

Archaeological investigations at a prospective burial field at Halldórsstaðir, Laxárdalur



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Introduction

Suður-Píngeyjarsýsla has become the hotbed of Viking Age funerary archaeology. Recent and ongoing excavations at Litlu-Núpar, Ingiríðastaðir and Kumlabrekka have thrown light on broad patterns and variation in the funerary practices of pre-Christian Iceland (Roberts & Hreiðarsdóttir, 2013). A reassessment of burial locations has provided theoretical frameworks that offer valuable insight into the role of burial fields in the landscape (Friðriksson & Vésteinsson, 2011).

A recent find at Halldórsstaðir provides the perfect opportunity to further develop our understanding of pre-Christian burial practices.

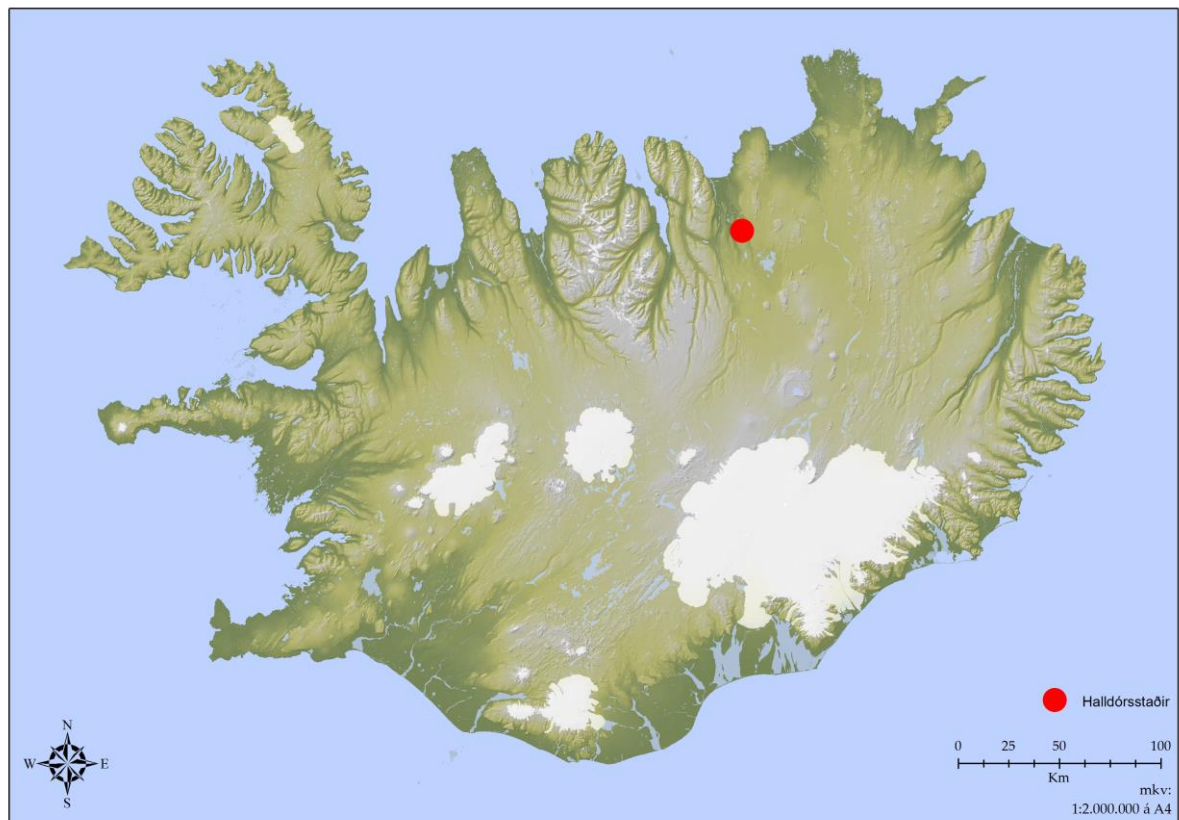


Figure 1: A map of Iceland showing the location of Halldórsstaðir.



Figure 2: A composite aerial image showing the Halldórsstaðir farm and the location of the burial field.

Methodology

The prospective burial field at Halldórsstaðir sits circa 250 metres above the current farmstead, on a low knoll by a bridle path running east-west up the side of the Laxárdalur valley toward Þegjendadalur. The survey of the site took place at 17th August, 2014. The survey relied on three sets of equipment. The first, a Trimble R8 GNSS, was used to survey the surface of the knoll, the locations of the prospective burials and the neighbouring landscape features. All measurements were recorded using the Real-Time Kinetic survey mode and the ISN93 coordinate system. A number of control points were also laid out and surveyed in order to support the subsequent survey method of aerial photography.

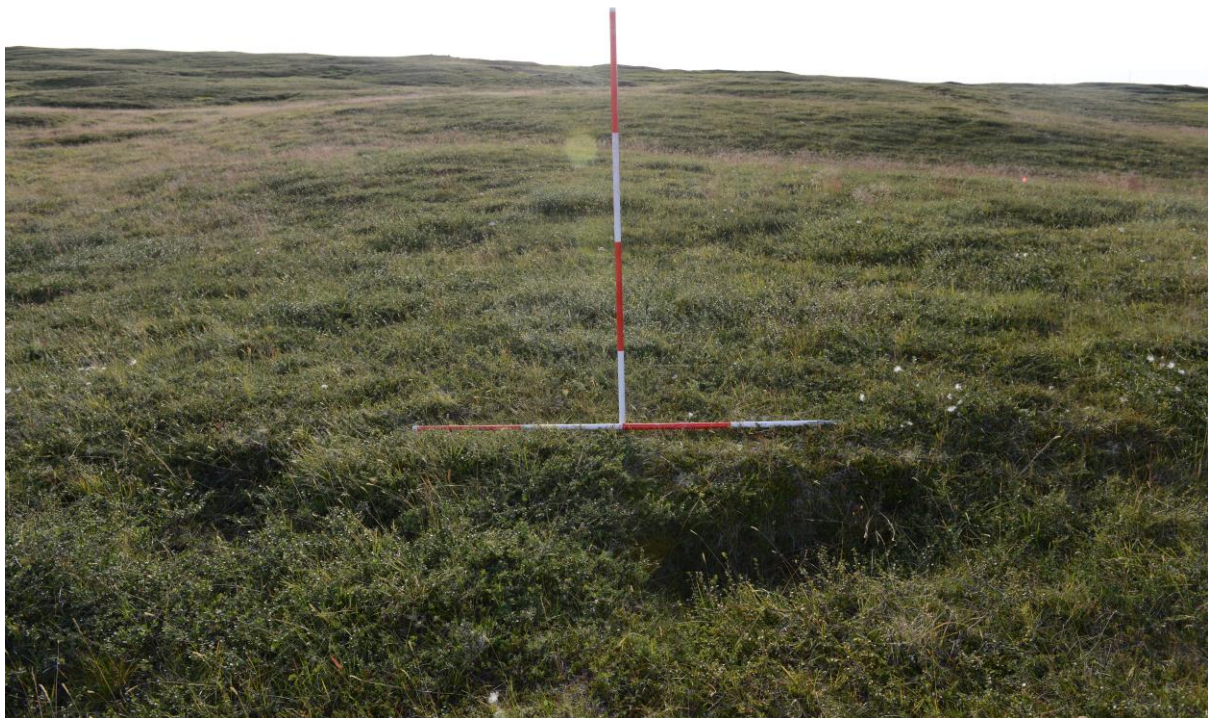


Figure 3: Features 1 & 2, looking west.

Aerial photographs were taken using a DJI Phantom 2 unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) and a Canon S100 camera. Adobe Photoshop and Agisoft Photoscan Pro were used to process the images and generate a three-dimensional model of the site.



Figure 4: Feature 3

Finally, a Nikon D800 was used to photograph the prospective burial features using both RAW and JPEG formats.



Figure 5: Features 4 & 5, looking west.

Results and concluding remarks

A total of 10 prospective burial features were identified. The features are arranged roughly in two parallel lines straddling the knoll on a roughly north-south axis. They appear to be robber trenches and are similar morphologically to robber trenches found in nearby burial fields at Ingiríðastaðir and Kumlabrekka (cf. Roberts, 2014). The features are usually paired, although Feature 3 appears not to be. The dimensions of the features are roughly similar. Most are elongated, with a length ranging from 1.6-3.0 metres. The width ranges from 1.0-1.5 metres, and they are generally less than 0.5 metres in depth.

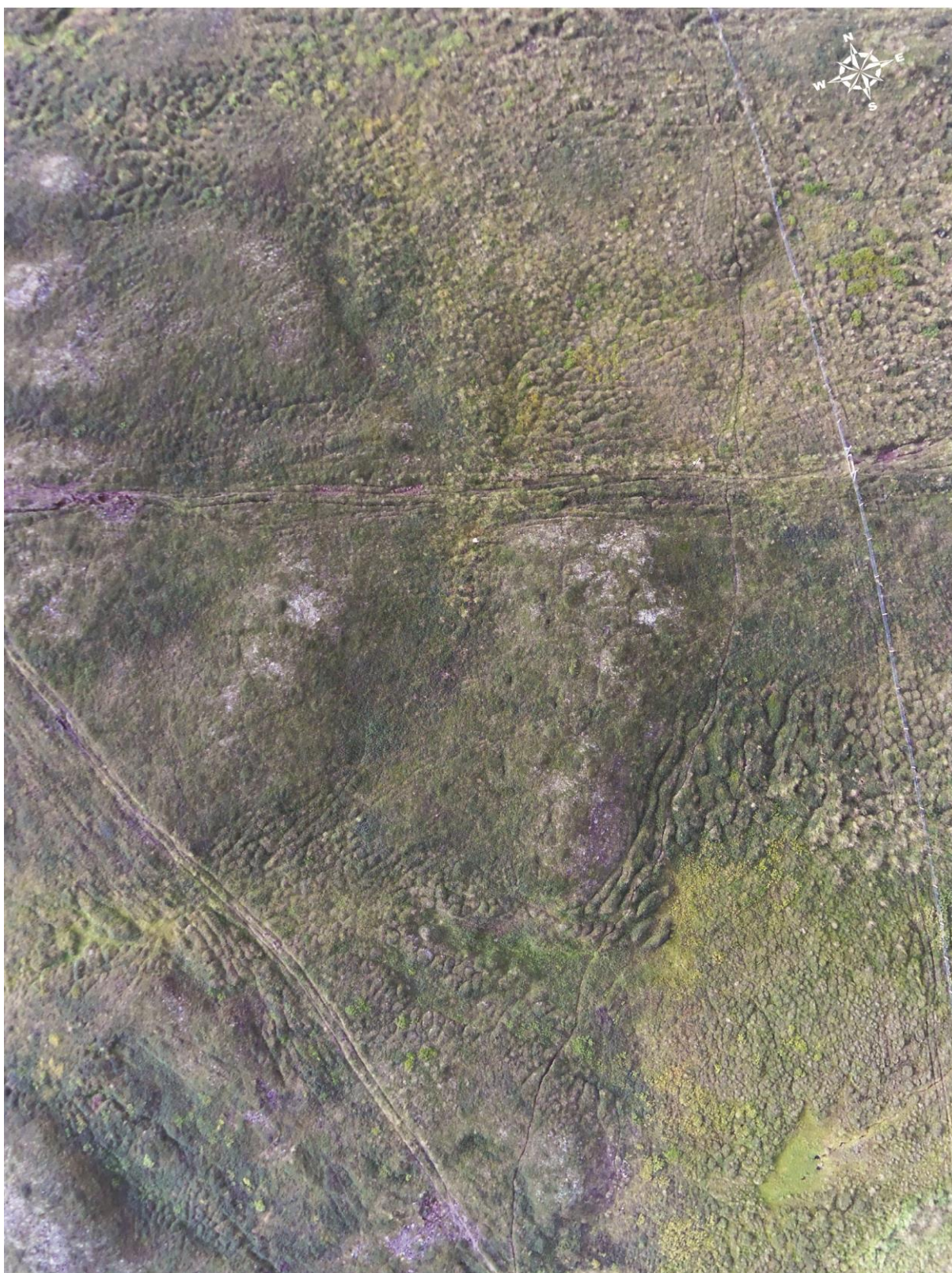


Figure 6: A closer look at the burial field.



Figure 7: Features 6 & 7, looking west.

The features strongly resemble other features associated with established pre-Christian burial fields. The site at Halldórsstaðir therefore has great potential in furthering our understanding of the burial practices of the Settlement age, extending the geographical scope of known sites further east and providing excellent comparative material to the nearby sites of Ingiríðastaðir and Litlu-Núpar.

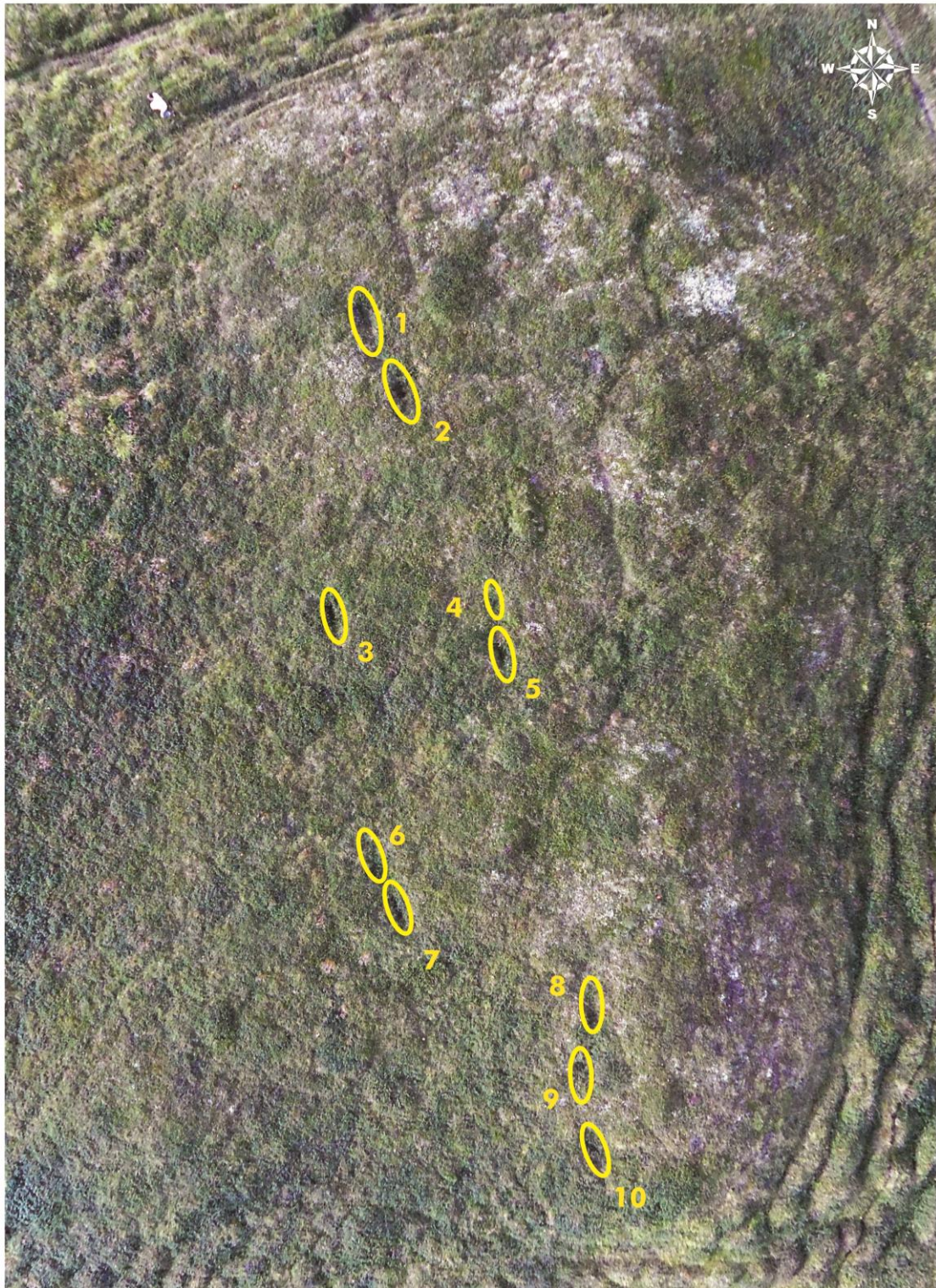


Figure 8: The burial field with the 10 features labelled.

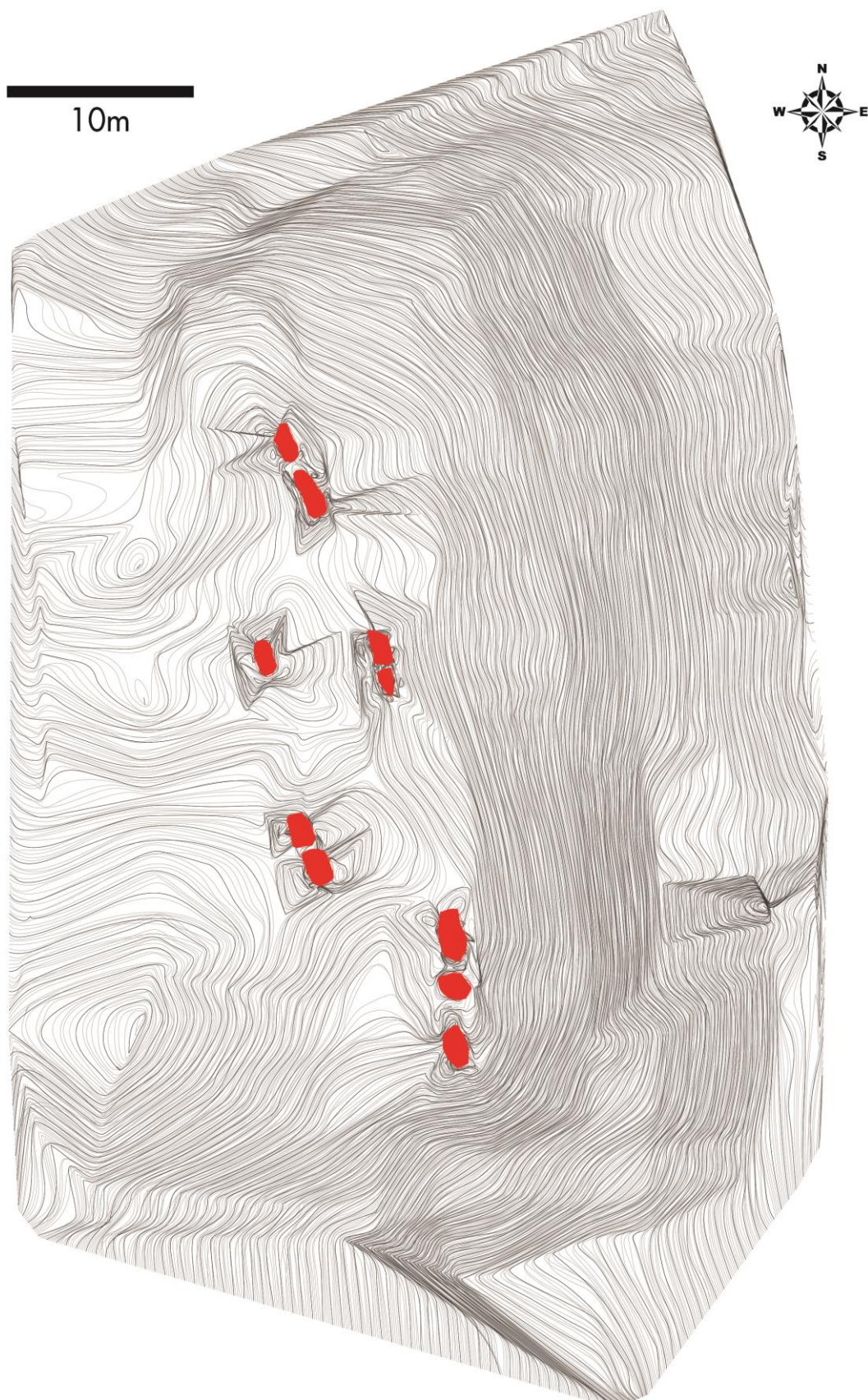


Figure 9: DEM showing the topography of the burial field.

Ingiríðastaðir, Suður-Píngeyjasýsla

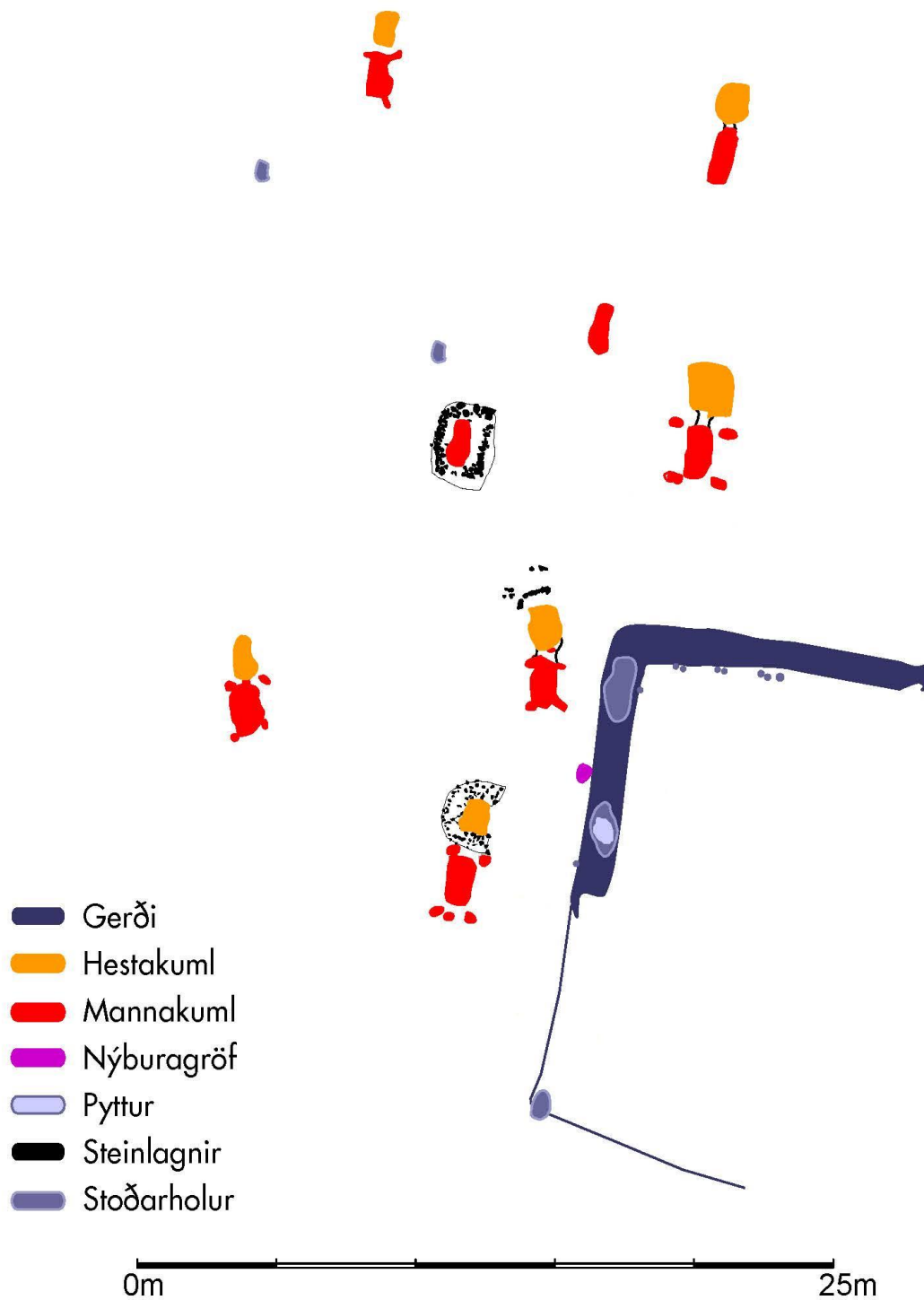


Figure 10: A plan of Ingiríðastaðir.



Figure 11: Feature 8.

Bibliography

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Roberts, H. 2014. FS523-08168 Ingiríðastaðir: an interim statement. Reykjavík: Fornleifastofnun Íslands.

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