

Neðri-Ás í Hjaltadal

Framvinduskýrsla

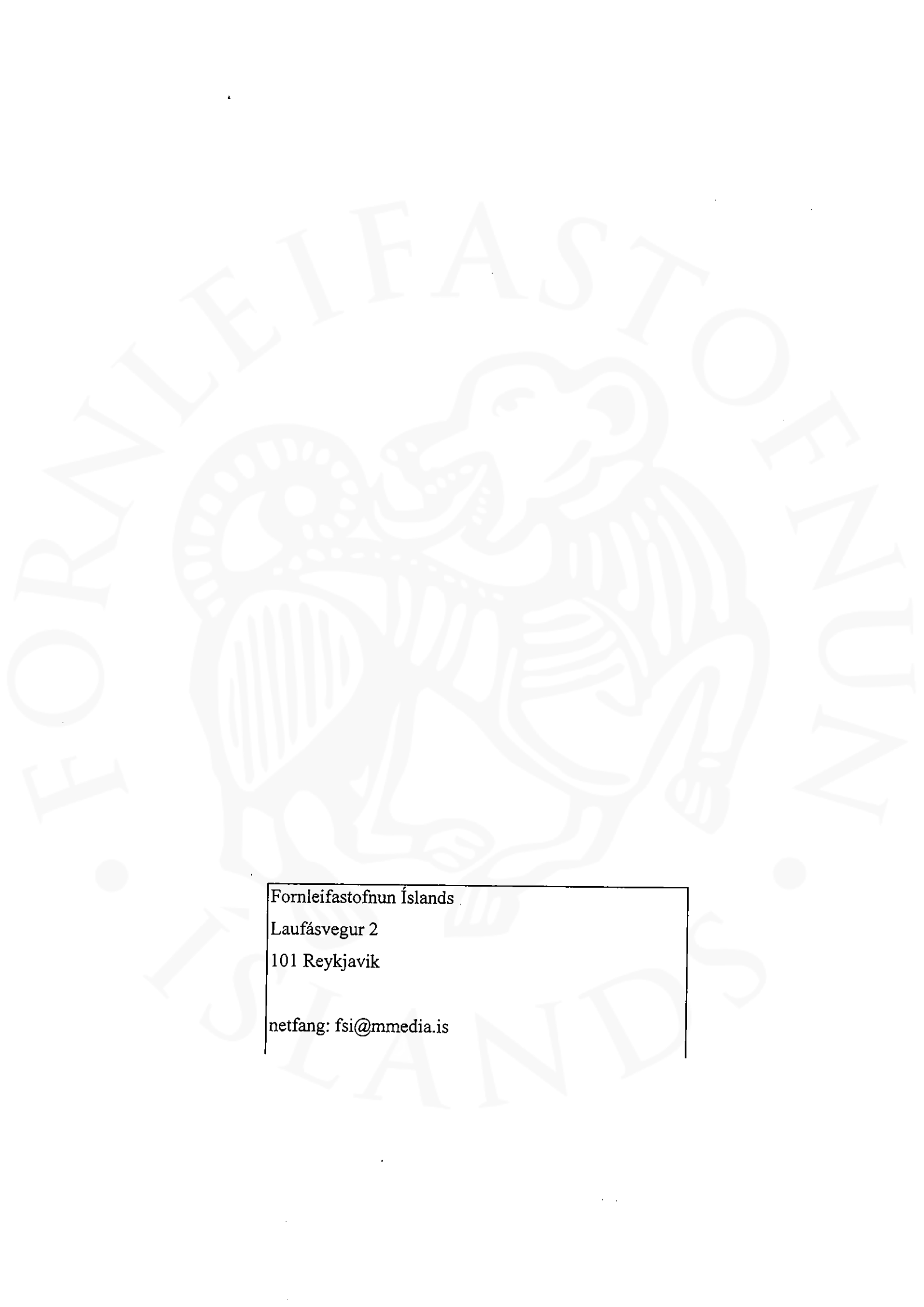
Preliminary Excavation Report 1998

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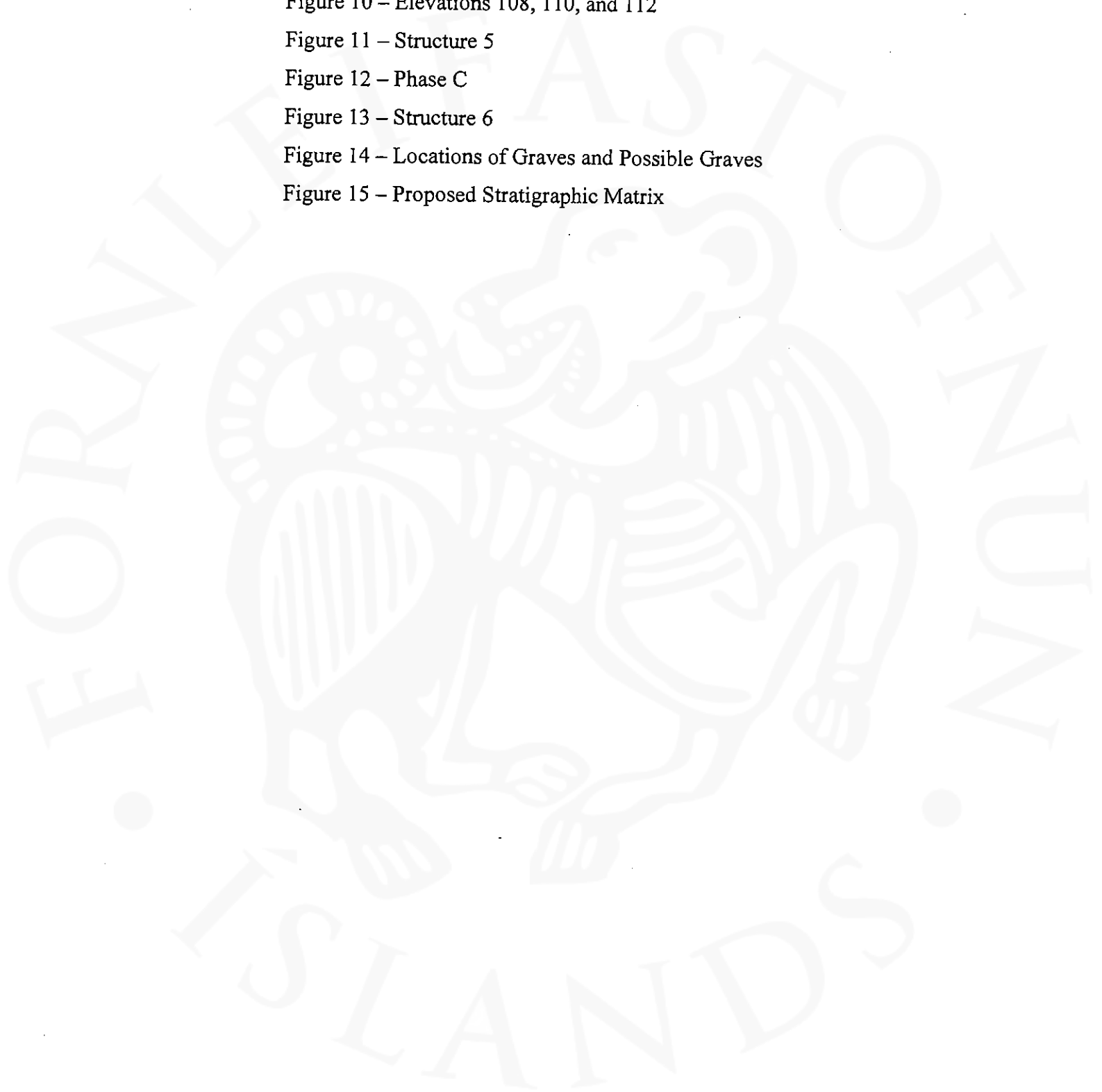
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Summary (Figures 1, 2, 3 and 5).

A co-operative archaeological research excavation was undertaken by Fornleifastofnun Íslands and Þjóðminjasafn Íslands during June 1998 at Neðri-Ás in Hjaltadalur, northern Iceland (Figures 1 and 2). The purpose of the excavation was to investigate the nature and extent of preserved archaeological deposits within and around upstanding structural remains located within an enclosure, itself located within the home field of the farm of Neðri-Ás (hereafter “the site”).

The excavations in 1998 expanded upon previous evaluation work carried out by Þjóðminjasafn Íslands in 1984 (Þór Magnusson, 1984) and 1997 (Sigurður Bergsteinsson, 1998). Excavation revealed complex structural deposits preserved in situ, and a large number of features believed to represent inhumations. The earliest of these features have been shown to be earlier than 1104 AD (See Appendix 1), and the latest structures are known to have been in use in very recent times (pers. com. Erlingur Garðarsson, farmer at Neðri-Ás). A semi-ruined modern turf and stone structure known locally as “*Bænhúsið*” (“The Chapel”) remained extant to a height of up to 2m prior to the commencement of excavation. Historical sources record the presence of a church at the site until as late as the middle of the 13th century, and traditions that it was founded as early as 984 AD. Previous evaluation work had revealed articulated human skeletal material in well defined graves, including the remains of coffins. The principle aims of the excavation were to locate and describe any structures that could represent a church, and to investigate the extent and density of human burials.

Five adjoining areas were opened for excavation during the 1998 excavation (Areas FJSW, FJNE, KG1, KG2, and KG3), and these formed the principal areas for investigation (Figure 5). Other exploratory trenches were also investigated, for tephro-chronological studies of the site and its environs, and to determine the relationship of the kirkjugarður and túngarður.

An evaluation of the viability of the skeletal material for DNA research was also conducted. These investigations were carried out by a team including staff from both Þjóðminjasafn Íslands and Fornleifastofnun Íslands. Íslensk erfðagreining hf. provided the services of a team to assess the viability of DNA sampling.

Investigation revealed the remains of a structure that had been re-built and re-used over

a period of several centuries, which had in that time served at least three different functions.

In modern times this structure had been used as a *fjárhús* (sheephouse) and *hlaða* (barn). The removal of this modern structure, following the completion of detailed recording, revealed the remains of a similar, but smaller structure beneath, also interpreted as being for livestock overwintering. This earlier *fjárhús* was shown to be associated with layers located beneath a dark grey tephra horizon dated to 1766 A.D. (Magnus Á. Sigurgeirsson, Appendix 1).

These remains of an earlier *Fjarhús* were shown to overlie a widespread deposit of culturally sterile material interpreted as representing a period of disuse or abandonment. Beneath that disuse horizon, a sequence of peatash deposits including large quantities of iron slag and charcoal was exposed. The peatash and iron slag, together with a sequence of intercutting pits and postholes are believed to represent a phase of iron working and/or iron production.

The removal of those layers associated with iron working, revealed the burnt or heat damaged remains of an earlier turf structure, including the white Hekla 1104 A.D. tephra within individual turf blocks. This earlier structure was found to be aligned differently to the later structures and to respect the alignment and distribution of probable grave cuts seen within an enclosed area, and is interpreted as a church. This enclosure, containing a number of human burials, is interpreted as a *Kirkjugarður* (Churchyard). Further investigation of the probable grave cuts showed some of these features predating the 1104 tephra layer. A number of possible graves could also be shown to be partially beneath the turf walls. Both of these factors imply that an earlier phase of the church structure may have occupied a slightly smaller area, or that the turf walls were added to or altered at a date later than 1104. Evidence for a timber structure within the area of the earliest turf walls was provided by a number of postholes, and also by the charred remains of horizontal timbers and several upright wooden planks. These may represent the only remains of the earliest church at Neðri-Ás. Further excavation of the earliest turf walls may reveal more evidence of earlier timber construction, and may reveal further cultural horizons dating to the 11th century or earlier.

A test trench located at the northwestern junction of the *kirkjugarður* and the *túngarður*, showed the *kirkjugarður* wall to be later than the earliest elements of the *túngarður*. No traces of a possible continuation of the *kirkjugarður* could be located north of the *túngarður*.

Introduction (Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10)

Evaluation work undertaken by Þjóðminjasafn Íslands in 1984 (Þór Magnusson, 1984) included the excavation of a test pit within the area of the kirkjugarður. This test pit revealed the presence of human burials, although the preservation of the skeletal material was poor (Skeletons 84-001 and 84-002, Hildur Gestsdóttir 1998). Evaluation work undertaken by Þjóðminjasafn Íslands in 1997 (Bergsteinsson 1998) included the excavation of a trench (97A) through the western part of the modern structure (Figure 5). This revealed a complex sequence of cultural and structural layers and highlighted the multi-period nature of the extant archaeological remains. Trench 97A extended beyond the southern wall of the modern fjárhús revealing five features interpreted as human burials. One of these features was tested, and this exposed articulated human skeletal remains in situ. Once more, the preservation of this skeleton was poor, though variable (Hildur Gestsdóttir 1997). The skeleton was not lifted during the course of the 1997 evaluation, but was re-excavated and removed in 1998 (Skeleton 98-001) in order to test the viability of the skeletal material for further research, including the possible study of genetic material. The skeletal material is discussed in a separate report (Hildur Gestsdóttir, 1998), and a brief assessment of the potential for genetic research awaits completion (Benedikt Hallgrímsson forthcoming).

Another trench excavated in 1997 (97B) tested the remains of the kirkjugarður boundary. This showed the H1104 A.D. tephra horizon to be later than the construction of that boundary (Sigurður Bergsteinsson 1998). This boundary was seen to utilise a shallow ditch and bank construction, and its visible remains form part of a semi-circular enclosure .

Prior to commencing the excavation of archaeological deposits, it was necessary to remove the remains of an upstanding modern turf and stone structure. The construction of this latest phase of the fjárhús can be dated to circa 1900 (pers. com. Erlingur Garðarsson), and the structure is typical of a common type of Icelandic agricultural building. Little previous archaeological work has been carried out on such structures, although similar structures are protected by Þjóðminjasafn Íslands. Prior to excavation in 1998 a detailed survey of the remains was undertaken, using a Total Station Theodolite. A detailed photographic record of the structure was made, along with detailed drawings at a scale of 1:20 of all extant elevations of the structure (Figures 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10). At this stage, the remains of the modern fjárhús were dismantled with the assistance of a mechanical excavator. The floors of the modern fjárhús, together with the lowest parts of its walls, were left intact for further investigation.

Background (Figures 1, 2, and 3.)

The modern farm of Neðri-Ás is located on the northern bank of the river Hjaltadalsá in Hjaltadalur, Skagafjörður, Northern Iceland, circa 19°16'W / 65°46'N, at an elevation of circa 130m above sea level. The remains of the fjárhús and its associated structures (the site) are located approximately 100m to the northeast of the modern farmhouse and 70m east northeast of the farm mound, at circa 135m above sea level. The site lies within the home field of the farm, an area that is currently utilised as horse pasture. The valley is aligned approximately southeast-northwest, with the river course situated approximately 800m to the southwest of the site, at a level of approximately 75m above sea level. To the east of the site the ground level rises gradually towards a low ridge, Ás, reaching to between 263m and 299m above sea level. Beyond Ás, some 2 kilometres to the northeast of the site, lies Kolbeinsdalur and the river Kolbeinsdalsá. To the north of Kolbeinsdalsá, the land rises precipitously to the mountain ridge Hnjúkar, reaching up to 1061m above sea level. The rivers Kolbeinsdalsá and Hjaltadalsá meet 5 kilometres to the northwest of the site, and flow into Skagafjörður at Kolkuós, 7.5 kilometres to the northwest of the site. The medieval episcopal see of Hólar is located approximately 8 kilometres to the southeast, where Hjaltadalur narrows towards its head.

The modern farm of Neðri-Ás draws its income from cattle, horses and tourism, although sheep raising has also been practised there within recent times. The raising of sheep remains a significant element within the agricultural base of Hjaltadalur.

Methodology

To gain the fullest understanding of the surviving archaeology, single context recording was adopted. This approach was supported by the re-excavation of the 1997 evaluation trench. This assisted targeting and allowed a comparison with contexts previously described in 1997. As there is no immediate threat to the site, the lowest visible structure has been left unexcavated, in the hope that it can be presented to the public at a later date. A grid system was re-established from points fixed in 1997 using a Total Station Theodolite, and the areas targeted for excavation were located within that grid. At this level planning areas were defined, each measuring 5 metres north-south and 5 metres east-west. Context recording was by means of a pro-forma recording sheet, supported by plans at a scale of 1:20 for each context, and by photography as deemed

necessary. Recovered artefacts were located in three dimensions, and bone samples were separately bagged and indexed. Environmental samples were retrieved under guidelines established by the environmental specialist Garðar Guðmundsson.

Turf and topsoil were removed and the semi-ruined modern fjárhús was dismantled with the aid of a mechanical excavator. The sensitivity of archeological deposits within the area of the kirkjugarður required a very careful approach to the use of heavy machinery to aid excavation. Two safe machining corridors were identified. A raised area beyond the western limit of the kirkjugarður could be ascertained upon inspection of the site, and discussion of these features with the site owner, Erlingur Garðarsson, revealed that this feature had been formed by the dumping of turf debris from the modern fjárhús within Erlingur's memory. This raised ground provided a platform from which the mechanical excavator was granted access to the western most part of the fjárhús, without entering the area of the kirkjugarður. Site inspection also revealed some broad rutting of the ground to the east of the modern fjárhús. Erlingur was able to confirm that tractors have been used to carry hay to the hlaða within very recent times. This traffic would have compromised any sensitive remains in this area, and therefore the establishment of a machining platform at this location could be justified. This platform was formed by a protective layer of loose soil, and then removed upon completion of machining. The second machining platform granted access to the eastern most element of the modern fjárhús and its subsidiary hlaða. All loose material remaining after machining was removed by hand.

Excavation was carried out by an experienced team of archaeologists, drawing on the resources of both Þjóðminjasafn Íslands and Fornleifastofnun Íslands. The excavation was intended to develop an understanding of the methodology and practise of stratigraphic excavation and single context planning amongst all participants. It is hoped, that if adopted as a common methodology for excavations, this approach will allow easier comparisons between sites.

Results (Figures 6, 11, 12, 13 and 14)

Following detailed recording, the greater part of the modern fjárhús (Structure 1 hereafter) and its subsidiary barn or hlaða (Structure 2 hereafter) was removed with the assistance of a mechanical excavator. Single context recording was commenced with the lowest remaining elements of those structures, being their floor layers, and the lowest courses of their walls.

Phase A (Figures 6 and 11)

This phase of activity covers the period from c.1730 until the disuse of the modern structures in very recent times. Included in this phase are Structure 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. Structures 1 and 2 are the modern stone built fjárhús, and Structures 3 and 4 are the remains of an earlier building occupying a very similar space, and thought to have the same function. Structure 5 is the remains of a smaller building, heavily truncated by the later structures, and also associated with deposits consistent with animal husbandry. Structure 5 must have been constructed prior to the fall of tephra in 1766, but there is a continuity of deposition, suggesting a continuity of activity at the site before and after that event.

Structures 1 and 2.

Context 204 was a variable dark reddish brown deposit of partially decayed and compacted straw, including fragments of plastic, glass, modern nails and undecayed wood. Context 204 was contained by the lowest course of the walls of Structure 2 (Context 207), and occupied an area approximately 6.2m by 2.4m, to a depth of between 5-30cm. This deposit was wholly consistent with the use of that structure for hay storage within very recent times. Context 205 was a dark brown to black deposit, very similar in composition to Context 204, but with a darker colour, a more plastic consistency and a more laminated structure. Context 205 was also found to contain glass, plastic and undecayed organic material, in this instance animal hair. Context 205 was contained by the lowest course of the walls of Structure 1 (Context 206), and occupied an area of approximately 10.3m by 3.6m, to a depth of between 2-15cm. Context 205 is consistent with the use of Structure 1 for animal overwintering within very recent times. Contexts 206 and 207 were both formed from one or two courses of irregular uncut stones, between 10-70cms in largest dimension, and formed both the inner and outer faces of the walls of Structures 1 and 2 (see figure 6). Behind these stone facings were loose highly mixed deposits of turf debris, (Contexts 208 and 209) forming a layer of packing between the stone facings and

earlier layers of turf. These earlier layers of turf had been truncated by cut features 217 and 218. Context 217 was a sub-rectangular cut for the construction of Structure 1, into which the packing (context 209) and stone facing (context 206) had been placed. Context 217 truncates a complex sequence of earlier layers, exposing at the base of its northern limit undisturbed deposits of natural origin. Context 218 was a more irregular cut for the construction of Structure 2, also truncating a sequence of earlier deposits, continuing beneath the upper horizon of the natural ground surface. The latter cut was also filled by a stone facing (context 207) and by packing (context 208). Elements of contexts 206, 207, 208 and 209 could all be shown to fill the area between Structures 1 and 2. The latter structures are interpreted as being contemporary, and likely to represent a single episode of construction and use. The removal of context 205 revealed a modern trench (237) filled by mixed floor debris (236) and was found to contain a plastic water pipe. It is likely that this feature was cut through 205, but that animal disturbance had obscured the trench.

Beneath context 204 were a number of cut features, associated with Structure 2. Features 331, 340, 344 and 406 were a series of small oval pits along the centre line of Structure 2, several of which contained large flat stones horizontal to the ground surface. The latter features are all interpreted as structural post settings/pads. Feature 406 was located to the north of the centre of Structure 2, and measured 0.51-0.55m in diameter, and was 70mm deep. The fill of feature 406 was dark brown and red turf debris (context 330) containing a large flat stone at its surface. Feature 344 was located circa 0.60m to the south and east of feature 406, and measured 0.42-0.62m in diameter, with a depth of 0.21m. Feature 344 was filled by mixed turf debris and semi-decayed organic material (context 335). Feature 331 was located approximately 1m from the southern limit of Structure 2, and measured 0.52-0.68m in diameter with a depth of approximately 110mm. Feature 331 was filled by a mixed yellowish brown silt (context 327) containing some organic debris, and two large flat stones at its surface. Feature 340 was located 0.60m to the northwest of feature 331, and measured 0.40-0.44m in diameter, with a depth of up to 0.38m. Feature 340 was filled by a yellowish brown sandy silt (context 339), containing occasional gravel and turf fragments. The excavation of the latter features showed them to have truncated earlier deposits, including the fills of several possible graves. Feature 331 truncated the upper fill (context 333) of a large square pit (feature 332). Feature 332 measured 0.90m in length, 0.70m in width and up to 0.43m deep, and truncated the fill (context 337) of an earlier grave (context 338).

The removal of context 205 revealed the remains of a low upstanding feature along the centre of Structure 1. This feature was formed by contexts 211 and 214. Context 211 was a loose dark brown deposit including small irregular stones, measuring 8.4m east-west, 0.90m north-south and upto 0.20m deep at its eastern limit. Context 214 was a layer of compacted turf situated beneath context 211 to the east of Trench 97A, also containing a number of small stones at its edges. Both of these layers were truncated by Trench 97A, but context 214 could not be identified to the west of the trench. This feature is believed to represent the lowest elements of a feeding trough or platform. It is likely that this feature represents a central baulk remaining after the annual removal of floor debris to the north and south. This process could be seen to have truncated numerous underlying deposits throughout Structure 1. The removal of layer context 211 revealed a cluster of three post holes (features 317, 319 and 321) beneath the eastern end of context 211. These latter features are associated with 211 and may have formed part of such a feeding trough or stall. A modern post hole or stone setting (feature 343) was also apparent beneath context 205.

The removal of the above contexts revealed the remains of earlier structural elements, beneath both Structures 1 and 2. These earlier structures, 3 and 4, were formed by several layers of turf and turf debris.

Structure 3

Structure 3 was represented by a series of turf deposits, (Contexts 212, 213, and 215) all of which had been truncated by Context 217, (the cut for the construction of Structure 1). Context 215, measuring 3.20m in length, 0.30m in width, and 0.13m in depth, was located at the northwest of Structure 3. Context 215 was composed of yellowish brown turf and contained a single course of six roughly shaped stones towards its western limit, along with greenish grey tephra. The north eastern area of this structure had been severely truncated by cut 217, and context 215 could not be traced to the east of Trench 97A. Context 212 was located at the south of Structure 3, west of Trench 97A, and Context 213 was located at the south of Structure 3, east of Trench 97 A. Context 212 measured up to 5.50m in length, up to 2.20m in width and 0.30m in depth, and was composed of mixed brown turf debris. Context 212 formed a corner at the south west of Structure 3, and also contained a number of large stones (up to 0.40m) at its southern edge. Context 213 measured at least 3.70m in length, up to 1.50m in width and up to 0.20m in depth, and was comprised of loose mixed brown turf debris, including a number of

large stones at its southern limit. Contexts 213 and 210 (Structure 4) have no clear boundary and are believed to represent the same episode of construction.

To the east of Trench 97A, context 213 was shown to be over further similar layers of turf and turf debris (contexts 219 and 228). The removal of these layers revealed an earlier turf wall formed by numerous small but distinct episodes of turf deposition. The uppermost of these, Context 232, formed part of an earlier structure (Structure 5).

Beneath the southern wall of Structure 3 (context 212) was a layer of reddish brown turf debris (context 223). At its southern limit context 223 had been disturbed and truncated by worm or frost action, beneath the stones in the wall of Structure 1. Context 223 was seen upon excavation to cover a layer of in-situ dark grey tephra (H-1766). The tephra layer represented the upper horizon of an otherwise similar deposit (context 248), containing decayed organic material and turf debris.

At the north of Structure 3, east of Trench 97A and extending beneath the northern limit of excavation were a series of external deposits comprised of turf debris and wind blown accumulation (221, 224, 230). Context 221 included small patches of dark grey tephra, and context 224 included numerous small flat stones, apparently sealed by a layer of dark grey tephra (H-1766). Context 230 was found to overlie the remains of an earlier turf wall (context 238, Structure 5). The original dimensions of Structure 3 are unclear, but are thought to occupy a similar area to Structure 1 (see Figure 6).

Structure 4

Very little remained of Structure 4 as it had been largely destroyed by its replacement Structure 2. The construction cut of Structure 2 (context 218) truncated a deposit of reddish brown turf blocks (Context 210), forming the southern part of the walls of Structure 4. At its south-eastern limit, context 210 was shown to seal and fill a very shallow shelf-like cut (Context 233), located along the length of the south-eastern wall. Context 233 measured 4.5m in length and 0.6m in width. Context 233 truncated context 245, a yellowish brown deposit, including turf debris, dark grey tephra (H-1766), and flecks of whitish tephra, possibly H-1104. The northern part of Structure 4 was both semi-subterranean and heavily truncated by the construction of the later Structure 2, and only intermittent patches of context 210 were apparent towards the north

and western limit of this structure.

Structure 5 (Figure 11)

Contexts 265, 238, 258 and 232 formed the truncated remains of the smaller, earlier Structure 5. Together, the latter contexts form the long walls of a sub-rectangular structure. Although heavily truncated, these walls enclose an area approximately 6m by 4.8m, although the original extent of this structure may have been greater (see Figure 11). Context 238 was located to the east of Trench 97 A, and measured 3.60m in length, up to 0.68m in width and up to 0.40m in depth. Context 238 was composed of pale to mid orange-brown strengur turf with occasional inclusions of peat ash. West of Trench 97A, a continuation of the same wall (context 265) could be discerned. Context 265 measured 1.50m in length, up to 0.45m in width and 0.26m in depth, and was composed of material very similar to context 238. Within context 265 it was possible to discern strengur that had been compressed to a thickness of between 20-40mm. The latter turf wall was truncated at its northern edge by an irregular naturally formed depression (feature 220) filled with very loose, platy disturbed material (context 222), located beneath the northeastern limit of the overlying Structure 3. Feature 220 is believed to represent the effect of worm or frost action beneath the foundations of the overlying Structures 1 and 3. Context 265 was overlain by elements of a widespread layer of yellowish brown silt (context 229) that included a dark grey tephra layer at its upper horizon (H-1766). In the area beneath the entrance of the later fjárhús, context 229 was truncated by an irregular cut feature (context 241) filled by peat ash and charcoal (context 231). Context 231 was found to contain a fragment of an early modern stove tile (F98-004) and also a fragment of whale bone (S-104). Context 231 was itself partially covered by context 223.

Context 258 was located at the south west of Structure 5, west of Trench 97A, and measured 0.90m in length, up to 0.60m in width and had a maximum depth of 0.17m. Context 258 was composed of compressed strengur turf, pale to dark reddish brown in colour, each turf having a thickness of between 30-60mm. This remnant of wall was beneath context 248, an extensive firm pale brown deposit containing a fibrous component, located beneath context 223 and the southern wall of the later Structure 3. Equivalent to context 248 was context 244, located in the area beneath the northern walls of Structure 3.

In the central area of this structure, the removal of deposits associated with Structures 1 and 3 (contexts 211 and 214) exposed a layer of loose dark brown silt and turf (context 216).

Context 216 measured 3.60m in length, 2.8m in width, and up to 0.15m in depth. Context 216 was found to contain small fragments of partially decayed birch twig, and may represent elements of a roof collapse from Structure 5. The latter context seals and partially fills a shallow irregular hollow (Feature 235, also filled by context 234). This location may account for the survival of context 216 in this area only.

Context 232 formed the upper part of the southeastern wall of Structure 5, east of Trench 97A. Context 232 measured at least 3.10m in length, upto 0.42m in width and between 80-110mm in thickness, and was composed of reddish brown turf strengur. The lower elements of this part of the wall of Structure 5 belong to an earlier phase of construction, re-utilised by Structure 5. At its southern edge context 232 was overlain by elements of context 228, a layer of mixed turf debris extending south from Structure 5. Context 228 measured 3.60m in length, up to 2.42m in width, 70mm in depth, and was found to contain occasional stones (up to 0.22m), along with a few fragments of iron slag.

Contexts 223, 228, 244, and 248 (above), are interpreted as layers of straw dung and turf debris accumulating externally to Structure 5, and produced by activity within that structure. The high organic content of layers 223, 244 and 248 suggest that this structure was used for the storage of animals and / or their food supply. The stratigraphic position of the tephra horizon H-1766 between layers 223 and 248/244 shows that Structure 5 was constructed prior to this date. The accumulation of similar deposits above and below the tephra horizon suggests similar activities were taking place before and after the deposition of the H-1766 tephra. This build up between the remains of Structure 5 and the H-1766 tephra horizon implies that Structure 5 was built some years prior to that event. Historical sources mention the ruins of a chapel being visible at Neðri-Ás in 1709 (JÁM IX, 221) and do not mention the presence of a fjárhús. It is reasonable to believe in light of these two strands of evidence that Structure 5 was built between those dates. A date of circa 1730 is therefore proposed.

The five structures detailed above are consistent with a continuity of animal husbandry at the site over a period of around 250 years up to the present day. The material remains of those structures demonstrate a process of re-use of structural elements over time.

That process of re-use can be seen to be continued with the layers beneath the structures so far described.

Phase B

Beneath the truncated remains of Structure 5 was an extensive deposit of dark brown silt (context 267). Context 267 measured up to 6.50m by 6.10m, with a depth of 10-150mm, sealing earlier deposits west of Trench 97A along with deposits north of Structure 5. Context 267 is interpreted as a naturally deposited layer representing a period of little or no activity prior to the construction of the earliest fjárhús (Structure 5). This layer is thought to have been laid down during the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

Phase C

Phase C represents a period of iron working and/or manufacture. This phase predates the earliest fjárhús, and post dates the church (Structures 6, below). Phase C falls within the medieval period, but at present no clear evidence can be offered for a more precise date. As its uppermost elements are sealed by a period of little activity (Phase B), whereas no similar disuse deposits could be discerned at the interface with Phase D, it is thought that an earlier rather than later date is more likely, and that smithing commenced at the site only a short time after the dereliction of the earlier church.

The removal of context 267 exposed numerous layers of pink peat ash covering an extensive area. This peat ash was found to contain quantities of iron slag and charcoal and is indicative of a period of iron smelting or iron working at the site. Several small pits and post holes also containing peat ash, slag and charcoal were also exposed by the removal of context 267.

Beneath the northeastern wall of Structure 5 was a layer of peat ash and slag (context 263). Context 263 measured 3.8m in length, 0.25m in width and up to 120mm in depth. Beneath the southeastern wall of Structure 5, similar layers (context 273 and 274) had been truncated by several cut features. These features (features 353 and 354, below) are interpreted as episodes of repair and reconstruction to an earlier structure, re-utilised for use as a smithy. Sealed beneath layer 232 (structure 5) was a deposit of red and brown turf debris (context 246) containing frequent stones up to 0.30m in length. Context 246 filled a cut (feature 353) measuring 1.24m in length, 0.40m in width and up to 0.29m in depth. Feature 353 truncated an earlier layer of turf (context 252), in turn seen to fill another repair or alteration to the wall (feature 354), measuring 0.97m in length, 0.35m in width and c.0.15m in depth. Feature 354 truncated the remains of a still earlier turf deposit (context 253) and the fill (context 266) of a large irregular cut feature to

the south of the wall (feature 356). Context 266 was composed of highly mixed turf debris including small quantities of slag and peat ash, and extended beneath the later wall repairs. Feature 356 measured 3.20m east/west by 2.08m north/south, with a depth of up to 0.50m. At its northeastern limit, feature 356 truncated the peatash and slag layer 273. The function of feature 356 is unclear, but may have offered a sheltered space for storage of equipment or raw materials associated with the process of smithing.

In the internal area south of layer 263 was an extensive deposit of pink/orange peat ash (context 285) containing frequent pieces of iron slag. Context 285 measured 4.55m east/west by 3.70m north/south with a depth of 45-100mm, and extended west of Trench 97A, where a similar deposit had been recorded in 1997. At its northern limit, context 285 had been truncated by a small pit (feature 235, above).

Following the removal of context 285, a further small pit (feature 308) could be discerned, also truncated by the later feature 235. A flat upright stone at the edge of that truncation was found to be retaining a deposit of mixed greyish green silt and gravel (context 306) including occasional lenses of peat ash. Context 306 formed the upper fill of feature 308 and is believed to represent the deliberate backfilling of that feature. Beneath context 306 was a deposit of charcoal and disturbed soil (context 307) at the base of feature 308. At its truncated upper surface this deposit was loose and very charcoal rich, towards its base deposit 308 became more compact and mixed at its interface with underlying natural deposits. The lower portion of this deposit was found to contain fragments of unburnt wood, and several small fragments of bronze sheet (F-98-018). Feature 308 measured 0.55m east/west, 0.68m north/south with a depth of up to 0.21m. At the southern edge of feature 308, a shallow channel filled by elements of context 307 extended 0.54m to the southwest, with a depth of up to 80mm and a width of c.0.18m.

Feature 308 is believed to be the truncated remains of a possible heat source, perhaps a furnace for the production or working of iron. Both the unburnt wood at the base of this feature and the channel leading into it may indicate ventilation of a high temperature fire. However, later truncation appears to have removed evidence of heat damage from the upper part of this feature. Samples were taken from this feature and from the surrounding layers of peat ash in an effort to confirm or deny this hypothesis. The overlying peat ash deposit 285 had been found to contain heat damaged stones bonded to iron slag (S-122), and the deposition of layer 285 may be consistent with the clearing out of a relict forge or furnace.

Beneath context 285, and truncated by feature 308, was a further deposit of pink peat ash (context 291). Context 291 was located north and west of feature 308, and measured 2.40m east/west, up to 1.15m north/south with a depth of up to 100mm. The latter context was found to contain several large fragments of charcoal (S-128), and numerous angular stones up to 0.34m in length, but no iron slag. A small bronze buckle (F98-019) was discovered in the northwestern corner of context 291. It is hoped that further analysis of this artefact will provide dating evidence for this phase of activity. Context 291 overlay a similar but more extensive deposit of pink peat ash (context 296). Context 296 measured up to 4.30m east/west, 5.40m north/south and was up to 80mm thick. The latter context extended 1.70m to the west of Trench 97A, overlying a line of stones running north to south at the western edge of the trench. Context 296 was highly variable being composed of many lenses of pink, red, orange, and yellow material. As such it is thought to represent many small episodes of deposition. At its lower horizon, context 296 was found to contain occasional patches of burnt turf.

The removal of context 296 and other layers associated with the smithy phase, revealed the remains of an earlier building (Structure 6) formed by turf and stone walls. The turf elements of this earlier structure showed widespread evidence of burning. The process of smithying inevitably carries with it a considerable fire hazard, and it is possible that this may account for the heat effects seen. However, the fire damaged remains of Structure 6 consistently appear beneath the layers of ash and slag associated with Phase C. A differential interpretation is that the smithying activity re-utilised a pre-existing structure that had fallen out of use because of its destruction by fire.

Phase D (Figure 13)

Further structural remains beneath the phase of smithying activity exhibited an alignment different to the later structures described above. These remains had been heavily truncated by later activity, but can be shown to lie on an orientation closer to east/west than the later buildings. The alignment and positioning of these structural elements was seen to be in accordance with the alignment and positioning of features identified as graves. No features thought to represent graves could be identified within the internal area of these structures. The turf elements of this structure (Structure 6) were seen to contain white tephra (H-1104) within individual turves, and therefore must have been constructed after that date. Several features

identified as graves can be seen to be sealed by layers including this tephra horizon, and therefore must predate elements of Structure 6. Additionally, features interpreted as possible graves could be seen to extend beneath parts of Structure 6. It is believed that the turf walls of Structure 6 represent an addition to, or reconstruction of, an earlier structure located within the limits of Structure 6. This earlier structure is evidenced by the charred remains of timber beams and planks, and by numerous postholes, all located within the inner edges of Structure 6. The alignment of these structures, their situation within the graveyard, and the location of graves around but not within the structures, all point to the conclusion that these structures represent the remains of a church or churches dating to the high middle ages.

Structure 6

Structure 6 encloses an area measuring c.5.20m east/west by c.4.20m north/south, although the truncated southern wall may have previously extended further into this internal space. The best preserved element of this structure is its northern turf and stone wall (context 413). Context 413 measures up to 5.10m in length and 1.40m in width, with an extant height of up to 0.49m. At its southeastern edge context 413 had been truncated by the construction of Structure 1 (cut 217). Context 413 was composed of small turf blocks including bands of white tephra (H-1104). At the surface context 413 is pink-orange in colour, with patches of blackening, whereas at the core of this wall, exposed in section, these turf block are a darker greyish brown in colour. Both in plan and in section, the turf blocks forming context 413 more closely resemble kvíahnaus than the strengur or klömbruhnaus turf more typically associated with higher status structures. The change in colour of context 413 is attributed to the burning of this structure. Both the inner and outer faces of context 413 could be seen to include a stone facing or foundation. This was most evident at the northern edge of context 413 where a course of large irregular stones (up to 0.62m in length) retains context 413.

The eastern wall of Structure 6 is formed by contexts 382 and 389. Context 389 is located at the southeastern corner of Structure 6, measuring 1.22m north/south and 1.38m in width. Context 389 was composed of dark pink burnt turf containing H-1104 tephra. At its northern limit context 389 lay above dark grey brown unburnt turf (context 382), extending northwards for 2.04m, and forming the lower part of the eastern wall of Structure 6. Both latter contexts were contained within courses of large irregular stones. The internal edge of this wall had been truncated, but also has a maximum width of c.1.40m.

Context 389 also lies over a narrow truncated band of burnt turf extending west, (context 381). Context 381 had been truncated at its southern edge by features associated with Phase C, and appears to represent only the inner edge of the southern wall of Structure 6. Context 381 could also be seen to seal several pieces of burnt timber. Context 360 also forms part of the heavily truncated southern wall of Structure 6. Context 360 is located at the southwestern corner of the structure, and is composed of pink orange burnt turf like that seen elsewhere in Structure 6. Context 360 was truncated at its centre by Trench 97A, where a double line of stones can be seen extending east /west at the base of context 360. A similar narrow line of stones (context 456) extends north from context 360, and is believed to represent the western wall of Structure 6. Context 456 is apparent for a length of 3.50m, and has a width of up to 0.60m, formed by at least three rows of stone. Both outer edges of context 456 lie over a lower course of stones along its centre.

It is possible that the channel thus formed may have contained a structural timber. As such, the turf and stone elements of Structure 6 are thought to be an addition to the timber elements, providing both reinforcement and insulation.

At the eastern edge of context 456, four post settings were discovered amongst deposits of burnt turf and charcoal, representing elements of the western wall. All of these features incorporate a post hole bordered by small to medium stones.

Feature 439 was located at the southwestern corner, and measures 0.20m by 0.14m with a maximum depth of 0.21m, and was filled by reddish orange burnt earth (context 438). Part of a whetstone (F98-027) was recovered from towards the base of context 438. A similar feature (feature 458) formed the northwestern corner of Structure 6. Feature 458 measured 0.32m by 0.24m with a maximum depth of 0.25m, and was filled by a dark brown silt including soot and charcoal (context 457).

Towards the centre of the western wall were two smaller square post settings (features 435 and 437). These are believed to be settings for door posts. Feature 437 measures 0.20m by 0.18m with a depth of 70mm, and is bordered by flat stones on their edges at the north and east. Feature 435 is located 0.62m north of feature 437, and measures 0.16m by 0.14m with a depth of 80mm.

At the base of Trench 97A, around 0.40m to the west of the latter post settings, lay the remains of a charred timber oriented parallel to the western wall. When first seen in 1997, these

remains extended for a length of 2.40m. Further traces of burnt timbers were located at the southern limit of the northern wall, lying parallel to that wall. These may have originally extended from feature 458 to features 410 and 412, two further post holes forming parts of the northern wall of Structure 6. Feature 410 is located approximately 3.45m to the east of feature 458, and 0.40m to the south of the northern wall of Structure 6. Feature 410 measures 0.15m by 0.16m with a depth of 0.16m. Feature 412, to the north west of feature 410 and adjacent to the northern wall of Structure 6, measures 0.20m by 0.14m with a depth of 0.12m. To the south of these features a deposit containing frequent fragments of charcoal (context 384) was seen to form a narrow linear band extending across the internal area of Structures 6. This context also marked the eastern most limit of the later smithy deposits, and marks a line along which the depth of truncation of the upper most natural horizon changes. To the east of this line later truncation has removed virtually all internal deposits. It is thought that this eastern most portion of Structure 6 originally had a surface higher than the western portion, and this would be consistent with a platform or dais at the eastern end of a church. Sterile geological deposits were encountered in the northeastern corner of this area between 0.28 and 0.42m higher than in the area to the west.

Context 384 extends towards the western limit of context 381 (see above). Context 381 can be seen to cover the remains of at least five burnt vertical timbers, and the remains of at least two horizontal timbers. At the truncated southern limit of context 381 is continuous band of charcoal and charred wood extending at least 1.45m east/west, with a thickness of between 10-30mm. This band of charcoal is believed to be remains of a horizontal beam. At the truncated northern limit of context 381, the remains of five planks could be seen. Test excavation of a small section of context 381 permitted the recovery of two of these planks (S-142 and S-143), and showed them to be sitting over a horizontal plank (S-141), also charred. This horizontal plank could be seen to lie over several small flat stones forming the lowest elements of this wall. All of the staves thus far exposed have a width of between 0.12-0.18m and a thickness of between 15-27mm. They are indicative of a structure whose walls are formed by timber panelling

The complexity of Structure 6 appears to show a degree of redundancy. It is likely that these features represent a process of construction and re-construction. The elements described above enclose a maximum internal space of 3.20m north to south, by 5.20m east to west. These measurements fall within the range of dimensions previously recorded for lesser churches in Iceland.

The Churchyard and possible graves.

Evaluation by Þjóðminjasafn Íslands in 1984 revealed the remains of two inhumations (skeletons 84-001 and 84-002, Hildur Gestdóttir 1998) within the area of the kirkjugarður, to the south of Structure 1. Evaluation by Þjóðminjasafn Íslands in 1997 revealed five features interpreted as possible graves towards the southern limit of Trench 97A. One of these was tested and found to contain an inhumation. This demonstrated a fairly dense concentration of burials close to the southern walls of the structures, but shed little light on the distribution of graves within the kirkjugarður as a whole. To gain a broader overview of the total number and distribution of graves, and to recover material to test the viability of further osteological work, three areas within the churchyard were investigated.

Area KG1 was located to the northwest of Structure 1, and measured 3.5m by 4.5m. Excavation in this area, adjacent to the boundary of the churchyard, revealed only deposits derived from turf debris and wind blown deposition (contexts 279, 289, 358, 359). Excavation was continued down to a sterile natural horizon (context 292), and no features that could represent burials were encountered.

Area KG2 extended north-east from the southern end of Trench 97A, in order to recover the inhumation exposed there during evaluation (Skeleton 98-001). The additional area opened measured 1.1m by 1.5m. Turf and topsoil were removed to reveal a layer of accumulation including turf debris (context 294). Context 294 extended to the limits of the trench measuring up to 0.21m in thickness, and was found to contain 1104 tephra in situ. Below context 294 three features believed to be graves were encountered (features 299, 301 and 303). Features 301 and 299 appeared to be intercutting and were not excavated further. Feature 299 contained the inhumation partially exposed in 1997, Skeleton 98-001. The removal of context 294 had revealed a layer of black/brown organic material (context 297) filling a pointed depression in the lower fill of feature 299. Context 297 was contained within this feature, and had a thickness of not more than 20mm. Its form is taken to be indicative of the compression and collapse of earlier grave fills, and of a coffin. Beneath context 297 was a mixed fill of yellow and reddish brown silt (context 298), being the main fill of feature 299. Removal of that fill exposed the remains of Skeleton 98-001, along with traces of a wooden coffin. This coffin could be seen as highly degraded dark traces of wood forming a rectangular shape at the edges of the grave cut. Similar traces of wood could be seen to have collapsed over the Skeleton 98-001, although the skull and the long bones of the legs were exposed above this horizon. Careful removal of these traces of

wood revealed the poor preservation of Skeleton 98-001. A full discussion of the skeletal remains may be found within a separate osteological report (Hildur Gestsdóttir 1998).

Area KG3 was triangular in shape, extending towards the south-east, from the southeastern limit of Area FJNE. The removal of turf and topsoil exposed a layer of accumulation including turf debris (context 311) sealing features consistent with up to eight further burials (contexts 313, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 328 and 329). A fragment of human bone was recovered whilst cleaning layer 324 (Skeleton 98-004). The isolated nature of this find is consistent with material disturbed by the excavation of a later grave. Those contexts closer to Area FJNE (313, 322, 323) form a dense concentration and appear to be intercutting, whereas the density of possible graves drops off rapidly towards the southeast and the outer area of the churchyard.

A considerable number of further possible graves were located within the main excavation areas, primarily clustering around the northeastern end of the earliest structures. Two of these features had been substantially truncated by the construction of the later Fjánhús, exposing human remains, and were therefore excavated. Feature 349 was a shallow rectangular cut north of the north east corner of Structure 6. Excavation revealed no traces of bone, but showed feature 349 to be truncating the remains of feature 351. This feature was found to contain the poorly preserved remains of the upper part of a human skeleton (98-002), together with traces of vertical wooden planks (S-139) forming part of a coffin around the head of individual 98-002.

Other Features

Excavation at Neðri-Ás also revealed a number of features and layers that merit further investigation. Sterile natural deposits have not yet been exposed throughout the area external to Structures 6. To the west, a mid to dark brown aeolian deposit including H-1104 tephra (context 372) has been exposed along with the partial remains of an additional possible structure (context 361) and numerous stones that cannot be shown to be connected to any of the features thus far excavated. Context 361 is located west of the southwestern corner of Structure 6, and measures 2.10m east / west by 1.40m north /south. Context 361 is composed of burnt turf debris lying over stones that can be seen to have to have been deliberately placed. The alignment of stones within

context 361 is inconsistent with this feature forming part of any of the structures so far excavated.

North of the northwestern corner of Structure 6, a number of large stones appear to be associated with a possible negative feature beneath context 420. Context 420 is a pale yellowish brown naturally deposited silt, but where this layer has been truncated by later features, it is seen to be sealing a thin band of pale pink ash (Context 431). A similar deposit (context 373) could also be seen beneath context 372, where the latter deposit had been truncated. Both contexts 373 and 431 indicate that further anthropogenic deposits await investigation, and as both of these contexts are seen to be some distance beneath the H-1104 tephra horizon, they indicate an early phase of activity at Neðri-Ás not otherwise evidenced by excavation.

A pair of test pits, arranged in alternate quadrants, tested the junction of the túngarður and the kirkjugarður. Following the removal of topsoil and turf debris, the remains of kirkjugarður wall (context 345) could be seen to lie over the remains of the túngarður (context 447). Context 347 was composed of yellow and brown turf strengur, compressed to individual thicknesses of between 20-40mm, and survived to a height of up to 0.40m. Context 447 was more mixed in colour, and contained a number of irregular stones up to 0.28m in largest dimension. Context 447 survived to a height of up to 0.32m. No traces of context 347 could be identified to the north of the túngarður, and both features were seen to be covered by later deposits of turf debris including intermittent patches of H-1104 tephra.

Proposals / Further Work

The above results are of a preliminary nature and represent only the first stage of an ongoing process of post-excavation and analysis. Further detailed study of the stratigraphic sequence may lead to some revision of the relationships between the events and layers recorded above. Specialist study of the artefacts and samples recovered should shed more light on issues of dating and function for the phases of activity thus far described.

Typological study of the bronze buckle recovered from the smithying phase (C) may help to provide a more accurate date for that activity. The identification of a tephra horizon dated to c.1000 AD. (See Appendix 1) offers the possibility for further excavation to securely recover evidence of activity at Neðri-Ás in the 10th century. The identification of early anthropogenic layers (contexts 372 and 431) in the area external to Structure 6 offer a further opportunity for

continued research.

The analysis of numerous samples taken during excavation will add an additional source of data to assist in further interpretation, and it is hoped these will address the nature of Phase C deposits, possibly offering a distinction between iron smelting and iron working. Further study of comparable data may assist in our interpretation of the features associated with this phase.

It is proposed that further excavation should be undertaken continuing the work described above, and that this might focus on areas to the north of the 1998 excavation, where further archaeological deposits have been seen to extend beneath the limits of excavation. It is also proposed that excavation should continue in the area to the west of Structure 6, down to a level at which further structures emerge, or sterile geological deposits become apparent.

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JÁM

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Fornleifarannsókn að Neðri-Ási í Hjaltadal

- Gjóskulagagreining -

Inngangur

Greint er frá athugunum undirritaðs á gjóskulögum að Neðra-Ási í Hjaltadal þann 24. júní 1998. Gjóskulög voru skoðuð bæði á uppgraftarsvæðinu og utan þess. Mæld voru tvö snið. Snið I var í skurði í mómýri skammt NA af Neðra-Ási og snið II í bakka í norðurhluta uppgraftarsvæðisins. Sýni voru tekin úr öllum gjóskulögum til smásjárskoðunar og ljósbrotsmælingar. Auk þess að skoða gjóskulög í sniðum voru þau greind í mannvistarlögum víðs vegar á uppgraftarsvæðinu eftir því sem unnt var.

Gjóskulög í Skagafirði

Þau gjóskulög frá því eftir Landnám sem helst má vænta að finnist í Hjaltadal eru eftirfarandi:

1. Landnámslagið (LNL) frá því um 871 e.Kr. Samkvæmt Þykktarkorti ætti þykkt þess að vera minni en 0,5 cm.
2. Dökkt gjóskulag með upptök í Veiðivatna/Dyngjuhálskerfinu. Talið vera frá því um 1000 e.Kr.
3. Hekla-1104. Þykkt þess er innan við 0,5 cm samkvæmt þykktarkorti. Þótt þykkt þess sé aðeins örfáir millimetrar sést það jafnan vel í jarðvegi sökum þess hversu ljóst það er.
4. Hekla-1300. Mesti þykktarárs þessa lags liggur um Skagafjörð og á það því að finnst þar mjög auðveldlega.
5. Hekla-1766. Gjóska frá þessu gosi olli miklum búsifjum í Skagafirði og ætti það að vera auðfundið í jarðvegi.
6. Hekla-1980. Gjóskulagið er mjög þunnt og ætti vart að finnst í jarðvegi.

Niðurstöður

Niðurstöður gjóskulagagreiningarinnar má sjá á meðfylgjandi sniðteikningum. Landnámslagið greindist ekki á svæðinu með vissu. Elsta gjóskulagið sem geindist frá því eftir Landnám samsvarar líkast til lagi sem lýst hefur verið úr inndölum Skagafjarðar, Austurdal og Vesturdal, og kallað er "s.g" (Gunnar Ólafsson 1985). Lagið telur Gunnar vera frá því um 1000 e.Kr. Þetta gjóskulag hefur undirritaður greint við Reynistað í Skagafirði og Bæ í Hnútafirði (Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson, óbirt gögn). Þetta gjóskulag er til staðar í báðum sniðunum að Neðri-Ási. Gjóskulagið H-1104 er allskýrt í báðum sniðum. Í sniði I er örþunnt dökkt gjóskulag undir H-1104 sem ekki verður greint með vissu að svo stöddu. Í sniði I eru tvö dökk, fremur grófkorna gjóskulög, ofan H-1104. Er hér að öllum líkindum um Heklulögin H-1300 og H-1766 að ræða. Smásjárskoðum og ljósbrotsmæling staðfestir að í báðum tilvikum er um Heklugjósku að ræða. Ljósbrot gjóskuglersins er í báðum lögum um $n_{1,550}$ sem er einkennandi fyrir ísúra gjósku með kísilsýruhluþfall (SiO_2) um 58 %. Í sniði II er aðeins um eitt gjóskulag að ræða ofan H-1104. Telja má víst að um sé að ræða gjóskulagið H-1766. Jarðvegsþykkt ofan gjóskulagsins í sniði II er villandi þar sem jarðvegurinn er að mestu úr mannvistarlögum, einkum torfi, sem myndast hafa á stuttum tíma. Utan uppgraftarsvæðisins er jarðvegur ofan H-1766 um 10-12 cm. Séu mannvistarlögin í sniði II ekki talin með er um mjög svipaða jarðvegsþykkt að ræða ofan meints H-1766. Gjóskulagið Hekla-1300 er þunnt í Hjaltadal, minna en 0,5 cm,

og fannst ekki í sniðum á uppgraftarsvæðinu. Hekla-1766 er um 0,5 cm þykkt. Gjóskulagið H-1104 er skýrt í jarðvegi á uppgraftarsvæðinu. Það var t.a.m. mjög áberandi í torfi kirkjurústarinnar.

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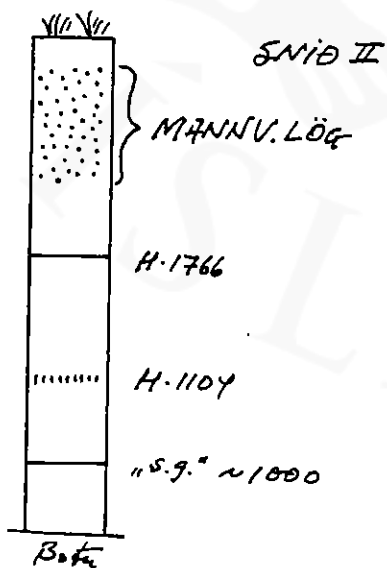
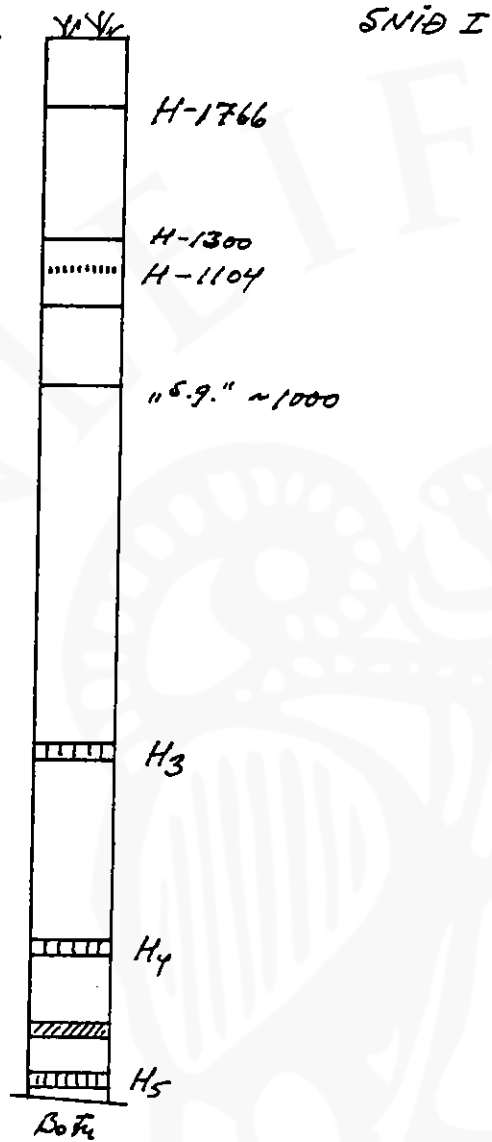
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Nesri - 'As í Hfaltadal
Gjóskeulagagræining

Maikv. 1:10.



Appendix 2: Index of Recorded Contexts

<i>Context Number</i>	<i>Brief Description</i>
200	Modern turf and topsoil
201	Fill of Trench 97A
202	Cut of Trench 97A
203	Machining / cleaning horizon.
204	Floor of Structure 2
205	Floor of Structure 1
206	Stone facing of Structure 1
207	Stone facing of Structure 2
208	Turf debris packing Structure 1
209	Turf debris packing Structure 2
210	Remains of turf wall, Structure 4
211	Remains of feeding trough, Structure 1
212	Southwestern turf wall, Structure 3
213	Southeastern turf wall, Structure 3
214	Lower remains of feeding trough
215	Northwestern turf wall, Structure 3
216	Roof collapse, Structure 5
217	Cut for construction, Structure 1
218	Cut for construction, Structure 2
219	Lower fill of southeastern wall, Structure 3
220	Shallow irregular hollow, northwest of Structure 3
221	Mixed turf layer, north of Structures 3 and 4
222	Loose turbed fill of [220]
223	Organic deposit beneath southwestern wall of Structure 3.
224	Turf debris with thin flat stones and H-1777 tephra, northeast of Structure 3
225	Turf debris between Structures 3 and 4
226	Remnant of northwest corner of Structure 3 (equals 215?)
227	Organic deposit beneath northwestern corner of Structure 3 (equals 223?)
228	Mixed debris layer south of Structures 3 and 5
229	Aeolian deposit inc. with H-1777 tephra
230	Aeolian deposit over northern wall of Structure 5
231	Peat ash fill of [241]
232	Southeastern wall of Structure 5
233	Cut for southern wall of Structure 4
234	Fill of [235]
235	Shallow pit/hollow within Structure 5
236	Fill of [237]
237	Modern pipe trench
238	Northeastern turf wall of Structure 5

239	Turf debris east of Structure 5
240	Turf debris beneath southern wall of Structure 4
241	Shallow irregular pit beneath western entrance of Structures 1 and 3
242	External debris beneath layer (240)
243	Compressed layer with peat ash and charcoal in area beneath western entrance of Structures 1 and 3
244	Equivalent to layer (248)
245	External turf debris beneath southern wall of Structure 4
246	Fill of [353]
247	Fill of [249]
248	Turf and dung deposit west/external to Structure 5
249	Post hole beneath feature[235]
250	Fill of [251]
251	Post hole beneath western limit of feeding trough
252	Fill of [354]
253	Remnant of turf wall beneath southern wall of Structure 5 and cuts [353] and [354]
254	Remains of turf wall beneath southern wall of Structure 4
255	Turf debris southern wall of Structure 5
256	External accumulation beneath layer (244)
257	Thin spread of charcoal in area of entrance to Structure 5
258	Southwestern corner of turf wall, Structure 5
259	Fill of [260]
260	Modern posthole
261	Compressed deposit under western end of feeding trough
262	Yellow brown accumulation in entrance to Structure 5
263	Peat ash and slag layer beneath northeastern wall of Structure 5. Associated with smithy.
264	Organic debris beneath wall (254).
265	Northwestern corner of wall of Structure 5
266	Fill of [356](large cut south of structure 5)
267	Widespread disuse horizon beneath Structure 5
268	Disuse / debris beneath northwestern wall of Structure 5
269	Dark grey tephra and silt beneath southern wall of Structure 4
270	Fill of [355]
271	Disuse / debris beneath northeastern wall of Structure 5
272	Loose debris beneath north eastern wall of Structure 5, associated with smithy
273	Peat ash and slag layer beneath southeastern wall of Structure 5, associated with smithy
274	Peat ash layer (equals 273?)
275	Remnant of turf wall southeast of Structure 5
276	Layer equivalent to (256) within Area KG1
277	Continuation of layer 272?
278	Turf layer beneath layer (273)
279	Widespread mixed turf debris in Area KG1
280	External turf debris, south of smithy.
281	Fill of [282]
282	Irregular external truncation north of smithy / church.

283	Peat ash over burnt southern wall of church
284	External aeolian accumulation, north of smithy / church
285	Peat ash and slag layer within smithy.
286	Turf debris south of feature [356]
287	Fill of [357]
288	External debris, north of smithy / church
289	Mixed debris within Area KG1, including 1104 tephra
290	External debris north of smithy church, including 1104 tephra
291	Peat ash deposit within smithy.
292	Natural horizon within KG1
293	Aeolian / disuse layer at northern L.O.E
294	Aeolian deposit beneath 1104 tephra, Area KG2
295	Gravel deposit beneath (290)
296	Peat ash deposit within smithy
297	Organic horizon in upper part of Grave [299]
298	Fill of grave [299]
299	Cut for grave of skeleton 98-001, Area KG2
300	Fill of possible grave [301]. Not excavated
301	Cut of possible grave, Area KG2. Not excavated
302	Fill of possible grave [303]. Not excavated
303	Cut of possible grave , Area KG2. Not excavated
304	Fill of [305]
305	Twin posthole, external / south of church
306	Upper fill of [308]
307	Lower charcoal fill of [308]
308	Small irregular pit, associated with smithy.
309	Peat ash layer over north wall of church
310	Mixed peat ash and turf beneath (309)
311	Aeolian deposit beneath turf and topsoil, Area KG3. 1104 tephra at lower horizon.
312	Peat ash deposit west of smithy area
313	Fill of possible grave, Area KG3. Not excavated
314	Fill of [315]
315	Small shelving pit associated with smithy
316	Fill of [317]
317	Small post hole beneath feeding trough (structure 1)
318	Fill of [319]
319	Small post hole (see also [317])
320	Fill of [321]
321	Small post hole (see also [317])
322	Fill of possible grave, Area KG3. Not excavated.
323	Natural deposit, Area KG3. Not excavated.
324	Fill of possible grave, Area KG3. Not excavated.
325	Fill of possible grave, Area KG3. Not excavated.
326	Fill of possible grave, Area KG3. Not excavated.
327	Fill of [331]

328	Fill of possible grave, Area KG3. Not excavated.
329	Fill of possible grave, Area KG3. Not excavated.
330	Fill of [406]
331	Modern post setting, Structure 2.
332	Square pit, beneath [331]
333	Fill of [332]
334	Burnt debris, west of smithy.
335	Fill of [344]
336	Burnt debris, west of smithy.
337	Disturbed fill of grave [338]
338	Partially excavated cut of grave (Skeleton 98-003)
339	Fill of [340]
340	Modern post setting, Structure 2
341	Burnt debris overlying northern wall of church
342	Fill of [343]
343	Oval cut of post setting, beneath floor of Structure 1
344	Modern post setting, Structure 2
345	Wall of Kirkjugarður, Test pit 1.
346	Peat ash overlying northern wall of church.
347	Patch of smithy debris east of main smithy area.
348	Truncated fill of grave[349]
349	Cut of grave, northeast of church
350	Accumulation / dumping against northern wall of church.
351	Truncated fill of grave [351]
352	Cut of grave, northeast of church (Skeleton 98-002)
353	Cut for repair to smithy wall
354	Cut for repair to smithy wall
355	Cut for timber in northern wall of smithy.
356	Cut of rectangular pit south of smithy.
357	Cut of large pit truncating southern church wall.
358	Peat ash deposit, Area KG1. Not excavated.
359	Aeolian deposit, Area KG1. Not excavated.
360	Burnt turf at southwestern corner of church. Not excavated.
361	Turf debris with structural stones, southwest of church. Not excavated.
362	Mixed turf and soot, southwest of church. Not excavated.
363	Disuse / aeolian layer over (361). Not excavated.
364	Fill of possible grave, southwest of church. Not excavated.
365	Fill of [366]
366	Small post hole truncating (364)
367	Fill of [368]
368	Small post hole truncating (364)
369	Fill of [370]
370	Small post hole (see also [366] and [368])
371	Fill of possible grave. Not excavated.
372	Aeolian deposit south and west of structures. H-1104 at surface. Not excavated.

373	Pale pink peat ash below (372) in modern pipe trench. Not excavated.
374	Mixed turf debris south of structures. Not excavated.
375	Fill of possible feature beneath (374). Not excavated.
376	Fill of possible grave beneath (375). Not excavated.
377	Fill of possible feature beneath (376). Not excavated.
378	Fill of possible grave south of church. Not excavated.
379	Fill of possible graves beneath southern wall of church. Not excavated.
380	Sooty / burnt deposit within southern wall of church. Not excavated.
381	Burnt turf containing burnt staves, southern wall of church. Partially excavated.
382	Unburnt turf with H-1104 tephra, western wall of church. Not excavated.
383	Irregular black horizon, possibly marking position of removed stones. Not excavated.
384	Linear charcoal/burnt deposit, marking division of church. Not excavated.
385	Charcoal rich deposit at northern limit of (384). Not excavated.
386	Burnt soil within area of smithy. Not excavated.
387	Patches of peat ash in northwestern area of smithy. Not excavated.
388	Peat ash / burnt turf with H-1104 at southern end of eastern church wall. Not excavated.
389	Burnt turf forming southeastern corner of church. Not excavated.
390	Turf debris filling possible feature beneath (388). Not excavated.
391	Disturbed natural deposit southeast of church. Not excavated.
392	Aeolian deposit east of structures, includes H-1104 at surface. Not excavated.
393	Fill of possible truncated grave east of church. Not excavated.
394	Fill of [395]. Partially excavated.
395	Cut of probable grave beneath / east of church. Partially excavated.
396	Fill of possible grave truncated by [395]. Not excavated.
397	Fill of possible grave east of church. Not excavated.
398	Lower fill, (beneath 397). Not excavated.
399	Natural yellow gravel and stones.
400	Fill of possible grave, northeast of church. Not excavated.
401	Natural red-brown silt with gravel.
402	Natural yellow brown silt, Area KG3
403	Fill of possible grave, at western L.O.E. Not excavated.
404	Natural red brown silt.
405	Natural yellow brown silt with gravel.
406	Modern post setting, Structure 2. Truncates (397).
407	Fill of [408]
408	Small post hole, northern wall of church.
409	Fill of [410]
410	Small post hole, northern part of church.
411	Fill of [412]
412	Small post hole, northern wall of church.
413	Burnt northern turf wall of church, with H-1104 in turves. Not excavated.
414	Dark organic horizon, north of / beneath north wall of church. Not excavated.
415	Fill of [416]. Partially excavated.
416	Possible grave north of church. Partially excavated.
417	Fill of possible grave beneath northern wall of church. Not excavated.

418	Fill of [419]. Partially excavated.
419	Possible grave north of church wall. Partially excavated.
420	Aeolian deposition north of church. Not excavated.
421	Pale pink peat ash, beneath (420). Not excavated.
422	Dark organic horizon, north of / beneath north wall of church. Not excavated.
423	Peat ash / burnt turf south of northern wall of church. Not excavated.
424	Soot and charred wood, north wall of church. Not excavated.
425	Peat ash / burnt turf at northern wall of church. Not excavated.
426	Lower element of northern wall, at base of Trench 97A. Not excavated.
427	Dark orange brown turf debris at western limit of northern wall. Not excavated.
428	Fill of [429]
429	Small post hole truncating (427).
430	Aeolian deposit at northern limit of Trench 97A. Not excavated.
431	Pale pink peat ash at base of Trench 97 A. Not excavated.
432	Fill of [433]
433	Small post hole west of west wall of church.
434	Fill of [435]
435	Sub-square post hole at entrance to church (North)
436	Fill of [437]
437	Post setting at entrance to church (South)
438	Fill of [439]
439	Post hole post setting at southwestern corner of church.
440	Fill of [441]
441	Small post hole associated with smithy
442	Fill of [443]
443	Posthole/post pad associated with smithy.
444	Soot and charcoal in western wall of church. Not excavated.
445	Burnt turf at western wall of church. Not excavated.
446	Internal collapse at southeastern corner of church.
447	Tungarður.
448	Irregular cut feature south of church.
449	Fill of [448]
450	Post hole at centre of eastern wall
451	Fill of [451]
452	Fill of [453]
453	Shallow posthole, southern wall of church.
454	Fill of [455]
455	Shallow oval depression, from removal of stone, southern wall of church.
456	Stones at base of western wall of church.
457	Fill of [458]
458	Post at northwestern corner of Structure 6

Appendix 3: Finds Register

Find No.	Context	General Name / Almennt heiti	Material	Type	Comments	Size
98-001	223	Pipe, part of / Krítarpípubrot	Ceramic	Other	Pipe stem	46mm
98-002	231	Fragment / Glerbrot	Glass	Vessel		34mm
98-003	231	Nail / Nagli	Metal	Fe-Iron		33mm
98-004	231	Pottery sherd / Leirkersbrot	Ceramic	Redware	Stove tile	30mm
98-005	244	Fragment / Bútur	Metal	Fe-Iron		49mm max
98-006	246	Nail / Nagli	Metal	Fe-Iron		32mm max
98-007	244	Fragment / Glerbrot	Glass	Window		17mm
98-008	256	Fragment / Bútur	Metal	Fe-Iron		27mm
98-009	205	Fragment / Bútur	Metal	Fe-Iron		38mm
98-010*	Re-assigned as Sample S-144					
98-011*	Re-assigned as Sample S-145					
98-012*	Re-assigned as Sample S-149					
98-013*	Modern - discarded					
98-014	284	Nail / Nagli	Metal	Fe-Iron		29mm
98-015	283	Nail / Nagli	Metal	Fe-Iron		56mm max
98-016	283	Nail / Nagli	Metal	Fe-Iron		66mm
98-017	285	Nail / Nagli	Metal	Fe-Iron		38mm
98-018	307	Vessel fragments / Brot úr potti	Metal	Cu-Bronze		41mm max
98-019	291	Buckle / Sylgja	Metal	Cu-Bronze		40mm
98-020*	Natural - discarded					
98-021	293	Fragment / Bútur	Metal	Cu-Bronze		8mm
98-022	320	Nail / Nagli	Metal	Fe-Iron		49mm
98-023	U/S	Nail / Nagli	Metal	Fe-Iron		34mm
98-024*	Re-assigned as Sample S-152					
98-025	U/S	Nail / Nagli	Metal	Fe-Iron		53mm
98-026*	Re-assigned as Sample S-153					
98-027	438	Whetstone / Brýni	Stone	Schist		94mm
98-028	387	Knife blade / Hnifsblað ?	Metal	Fe-Iron		43mm max
98-029	254	Rod / Teinn	Metal	Fe-Iron		64mm
98-030	241	Whetstone / Brýni	Stone	Schist		93mm
98-031	381	Fragment / Bútur	Metal	Cu-Bronze		13mm
98-032	388	Nail / Nagli	Metal	Fe-Iron		54mm
98-033	212	Pottery sherd / Leirkersbrot	Ceramic	Unknown	Vessel-body	26mm max
98-034	214	Vessel fragment / Brot úr fláti	Glass	Vessel	Vessel-base	46mm
98-035*	Re-assigned as Sample S-151					
98-036	214	Nail / Nagli	Metal	Fe-Iron		44mm
98-037	214	Whetstone / Brýni	Stone	Schist		34mm
98-038	203	Vessel fragment / Brot úr potti	Metal	Fe-Iron	Vessel base	130mm max
98-039	205	Nail / Nagli	Metal	Fe-Iron		68mm max

Appendix 4: Samples Register

No.	Context	Type / Comments
S-101	224	Bone
S-102	216	Bulk sample –plant macro.
S-103	223	Bones
S-104	231	Bones. Includes fragment of whalebone.
S-105	231	Bird bones. Partially articulated.
S-106	231	Slag.
S-107	U/S	Bone
S-108	238	Slag
S-109	238	Bone
S-110	244	Bone
S-111	256	Bone
S-112	248	Slag, from layer post dating smithy.
S-113	254	Ash. Contains fragments of burnt bone and charcoal.
S-114	257	Charcoal.
S-115	276	Animal bone from layer inc. dark grey tephra. (c.1777?)
S-116	267	Bone
S-117	267	Slag.
S-118	216	Fish bone.
S-119	285	Charcoal. From peat-ash layer
S-120	285	Bones. From peat-ash layer
S-121	285	Slag. From peat-ash layer
S-122	285	Stone, with slag encrustation.
S-123	290	Bone.
S-124	307	Bulk sample from charcoal filled pit.
S-125	291	Peat-ash. Sub-sample for hammer scale.
S-126	307	Burnt bone fragments from charcoal filled pit.
S-127	307	Unburnt wood fragments from base of charcoal filled pit.
S-128	291	Large fragments of charcoal.
S-129	298	Soil sample from pelvic area of Skeleton 98-001.
S-130	267	Bone.
S-131	312	Bone.
S-132	296	Bone. From peatash layer.
S-133	296	Bone. From peatash layer.
S-134	336	Slag. From burnt turf debris.
S-135	263	Stone with slag encrustation.
S-136	263	Slag. From peat-ash layer.
S-137	263	Slag. From peat-ash layer.
S-138	263	Slag. From peat-ash layer.
S-139	351	Wood fragments. Remains of coffin (Sk.002)
S-140	266	Bone.

No.	Context	Type / Comments
S-141	381	Burnt timber (in-situ) - Horizontal situation.
S-142	381	Burnt timber (in-situ) - Vertical timber
S-143	381	Burnt timber (in-situ) - Vertical timber
S-144	266	Wood.
S-145	246	Wood.
S-146	248	Bone.
S-147	334?	Slag.
S-148	200	Bone.
S-149	266	Bone.
S-150	348	Wood.
S-151	214	Wood. Fragment of knotwood or root.
S-152	337	Human teeth. Disarticulated. From truncated grave fill.
S-153	324?	Fragment of human bone.

Appendix 5: Illustrations

Figure 1 – Skagafjörður

Figure 2 – Hjaltadalur

Figure 3 – Site Location

Figure 4 – Location of Elevation Drawings

Figure 5 – Main Excavation Areas

Figure 6 – Foundations of Structures 1 and 2

Figure 7 – Elevations 101, 102, and 105

Figure 8 – Elevations 103, 104, and 107

Figure 9 – Elevations 106, 109, and 111

Figure 10 – Elevations 108, 110, and 112

Figure 11 – Structure 5

Figure 12 – Phase C

Figure 13 – Structure 6

Figure 14 – Locations of Graves and Possible Graves

Figure 15 – Proposed Stratigraphic Matrix



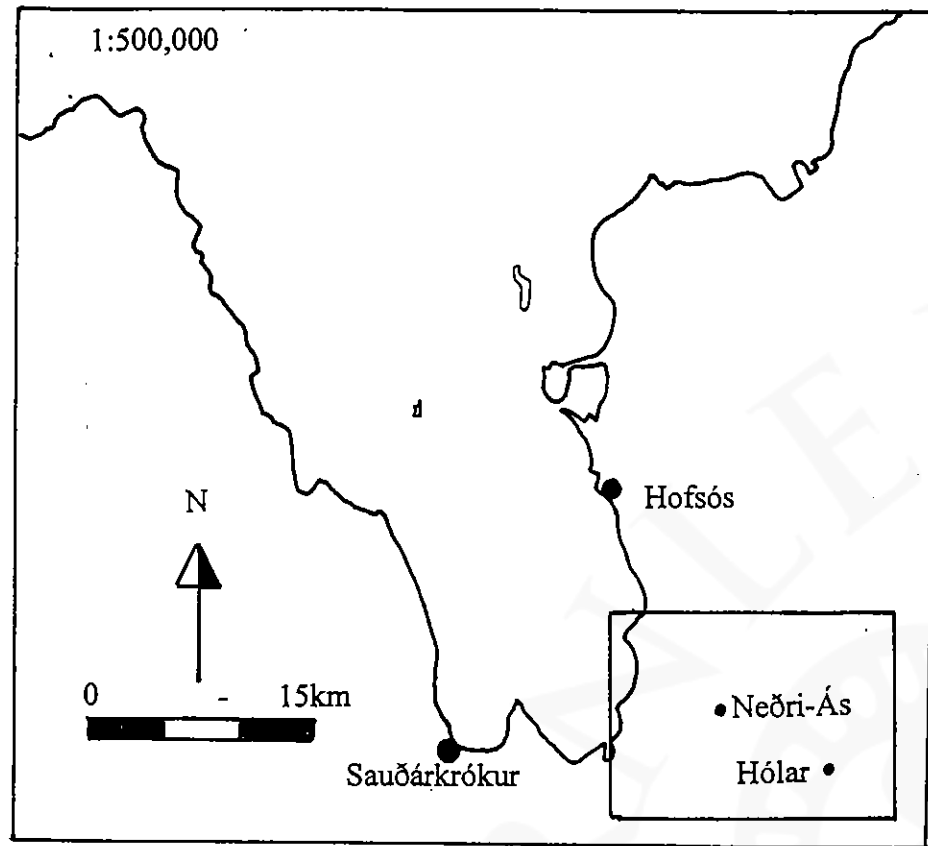


Figure 1 - Skagafjörður

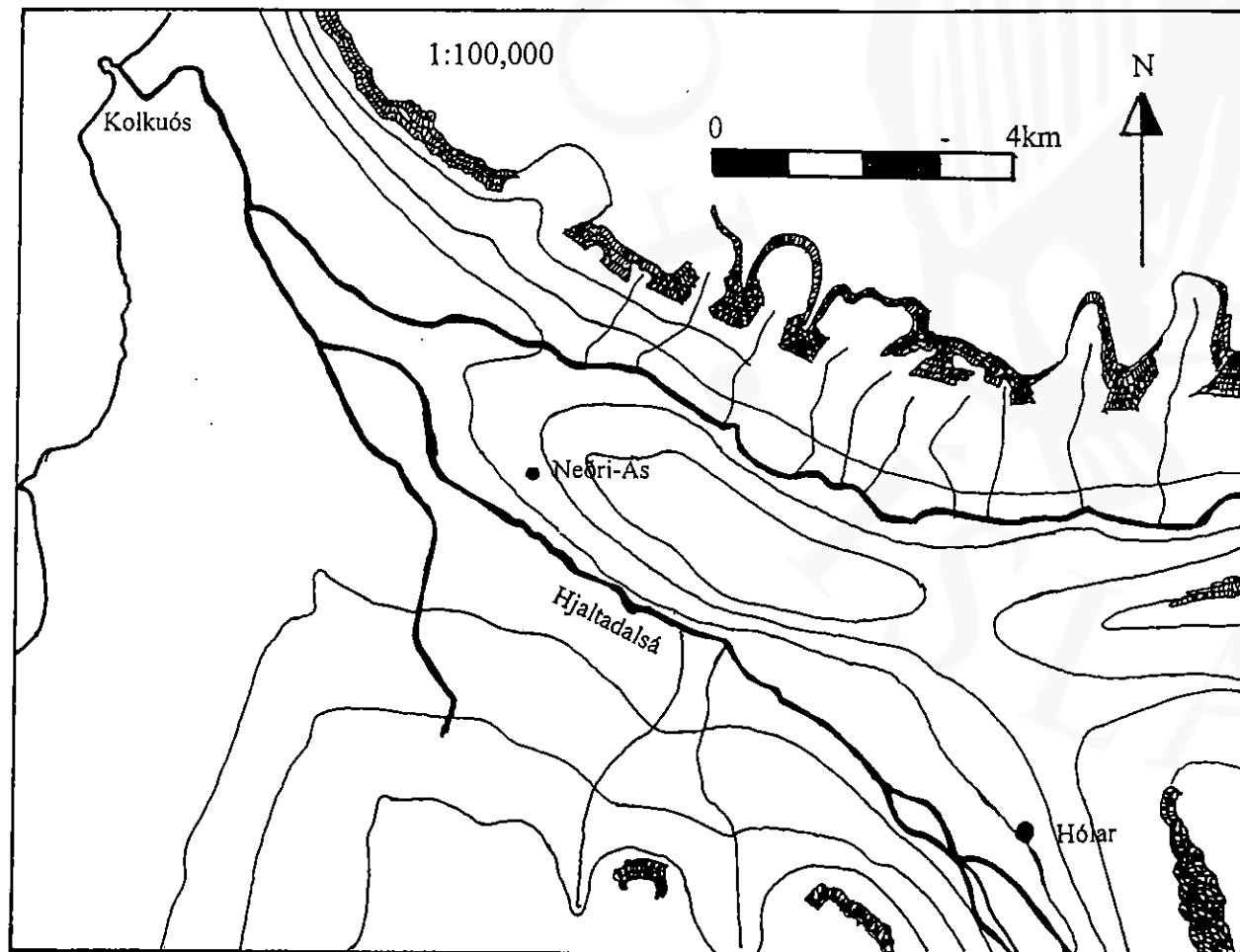
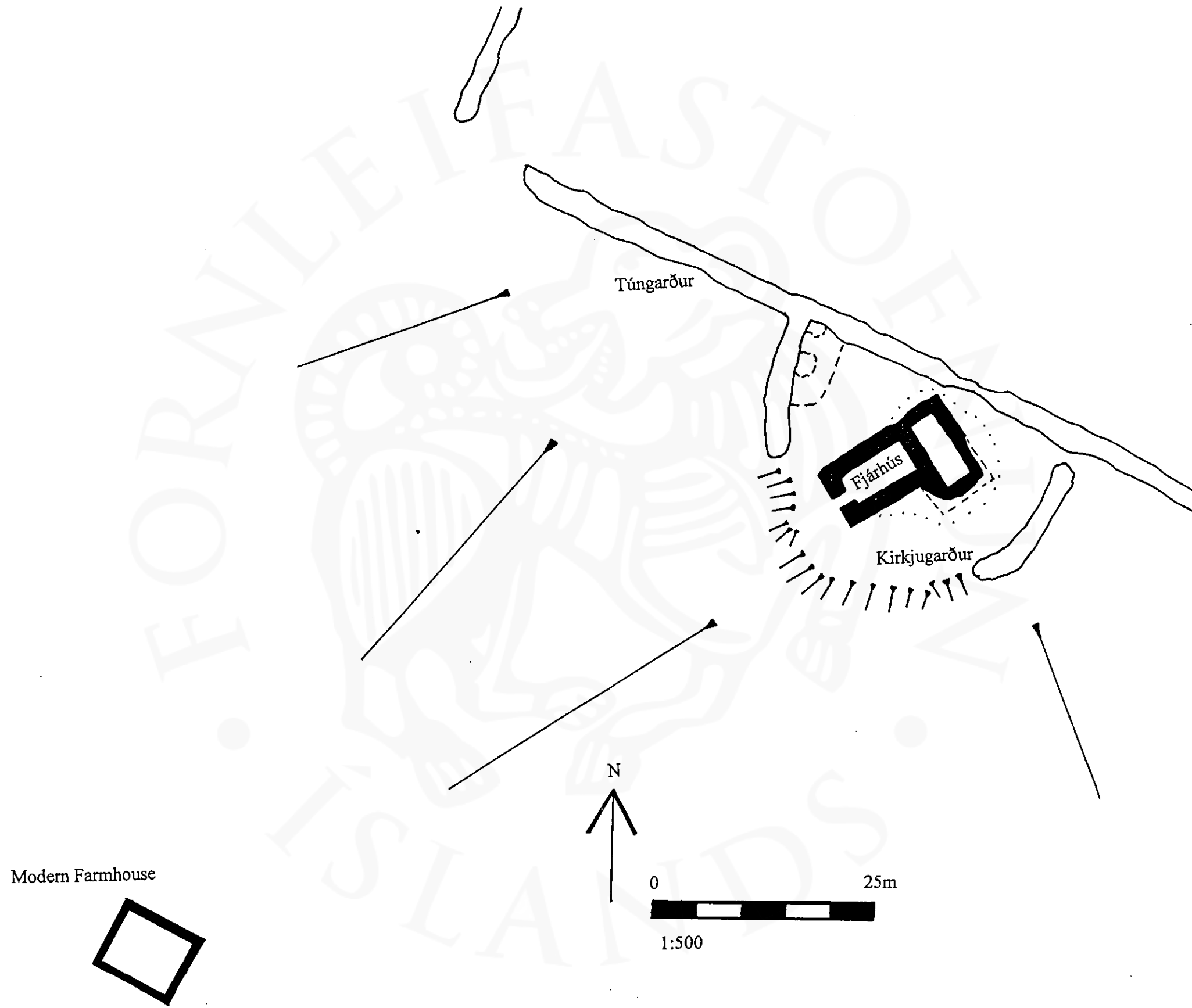


Figure 2 - Hjaltadalur



Neðri-Ás

Figure 3 - Site Location

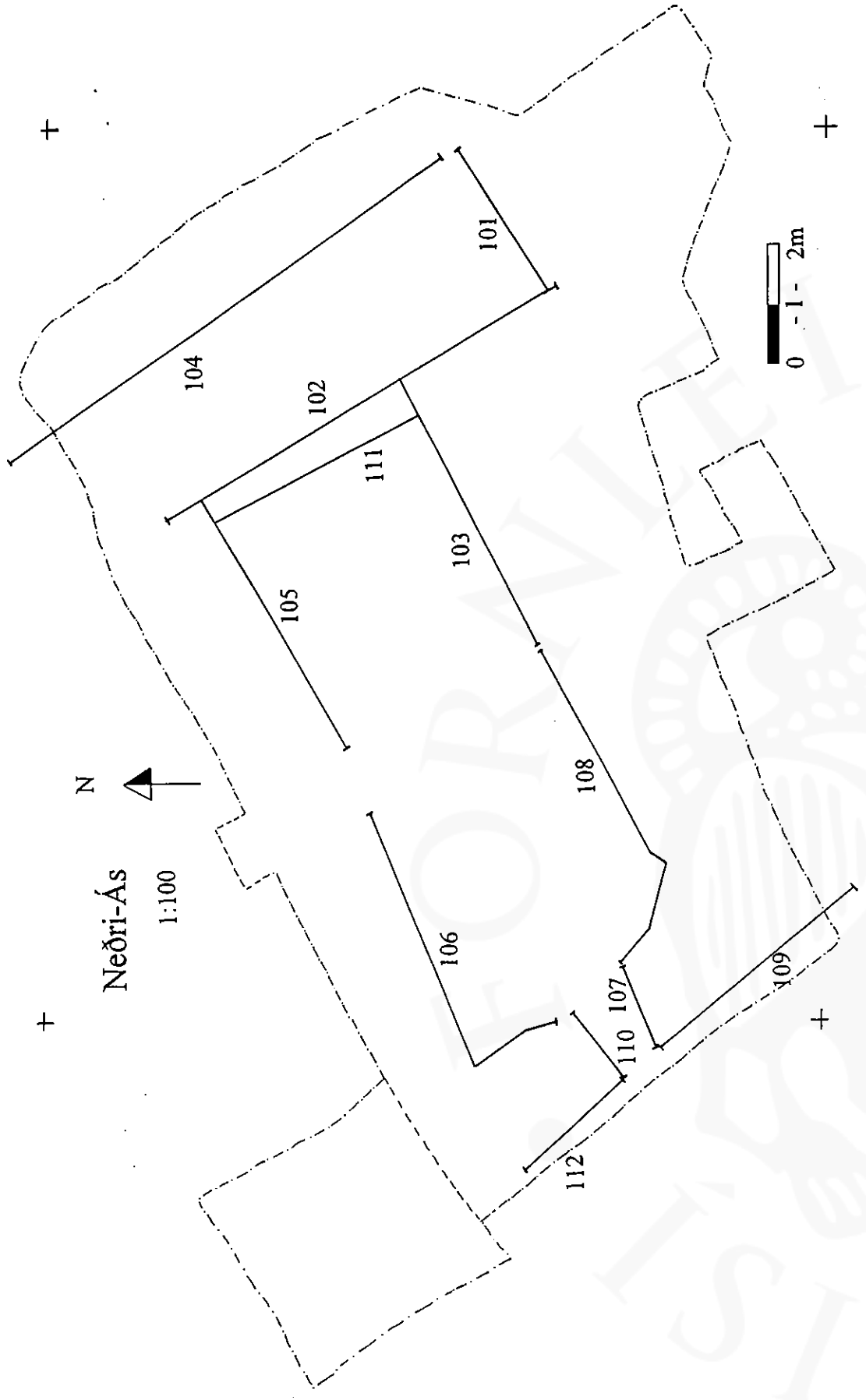


Figure 4 - Location of Elevation Drawings

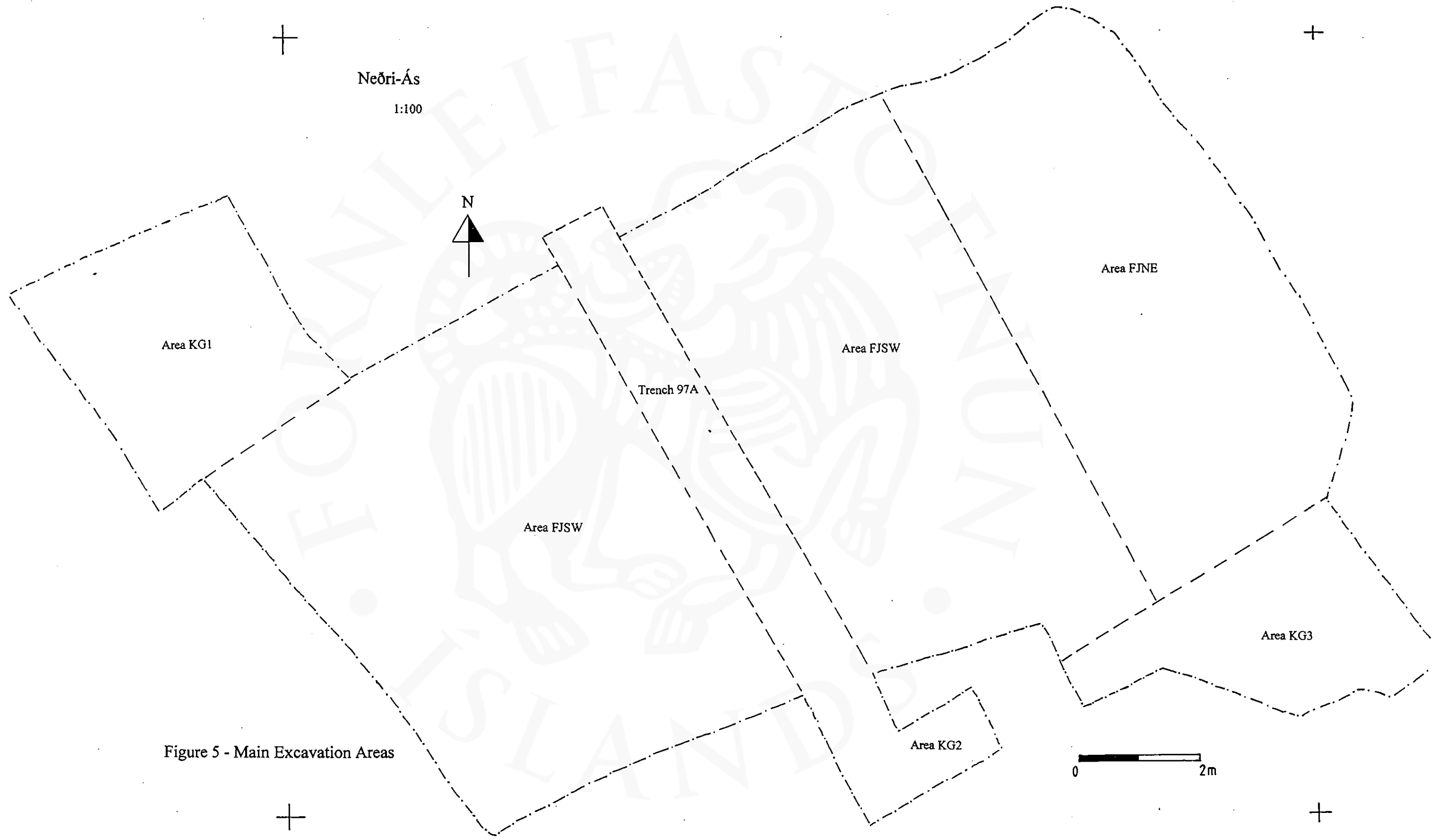
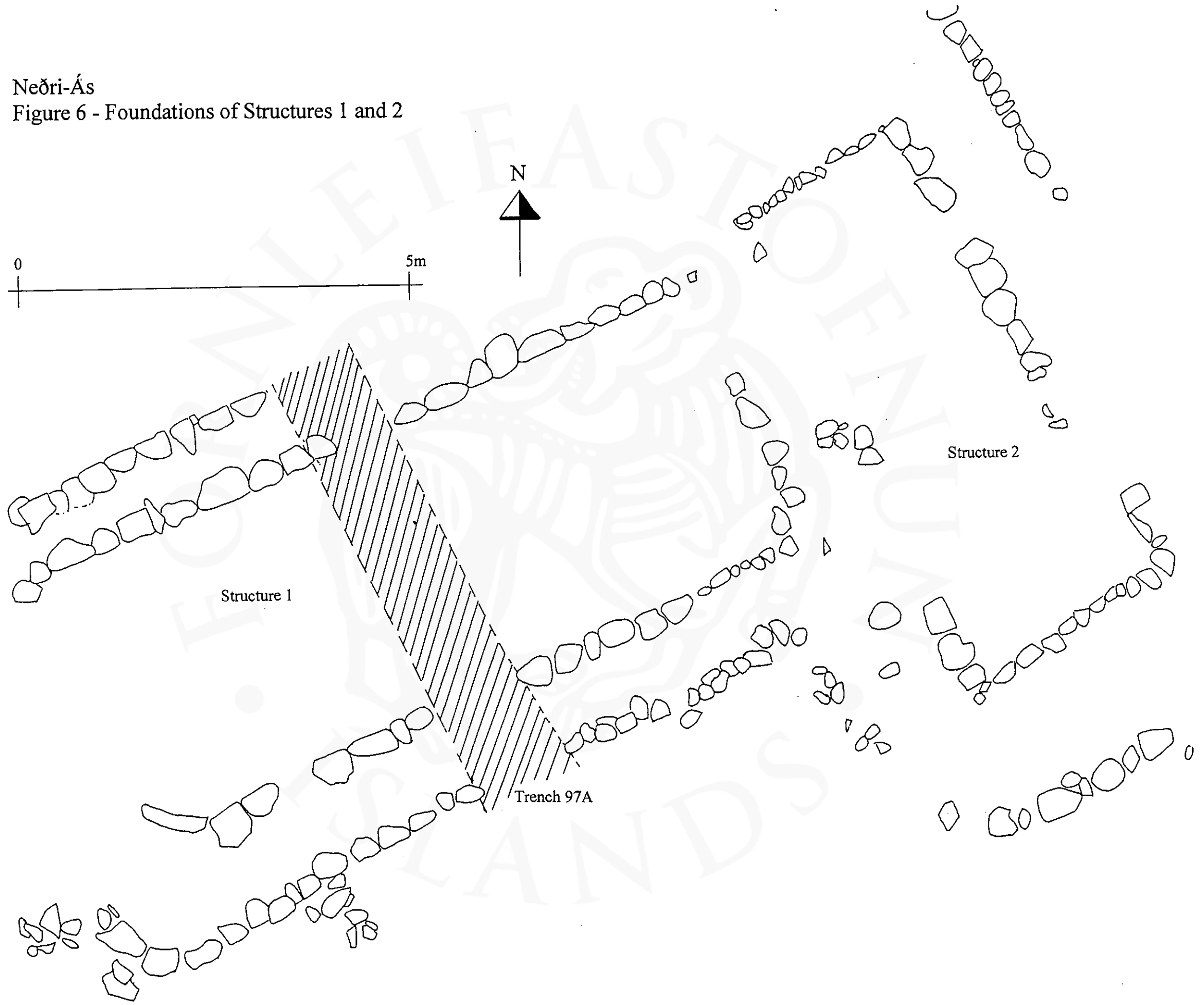
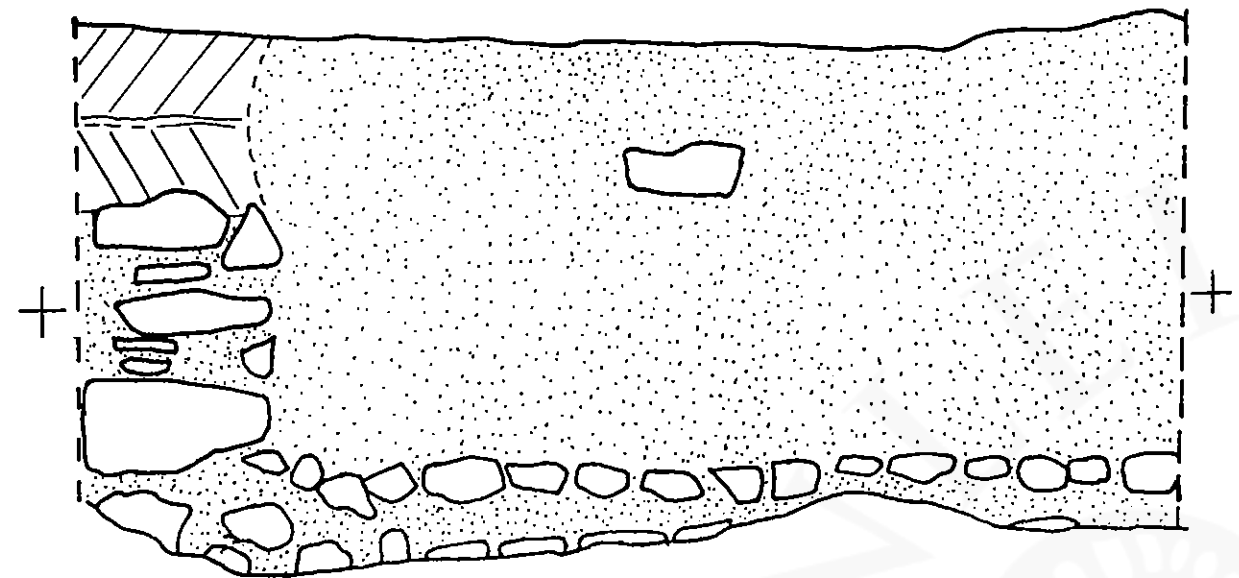




Figure 5 - Main Excavation Areas

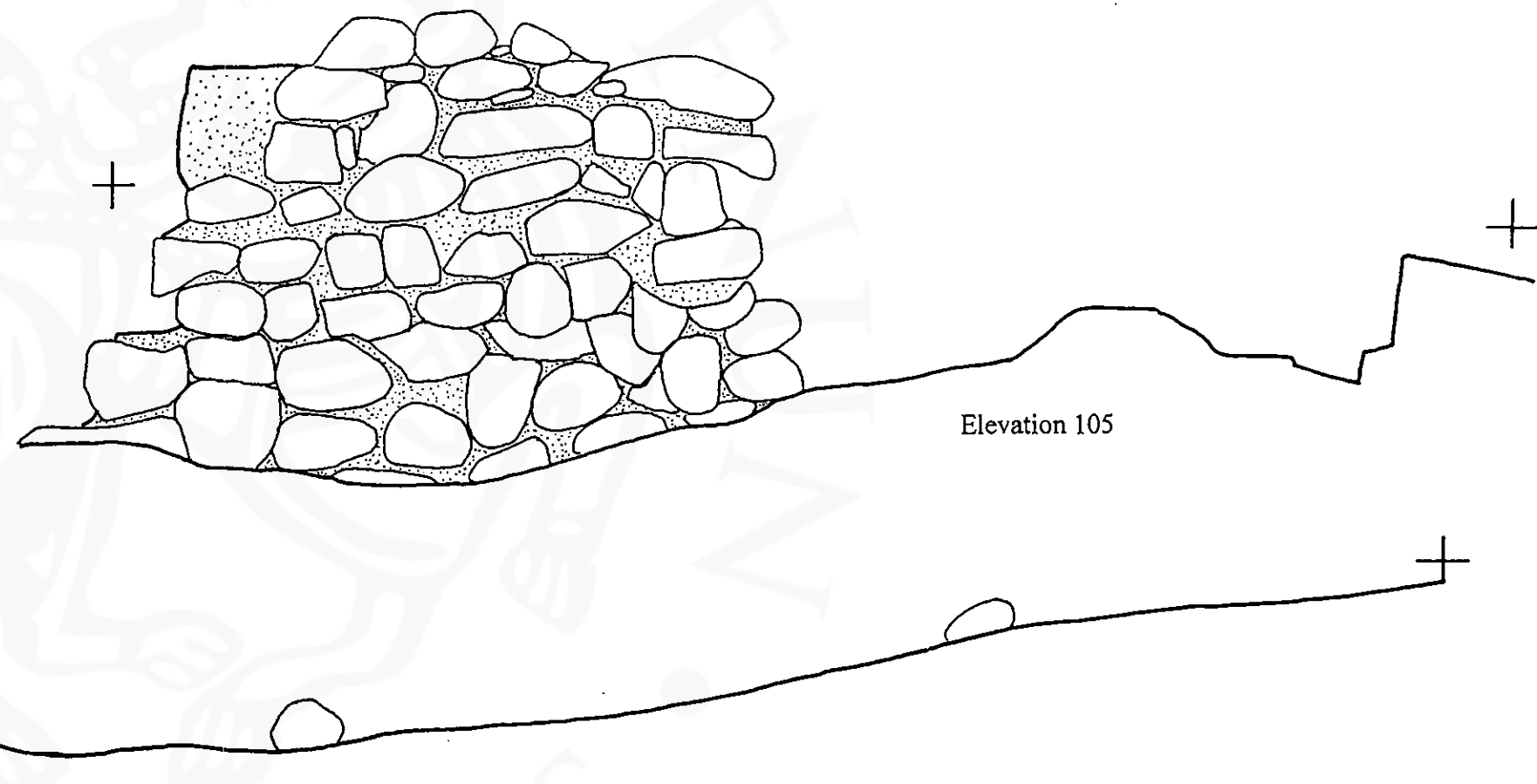
Neðri-Ás
Figure 6 - Foundations of Structures 1 and 2



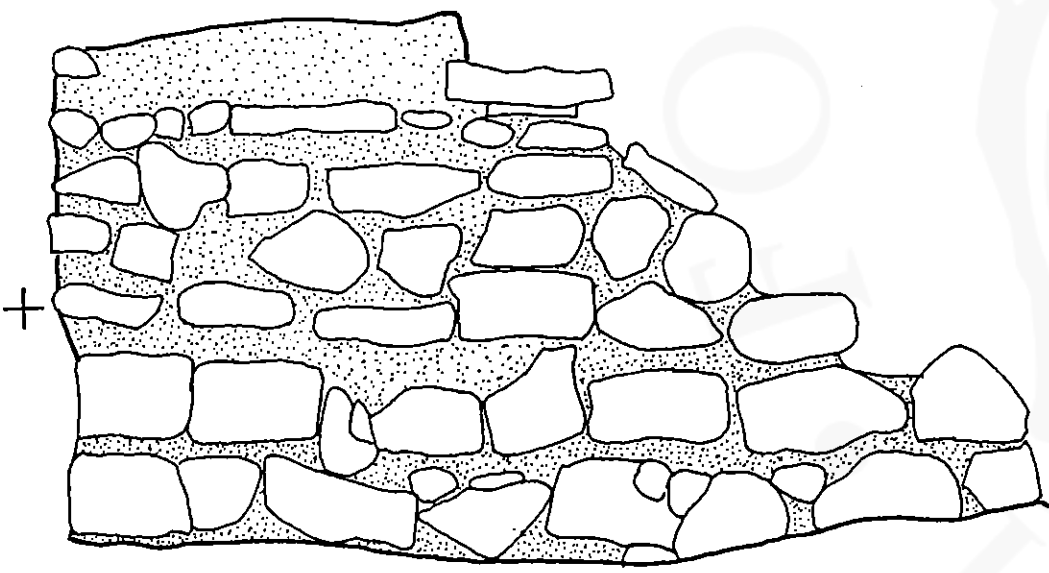


Elevation 101

-  Strengur
-  Klömbruhnaus



Elevation 105



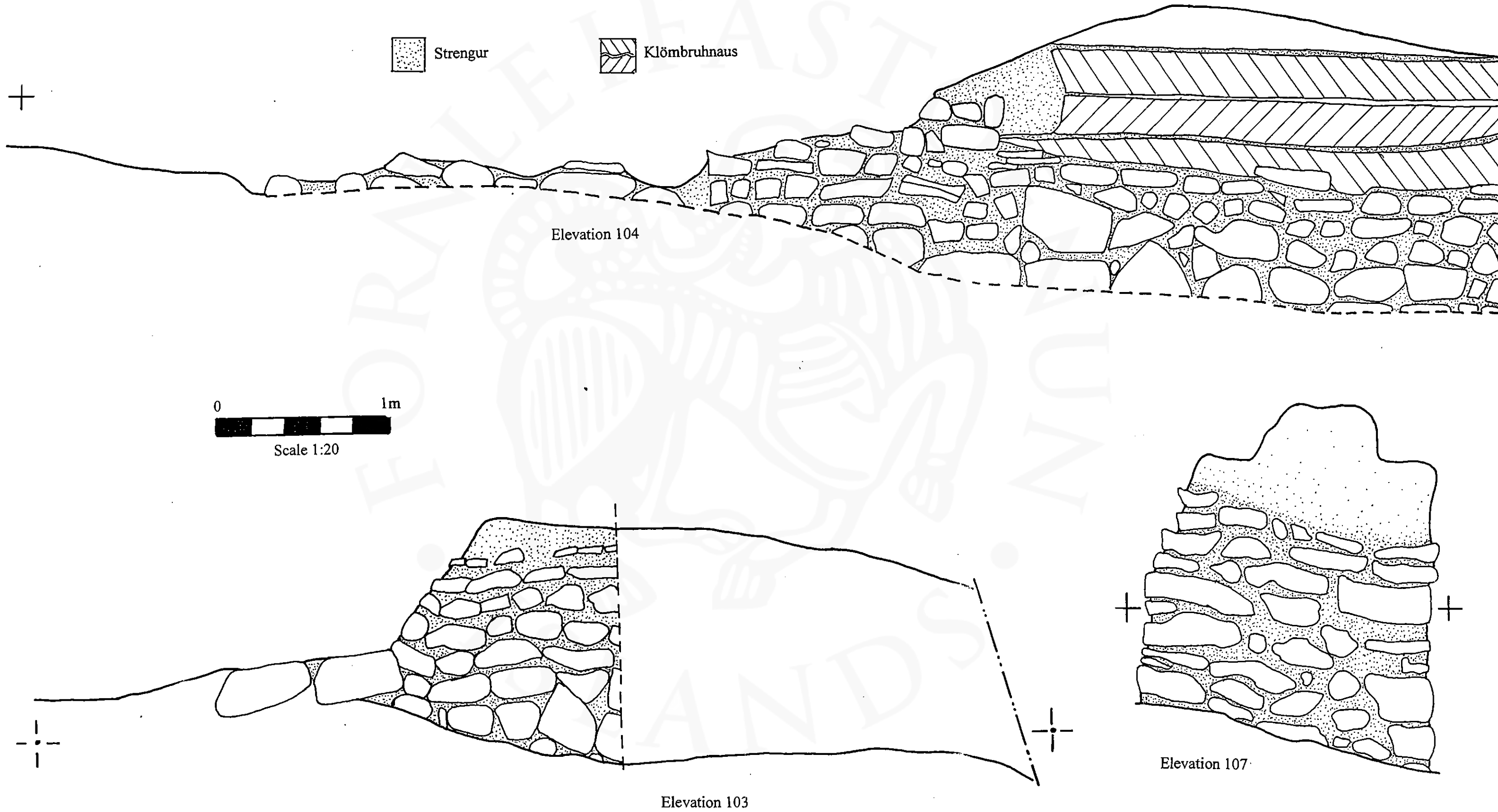
Elevation 102



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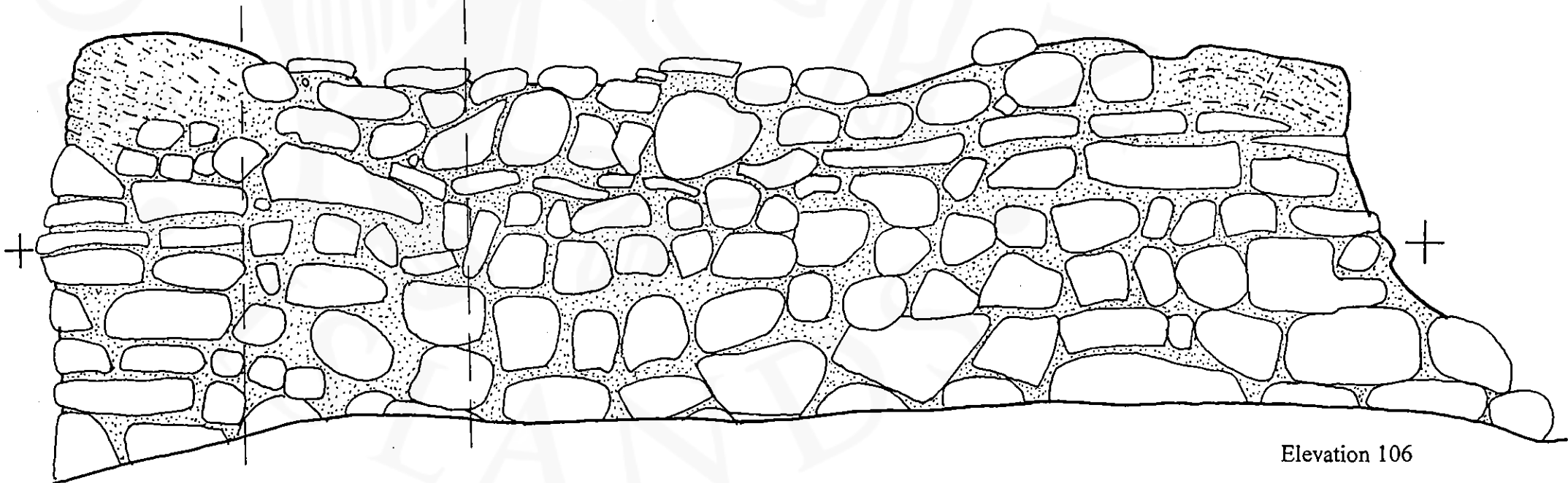
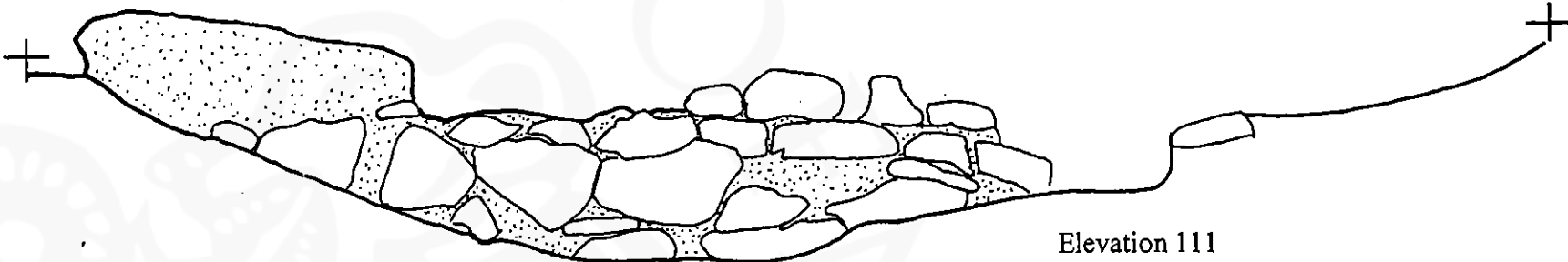
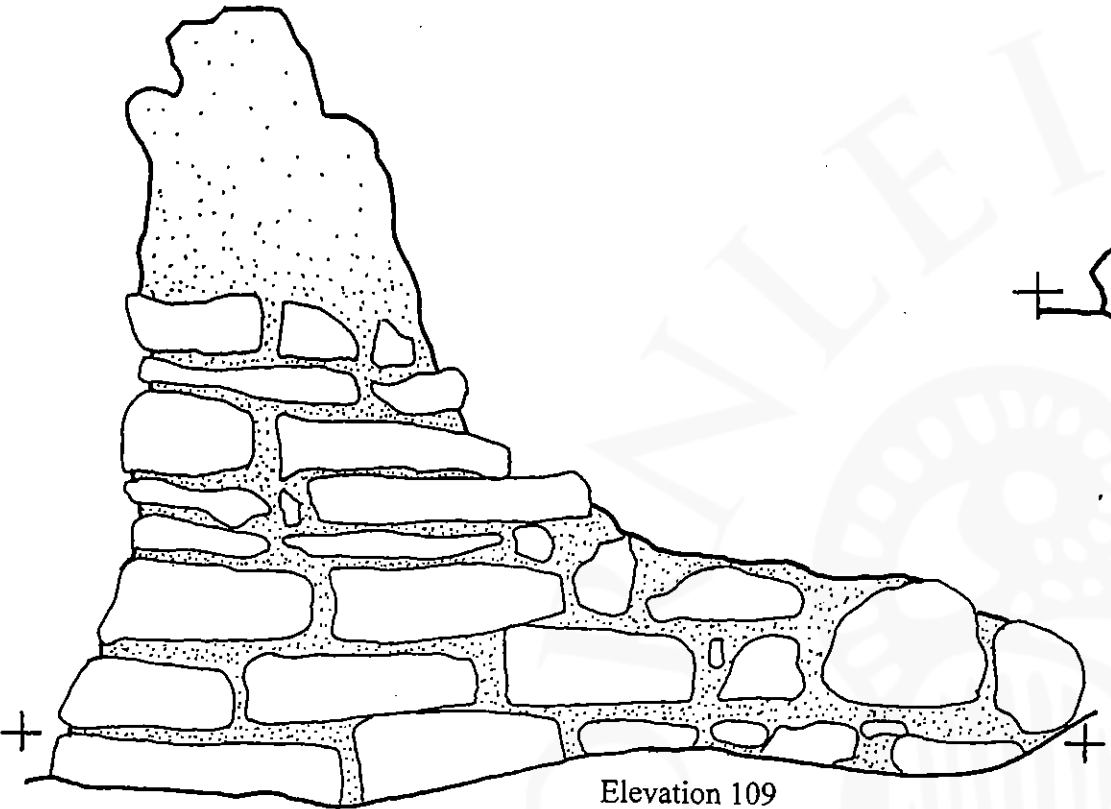
Neðri-Ás
Figure 7 - Elevations 101, 102 and 105

Neðri-Ás
Figure 8 - Elevations 103, 104 and 107



Neðri-Ás
Figure 9 - Elevations 106, 109, and 111

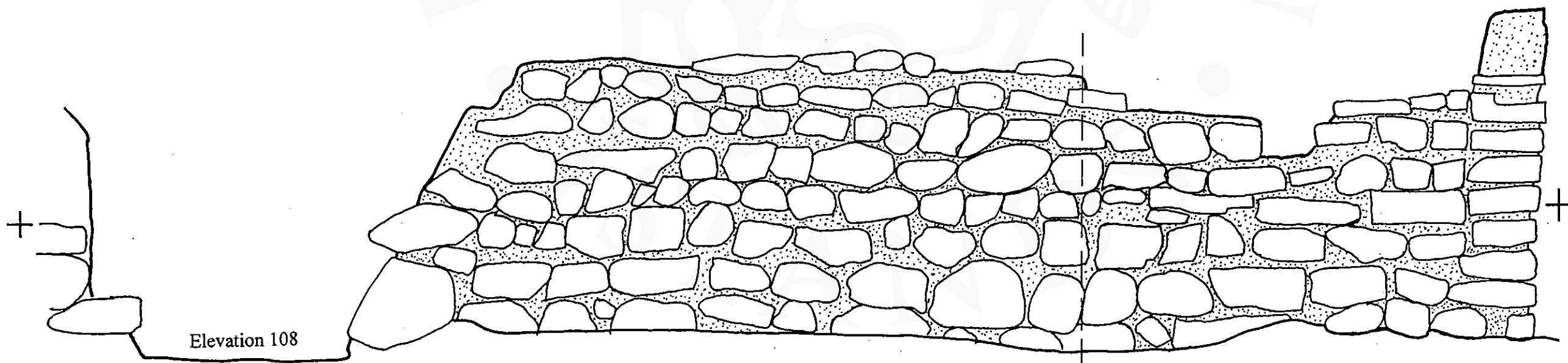
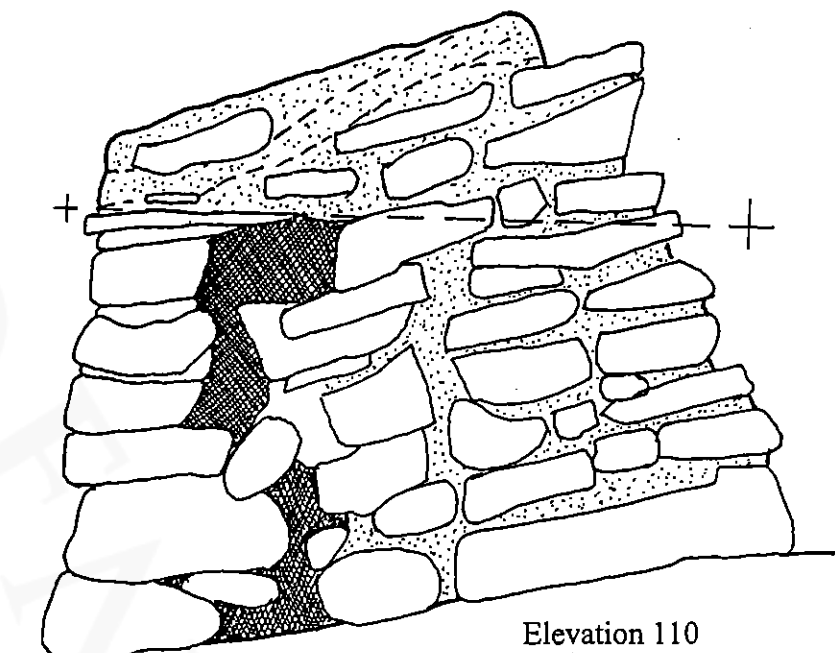
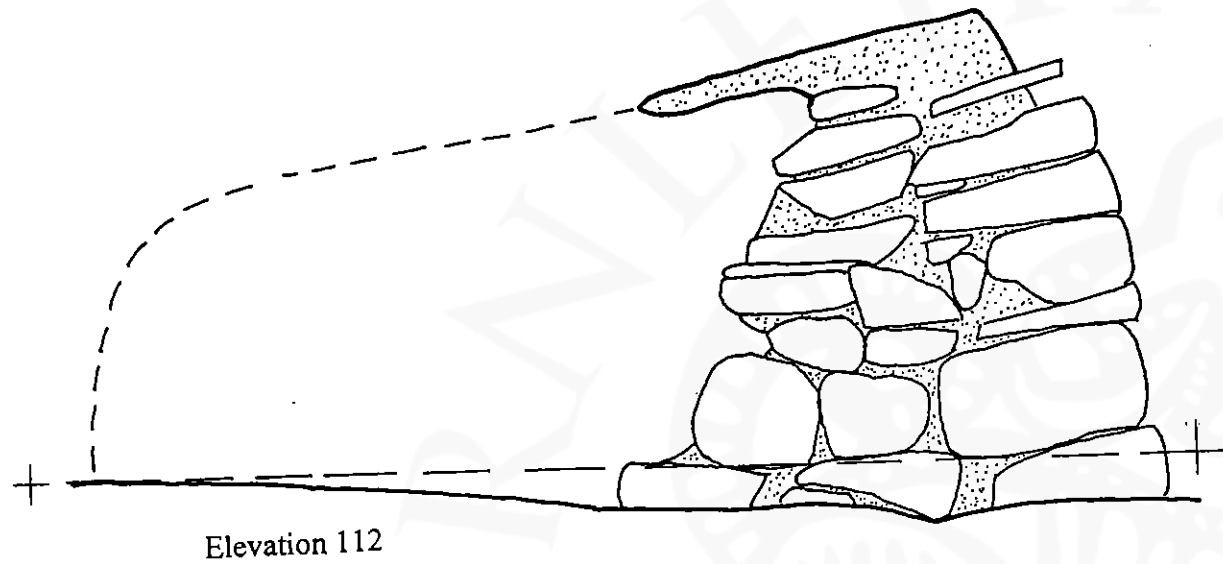
 Turf



Scale 1:20

Neðri-Ás
Figure 10 - Elevations 108, 110, and 112

Strengur Void

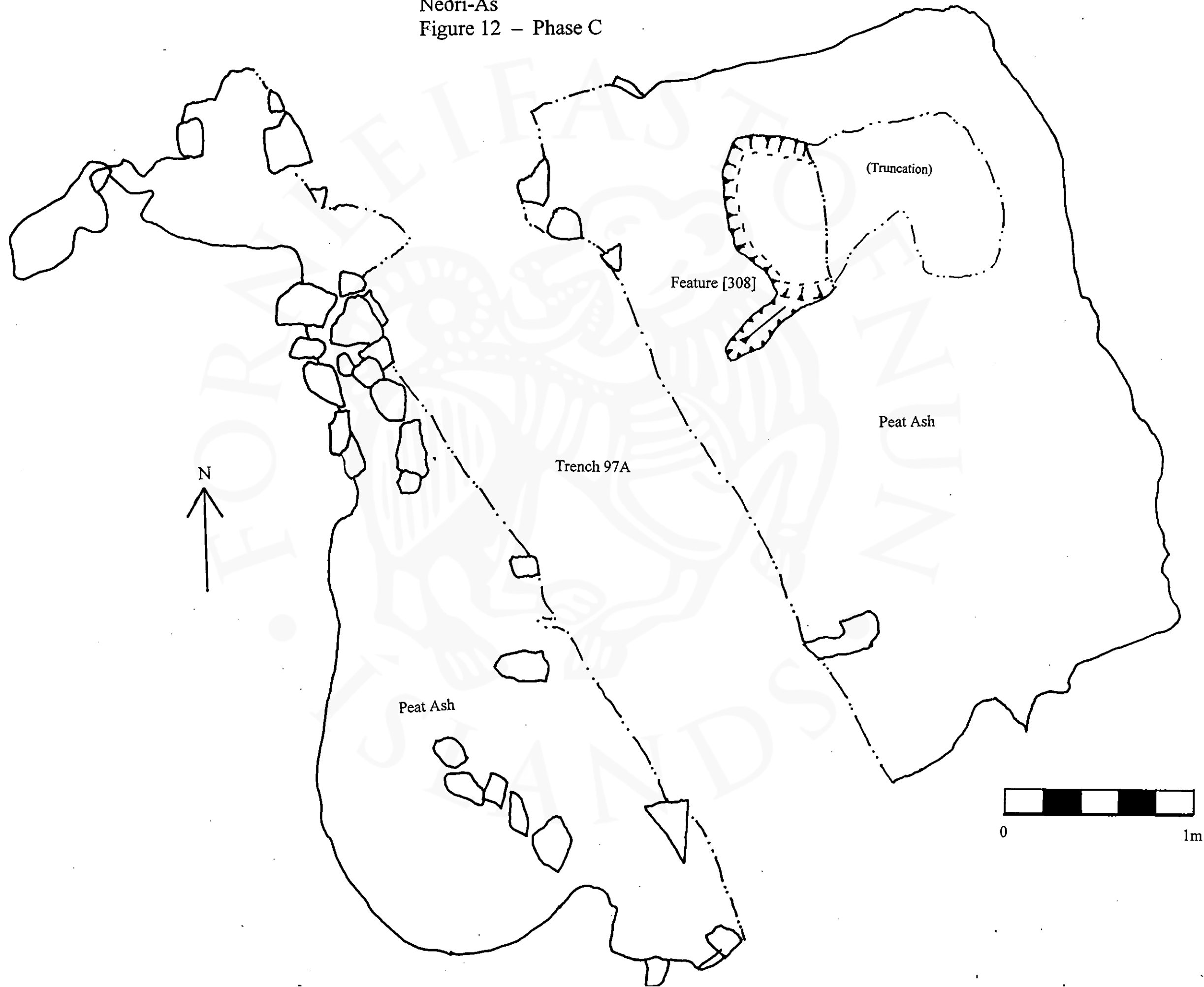


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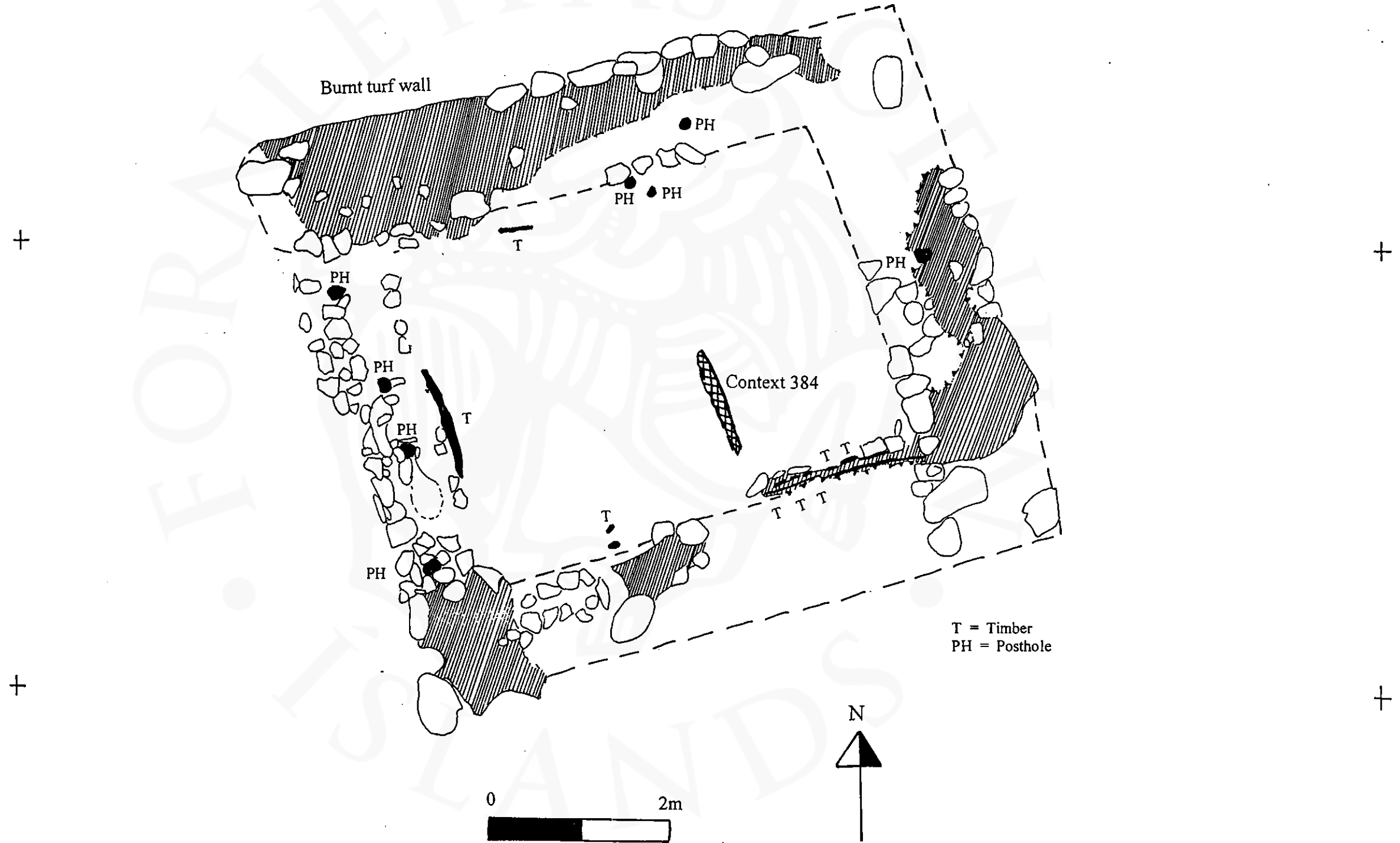
Neðri-Ás
Figure 11 – Structure 5



Neõri-Ås
Figure 12 – Phase C

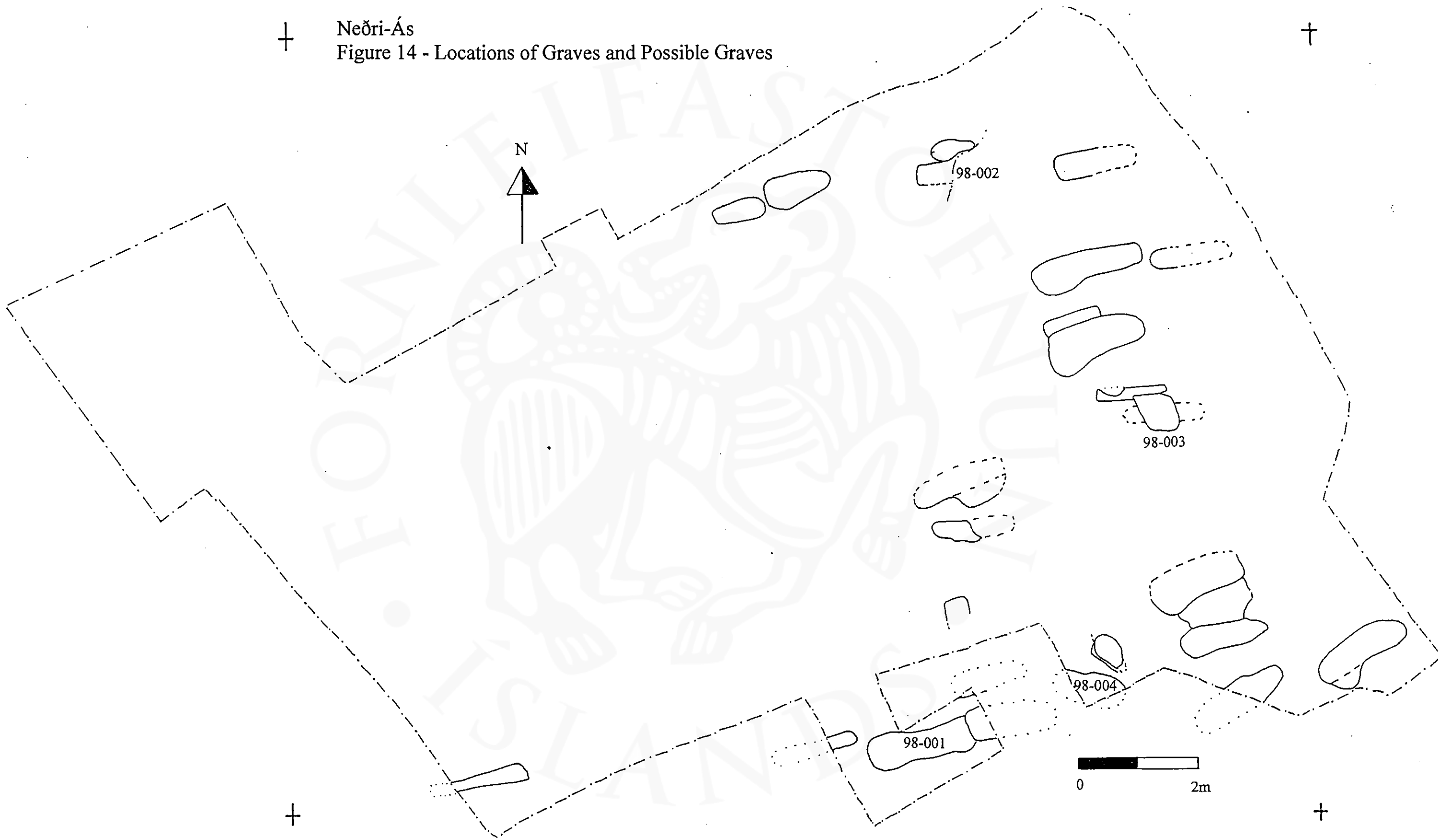


Neðri-Ás
Figure 13 – Structure 6





Neðri-Ás
Figure 14 - Locations of Graves and Possible Graves



Neðri-Ás. Figure 15 - Proposed Stratigraphic Matrix

