



## Fornleifakönnun í Akralandi (Arnarneslandi)



Daniel T. Rhodes og Ragnheiður Traustadóttir

september 2004

**2004/39**

1. Introduction.....	2
1.1 Aðdragandi (Background) .....	2
2. Methodology .....	4
3. Rannsókn (Research Results) .....	5
3.1 181134-178-3 .....	5
3.2 181134-178-32 .....	8
3.3 181134-178-34 .....	10
3.4 181134-178-5 .....	13
3.4.1 Possible Túngarður (Field Enclosure) .....	14
3.4.2 Possible Útihús (Outhouse) .....	15
4. Recommendations.....	17
4.1 181134-178-3 .....	17
4.2 181134-178-32 .....	18
4.3 181134-178-34 .....	18
4.4 181134-178-5 .....	18

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Aðdragandi (Background)**

Permission from the Archaeological Heritage Agency of Iceland was granted for a program of archaeological test excavation, which was initiated at Akraland in Garðabæ from the 19th to the 30th of May 2004 under the supervision of Ragnheiður Traustadóttir of Byggðasafn Skagafjarðar (Glaumbær Folk museum). The investigative team included Daniel Rhodes BA MSc., Auður Blöndal, student of archaeology and Dr Derek Watson. Contributions on geology and tephra analyses were made by Magnús Á. Sigurgeirson.

In 1994, archaeological remains were surveyed in four locations: peat-pits, outhouse and enclosure, pillar box, and a ruin. This survey made clear that these remains would be endangered or destroyed once development took place. Therefore it was considered necessary to survey and evaluate them for a second time, not the least as city plans have undergone changes since the first report was produced ten years ago. Descriptions of the remains in this report are for the most part derived from the older report, as it is still fully valid, although with the addition of two new locations, which were discovered during the field survey of 2004. Measurements were transferred onto an aerial photograph from 2002 as well as the development plans, both of which accompany this report.

Due to changes in city plans and construction intended to commence summer 2004 in Arnarnesland (Akraland), Bergljót Einaradóttir, town planer, delegated to Ragnheiður Traustadóttir, archaeologist, and Anna Rut Guðmundsdóttir, student of archaeology, the task of measuring ruins and re-evaluating an archaeological survey from 1994. Field survey was conducted in April 2004. It led to the discovery of ruins in two locations, neither of which had been surveyed before.

The results of these studies, from 1994 and 2004, were compared with the current city plans. The comparison revealed that undisturbed ruins would be harmed by construction. The survey report will discuss research in every location surveyed and possible counter

measures. However, the final decision regarding counteracts will be made by the Archaeological Heritage Agency.

Prior to the commencement of test excavations a thorough archaeological survey of the area was carried out by Ragnheiður Traustadóttir of the National Museum of Iceland (*Vettvangskönnun vegna deiliskipulags Arnarnesslands*. Þjóðminjasafn Íslands 1994). The results of this survey have been incorporated into the pre-excavation descriptions and images within this report.

Other archaeological surveys within Garðabær, but not the Akraland area, include:

Ragnheiður Traustadóttir og Rúna Knútsdóttir. *Fornleifaskráning í Garðahverfi*. Þjóðminjasafn Íslands 2004.

Orri Vésteinsson. *Fornleifakönnun. Álfanesvegur milli Engidals og Selskarðs*. Fornleifastofnun Íslands 1999.

Reference to these surveys is intended to contextualize this investigation within the wider cultural landscape and help to inform those recommendations given at the end of this report.

## Archaeological Remains in Arnarnesland (Akraland)

Akraland is located in Garðabæ, a southern suburban district of Reykjavík.

The outer limit of the area, originally named Arnarnesland - though now referred to as Akraland, are according to the attached development plans from development officials in Garðabær.



Map showing Garðabær in Greater Reykjavík with research area marked

## 2. Methodology

It was decided that a series of small test excavations in those areas identified as being of possible archaeological significance (henceforth in this report referred to as *features*) would be the most effective method of establishing the cultural provenance of the proposed construction site through the analyses of stratigraphic deposition. Excavation was supplemented by documentary and archival work to assess the nature and role of Akraland in the wider cultural landscape and its possible association with areas of known cultural significance.

In total, 5 archaeological units were excavated and named in accordance with the previous survey (178-31, 178-32, 178-34 178-5). All trenches were excavated down to

either natural sterile subsoils or bedrock to ensure no lower cultural strata were overlooked.



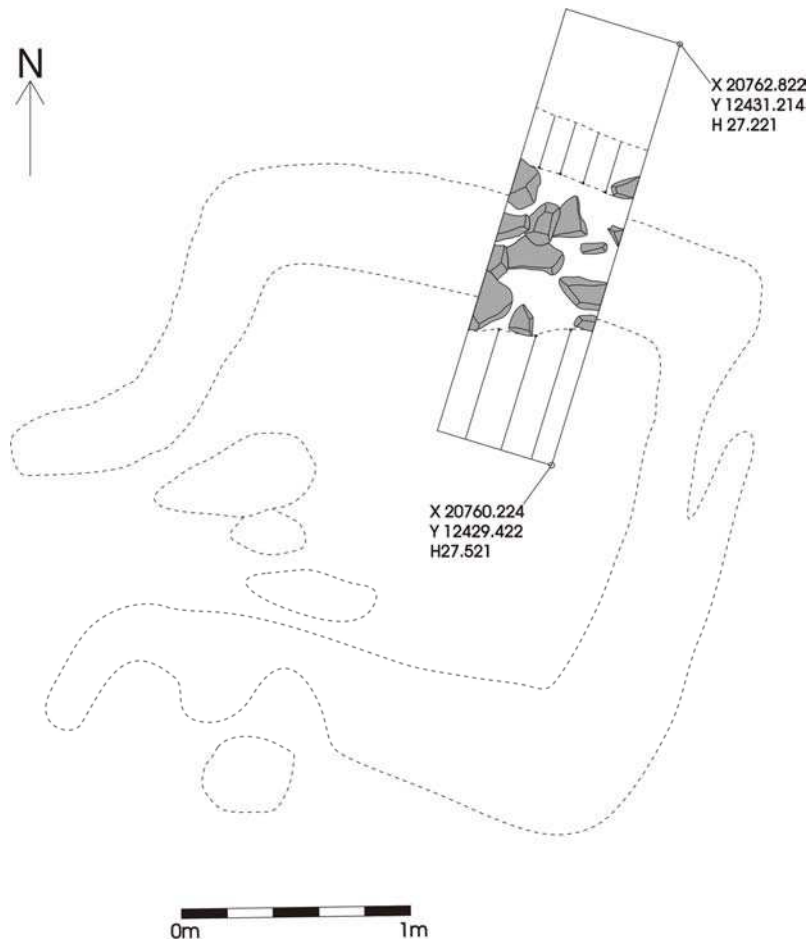
Aerial photograph showing Akraland with the locations of features marked.

### 3. Rannsókn (Research Results)

#### 3.1 181134-178-3

Nat. Grid: E358515, 08619 N402461,86765

The feature lays N-NE of Hofstaðaskóli (School), ca.10m South of Bæjarbraut across a modern road from Blómahæð 10. The ground surface is extremely uneven with the feature recognisable as a raised hummock, the eastern side of which is parallel to Bæjarbrautin and approximately 4m in length. The north and south sides of the feature measure approximately 5m in length. The south-western corner on the western end is open, but the linearity on this side is less distinguishable. Those elements of the feature identified in survey as possible “walls” range from between 0.35m to 0.50m in thickness.



Pre-excavation plan of feature 181134-178-3  
showing excavation area and context 001.

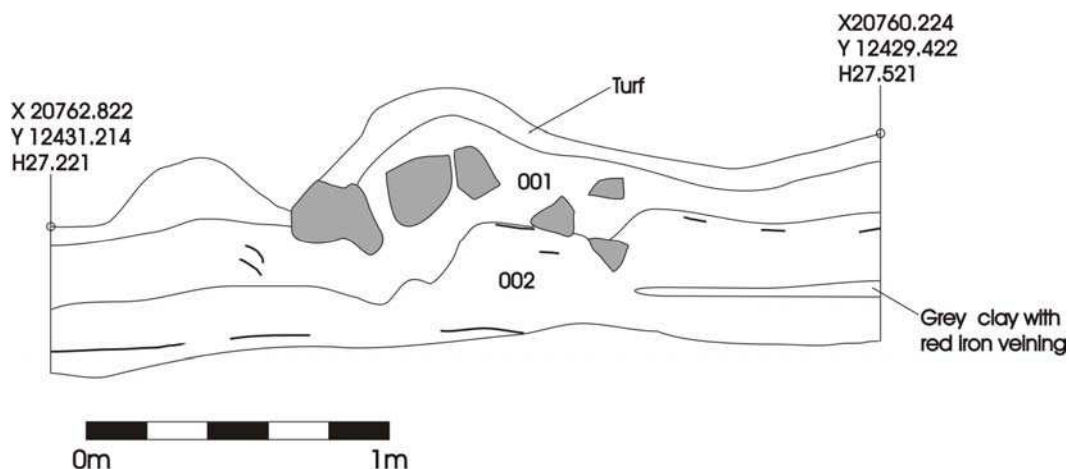
A small archaeological trench measuring 3m by 0.80m and orientated approximately north to south along its longest axis was excavated to a depth of 1m. It was intended that the placement of this trench would dissect at a right angle a part of the feature thought to be a wall, thereby, identifying possible internal and external zones of any structure, as well as exposing in section the nature of any such structural elements.

Directly below the turf lay a clayey-silt, mid to dark-brown, topsoil (context 001) containing a number of angular stones at the mid section of the trench, the largest of which being c.0.44m in size and the smallest c.0.18m. Although a number of these stones overlaid one another none appeared to have been worked.

Within context 001 at maximum depth of 0.60m were two small tephra deposits approximately 0.10m in length and <0.02m thick. These have been positively dated as

originating from the Katla eruption of 1500. The nature of deposition of this tephra (i.e. laminated, one above the other, within a single context) would strongly suggest some episode or episodes of disturbance occurring at some point after 1500. However, whether this is culturally significant is unclear as this disturbance does not seem to be corroborated by any other easily definable cultural activity related directly to the feature, although the features proximity to those areas of peat cutting defined early may account for the disturbance. The maximum depth of context 001 was 0.60m and the minimum 0.10m.

Below context 001 at a maximum depth of 0.80m sits context 002 a heavily mixed clayey silt deposit ranging in colour from grey through mid-brown with yellows and oranges, becoming redder toward the base of the trench where iron panning becomes more evident. Context 002 has a maximum depth of 0.45m and a minimum of 0.15m. Also within this context at the northern end of the trench is a dark undisturbed tephra layer, some 0.45m below ground level. The tephra can be traced under the stone within the central part of the trench but halts approximately 0.90m from the southern termination of the trench. The tephra layer lies approximately 0.15m below the stones. It is dark-grey and between 0.05m and 0.01m. This is the so-called Middle Age Layer, which was created by a submarine eruption close by the Reykjanes Peninsula in the early half of the 13th century, most likely in 1226. 0.002m above the layer is a second very thin tephra created by the same eruption as the Middle Age Layer and could be from 1231. At the northern end of the trench this appears as a semi continuous deposit 1.80m in length and <0.02m in thickness at a depth of 0.725m, and at the southern end as a more diffuse deposit.



North-west facing section through 181134-178-3. Thick black lines denote tephra deposits.

The cut was extended by 0.5m to the North where both layers have conjoined. Patches of the Landnámلاغ, Middle Age Layer, and K-1500 are found in the turf of the structure. Going by this information, it is certain that the ruin is from after 1500. As no tephra younger than K-1500 have been found in the area, it is impossible to estimate for how long the structure was in use.

Both contexts 001 and 002 appear lower in the north than in the south (in relation to the excavated area). This does not appear to be the result of any intentional cultural event (i.e. the digging of a foundation trench or dug down structure) but is most likely the result of natural topography. It may be this topographic morphology, which has precipitated the natural accumulation of stones found during the excavation and resulting in the feature's distinctive form.



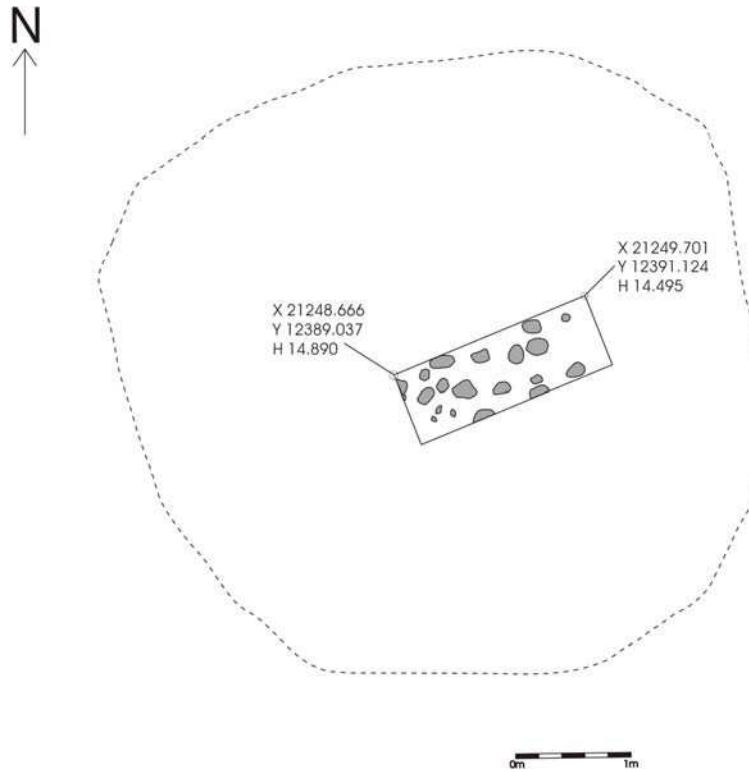
SW facing section

The excavation did not reveal any evidence of habitation related to this feature such as occupation layers associated with waste accumulation. The lack of such deposits would suggest that, were this indeed a structure, then it was one rarely occupied or used.

### **3.2 181134-178-32**

Nat. Grid: E358021, 73481 N402451,95104

This feature lays ca.40m north of Krókamýri on a small hill in the south of the proposed development area. It is a sub circular feature approximately 5.5m in diameter with a small central mound standing at a height of 0.80m. The feature is within a heavily eroded zone, which reaches to the base of the hill and in places beyond. The erosion has exposed the natural gravel subsoil.

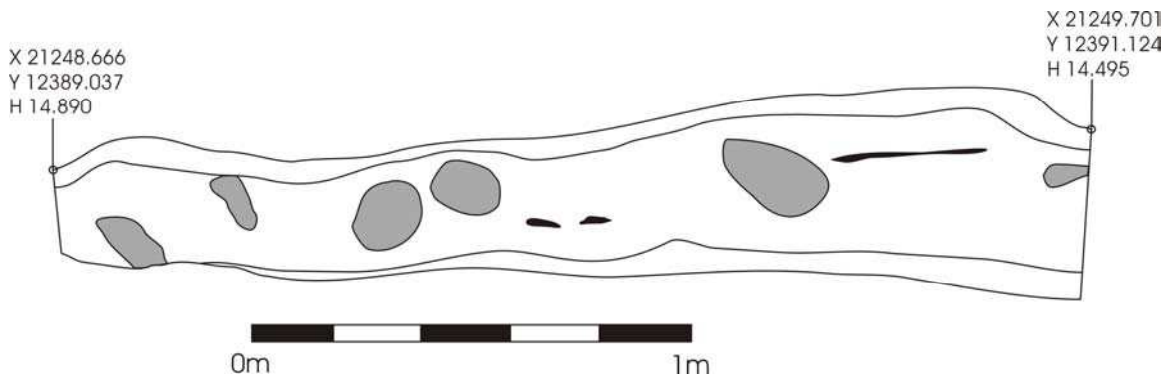


Pre-excavation plan of feature 181134-178-32 showing excavation area and context 001.

A trench measuring 2.4m by 0.8m and orientated approximately north to south along its longest axis was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.66m. Directly below the turf lay a clayey-silt, mid to dark-brown, topsoil (context 001), 0.35m in thickness, containing a number of sub-rounded stones the largest of which being 0.30m and the smallest 0.09m. The distribution of these stones within the context appeared in no way ordered or intentionally placed suggesting either natural or accidental deposition. Within this context and between many of the stones were thin ( $<0.02\text{m}$ ) tephra deposits identified as that of the Katla eruption of 1500. This tephra however appeared at a number of different depths, both above and below many of the stones within 001, again attesting the mixed nature of the deposit as a whole.

Directly below context 001 laid the same natural gravel subsoil to be found in those areas of erosion surrounding the feature.

No evidence of any deposits of cultural significance appeared within this trench. It is possible that due to the feature's close proximity to those areas identified with peat cutting activities it may represent some kind of remnant of this, such as the abandonment of a small number of sods resulting in the steady accumulation of topsoil and vegetation, and the creation of an area of faunal acculturation defined against the surrounding erosion.



North-west facing section through 181134-178-32. Thick black lines denote tephra deposits.

It may be that the creation of a small mound such as this was intentional (the predominantly rounded nature of the stones in contrast to the predominantly angular nature of those in all the other features could be testament to this) and intended as some form of boundary or small marker cairn. Nonetheless, the deposition of tephra within the feature's only soil horizon allows us to date the feature no earlier (and possibly much later) than 1500.

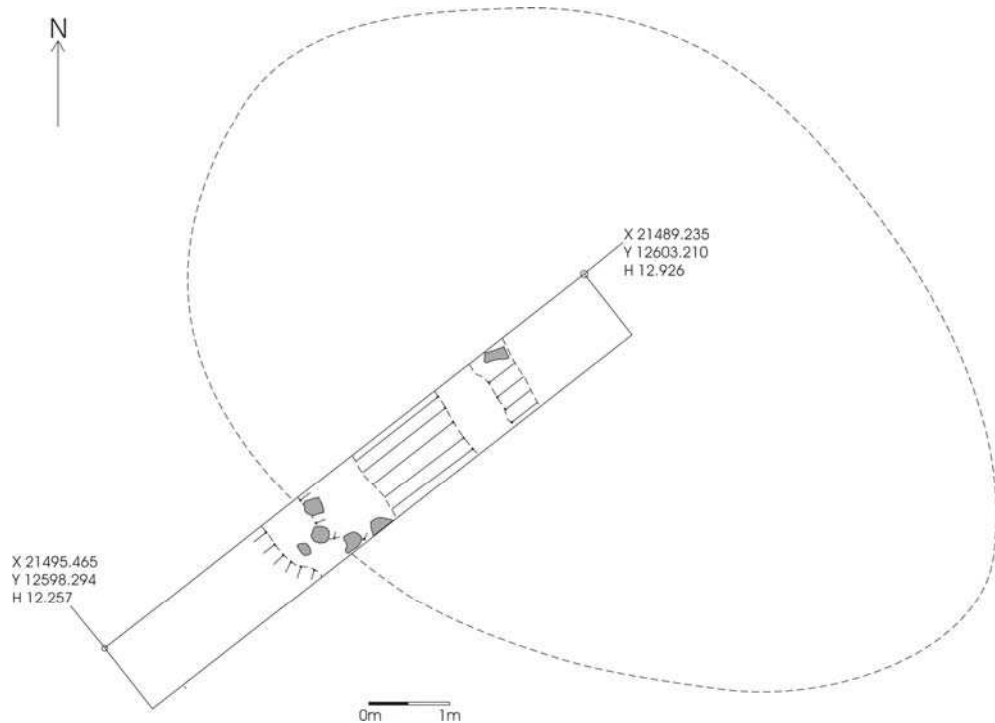
### 3.3 181134-178-34

Nat. Grid: E358085, 53 N402757,74

This feature lies south-east of Hegranes 25, ca. 10m from Hafnarfjarðarvegur. Locally known as Virkið (*Fort*) this feature appears as a sub-rectangular mound within the natural surrounding topography standing to a height of approximately 0.60m. It is ca.12m in length from north-east to south-west and ca.8m in width from North-West to South-East.

A trench measuring 7.80m by 1m and orientated approximately north-west to south-east along its longest axis was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.22m. As with feature 178-

3 it was intended that the placement of this trench would dissect at a right angle a part of the feature thought possibly a wall. Again this was in order to identify possible internal and external zones of any structure as well as exposing in section the nature of any such structural elements.



Pre-excavation plan of feature 181134-178-34 showing excavation area and context 001.

Directly below the turf lay a clayey-silt, mid-brown topsoil (001) with a maximum thickness of 0.30m and a minimum of 0.05m. Directly below this at the south-eastern end of the trench lay a second mid to dark-brown clayey silt deposit with a maximum depth of 0.16m and tapering to an end at the south-east. Directly below these two natural deposits at a depth of 0.45m sat 2 mixed turf layers (003 and 004) containing small tephra deposits. The maximum depth of 003 is 0.26m and minimum 0.04m. The maximum depth of context 004 is 0.30m and the minimum 0.04m. Context 003 overlays 004. Context 004 also appears (in section) to sit within a sub-angular cut (005) at the south-eastern end of the trench. This cut is 0.30m in depth and 0.53m wide but does not appear in its entirety due to the termination of the excavation trench. That which is visible in the section appears to have a regular south-west to north-east sloping side and a flat base. Considering the orientation of the trench as being through what appeared during pre-

excavation survey as possible turf walls and the subsequent discovery during excavation of turf deposits (contexts 004 and 003) it is possible that this cut represents a form of building technology synonymous with Icelandic architecture of all periods.

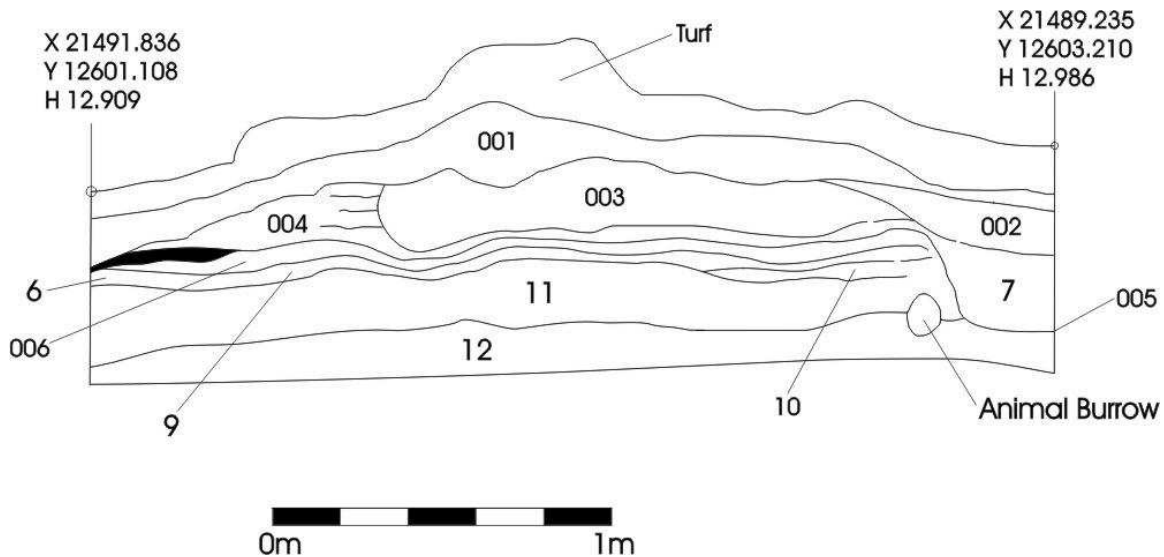
Within the shorter south-east facing section of the trench, at a maximum depth of 0.67m, (within context 003 at the base of the cut described in the previous paragraph) could be seen a small deposit most likely the remnants of occupation. This appeared as a small patch (approx. 0.30m in length and 0.10m in depth) of mid-brown silty clay with a black organic linear inclusion at its base. This thin lamination (<0.05m in thickness) also contained small red



oxidized deposits, all of which are reminiscent of anthropogenic deposits found within other archaeologically investigated structures.

Within both contexts 003 and 004 were small tephra deposits identified as that known as Landnáms-tephra (LNL) dated as  $874 \pm 2$ . The same tephra also appears in the north-west area of the excavated section at a depth of 0.40m. This is directly below context 004 suggesting a close temporal relationship between the deposition of the tephra and the construction or collapse of the turf wall 004. This tephra also sits directly on top of context 006 the natural subsoil cut by 005. Again, this suggests a close relationship between the deposition of the tephra deposit and the construction of the structure. The repetition of the Landnám-tephra within context 004 (up to 7 laminations) would also suggest a technique of turf construction consistent with that known as *strengur*, possibly dating from the 10th century. In this string turf LNL appears numerous times, and it is apparent that it was close to the surface when the turf was cut from the ground.

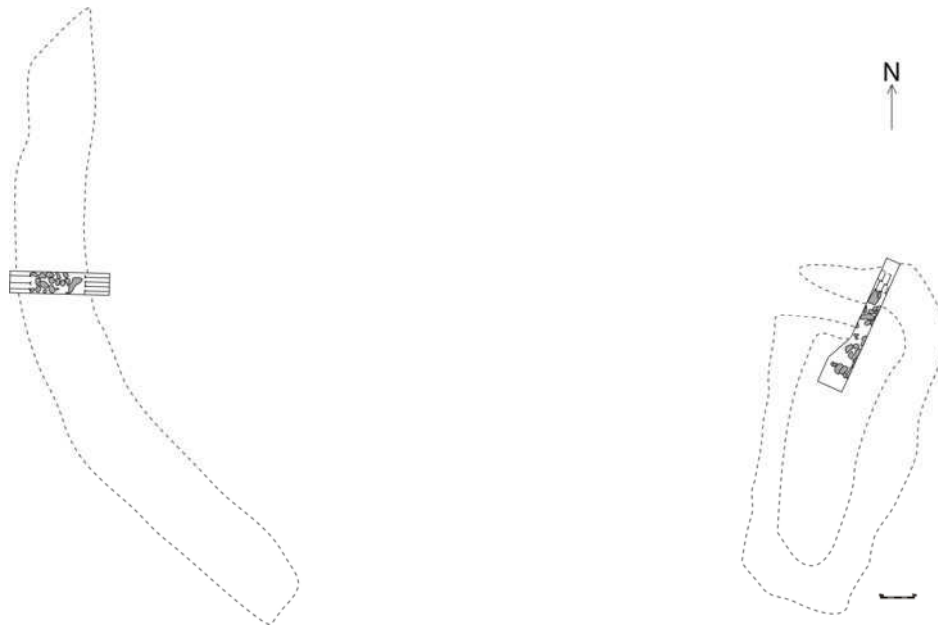
Judging by the surrounding environment, most topsoil has been blown away in earlier times and only the mound remained, possibly because of the structural layers and the compact turf. The erosion probably occurred mostly before 1500, as K-1500 is hardly disturbed at the southernmost edge of the trench.



Section plan of 178-34

### 3.4 181134-178-5

The ruins lie upon a slope approximately 180m south of the Arnarnes Bridge, and are named *Field Enclosure* and *Outhouse* on the development draft. The immediate surrounding landscape is rocky and uneven. The ruins have blended very much with this environment and can hardly be detected on aerial photographs. Those areas of the “outhouse” identified in the 1994 survey, as possible *walls* appear to have become less distinguishable; however, the north-west *wall* is still perceptible (measuring a little over 8m). The south-east *wall*, although less distinguishable, seems of similar length with the adjacent shorter south-west and north-east being approximately 6m in length. Internally the ruin comprises a number of large boulders thought to be the possible remains of either internal dividing walls or collapse from the outer superstructure.



Pre-excavation plan of features 181134-178-5 (*Utihús and Túngarður*) showing excavation areas.

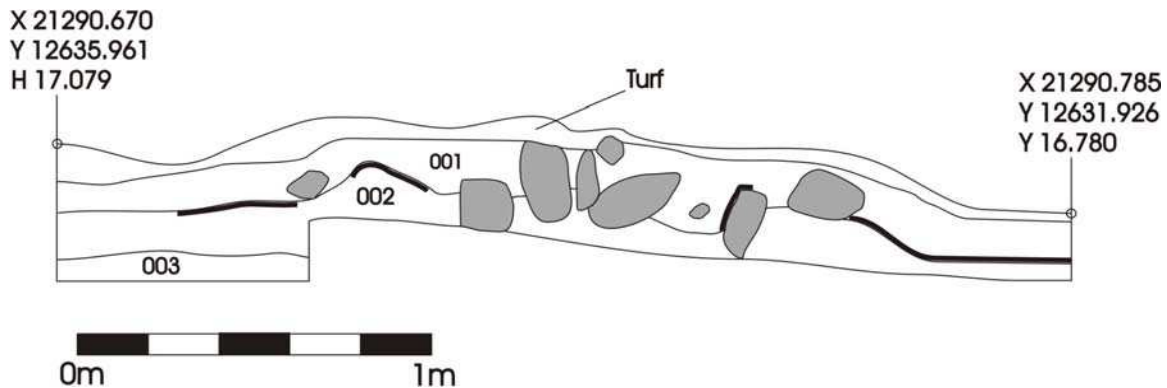
18m west of the *Outhouse* is the linear feature or *Field Enclosure*. This is a large curved feature approximately 26m in length and up to 2m in width and orientated north-west to south-east. It stands at a height of c.0.60m in places but is also barely distinguishable from the surrounding environment in others.

### 3.4.1 Possible Túngarður (Field Enclosure)

Nat. Grid: E358000, 09374 N402706,33538

A trench measuring 4m by 0.85m orientated approximately East to West along its longest axis was excavated to a maximum depth of c.0.70m. Below the turf at a maximum depth of 0.15m lay a mid to dark brown clayey silt with a maximum thickness of 0.30m (context 001). Within this context were a number of sub-angular stones the largest being c.0.75m and the smallest 0.12m. These stones were predominant in the middle of the trench where the context was at its highest, creating the raised linear form recognized in the pre-excavation survey. At the interface between context 002 and the lower context 003 (light to mid-brown clayey-silt) K-1500 tephra lay up against the stones at both sides of the deposit within the trench. It is however, not visible under the stones at the mid-section of the trench, though it does appear thus at the eastern end. One stone lies under the tephra at the eastern end of the trench suggesting that the deposition of the stones

occurred prior to 1500. Were we to presume this deposition to be of human origin then it would seem that the stone feature stood well above the ground in 1500 and would have been in use at that time. Judging by the section, the stones within the deposit have not collapsed out of their original grouping to any notable degree until some time after K-1500 was deposited, therefore possibly suggesting continued use (and repair) for some time after 1500.



North-west facing section through 181134-178-5 (*Túngarðu*). Thick black lines denote tephra deposits.

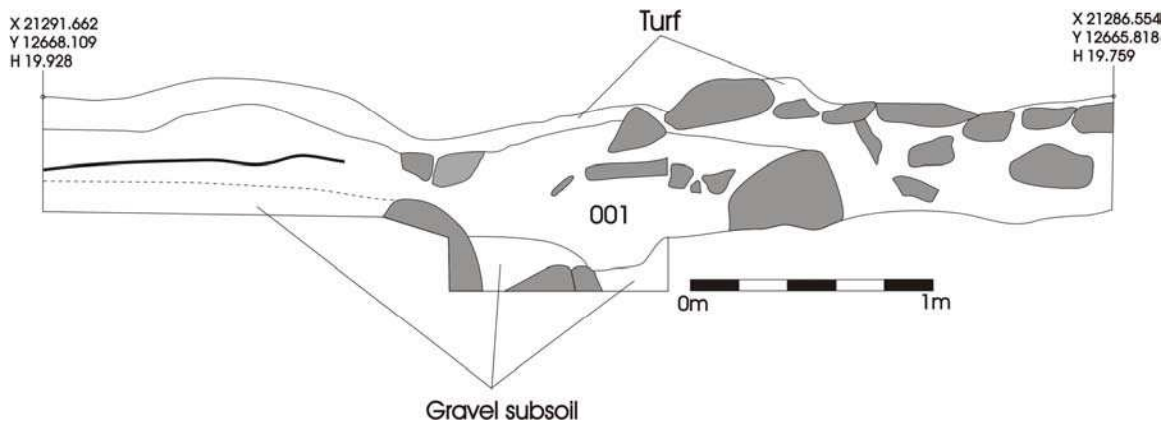
### 3.4.2 Possible Útihús (Outhouse)

Nat. Grid: E358003, 8747 N402734,54367

A trench measuring 5.50m by 0.60m in the north-east and extended to 1m in width in the south-west and orientated approximately north-east to south-west along its longest axis was excavated to a maximum depth of c.1m.

Below the turf, at a maximum depth of 0.22m, lay a mid to dark brown clayey-silt with a maximum thickness of 0.80m (001). Within this were a large number of angular boulders the largest of which being 0.54m and the smallest 0.12m. These did not appear intentionally placed or set in any particular order (as one would expect from wall foundations) but became markedly denser when the trench was extended to the south-west. However, in the south-west these stones sat, not within context 001, but within topsoil, itself sitting at a thickness of 0.54m upon natural underlying bedrock. Within context 001 was also a discontinuous, but easily definable tephra horizon at an average depth of 0.40m. This tephra is again that of Katla 1500. Large patches of K-1500 are on top of the easternmost stones suggesting that these stones are in situ and therefore

deposited before 1500. Below context 001 at a depth of 0.55m was a non-anthropogenic gravel clay layer consistent with that found at the base of all the other features outlined above. Where no absolute division existed between these two layers context 001 became greyer and subsequently merges into context 002.



North-west facing section through 181134-178-5 (*Utihús*). Thick black lines denote tephra deposits.

The excavation did not reveal any evidence of habitation related to this feature such as occupation layers associated with waste accumulation. The lack of such deposits would suggest that, were this indeed a structure, then it was one rarely occupied or used.



#### **4. Recommendations**

##### **4.1 181134-178-3**

It is advised that prior to construction this feature and surrounding area be mechanically stripped of topsoil only under the supervision of a qualified archaeologist in the event that more substantial cultural remains exist outside those areas excavated under the current contract. Should such remains be found then a further program of archaeological excavation should be initiated.

#### **4.2 181134-178-32**

This feature does not appear to be of any archaeological significance and can therefore be removed with no further investigation.

#### **4.3 181134-178-34**

This feature is of potentially high archaeological interest and should be treated accordingly. It is therefore advised that a full archaeological excavation be carried out by suitably qualified archaeologists prior to any further development.

#### **4.4 181134-178-5**

It is advised that prior to construction this feature and surrounding area be mechanically stripped of topsoil only under the supervision of a qualified archaeologist in the event that more substantial cultural remains exist outside those areas excavated under the current contract. Should such remains be found then a further program of archaeological excavation should be initiated.

## Byggðasafns Skagfirðinga:

- 28 **Fornleifaskráning vegna aðalskipulags í Fjarðabyggð.** Svæðisskráning. Guðný Zoëga, Ragnheiður Traustadóttir janúar 2004.
- 29 **Fornleifaskráning vegna aðalskipulags Breiðdalsvíkur.** Guðný Zoëga, Bryndís Zoëga, Anna Rut Guðmundsdóttir, janúar 2004.
- 30 **Fornleifaskráning vegna deiliskipulags á Þingeyrum.** Guðný Zoëga, mars 2004.
- 31 **Fornleifaskráning vegna deiliskipulags í Skálmarhæ.** Ragnheiður Traustadóttir, Anna Rut Guðmundsdóttir, maí 2004.
- 32 **Fornleifaskráning vegna deiliskipulags í Arnarneslandi.** Ragnheiður Traustadóttir og Anna Rut Guðmundsdóttir, maí 2004.
- 33 **Greining mannabeina úr kirkjugarðinum í Keldudal, Hegræsi.** Framvinduskýrsla. Guðný Zoëga, september 2004.
- 34 **Hallormsstaður og nágrenni.** Fornleifaskráning. Guðný Zoëga, nóvember 2004.
- 35 **Hálsþorp í Djúpvogssæppi.** Fornleifaskráning. Guðný Zoëga, nóvember 2004.
- 36 **Neiðr-Ás í Hjaltadal.** Fornleifaskráning vegna deiliskipulags. Bryndís Zoëga, Guðný Zoëga desember 2004.
- 37 **Vopnafjörður.** Heimildaskráning vegna væntanlegra vegaframkvæmda. Bryndís Zoëga, Guðný Zoëga desember 2004.
- 38 **Fornleifaskráning vegna aðalskipulags á Langholti Skagafarði.** Grófarfjall, Bráutarholt, Stóra-Seyla, Torfgarður, Ytra-Skörðugil I og II, Halldórsstaðir, Jaðar og Páfastaðir. Bryndís Zoëga, Guðný Zoëga desember 2004.
- 39 **Fornleifakönnun í Landi Arnarness, Garðabæ.** Daniel Rhodes, Ragnheiður Traustadóttir október 2004.

Heimasíða Byggðasafns Skagfirðinga er  
[www.krokur.is/glaumb/](http://www.krokur.is/glaumb/)