

Medieval Zooarchaeology at Staðartunga farm in Northern Iceland.

Establishing research protocol

Kristin L. R. Møller-Nilsen (HÍ) & Ramona Harrison (AHKR, UiB)



Staðartunga in Iceland (right) and in relation to other farm midden sites with Zooarchaeological materials in the area around Eyjafjörður (left). These sites will be important for comparison. Maps: Árni Daniel Júlíusson.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

- Part of the interdisciplinary project “Power, wealth, and Plague in Two Valleys – Svarfaðardalur, Hörgáladur and their hinterlands ca. AD 870-1500” (2VP) led by Árni Daniel Júlíusson (HÍ, RA) and Ramona Harrison (UiB)¹.
- Focuses on farm economy, livestock management, resource utilisation, and site organisation.
- Aims to discuss the mode, nature, and pace of changing social structures and the ecological, natural, and social influences driving this change.
- Based on work done in the area².

STAÐARTUNGA FARM

- Known from written sources dated back to 1396 AD³.
- A large independent farm. At times under the Möðruvellir monastic farm estate. High status?
- Situated on a natural plateau south of the Hórga river with a good view of Hörgáladur and surrounding farms. Is described as having good pastures.
- Surveyed in 2008⁴, preliminary investigations in 2013 and 2014⁵.

FIELD STRATEGY

- Extensive coring across the site to separate cultural deposits from naturally occurring mound.
- Two trenches, trench 3 (1x3m) and trench 4 (2x5m), 30 meters apart to get an overview of midden mound.
- Deturfed and excavated by hand, sieved through 4mm mesh.
- 3 eDNA samples from each stratigraphic layer along with C14-samples.



Overview of western half of site (left), Eyjafjörður visible in the distance. Field documentation, (middle), coring grid (right).

THE 2022 FIELD SEASON

- Became a study in adaptability
- Established a 5x5 meter grid system for coring, along with new recording form.
- Established criteria to serve as proxy for preservation.
- Complete chronology dating all the way back to landnám. Profile includes segmentation from H1104 and H1300 tephra layers.
- Bone deposits identified in all cultural layers (N = 11), although alternating good and poor preservation.

Next steps

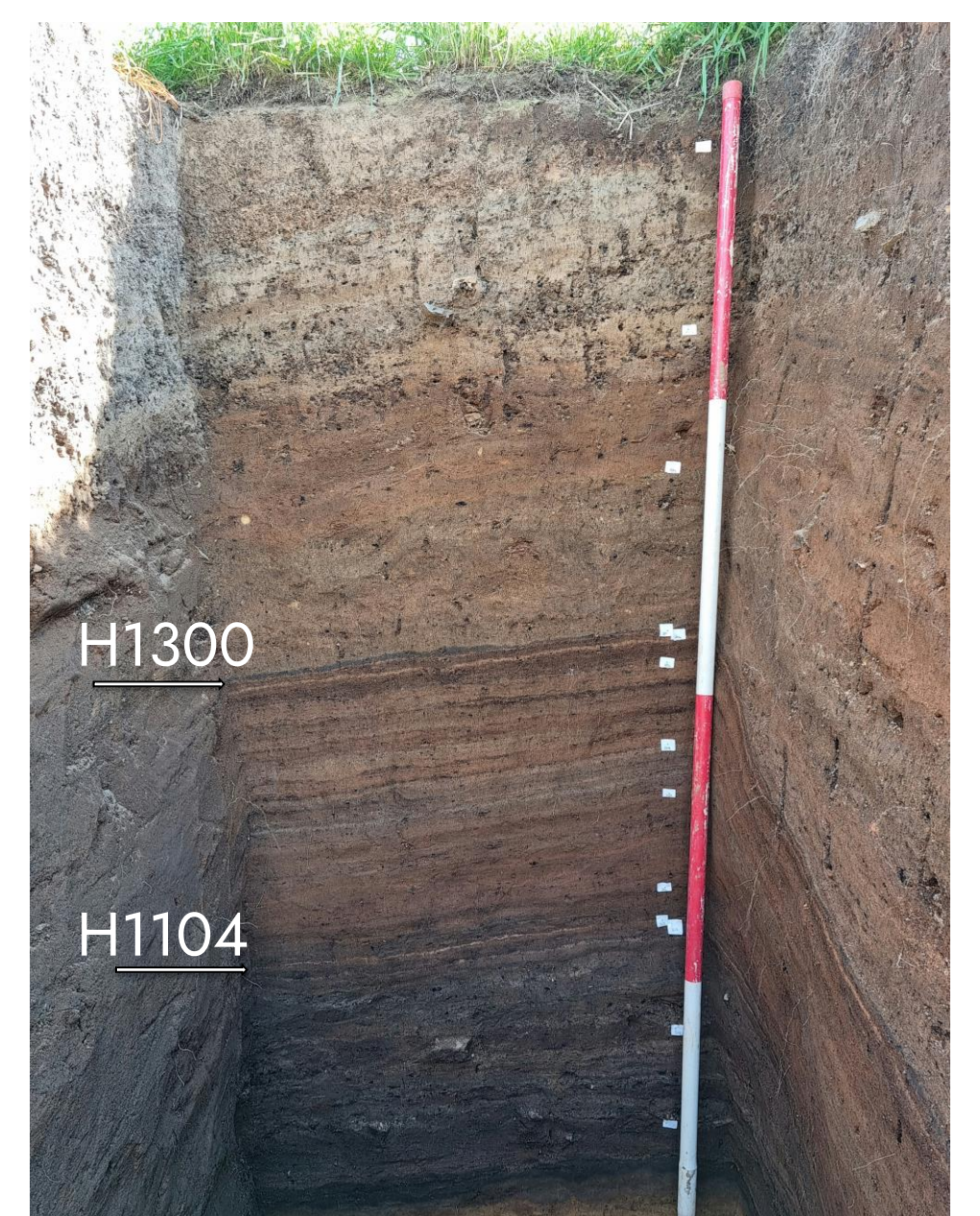
- Complete macroscopic analysis of faunal remains.
- Coordinate sampling for isotopic analysis such as carbon ($\delta^{13}\text{C}$), nitrogen ($\delta^{15}\text{N}$), oxygen ($\delta^{18}\text{O}$) and sulphur ($\delta^{34}\text{S}$).



Example of bone recovered from trench 3. Notice difference in preservation from the top left corner (206), to top right corner (207) to the remaining 5 trays (all 204).



Near intact whale bone artefact recovered during excavation. The bone has been polished and worked to a smooth surface. Maybe a handle or a drill? Recovered in layer just above H1300-tephra (awaiting C-14 dates). Photo: R. Harrison



Southern profile of trench 3.

1) Júlíusson, A.D. 2021. Power, Wealth and Plague in Two Valleys – Svarfaðardalur, Hörgáladur and their hinterlands ca. AD 870-1500 Proposal to the Icelandic Research Fund 2021 Grant of Excellence. Typescript.
 2) Harrison, R. 2013. World Systems and Human Ecodynamics in Medieval Eyjafjörður, North Iceland: Gasir and Its Hinterlands. PhD diss., Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York.
 3) *Diplomatarium Islandicum 111,526*
 4) Hreiðarðsdóttir, E.Ó (edt) (2008). *Fornleifskráning í Öxnadal- og Skriðuhreppi. Fornleifastofnun Íslands*. Report FS370-04071. Reykjavík, Iceland. Volumes 1-3.
 5) Harrison, R. & Roberts, H. (2014). Investigations into the Gásir Hinterlands and Eyjafjörður Human Ecodynamics: Preliminary Field Report of the 2013 Skuggi and Staðartunga Excavations in Hörgárdalur, Eyjafjörður.

