveit. Krókdalur became summer pasture, and may have been used for charcoal and iron making, but its abandonment was essentially absolute compared with the more complex goings-on in the still fully inhabited area of Mývatnssveit. Although the inland areas seem to have been established later their occupation can be seen as a part of the initial colonisation process, evidencing assessments of carrying-capacity and concerns for place-holding, but their abandonment, much more swift and complete, is likely to have a more particular and context-specific explanation.

More useful comparisons to the Mývatn data are to be had from other, still inhabited, regions. Similar patterns of settlement, with high numbers of abandoned farms interspersed between continuously occupied farms have been recorded in Reykjahverfi

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[51] Guðrún Sveinbjarnardóttir 1992, *Farm Abandonment in Medieval and Post-Medieval Iceland: an Interdisciplinary Study*, (Oxbow Monograph 17), Oxford. Sveinbjörn Rafnsson 1990, *Byggðaleifar í Hrafnkelsdal og á Brúardölum*, (Rit hins íslenska fornleifafélags 1), Reykjavík.

[52] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2005, *Archaeological investigations in Krókdalur 2005*, FS387, Reykjavík.

[53] Uggi Ævarsson 2009, *Fornleifakönnun á Hólsfjöllum – Bakkastaðir og Þrælagerði*, FS410, Reykjavík.

and Kelduhverfi.[54] The patterns and the characteristics of the abandoned farms are entirely comparable to Mývatnssveit but so far dating evidence has been obtained from only one site in Reykjahverfi, Saltvík,[55] and one in Kelduhverfi, Maríugerði. Both have late 10th to 11th century dates and seem to be comparable to the sites with the shortest occupation in Mývatnssveit. In Þegjandadalur a contiguous area of 5-10 abandoned farms has been recorded. Some of these farms were quite substantial and were occupied for several centuries but the whole valley seems to have been deserted before 1300.[56] In other parts of Aðaldalur two separate sites conform to the pattern: Höfðagerði, also a substantial farm abandoned between 1300 and 1477,[57] and Litlu-Núpar where occupation had long ceased in 1477 although it can at present not be narrowed down more preceisely.[58] In Seljadalur west of Reykjadalur, a valley of comparable altitude to Mývatnssveit, three sites have been dated. Hólakot, was abandoned before 1300,[59] a single structure (not a farm) referred to as Þórutóftir was in ruins before 1104/58 while Narfastaðasel had been established before 1300.[60]

Further afield recent field-work in Hörgárdalur in the Eyjafjörður region has uncovered evidence of a small farm, Skuggi, occupied in the 10th-12th centuries,[61] and a

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[54] Birna Lárusdóttir 2007, 'Settlement organization and farm abandonment: The curious landscape of Reykjahverfi, North-East Iceland.' ed. Wendy Davies, Guy Halsall & Andrew Reynolds: *People and Space in the Middle Ages, 300-1300* (Studies in the Early Middle Ages 15), Brepols, Turnhout, pp. 45-63. Stefán Ólafsson ed. 2008, *Fornleifaskráning í Kelduneshreppi* I-II, FS392, Reykjavík.

[55] Orri Vésteinsson ed. 2004, *Fornleifarannsóknir í Saltvík 2003*. Lilja Björk Pálsdóttir et al. 2010, *Fornleifauppgröftur á fornu býli í Kelduhverfi. Framkvæmdarannsókn vegna fyrirhugaðs Dettifossvegar*, FS443, Reykjavík.

[56] Elín Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir & Howell Roberts 2009, 'Þögnin rofin. Fyrstu niðurstöður fornleifarannsókna á eyðibyggð á Þegjandadal.' *Árbók Þingeyinga 2008*, pp. 5-24.

[57] Oscar Aldred 2004, *Archaeological investigations, Höfðagerði, Núpar 2003*, FS227, Reykjavík, p. 36.

[58] Lilja Björk Pálsdóttir & Rúnar Leifsson 2010, *Fornleifarannsóknir á Litlu-Núpum í Aðaldal 2008 og 2009*, FS453, Reykjavík.

[59] Sólveig Guðmundsdóttir Beck 2010, *Fornleifakönnun í Hólakoti, Seljadal*, FS441, Reykjavík.

[60] Þóra Pétursdóttir 2009, *Frumrannsókn menningarminja í Narfastaðaseli*, FS418, Reykjavík.

[61] Harrison, Ramona 2010, 'Small holder farming in early medieval Iceland. Skuggi in Hörgárdalur.' *Archaeologia islandica* 8, 51-76

probably larger farm, Oddstaðir, occupied into the 13th-14th centuries.[62] In Þistilifjörður what looks like like a substantial farm on the coast, Hjálmarvík, had been abandoned before 1300 and incorporated into the estate of Svalbarð, perhaps in a similar development as took place in Þegjandadalur where the major church centres Múli and Grenjaðarstaður took over the fields and pastures of the deserted farms. There are a number of farms from around the country with late-Viking age to late medieval abandonment dates which cannot be related to natural causes or short-distance relocations, e.g. Goðatættur in Papey (12th), Herjólfsdalur in Vestmannaeyjar (11th), Þjótandi in Flói (12th), Hvítárholt in Hrunamannahreppur (11th), Skallakot (11th) and Snjáleifartóttir (12th) in Þjórsárdalur, Háls in Hálsasveit (14th), Reyðarfell in Borgarfjörður (16th) and Forna-Lá in Eyrarsveit (15th-16th),[63] but to what extent these sites may reflect comparable processes as seen in the Northeast is difficult to judge as information about the landscape and settlement context at each site is as a rule limited.

It is at least a possibility that similar processes as have been documented for Mývatnssveit were underway throughout the country from the 11th to the 14th century. There are clearly areas like Reykjahverfi and Kelduhverfi where the abandonment rates were comparable to or greater than in Mývatnssveit but judging from comprehensive survey work in regions like Eyjafjörur, Fljótsdalshérað and the southern plains most areas witnessed farm-site reduction on a significantly more limited scale than Mývatnssveit.

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[62] Unpublished radiocarbon dates, SUERC-27385, 27389-27393.

[63] See references in Table 1, pp. 74-75 in Orri Vésteinsson 2004, 'Icelandic farmhouse excavations. Field methods and site choices.' *Archaeologia islandica* 3, pp. 71-100. Also Bjarni F. Einarsson & Sandra Sif Einarsdóttir 2009, *Þjótandi við Þjórsá. Fornleifarannsóknir 2008*, Fornleifafræðistofan, Reykjavík.

Orri Vésteinsson

# *Samantekt*

Sumarið 2010 var í þriðja sinn gerð atlaga að því að tímasetja fornbýli í Mývatnssveit og nágrenni. Grafið var í fjögur fornbýli í Mývatnssveit og þrjú efst í Reykjadal, í landi Máskots og Víða. Þá var grafið í fjögur sel og fornan garð í Mývatnssveit og gerðar athuganir í Svartárkoti í Bárðardal. Þessar athuganir fylla mjög þá mynd sem rannsóknir síðustu 15 ára hafa smátt og smátt dregið upp af upphafi og þróun byggðar á þessu svæði.

Þrír staðir bættust í flokk þeirra sem nú má fullyrða að séu eldri en ~940. Það eru Þyrilskot, Beinisstaðir og Gautlandasel. Því er nú vitað um sjö staði á þessu svæði þar sem mannvist hafði hafist fyrir ~940. Meðal þeirra eru bæði bólstaðir og sel, og meðal bólstaðanna bæði örreytiskot og stórbýli. Fyrir utan Hofstaði er hvergi hægt að fullyrða að byggð hafi **ekki** verið komin á fyrir ~940. Því veldur að mjög er tilviljun háð hvort V~940 gjóskan hafi varðveist einmitt á þeim stöðum þar sem skurðirnr eru teknir og mjög víða hefur jarðvegur verið stunginn upp í öndverðu þannig að gjóskulögum er ekki lengur til að dreifa. Það má því álykta að flestir ef ekki allir þekktir bólstaðir á svæðinu hafi verið komnir í byggð fyrir ~940. Það eru alls 40 staðir sem vitað er um (fyrir utan selin) en þar sem ætla má að einhverjir staðir hafi orðið eyðileggingu að bráð hefur þessi tala verið heldur hærri. Það leiðir af þessu að á 10. öld hafi verið tvöfalt fleiri bólstaðir í Mývatnssveit heldur en á 14. öld og síðar. Athygli vekur um þessa elstu staði að garðlögin (sem flestir skurðirnir eru í) eru ævinlega yngri en ~940 og þar sem grafið hefur verið í skálalegar rústir þá eru þær líka yngri en gjóskan sú. Þetta gæti styrkt þá hugmynd að þróun mála í Sveigakoti, þar sem fyrstu 2-3 kynslóðirnar bjuggu í jarðhúsum áður en lítill skáli var byggður, sé ef til vill dæmigerð fyrir svæðið allt. Ef garðlög voru ekki hlaðin og ekki heldur skálar fyrr en á seinni hluta 10. aldar þá þýðir það að elstu bólstaðir eru þá því aðeins sýnilegir að þeir hafi haldist í byggð svo lengi. Bólstaði, þar sem hvorki skálar né garðar voru hlaðnir, myndi vera mjög erfitt að finna.

Margir af þessum stöðum voru í notkun í mjög skamma hríð, nokkur ár eða áratugi og allmargir voru komnir í eyði fyrir 1104/58. Aðrir voru hinsvegar í byggð mun lengur, margir fram á 13. öld og að minnsta kosti tveir fram á þá 14. Það er ljóst að

eyðingu þessara bólstaða er ekki hægt að skýra með tilvísun í tilraunamennsku landnámskynslóðanna. Flestir staðanna voru í byggð í 150 til 400 ár og verður því að leita annarra skýringa á eyðingu þeirra. Flest bendir til að bólstaðirnir hafi lagst í eyði smátt og smátt; það er ekki hægt að benda á ákveðin tímabil þar sem fækkun bólstaða var meiri en á öðrum. Eyðing allra þessara staða virðist því tengjast hægfara endurskipulagningu á landnýtingu á þessu svæði en mögulegt er að samskonar endurskipulagning hafi einnig átt sér stað víðar á Norðausturland, t.d. í Reykjahverfi og Kelduhverfi þar sem mikill fjöldi eyðibýla hefur verið skráður. Í Mývatnssveit og nágrenni er greinileg tilhneyging í þá átt að þeir bæir sem fjærst eru vatninu leggjast fremur í eyði og virðist það ekki fara eftir stærð heldur hafa stórbýli á borð við Brennu og Þorleifsstaði verið jafnlíkleg til að leggjast í eyði eins og miðlungsbæir á borð við Litlu Gautlönd og Selholt eða smábýli eins og Beinisstaðir og Hallskot. Það er mögulegt að þessi fækkun bólstaða stafi af fólksfækkun en athyglisvert er að fjöldi bólstaða á 10.-11. öld hefur verið svipaður og fjöldi heimila var á svæðinu í byrjun 18. aldar. Á seinni öldum var fleirbýlt á flestum jörðum í Mývatnssveit og má vera að breytingin á miðöldum hafi snúist meira um að folk hafi fært búskap sinn á færri staði en að heimilum hafi fækkað.

Ein hugmynd sem könnuð var nánar sumarið 2010 var að í kringum affall Mývatns gæti snemma hafa verið byggt enda er þar gnægð veiðiskapar. Væri að mögu leyti rökrétt að það folk sem fyrst hefði komið í Mývatnssveit hefði sest þar að til að geta lifað af veiðum á meðan það var að koma sér upp bústofni. Til þessa gæti bent að vitað er um þrjá minjastaði í kringum affallið sem allir eru á bökkum Laxár, byggðir í hrauni þar sem skilyrði til ræktunar eru afar takmörkuð. Af þessum var Slehagi kannaður 2001 en þar virðist hafa verið búið fram undir 1300 en ekki hafa fundist þar skýrar vísbendingar um upphaf byggðarinnar. Tveir staðir til viðbótar voru kannaðir sumarið 2010. Annar er Mýnesás en þar er stæðilegur garður sem girðir af allstórt svæði með nokkrum óljósum rústum. Garður sá er byggður eftir 940 en löngu fyrir 1158. Hinn er við Kleifarhólma en þar er lítil tvískipt toft sem gæti verið skáli og hefur hann líka verið byggður eftir 940 en verið fallinn fyrir 1158. Fjórða staðinn mætti flokka með þessum en það eru Geirastaðir þar sem búið hefur verið samfleytt frá landnámsöld. Staðfesting á því að kuml eru í Kumlabrekku norðaustan við bæinn fékkst einmitt sumarið 2010. Þessar

niðurstöður benda ekki til þess að þessir þrír eða fjórir staðir séu endilega eldri en aðrir í Mývatnssveit en þær afsanna það ekki heldur og má því halda þeim möguleika opnum. En þær sýna að þessir staðir hafa verið í notkun á sama tíma og flestir aðrir í sveitinni og er því einsætt að túlka þá sem hluta af því kerfi, hver svo sem uppruni þeirra kann að hafa verið. Einn möguleiki er að þessir staðir hafi aldrei verið sjálfstæð býli, enda vantar á þeim öllum sitthvað af því sem þeim fylgir yfirleitt, t.d. tún í Selhaga og sannfærandi byggingar á Mýnesási, heldur einhverskonar útstöðvar til að tryggja aðgang að veiði í Laxá. Þetta er þó langt í frá að vera leyst mál og þarf frekari rannsóknir til að fá góða skýringu á þessum stöðum. Eitt sem gæti bent til að við Kleifarhólma hafi verið sjálfstætt býli er garðlag í hrauninu norðvestan við rústina. Það hefur í aðalatriðum austur-vestur stefnu og virðist hafa legið frá Laxá til vesturs yfir hraunið en sveigt síðan til suðvesturs og endað við Pollalæk. Vestasti hluti þess sést enn og var skráður 1996 en af gömlum loftmyndum má sjá framhald þess undir nýræktartúnunum austan við þjóðveginn. Ef þetta er einn og sami garðurinn þá má líta á hann sem norðurmörk þess lands sem tilheyrði þeim sem bjuggu við Kleifarhólma. Það land hefur þá náð yfir syðstu totuna af Geirastaðalandi en einnig allstóra spildu í suðausturhorni Hofstaðalands.

Hluti af rannsóknunum 2010 beindist að seljum en þær miðuðu að því að tímsetja notkun selja í Mývatnssveit. Á Gautlandaseli og mögulega Sellandaseli fundust ummerki um mannvist undir gjóskunni frá 940. Má vera að Sellandasel hafi upphaflega fremur verið járnvinnslustaður en sel en þar fannst töluverður rauði og einnig vísbending um kolagröf. Á Sandvatnsseli var komin mannvist alllöngu fyrir 1300 og á Arnarvatnsseli löngu fyrir 1477 en á síðastnefnda staðnum er tvæfalt garðlag í kringum selið og auk þess fleiri rústir en á hinum stöðunum og verður að telja líklegt að Arnarvatnssel sé upphaflega sambærilegur staður og Þyrilskot, gerði með skepnuhúsum. Þó ekki hafi fundist skýr vísbending um að Arnarvatnssel hafi verið byggt á 10. öld þarf varla að efa að svo hafi verið.

Hér fylgir stutt samantekt um staðina sem grafi var í sumarið 2010.

**Þyrilskot:** Ummerki um mannvist (ræktun) undir V~940 en ofan á henni er garður byggður úr klömbrunhaus sem hefur verið fallinn fyrir 1104. Auk rústanna inni í gerðinu eru tóftir norðaustan við það og má vera að þar sé líklegra að finna híbýli manna.

**Hallskot:** Í einum skurðanna var viðarkolalag undir s.k. landnámssyrpu, þ.e. frá fyrstu öldum eftir Kristburð og mun fremur vera eftir náttúrulegan skógarbruna en mannvist. Ljóst er að Hallskot hefur byggst fyrir 1104 og virðist innri túngarðurinn hafa verið endurhlaðinn eftir 1300 þannig að byggðin getur hafa varað fram á 14. öld.

**Víðatóft:** Á þessum stað er tvöfalt garðlag en það sem lítur út eins og mögulegur þriðji garður að sunnan er í raun stífla og frárennsliskurður og mun þetta vera eitt elsta dæmið um framræslu sem þekkt er á Íslandi. Mannabein hafa fundist við Másvatn og er sá staður rétt utan við túngarð eins og hann hefur verið áður en þjóðvegurinn og malarnám honum tengt eyðilögðu hann. Beinin er því einsætt að tengja við búsetu á þessum stað á víkingaöld. Byggð hefur verið komin á í Víðatóft á seinni hluta 10. aldar en bærinn kominn í eyði fyrir 1104.

**Beinisstaðir:** Á Beinisstöðum var grafið 2007 en þá kom ekki annað í ljós en mannvistarlög undir H-1300. Sumarið 2010 var grafið í túninu neðan við bæjarhólonn og þar komu í ljós mannvistarlög undir V~940 gjóskunni, en einnig sást að byggðin hefur varað fram undir 1300.

**Girðingar:** Á Girðingum er skýr rust af skála með afhýsum og hefur hann verið byggður á seinni hluta 10. aldar en fallinn fyrir 1104/58. Skálinn er ekki elsta húsið á þessum stað en hversu miklu eldri eða hvar þau hús eru verður ekki sagt að svo stöddu.

**Mýnesás.** Túngarðurinn er byggður eftir 940 en alllöngu fyrir 1104/58 og má vera að hann hafi þá þegar verið fallinn. Tvær dokkir nyrst á ásnum koma helst til greina sem íveruhús á þessum stað.

**við Kleifarhólma.** Tóftin, sem líklega er lítill skáli, er byggð eftir 940 en fallin fyrir 1104/58. Við hlið hennar er lítill öskuhaugur sem styður að þarna hafi verið heilsársbyggð um skeið. Þriðja hólfið í tóftinni, norðvestan á, virðist vera yngra en skálinn og hólfið norðan við hann, og gæti verið lítil rétt eða heystæði. Tæplega 300 m

norðan við tóftina hefur garðlag legið frá Laxá og til vesturs yfir hraunið en síðan sveigt til suðvesturs og enda við hné sem er á Pollalæk skammt vestan við þar sem heimreiðin að Hofstöðum hefst. Má vera að þetta garðlag afmarki landareign þessa bæjar að norðan.

**Arnarvatnssel:** Ekki fundust aðrar gjóskur en V-1477 sem hægt var að miða við en mikið rask hefur verið á þessum stað og er túngarðurinn margendurbyggður fyrir lok 15. aldar. Má af því ráða að byggð á þessum stað sé ekki síður forn en á öðrum sem kannaðir hafa verið en mannvist hefur verið þarna samfelld fram undir lok 19. aldar.

**Gautlandasel:** Ummerki um mannvist sjást undir V~940 og hefur staðurinn verið í notkun í nærri 1000 ár.

**Sandvatnssel:** Elstu ummerki um mannvist eru undir H-1300 gjóskunni en staðurinn hefur síðan verið í stöðugri notkun fram undir 1900.

**Sellandasel:** V~940 liggur ofan á lagi sem er mögulega hreyft af mönnum en það hefur ekki fangist staðfest. Örugg mannvist er hinsvegar fyrir H-1104/58 og síðan samfellt fram undir 1900. Mögulegt er að í öndverðu hafi verið járnvinnsla á þessum stað en lagið undir 940 gjóskunni gæti tengst vinnslu á mýrarrauða en auk þess fundust vísbendingar um kolagröf.

Tæpum 600 m norðan við selið er garðlag sem liggur þvert yfir Grasaskarð og hefur náð milli Krákár og Sellandagrófar. Grófarmegin endar garðlagið í lykkju og þar vaer grafinn skurður sem sýndi að það er byggt eftir 940 en fallið við jörð fyrir 1104/58. Mögulega hefur þessi garður verið á mörkum Oddastaðalands og sellanda eða afréttar þar sunnan við.

**Svartárkot:** Svartárvatn virðist nú hafa brotið alveg öskuhauga sem sáust fyrir nokkrum árum í sniðunum við vatnið. Könnun þeirra sýndi að búið hefur verið á þessum stað á ýmsum tímum, einhverntíma á tímabilinu milli 940 og 1104/58, aftur á seinni hluta miðalda, á 14. og 15. öld og síðan aftur frá 17. öld fram á þá 19.