Skagafjörður Heritage Museum Booklet XXIII

READING THE LANDSCAPE

by Guðmundur St. Sigurðarson,
Guðný Zoëga and Sigríður Sigurðardóttir
English version by Nancy Marie Brown

2017

Foreword

With this booklet we hope to give those who are out and about, and who are curious about the old days and like to ponder the old ways of farming and working, the means to interpret the archaeological remains that can so widely be seen in the landscape. We will, however, only touch upon the main types of remains found, especially those mementos of the way of life before the modernizations of the 20th century. Even then we cannot provide a complete list, as it is hardly possible to describe all such remains in such a little book.

The beauty of nature has a magnetic attraction. The same is true of the cultural landscape in the minds of those who perceive how our forefathers used the land and set their mark upon it. It is customary to travel through the countryside without a guidebook or a map. There we can find names of farms and other places that recall past ways of life. If we examine these sites, we may see traces of old man-made structures-where they have not been plowed under or covered over by modern buildings. Here we can read remarkable tales. Bits of walls and half-ruined houses are to some people an eyesore, but knowing their purpose and the work that went into them we see them in a different light. Suddenly they reveal secrets that can truly enrich our lives.

Table of contest

Proofreading: Kathryn Catlin.
Frontpage picture: *Tjarnarkot in Sléttuhlíð. By Guðný Zoëga.*
Other pictures:
BSk. - Byggðasafn Skagfirðinga/Skagafjörður Heritage Museum.
HG - Hörður Geirsson.
HP - Hjalti Pálsson.
HSk. - Héraðsskjalasafn Skagfirðinga/Skagafjörður Archives.
MSA – Minjasafnið á Akureyri/Akureyri Museum.
SASS - John Shoenfelder.

ISBN-978-9935-9338-4-3

Reading the landscape

What do the ruins of old buildings and other man-made structures look like? What can they tell us? And how can we discover their age and what they were used for?

Throughout the ages, most structures in Iceland were built out of turf or stone or a mixture of the two. They usually had timber frames of some sort, and were sometimes clad to some extent with wood. From the first days of Iceland's settlement in the late 800s down to our own times, some buildings were built entirely of wood, but concrete doesn't enter our story until the turn of the 20th century. Some concrete structures are legally considered to be archaeological remains nowadays (over 100 years of age), but they are still very much in the minority, as far as archaeological remains go, and often look familiar to those who chance upon them. They are usually the cellar or foundations of a house, the abutments of a bridge, and so on. Wooden buildings, on the other hand, are less longlasting; they leave little sign of themselves once they are abandoned. Either the wood was salvaged and reused when the house was torn down, or else it rotted and decayed into the soil as time passed.

Structures made of turf and stones are of such a nature that their remains can last for centuries, even when they are buried in the earth. Where houses have been built on the same site, time after time, mounds form in which layers of human habitation are preserved. All over the countryside there are extensive farm mounds and other ruins that bear witness to this process. But even though these turf and stone structures still exist centuries later, they are not always easy to discern. How well they can be seen depends on many things, particularly on the direction of the light and the ground cover, and it can be hard to imagine how they once looked.

The farmstead at Málmey in Skagafjörður. The area surrounding the farm mound and the ruins in the homefield is much greener than the other vegetation on the island. The oldest remains, however, are the same color as the surrounding vegetation. Photo: HP.

For obvious reasons it's difficult to spot ancient building remains in wooded or brushy areas, no matter what time of year. Where seasonal changes in the ground cover are greater, though, the right time of year can determine whether or not we can pick them out. The best viewing conditions are in the spring and the fall. At these times, the remains stand out clearly from the surrounding earth because thick turf walls and layers of human detritus or animal manure act as good fertilizer: the ruins are often the first places to green up in the spring and the last to turn brown in the fall. The species of plants growing in an area can be another clue to the existence of archaeological remains as ruins are often overgrown with the types of plants commonly found around human habitations.

The older the remains, though, the less their effect on the greenery they end up blending into the surrounding vegetation more or less completely. Changes in the vegetation are thus not only useful for finding and recognizing remains, they can also tell us the likely age of the ruins. How lush and

distinct the vegetation is suggests how old the ruins must be. Along with the ground cover, the light conditions and the location of the sun make a big difference in the visibility of ruins, especially older ones or those that have been flattened, for instance by plowing. When the sun is low in the sky, shadows are drawn from insignificant dips and hollows that otherwise we would hardly notice, and the outline of a ruin can come to light.

Many clues can even reveal ruins under smooth pastures or plowed fields. The greenery may be richer and more lush over old ditches or other dug down features as the soil is deeper and more fertile. The effects can also be negative, for instance, where a stone structure under the field inhibits the growth of vegetation.

Once we have spotted the remains of ruins, the next step is to figure out what nature of ruins they might be. It helps to know what to expect: what the various kinds of ruins look like and where they are commonly found. The particular type of landscape, for example, wetlands, ravines, brooks, meadows, seasides, or lakes, as well as the kind of vegetation-woods, grasslands, and so on can give us important clues about the role of the ruins, as can the configuration of the ruins in relation to one another. Specific kinds of ruins are always found in specific places, and this rule can help us not only decipher the ruins we have found, but also guide our search for unknown or unrecorded ones.

What follows is a list of different kinds of ruins and other archaeological remains and where they can be found. The list is not comprehensive, but it gives a good picture of the most common types of remains and what they look like. To give our listing some kind of order, we've divided the remains into two groups: those found inside the homefield (the well-fertilized field immediately surrounding the farmstead), and those outside of it. Inside the homefield are the farmhouse,

smithy, and storehouses, the cow byre, sheep shed, lamb barn, and rams' stalls, the horse stable, hay barns, and hay platforms. Outside of the homefield are, for example, the sheep fold, shieling, and shepherds' huts, and enclosures of various kinds. Some types of ruins can fall into either category, for example, milking pens, which can be found beside both the farmhouse and the shieling as well as remains pertaining to sea going which might lie inside or outside the homefield.

Along with the things we have already mentioned, among the most productive ways to find ruins and to get an idea of their purpose and age is, of course, to consult written sources and talk to locals. It is perhaps unlikely that when we are out and about we will decide to embark upon a major research project to learn more about the remains we stumble upon. Still, it is worthwhile naming here the major sources that archaeologists use to find remains and to gather information about them:

- *boundary and placename registers (örnefnaskrá)*
- *maps, field maps, and aerial photographs*
- *local histories*
- *the Diplomatarium Islandicum (a published collection of ancient charters and documents)*
- *cartularies (máldagar)*
- *county and parish descriptions (sýslu- og sóknalýsingar)*
- *land registers (jarðabók)*
- *real estate registers (fasteignaskrá)*
- *assessments, farm registers, and accounts*
- *real estate assessments and appraisals (úttektir)*
- *travel books and biographies*
- *old photographs*

Aerial photographs are readily available on the internet, for example, through Google Earth or the Icelandic website *ja.is*. Where the photographs are good, we can clearly make out the location and outline of archaeological features; for that

reason, it is a good idea to take a look at such pictures before going out in the field. It can also be fun and rewarding to study aerial photos once we have discovered remains on an excursion, so that we can get a clearer idea of their extent. Sometimes we can see ruins or old walls very well in an aerial photo even though they are unclear from the ground. Archaeological surveying and, sometimes, excavation reports are also widely available on the internet.

It is worth keeping in mind that while we may find information on the age and purpose of a ruin, there is always a chance that it has, over time, played more than one role, and often older remains are hidden beneath younger ones. Sources of information about the latest purpose of a ruin or the most recent building on a certain site do not, after all, tell the whole story.

While the remains of olden times can truly enrich our lives by teaching us about our own history, providing us with both educational value and aesthetic pleasure, we must remember that access to and the treatment of such archaeological remains is subject to certain restrictions. Archaeological remains are the property of the Icelandic nation and special laws apply to them (such as the Heritage management laws Nr. 80 of 2012). These laws prohibit the damaging of any archaeological remains without the permission of the authorities charged to protect the nation's cultural heritage. It is equally important to be careful that heritage is not damaged by foot traffic or souvenir-hunting. The Cultural Heritage Agency of Iceland is in charge of the protection of cultural heritage and makes all decisions concerning the use of archaeological sites. The agency should be notified of any unexpected archaeological finds or of any damage to an archaeological site.

It goes without saying that it is common courtesy to introduce ourselves to the landowners and to ask permission before

exploring private property, especially if we are crossing fields or other land in use. Access to certain areas may be restricted at some times of the year, such as during the eiderduck nesting season, to give but one example. Neither is it much fun to find ourselves accidentally in the middle of a sheep roundup, or surrounded by a herd of horses or cattle, if we are not used to them. It is always better to be safe than sorry, and best to obtain information and permission before we start out.

Settlement remains inside the homefield

It is often easy to find signs of the old ways of farming and of old-time buildings in the homefields of farms that were deserted before or around the time of mechanization. Remains inside the homefields of farms that are still being worked, on the other hand, have often been erased by plowing or other agricultural or construction processes. Sometimes, though, we can still make out dips and hollows where old buildings once stood.

Remains of and around the farmstead

Farm mounds bear witness to the fact that farmhouses were consistently torn down and remodeled or rebuilt on the same site. Ash and rubbish were generally tossed out behind the farmhouse, creating a rubbish-heap or midden that in some places is hard to distinguish from the farm mound itself.

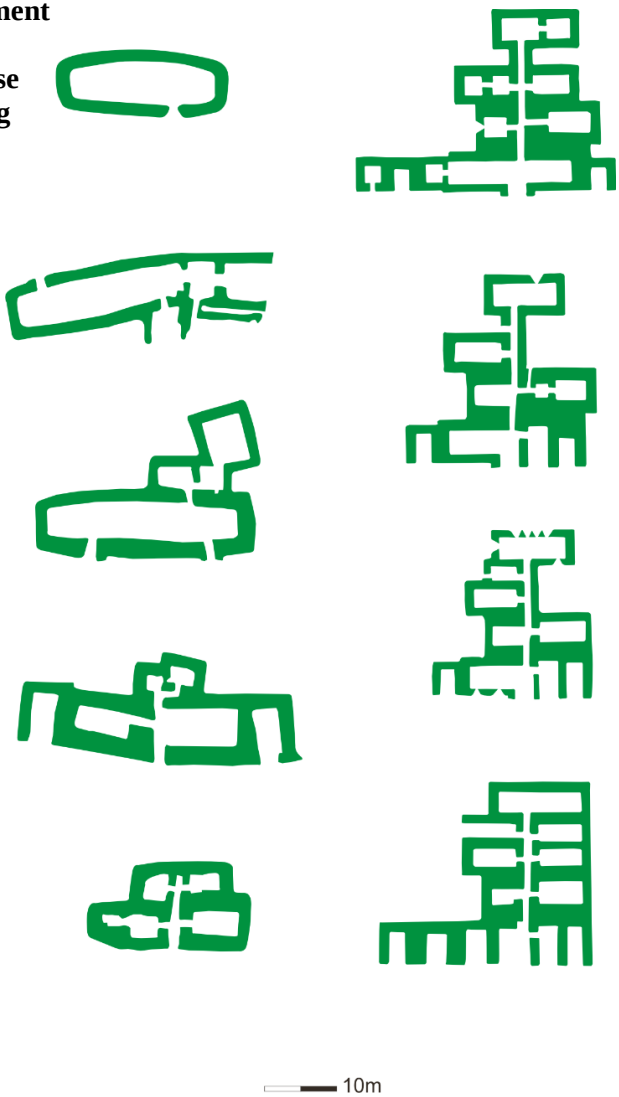
Farm mounds and middens are enormously important sources of information about life in the old days and preserve information about such things as house styles, diet, and ways of making a living, to name a few. Modern houses are often built on top of old farm mounds, but the mounds also frequently appear as luxuriant green hills or knolls in the landscape.

View over the old farm mound at Syðri-Hóll in Skagabyggð, Húnavatnssýsla. The farm was built on top of a natural hill that then continued to grow taller as the layers of human habitation accumulated. Photo: BSk.

The Farmstead and living quarters (íveruhús/híbýli[1]): Many different styles of farmhouse have been popular between the settlement of Iceland and our days. Most of the turfhouses that have been preserved are large or medium-sized houses in the style known as "passage farmhouses" which is the latest development of housing (see below). The ruins we are most likely to stumble upon, however, are mostly of small farms in places where modern farming methods have not set their mark on the environment.

[1] The Icelandic terms are all in singular form.

Development of turf farmhouse and living quarters



Farm houses: The drawings show the development of turf houses from the longhouse (top, left) to the gabled farmhouse, a passage farmhouse with gables facing the front yard (bottom, right). Illustration: BSk.

Longhouses (skáli): The oldest style of farmhouse, dating to the first centuries of settlement, is seldom visible on the surface of the ground; the walls have been buried and the vegetation covering them looks the same as that on the surrounding land. The ruins of a longhouse (or skáli) are oblong in shape, usually with long walls that are bowed out and about 15-30 meters in length. They can be either single, solitary ruins or in a cluster of connected buildings.

This aerial photo shows the turfhouses at Glaumbær, which is the style of farmhouse known as a "passage farmhouse." The main entrance is in house number 12 (Suðurstofa) and leads into a passageway, number 1, which runs between the back houses and leads to the one farthest back, which is the "baðstofa", nr.6-8, the family's main living quarters. House number 2 is the back entrance, number 3 is the kichen, number 5 is a formal living room, numbers 4 and 11 are larders, numbers 10, 13, 14 and 16 are store rooms, and house nr. 15 is the smithy. Photo: J.S./SASS.

Passage farmhouses (gangabær) replaced the longhouses. The usual arrangement for a passage farmhouse was to have

a hallway linking the formal living room, or *stofa*, in the front of the house, and the *baðstofa*, the family's main living quarters, at the back, with the kitchen and larders in between. There were a great many versions of this arrangement, with various numbers of houses of different sizes linked together in this way. Generally speaking, remains of passage farmhouses are easily recognized as a cluster of ruins, of which the size and number relate to the size and wealth of the farm. The latest examples of the passage farmhouse are called the gabled farmhouse and the front house. In the gabled farmhouse, the houses were ranked up side by side like the teeth of a comb, their gables all turned toward the front yard. In the front house, a wooden building stood in front of the cluster of houses, with its long side facing the front yard.

The cow byre (fjós): In ancient times it seems that the cow byre stood next to the farmhouse, the longhouse. In the most recent passage farmhouses, on the other hand, it was common to connect the byre to the house; usually it was part of the farmhouse cluster or built up against it and accessed through an internal passageway. A type of farmhouse with two stories was also known, in which the cows lived on the ground floor and the humans above. In addition to the byre at the farmhouse, there might also be a shed outside of the homefield where the cows were milked in the summertime; although called the *summer byre (sumarfjós)*, this shed was used for many tasks. The ruins of a cow byre can sometimes be recognized by the upright stones that divided the cows' stalls or by a stone-paved floor, but they can also be without any particular features.

Storehouse (skemma): The ruins of storehouses often account for many of the rooms found at a passage farmhouse. Usually they are found on either side of the main entrance to the farm or in the row of connected buildings that faces the front yard. Ruins of single storehouses look like that of any other kind of shed.

The smithy (smiðja): Sometimes smithies were part of the cluster of connected farm buildings, but, because of the danger of fire, it was also common for them to stand somewhat apart in the front yard. Strangely, archaeologists have discovered that it was common to re-use old churches as smithies and vice versa.

Fish-stones (fiskasteinn) often stood in the front yard of the farm. These were usually large stones with a bowl or hollow at the top from centuries of use: Dried fish and other hard foodstuffs were laid on these stones and beaten to soften them before eating.

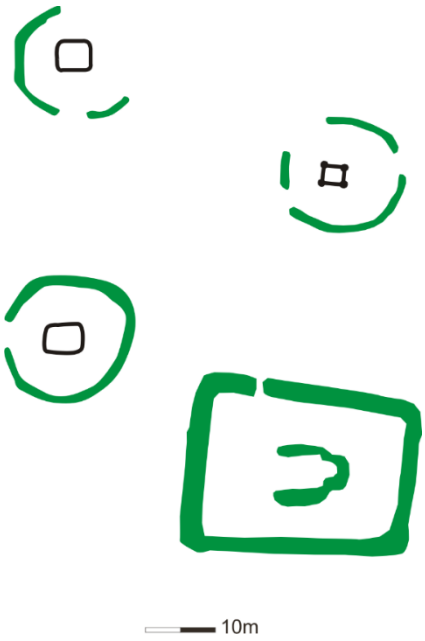
Horse-stones (hestasteinn), a combined hitching post and mounting block, were also common in the front yard or, at least, not far from the house. Horses were tied to these stones while their riders stepped inside for a moment or were getting ready to go on a trip.

The horse-stone at Glaumbær. Steps were cut into the stone so it could be used as a mounting block. Photo: BSk.

Various other worked stones can be found on or near an old farmstead. For example, there are stones in which basins were carved for handwashing, as well as cooling troughs used during by blacksmiths to cool the iron.

A church generally stood not far from the farmhouse. The photo is of a chapel at Gröf on Höfðaströnd. Photo: HG.

Churches (kirkja): Ruins of churches and chapels are often very small and without any distinguishing signs, but they are readily found on or near the farm mounds. Their long sides generally run east to west, and they may have a small projection, the choir, on the east end. What especially singles out a church ruin is if there is a wall surrounding it.



These drawings show the various shapes and sizes of churches and churchyards. Often the churches in the oldest churchyards were little wooden buildings that left no marks on the surface. For these, only the walls around them can be made out. Illustration: BSk.

Churchyards (kirkjugarður): Graveyards most often had boundary walls built of turf and/or stone and were usually close to the farm mounds. The oldest churchyards are mostly circular, about 15-25 meters in diameter, but they become larger and can be either oval-shaped or square, and of many different sizes, in later times.

Barns and other building remains in the homefield

Other than the ruins of the farmhouse itself, remains found in the homefield or the front yard are, as a rule, barns or out-buildings for livestock of one sort or another. In some cases, we find old turf houses inside the homefield of a large farm or estate; these are the ruins of a small farm whose occupants kept their own household alongside that of the main estate. Housing for livestock can be of many kinds and go by many names. Often the choice of name reveals the role of the building the ruin once was, but it was common for such buildings to have had many uses.

Here is a view from inside a two-aisled sheep shed, with foundation for the feeding trough in the middle and the arch of a doorway into the attached hay barn. The building had collapsed, but we have cleared the wooden supports and the roofing materials out of the way so that the method of laying up the walls and the feeding-trough can be clearly seen. Photo: BSk.

Sheep sheds (fjárhús): The ruins of sheep sheds can have several different distinguishing marks. The type known as a *feeding-trough barn (garðahús)* has a feeding-trough or hay rack running down the middle of the building with pens on either side. Doors for the animals were located either at one end of the manger or leading out from each pen. Usually there was an entrance from the feeding-trough into a connecting hay barn or hay platform. When two or more feeding-trough barns were conjoined, it was called a group barn or many-sided barn; these were built in many different styles. A sheep shed with only one pen usually had stalls with feeding-troughs along each long side. Sheep sheds were seldom connected to the farmhouse, but rather were scattered about the homefield; they were just as likely to be in the middle of it as along its edges. This same kind of building could also be found outside of the homefield and far from the farm, often near an old shieling where there were rich meadows and the sheep could graze outside long into the winter. Buildings of this sort, far from the farm, were called *grazing sheds (beitarhús)*.

Hay barns (hlaða) were often attached to sheep sheds but could also be free-standing structures. These barns were roofed over, but hay platform, which can still be widely found, were not really buildings at all, but rather low walls into which the hay was piled and then covered over with strips of turf.

Other out-buildings (útihús / hesthús / hrútakofi / lambhús / hænsnakofi): horse stables, rams' stalls, lamb barns, chicken coops, and so forth have often performed more than one role over time, as the need arose. These buildings have the distinguishing feature, though, of being smaller in scale, as a rule, than sheep sheds. Sometimes we can make out a feeding-trough or stall along one wall, but ruins of this kind of barn are generally without any special features that distinguish one from another. Chicken coops were mostly

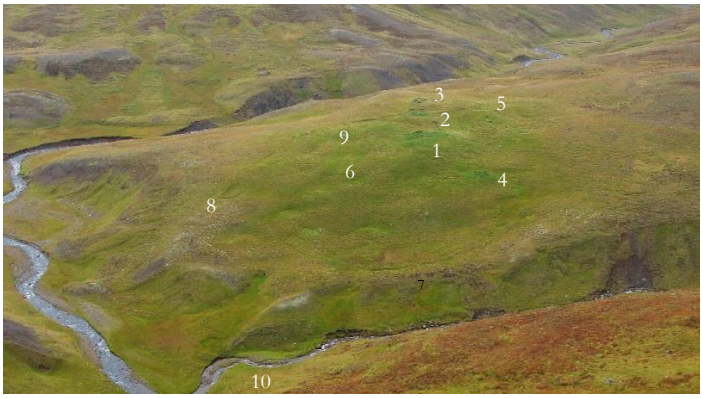
close to the house, while horse stables could be either close to the house or out along the edges of the homefield, which is where the rams' stalls were also generally found. But these buildings, along with the lamb barns, could also be connected to the farmhouse or to the sheep shed.

Very distinct hollows left by the remains of a two-sided sheep shed and a hay barn in the flattened homefield at the farm of Syðri-Ey in Skagabyggð, Húnavatnssýsla. Photo: BSk.

Ruins of a simple feeding-trough barn at Kálfárdalur in Húnavatnssýsla. Photo: BSk.

Sheep sheds and barns

Ruins of sheep sheds can take very different shapes. Often the hay barn or hay platform was adjacent to the sheep shed. Illustration: BSk.



Kálfárdalur in Húnavatnssýla was originally a summer shieling belonging to the nearby estate, Bólstaðarhlíð, but a year-round farm was established here sometime before 1700. It remained a large farm, by the standards of the time, until the turn of the 20th century, but was abandoned in 1935. Despite much activity at the farm over the last few centuries, mechanization never made it to Kálfárdalur, and the ruins and homefield are undisturbed for that reason, beautifully bearing witness to a lost way of life. Circling the hillocky homefield is the sunken homefield wall (no. 7), with a little corral and kitchen garden up next to it on the northern side (no. 8). Flat beds (no. 6) lie along the hillside to the north of the farmhouse (no. 1), below the farm lane (no. 9), a vestige of which can be seen right behind the house. A marked change in vegetation can be seen on this autumn day around the farmstead (no. 1), the out-buildings (nos. 2-4), and the milking pens (nr. 5), where the soil is deeper and better fertilized, allowing the growth to be richer in that area. In the little meadow down by the river Kálfá, wool was washed, but signs of such activities are seldom visible. Photo: BSk.

Other ruins inside the homefield

We often find earthworks of various kinds both inside and outside of the homefield. Under the category of earthworks we are lumping together all sorts of ruins that have no roofs, such as corrals (*réttir*) and fenced off night pastures, which are often found in combination with smaller bits of wall, such as the ruins of milking pens. Of course, the roofs have commonly collapsed in most ruins, and it can be difficult or

even impossible to say, in some cases, whether or not there had ever been a roof. Of the earthworks close to the farmhouse, the homefield boundary wall is the most obvious.

Homefield boundary walls (túngarður/vallargarður) are, more often than not, extensive constructions. At one time they circled almost every farm, although they have now largely disappeared due to modern agricultural practices, such as the mechanical flattening of hayfields. The homefield wall stretched around the entire homefield, protecting it and the farmhouses inside from damage by grazing animals over the summer.

The turf-built homefield wall around Glaumbær, on Langholt in Skagafjörður. Photo: BSk.

Corrals (rétt): Corrals of various sizes can be found close to the farmhouse even as part of the farmhouse cluster itself or out by the homefield wall. Small horse corrals or paddocks were often built right next to the farmhouse, so that the farmers could conveniently pen up their own mounts of those of their guests.

Wells and springs (brunnur/vatnsból) were important, since easy access to water was the basis on which a farm site was chosen. Wells were often stone-clad and could be several meters deep; usually they were circular in shape, but sometimes they were square. Springs, especially those that bubbled up, were also surrounded by some kind of structure, if necessary, to make them more accessible. We can widely see the marks of circular earthen berms where wells once were, but seldom is there anything left of them where people have flattened the fields around the farm and filled in the wells. Sometimes streams were redirected home to the farm.

A kitchen garden at Hofsós, Skagafjörður. Photo: BSk.

Kitchen and pleasure gardens (matjurtagarður / kálgarður / skrúðgarður): From the 18th through the 20th centuries, people kept kitchen gardens (vegetable and herb gardens) beside their farmhouses. Some farms also had pleasure gardens, with flowers and trees. Both can be found in the front yard or up next to the farmhouse, but kitchen gardens are just as often found next to the homefield wall or even outside of the homefield. The kitchen gardens were well protected from grazing animals, usually by a wall made of turf or stones; these walls, especially later in the 20th century, sometimes had a fence on top of them. Village dwellers also enjoyed having kitchen gardens, and we can readily find signs of them in and around the sites of old settlements. Kitchen gardens were placed where they would receive the most sunshine, which was often on a south-facing slope.

Flat beds (beðasléttur): Here and there we can see signs of tussock-flattening, an agricultural practice done by hand and common mostly between 1880 and 1930. For that reason this era is often called the Flat Bed Days (*þaksléttutíminn*). The so-called flat beds, long beds which are shaped like slightly convex strips of meadow land with shallow channels to allow for water drainage. The evidence for this type of land improvement has widely disappeared due to later agricultural practices.

Ditches and channels (skurður/ræsi): Hand-dug ditches used to be widespread on the homefields of farms, but they have also, for the most part, disappeared. Hand-dug ditches are, as a rule, considerably less extensive than machine-dug ones. Ditches were dug to drain the land and to direct the water to or from the hay meadows, and also to bring water to the buildings for watering the livestock. Where these ditches have been preserved, it's not uncommon for the spoil to look like a small embankment on either side of the ditch. Farmers also dug channels to lead water to their watermills, which of course stood beside a river or lake.

The farm lane (heimreið) was the last part of the road leading up to the front yard in front of the farmhouse. Sometimes it was stone paved all the way from the main road, through the homefield, to the front yard.

Remains outside of the homefield

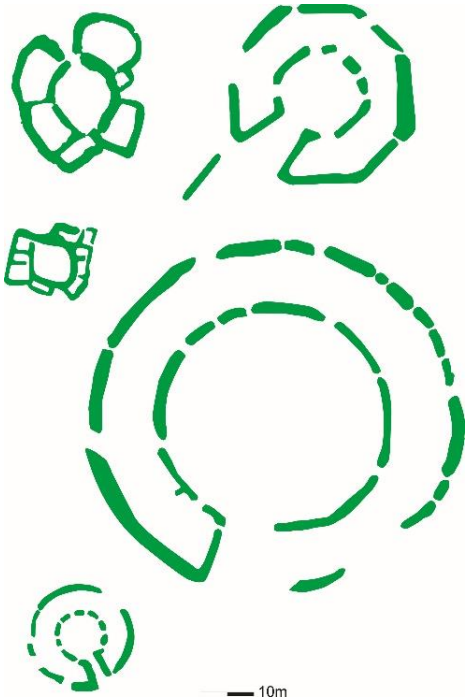
Settlement remains outside of the homefield are often better preserved than those inside it, as they are often in places where modern agricultural methods have never been practiced. Scattered here and there in the outer pastures will be ruins and traces of structures from several centuries; they reveal themselves especially well in the spring and fall, since they green up before their surroundings and stay green longer, although older ruins are often less luxuriantly vegetated and therefore less easily seen. As with the ruins inside the

homefield, the keys to unlocking their secrets are their appearance, their situation in the landscape, their relation to other ruins as well as written sources and local knowledge.

Shown here is the corral at Glerárrétt in Eyjafjörður. Photo: HSk. DB, nr. 1453.

The Hlíð corral at Bjarnastaðahlíð is the sorting pen for the farms of Vesturdalur in Skagafjörður. Photo: BSk.

Sorting pens
(Skilarétt)
Various forms of sorting pens. The large corral, into which all the sheep were driven before being separated, was usually called the "all-men's pen." From there, the animals were led into the smaller compartments. Each farm had its own compartment. Illustration: BSk.

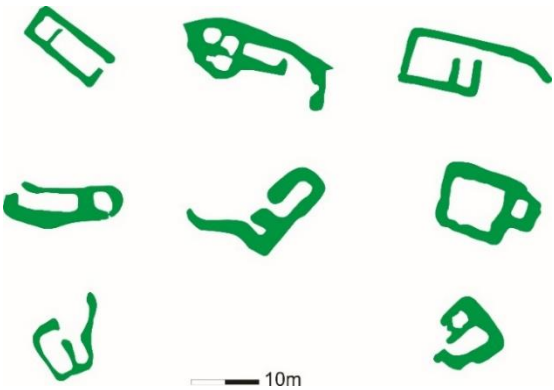


Corrals (rétt): Corrals were usually built out of stone or a mixture of stone and turf; corrals built solely out of turf are uncommon, although not entirely unknown. In recent times, corrals have been made from a variety of materials—chiefly wood or concrete, but often whatever was closest to hand, such as corrugated iron, for example.

We often find the ruins of corrals up next to cliff walls or other natural enclosures that made it easier to herd the livestock in. Corrals for daily use, for example, for shearing the sheep, marking the lambs, and so on, were usually rather small and simple in construction, having only one or two pens, and stood close to the farm. The so-called legal corrals or sorting pens are, on the other hand, often far from the farms. These are very large corrals surrounded by many smaller pens or compartments. After the sheep were driven

down from the communal grazing areas in the highlands, the farmers sorted them into these pens, with each farm having its own compartment. This tradition is still alive.

Weaning folds *(Stekkur)*



As the drawings shows, weaning folds came in several different shapes. Illustration: BSk.

Weaning fold (stekkur): The ruins of weaning folds usually have two parts. These pens were rather small corrals with a well-defined little box or shed, called the lambs' nook, at one end. They lay outside of the homefield, a little way from the farm. It was common for weaning folds to be built up beside a bank, mound, or cliff that would make a natural barrier when the sheep were driven in. They are often in sheltered spots, in green gorges and meadows that remain snow-covered for many weeks in the winter, unlike sheepfolds, which were placed in spots where the snow would blow off.

Weaning folds were used in the beginning of June, before the lambs were weaned from the ewes. The ewes and lambs were driven into the pen in the evening, and the lambs were locked into the lambs' nook overnight. The ewes could then graze all night, either loose or fenced inside an area called the night pasture. In the morning, they were driven back into the

weaning folds and milked. After that, the lambs were released and allowed to go with their mothers all day. When the lambs were about four weeks old, they were weaned from the ewes and driven up into the highlands, but the ewes continued to be milked, now both night and morning, either in the weaning folds or, more often, in small corrals closer to the farm; these were called milking pens.

Milking pens (kvíar): Milking pens were usually right outside the homefield wall on the main farm, although it was also common to build milking pens at the summer shielings. They were oblong and rather narrow corrals, although rectangular multi-purpose corrals could also be used as milking pens. Some farmers had portable milking pens, which they put together out of wood as needed. Portable milking pens were widely used from the 19th through the 20th century; these corrals leave little mark on the landscape and it is difficult to find signs of them. Ruins of milking pens close to the farm have often disappeared as well, thanks to changes in agricultural practices, but the many place names that contain the word milking pen (*kvía*), such as *Kvíaból*, *Kvíhóll*, and so on, tell us where these pens once stood.

Ruins of a milking pen in Kálfárdal. Photo: BSk.

Night pastures (nátthagi): Night pastures were fenced-in areas where the ewes were kept at night before the lambs were weaned. Usually the night pastures were fenced with walls made of turf and/or stone. These areas could be as big as a large corral or even a small homefield. Inside or right next to the night pasture we can often find the weaning folds where the ewes were milked.

Sheepfolds (fjárborg): Sheepfolds were circular and built of turf or stone. Often they were nearly fully enclosed, with domed roofs and low doors for the sheep. Sheepfolds are found far from the farms; they were more common in the south and east of Iceland, and seldom used in the north or west. They are most often found by ridges or riversides where there is little snow accumulation. Sheepfolds provided shelter in bad weather for animals that stayed out all winter. Little sheep sheds, in some places, served the same purpose.

Sheepfold at Litlibær in Skötufjörður. Photo: BSk.

Grazing sheds (beitarhús): The ruins of a grazing shed generally consist of the remains of a well-built sheep shed or other structure, with a hay barn or hay platform usually attached. Grazing sheds were often built where there were good pastures, or at old summer shielings, up to several kilometers distant from the farm. Sheep were sent to graze

there over the winter in order to rest the homefield and the pastures near the farm.

Shielings: The ruins of summer shielings are commonly small two- to four-part structures, composed of a *baðstofa*, or main living quarters, larders, and sometimes a cow barn. Nearby is often an oblong corral, the milking pen, where the ewes were milked. In some cases, it is difficult to distinguish between the ruins of a summer shieling and those of a small farm, and it was not uncommon for a shieling to expand, over a longer or shorter period of time, and become a regular farm with a complete complement of livestock, as many farm names bear witness. No homefield wall enclosed a summer shieling, as a rule, and the existence of such a wall can be taken as a sign that the farm was inhabited for longer than just over the summertime.

Ruins of a three-part shieling (sel) on the property of the farm Breiðavað in Húnavatnssýsla. Photo: BSk.

Summer shielings are, as a rule, located at a considerable distance from the main farm, usually in a valley or in the highlands where the grazing conditions are good over the summertime. The herds were driven there, and people stayed there all summer preparing and preserving milk and cheese and other dairy foods for the winter. Just as for a regular farm, good access to drinking water was needed at the shieling, so

they were usually sited near streams, rivers, or lakes. This type of migratory farming, called transhumance, was practiced in Iceland from the time of the settlement in the late 800s into the 18th and 19th centuries.

Shielings (Sel)

The ruins of summer shielings come in a great variety of shapes. Illustration: BSk.

Ruins of a shieling at Seldalur, a valley leading off from Kálfárdalur in Húnavatnssýsla. The shieling itself stood up on the old riverbank and can be seen as a set of green mounds in the photo. Ruins of an oblong milking pen lie below the old riverbank nearer to the current course of the river.

Signs of land use

Just as is true close to the farmstead, a large part of the remains that we can see outside of the homefield are earthworks of some sort that performed various roles, such as keeping livestock in or out of a certain area, protecting a tract of land from avalanches or from erosion by the sea or a rushing stream, improving transportation or communication, and so on.

Enclosures (gerði) are fenced-in tracts of land, usually surrounded by walls of turf or stone. In some cases, such a wall reveals the presence of an old farm, but it can also be connected to organized land use of other kinds. Place names often combine the word enclosure (*gerði*) with such words as steer (*Nautagerði*), goat (*Geitagerði*), or grain field (*Akurgerði*), for example, giving us an idea of their role. There are

many examples of the place name “slave enclosure” (*Þrælsgerði* or *Þrælagerði*), which perhaps is an acknowledgment of who built the structure or who lived in that place.

Homefield boundary walls (túngarður): Around a permanent dwelling there was usually a walled field, and the existence of such a wall around an outlying grazing area or a summer shieling may indicate that there was at one time a dwelling.

Aerial photo of Örlygsstaðir in Skagafjörður. Uneven terrain within the boundary may have belonged to an ancient farm. Photo. HP.

Irrigation systems and dams (áveita): Wherever there are hay meadows near rivers or lakes, we can find old irrigation systems and dams from the days when people used the spring floods to fertilize their fields. When the floods came, they closed the dams so that the silt carried by the overflow, which is excellent fertilizer, would be retained when the water subsided or evaporated.

Retaining walls and dikes (leiðigarður/varnargarður): There are examples of walls having been built on hillsides above settlements and hayfields, where there is danger of avalanches, so as to direct the snow and mud away. Dikes are also found along rivers and by the seashore where there was danger of erosion.

Sheltering walls (skjólgarður): Here and there sheltering walls were built to protect livestock from bad weather. Sheltering walls built in a cross-shape were called cross-walls.

Land bridges (landbrú): Roads that were built up over wetlands were called land bridges. These structures were made just like homefield walls, but were lower and broader. This type of road improvement made it easier to travel through the countryside, especially in the summer. Also known were sled roads over wetlands. These were places where the tussocks were cut off or beaten flat and water was allowed to collect in the roadway. When it froze it became a smooth, ice-covered road.

An ancient land bridge that lies along the Hrollleifsdalur valley in Skagafjörður. Up against it was built a little corral. Photo: BSk.

A shepherd's hut on the property of the farm Enni in Refasveit, Húnavatnssýsla. Photo: BSk.

Shepherds' huts (smalakofi): While the ewes were being milked in the milking pens, they were driven out to graze in the mornings and home for milking in the evenings. Shepherds guarded the flocks all day, and it was often children or youngsters who were given this task. It was common for the shepherds to build themselves small huts or shelters against the wind and weather while they sat guard. The ruins of shepherds' huts are often very little and stand on hillsides or mounds where there was good visibility.

Fox traps (refagildra) often look like the remains of stone cairns or simple stone piles and are found in similar places, often above rivers or on mounds. An elongated box was built of stone, only big enough so that the fox could come in and barely that. Bait was set inside the box to lure the fox in, and the box was equipped with a trapdoor that fell shut when the bait was taken and the fox had stepped all the way into the box.

A fox trap. Photo: BSk.

Watermills (mylla) were owned by many farms and used to grind grain. They were powered by water from streams, often the farm stream, which was directed to the mill and drove the wheel that turned the grindstone. We can readily find the ruins of watermills on the banks of streams; there we can often see channels leading from the streambed to the mill site and also channels running back from there to the streambed again.

Pools (laug): Hotsprings of all sizes were used for bathing and clothes-washing. Frequently they were cased with stone, at least in part.

The pool at Kelduland is located where the hotspring meets the boundary stream. Photo: BSk.

This photo shows the Bishop's Pool at Reykir in Hjaltadalur, which is a stone-cased bathing pool with seats. Several written sources note that people used to meet at the bathing pools to exchange gossip or get advice, and these were doubtless popular meeting places in the old days. Photo: BSk.

The photo shows Úlf's Barrow, near Úlfsstaðir in Blönduhlíð in Skagafjörður; it is said that a man is buried inside the mound. Photo: BSk.

Barrows or burial mounds (dys/kuml): Heathen people in ancient times were buried or interred in grave mounds. These

barrows are generally unremarkable and can look like fallen cairns or oblong hollows. They can also be square, circular, elliptical, or boat-shaped structures, sometimes lined with a single layer of stone. They can be found singly or grouped together, outside the homefield, and beside a landmark rather than on flat ground. Often they are near old roads and/or boundary markers.

A probable burial mound on the property of the farm Höfði on Höfðaströnd in Skagafjörður. The simple stone structure has a boat-shape. Photo: BSk.

Children's playgrounds (leikstaður barna): It is common to bump into low structures and buildings where children have had their pretend farms and playgrounds. Playgrounds are often inside the homefield, but they can also be found at quite a distance from the farmhouse, for example, close to the hay meadows and other places where the adults have to work and the children must find something to amuse themselves with in the meantime.

Hay and peat platforms (heytóft, mótóft: Where hay was cut in the meadows or wetlands, low, stubby walls were built and

haystacks erected inside them. The hay was collected together and piled up into heaps and covered over with turf to keep it until winter, when it was needed to feed the livestock. These platforms are most often rectangular or oval in shape, and have no doors. Inside the walls, the floor is built up somewhat higher than the surrounding terrain, to keep the hay dry and to make it easier for the cowherd to get at it. Sometimes when people refer to a hey platform, they mean a place where stacks of turf or peat, instead of hay, are stored. It is hard to tell by looking at these kinds of ruins which purpose they served, especially since they are often found in the same sort of location. Hay was cut in the wetlands outside of the homefield, which is equally where turf and peat were sought. Turf-cutting does not leave much of a mark on the landscape, after the area has regrown, but cuttings for peat were deeper and are generally more obvious and easier to recognize.

Here a farmer is making a haystack. By the time he is finished, the hay will be fully covered over with strips of turf to keep out any animals that might damage the winter's hay supply. The walls surrounding the haystack are rather low. When the hay has all been fed out, the empty platform with its low, stubby walls looks to the eye just like a sunken spot in the earth, which will smooth out over time. Photo: MAS-BS, nr. 7331.

This young man, on his way home after a successful bird hunt, follows a well-used riding trail. Photo: MSA-Gook, nr. 124.

Roads and trails (gata/slóði): The paths that men and animals have traveled back and forth on for ages appear as clear roads or trails. The signs of many side-by-side tracks can be widely found along the main roads in the countryside and between settlements. Single and double paths are most commonly seen crossing farm fields and between the various buildings on a farm. Sometimes it can be hard to distinguish new tracks from old ones, since the tracks sheep make today look just like the ones they made long ago.

By following these old tracks, we can often make out where fords once stood across rivers and streams. Their names can also reveal such places. Trails also led from the farm to the weaning folds, the grazing sheds, and the shielings, and often drew their names from the place to which they led, such as "Shieling Road" (*Selgata*). Old roads can also be found at ancient settlements, meeting places, and market places.

Old riding tracks at Djúpadalsáreyrar in Blönduhlíð in Skagafjörður. Photo: BSk.

Cable cars or cable ferries (kláfferja): Wooden boxes that were conveyed over rivers on cables were called cable cars or cable ferries. They were used to ferry people and animals from one bank of the river to the other in places where the river was dangerous or impossible to ford. Signs of such ferries include interesting winding mechanisms and drystone abutments. The ferries were sited at the narrowest spot between the riverbanks.

The picture shows the so-called Flatatungukláfur, a cable ferry over the river of Héraðsvötn in Skagafjörður. It was taken around 1900. Photo: HSk-DB, nr. 971.

Bridge abutments (brúarstöpull): Drystone bridge abutments sometimes still stand on riverbanks, usually where the river runs through a gorge or the distance between banks is

narrowest. All other signs of a bridge have usually disappeared.

Fords (vað): Fords across rivers or streams are not really manmade structures and are not always easily found. By following old trails we can often determine where the ford once was; in addition, place names often indicate their location.

Peat cuttings in land owned by Kelduland in Skagabyggð, Húnavatnssýsla. Photo: BSk.

Peat cuttings (mógröf): Peat cuttings can be widely seen in wetlands. They look like ledges or pits, and can be very extensive. Often they are around a meter and a half deep, but they can be deeper. Peat was used as fuel for cooking from the time of the first settlement into the 20th century.

Turf cutting and digging (torfrista/torfstunga): Signs of turf cutting are hard to make out, although turf pits can be 10-50 centimeters deep, where both sides are distinguishable.

Turf cuttings at Glaumbær in Skagafjörður, where turf strips and turf blocks were dug out. Photo: BSk.

Charcoal pits (kolagröf): Charcoal pits usually look like green hollows; they are circular or rectangular, 50-200 centimeters broad and commonly about 50 centimeters deep. Charcoal was made from the time of the first settlement of Iceland in the 9th century all the way through the 19th century, and charcoal pits can be widely found wherever woods or brushland have grown. Charcoal pits from later centuries, after the woodlands began to decline, are mainly found high on the heaths or down in the dales. Charcoal was made by first digging a hole, then filling it with logs and setting them on fire. The pit was covered over with turf and hard-packed dirt, which smothered the fire and caused the wood to turn into charcoal rather than burning up. Wood charcoal gives a higher heat and burns more slowly than peat, dried dung, or wood and was especially useful for the forging of iron.

Traveler's huts and herders huts (sæluhús / gangnakofi): Here and there in the dales and up in the mountains we find ruins of turf and/or stone huts. These were built beside mountain paths or in the summer grazing lands so that people could have a place to stay overnight when they were traveling or rounding up sheep. Ruins of traveler's huts can also be found beside old highways that were once the main road. These ruins look much like the ruins of an out-building, such as a storehouse, on a farmstead.

The emergency hut that once stood beside the Galtará river in Húnavatnssýsla. The photo was taken around 1900. Photo: HSK-DB, nr. 813.

A traveler's hut near Hraunlækur in Vesturdalur in Skagafjörður. Photo: BSk.

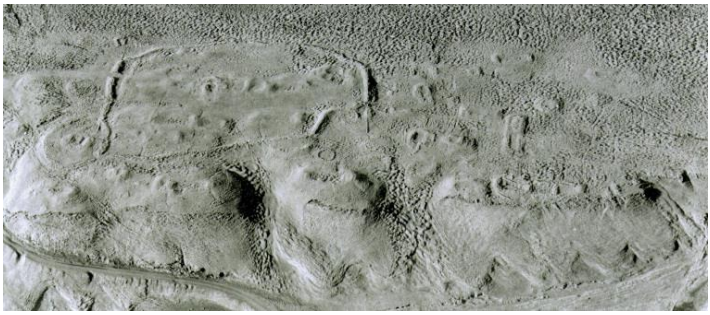
Meeting places

Trading stations (verslunarstaður) can be found at a number of locations in the country. They were situated in areas where there were good natural harbours. The distinguishing characteristics of these sites are the remains of many free-standing huts or booths. However, due to their coastal location, these sites have often been heavily damaged by sea erosion.

Ruins of a 19th-century trading station at Grafarós in Skagafjörður. The site has been damaged through erosion. Photo: BSk.

Assembly sites (þingstaður) can be found in a number of places all over the country. The assemblies were used to host legal proceedings but it is clear that trading also took place during the assemblies as well, and that these sites played more than one role. The distinguishing characteristics of these sites are a great number of ruins of small but free-standing huts or booths.

Other types of meeting places we can name include, for example, the sorting pens, which we've already discussed. A great number of people came together for the sheep or horse roundups, but these meetings usually lasted only one day.



The site of the Hegranes Assembly on the property of the farm Garður in Skagafjörður. In the photo we can see the remains of meeting and/or trading booths of all sizes scattered about the plain, as well as the homefield wall of the tenant farm Litli-Garður and a circular wall at one of its corners (in the lower left of the picture). The circle was long thought to be the judgment circle (or doom ring) of the assembly, but an archaeological excavation revealed that a churchyard wall had been built there in the 11th century and most likely taken down in the 12th or 13th century. One assembly booth was investigated by the archaeologists and dated to the 12th century. Written sources mention an assembly site and a trading place at Hegranes during the Commonwealth Era (900-1262), but say that it had ceased to be used by the 14th century. Photo: HP.

There are usually not many ruins of structures in the neighborhood of the corrals, although in some places there were herders' huts which played and still play a variety of roles. Other meeting places leave even less of a mark on the landscape, such as the places where people met for games and competitions in either the summer or the winter, for example, for ice-skating, horse racing, or, in ancient times, horse fights. Place names might point to these activities in some locations, but there are seldom any physical remains.

A cairn on the lands of Saurbær in Vatnsdalur in Húnavatnssýsla. Photo: BSk.

Cairns and similar structures

We often notice stone structures of various types on hills and along rivers outside of the homefields throughout the countryside; these range all the way from a few stacked-up stones to substantial cairns. Cairns *(varða)* were erected for various reasons, and it's usually not easy to tell from the cairn itself what purpose it served; instead, we have to rely on place names and other sources. Their location and their relation to other remains can, however, give us important clues to their purpose. Cairns were generally built of stones, but cairns made out of turf are also known in places where stones were hard to find.

In the same sorts of locations where cairns are found, we might also stumble upon other drystone structures with various purposes which do not leave much of a mark on the landscape; for example, shepherd's huts, fox traps, heathen burial mounds, or children's playgrounds. In addition to these ruins, there are numerous solitary huts and ruins in outer pastures that bear witness to land use in ages past. Among

these we can list hay and peat platforms, which are often found in similar spots.

Trail-marking cairns (leiðarvarða): Many cairns set in a row, with equal spacing between them, usually mark a path between farms or settlements.

Landmark cairns (landamerkjavarða): Often cairns are built atop landmarks that can be seen from a long distance away. Usually these are solitary cairns. Then often bear their own names and are marked down in place-name registers and lists of landmarks.

"Bone cairn" (Beinakerling): In some places, we find stone heaps that aren't carefully built up like cairns, but that undeniably put us in mind of them. These so-called "bone women," often found beside heavily traveled roads, are a curious relic of times past, for this was their purpose: People passing by tossed a stone on them and slipped in between the crevices a hollow bone, into which was stuck a message written in verse for the next travelers. These "bone women verses" were often riddles.

Beacons (mið): Cairns were also built to act as beacons marking a fishing ground or the approach to a harbor. Befitting their purpose, they are usually found at the edge of the sea, but they can also be somewhat inland.

Time-markers (eyktarmark): It was very common to build cairns to function as so-called time-markers, which acted as landmarks marking where the sun stood above the horizon at certain hours of the day. For instance, the people of the farm knew that it was noon when the sun stood over the noon cairn, and so on. These, like some other cairns, seem to have had their own names, such as afternoon cairn, noon cairn, night cairn, and so on; at least there are places that bear names of this type.

A boat house on the property of the farm Syðri-Ey in Skagabyggð, Húnavatnssýsla. Photo: BSk.

Evidence of seafaring life

Remains pertaining to seafaring life are often poorly preserved due to their proximity to the sea. It's also true that many good natural harbors have grown into densely settled towns, and all signs of earlier ways of life may have been destroyed during the building of the modern harbor. Most farms that owned land by the sea fished to some extent, and there were also fishing stations and fishing ports that were used by many farms or settlements. Wherever there are good natural harbors we can expect to find remains, although the coastal erosion has sometimes caused significant damage to the sites.

Boat houses (naust): where boats could be drawn inside and stored, were on or next to the tideline. They were made in many different styles, from roofed-over sheds to simple walls that the boat was laid between. It can be difficult to distinguish the remains of a boathouse from the dwellings of the seamen themselves, although sometimes they are boat-shaped.

Seamen's houses or fishing huts (sjóhús/verbúð): were the dwellings of the seamen during the fishing season. Sometimes these houses had two floors. The fishing gear and other equipment was stored on the ground floor, and the men slept on the upper level. The lower level of the house was built of stone, and the upper one of wood. But the fishing huts could also be ordinary stone- and turf-built houses.

Ruins of a seamen's hut at Bjarnarey, an island in East Iceland. The huts were often divided into two sections, as we can see here. Photo: BSk.

Slips (hróf): Where ships or boats were drawn onto shore to be stored, a roadway was sometimes gouged or carved up to them. Looking something like two long ridges, these boat slips were not carefully made structures, in general.

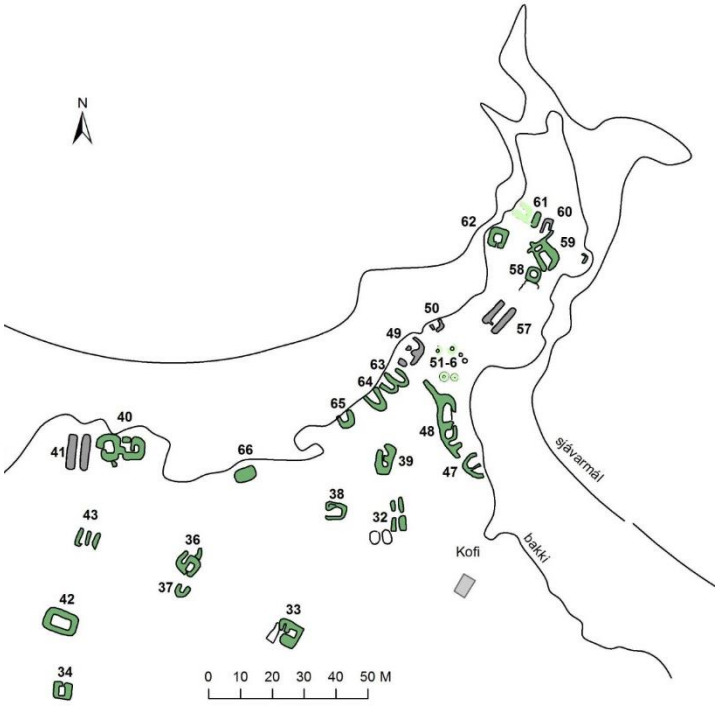
Fish shacks (fiskbyrgi): were most often simple drystone buildings, either square or round, in which dried or salted fish was stored. The ruins of fish shacks are hardly distinguishable from those of other drystone structures, other than that they are found beside the sea.

Drying sheds (hjallur/þurrkhjallur): Often we can find the foundations of sheds used for drying and storing food. These

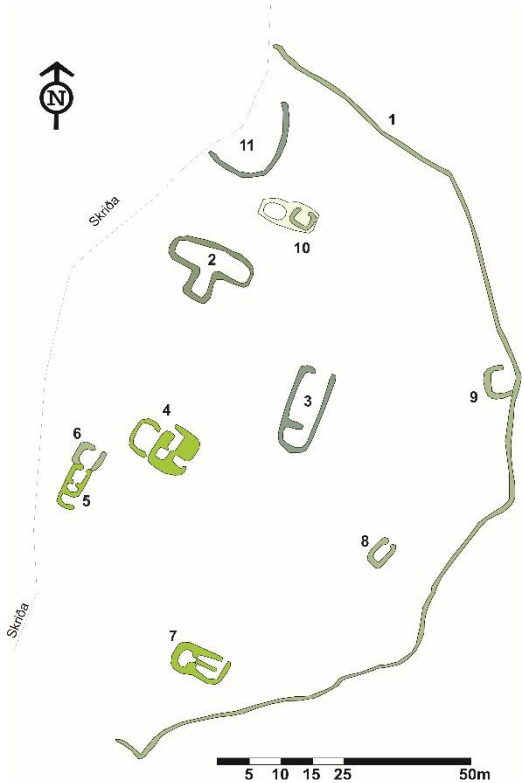
foundations are usually rectangular platforms that look like smooth, flat surfaces or shelves, surrounded by a single row of stones. Drying sheds were built out of wooden slats or latticework, and were partly open to the elements. They were used to dry and store such foods as meat jerky, dried stockfish, cured shark, and so on.

Boat yards (uppsátur): Places where many boats were drawn ashore look like parallel lines of stone ridges leading up from the sea. Built up sea walls and docks look somewhat the same, although these are rarer.

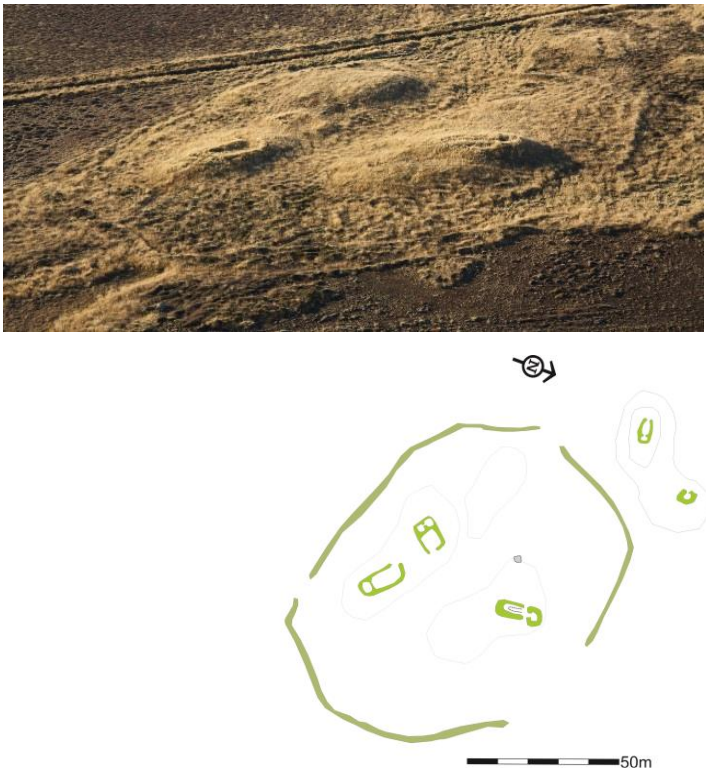
Examples of man made structures in the landscape



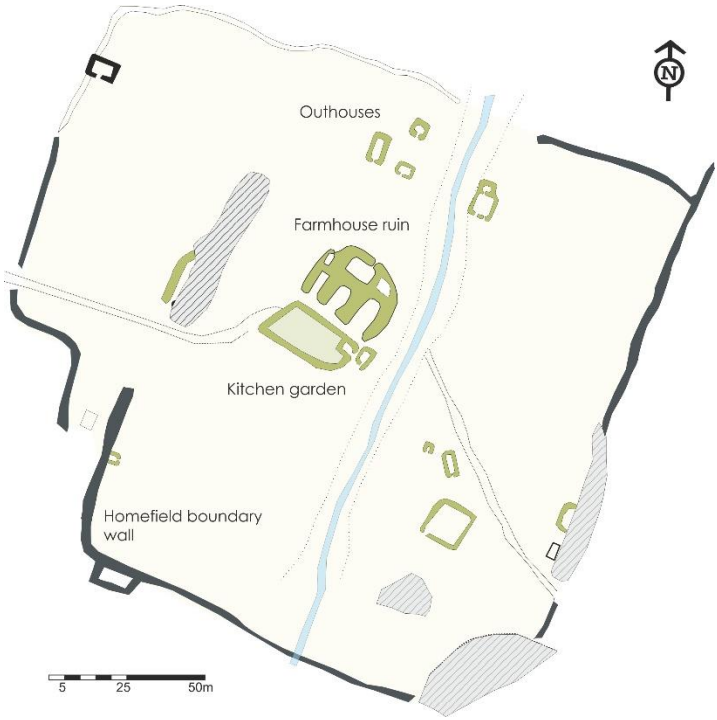
Remains of seafaring life at Hjallanes peninsula, on the property of the farm Höfn in Skagabyggð, Húnavatnssýsla. Here we can find a cluster of remains, including the ruins of many different kinds of structures which bear witness to a significant reliance on fishing and the great variety of activities that took place at such a site. Among other things, we can see boat houses, slips, and boat yards beside the sea. There are also the ruins of huts and houses that were the seamen's dwelling places. During the fishing season many other jobs had to be done, such as gutting, drying, and preserving the fish, and we can also see signs of those activities here. This archaeological site is in great danger due to the proximity of the water, and since this drawing was made several ruins have disappeared into the sea. Illustration: BSk.



This drawing shows the homefield of the farm Hrappsá in Deildardalur, Skagafjörður. The remains lie on the moors and the farm was abandoned long before modern agricultural machinery comes into our story. For that reason, we can find in this homefield remains from the very first centuries of Iceland's settlement all the way up to the second half of the 19th century. Some time in the distant past the Hrappr River, from which the farm took its name, changed its course and a landslide covered the western half of the homefield. In the drawing are: 1. The homefield wall, which was built in the early part of the 12th century; the western part of the wall disappeared under the landslide. 2. Ruins of a longhouse from the 10th or 11th century. 3. A corral from the 10th or 11th century. 4. Ruins of a farmhouse from the 19th century. 5. Ruins of out-buildings that belonged to the 19th-century farmstead. 6. Older ruins under the ruins of these out-buildings. 7. A sheep shed and hay barn from the 19th-century farm. 8. Ruins of a hut of unknown age. 9. A corral built up against the homefield wall and of the same age as it. 10. Ruins of a house and a pit, age unknown. 11. A half-circular wall, of which part has disappeared under the landslide. Illustration: BSk.



Grafargerði, a small farm in Höfðaströnd. The picture above is an aerial photo, and that below is a plan of the remains on the site. Here the remains have been protected from plowing. The younger corrals and ruins of sheep sheds lie on top of hills or mounds that formed because of repeated rebuilding on the same spot. People lived here from the 12th through the 16th century, although the ruins of out-buildings that we can see are only from the 19th to 20th century. The homefield wall that surrounds the mounds dates from the time when people lived here, and is not related to the ruins of the out-buildings. The ruins can be clearly distinguished from their surroundings, with the walls still standing and covered with grass, while the homefield wall and the homefield itself have turned to tussocky moor. The ruins can be easily seen from the main road. Photo: HP; illustration: BSk.



A plan of Kambshjáleiga in the property of the farm Háls in Hamarsfjörður. The farm was inhabited from the first part of the 19th century until the middle of the 20th, and the ruins are still very complete. They provide a fascinating collection of remains illustrating all the different kinds of ruins we can expect to find at an ordinary Icelandic farmstead from the era before people began to work the fields with heavy machinery. Many farms were abandoned in the middle of the 20th century when they were considered too difficult to farm, either because they were in remote or marginal places, or because the features of the land did not accommodate modern agricultural methods. Remains of these farms can be widely seen, both in remote spots and only a few steps from the main roads. Illustration: BSk.

The photograph above shows the summer cottage on the property of Höfði in Höfðaströnd. It was built near the site of the old farmstead of a tenant farm belonging to Höfðagerði which was established in the 12th century and rebuilt there on the same spot until the 19th century, and which went by the name "Kotið" (the Cottage). Often it is the case that places we now think are good building spots were thought to be so in the old days as well. Settlement remains can often, for this reason, be found in the neighborhood of new summer houses or vacation cottages. The site for this summer house was carefully chosen so that it would not damage the remains of the Cottage. The illustration shows the location of the remains in relationship to the new house. Although only a few of the farm remains are close to the house, there is much of interest to be seen just a short walk away. Photo and illustration: BSk.

Sauðá 181763 48
Hæringsbúðir
Guðmundur St. Sig. 30/5 2005
Hnit: ISN93

We often find remains in the most unlikely spots. Above are a photo and plan of a longhouse and the ruins of out-buildings, known as Hæring's Booths, that can be found on and next to the golf course in Sauðárkrókur. Many remains have disappeared due to 20th-century land development, but even so we can still find remnants of the old days, if we look about with a keen eye, inside the borders of busy farms and towns. Here we might find, for example, old dwellings that have been surrounded by the town, old piers or boat slips, remains of seamen's huts, kitchen gardens or pleasure gardens, ruins of out-buildings or yards from the first part of the 20th century, ditches, roads, and much more. Photo and illustration: BSk.

This picture is of the farm Steiná in Svartárdalur in 1937. We can see the farmhouse and out-buildings or livestock barns, as well as many other clearly defined structures inside the old homefield. The farmhouse stands in the middle of the homefield, far to the right. Wash is hanging on the clothesline next to the farm lane, which leads down to the stream. Alongside the farm lane are walls that acted as a fence. People crossed the stream at the ford, and from there the way led along a path by the base of the hill to the left. Up in the ravine, at the top of the homefield on the other side of the farm lane, are six potato beds. The homefield wall can be clearly seen behind the farmhouse, and the field seems to have been newly enlarged, when the photo was taken, because between the house and the wall lie some ridges that could be the remnants of an older homefield wall. The livestock barn to the right of the farmhouse is probably a combined cow byre and sheep shed. Another sheep shed lies on the left side of the stream, at the top of the lower field; it has two doors. Lower down in the same field is another sheep shed with three doors. On the left side of the old streambed, which cuts the field in half, are twin sheep sheds. The lower one, closer to us in the photo, has three doors, and the upper one, two. Around the lower sheep shed, sheep dung was piled up to dry. The dung was shoveled out of the sheep sheds and stacked up; when it became completely dry, it was used as cooking fuel. All the buildings are built out of turf and stones. The farmhouse itself has three gables facing the front yard, each of them with wooden siding. Photo: HSk-BS, nr. 428.

Useful sources (in Icelandic)

Birna Lárusdóttir (ed.) (2011). Mannvist. Sýnisbók íslenskra fornleifa. Reykjavík: Opna.

Jónas Jónasson (1961). Íslenzkir þjóðhættir (3. ed.). Einar Ól. Sveinnson (ed.). Reykjavík: Ísafoldarprentsmiðja.

Rit Björns Halldórssonar í Sauðlauksdal (1963). Gísli Kristjánsson and Björn Sigfússon (eds.). Reykjavík: Búnaðarfélag Íslands.

Þorvaldur Thoroddsen (1919.) Lýsing Íslands (3. ed.) Copenhagen: Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag.

Useful online resources

For standards on archaeological surveying (Fornleifaskráningarstaðlar) and an interactive map of Icelandic heritage (kortavefsjá) see the homepage of the Cultural Heritage Agency of Iceland: www.minjastofnun.is

Laws on cultural heritage management (lög um menningarminjar nr. 80/2012). www.althingi.is

Glossary of archaeological terminology in Icelandic and English (orðasafn). The Institute of Archaeology (Fornleifastofnun Íslands): www.instarch.is

Archaeological research reports

The Skagafjörður Heritage Museum: www.glaumbaer.is/is/gagnabanki/rannsoknarskyrslur

The National Museum of Iceland: www.natmus.is/stofnunin/utgafa/skyrslur

The Institute of Archaeology: www.instarch.is/skraningarskyrslur