Archaeological investigations in Mývatnssveit 2007

Orri Vésteinsson ed.

With contributions from Thomas H. McGovern & Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson

Fornleifastofnun Íslands
FS386-02263
Reykjavík 2008

Front page: Trenching at Þorleifsstaðir, looking north. June 16th 2007.

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Orri Vésteinsson

Introduction

In 2006 a campaign of major archaeological excavations in Mývatnssveit – the area around Lake Mývatn in NE-Iceland – wound to a close with the completion of fieldwork at Hrísheimar and Sveigakot. Together with the excavation of Hofstaðir, which was completed in 2002, these formed the backbone of extensive archaeological fieldwork focused on the Mývatn area which had begun in 1991, and which became subsequently known as the *Landscapes of Settlements* project. In addition to the three large scale excavations an archaeological survey for Skútustaðahreppur (the district of the Mývatn community) was carried out in 1996-1999 followed by a number of smaller scale excavations aimed at dating (Brenna, Oddastaðir, Stöng, við Víðiker) and retrieval of faunal assemblages (Steinbogi, Selhagi) in 2001-2002. Alongside the conventional archaeological investigations an extensive programme of palaeo-environmental research has been conducted as a part of the *Landscapes of Settlement* project. Since 2002 the project has extended its geographical range to include the eastern part of the region of Suður-Þingeyjarsýsla and various off-shoot projects have developed, building on the experience and extensive data sets generated by the Mývatn investigations. These include a survey of a complex system of earthworks, a programme of identification of pagan burial sites resulting in successful excavation of grave-fields in Daðastaðir, Litlu-Núpar and Saltvík, intensive surveying of abandoned valleys in Þegjandadalur and Krókdalur, and investigations of assembly sites in Þingey and Skuldaþingsey. Many of these latter projects have been made possible because of support from Hið þingeyska fornleifafélag, the local archaeological association, but the bulk of the funding for the Mývatn investigations was provided by Rannís, The Icelandic Centre for Research, and the National Science Foundation.

All this research activity has generated enormous quantities of data which are currently being analysed with a series of monographs and papers in the pipelines. The project is therefore entering a stage of reflection and debate, although several avenues for future research have already been identified. There were however a few loose ends which could be tidied up with minimum effort and it was primarily with the aim to do this that further fieldwork was planned for 2007. The loose ends were twofold:

On the one hand a number of indications and tips had been recieved in previous years about sites which had slipped through the net when the whole region was surveyed in 1996-1999. Following up on these was a small but important component of the fieldwork in 2007.

On the other hand test-trenching of several abandoned farms in 2001-2002 had revealed that they all had medieval dates, some abandoned before 1300 and others even before 1158. The question remained whether this reflected a general pattern of farm-abandonment in the late- or immediately post-Viking age periods. Mývatnssveit has an unusually high number of abandoned farms, identifiable as such by visible ruins and field-boundaries, in several cases confirmed by archaeofauna, and of those medieval dates had been obtained for eight (Hrísheimar, Sveigakot, Selhagi, Steinbogi, Oddastaðir, Brenna, Stöng, Hali). An intermediate type of site, too small to be confidently regarded as a farm, had one representative (við Víðiker) also with a medieval date. While one of these sites (Oddastaðir) was briefly re-occupied in the late 17th century – and the historical record contains information of several short-lived foundations in that period – the archaeological results so far had not produced any indications of post-medieval changes in settlement patterns (i.e. before the 19th century), contrasting sharply with the medieval scene of extensive change. To obtain a fuller data set test trenching was therefore planned for the four remaining abandoned farm-sites with extensive visible archaeological features (Beinistaðir, Litlu-Gautlönd, Þorleifsstaðir, Selholt) as well as one of two remaing sites of the intermediate type (Geldingatættur – the other site is Þrælagerði).

While getting dates for abandoned farm sites is relatively simple it is much more difficult to obtain dating evidence for sites which have been occupied permanently since medieval times. While documentary evidence for most of these stretches back to the 14th-15th centuries it remains uncertain how many of them were occupied in the Viking age. If all or most of them were established in the Viking age, the abandonment of the other sites would suggest a reduction in farm numbers, but it is also possible that the farms occupied in later centuries were later establishments, replacing the abandoned farms in some process of reorganisation. Of the permanently occupied farms only Hofstaðir has firm archaeological proof of Viking age occupation. Baldursheimur, Gautlönd and Grímsstaðir are directly associated with pagan burials and can therefore be assumed to have been occupied in the 10th century, whereas Arnarvatn, Vindbelgur and Neslönd are less securely associated with pagan

burials or stray finds of Viking age date. An even more tenuous association suggesting early establishment is the presence of a chapel or a church on a farm, but a general argument exists placing the establishment of the majority of these in the 11th century. That would add farms like Geirastaðir, Skútustaðir, Grænavatn and Reykjahlíð to the tally of likely Viking age establishments. It is a cause for worry that farms in this group are mostly in prime locations and can be considered high status in the Mývatnssveit context, whereas the permanently occupied farms with no dating evidence belong mostly to the lower status category. It is precisely farms like Neslönd, Fagranes, Gröf, Geiteyjarströnd, Kálfaströnd, Brjánsnes, Garður, Álftagerði, Sveinsströnd and Litlaströnd which, on account of their less ideal locations, might be suspected to be later establishments, possibly re-locations from the abandoned farms. This possibility remains to be investigated but a first stab at looking at archaeologcical deposits on the permanently occupied farms was made in 2007 although the primary aim of those investigations was to locate sites for future investigation of post-Viking age remains.

While the Mývatn investigations have been firmly focused on the earliest period of settlement in Iceland, the broadening geographcial scope of the project has also been accompanied by a broadening temporal scope with new research questions forming about developments in the late medieval and early modern periods. Understanding long-term process has emerged as an important issue and this is the goal of the project *Human and Social Dynamics in Myvatnssveit, Iceland, from the Settlement to the Present*, directed by Astrid Ogilvie. As a part of this project a coring survey was carried out on several sites of permanently occupied farms (Grímsstaðir, Geirastaðir, Hofstaðir, Baldursheimur, Grænavatn and Skútustaðir) in order to locate stratified midden deposits and assess their archaeological potential.

In addition a visit was made to Hrísheimar where four artefacts were picked up, three rivets close to the midden and a stone with three man-made grooves found at the foot of the hill some 50 m NW of the excavation area.

This report describes the results of the survey, trenching and coring, but results of surveys for pagan burials carried out concomitantly by Adolf Friðriksson and of soil accumulation directed by Ian Simpson will be reported separately. The 2007 fieldwork was unsuccessful in one aspect in that the GPS station brought to map the sites broke down. New maps were produced for Geldingatættur and Selholt using

tapes and hand-held GPS, but for the others the maps generated for the 1996-97 survey report remain the only ones available.

The fieldwork was conducted between June 10th and 22nd 2007. Thomas H. McGovern directed the coring surveys, assisted by graduate students George Hambrecht, Ramona Harrison, Konrad Smiarowski and Albína Pálsdóttir. The group also dug exploratory trenches at Geirastaðir and Þorleifsstaðir. Orri Vésteinsson carried out the survey and dug the dating trenches, assisted by Adolf Friðriksson and Konrad Smiarowski. Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson analysed tephras in the profiles. The whole team was lodged and fed at Narfastaðir courtesy of the *Human and Social Dynamics* project. Elíns Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir and Oscar Aldred kindly assisted with the creation of this report. As always the people of Mývatnssveit showed their enthusiasm and support for the project. The landowners kindly gave permission for excavation and coring and special thanks are due to Ásmundur Jónsson and Guðmundur Jónsson in Hofstaðir, Böðvar Jónsson and Sigurður Böðvarsson in Gautlönd, Finnbogi Stefánsson in Geirastaðir and Helgi Jónasson in Grænavatn who were all generous with their time and assistance. As ever Árni Einarsson of the Mývatn Research Station provided tremendous help and encouragement.

Orri Vésteinsson

Results of trenching at five medieval sites

Beinisstaðir

Beinisstaðir is an abandoned farm in the upper Laxá valley, 1 km north of another abandoned farm, Steinbogi, both within the boundaries of the modern farm Helluvað, which lies another 1,25 km further south. Beinisstaðir is on the western side of the river, sitting high on a steep slope diagonally across from, and over-looking, Hofstaðir. The site is dominated by a large modern ruin of a winter-house for sheep which was in use to about 1940 and presumably built in the late 19th century. It sits on top of a broad farm mound, measuring approximately 30x20 m. The mound is at the top end of a steep L-shaped home-field which is some 0,75 ha in size. The home-field is uneven and probably has not been worked by modern machinery but it was mowed in living memory and should be regarded as a modern artefact although its size and shape may have been influenced by an earlier field. Several of the bumps in the home-field may be remains of buildings but there are two further ruins in the home-field, both of which look considerably older than the winter-house. One, in the northwest corner of the home-field, looks like a large sheep-house, and the other one, some 30 m down-slope is probably an animal stable too. Some 10 m down-slope from this, in the corner of the L, there is a natural spring, but there is also a natural brook that runs down-hill some 40 m north of the home-field edge. To the north of this there is a modern hay-field and at the south-western corner of this there is a badly damaged but clearly visible ruin, probably a sheep-house of uncertain age. It is 150 m north of the winter-house. A mid-20th century areal photograph suggests that there was at least one further ruin surrounded by an enclosure some 50 m further north but this has now been completely levelled. There are no traces of a home-field boundary visible around this site but there are indications that it was located within a larger boundary, enclosing an area of at least 18 ha. This enclosure is on a par with the large enclosure around Hofstaðir and another slightly smaller around the site Geldingatættur some 1,2 km north of Beinisstaðir (not to be confused with the site of the same name on the eastern side of the river discussed below).

Fig. 1. Beinisstaðir from the SSW. The modern winter-house for sheep left of centre and the location of the trench is indicated by the dark spoil heap down-slope to the right.

Fig. 2. Beinisstaðir from the northeast, from across river Laxá, just south of Hofstaðir. Photo by Tom McGovern.

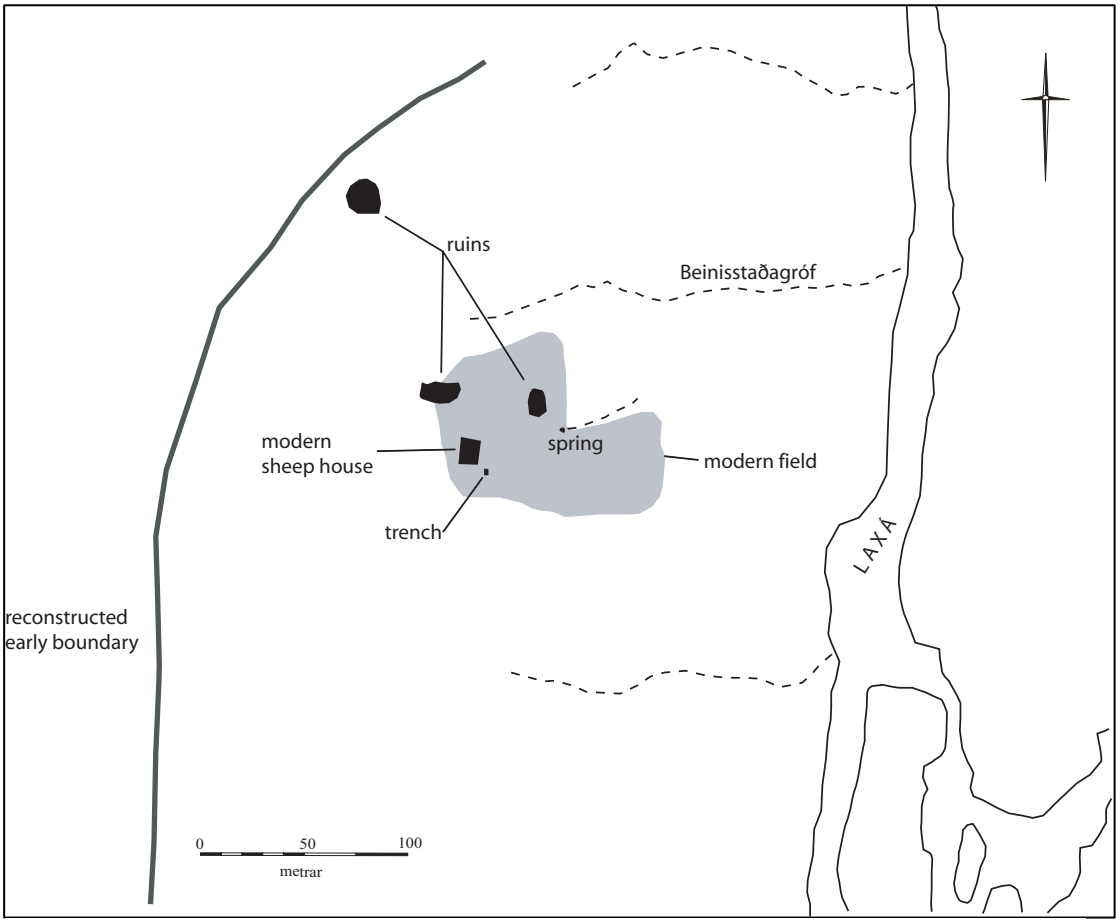

Fig. 3. Plan of Beinisstaðir

Beinisstaðir is mentioned along with Steinbogi in the Land register of 1712 and had clearly been uninhabited for a long time then.[1] That is the earliest record of

[1] *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalín* XI. *Þingeyjarsýslur*, Kaupmannahöfn 1943, p. 223.

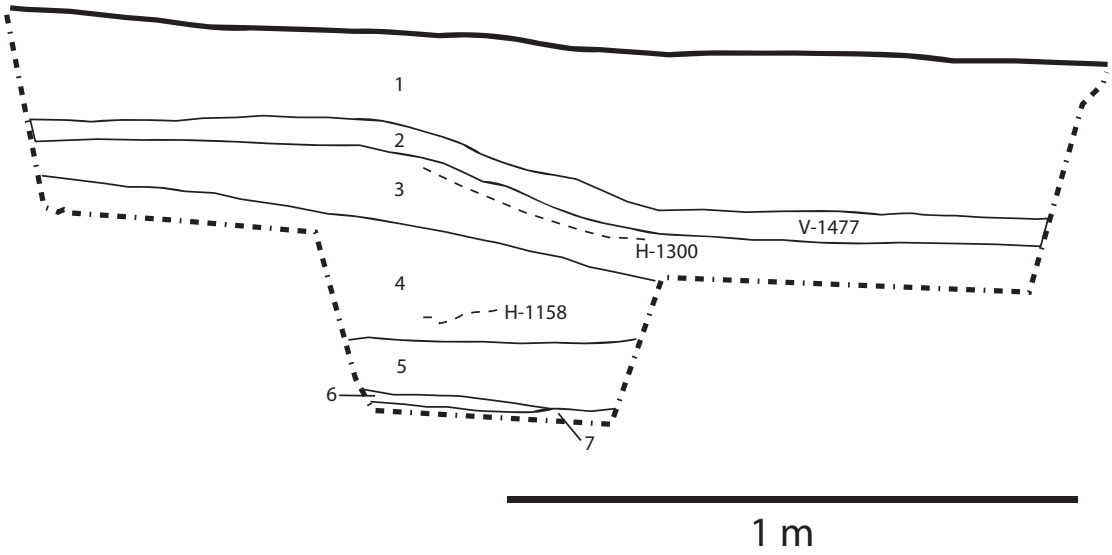

Fig. 4. East facing section of trench in Beinisstaðir farm mound.

the name, a variant of which is Beitisstaðir. Both forms are obscure although they could conceivably be seen to contain the personal names Beinir or Beitir. Whatever the original meaning of the name it can be considered to be, or at least be derived from the original name of the farm. A mid 20th century antiquarian description of the site mentions charcoal and a floor layer observed at a depth of 2 feet on the farm mound, south of the winter-house.[2]

In the absence of any field-boundary it was decided to place a trench in a shallow depression 4,5 m southeast of the southeast corner of the winter-house. The trench was 2 m long and 0,5 m wide and was dug to a depth of 0,65 m. At the base there was a 2-3 cm thick, laminated blueish-black floor layer, (7) which seemed to be sitting in a shallow cut, the edge of which was observed in the trench. The floor was capped by a thin layer of up-cast, possibly trampled (6), and this in turn by a layer of aeolian silt highly mixed with ash (5). Above this was a less mixed layer with colourful turf debris and some charcoal (4). A lens of white tephra, presumably H-1158, was probably embedded in the turf rather than in situ. Above this were natural aeolian deposits (1-3) including the H-1300 and V-1477 tephras in situ.

[2] This description is mainly based on the 1996 survey record (Orri Vésteinsson, *Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahreppi* I. *Fornleifar á Hofstöðum, Helluvaði, Gautlöndum og í Hörgsdal*, Reykjavík 1996, pp. 30-31), augmented by observations made in the field in 2007.

Systematic and judgmental coring within the home-field suggested that both ruins north of the winter-house predated the V-1717 tephra. Thomas H. McGovern who directed the coring survey describes the results thus:

> An initial transect running down slope from the [winter-house] was set out and cores were taken approximately 2-5 meters apart down the slope. The coring transect immediately suggested major disturbance had taken place over wide areas of Beinisstaðir as whole sets of tephra layers were missing in many cores. The dark V-1717 tephra was present ca 15-20 cm below the modern surface in nearly every core taken, but below this tephra often the next intact tephra encountered was the prehistoric H3 – no V-1477, no V~940, no LNS present in many cores. In only one core was a probable 1477 tephra observed below the 1717. However, in several cores, the clear local manifestation of the LNS was observed, twice in near association with cultural layers containing charcoal and peat ash flecks. Given the apparent damage to the stratigraphy by probable turf cutting, it is not possible to firmly state that Beinisstaðir was a Landnám farm, and in the observed cases it would appear that the first cultural deposits were slightly above the LNS. No V~940 was observed in any core, so it seems that these early layers were probably laid down sometime in the early to mid 10th century - probably a Viking age foundation if not a first settler. In three cores outside of the … visible structures the cores encountered what appeared to be black, compact, charcoal rich floor layers. In two cases these cores showed some cultural material (charcoal, calcined bone flecks, peat ash) below the apparent floor layer, but further disturbance beneath which removed V~940 and the rest of LNS. As the cores moved down slope, the amount of cultural material in the samples declined, in some cases simply resembling jumbled turf fragments rather than anything resembling a midden.

No significant midden deposits were found and the absence of tephra layers over much of the home-field may suggest that it was used for turf-cutting, probably after the farm had been abandoned. This post-abandonment activity complicates interpretation of the site, but the number of structures and the number of floor-layers indicate that this was a farm rather than a shieling. The alleged farm mound, while extensive, is not deep and seems to contain fairly simple stratigraphy. The limited build-up of anthropogenic deposits at this site may suggest that it was occupied only briefly. It seems to have been abandoned well before 1300, although presumably after 1158 if the lens of that tephra is correctly identified as embedded in turf.

Geldingatættur

On the eastern side of River Laxá, some 2,25 km downriver from Hofstaðir there is a site called Geldingatættur. It is 130 m from the river bank at the base of the valley-side in grassy shrubland. The site consists of a single ruin, possibly a weaning fold, which sits on a slight rise, possibly earlier building remains, enclosed by a boundary, which is double on the south-western and eastern sides. The inner boundary is shaped like an open 8 but the outer boundary seems to have enclosed an area almost sub-rectangular in shape although its north-western parts are missing. The ruin is at the base of the valley-side, but the enclosure is built onto the slope, including a small but steep hill which protrudes from the slope. This hill would seem like an ideal location for a building, but its top is notable mainly for its flatness although there is a shallow regular depression on its northwest side which may be the remains of a structure. The vegetation on and around the ruin is dominated by grass whereas the enclosure is covered by low shrub (willow and dwarf-birch). This may suggest that the ruin is more recent, or at least that it has been in use long after the enclosure ceased to function. There are no pre-20th century sources about this site.[3]

Geldingatættur is not interpreted as a farm site. Rather it belongs to a small group of intermediate sites, of which there are at least two other examples in Mývatnssveit; við Víðiker and Þrælagerði. Like farms these sites are characterized by an enclosure – indicating hay making – but these are very small, typically 0,2-0,4 ha, and the number of ruins is also smaller than would be expected even at the meanest farm, typically 1-2. There is currently not enough information available to theorize about the function of these sites. All that can be said is that they share some of the attributes of farms but do not seem to have been farms. That stalling of domestic animals was an important part of their function seems likely. The name of this site (and confusingly another similar one across the river) seems to have been coined after it ceased to function as the second element (– tættur) means ruins. Geldingur normally refers to young wethers although it can be used also of any castrated animal, including

[3] Orri Vésteinsson, *Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahreppi* I. p. 79.

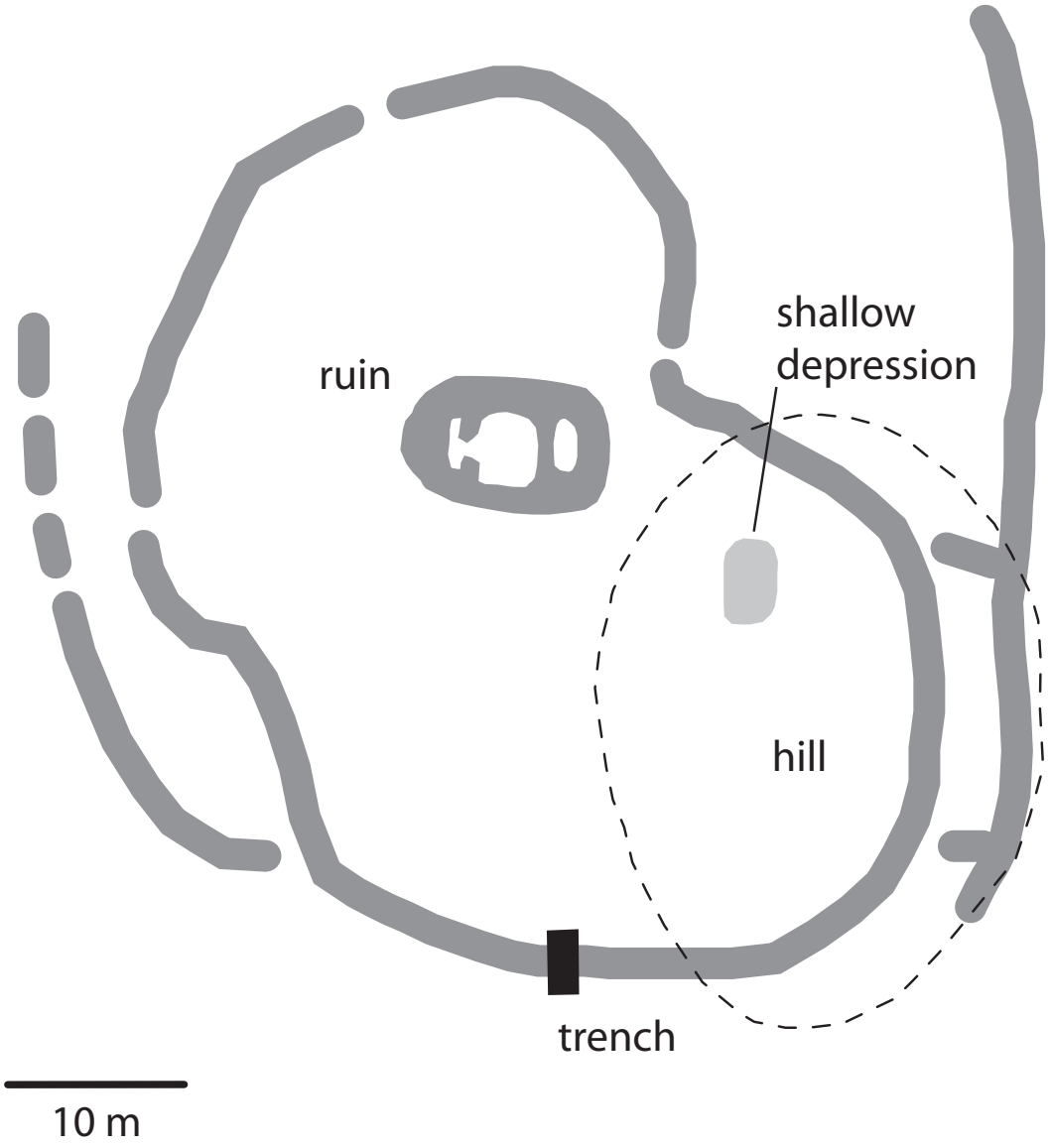

Fig. 5. Plan of Geldingatættur.

Fig. 6. The trench after excavation, facing southeast.

Fig. 7. Konrad Smiarowski coring at the side of the ruin, looking west.

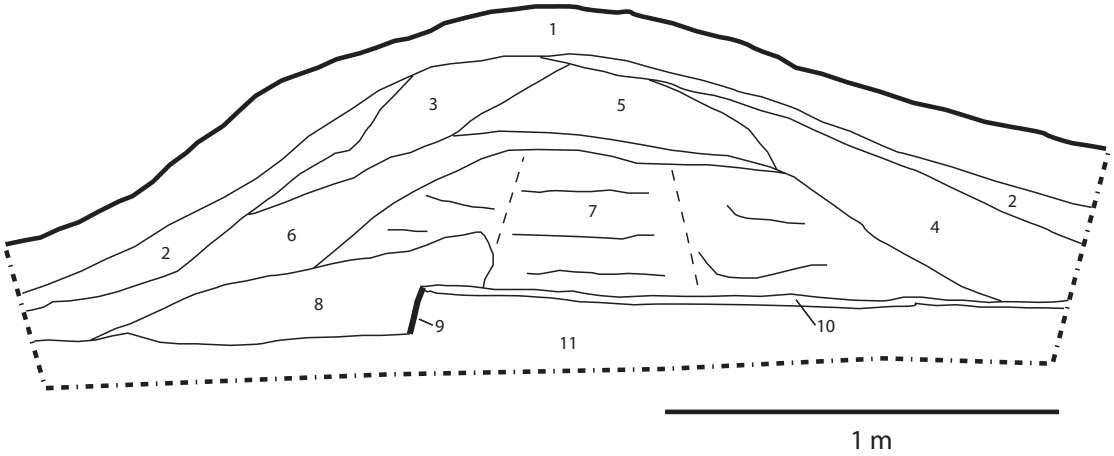

Fig 8. West facing section through the enclosure at Geldingatættur. The left hand side is inside the enclosure.

men. The name therefore indicates that in later centuries at least people thought that the site had been used for stabling wethers – a likely hypothesis on all accounts. There is however no obvious water source at this site, i.e. closer than the river, 130 m away.

A 3 m by 0,7 m trench was dug through the enclosure on the southern side, to the depth of little less than a metre. It revealed that a culture layer (10), yellow-brown silt with peatash, had formed more or less directly on top of the V~940 tephra. This had then been cut (9) on the inside of the enclosure and a turf wall of *strengur* (7) built on top. The core of this wall was clearly visible with three rows of turf with the *landnám* sequence of tephras as well as the same material as in layer 10 embedded in it. Collapse from this wall was visible on both sides and on the northern (in)side it capped a homogeneous mid-brown aeolian silt fill which had accumulated against the cut (9) and the base of the turf wall. Another, slightly paler aeolian accumulation (6) capped this and the wall on the inside, but on top of that another turf wall (5) had been built. Collapse (3) from this wall had trickled down on the inside of the enclosure but on the outside there was a thick aeolian accumulation (4), no doubt representing a lengthy period of time. On top of these deposits (3, 4 and 5) there was a thick band of the V-1477 tephra in situ (2). No traces of either the H-1158 nor the H-1300 tephras were found in the trench so the date-bracket for this site must remain wide (i.e. 940-1477). Tephrochronologist Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson is however of the considered opinion (see his report below) that the H-1300 tephra would be found overlying the

Fig. 9. The southern side of the enclosure at Geldingatættur showing the location of the trench, looking west towards river Laxá. Konrad Smiarowski is standing on the wall.

cultural layers if further cuttings were made into the enclosure.

The cultural layer at the base of the sequence is interesting as it suggests that some activity had been taking place at the site before the enclosure was built. It is tempting to conclude from the fact that this layer formed on top of the V~940 tephra that the site was initially occupied in the mid to late 10th century, but soil accumulation rates in this region are too slow to make such a deduction safe. It is however quite possible. The second phase of the wall suggests that this site was maintained for some period of time, at least decades if not centuries.

Konrad Smiarowski conducted an arbitrary soil coring survey in and around the ruin inside the enclosure. He found no traces of anthropogenic activity in any of the cores, not even inside the structure. While the cultural layer under the wall suggests that burning took place at this site in the beginning, the absence of ash, charcoal and bones in the cores supports the idea that this was not a site permanently inhabited by humans.

Fig. 10. Areal photograph of Litlu Gautlönd, looking west. Photo by Árni Einarsson.

Litlu-Gautlönd

Roughly midway between Helluvað and Gautlönd (2,25 km south of the former and 1,75 km north of the latter) lies the site Litlu-Gautlönd, on the western bank of the lake Arnarvatn. The site is first mentioned in the 1712 land register and had then been long abandoned.[4] A cottage was built there shortly before 1820 and occupied for a few years and the ruin of this building is now the most obvious monument at this site, other parts of which are largely covered in dense shrub (willow and dwarf-birch) obscuring a large number of ruins and earthworks. An electric fence has been built across the southernmost part of the site and in that section grazing animals have gnawed away much of the shrub leaving a grassy surface. A hay-field has been made south of the site reaching just short of the southernmost boundary wall. The map of the site produced for the 1996 survey report is wholly inadequate and only shows some of the buildings visible at this site.[5] Unfortunately a new plan could not be made in 2007 on account of faulty equipment and a full reconnaissance of the structural remains was aborted after a couple of days of particularly bad fly-swarms.

[4] *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalín* XI. *Þingeyjarsýslur*, Kaupmannahöfn 1943, p. 224.
[5] Orri Vésteinsson, *Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahreppi* I. p. 47.

Fig. 11. The trench at Litlu-Gautlönd, looking south. Representatives of the *Nematocera* suborder posing in front of the lens.

A full account of the surface archaeology at Litlu-Gautlönd must therefore wait a later opportunity but briefly it can be said to consist of an enclosure, in places two parallel walls, describing two sides (south and west) of an oblong home-field at least 2 ha in size. The wall peters out to the north, but the eastern side is fairly well defined by the lake to the south and a marsh to the north. Inside the enclosure there are three hills or mounds with structural remains on top. The 1820s cottage is below the gap between the two more northerly mounds. There are several small ruins in this central portion of the site, at least four associated with the 19th century occupation and two earlier ones connected to the enclosure. On the southernmost mound there is a ruin which from its shape and position might be considered as a byre and another one down by the lake-side. An L-shaped inner boundary wall runs from the lake just south of the lake-side structure up to the southernmost mound and from there northwards connecting the other two mounds.

The name of the site was first recorded in 1712 and is made by adding the diminutive ‘lesser’ to the name of the farm on the land of which it is found. It is quite possible that there were originally two farms called Gautlönd, and one was considered

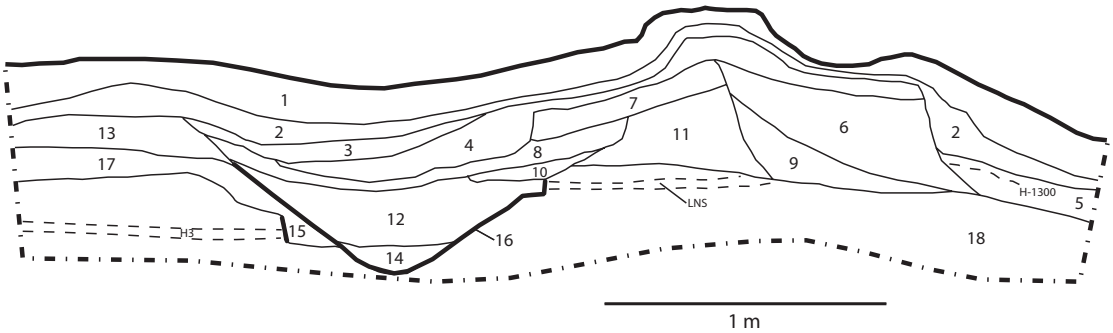

Fig 12. South facing section through double field boundary at Litlu-Gautlönd.

lesser than the other, but in general it seems that such ranking names are an early modern feature and it is equally likely that the name was made after the original name of the farm had been forgotten on the assumption that it had been a cottage from Gautlönd proper. The significant archaeological remains at Litlu-Gautlönd suggest that this was not a particularly small farm, certainly larger by an order of magnitude than both Steinbogi and Beinisstaðir further north.

A trench was dug through the double boundary 30 m south of the fence, just north of the bend on the enclosure. The trench was 4 m long and 0,5 m wide, extending from the middle of the outer wall over the whole of the inner wall. The outer wall turned out not to be much of a construction. It was clearly the earlier of the two, represented by a cut (15) which had been made on the inside, but the only thing remaining of the wall was a layer of turf debris interspersed with specks of H3 (17). This earlier wall seems to have been demolished when the later wall was built, partly by the cutting (16) of a substantial ditch on the outside of the more recent wall (11). This turf wall was made of *strengur* (6 layers were visible), and collapse from it (8 and 9) sealed three layers of fill in the ditch, two small ones of up-cast at the top and bottom (10 and 14 respectively) and a more substantial layer (12) slightly mixed aeolian silt. On top of the turf collapse (8) a second phase of the wall (7) had been built and it is possible that the compact turfy layer 6 represents a third phase although it did not have clear stripes. Layers 13, 4 and 5 are natural aeolian accumulation, the last mentioned containing the H-1300 tephra in situ. Layer 3, sealing 4 and 13, had occasional charcoal but it is possible that this is natural as there was nothing else anthropogenic about this deposit. The whole sequence is then sealed by the V-1477 tephra (2). The natural (18) contained the *landnám* sequence (LNS), including the V~940 tephra, surviving under the later turf wall which has clearly been built some considerable time after the deposition of that tephra as there were up to 10 cm of

aeolian accumulation between them. Below what remained of the earlier wall the whole *landnám* sequence was however missing.

Despite harrowing conditions Tom McGovern and his team conducted a coring survey with the following results:

> Coring around the 19th c ruins produced little or no cultural deposits, with only a few patches of turf and peat ash appearing in the cores. Perhaps significantly, the widespread V-1477 tephra (very thick in other parts of the site) is largely absent in cores around the later structures, suggesting disturbance by turf cutting and other activities. Coring by the lakeside also produced only isolated flecks of cultural material, with very little evidence for any prolonged 19th c occupation.
>
> About 100 m to the south of the main 19th century structures and apparent activity area are ruins which seem to relate to the earlier medieval occupation (GPS N65.56573 W017.14272). These ruins did show more consistent tephras, with the V-1717 and the locally thick V-1477 very clear above the cultural deposits in all cores. Perhaps due to medieval disturbance, the LNS was not generally present. Cores running down hill from these ruins produced what appeared to be substantial cultural deposits below the V-1477 tephra.
>
> A small shovel test pit (GPS N65.56573 W017.14272) was opened on this coring, producing about 50 cm of natural and cultural deposit above sterile subsoil. All the cultural materials were below both the V-1717 and the V-1477 tephras. The cultural deposit appeared to be a short segment of turf wall construction above a sheet midden about 10-15 cm thick. The sheet midden contained ash and charcoal and a few flecks of bone and bird egg shell.
>
> Further down hill, a larger ruin lies near the shore of the lake (GPS N65.56584 W01714184). This appears to be a multi-room structure, and might represent a dwelling house. Coring along the edge of the structure facing the lake produced very little in the way of cultural deposits, and no clear indication of an associated midden (the midden material may well in fact have been thrown in the lake). A core in the center of a room depression produced a floor layer well below the V-1477 tephra, some cultural deposits below, and then subsoil followed by the H3 tephra (LNS apparently removed). This would appear to date this lake side structure to the medieval occupation.

The high number of ruins, the wide distribution of occupational deposits and the replacement of the original enclosure with another one, which in turn was repaired at least once, all suggest that Litlu-Gautlönd was a substantial farm occupied for a considerable period of time, possibly from the 10th to the 13th centuries, although at present the start date must remain conjectural.

Þorleifsstaðir

Baldursheimur is presently the southernmost farm in Mývatnssveit but on its farmland there are two major archaeological sites; Hrísheimar where excavations took place in 2002-2006, and Þorleifsstaðir, which has hitherto not been investigated, bar a brief survey report made in 1997.[6] Þorleifsstaðir lies 2,4 km southwest of Baldursheimur and 2,3 km southeast of Hrísheimar, at the southern end of the same wetland which Hrísheimar is adjacent to. The site is 1,3 km west of river Kráká in the middle of a semi-dry shrub-moor in between undulating hills, the tops of which are now denuded by erosion. The wetland, now probably considerably less marshy than it was in antiquity, extends up to the home-field boundary on the western side and inside it in the south-western corner. There is no obvious water source apart from bog-water and the river, 1,3 km away. In its relationship with the wetland the location of this site is very reminiscent of Hrísheimar.

Þorleifsstaðir is first mentioned in the 1712 land register, which records it as a long abandoned farm where the people of Baldursheimur had occasionally, but not for a long time, operated a shieling.[7] There are no other records of subsequent use of this site and in the 18th and 19th centuries other shieling sites, further south, were in use, presumably in preference to Þorleifsstaðir. The place-name, with the common personal name Þorleifur, may well be original. As at Litlu-Gautlönd the 1997 survey plan of this is inadequate but attempts at producing a new plan had to be aborted in 2007 on account of faulty equipment. However, because the shrub is considerably lower than at Litlu-Gautlönd the main characteristics of Þorleifsstaðir can be described with confidence. The site consists of an elongated enclosure, measuring some 270x170 m, or 4,5 ha, with an extension to the east, making the home-field almost twice as wide, or 330 m, bringing the area inside the enclosures to little less than 9 ha. The area within the eastern extension is relatively flat and featureless with no discernable archaeological remains apart from the enclosure wall. Within the original enclosure, in the western half of the home-field, there are four natural hills, three of which have archaeological remains. On the northern side there are two low but wide hills with shrub-less grassy tops and what appear to be relatively recent ruins,

[6] Elín Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir, Orri Vésteinsson & Sædís Gunnarsdóttir, *Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahrepp*i II. *Fornleifar í Baldursheimi, á Litlu-Strönd, Sveinsströnd, Arnarvatni, Neslöndum, Vindbelg og Geirastöðum*, Reykjavík 1998, p. 15.
[7] *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalín* XI. *Þingeyjarsýslur*, Kaupmannahöfn 1943, p. X.

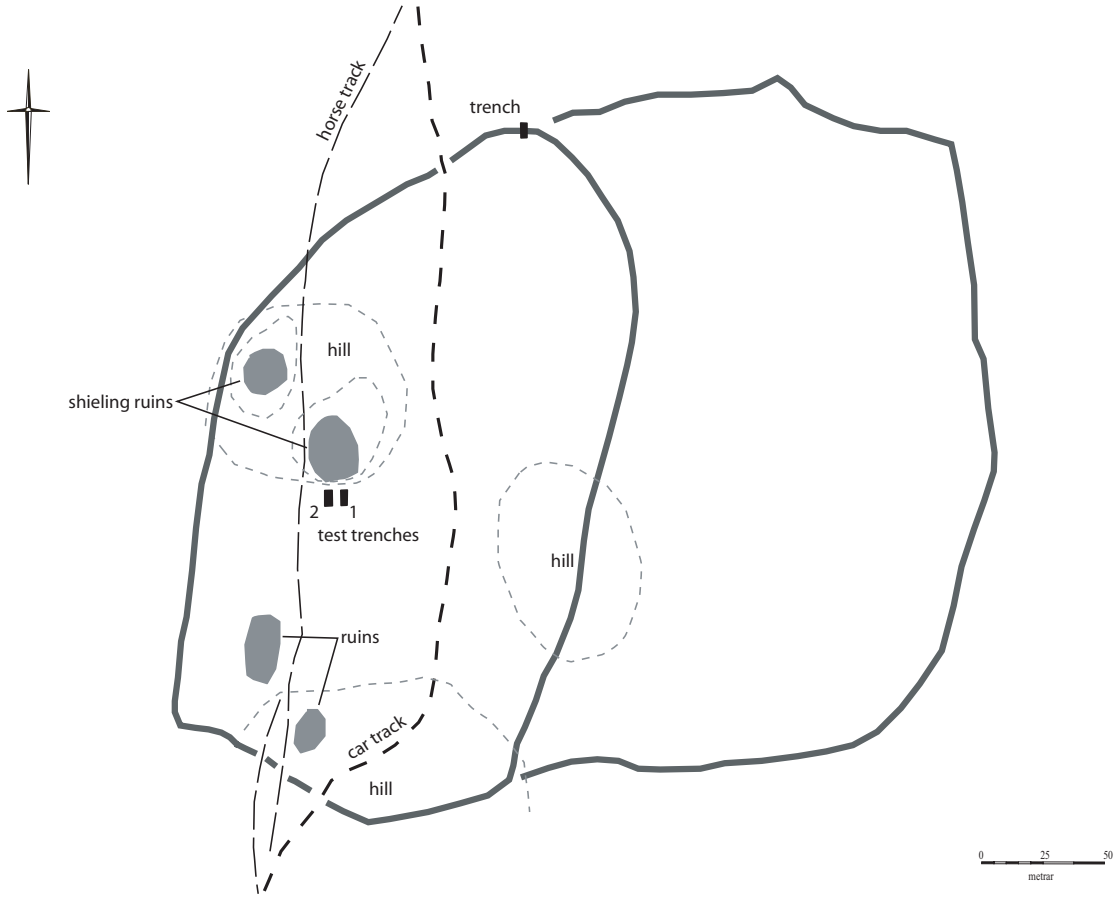

Fig. 13. Plan of Þorleifsstaðir.

presumably of a shieling used after the abandonment of the farm. The more easterly of the two has a complex ruin with at least five rooms, and its upper part at least seems to be made entirely of archaeological deposits. Two test trenches were dug into the southern slope of this mound. The southern side of the enclosure lies across the southernmost hill and on this there are at least two ancient looking ruins, one elongated with three rooms.

A trench was dug through the inner (earlier) enclosure on its northern side, 35 m east of the vehicle track that transects the site. The earliest phase of construction is represented by a ditch cut (16) on the outside of the wall. If there was a wall associated with this ditch it is perhaps represented by a thin layer of upcast (9) below the second phase wall (8). The original ditch was filled upcast material with specks of H3 (14). The second phase is represented by another cut (15) which seems to have widened the original ditch and is associated with a turf wall (8) built on the edge. This turf wall was built of *strengur* turf, and had at least three stripes with the LNS (including V~940) in them. Collapse from this wall (7) was visible on the southern (in)side of the wall and against this there was an aeolian accumulation (5), including a

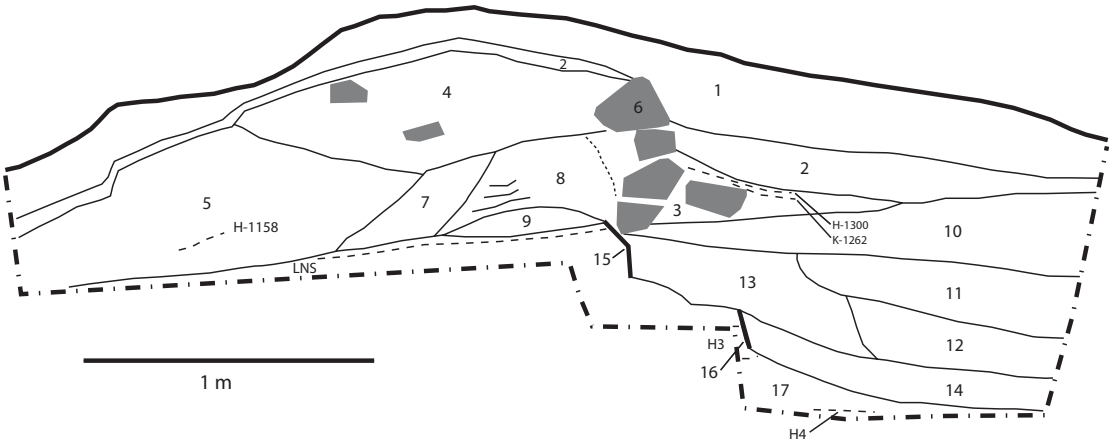

Fig 14. East facing section through enclosure at Þorleifsstaðir.

stripe of H-1158 in situ. A third phase of construction, preceded by the infilling of the ditch, is represented by the building of a stone facing (6) on the outer (northern) side of the wall and a 'topping' on the wall (4) made of upcast rather than turf, although this material did include H-1158. The ditch had filled first with turf debris (13 and 12), some of which included both the LNS and H-1158, then a layer of aeolian sand (11), perhaps indicating a spate of erosion, and finally more commonplace aeolian silt with some turf debris (10). Collapse from the third and final phase of the boundary (3) had stripes of both K-1262 and H-1300 in situ.

The second phase of this boundary was built after ~940 but well before 1158. The final phase was built after 1158 but had gone into disrepair before 1262.

Tom McGovern and his team conducted a coring survey concentrating on the two northerly hills where most of the structures are found and dug two parallel trenches in the southern slope of the more easterly of the two hills. Tom describes the results thus:

> The upper structures were below the V-1717 tephra but had obliterated the V-1477 tephra. The visible earlier buildings and wall lines were below intact V-1717, V-1477, and probably H-1300 tephras, and as we discovered were probably above the V~940 and LNS tephra horizons. The later (early modern?) buildings were inserted into the older structures, as was commonly done on many re-occupied sites. The outlines of the earlier buildings were far less clear, but the structures on the eastern hill appear to be the main dwelling house, which may well have been a long-hall in form, possibly with associated out-shot rooms to the north and east. This structure seems to have had two small ca 50 x 50 cm pits dug into it quite some time ago, possibly by an earlier archaeological visitor.

Fig. 15. Structure wall on the eastern hill seen from the southeast corner, with the original wall line to the photo left (southeast) and the cut of the inserted later structure in photo center. Flag marks core in early wall which showed intact V-1717 and V-1477 tephra. Photo by Tom McGovern.

South of this was a grassy slope stretching approximately 15-20 meters to the south-east from the apparent walls of the main structure. This slope was tested with two coring transects running approximately N-S and E-W. Cores struck intact V-1717 and V-1477 tephra consistently and at base hit what appeared to be both V~940 and the LNS (with apparent cultural material between). These initial results showing cultural deposits in association with early tephras prompted two test trenches along the two coring transects (1 and 2), one (2) approximately 1 x 3 meters, the other (1) approximately 1.5 x 3 meters (with long axis running across the slope). The test trenches were intended to provide a better view of potentially complex midden stratigraphy and to test for bone preservation and abundance. The two test trenches were shovel excavated through the upper culturally sterile layers and trowel excavated in the cultural layers. Test trench 1 was carried to sterile subsoil in a 0.50 x 3 m *sondage* but otherwise left just above the cultural layers, while test trench 2 was halted before reaching sterile subsoil to avoid damaging emerging stratigraphy. The test trenches both showed regular stratigraphy with bedding angles generally following the modern slope, but at the base of both test trenches upcast soil with flecks of the distinctive H3 tephra were encountered. This sort of deposit is so closely associated with early sunken featured structures (pit houses) that we halted work and carefully cleaned up to be able to document the relationships of tephra, upcast, and fill.

In the upper (north) end of test trench 1 it became clear that we had clipped into the outside corner of a pit house that had cut through the LNS, and which had both intact walling of turf blocks holding substantial amounts

of grey-green tephra and the upcast subsoil mixed with H3. Running **above** these *in situ* structural elements but **below** some turf and soil "melt" from the pit house weathering was the grey green V~940 tephra. This pit house had been constructed soon after *landnám* (and making use of turf blocks holding substantial amounts of LNS) and had been abandoned and stood roofless when the V~940 tephra fell. This sequence is strongly reminiscent of the stratigraphic situation at Hrísheimar a few kilometers away, where pit houses were dug directly into the Landnám ash horizon and in-filled before the fall of the V~940 tephra.

In the south end of the same test trench 1, more patches of mixed subsoil and flecks of H3 were encountered, above the LNS but below the V~940 tephra. This second upcast deposit cannot be the same as the structure cut into in the north side of the unit, so this must represent another pit house with a similar occupational sequence. In the base of test trench 2, patches of the same sort of mixed subsoil and H3 tephra were encountered, possibly deriving from a third pit house in this area. All of these three (?) pit houses are stratigraphically below the wall fall deposits apparently associated with the long rectilinear structure just to the north at the top of what now appears to be a small farm mound. Given the clear indication of multiple structural phases and pit houses just outside the limits of the 2007 test trenches, we decided to cease excavations before damaging any key stratigraphic connections.

A small number of bones were recovered (mainly from test trench 2), but these were well preserved and included an artifact recovered near the lowest excavated portion of test trench 2 made from a horse metacarpal bone (not an ice skate, but carefully prepared and showing marks of cord-binding along the distal end cut into a V-notch). Bird egg shell was recovered in several cores, and fragments were present in the profiles as well. Soil pH was high, running 6.75- 7.0 and should provide excellent conditions for organic preservation. Fire cracked stones were also encountered at the lower levels, apparently part of a midden deposit.

Fig. 16. Worked horse metacarpal.

To this it may be added that the observation of cultural deposits between the LNL and the V~940 was confirmed by a subsequent inspection by Magnús Sigurgeirsson (see his report below) who also noted that the anthropogenic deposits were capped by the H-1300 tephra, suggesting a late 9th to late 13th century occupation of this site.

Fig. 17. Selholt and the great earthwork north of th reuins, looking northeast. Photo by Árni Einarsson.

Selholt

Northwest of lake Mývatn there is a smaller lake, called Sandvatn. There are no farms on this lake which is in effect a backyard to Mývatnssveit, on the border with the neighbouring community of Laxárdalur. The lake is however rich in both fish and birdlife and was an important resource for the farms which owned land along its shores (Hofstaðir, Geirastaðir and Grímsstaðir on the Mývatnssveit side). There are however two substantial abandoned farm sites on the lake; one is Brenna which was investigated in 2002, and the other is Selholt, further northeast, on the present property of Grímsstaðir.

Selholt is not mentioned in any pre-20th century records and the name suggests that the site was used as a shieling. There are indeed recent-looking ruins in Selholt, presumably of 19th century date, which support this. The shieling was however built on

Fig. 18. Recent ruin on the southern end of the main ruin complex in Selholt, looking SSE.

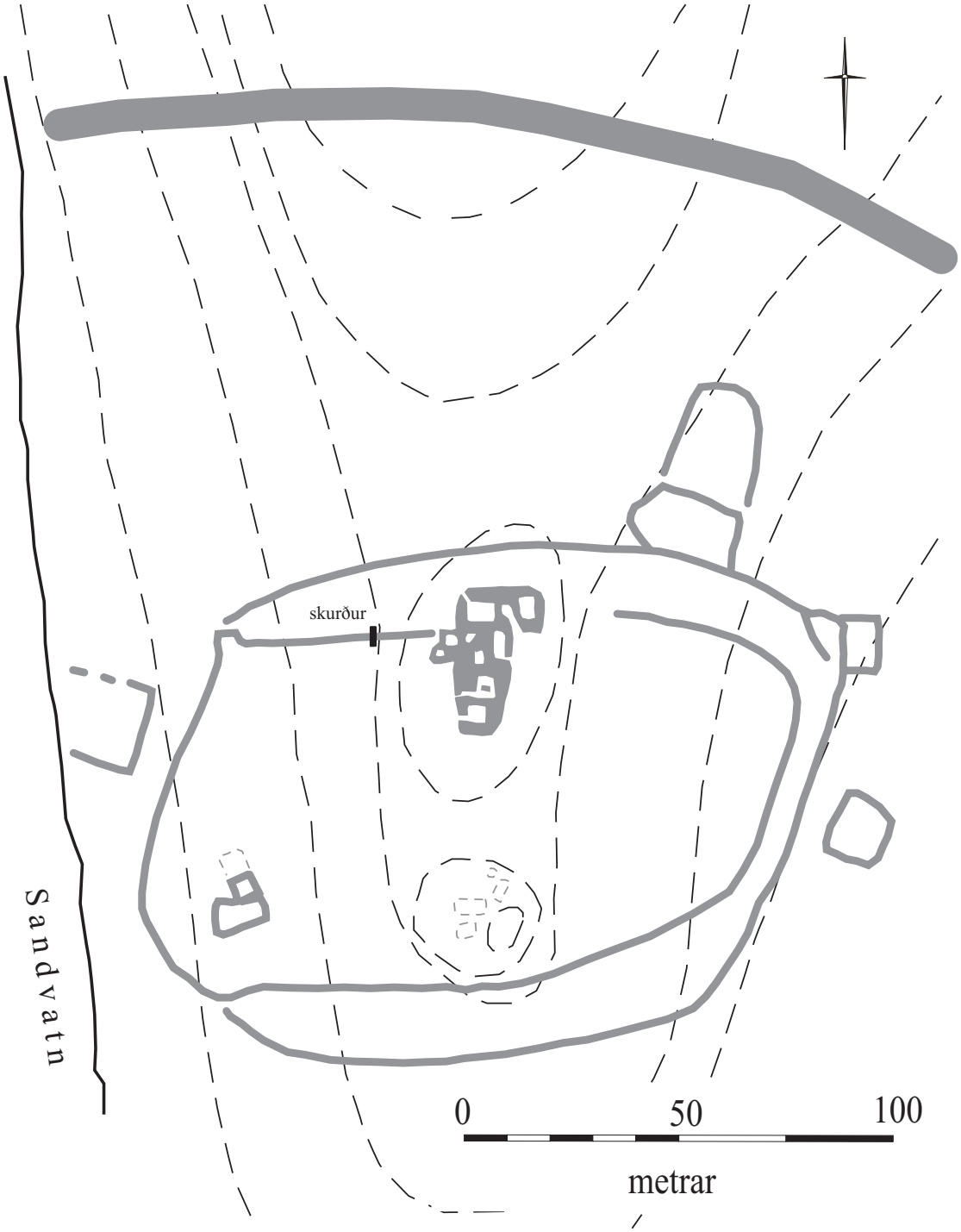

Fig. 19. Plan of Selholt. The broad stripe across the top of the plan is the western end of the great wall which stretches some 650 m east from lake Sandvatn. The contour lines are indicative rather than accurate.

earlier ruins and the substantial field-boundaries at this site suggest that it may have been a farm. In 1991 a description and plan of this site was published by a local

Fig 20. Selholt viewed from Selás, looking west. The main ruin-complex is in the paler green clearing at the centre of the photograph but the extent of the medieval homefield corresponds approximately to the area of higher shrub.

antiquarian who noted that the boundaries were below the V-1477 tephra.[8] A 1999 survey of the site concentrated on the complex ruin of the shieling but no plan was produced of the entire site.[9] The name Selholt is attached to a small hill on the shore of Sandvatn, west of a more substantial ridge called Selás (by which name the site sometimes also goes). The top of the hill is grassy on and around a large complex ruin, but otherwise the site is covered in dense and high shrub, both willow and birch growing to 1-2 m height. The dense vegetation has made reconnaissance of the site difficult and there may well be as yet undiscovered ruins within the enclosure.

The general features of the site are however clear. It consists of an inner enclosure measuring 140x80 m or 1,1 ha, draped diagonally across a hill. This boundary disappears under the main ruin complex, elements of which must therefore post-date it. An outer, and presumably later enclosure is found on all sides except the

[8] Eysteinn Tryggvason, 'Stöng og önnur eyðibýli við norðanvert Mývatn.' *Árbók Þingeyinga 1991*, 25-36, here pp. 29-31.
[9] Birna Lárusdóttir, Elín Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir, Hildur Gestsdóttir, Orri Vésteinsson & Sædís Gunnarsdóttir, *Fornleifasrkáning í Mývatnssveit* IV. *Fornleifar við norðan- og austanvert Mývatn, milli Grímsstaða og Kálfastrandar auk afréttarlanda*, Reykjavík 2000, pp. 117-18.

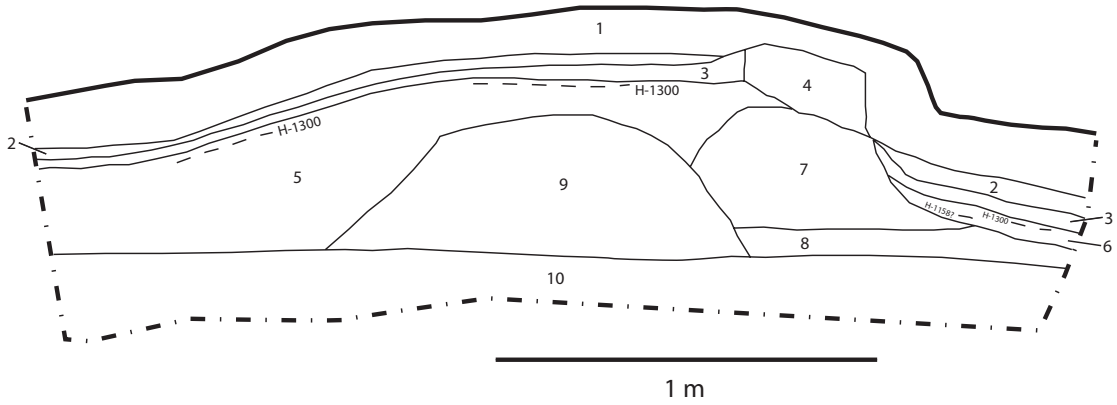

Fig. 21. East facing section through inner boundary at Selholt.

western one (the lake-side), measuring 150x120 m or 1,8 ha. Attached to this at the north-eastern corner are several smaller enclosures but there also two small detached enclosures outside the home-field, one on the eastern side and another on the western, with an open side facing the lake. The most prominent feature inside the enclosure is a ruin complex, measuring 33x14 m, with at least 9 rooms, apparently from different periods. The southernmost has a neat stone-facing on the inside which looks recent. This complex sits on a slight rise which can be assumed to be the remains of earlier building phases. 30 m to the south of this, following the crest of the hill, there is a cluster of small but regular depressions which are clearly anthropogenic. They are much to large to be considered as charcoal-pits and may be the remains of sunken featured buildings. Down-slope on the western side there is a small structure with two or three compartments, from its size probably a fold rather than a house. As already mentioned further structures could lurk under the dense vegetation inside the enclosure.

A trench was dug through the inner boundary some 15 m west of the main ruin complex. It was 3x0,7 m and 0,8 m deep. Unlike most other boundary walls so far trenched in Mývatnssveit this one is not associated with any ditch. The earliest wall (9) was simply built on the surface (10) some time after V~940 (the whole LNS is intact), using *strengur* turf that included cultural material indicating occupation of the site before the boundary was built. After some time, represented by a layer of aeolian silt with some turf debris (8) a repair (7) was built of similar, slightly darker, turf. This was sealed by aeolian silt (6) on the outside and a mixed layer of aeolian and turf debris (5) on the inside. Both included stretches of the H-1300 tephra in situ, and 6 also had a dash of white tephra, but it was not possible to confirm that it was H-1158

in situ. Postdating these layers, and therefore more recent than 1300, is a final repair to the wall (4), made from compact dark turf with reddish patches, some sort of *hnaus* rather than *strengur*. This in turn was sealed by a layer of humus (3) which has formed under the V-1477 tephra (2).

This site, which is among the smaller in terms of home-field size, therefore seems to have been in use for a considerable period of time. However, while there clearly was some activity at the site in the 14th or 15th centuries, the boundary had clearly gone out of repair long before 1300, suggesting perhaps that the late-medieval activity represents a short-lived re-occupation of a deserted farm rather than the end of a long and continuous occupation.

Thomas H. McGovern

Results of coring surveys at six modern farm sites

Hofstaðir

The survey team visited Hofstaðir on June 12th, with the objective of attempting to locate undisturbed midden deposits dating to medieval-early modern phases of the farm. A consultation with Guðmundur Jónsson confirmed that the large mounded midden depicted by Bruun 1908 had been spread over the home field in the 20th century, making use of both hand tools and bulldozer. He pointed out the area once occupied by the midden, which was still marked by two low mounds. We set out an 85 m transect which crossed both mounds and began a systematic coring survey of this area.

Fig. 1. Transect line across the two low mounds seen from the northern end.

The cores taken along this transect produced somewhat varied results, but all demonstrated very disturbed stratigraphy. The V-1717 and V-1477 tephra horizons were virtually absent, as was the V~940. The LNS was occasionally but rarely observed, and some cores indicated that disturbance had continued down to the prehistoric H3 tephra. While clearly cultural materials (peat ash, wood charcoal, and a few flecks of calcined bone were present in the cores, this material was almost certainly simply displaced midden material, and the absence of tephra horizons found in other parts of the site nearby serve to stress the degree of disturbance across this area. The midden deposits once present here have been completely destroyed. Note that substantial quantities of

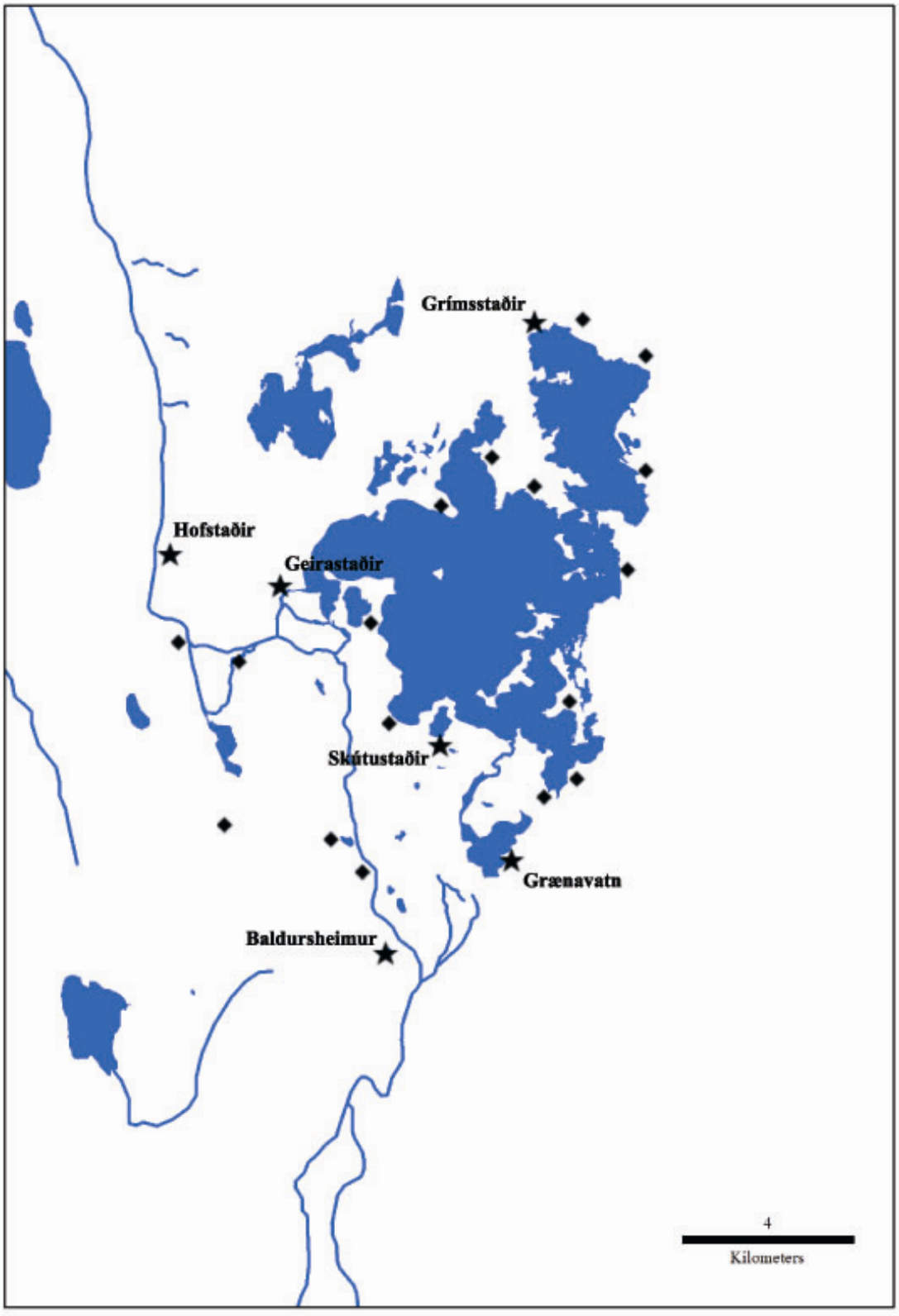

Fig. 2. Map showing the coring sites (stars) and the other permanently occupied farms (diamonds) in Mývatnssveit.

charcoal and some smithing slag were recorded in cores taken on the northern mound, repeating results of a 1999 coring run. This heavily disturbed area may in fact have the remains of a smithy or similar structure, but it would require a large scale excavation to confirm this. These coring results, combined with previous seasons' unsuccessful attempts to find stratified midden deposits along the eastern and southern sides of the home field would seem to indicate that this area has been so completely modified by 20th century agriculture as to effectively remove midden deposits from the whole area.

The team observed and collected some bone fragments from the surface, along the modern access road to the farm house. These included a substantial worked whalebone rod (artifact) and several sheep metapodials showing bi-perforated marrow extraction (typical of medieval-early modern butchery practices). The bones seem to have been produced by a small utility trench running along the west side of the access road, suggesting possible midden deposits in this area. A series of corings along the western edge of the access road turned up very little cultural deposit, though the V-1717 tephra and the LNS tephras (but not V1477) were present.

Fig. 3. Test pit 2007-1, from the northeast.

We crossed the road to the eastern side (near the farm ruin area, now covered by small þúfur formations) and carried out a series of cores just to the south of the þúfur covered farm mound area, again without finding any significant amount of cultural deposits, but identifying some in situ tephra. We then moved northwards along the line of the access road, coring in an attempt to find any midden material between the road and the farm mound structures. In one core we encountered very deep cultural deposits extending to over a meter, and a 2 x 1 m test unit was opened around this core to investigate these deposits and attempt to determine bone preservation and

concentration. This unit (test pit 2007-1) produced some well preserved bone, as well as fragments of window glass and recent glazed pottery, but despite use of a 4mm dry sieve, the bone recovery was very low for the area opened. A portion of the unit (0.5 x 1 m) was carried down to the top of what is probably the 1477 tephra, recovering few artifacts and only one or two pieces of bone. We halted work on the test pit at this stage, as it was clear that we were not in a productive midden area and might be on the edge of an early modern- late medieval structure which could be damaged by carrying this narrow excavation unit any lower.

We then concentrated on the grassy slope leading down towards river Laxá to the west of the access road, placing cores an area 25-30 m from the medieval/early modern structure to attempt to locate a more distant midden depositional pattern, downhill of the main building complex. This area did produce some cultural deposits, but these were fairly shallow and the absences of any tephra between the V-1717 and occasional LNS again suggested disturbance. Several cores placed closer to the modern farm house on the west side of the road (nearest the location of the bone surface finds) produced little evidence of thick cultural deposits either. A final attempt to try to positively confirm or deny the presence of midden beneath the roadway resulted in a dual run of cores along both sides of the modern access road. The result was somewhat discouraging, as along the lower side (west) side of the access road very little cultural material of any sort was recovered, with shallow cores reaching LNS within 20 – 40 cm. On the upper (east) side of the access road there were much deeper cultural deposits extending down well over a meter. These tended to contain extensive structural turf banding as well as different sorts of cultural deposit, but more closely resembled structural layers than midden. We concluded that another test pit in this area would be very likely to damage intact structures and very unlikely to provide much insight into midden distribution.

Hofstaðir may still have rich and extensive medieval and post-medieval cultural deposits within the farm mound, and conditions of organic preservation remain outstanding. However, it would appear that midden deposits have not survived in either concentrated pit fill deposits or in situ sheet midden form anywhere in the home field area, along the modern access road to the west of the farm mound, or down the slope still further to the west. While bone fragments in good condition seem to have been produced from the small utility trench excavation, these do not in fact seem to be associated with extensive or rich midden deposits in this area. While it is

possible that midden deposits do exist within the farm mound area itself, the work done in 2006 and 2007 suggest strongly that there are no longer intact midden deposits easily accessible around the margins of the farm mound on any side. It appears that it will take a major open area excavation of the farm mound to recover significant amounts of stratified animal bone from later medieval-early modern Hofstaðir.

Grænavatn

On June 13th the survey team moved to the farm of Grænavatn, and met the elder farmer Helgi Jónasson, who pointed out the area where refuse had been traditionally dumped over the edge of the large farm mound into the Grænavatn Lake. This area was approximately 15 x 5 m, and was marked by the growth of rich lyme grass (*Elymus* sp). A series of cores was taken along the edge of the farm mound (roughly east-west), and a second series was taken running north away from the edge into the farm mound area for a distance of 25 meters. The east-west coring transect (15 m) confirmed the presence of rich organic deposits along the erosion edge, probably midden material. The tephra identified in core included the V-1717 (visible in nearly all cores) and a thicker grey-green tephra probably representing the 1477 tephra. In the north-south coring transect, V-1717, V-1477, and the LNS were all visible, with a possible presence of the V~940 tephra remaining unconfirmed. The north-south transect produced multiple "turf block" bands suggesting that a substantial amount of the farm mound in this area may be composed of displaced structural turf. In four cores the LNS was reached, with what appear to be in situ cultural deposits just above. This would seem to confirm the antiquity of this settlement site, which

Fig. 4. Site of midden on the bank of Lake Grænavatn, looking northwest.

certainly is in one of the most favorable locations in the region in terms of access to wild resources and good grazing.

At the base of the farm mound at the edge of the lake is a clear freshwater stream emerging from the lava substrate as a fast-flowing spring. This has been modified and developed as a well, clearly in use for a long time. A pathway leads down to the well from the top of the farm mound, and this pathway forms a marked depression in the cultural layers. The water in the lake is very clear, and many bones and artifacts were observed in the shallows. A collection of these includes mainly fairly recent glazed pottery, but there is also a ring-and-dot ornamented bone mount, possibly a center plate for a double sided comb).

Fig. 5. fresh-water outlet into Lake Grænavatn, looking south.

Fig. 6. Ornamented bone-mount retrieved from Lake Grænavatn.

Conditions of preservation in the farm mound are excellent, soil pH 6.25-6.5. The most accessible portion of the midden deposits are probably directly at the edge of the farm mound, and a trench could be opened along this edge without significantly destabilizing the deposit. A small crew excavation here would certainly recover modern-19th c materials in some quantity, and might well reveal a longer intact stratigraphic sequence.

Geirastaðir

On June 14th 2007 the team moved to Geirastaðir in the lava area near the Mývatn lake side, where the farmer Finnbogi Stefánsson was able to positively locate the recent dumping area in a boggy depression just behind and north of the modern house (Geirastaðir I). This area was also said to contain a possible medieval chapel and a later smithy. We made a sketch map of the boggy depression area, set out a coring transect, and excavated a small test trench (2 x 2 m, 0.5 m x 1 m taken to lava substrate. The coring transect began near the modern house, near the location of a historic smithy (according to Finnbogi), and the first two cores produced several deposits of structural turf probably associated with this building. Bird egg shell, bone fragments, and charcoal were recovered from these cores but tephra were not observed. Additional cores further from the modern house produced more indications of midden deposits (but no additional tephra), and the 2 x 2 meter test pit was opened in this area. Bone and relatively recent artifacts were immediately recovered during de-turfing, (contexts

Fig. 7. Boggy depression north of Geirastaðir I, looking northeast.

Fig. 8. Test pit, showing surface of context 002.

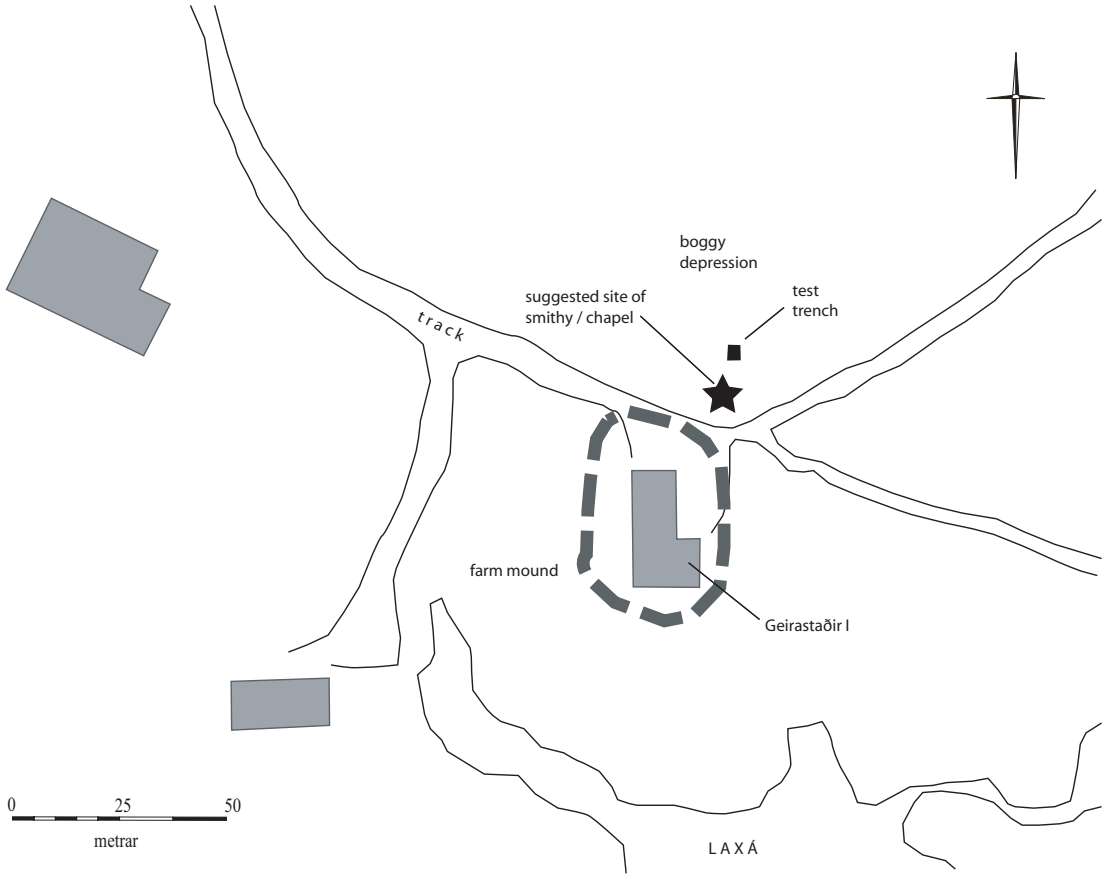

Fig. 9. Plan of Geirastaðir.

[001] and [002]). The surface of [002] (seen in fig. 7) had substantial amounts of bone as well as 20th century artifacts (wire, glass, probable porcelain electrical insulator). The test pit was extended to the lava substrate in a 0.50 x 2 m sondage.

In the sondage were two additional midden contexts [003] and at base [004]. Context [004] rested directly upon the lava

Fig. 10. Sondage within the test pit at Geirastaðir, showing the relationship of the midden contexts.

substrate, but still contained some late 19th-20th c glazed pottery. This part of the Geirastaðir midden is apparently entirely modern-19th century, but it is likely that older deposits are to be found nearby. Soil acidity was low (pH 6.25-6.5) and bone preservation was excellent. After backfilling the Geirastaðir test trench 1, we made one coring in the front of the modern house, near a small grassy mound which appeared to be cultural, but in fact showed no cultural deposits in the core.

Geirastaðir is a potentially very interesting site with early medieval / Viking age deposits probably present in the area. The boggy depression sampled by the coring transects and the test pit probably contains multiple phases, but the area excavated in 2007 seems to be entirely recent-early modern. This is an excellent source of data on these periods.

Baldursheimur

On June 17th the team visited the farm of Baldursheimur, and carried out two coring transects between the modern Baldursheimur 1 farm (on the older farm mound) and the small lake fronting the old farm area. The lake was full of ducks and small waterfowl, and the rich wet meadows around the margins were still being grazed by the modern dairy herd. The edge of the farm mound was very distinct on the surface, and cores taken on its edge (transect 1, 17 m from farm mound to lake shore) revealed structural turf construction/demolition debris as well as charcoal and peat ash deposits.

Fig. 11. Coring transect 2 ran 20 m roughly N-S, parallel to the lake shore. Looking NW.

Fig. 12. Albína Pálsdóttir and Ramona Harrison working on transect 1 (15m) near the farm mound edge. Looking WSW.

The deposits further away from the farm mound also showed significant amounts of cultural deposit, and it would appear that an extensive sheet midden extends from between the farm mound and near the edge of the lake. Coring directly at the lakeshore produced the least cultural deposit, and it would appear that the greatest potential midden concentration is within 10-15 m of the farm mound. In several cores, layers of what appear to be wind-deposited sand are present, and the base of the cores all end in very dark, wet, peaty sand. Cores regularly retrieved cultural material from between V-1717 and V-1477, but the lower tephras were hard to see due to the darkening and increasingly peaty character of the soils. Soil pH ranged from 6.0-6.25, slightly more acid than the Mývatn average but still in the range for good bone preservation. What appeared to be bird egg shell was recovered in two cores.

While much of the Baldursheimur holding has been heavily impacted by land reclamation and modern farming, there is clearly a cultural deposit extending over something like 20x15 m in the area between the modern farm mound edge and the lakeside. This definitely dates to late medieval/early modern times, and may well extend into earlier periods. While we did not test pit to check for bone concentration, this area would seem to be extremely promising for further investigation, as it may fill in a blank spot in the Mývatn zooarchaeological record, and would certainly be an important record from a major farm.

Grímsstaðir

On the morning of June 18th the team visited the farm of Grímsstaðir on the shores of Mývatn. Coring by the lake side and on mounded features outside the wire fence enclosing the modern garden area around Grímsstaðir 1 farmhouse produced little or no cultural material, and no intact tephra down to H3.

Fig. 13. Coring just below the farm mound with modern house on top. This core produced a small amount of what may be midden material below turf collapse. Looking NW.

This suggested substantial field flattening and disturbance had taken place in the recent past (the V-1717 tephra was also absent) over a fairly wide area. Soil acidity was low (pH 6.25-6.5) and as in most other Mývatn sites conditions of bone preservation should be good. While most cores produced little or no archaeological material, two cores in the wire-enclosed modern garden area did produce some possible midden / cultural material (charcoal, wood and peat ash) below a probable turf collapse layer. It is probable that some intact earlier cultural deposits do survive in the wire enclosed garden area, but these are fairly thin and restricted in area. While it is possible that deeper deposits are to be found on the site, opportunistic coring of green mounds around Grímsstaðir 1 uniformly produced only faint traces of cultural layers, and most showed evidence of major disturbance (missing tephra).

Grímsstaðir is known to be an early settlement site, but the area around the modern structure of Grímsstaðir 1 has very limited cultural deposits, and no apparent deeply stratified midden. If the farm has been moved in fairly recent times (as has been suggested) these spotty and shallow cultural deposits make good sense, but there seems to be too little material for a long-lasting farm site dating back to Landnám. Either this material has been removed by flattening activity or the modern farm buildings are not on the older settlement area. While a more systematic survey of the whole Grímsstaðir holding might prove productive, there seems to be little prospect of recovering a deeply stratified deposit around the modern farm building.

Skútustaðir

On June 18th, the survey team carried out sketch mapping of midden deposits first discovered by Árni Einarsson on the south east side of the modern farm and church buildings. At the top of a grass covered hill just 20 m WSW of the modern farm building (Skútustaðir III) there is an indistinct group of structural ruins (in the legendary area of the tunnel built by Killer Skuta). This area was designated area A. A small exposure had been opened by a path from the modern farm buildings

Fig. 14. Area A, looking northeast. The building to the right is Skútustaðir III.

Fig. 15. Area B, looking southwest.

down slope to a barn and tractor shed, and this showed what appeared to be rich midden deposits full of charcoal, peat ash, and fire cracked stones as well as bird, fish, mammal and shellfish remains. The surface collection made by Árni included cod, trout, charr, cattle, sheep, and unidentified mammal bone, and suggested a rich midden deposit. No glass, ceramic or pipe stems were visible in the exposure. The deposit seemed to be part of a larger fill of the edge of one of the lava craters, running down into the crater on an E-W axis. Green grass also extended down-slope to the S, running into what appears to be a second crater. These midden deposits along the crater rim area were designated area B.

Still further down slope, near the small pond that runs eastwards to the Mývatn Science Station where Öskutangi ("ash

Fig. 16. Area C, Öskutangi, is the narrow strip of land jutting out into the sedge filled pond just below the centre of picture. Looking ESE from Area B.

peninsula") and a small mound showing green grass growth was clearly evident. This area was designated area C.

These indications of middens were only brought to the attention of the team once it had arrived in Mývatnssveit, and as a result time did not allow an excavation permit to be applied for. With the landowners' permission the fieldwork was therefore limited to mapping and coring to confirm the presence/absence of cultural deposits.

Coring in area A around the probable structures revealed cultural deposits both above and below the probable V-1717 tephra, but not any great depth of deposit. In area C, both the small ash peninsula and the mound revealed some ash and charcoal indicating cultural deposits, but boggy soil and fairly thin deposits suggested limited midden accumulation. By contrast coring down both the south and east slopes of area B produced extraordinary results. Transect 1 running along the apparent upper edge of the crater rim and Transect 2 running southeast down past the exposure indicated the presence of rich midden. Bone fragments (including half a seal metapodial) were present in every core, and the density of deposit seems impressive.

On the southern end of Transect 2 (running roughly N-S) relatively shallow cultural deposits were present right at the crater rim, but deposit depth increased dramatically as cores were moved southwards, down the slope towards the pond in area C. The deepest core hit rock at about 255 cm from surface, with rich midden present right at the bottom (egg shell, fish and mammal bone, clam shell fragments). One tephra (grey green possibly the V~940 tephra) was observed in this core, but in the rest of the midden cores tephras were difficult to observe, and the LNS was not firmly identified in any of the deposits.

These results are consistent with the infilling of a crater. It appears that the Skútustaðir midden deposit may reflect a long period of accumulation, and may provides a potentially unique opportunity to investigate long term change through time at a major farm in Mývatnssveit.

Appendix. Finds lists

Hofstaðir

1. Ceramic. Willow ware w. blue decoration. From testpit #1 2007
2. Ceramic. White glazed earthenware, 5 pieces. From testpit #1 2007
3. Ceramic. Red painted earthenware. From testpit #1 2007
4. Ceramic. Red earhtenware, glazed. From testpit #1 2007
5. Clear glass. Bottle? From testpit #1 2007
6. Clear glass. Window glass? From testpit #1 2007
7. Iron nail, 10cm long. From testpit #1 2007
8. Worked whale bone. Cylindrical, 30 cm long, 5cm circumference. Found on side of road
9. Ceramic. White glazed eartheware, 12 pices. Found on side of road
10. Ceramic. Glazed earthenware. Found on side of road
11. Bone. Ovis horncore worked. From testpit #1 2007

Grænavatn

1. Bone. Button, 4 holes. Good condition. From lake
2. Ceramic. Plate, Rosenthal makers mark, green. 20th century? From lake
3. Ceramic. White glazed earthenware, makers mark, plate fragment? Makers mark, decorated. From lake
4. Ceramic. White glazed stoneware, 3 pieces. Bowl pieces? From lake
5. Ceramic. Stoneware, 5 pieces. From lake
6. Ceramic. Hand painted earthenware. Willow-ware? Blue painted. From lake
7. Ceramic. Hand painted earthenware. Willow-ware? Blue painted. From lake
8. Ceramic. Hand painted earthenware. Willow-ware? Blue painted, plate rim? From lake
9. Ceramic. White glazed earthenware, 3 pieces. Mended. From lake
10. Clay/brick?. Red brick? Unusual shape. From lake
11. Ceramic. Painted earthenware, 7 pieces. Green, pink, lavender decorations. From lake
12. Stone. Modified stone, hole. 4mm hole in middle. From lake
13. Glass. Green glass, 4 pieces. Bottle? From lake
14. Brick? Red brick. Eroded, has inclusions, possibly old. From lake
15. Glass. Smokey white opaque. From lake
16. Glass. Clear glass, 6 pieces. From lake
17. Glass. Brown glass. From lake
18. Brick. Glazed brick, 2 pieces. From lake
19. Schist. Whetstone. Grey. From lake
20. Schist. Whetstone. Grey. From lake
21. Iron. Collar. From lake
22. Metal. Button. Tin? 1cm diameter. From lake
23. Ceramic. Black glazed earthenware. Black, decorated, probably English identifiable. From lake
24. Ceramic. Stoneware. From lake
25. Ceramic. Grey? Painted, glazed. From lake
26. Bone/bronze. Decorated, comb piece. 5 circles with dots in middle, bronze nail, medieval. From lake

27. Iron. Nails, 7 pieces. Various types. From lake
28. Iron. Hinge piece? From lake
29. Iron. Wrought iron. Very thick, rim? From lake
30. Ceramic. White glazed earthenware, 17 pieces. Rims, bottoms of various vessels. From lake
31. Ceramic. White glazed earthenware, 112 pieces. Various fragments. From lake

Geirastaðir

1. Ceramic. White glazed earthenware, 3 pieces, some with decoration. From testpit #1 2007, unit 002
2. Rubber? Bit of rubber. From testpit #1 2007, unit 002
3. Glass. Clear glass. From testpit #1 2007, unit 002
4. Iron nails, 2 pieces. From testpit #1 2007, unit 002
5. Wood/copper. Wood pin with bronze-ring. From testpit #1 2007, unit 002
6. Iron plates, triangular, thin, 2 pieces. From testpit #1 2007, unit 002
7. Iron. 3 pieces. From testpit #1 2007, unit 002
8. Iron wire. From testpit #1 2007, unit 003
9. Iron plates, 6 pieces. From testpit #1 2007, unit 003
10. Glass. Milky white glass, sheet. From testpit #1 2007, unit 003
11. Glass. Green glass, thick. From testpit #1 2007, unit 003
12. Ceramic. White glazed earthenware, 2 pieces. From testpit #1 2007, unit 003
13. Porcelain? Electric insulatior piece? From testpit #1 2007, unit 003
14. Iron. Galavanized? From testpit #1 2007, unit 003
15. Wood. 2 big pieces of wood. 2 smaller pieces. From testpit #1 2007, unit 004
16. Ceramic. White glazed earthenware, 4 pieces. Some decorated. From testpit #1 2007, unit 004
17. Iron nail. Looks old. From testpit #1 2007, unit 004
18. Copper. Coin? From testpit #1 2007, unit 004
19. Iron plate, galvanized?. From testpit #1 2007, unit 004

Magnús Á. Sigurgeirsson

Gjóskulagagreining

Inngangur

Farin var vettvangsferð þann 22. júní 2007. Skoðuð voru snið á fimm stöðum í Mývatnssveit, á Þorleifsstöðum og Litlu-Gautlöndum suður af Mývatni (Mývatnsheiði), Beinistöðum og Geldingatóftum í Laxárdal og Selholti við Sandvatn. Fimm snið voru mæld og teiknuð og gjóskusýni tekin til frekari athugana.

Rannsóknir hafa sýnt að talsvert er af gjóskulögum í jarðvegi í Mývatnssveit. Hafa þau í gegnum tíðina nýst vel við aldursákvarðanir á fornminjum og gosmyndunum. Þau gjóskulög sem mest hafa verið notuð við aldursgreiningu fornminja eru, Landnámslagið (LNL) frá því um 870, V~950, H-1104, H-1158, K-1262, H-1300, V-1410, V-1477 og V-1717. Í Mývatnssveit er svokölluð Landnámssyrpa (LNS) skýr í jarðvegi en í henni koma fyrir 5-6 dökk gjóskulög með stuttu millibili. Yngsta lagið í LNS er yfirleitt V~950. Þykkt LNS er á bilinu 6-10 cm.

Niðurstöður athugana

Þorleifsstaðir

Túngarður: Gjóskulagið H-1158 liggur yfir torfhrunslinsu sunnanmegin garðsins, á ca. 40 cm löngu bili. Landnámssyrpan, mjög skýr, liggur næst undir kjarna (miðju) garðsins. Næst ofaná LNS, undir garðinum, er þunnt graftarlag og síðan tekur við torf með LNS þar sem gjóskulagið V~950 er yngsta gjóskulagið. Torf með H-1158 er þar fyrir ofan. Snið var mælt í N-enda skurðs V-megin (mynd 1, snið I). Samkvæmt þessu er elsti hluti garðsins frá því nokkru eftir 950 en yngsti hluti hans frá því eftir 1158, þó vart síðar en 13. öld.

Tveir skurðir í bæjarhól voru skoðaðir.

Eystri skurður: Sérstaka athygli vakti að á milli V~950 og LNL er þunnt mannvistarlag sem þykknar inn í hólinn, frá 1 cm til 4 cm. Snið var mælt í austurprófíl skurðsins um 60 cm frá N-enda (mynd 1, snið II).
Vestari skurður: Mannvistarlög ná alveg niður í grjóturð, þannig að engin gjóskulög sjást undir þeim. Snið í suðurenda skurðarins var mælt (mynd 1, snið III).

Í báðum sniðunum í bæjarhólinn mátti sjá slitrótt örþunnt ljóst lag á milli V-1477 og H-1300. Smásjárskoðun staðfestir að um súra gjósku er að ræða. Telja má næsta víst að þessi gjóska sé frá Öræfajökulsgosinu árið 1362 en hún hefur fundist á stöku stað í Mývatnssveit áður.

Elstu ummerki um mannvist á Þorleifsstöðum eru frá því á milli 870 og 950. Yngstu mannvistarlög liggja undir Heklugjóskunni frá 1300.

Litlu-Gautlönd

Skoðað var snið í garð. Gjóskulögin V-1477 og H-1300 liggja yfir torfi garðsins. LNS er undir garðinum, 1-2 cm þykkt ljóst mannvistarlag er á milli V~950 og torfsins (tað ?). Garðurinn er að öllum líkindum frá 11.-13. öld.

Beinistaðir

Mælt var snið í A-prófíl skurðs (mynd 1, snið IV). Ofan á dökku hörðu gólflagi er allþykkt torflag sem inniheldur slitrur af Heklu-3, LNS og H-1158. Gjóskulagið H-1300 er í jarðvegi yfir torfinu. Mannvistarlög eru frá því fyrir 1300.

Selholt

Snið í túngarð var skoðað. Gjóskulögin V-1477 og H-1300 liggja yfir mannvistarlögum. Litlir ljósir blettir sáust á tveimur stöðum en ekki tókst að staðfesta að um ljósa gjósku væri að ræða. Blettirnir skófust auðveldlega í burtu. Snið var mælt í S-enda skurðs (mynd 1, snið V). Mannvistarlög eru frá tímabilinu 950-1300.

Geldingatættur

Skurður í túngarð var skoðaður. Í honum var skýrt torf með LNS ásamt þunnu manvistarlagi, ~ 1 cm þykku. Undir garðstorfinu er LNS og þunnt mannvistarlag. Yfir garðinn liggur V-1477. Ekki tókst að finna H-1300 yfir garðinum. Garðurinn er að

öllum líkindum frá 11.- 14. öld. Líklegt verður að telja að finna megi H-1300 yfir garðinum við frekari rannsókn.

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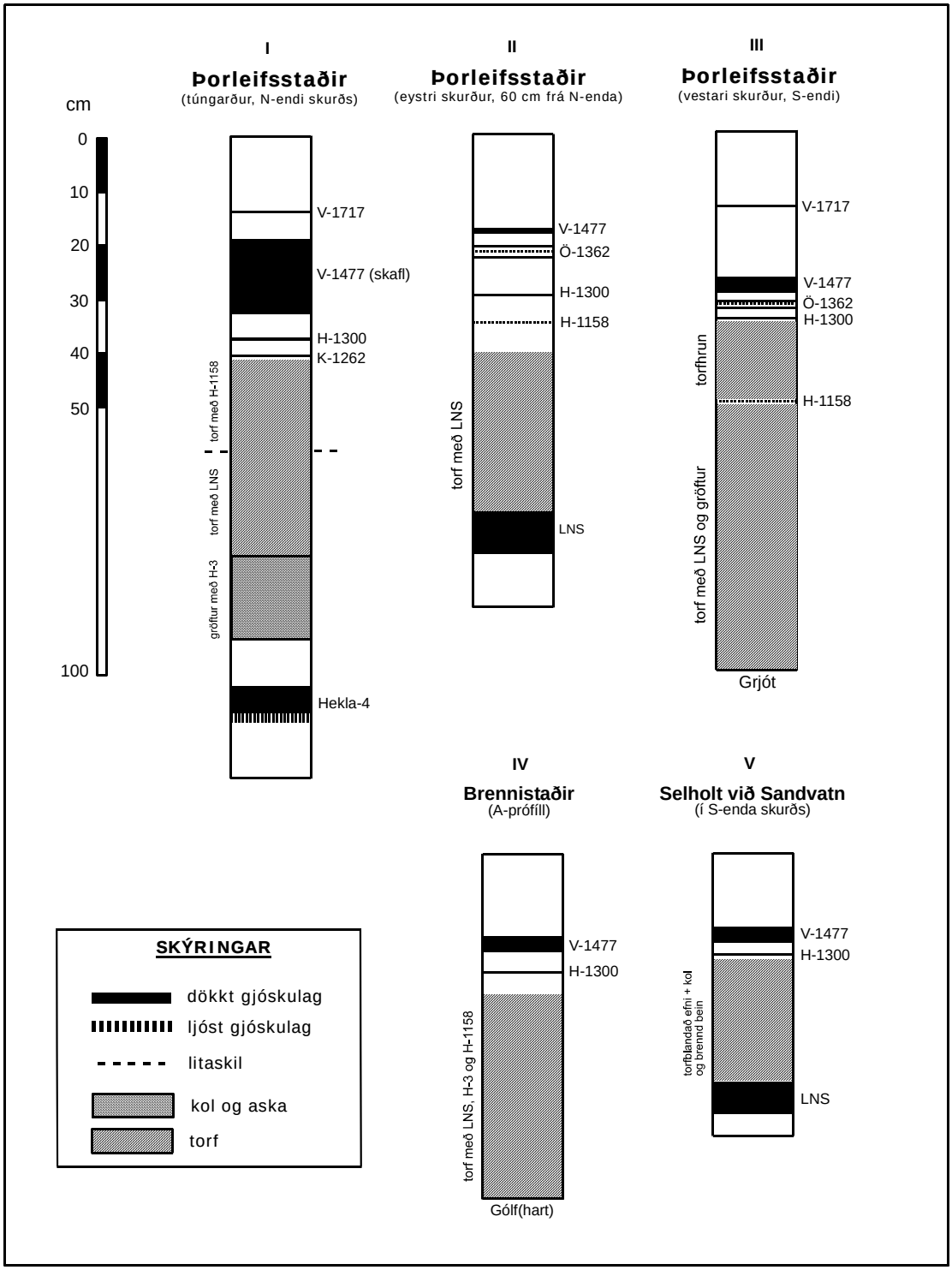


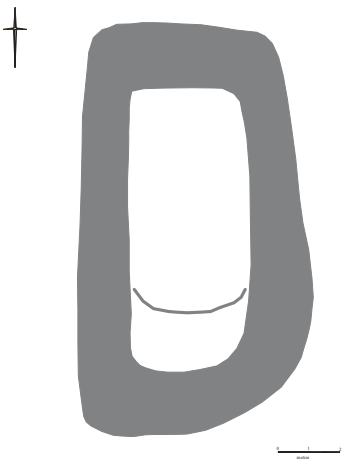
Mynd 1. Jarðvegssnið frá Mývatnssveit, S-Þingeyjarsýslu.

Orri Vésteinsson

Viðbætur og leiðréttingar við fornleifaskrá Skútustaðahrepps

Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahreppi kom út í fjórum heftum á árunum 1997-2000. Síðan fyrsta heftið kom út hafa Fornleifastofnun borist fjölmargar ábendingar um atriði sem vantaði eða betur mættu fara og nokkrir nýir staðir hafa verið skráðir á vettvangi, einkum sumarið 2007. Ábendingar og leiðréttingar hafa verið færðar inn á gagnagrunninn ÍSLEIFU jafnóðum og er aðeins lítinn hluta þeirra að finna hér en í skránni hér að neðan er úrval staða, sem flestir voru skráðir 2007 og varða með einum eða öðrum hætti þau rannsóknarefni sem tíunduð eru í inngangi.

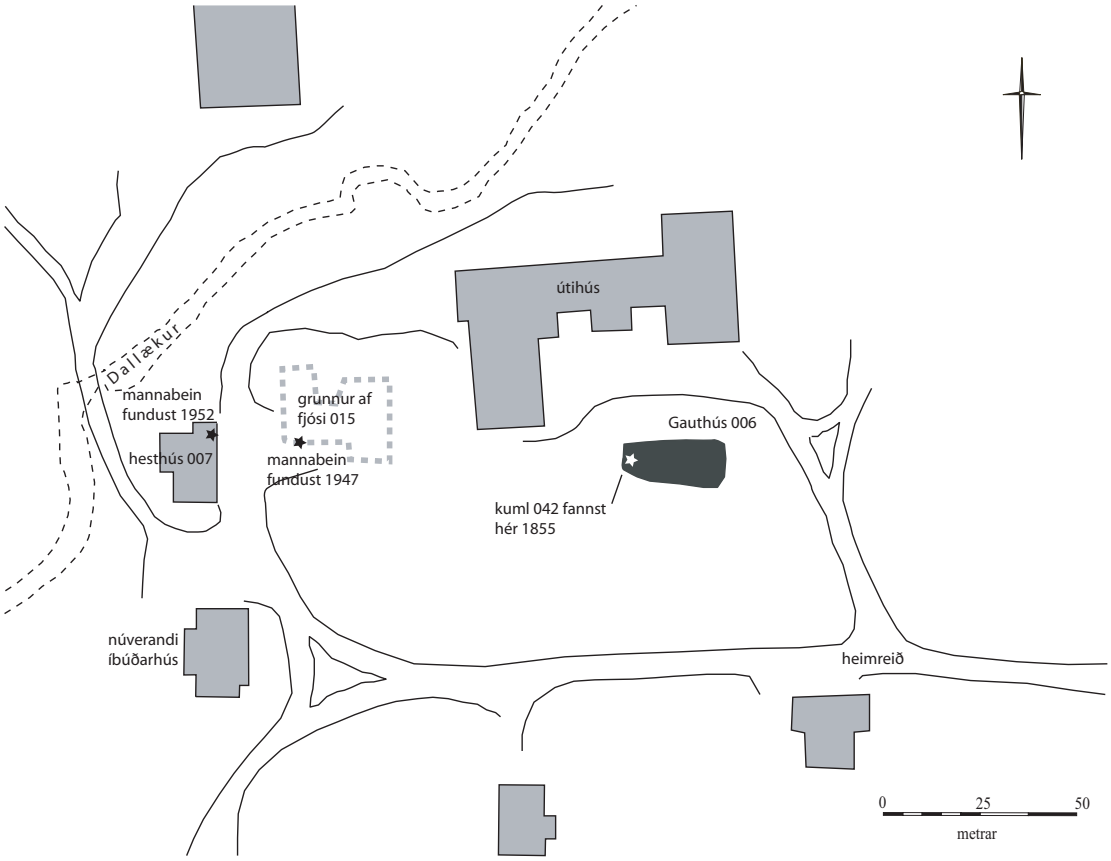
SÞ-193 Helluvað



SÞ-193:055 tóftir 65°36.385N 17°12.708V
Sunnan við Tjaldstæðisbungu er tóft, suðvestur og upp af sléttri flöt sem er austan við bunguna og nær langleiðina frá veginum. Tóftin er um 200 m SSV við þjóðveginn, beint vestur frá Beinisstöðum.
Tóftin er 4x10 m að innanmáli, veggir 1,5-2 m breiðir. Hún er mjög sigin og gróin lyngi. Sennilega tvískipt og er minna hólf í suðurenda. Tóftinni hallar til NNA og hafa dyr væntanlega verið á norðurgafli þó ekki séu þær greinilegar.
Hættumat: engin hætta
Heimildamaður: Ingólfur Jónasson

SÞ-194 Gautlönd

SÞ-194:006 *Gauthús* tóft fjárhús 65°33.155N 17°07.828V
"Gauthús er gamalt fjárhús norður af Taðhól. Norðvestur af Nýhúsum. Gauthúsabeð eru gamlar þeksléttur norðaustur af Gauthúsi." segir í örnefnalýsingu. Tóftir Gauthúsa eru ANA við núverandi íbúðarhús, skammt sunnan við stóra útihúsasamsteypu (sbr. 007) á lágum hól.
Í túni.
Kumlið 042 fannst þegar grafið var fyrir hlöðunni vestan við þessi hús. Nafn húsanna mun vera til komið af því að kumlbúinn hefur verið talinn vera Gautur sá er bjó á

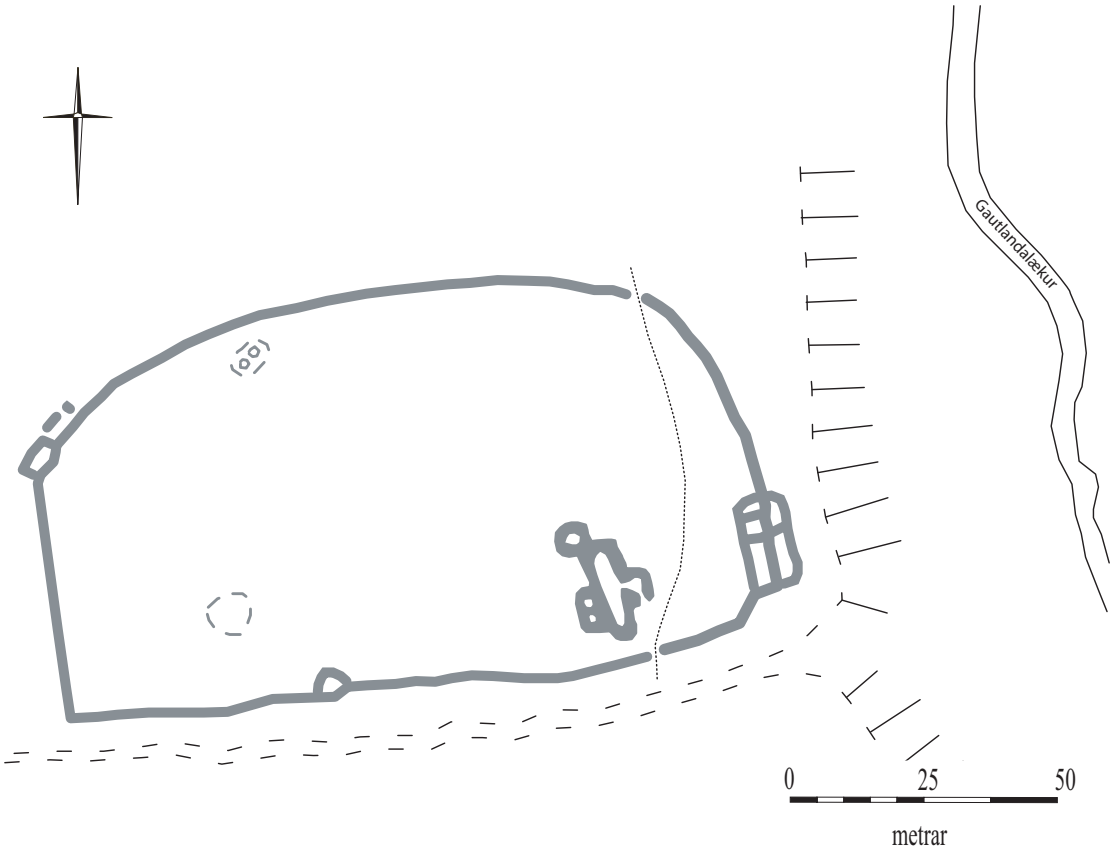


Gautlöndum samkvæmt Reykdæla sögu en hundsbeinin sem fundust í kumlinu hafa þótt styrkja þá meiningu því í sögunni er sérstaklega getið um hund Gauts - ÍF X, 225-26. Víg Gauts í túninu á Gautlöndum er einnig efni í Hrana sögu hrings. 2007: Gauthús voru í notkun fram yfir 1970 en voru felld í kringum 1990. Þá var grafinn í gólfinu kassi með mannabeinum þeim sem fundist höfðu 1947, en hann var grafinn upp aftur 2007.
Hættumat: hætta, vegna ábúðar
Heimildir:Túnkort 1919; Ö-Gautlönd, 1140.
Heimildamenn: Böðvar Jónsson, Sigurður Böðvarsson

SÞ-194:007 heimild um hesthús 65°33.157N 17°07.955V
"Norður af bæ stóðu Hesthús." segir í örnefnalýsingu. Hesthús voru rúmlega 20 m beint norður af bænum. Þar var síðar áhaldageymsla og er steinhúsið sem nú stendur þar arftaki þess. "Norðan við hesthúsið var áföst hlaða, sem 1952 var steypt upp og stækkuð og notuð sem áhaldageymsla. Við þá stækkun fundust við norðausturhornið tvær beinagrindur af mönnum."
Í túni.
Norðaustan við þetta hús er sýnd votheysgryfja á túnakorti. Þær munu hafa verið amk tvær. "Norðan við hesthúsið var áföst hlaða, sem 1952 var steypt upp og stækkuð og notuð sem áhaldageymsla. Við þá stækkun fundust við norðausturhornið tvær beinagrindur af mönnum." 2007: Þessi bein voru grafin niður aftur á sama stað, en dýpra. Ekki er vitað hvernig þau snéru - Böðvar Jónsson, viðtal 14.06.2007
Hættumat: hætta, vegna ábúðar
Heimildir: Túnkort 1919. Ö-Gautlönd, 1140; Aths. Böðvars Jónssonar.
Heimildamaður: Böðvar Jónsson

Trékassi með beinum manna og dýra sem grafinn var upp úr Gauthúsum sumarið 2007.

SÞ-194:015 fjós legstaður 65°33.167 N 17°07.915 V
"Fjóshóll er gamalt nafn á hólnum, þar sem stendur fjós Jóns G. Péturssonar." segir í örnefnalýsingu. Hóllinn er um 50 m NA við núverandi íbúðarhús, milli 007 og 006.Í túni, nú hlað og byggingar.
Fjós Jóns G. Péturssonar var byggt 1947 og sést steyptur grunnur þess enn. Áður voru á hólnum votheysgryfjur og er ekki vitað til að fjós hafi áður staðið á hólnum, né hefur nafnið verið notað. Fjósið var áður inni í bænum. Hóllinn er sýnilega sundurgrafinn af votheysgryfjum og fjósgrunninum. 2007: Þegar fjósið var byggt 1947 kom í ljós mannsbeinagrind í líkkistu sem snéri norður-suður. Beinin komu í ljós þegar ýtumaður var að grafa fyrir fjósinu og voru þau undir suðurhlið þess, vestantil. Björn Sigfússon var í heimsókn á bænum ásamt bróður sínum og tóku þeir þátt í að hreinsa upp beinin. Beinin voru sett í kassa sem lengi var geymdur í Gauthúsum (006) en síðan grafinn í þeim eftir að þau voru tekin niður um 1990. Beinin voru grafin upp aftur 20.06.2007 og reyndust vera úr tveimur einstaklingum, auk dýrabeina (kind, geit, nautgripur, hestur og þorskur).
Hættumat: hætta, vegna ábúðar
Heimildir: Ö-Gautlönd, 1140; Aths. Böðvars Jónssonar.
Heimildamaður: Böðvar Jónsson

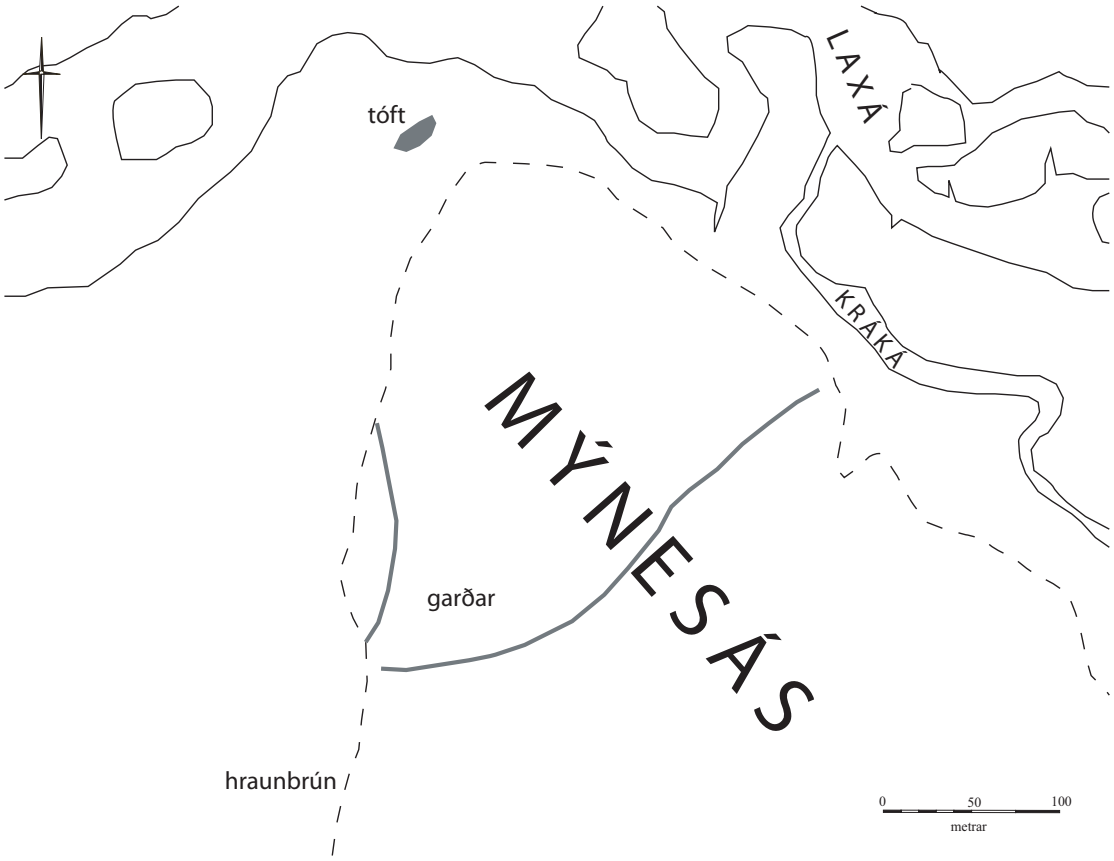


SÞ-194:036 *Girðingar* bæjarstæði býli 65°31.763N 17°06.954V
"Girðingar eru svo gömul mannvirki, sem afmarka reiti suður af Kofamýri." segir í örnefnalýsingu. Girðingar eru um 50 m norðan við merkjagirðingu milli Gautlanda og Heiðar. Tún er ræktað fast að merkjunum Heiðarmegin og er því hægt að keyra alveg að rústunum). Um 60 m eru austur í Gautlandalæk frá túngarði.
Tóftirnar eru í flötum lyngmóa ofan við Gautlandalæk og er gulvíðir (0,5-1,5 m hár) ráðandi en fjalldrapi inn á milli og meira ofan á görðum og tóftum. Meðfram túngarðinum að sunnanverðu er skorningur, gróinn vatnsfarvegur, en langt er síðan vatn hefur runnið um hann að staðaldri. Annar vatnsfarvegur liggur til norðurs meðfram vesturhlið túngarðsins og sveigir síðan til austurs meðfram norðurhlið. Skemmra er síðan vatn hefur runnið um hann. Kúm var áður fyrr haldið til beitar suður fyrir Kofamýri en í seinni tíð sækja skepnur mjög lítið á þetta svæði enda er kjarrgróður þar í miklum vexti.
Túngaðurinn afmarkar svæði sem er um 150 m frá austri til vesturs og 80 m frá norðri til suðurs. Hann er víðast um 2 m á breidd og 0,5 m hár. Einföld hólf eru áföst við garðinn á tveimur stöðum, eitt mjög djúpt við norðvesturhorn og annað grynnra og sveigðara við suðurhlið, heldur vestar en miðja hennar. Við suðausturhorn er tóft með 5 hólfum áföst túngarðinum - eða e.t.v. frekar fimm hólf sem hafa verið hlaðin á mismunandi tímum utan og innan í túngarðinn. Bæjartóft er 5 m innan við túngarð í suðvesturhluta túnsins. Það er 20 m löng skálatóft sem snýr norður-suður, með sveigðum langveggjum. Hún er með 4 áföstum hólfum að vestanverðu, þremur í klasa sunnaná og einu við norðvesturhorn. Á austurhlið er eitt áfast hólf, gæti verið forskáli. Veggir eru um 3 m þykkir og 0,7 - 1 m háir. Skálatóftin er 18x3 m að innanmáli, tóftin við norðvesturhorn 3x2 m en hinar minni. Að auki eru á tveimur stöðum í vestanverðu túninu ójöfnur og hvompur sem gætu verið tóftir en ekki er það skýrt.
Hættumat: engin hætta

Girðingar úr lofti, horft til vesturs. Myndina tók Árni Einarsson.

Heimildir: Ö-Gautlönd, 1143.
Heimildamaður: Böðvar Jónsson

SÞ-194:065 heimild
Tóftir og garður voru sunnan við lækinn SSV af íbúðarhúsi þar sem nú er sléttað tún í halla móti norðri.
Hættumat: hætta, vegna ábúðar
Heimildamaður: Böðvar Jónsson



SÞ-198 Arnarvatn

SÞ-198:049 *Mýnesás* tóftir býli 65°35.122N 17°05.294V
"Norðurendi Mýnesáss kallast Ásendi og þarna norðan í ásnum er Ásendahellir. Á ásendanum sést djarfa fyrir gömlum tóftum og hafa sumir látið að sér detta í hug að þarna hafi staðið býlið Hraunás sem getið er í fornum sögum. Frá ásendanum og suður að Smiðjutjörn mótar fyrir mjög fornum garði sem e.t.v. styður hugmyndir um forna búsetu." segir í örnefnalýsingu. "Rústirnar eru friðlýstar þjóðminjar. Björn Sigfússon (óprentuð ritg. 1976) getur þess að um 1880 hafi fólk verið í "Hraunási" (á Arnarvatni) á meðan það bjó sig til Ameríku, og hafði það verið "húsmennska fremur en hjáleiguréttindi." Þetta nafn kemur þó ekki fyrir í örnefnaskrám og kunnugir menn þekkja það ekki lengur. Þegar ég [HH] skoðaði rústirnar (1977) fannst mér bær vera mjög ógreinilegar, og naumast geta verið eftir raunverulegan bæ. Hins vegar er fyrrnefndur vörslugarður vel greinilegur." Ásendi er um 350 m austur af brúnni yfir í Geldingsey. Tóftirnar eru á suðurbakka Laxár við norðvesturendann á Mýnesási. Þær eru um 200 m austan við brýrnar yfir í Geldingaey og liggur slóði að þeim frá þeim vegi.

Á árbakka, í hraunjaðri. Ofan (austan) við er lyngmóaás. Minjarnar eru á greinilegum valllendisbletti sem sker sig úr frá lynggrónu hrauninu vestan og sunnan við og ásnum austan við. Í raun er gróðurinn helsta vísbendingin um að búskapur hafi verið á þessum stað.

"Aðaltóftin liggur frá austri til vesturs, nálægt 7 fðm. löng og 3 fðm. breið; dyr eru á austurendanum. Neðan við hana vestantil er ferhyrnd upphækkun, líklega heystæði, nálægt 5 fðm. langt og trúlega 4 fðm. breitt. Framan við það er tóft, sem liggur þvert niður frá austurenda aðaltóftarinnar, og hefir dyr á neðri enda, mótnorðri. Hún er nær 4 fðm. löng og 2. fðm. breið. Nokkru neðar, nær ánni, er sérstök tótt, sem virðist hafa verið grafin í jörðu að nokkru leyti, en þó eigi svo glögg, að hægt sé að mæla stærð hennar. Það er auðséð á tóttum þessum, að hér hefur verið smábýli, og að bygð hefur ekki haldist hér lengi. Hygg ég víst að hér hafi Hraunás verið; hér á það nafn vel við, og hvergi annarsstaðar verður bent á líkur til að hann hafi verið." Lýsing Brynjúlfs Jónssonar úr Árb 1901, 11. Á þessum stað er ein tóft skýr, um 25 m löng og snýr norður - suður og virðist tvískipt. Grjóthleðslur sjást í vesturvegg að utan. Tóftin er hlaðin uppi á hraunhól og gætu aðrar tóftir verið á næstu hólum norðan og austan við og eins niðri á árbakkanum vestan við. Hellir er skammt norðaustan við tóftina og gæti það verið Ásendahellir. Garður liggur yfir ásendann um 200 m sunnan við tóftirnar og annar virðist liggja meðfram hrauninu í brekkulögginni vestan við ásinn langleiðina milli tóftanna og Smiðjutjarnar. Þessir garðar gætu afmarkað túnstæði sem er tæplega 3 ha. að stærð.

Hættumat: engin hætta

Heimildir: Ö-Arnarvatn, 5; HH, 47 og Örnefnakort af Arnarvatni; Árb 1901, 11.

Heimildamaður: Arnljótur Sigurðsson

SÞ-199 Haganes

SÞ-199:001 *Haganes* bæjarhóll bústaður 65°35.503N 17°03.667V

Gamli bærinn var 10-20 m norðar en íbúðarhúsið í Haganesi sem nú er. Bærinn var vestan við heimreiðina, þar sem nú er sléttur grasbali. Ekki er greinanlegur bæjarhóll á þessum stað enda voru síðustu leifar gamla bæjarins sléttaðar nýlega.

Slétt grasflöt vestan heimreiðarinnar sem liggur áfram norður fram hjá bænum.

2007: Rofunum af gamla bænum var rutt niður í Öskuhver að suðvestanverðu (OV)

Hættumat: hætta, vegna ábúðar

Heimildir: Túnkort 1919.

Heimildamaður: Ívar Stefánsson

SÞ-199:010 *Beinahver* heimild um öskuhaug 65°35.559N 17°03.648V

"Syðst vestur af Bæjarhóli er lítill gígur, sem heitir Beinahver, og suður af honum og nær bæ er Öskuhver. Í þá hafa verið borin bein og aska." segir í örnefnalýsingu. Gígurinn er beint vestan við steypt íbúðarhús sem verið er að byggja 1998. Beinahver er sá stærri gíganna tveggja. Norðan í honum eru klettar en þess fyrir utan er hann alveg gróinn grasi. Vestan gígsins er timbur og járnhaugur en í honum sjálfum sjást engar mannvistarleifar.

Gróinn gígur.

19.06.2007: Ekki hefur verið borin aska í Beinahver í tíð Ívars en austan við miðja suðurhlið er gróinn hnúður sem gæti verið öskuhaugur. (OV)

Hættumat: hætta

Heimildir: Ö-Haganes, 2

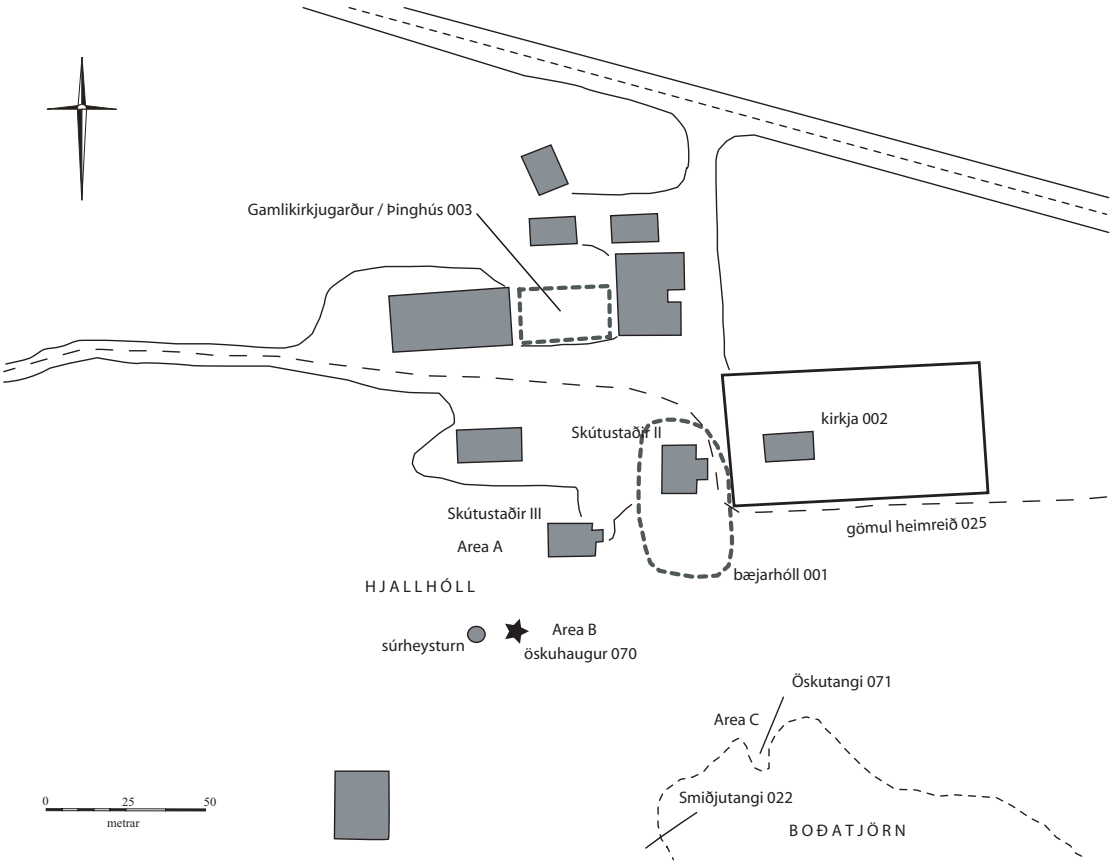
Tvöfaldur garður í Hamrshólum, horft í austur. Myndina tók Árni Einarsson.

Heimildamaður: Ívar Stefánsson

SÞ-199:011 *Öskuhver* heimild um öskuhaug 65°35.538N 17°03.702V
"Syðst vestur af Bæjarhóli er lítill gígur, sem heitir Beinahver, og suður af honum og nær bæ er Öskuhver. Í þá hafa verið borin bein og aska." segir í örnefnalýsingu. Öskuhver er beint suður af Beinahver. Hann er grynnri og enn grónari. Í honum er mjög mikill gróður og rabbabarabeð en ekki sjást merki mannistarleifa.
Gróinn gígur. Örlitlar leifar járnrusls eru í gígnum.
19.06.2007: Rofunum af gamla bænum var rutt niður í gíginn að suðvestanverðu og sést vel fyrir því. Rotþró hefur verið grafin inn í suðausturhlið gígsins. Ösku var hent í þennan gíg fram á 20. öld. (OV)
Hættumat: hætta, vegna ábúðar
Heimildir: Ö-Haganes, 2
Heimildamaður: Ívar Stefánsson

SÞ-199:067 garðlag landamerki 65°34.716N 17°02.957V
Tvöfaldur garður er í Hamarshólum á merkjum milli Haganess og Álftagerðis. Annarsvegar er svotil þráðbeinn garður (lítlisháttar sveigja á honum til suðurs þar sem hann endar að austan) og er merkjagirðingin á honum eða meðfram honum. Hinsvegar er hlykkjóttur garður sem er norðan við hinn uppi á Hamarshólum en snýr síðan suðurfyrir þar sem hólunum byrjar að halla til vesturs. Framhald þessa garðs má rekja áfram til vesturs út á hraunið og er hann amk. 553 m langur. Þar sem lengst tókst að rekja hann til vesturs endar hann við hraunnibbu um 40 m sunnan við núverandi merkjagirðingu.
Báðir garðarnir eru hlaðnir úr hraungrýti og sést það vel vestan til í Hamrshólum en annars eru þeir báðir vel grónir á köflum. Grjóthleðslur sjást einnig vel þar sem gaðurinn er hlaðinn á hrauni vestan við hólana en í mýrarsundum á milli er hann alveg

sokkinn og sést sumstaðar aðeins sem fjalldraparæma í gegnum störina. Garðurinn er víðast um 2 m breiður. Hvergi eru meir en 2 umför af grjóti og garðurinn er mest 0,4 m hár, en víðast lægri
Hættumat: hætta, vegna mannaferða
Heimildamaður: Árni Einarsson



SÞ-200 Skútustaðir

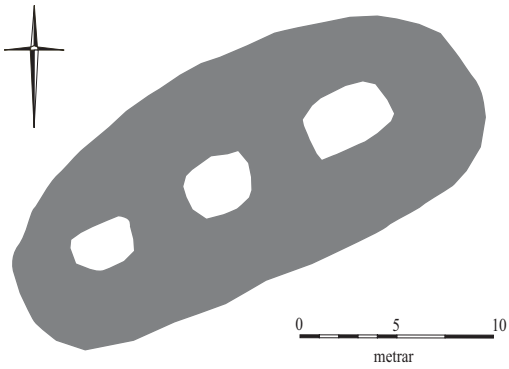
SÞ-200:003 *Þinghús* heimild um þingstað 65°33.989N 17°01.978V
"Gamlikirkjugarður er vestur af fjósbyggingu Kristjánssona. Garður þessi var lagður niður 1863-64, en þó mun hafa verið grafið þar síðan. Í Gamlakirkjugarði var kirkja fyrir 1863, síðan notuð sem þinghús, þar til Þinghúsið var byggt 1896." segir í örnefnalýsingu. Búið að slétta þennan garð og eru þar snúrustaurar nú. Vestan við þar sem áður var fjós og austan við byggingu sem þar stendur nú (nýrra fjós?). "Í gamlakirkjugarði var kirkja fyrir 1863, síðan notuð sem þinghús, þar til Þinghúsið var byggt 1896. Þinghúsið stóð sunnan við fjósið, var rifið 1953." segir í örnefnalýsingu. Þinghúsið (og kirkjan) var þar sem er hlað, mitt á milli íbúðarhússins Skútustöðum II og fjóss (sem nú er að verða að þjónustuheimili fyrir starfsmenn Selsins).
Malarhlað.
2007: Mannabein komu upp þegar grafið var fyrir vatnslögn heim að Skútustöðum III. Gamlikirkjugarður er talinn hafa náð alveg á milli fjóssins og skemmunnar en ekki er vitað hvort þinghúsið hafi staðið á sama stað og kirkjan í garðinum. (OV)
Hættumat: hætta, vegna ábúðar
Heimildir: Túnakort 1919; Ö-Skútustaðir, 2.

SÞ--200:070 öskuhaugur 65°33.952N 17°01.998V

Um 30 m SSV af Skútustöðum III, á suðurbrún Hjallhóls, um 10 m austan við steyptan súrheysturn velta bein út úr barði. Borun sýndi fram á allat að 2,5 m djúpan öskuhaug sem hefur fyllt lítinn gervigíg á brúnininni og nær líka niður alla brekkuna. Hún er 8-10 m há.
Hár og brattur hóll í túni

SÞ-200:071 *Öskutangi* öskuhaugur 65°33.938N 17°01.925V
Um 60 m suður af svuðvesturhorni kirkjugarðs gengur lítill tangi út í tjörnina. Annar öskuhaugur er í tjarnarbrúninni um 10 m vestar.
Þessi tangi gæti hafa verið skráður 1998 sem Smiðjutangi (022) en hann mun vera 20-30 m vestar, lítill tangi með hraunnibbu.
Hættumat: hætta, vegna ábúðar
Heimildamaður: Árni Einarsson

SÞ-204 Garður



SÞ-204:041 *Litli Garður* tóft býli 65°33.701N 16°58.446V
Norðan undir Arngarðshólum gengur lítill höfði út í Mývatn og er hann tengdur meginlandinu með grónu sandrifi. Garðsvogsmegin (austanmegin), syðst á þessu rifi er þrískipt tóft og óljóst garðlag (042) um 70 m sunnar, í rótum Arngarðshóla. Litli Garður er tæplega 1 km norðan við Garð 001.
Tóftin er austanmegin á grónu sandrifi sem tengir tvö samvaxna hraunhóla við meginlandið. Á rifinu er talsverður jarðvegur og sléttur grasmói. Sunnan við er samfelld hólaröð meðfram Garðsvogi suður að Garði. Fast sunnnan við tóftina er stallur og á honum hefur verið ræktað tún.
Þrískipt, aflöng tóft á náttúrulegum hrygg sem vatnsbakkinn hefur brotið af austurendann. Tóftin er 25x11 m að utan en hólfin (frá austri til vesturs): 4x2,5, 3x2,5 og 3x2 m. Rústahóllinn er meir en 2 m hár og þar af eru hleðslur tæplega minna en 1 m þó erfitt sé að greina hvar byggingar taka við af hinum náttúrulega hól. Engin skýr mannverk sjást í rofinu á vatnsbakkanum austanmegin
Hættumat: engin hætta
Heimildamenn: Árni Einarsson, Kári Þorgrímsson

SÞ-204:042 garðlag 65°33.636N 16°58.476V
Á loftmynd sem Árni Einarsson hefur tekið sést garður sunnan við Litla Garð 041. Hann sést hinsvegar óglöggt á jörðu niðri. Suðausturendi garðsins, við vatnsbakkann, er greinilegastur en þaðan má rekja hann um 70 m til norðvesturs þar sem hann hverfur undir tún. Sá endi er um 70 m suður af Litla Garði 041.
Þar sem garðurinn er greinilegastur er hann 2,5 m breiður og 1,25 m hár. Þar er hann hlaðinn í brekkurótum en vestast þar sem hann skilur sig frá brekkunni er hann alveg sprunginn í þúfur og er þar 3-4 m breiður. Hann er algróinn. Mögulegt er að þessi garður hafi girt af nesið sem Litli Garður er á en um það sjást þó engin merki að vestanverður þar sem túninu sleppir.

Litli Garður (tóft ofan við miðja mynd og garðlag til hægri). Horft í austur. Myndina tók Árni Einarsson.

Hættumat: hætta, vegna ábúðar
Heimildamaður: Árni Einarsson

SÞ-209 Grímsstaðir

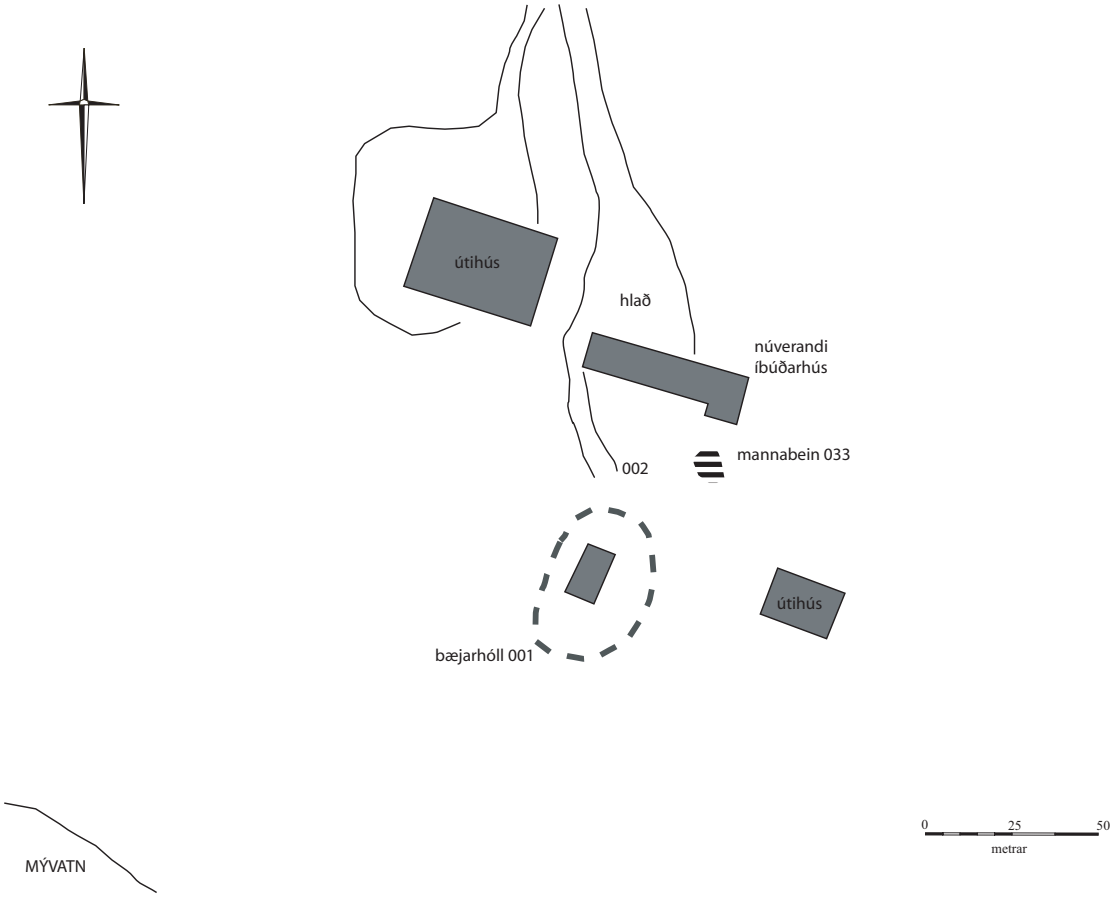
SÞ-209:048 *Á Húsum* tóft beitarhús 65°39.150N 17°00.367V
"Beitarhús stóðu austan í Húsás sunnarlega, oft kallað Á Húsum. Nú eru þar tættur, stundum nefndar Húsatættur." segir í örnefnalýsinu. "3. Húsaás er örnefni um 1,5 km vestur frá Grímsstöðum, miðja vegu milli Grímsstaða og Selåss. Þar eru unglegar selrústir, en einnig er þar mikill garður mjög forn og nokkrar minni garðhleslur sem einnig virðast gamlar. Ekki er mér kunnugt um fornar húsarústir, en þær geta legið faldar undir síðari alda selrústum. Garðhleðslurnar benda til fornbýlis, en ekki mér kunnugt um að þekktar séu nokkrar sagnir um þetta býli." ET Stöng og önnur eyðibýli, 31. Húsatættur eru 1,5 km vestan við þjóðveginn, beint vestur af Stóruborg. Tóftin er suðaustast á Húsaásnum og er greinilega frá þjóðveginum þar sem þær standa hærra en umhverfið í kring og auk þess eru þær fagurgrænar.
Tóftin er á hæð á lyngivöxnum ás.
Tóftin er 25 X 10 m að stærð og eru a.m.k. fjögur hólf í henni. Hólfin eru misgreinileg og verið getur að fleiri hólf séu við tóftina. Greina má grjóthleðslur á stöku stað. 2007: Þar eru engir garðar í kring eins og ET gefur í skyn en fleiri tóftir en voru skráðar 1999. Ein stök tóft, lítil, er á hóli um 20 m SV við beitarhúsatóftina og um 40 m austan við hana er tóftalegt svæði, má með góðum vilja greina þar þrískipta tóft, aflanga frá N til S. (OV)
Hættumat: engin hætta

Heimildir: Ö-Grímsstaðir, 14; ET Stöng og önnur eyðibýli, 31.

SÞ-209:082 garðlag vörslugarður 65°39.200N 17°02.056V
"Norðan og austan við þessi garðlög er einn af þessum breiðu "göngugörðum", sem girðir Selholtið af, og liggur í boga frá vatninu og suður á Selásenda, þar sem flóamýrar og tjarnir taka við. " HH. "Stóri garðurinn er um 700 m langur, byggður eingöngu úr lausum jarðvegi. Nú er hann víða um 10 m breiður og 0,5 m hár eftir að frost og þýða hafa flatt hann út um 5 til 10 aldir. Að vestan nær hann að vatnsborði Sandvatns, en að suðaustan gengur hann um 100 m út á hraun sem vatn flæðir um. Eitt greinilegt hlið er á garðinum, í norðaustur frá bæjarrústunum sem eru umluktar innri görðum." ET. Norðan við Selholt liggur mjög stæðilegur garður frá Sandvatni í sveig upp í ásinn vestan við holtið og yfir hann til vesturs þar sem hann hverfur í stararfen. Bílslóði sem liggur eftir Selási er ofan á garðinum á kafla.
Liggur að mestu um þurrt mólendi en hverfur í mýri.
Hættumat: hætta, vegna ábúðar
Heimildir: HH, 14; ET Stöng og önnur eyðibýli, 29-31.

SÞ-212 Vindbelgur

SÞ-212:001 bæjarhóll bústaður 65°36.922N 17°01.470V
Um 15 m suðaustan við núverandi íbúðarhús. 10 m vestur af gamalli, stórri hlöðu.
Ósléttur bæjarhóll.
Ábúendur nota þetta gamla bæjarhús sem reykhús. Húsið var stærra áður. Það er búið að slétta í kringum það, en því hefur verið haldið við. Það sem enn stendur er eldhúsið gamla. Dagbók OV 15.06.2007: "Ég skil Jón þannig að torfhúsið sem enn stendur sé framhlutinn af eldri bæ, en að yngri bær, frambær eins og á Syðri Neslöndum, þessi þó bárujárnsklæddur, hafi staðið norðan við, þar sem nú er flöt sunnan við skemmuna



sem er áföst núv. íbhúsi. Það stendur þó á ekki síður girnilegum hól en torfhúsið. Hólmyndunin undir torfhúsinu er 1,5-2 m há og sá hóll er 35 m langur frá N-S, og 25 m breiður frá A-V. Múr hefur verið settur milli steinanna í austurhluta suðurgafls þessa húss. Tvíbýli var á bænum á fyrri hluta 20. aldar (og eflaust áður) og skýrir það af hverju bæirnir voru tveir samtíða, hlið við hlið. Eðlilegra hefði verið að líta á þetta allt sem eitt bæjarstæði enda eru engin skil sjáanleg í landinu milli 001 og 002. Bærinn snéri stöfnum í austur. Jón segir að elsti bærinn sem hann hefur heyrt um hafi haft burstir sem snéru í austur. Aðkoma að bænum var aftan að honum, úr NNV eins og nú og gæti slóðin sem liggur niður geil í brekkuna sem best verið forn - ég spurði Jón þó ekki að því."
Hættumat: hætta, vegna ábúðar
Heimildir: Túnkort 1919.

SÞ-212:033 heimild um legstað 65°36.932N 17°01.443V
Mannsbeinagrindur komu í ljós um miðja 20. öld þegar vatnslögn var lögð frá brunni NA við íbúðarhúsið heim að því. Grindurnar voru fjölmargar, en snéru sitt á hvað, bæði af börnum og fullorðnum. Þessi staður er um 10 m suður af núverandi íbúðarhúsi, 25 m norðaustur af torfhúsinu á 001.
Slétt grasflöt heima við bæ. Brunnurinn er í brattri brekku niður af flötinni.
Hættumat: hætta, vegna ábúðar

SÞ-213 Geirastaðir

SÞ-213:036 tóft 65°35.409N 17°06.709V
Geirastaðamegin á móts við þar sem Syðstakvísl og Miðkvísl koma saman, um 100 m

Tóft við Kleifarhólma, horft í suðaustur. Neðan við tóftina glittir í Ásmund Jónsson bónda á Hofstöðum sem vísaði á staðinn.

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.
Hættumat: engin hætta

Varða við götu milli Hofstaða og Geldingatótta. Horft upp eftir Laxárdal til suðurs.

SÞ-214 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 ofan á haug sem er 7 m frá norðri til suðurs (snýr eins og gatan neðan við) og 3-4 m breiður frá austri til vesturs. Hann er um 1,5 m hár en í vörðunni eru 2 umför og hefur hún aldrei verið stór um sig.
Hættumat: engin hætta

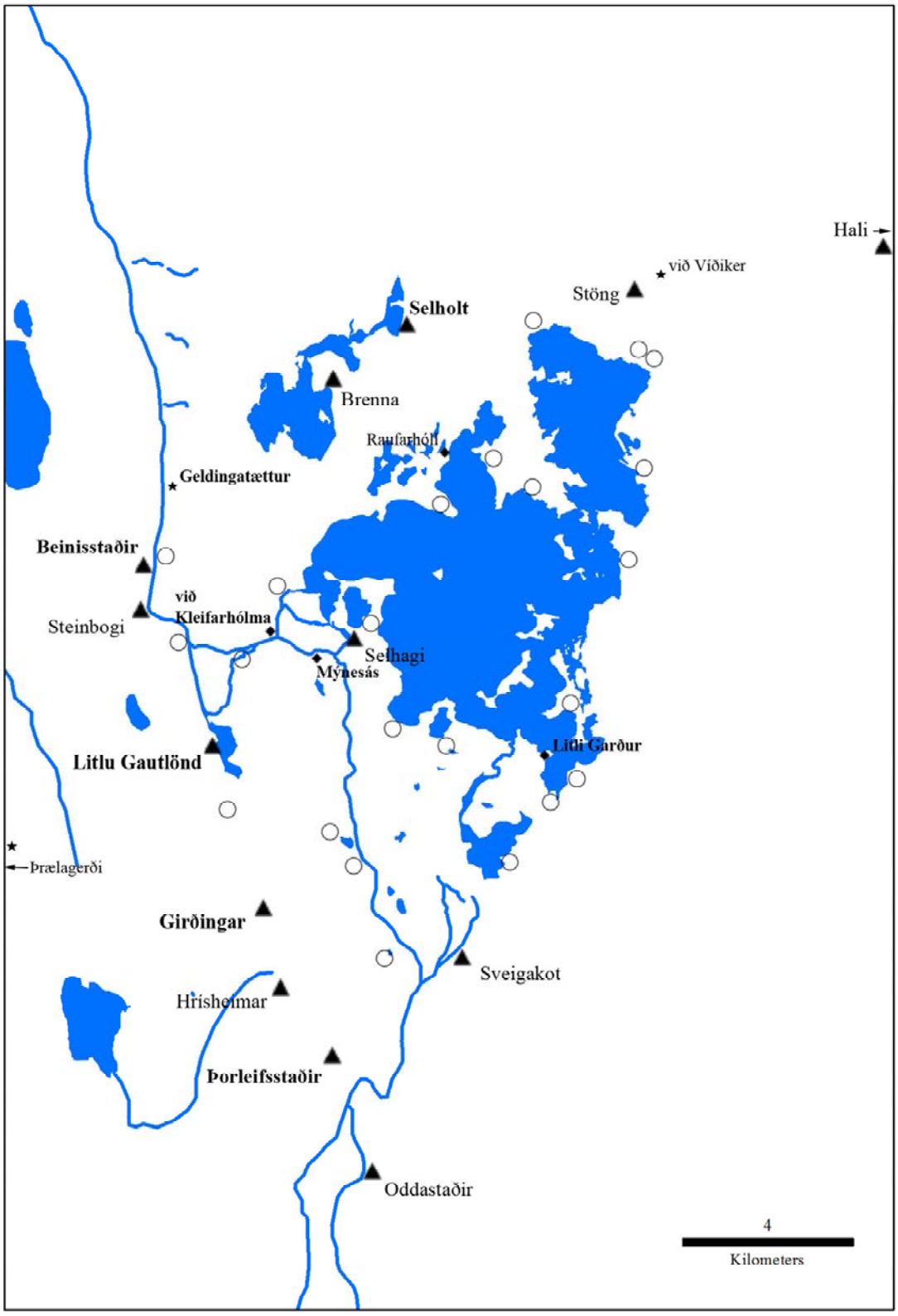
Orri Vésteinsson

Discussion

The results of the 2007 season confirm earlier observations that a large number of farms were abandoned in Mývatnssveit before 1300. It is now possible to state with confidence that 11 farms (Beinisstaðir, Brenna, Hali, Hrísheimar, Litlu-Gautlönd, Oddastaðir, Selhagi, Selholt, Steinbogi, Sveigakot, Þorleifsstaðir) had been abandoned by the time the H-1300 tephra was deposited. In some cases it seems that the abandonment had occurred much earlier (before 1158 in Hali and Brenna) but in others occupation continued well into the 13th century (Steinbogi, Þorleifsstaðir) and at Sveigakot the final abandonment seems to take place either side of 1200. In addition there are two further sites; Stöng, which was abandoned before 1477, and Girðingar, which has not been trenched but belongs typologically to the Viking age. Girðingar is hardly the original name of this farm and it may be that it is the actual location of Bjarnastaðir reported as a long abandoned farm in the Land-register of 1712.[10] It has been assumed that the 19th century farm of the same name had been built on the same site as the pre-Arnamagnaean one, but analyses of soil profiles in the home-field of the 19th century Bjarnastaðir suggested no anthropogenic presence bleow the 19th century horizons.[11] It is therefore likely that Girðingar was originally called Bjarnastaðir.

The tally of abandoned farms could therefore be as high as 13, and added to that there are at least two sites of an intermediate type (too small to be farms, too large to be plain animal stalls) with medieval abandonment dates – við Víðiker before 1158 and Geldingatættur before 1477. Yet another site type, discussed below, could up the number even more, to 17 or more. That most, if not all, of these farms had been abandoned before the 14th century is supported by the 1318 charters of the churches at Skútustaðir and Reykjahlíð, which show that the former had 12 and the latter 6 farms

[10] *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalín* XI. *Þingeyjarsýslur*, Kaupmannahöfn 1943, p. 224.
[11] Ian Simpson, pers. comm.



Map of Mývatnssveit showing abandoned farms securely dated to medieval times (triangles); the intermediate type of site (stars); possible early sites on the lake (diamonds) and the permanent farms (circles). Sites reported in this publication are in bold.

in their parishes, a total which corresponds exactly with the number of *lögbýli* in each parish in later times.[12]

At present it seems that these sites were not all abandoned at the same time, and the abandonment phase could be as long as two centuries, from the 11th to the 13th, with possible outliers in the 14th and even 15th centuries at Selholt and Stöng respectively. It should also be noted that dating the dereliction of home-field boundaries does not necessarily translate into dating the final abandonment of a farm. At Sveigakot a long history of decline has been recorded, with at least one temporary abandonment phase, and it may well be that at farms on such a trajectory field-boundaries were among the first structures to go out of use. It should also be remembered that in Iceland home-field boundaries eventually went out of general maintenance at some point before early modern times, and it may well be that this point was in fact the 13th century. Even so at nearly all the Mývatnssveit sites indications are available for other features, confirming the pre-1300 abandonment dating.

The length of occupation at these sites seems to have been quite variable. At the best documented sites the occupation spans upwards of 4 centuries: At Þorleifsstaðir the occupation began between 871±2 and ~940 and lasted to the late 13th century (possibly not continuously though); at Sveigakot it also began in the late 9th century and continued with one major hiatus until the end of the 12th century; at Steinbogi occupation had begun by the late 10th century (and possibly earlier) and lasted until the second half of the 13th century. At Hrísheimar there is also evidence for a very early start but the end of occupation there remains unclear. However the unexcavated deposits appear substantial, much more so than at Sveigakot, implying a similar if not longer occupation. At other sites the evidence is more circumstantial – the lack of home-field boundaries at Hali, Selhagi and Beinisstaðir may suggest a short-lived occupation, and in the case of Hali which was clearly abandoned long before 1158, a very early one too. Girðingar seems also to be a single phase occupation even if it has a home-field boundary. Along with Hali it is the only site in Mývatnssveit with the remains of a Viking age hall clearly identifiable on the surface. All the others have more recent structures on top of the Viking age/medieval

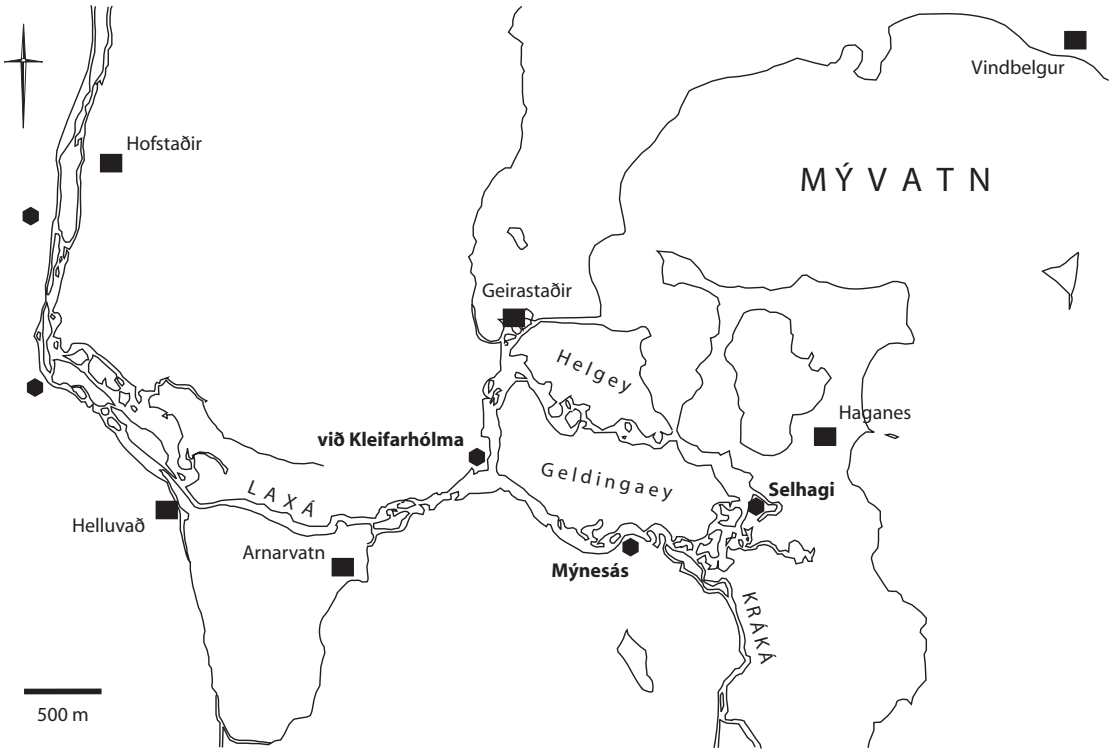
[12] *Diplomatarium islandicum* II, 429-30. The numbers do not include the church farms themselves, nor the annex-church farms of Hofstaðir and Grænavatn, which were technically independent parishes, not owing customary dues to the other churches.

dwellings. At Oddastaðir, Selholt, Brenna and Litlu-Gautlönd, double and even treble home-field boundaries attest to at least more than one building phase. In the cases of Oddastaðir and Brenna the occupation seems to have come to an end before 1158, suggesting perhaps a 100-150 year lifespan for those farms.

The abandoned sites are quite variable in terms of size and site status. The excavations at Sveigakot and Hrísheimar suggest that the latter site was of considerably higher status than the former, and there are considerable differences in the sizes of the home-fields, ranging from less than 0,5 ha at the intermediate type of sites, to about 1 ha at the smallest farm sites up to 9 ha at the largest. The number of ruins is also quite variable and although this may indicate more the length of occupation than the size of the operation in each case, there is a rough correspondence between home-field size and the number of ruins. Although comparable evidence is not available for the permanently occupied farms, it seems unlikely that they were substantially larger. In fact, as late as 1919 – after a period of substantial home-field levelling and enlargement – home-field sizes in Mývatnssveit ranged from 1 ha to 7,7 ha,[13] suggesting that the abandoned farms represent more a cross-section of Mývatnssveit society rather than a particular rung in the socioeconomic ladder.

What these sites do have in common is that they are all, except Selhagi, on the outer margins of the Mývatnssveit settlement. They are not necessarily ecologically marginal but they can all be described as occupying a zone between the permanently occupied farms and the summer pastures all around the district. Selhagi is however an important exception to this pattern, located at the outflow of Mývatn, at one of the most nutrient rich locations available in Mývatnssveit. It is an important exception because it lacks most of the attributes which are normally associated with a farm: it consists only of a single ruin (albeit a large and complex one) and does not have any home-field around it. If it were not for the archaeofauna from this site it would not be possible to classify it as a farm, but the bones have an undoubted farming signature. Considering its location it is indeed the relatively modest numbers of bones of wild animals that is surprising. Geirastaðir, one of the permanent farms on the lake, and a farm by tradition considered to be one of the earliest, is located in a similar setting on the northern side of the outflow from the lake, in the same sort of lava-field. At Geirastaðir a home-field has been made on the lava, requiring considerable effort no

[13] Skútustaðahreppur. Túnakort. Jarðadeild. Þjóðskjalasafn Íslands.



Plan of the outlet of Mývatn, showing the location of possible early settlements (hexagons) and permanent farms (squares).

doubt, as soil and manure will have needed to be transported manually onto the bare rock for anything to grow there. It is therefore possible that Selhagi represents a similar type of site location as Geirastaðir, but had become abandoned before efforts to produce a home-field had resulted in any permanent alteration of the vegetation. Intriguingly there are two further sites on the river-banks in the outflow area which could also be settlements of a short-lived nature: unnamed site við Kleifarhólma SÞ-213:036 and Mýnesás SÞ-198:049 both reported above. Both have only a single ruin, but in both cases they are of a size to be dwellings, and at Mýnesás the ruin is associated with a boundary that might define a ca 3 ha home-field. If these turn out to be farms then it might be possible to argue that there was an initial concentration of settlement around the outflow of the lake – which would make excellent sense as it is an area of exceptionally high biomass. There are at least two similar sites located on the lakeshore far away from the outlet. One is Litli-Garður SÞ-204:041-042 reported above, and the other is Raufarhóll SÞ-212:011 reported in 1997.[14] The latter is associated with a pagan burial SÞ-212:012 which may support the interpretation of it

[14] Elín Ósk Hreiðarsdóttir, Orri Vésteinsson & Sædís Gunnarsdóttir, *Fornleifaskráning í Skútustaðahreppi* II. *Fornleifar í Baldursheimi, á Litlu-Strönd, Sveinsströnd, Arnarvatni, Neslöndum, Vindbelg og Geirastöðum*, Reykjavík 1998, p. 63-64.

as an early farm. Even more circumstantial cases could be made for other sites, like Arnarbæli and Kirkjubær/Rófugerði on the lakeshore of Skútustaðir.

There are two possible, and not necessarily exclusive, explanatory frameworks which can be brought to bear on the question of why this large scale farm abandonment took place in Mývatnssveit in the 11th to 13th centuries. On the one hand it is possible that the abandoned sites are precursors to the permanently occupied farms and that the abandonment therefore reflects relocations, restructuring and possibly instability of early settlements rather than any significant reduction in population or economic activity. The abandonments would then be seen as the consequence of trial and error in the first centuries of occupation, evidence that landscape-learning took a long time and required several fresh starts. This line of thinking was explored in a previous report where it was hypothesized that Oddastaðir could represent a relocation from Sveigakot in the late 11th century when we know that the latter site was periodically abandoned. A more complicated scenario was also imagined whereby Brenna fell victim to the success of Hofstaðir, if the latter really was only established after ~940. This would entail the Hofstaðir property having been carved out of the combined properties of Geirastaðir and Brenna, and the latter being abandoned in order to make Geirastaðir a viable unit. This line of reasoning can be applied to the putative early sites in the outflow area, which can easily be seen as locations chose by pioneers who were primarily interested in survival and in laying claim to those areas which could best aid survival. While excellent locations for fishing and bird-hunting these sites have however serious shortcomings for practically all other aspects of the farming model established in settlement period Iceland. It therefore makes sense that they would eventually have been abandoned for others with greater hay-making and grazing potential – Selhagi presumably for Haganes, Mýnesás for Arnarvatn and við Kleifarhólma perhaps for Geirastaðir or Hofstaðir.

Hali is probably best regarded as an abortive attempt to establish a farm a good distance outside the main settlement around the lake, but the rest of the positively identified pre-1300 abandoned farms seem all to have been operated for at least a generation, some definitely much longer. In all those cases it is difficult to argue that these farms occupy sites which are likely to have bee preferred initially to the locations of the permanent farms. They are as a rule further from the lake and have less hay-making potential than the permanently occupied farms. Unless our ideas about the concerns guiding site location in the settlement period are seriously

flawed, it seems therefore that relocation cannot be the main explanation for the abandonment of these sites. It simply makes little sense to suggest that Þorleifsstaðir and Hrísheimar were occupied when Baldursheimur was not, or that Sveigakot and Oddastaðir were occupied when Grænavatn was not. In addition to the pagan burials suggesting 9th-10th century occupation of the permanently occupied farms Grímsstaðir, Gautlönd and Baldursheimur, proof of human presence at Skútustaðir between 871±2 and ~940 has been obtained during fieldwork in 2008.[15] Relocation only becomes a possibility if it is suggested that it occurred outside the boundaries of the original farm, i.e. that the people of Þorleifsstaðir left, not for Baldursheimur, but some more distant location outside their property, e.g. one of the lower status farms on the eastern side of Mývatn for which no dating evidence exists. This however would be a rather convoluted scenario and cannot be preferred as it lacks all positive evidence to support it.

Another explanatory framework must therefore be preferred. This would have the abandoned farms established at the same time, or in a few cases perhaps slightly later, than the permanently occupied farms on the lake, and have them in operation concurrently with the latter group for upwards of 4 centuries. If this is correct it implies a major reduction in the number of households, and therefore potentially a major decline in population and economic activity. It is important to note that this development is not only evidenced in Mývatnssveit, but also in other parts of Þingeyjarsýslur.[16] So far however archaeological survey has not picked up on such large scale abandonment in other parts of the country so that although there may be factors obscuring such development elsewhere, it is best regarded as a regional rather than national phenomenon at present. The number of abandoned farms is in the order of one third to half between Skjálfandafljót and Jökulsá á Fjöllum, suggesting that a corresponding reduction in population would have had a major impact on the region, perhaps reducing the population from 2000 to 1200 persons. Of course absolute population decline is only one possible outcome of such a reduction – there could have been a corresponding increase in the size and number of households on the permanently occupied farms.

[15] Thomas H. McGovern pers. comm.

[16] E.g. in Reykjahverfi: 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, 45-63.

Traditional explanations of farm abandonment focus on natural catastrophes (volcanism, epidemics) and environmental degradation, but no positive evidence exists for any such factors in Mývatnssveit before 1300. Sigurður Þórarinsson's idea of an over-optimistic pioneer fringe[17] could apply, although he formulated it for settlements which were much more firmly on the highland margins, areas which in later centuries have been absolutely uninhabitable. His idea could however be adapted to the more benign environment of Mývatnssveit, viewing it not so much as over-optimism of how far inland it was possible to settle but rather of the total carrying capacity of the land. In this view the early settlers would have created too many and too small units, which in the long run proved not to be viable. If the abandonment turns out to have been a drawn-out process then that could be seen as support for this scenario. The abandonment was then not caused by any particular factor (i.e. like population decline or economic change) but more as opportunities arose for enlarging properties by merging them and leaving the less ideal farm site for the more ideal one. It could be pointed out that parts of Mývatnssveit look like planned settlements. The evenly spaced string of farms Girðingar-Gautlönd-Litlu-Gautlönd-Helluvað-Steinbogi-Beinisstaðir along upper Laxá and Gautlandalækur looks for instance very much like somebody planned it. If that somebody was greedy – as is often the case with landowners – then he or she may have overestimated the number of farm-units this stretch of land was able to support in the long run. It is easy to see how this can happen and it is also easy to see how it can take a long time for such mistakes to be unwound. Landowners would always be dependent on receiving rents from their farms and as long as the combined rents from two small units were greater than the rent of a single, larger unit, they would be inclined to keep the smaller units. Even when a larger unit could be envisaged to yield equal or higher rent than the two small units, this would have required investment and time which the landowners may have felt they could not afford. This would of course depend on there being enough people prepared to rent the small units, which is a proposition difficult to prove or disprove. Any incidental drop in population numbers would of course help in such a transition.

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[17] Sigurður Þórarinsson 1977, 'Gjóskulög og gamlar rústir. Brot úr íslenskri byggðasögu.' *Árbók hins íslenzka fornleifafélags 1976*, 5-38.

Another approach would be to ask: "cui bono?" And it is apparent that the permanently occupied farms benefited most from the abandonment. The farms which had indirect access to Lake Mývatn; Helluvað, Gautlönd, Baldursheimur, and Grænavatn, were each able to add the home-fields and pastures of two farms to their properties. While all the farms had been in operation, the permanent ones had been seriously hemmed in and their pastures will have been quite small, and substantially smaller than they became after the abandonment. Summer-pastures were presumably then as in later times primarily in the highlands, far away from Mývatnssveit itself, and adding a few score hectares to a property will therefore not have made much of a difference for a farm's capacity to graze lambs, wethers and horses in summer. It might have made a difference for its capacity to graze milch-cows and ewes in the all-important summer period when these animals were milked and were most in need of a nutritious diet. An increase in milk-production is therefore a possible explanation. Although it hardly constituted a burden of such magnitude to occasion these changes it can be noted in this context that in addition to other dues the church at Skútustaðir extracted a cheese due from 11 farms in its parish in 1318.[18] The cheese due was presumably introduced in the 12th or 13th centuries, and so clearly represents an additional burden, but only if we see it as reflecting that milk-products were being extracted from farmers in greater quantities from other parties, primarily landowners, can this be used to suggest a shift towards increased milk production. If we imagine that the farms had by and large been owned by yeomen farmers in the Viking age and were increasingly coming under the control of landowners in the 12th and 13th centuries then that would support this idea as landowners received all their livestock rent in butter.

The problem with this explanation is that there is no good evidence for this sort of shift in tenure patterns and that the archaeological evidence suggests a shift away from cattle towards higher number of sheep, and that the sheep were being raised more for wool and mutton than milk.

Another explanation, more compatible with the available archaeological evidence, would be to see the abandonments in terms of a shift away from intensive animal husbandry to more extensive regimes. It is well established that the farming model established by the settlers was primarily based on raising cattle, with equal or

[18] *Diplomatarium islandicum* II, 430.

near equal ratios between cattle and sheep, with significant numbers of pigs and goats as well.[19] Although practically nothing is known about how these animals were grazed, and it is not inconceivable that both pigs and goats were taken to far-away mountain pastures in summer, the general assumption is that they stayed close to home year-round, complementing the image of intensive farming.

If we equate the smaller properties of the Viking age with the Viking age farming model, with its primary emphasis on cattle, then it makes sense to see the abandonments as symptomatic of a change away from that model towards the one well known from early modern times, emphasising sheep. The abandonments do coincide in time with the disappearance of pigs and goats from the zooarchaeological assemblages and it seems also with the beginnings of a dramatic increase in sheep numbers. The fly in the ointment is that this change is at present only demonstrated for Steinbogi, one of the smallest farms that became abandoned before 1300, a site which is too small to support anything but miserable numbers of sheep, but nevertheless exhibits dramatically higher ratios of sheep to cattle around 1200 than any of the Viking age sites.

No doubt the actual process of was more complex than the neat dichotomy of small properties=cattle vs. large properties=sheep would imply. And it is quite likely that some of the other factors mentioned here, as well as others not mentioned, influenced the development.

As is always the case, the much clearer picture we now have of the archaeology of Mývatnssveit calls for more questions to be answered. The tasks ahead can be suggested to include:

- Characterization and dating of suggested habitation sites around the outflow of Mývatn and along its shores.
- Confirmation of the Viking age date of Girðingar
- Confirmation of Viking age dates of occupation at more of the permanently occupied sites, esp. the lower status ones.
- Collection of proxy data to independently assess the different status of the permanent farms.

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[19] McGovern, Thomas H., S. Perdikaris & C. Tinsley 2001, 'The economy of landnám. The evidence of zooarchaeology.' *Approaches to Vínland*, A. Wawn & Þórunn Sigurðardóttir eds., (Sigurður Nordal Institute studies 4), Reykjavík, 154-65.

- Analyses of animal bones from deeply stratified middens (i.e. from the Viking age to late medieval/early modern times) at a representative sample of both permanently occupied and abandoned farms. This work has already started with investigations at Skútustaðir but a lower status permanent site also needs to be examined as well as a longer sequence for 1-2 of the abandoned farms.

Finally, the human bone finds at Gautlönd and Vindbelgur deserve a short comment. At the former site the two finds of human burials in 1947 and 1952 are in close proximity to each other and they line up with the confirmed pagan burial found there in 1855. The 1947 find was of a skeleton in a wooden coffin, oriented north-south, and it is these bones that were re-excavated in 2007, turning out to be of at least two individuals. The 1952 find involved more than one individual, but orientation was not noted. This means that a minimum number of 5 people have been found at Gautlönd, and the apparent linear arrangement of the graves as well as the orientation of the 1947 find may suggest that they are all pagan burials. The possibility that the mid-20th century finds are from a Christian cemetery cannot however be ruled out – the density of burials and the lack of grave goods could be used to support such an interpretation.

The human bones found by the farm mound in Vindbelgur in the mid-20th century are described as numerous and oriented this way and that. The apparent density of the graves, the location of the cemetery adjacent to the farm mound and the lack of grave goods is consistent with a Christian cemetery, but the information that the graves were oriented in various directions could indicate a pre-Christian grave site. In either case this information adds Vindbelgur to the number of likely Viking age sites in Mývatnssveit.

Orri Vésteinsson

Samantekt

Mývatnssveit hefur verið vettvangur umfangsmikilla rannsókna á vegum Fornleifastofnunar allt frá upphafi hennar en á síðustu árum hefur heldur dregið úr fjölda og stærð verkefna þar enda hafa þau klárast eitt af öðru. Rannsókn á skála á Hofstöðum var lokið 2002 og uppgrefti á Sveigakoti 2006, en uppgreftir á kirkju og kirkjugarði á Hofstöðum og bæjarstæði Hrísheima liggja niðri um hríð en stefnt er að því að taka upp þá þræði aftur á næstu árum. Auk þessara stóru uppgraftarverkefna hefur verið gerð heildarskráning fornleifa í sveitinni (1996-1999), nokkrir takmarkaðir uppgreftir í öskuhauga hafa verið gerðir (á Steinboga og í Selhaga) og skurðir hafa verið teknir í nokkur fornleg bæjarstæði til að ákvarða aldur þeirra – það eru Brenna, Stöng, Víðiker og Oddastaðir. Allir þessir staðir eru frá miðöldum og liggur fyrir að öll þessi býli – að Hofstöðum undanskildum – höfðu lagst í eyði fyrir 1300, sum fyrir 1158.

Fleiri fornleg eyðibýli eru í Mývatnssveit og var ákveðið að láta reyna á hvort hægt væri að aldursgreina þau með einföldum skurðgrefti. Á öllum stöðunum fyrir utan Beinistaði voru grafnir litlir skurðir í túngarða en á Beinsstöðum eru engir garðar varðveittir og þar var grafið ofan í dæld þar sem ætla má að bærinn hafi staðið. Allsstaðar fundust gjóskulög en misjafnt er hversu nákvæmlega var hægt að afmarka byggðina á hverjum stað í tíma. Skýrastar niðurstöður fengust fyrir Þorleifsstaði í Baldursheimsheiði en þar hefur byggð hafist milli 871±2 og ~940 en lagst af milli 1262 og 1300. Á Beinisstöðum, Litlu-Gautlöndum og í Selholti eru mannvirkjaleifar eldri en 1300 en á Geldingatóttum norðarlega i landi Hofstaða var aðeins að finna V-1477 yfir garðinum. Síðastnefndi staðurinn er að líkindum beitarhús eða sel fremur en mannabústaður.

Á grundvelli þessara og eldri greininga má því fullyrða að ekki færri en 10 býli hafi farið í eyði í Mývatnssveit fyrir 1300 og hefur þá orðið meir en þriðjungs fækkun á bólstöðum í sveitinni ef miðað er við að allar gömlu lögbýlisjarðirnar hafi jafnframt verið í byggð.

Samhliða skurðgrefti til aldursákvarðana var gerð könnun með jarðbor á nokkrum gömlum bæjarstæðum til að kanna þykkt og útbreiðslu öskuhauga. Þessi

verkhluti var undir merkjum alþjóðlega rannsóknarverkefnisns *Human and Social Dynamics in Mývatnssveit, Iceland, from the Settlement to the Present*, sem leitt er af Dr. Astrid Ogilvie. Markmið borkönnunarinnar var að staðsetja öskuhauga frá seinni öldum en rannsóknarverkefnið miðar að því að afla gagna um langtímaþróun umhverfis og samfélags í Mývatnssveit og bæta við hið umfangsmikla gagnasafn sem þegar hefur verið byggt upp um fyrst 2-3 aldir byggðar í sveitinni. Borað var á Grímsstöðum, Geirastöðum, Hofstöðum, Baldursheimi, Grænavatni og Skútustöðum og lítill könnunarskurður grafinn á Geirastöðum. Allsstaðar fundust vísbendingar um öskuhauga, en mismiklar og var öskuhaugur á Skútustöðum valinn til frekari rannsóknar sumarið 2008.

Þá var unnið að kumlaleit í sveitinni, gerðar athuganir á uppblæstri og jarðvegsþykknun og bætt við fornleifaskrá sveitarinnar. M.a. tókst nú að staðsetja eyðibýlið Girðingar syðst í landi Gautlanda en þar er skálalaga tóft með afhýsum innan ferkantaðs túngarðs.

Að lokum má geta þess að mannabein sem fundust á Gautlöndum 1947 og höfðu lengi verið geymd þar í kassa uns þau voru grafin aftur í útihústóft, voru nú grafin upp aftur. Reyndust það vera leifar tveggja einstaklinga og eru beinin mjög vel varðveitt þó töluvert vanti nú upp á að grindurnar séu heilar. Beinin höfðu komið í ljós á hól norðan við bæinn meir en 100 m frá þeim stað sem kuml fannst 1855 og er mögulegt að þau séu úr kumli líka þó einnig komi til greina að þau séu úr kristnum grafreit.