



Settlement, shieling and landscape

Introduction

This paper is based on the results of the interdisciplinary project, *Settlement, shieling and landscape* (Emanuelsson *et al.* 2003). The disciplines included are archaeology, human geography and palaeoecology, represented by the project members Marie Emanuelsson, Annie Johansson, Stefan Nilsson, Susanne Pettersson, and Eva Svensson. Working within an interdisciplinary framework has proved to be a fruitful method by which to shed light on the settlement structures of a thinly populated area of Sweden, even though it has been a subject for discussions and even jokes within the project. The human geographer and the palaeoecologist highlighted this in a comparison of the capacities of the various disciplines. The resulting value of zero (figure 1) has, however, nothing to do with the actual result. On the contrary, the results provided evidence for a diversity of settlement since prehistoric times, even though the region's settlement history has traditionally been understood through the model of medieval colonisation.

Method land use	Human geography (maps)	Vegetation history (pollen)	Archaeology (field traces)	Sum (land use)
Cultivation	–	++	+–	1 +
Hay-making	++	+	--	1 +
Grazing	--	++	--	2 –
Sum (method)	1 –	5 +	4 –	0

Figure 1. The assessment of the potential for land use drawn from the participating disciplines in the project. Table by Stefan Nilsson, human geographer, and Marie Emanuelsson, palaeoecologist (Emanuelsson *et al.* 2003, Table 1, p. 8). Addition by the author = 1 sign for minor; 2 signs for medium.

Working with archaeology and the other disciplines within this project has been a challenge, since existing local studies and reliable references were not available to the project. In the beginning of the 1990s, when the first local investigations of the study area Dalby took place, the area was considered to have been colonised during the Middle Ages. This conclusion was primarily based on negative evidence, on the

absence of prehistoric graves in an area of 100 kilometres in circumference. However, agrarian settlement in the area has later been documented from AD 500 onwards. A different economic strategy with a different relationship to the local and wider society could explain the apparent differences in the material culture.

Dalby parish with the hamlet of Backa and Skinnerud

The investigated area is located in the area of the medieval parish of Dalby (figure 2), a region known from written sources as having been almost exclusively inhabited by freeholders (the oldest tax rolls from AD 1503). According to the National Register of Ancient Monuments at the National Heritage Board in Stockholm, the outland resources in Dalby have been very important. By 1997, approximately 80 bloomery furnace sites, 1300 charcoal pits, 700 pitfalls for elk and 150 shielings are known from the parish. Results from excavations and initial pollen analyses have shown that non-agrarian activities such as bloomery iron were undertaken from AD 400 to early modern times, and pitfalls were constructed from approximately 3000 BC to early modern times. Agrarian activities, such as shielings and hay-making, have been dated from AD 700-900 to modern times. The bloomery iron production and the use of pitfalls are concentrated to the period AD 900-1200, indicating a time of intensified, non-agrarian outland usage and a production which was probably related to an external market.

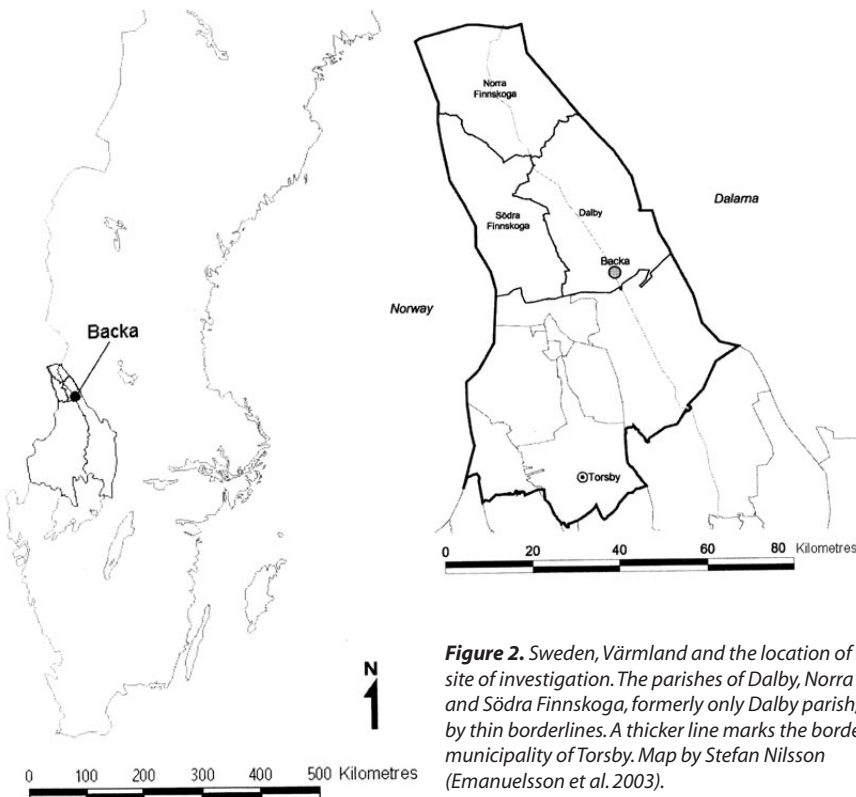


Figure 2. Sweden, Värmland and the location of Backa, the site of investigation. The parishes of Dalby, Norra Finnskoga and Södra Finnskoga, formerly only Dalby parish, are marked by thin borderlines. A thicker line marks the border of the municipality of Torsby. Map by Stefan Nilsson (Emanuelsson et al. 2003).

The settlement of Backa and Skinnerud

The project *Settlement, shieling and landscape* started in 1998, following a trial excavation in 1996. Attention was focused on a single hamlet, Backa, in order to obtain a detailed picture of the settlement, the outland use, and the relationship between them. The place-name, stray finds and a prime topographical location made Backa a possible prehistoric settlement. Two stone axes and a hearth dated to the Bronze Age (LuA 4672 in Appendix) indicate a temporary settlement in the area during the Neolithic and early Bronze Age. A more sedentary type of settlement may be expected from the Iron Age, most likely prior to AD 500.

The smallholding of Skinnerud, a secondary unit of Backa, located on a location suitable for cultivation and hay-making, close to the hamlet of Backa, was partly excavated in 1996 and again in 1998-2000. Four house structures were identified (figure 3). The largest building is interpreted as a hall (HI) with a diversity of uses, including a summer dwelling. Next to the hall was a cooking house (HII), which was most likely the winter dwelling. The other two houses were probably a store (HIII) and a cattle byre (HIV). According to the remains and artefacts, the site was probably occupied by a well-to-do household, consisting of a nuclear family, one or two farmhands and maids, and maybe some unmarried siblings and elderly relatives. This secondary unit of Backa has been dated to Viking period/early Middle Ages (Lu 4192, Lu 4193, Lu 4195, LuA 4191, LuA 4194, LuA 4671, LuA 4933 in Appendix)

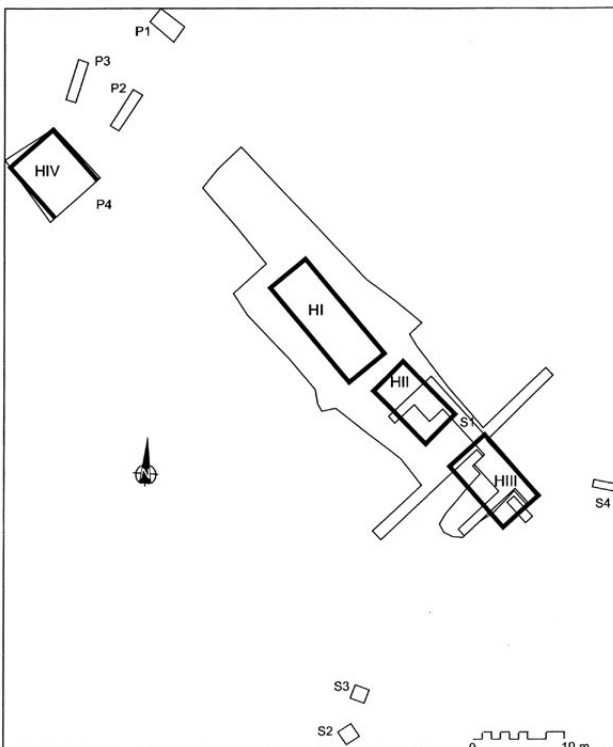


Figure 3. The excavation area at Skinnerud. HI-HIV = houses; P1-P4 = test pits; S1-S4 = test pits. Plan by Annie Johansson. (Emanuelsson et al. 2003, Figure 16, p. 42).

with three exceptions. One of the exceptions indicates a period of activity during the Migration period (LuA 4932), the other two indicate some kind of activity later than the settlement (LuA 4685, LuA 4934 in Appendix).

Nearly 300 artefacts have been registered, the majority being everyday items of iron or stone, but the collection also includes some finds of a more prestigious character. Among the activities, interpreted from the combination of finds, iron and skin-/leather-working constitute the most interesting categories (figure 4). Production based on outland resources demonstrates that the settlement used many resources in the forested zone. Since there are 'imported' items such as beads and copper alloys, the inhabitants were probably involved in trade, most likely including iron and skin/leather products.

The place-name, 'Skinnerud', which could be interpreted as a settlement occupied by a tanner or someone who deals in leather articles, is interesting in this context. The artefacts from the late Viking period/early Middle Ages may indicate that the place-name is of equal antiquity.

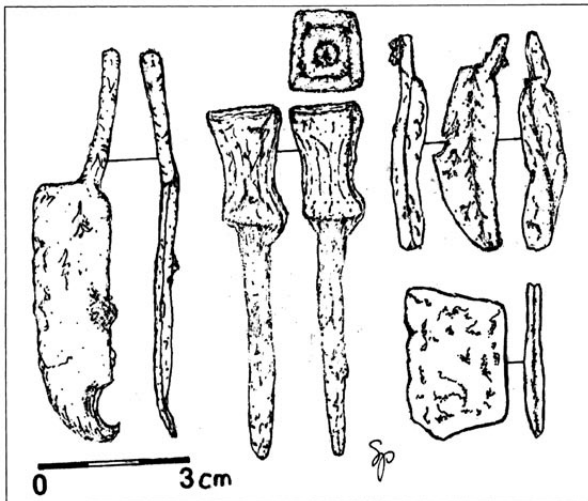


Figure 4. Tools probably used for skin- and leather-working found at Skinnerud. Drawing by S. Pettersson. Left = scrape/cutting tool. Middle = awl. Right top = Scrape/carving tool. Right bottom = knife (Emanuelsson et al. Figure 21, p. 52).

The outland of Backa

A study of historical maps was conducted to investigate the occurrence of hay-making on the marshlands lying between the hamlet of Backa and its shieling, Backasättern. Four of these mires, Multmyren, Stakällsmyren, Tittbäcksmymren, Blötmyren, and the shieling of Backasättern, were studied by using pollen analyses. Interpretation of the results is summarised in Figure 5 and the radiocarbon dates are listed in the Appendix.

Altogether, sixty buildings and building foundations have been mapped at Backasättern. With a purpose of dating the establishment of some buildings on the shieling, four building foundations were selected and investigated. One possible

house could be dated to the Migration period (LuA 4670 in Appendix) and the rest of the radiocarbon datings from the excavations of the shieling indicate that the houses were used until the late Middle Ages/early Modern period (LuA 4928, LuA 4929, LuA 4930, LuA 4931 in Appendix). Most of the artefacts and one of the house foundations could be dated to the Modern period.

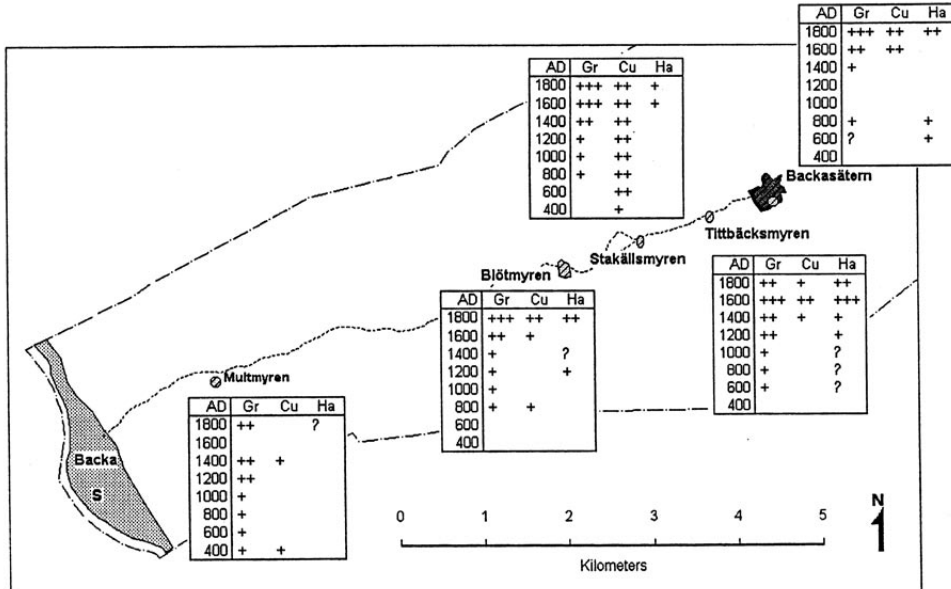


Figure 5. Interpretation of the results of the pollen analysis of the sampled mires and Backasättern. The agrarian land use of each site is summarised in the tables. Gr = grazing; Cu = cereal cultivation; Ha = hay-making. Observe that the impact of land use (+ = minor; ++ = medium; +++ = major; ? = ambiguous or indistinct) is subject to change at each site and that the chronologies are simplified. Map by Marie Emanuelsson & Stefan Nilsson (Emanuelsson et al. 2003, Figure 38, p. 102).

A chronological interpretation of settlement, land use and outland use at Backa

The chronology of settlement, land use, and outland use at Backa can according to the results of the project be summarised as follow:

A sedentary settlement – with permanent fields and meadows – was established in the hamlet of Backa around AD 500, as well as some of the pitfalls for elk in the forested outland. At the same time, about AD 500, bloomery iron production and various forms of agrarian outland use were initiated.

In the late Viking period and early Middle Ages, the settlement expanded and Skinnerud was established. This settlement was probably preceded by an expansion within the hamlet; during which time the entire nearby infield area was taken into use. Although the settlement expanded and the population increased, the agrarian outland use was not intensified. On the contrary, the shieling of Backasättern appears to have been deserted at the same time as the bloomery iron production and use of

pitfalls were intensified – probably with the intention of sale to an external market.

Around AD 1200, bloomery iron production, however, declined dramatically, and somewhat later, the construction of pitfalls for elk also followed the same trend. Still, non-agrarian outland production continued and the techniques and organisation of the iron production were even improved. The reduced level of production may indicate that it at this time was only intended for home consumption. Shortly after the decline in the non-agrarian outland use, the agrarian outland use increased.

Since Skinnerud was probably deserted around AD 1250, the former settlement area could be used for an agrarian expansion within the hamlet, and about AD 1400 the shieling of Backasättern also seems to have been re-established. In fact, an increase in agrarian production could be indicated at Backa in a period otherwise known as the 'late medieval agrarian crisis.' The last period of expansion documented by the study was a heavily intensified agrarian outland use around AD 1600. At this time, hay-making in the outland became important and new shielings were established.

The forest farmers and the market

Apart from the more general expansions and recessions, the society of Dalby experienced local economic cycles, differing somewhat from the norm of expansion of agrarian outland use during the late Middle Ages. The recession also affected Dalby, but the effects were different from those that might have been expected. In fact, the expansion in agrarian outland use should be considered an integral part of this crisis.

The intensive iron production in the beginning of the Middle Ages was probably aimed at an external market. It appears to have been so important that the forest farmers of Backa gave up the use their shieling of Backasättern in order to concentrate on retail production. When the market failed, the forest farmers were again forced to increase the agrarian production for their own consumption. The economic recession during the late Middle Ages must have caused a lack of demand for the products in the wider market.

Bloomery iron production remained a local interest until the seventeenth century when production ceased. By then, the forest farmers of Dalby had entered another market with other products based on outland resources, namely cattle. The expansion in agrarian outland use in early modern times was probably linked, at least partly, to an increase in cattle breeding for sale to the Swedish mining districts.

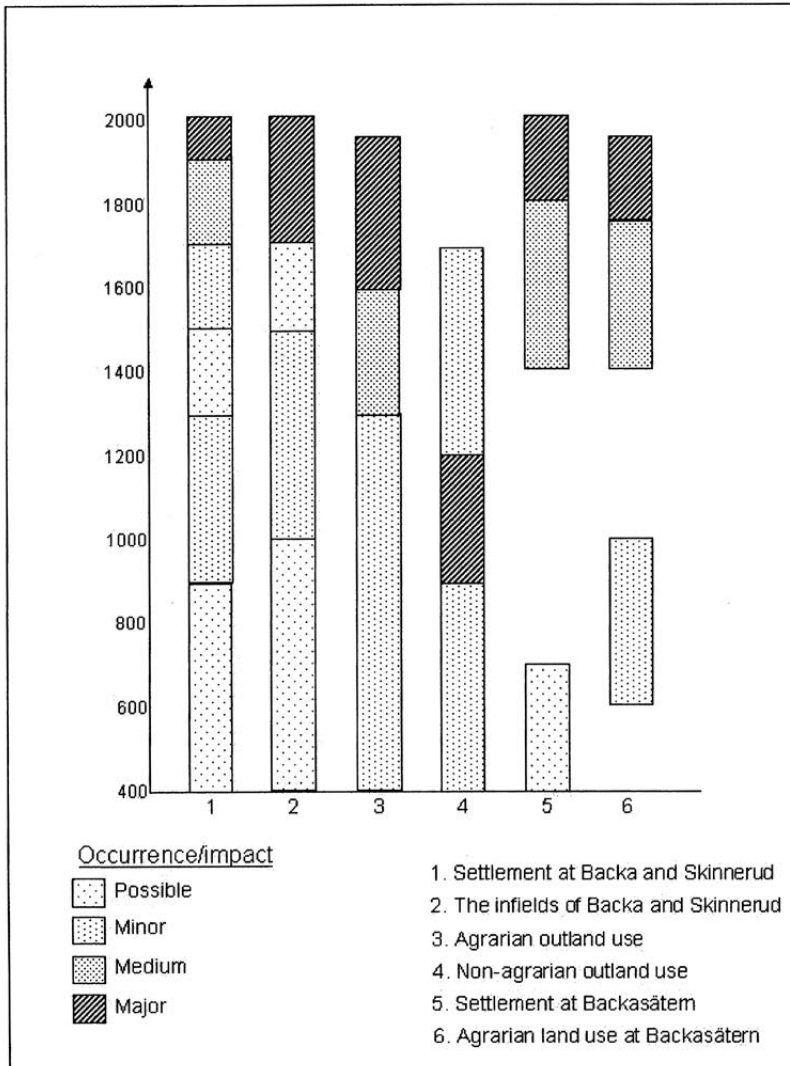


Figure 6. Occurrence of settlement and the impact of different land use activities over time on the Backa estate. Figure by Marie Emanuelsson, Annie Johansson, Susanne Pettersson, Eva Svensson and Pontus Ullgren (Emanuelsson et al. 2003, Figure 50, p. 130).

Summary

The project 'Settlement, shieling and landscape' has studied a single hamlet, Backa, in the periphery of northern Värmland, Sweden. Using interdisciplinary methodology has made it possible to study the settlement development and the fluctuations over time (c. AD 500 – 1700) in both agrarian and non-agrarian outland use. The activities that were investigated include hay-making, cereal cultivation in the outland, the use of shielings and forest grazing, bloomery iron production and the use of pitfalls for

elk. Results from the project indicate that outland activities were intended for self-subsistence as well as for the production of retail goods.

It appears that the forest farmers in the investigated area were dependent on the demands of, and changes in, the market and its related areas. In times with good market opportunities, production of retail goods expanded and production for self-consumption diminished, whereas the production for self-consumption grew more important in periods of market decline. The main aim of producing goods for sale seems to have been the possibility of maintaining a consumption of goods in accordance with the forest farmers' desired social position.

References

Emanuelsson, Marie, Annie Johansson, Stefan Nilsson, Susanne Petterson and Eva Svensson 2003: Settlement, Shieling and Landscape – The Local History of a Forest Hamlet. *Lund Studies in Medieval Archaeology* 32. Stockholm

Appendix

List of ^{14}C -analyses. Modified by the author out of; Table 4, p. 47; Table 21, p. 91 and Table 22, p. 116 in the book (Emanuelsson *et al.* 2003).

Radiocarbon date		Calibrated date, 1 sigma	Site	
LuA 4670	BP 1460±80	AD 470-670	Backasättern	
LuA 4928	BP 415±100	AD 1420-1530, 1560-1630	Backasättern	
LuA 4929	BP 495±85	AD 1300-1360, 1380-1490	Backasättern	
LuA 4930	BP 490±95	AD 1300-1500, 1600-1620	Backasättern	
LuA 4931	BP 305±80	AD 1480-1660	Backasättern	
Lu 4192	BP 880±60	AD 1046-1098, 1115-1145, 1153-1229	Skinnerud	
Lu 4193	BP 1110±80	AD 881-1014	Skinnerud	
Lu 4195	BP 850±70	AD 1064-1075, 1126-1134, 1159-1276	Skinnerud	
LuA 4191	BP 900±140	AD 1011-1280	Skinnerud	
LuA 4194	BP 910±60	AD 1032-1218	Skinnerud	
LuA 4671	BP 770±90	AD 1160-1300, 1370-1380	Skinnerud	
LuA 4672	BP 3230±90	1620-1410 BC	Skinnerud	
LuA 4685	BP 225±90	AD 1520-1950	Skinnerud	
LuA 4932	BP 1555±85	AD 420-600	Skinnerud	
LuA 4933	BP 1090±100	AD 780-1030	Skinnerud	
LuA 4934	BP 375±85	AD 1440-1530, 1550-1640	Skinnerud	
Radiocarbon date		Calibrated date, 1 sigma	Mire, depth at peat profile, cm	
LuA 4967	BP 535±85	AD 1313-1441	Multmyren	55-56
LuA 5122	BP 1445±90	AD 539-663	Multmyren	67-68
LuA 4968	BP 1835±85	AD 78-320	Multmyren	69-70
LuA 4956	BP 170±90	AD 1648-1951	Blötmyren	55-56
LuA 4955	BP 1115±90	AD 781-1018	Blötmyren	75-76
LuA 5123	BP 1220±90	AD 686-948	Blötmyren	78-79
LuA 4954	BP 690±85	AD 1264-1392	Stakällmyren	27-28
LuA 5124	BP 1225±80	AD 687-893	Stakällmyren	32-33
LuA 4953	BP 2015±85	147 BC-AD 75	Stakällmyren	44-45
LuA 4686	BP 225±90	AD 1526-1948	Tittbäcksmýren	28-29
LuA 5125	BP 845±80	AD 1044-1276	Tittbäcksmýren	43-44
LuA 4687	BP 880±110	AD 1023-1273	Tittbäcksmýren	48-49
LuA 5126	BP 1375±80	AD 616-756	Tittbäcksmýren	65-66
LuA 4836	BP 620±80	AD 1290-1409	Backasättern	20-21
LuA 5127	BP 965±80	AD 998-1162	Backasättern	27-28
LuA 4835	BP 1135±80	AD 780-996	Backasättern	30-31
LuA 5128	BP 1390±85	AD 601-688	Backasättern	40-41
LuA 4736	BP 1630±95	AD 262-539	Backasättern	48-49

