



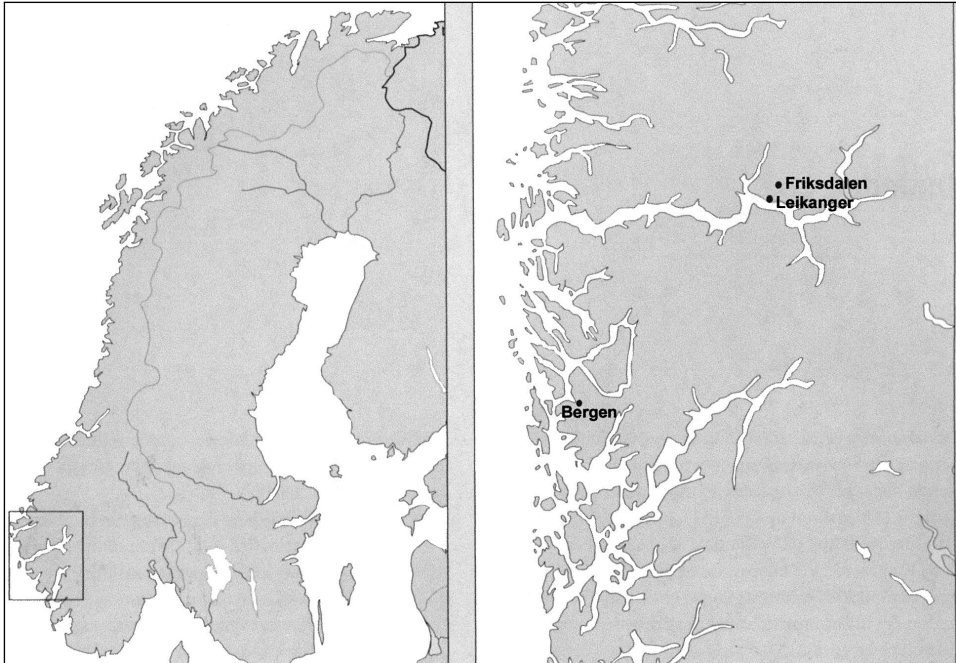
## **Shielings and landscape in western Norway** – *Research traditions and recent trends*

Few archaeological investigations have been carried out to investigate farming related activities in the mountain areas of Norway. In the 1980s, some mountainous areas, especially in the western part of the country, were surveyed and partly excavated in connection with the development of hydroelectric energy (Kvamme and Randers 1982, Gustafson 1982 a and b, Indrelid 1988, Bjørge *et al.* 1992, Randers and Kvamme 1992). The aim of this research was, however, somewhat limited, and it was not seen in connection with the farms in the lowland which used the mountainous areas for pastures in the summer season. I will use this opportunity to present some of the results and methods used in my study of shielings and the farms they belonged to in the fjord district of Sogn in western Norway (Skrede 2002).

The area of my investigation is Leikanger, a small rural community situated along Sognefjorden (figure 1). Here, I have concentrated my studies on two areas with house remains of shielings in the mountain valley Friksdalen: Svolset and Heimste Friksdal, respectively 800 and 650 metres above sea level. They represent two areas that can serve as case studies illuminating the early history of shielings in Norway, and the different types of building constructions in the mountain areas of western Norway.

Shielings are summer residences for farmers in the mountains where they pasture cattle, sheep and other animals. There has been debated as to when the shieling system began. One view is that it is a medieval system (Hougen 1947:320), while others see it as a much older system that dates back to the late Iron Age – if not earlier. The character of the shielings may also have been different. How did my investigations illuminate these questions?

While earlier historical research has tended to see the outlying land from the perspective of the farm, I have focused on the outlying land as such, but also in connection with the historically related farms (Skrede 2002). I have studied the area in a holistic way, in order to show the relation between two mountain sites used respectively in the Iron Age and in the Middle Ages. It was important to investigate whether they represent different uses and organisation in the different time periods.



**Figure 1.** The investigation areas – Leikanger and Friksdalen

My main aim has been to supply more information about the oldest shieling systems in this part of the country, and to study:

- the outlying land in relation to relevant farms in the lowland area
- the extent and character of the sites
- the function of the site and the house remains more closely
- in order to obtain a more precise dating
- to compare possible shieling systems with systems from later periods

These sites have earlier been studied archaeologically by Bente Magnus (Magnus 1983, 1985, 1986, 1991) and pollen botanically by Mons Kvamme. Kvamme's results have not yet been published (Kvamme personal comments). In the early 1980s, Magnus surveyed 12 clustered house remains at Svolset (Magnus 1991:18). Only one room in a double house remain was totally excavated, while another was partially examined. The remaining house sites were only investigated with test pits (Magnus 1985:11). The house remains at Heimste Friksdal, seven in total, have only been excavated by samples. Magnus also surveyed four stones with cup marks and about 50 cooking pits – dispersed in the valley. Kvamme found evidence from pasture activity dating from the late Bronze Age (Magnus 1991).

According to Magnus, Svolset was used as a shieling from the Migration period and was abandoned by the end of the Viking period. She found that the most intensive usage was in the late Iron Age (Magnus 1986:49). Of the 12 house remains, 8 of them had two rooms. She interpreted the site as a result of a planned expansion

from the lowland farms and as a seasonal site used in the summer for pastures and as shielings (Magnus 1986:50). According to Magnus, the cooking pits represented an older phase than the house remains (Magnus 1991:21).

During the thirteenth century, a new shieling was in use at Heimste Friksdal, 2 kilometres lower down the valley. Both the archaeological and the pollen botanical evidence showed that they probably were abandoned after the Middle Ages, but in use again during the sixteenth century (Magnus 1986:49).



**Figure 2.** Picture from Friksdalen. Svolset is situated in the centre of the picture.

My investigation of the area has been carried out in the form of test pits as minor samples of the houses and some of the cooking pits (Skrede 2002:17). Nine of the house remains have been radiocarbon dated. All house remains were drawn and mapped by GPS. Also the cooking pits and the cup mark stones were mapped by GPS. There was no historical written evidence concerning the mountain sites.

Through the new survey, I found four new house remains, 16 in total (Skrede 2002:23). This is a larger number than usual in the mountains of western Norway. More than six is rare, and only two other locations in western Norway have as many as 14 house remains (Indrelid 1988:111, Furnes 2001:24-30). Fifteen of the 16 house remains at Svolset had walls built of stone, and the size did not vary too much. Most of the rooms were between 20 and 30 square metres (Skrede 2002:92), similar to house remains at other mountain sites (Indrelid 1988:111, Bjørge 1992:304). Ten of the house remains at Svolset contain at least two rooms (figure 3), while six have one room. In other mountainous areas of western Norway, most house remains have only one room.

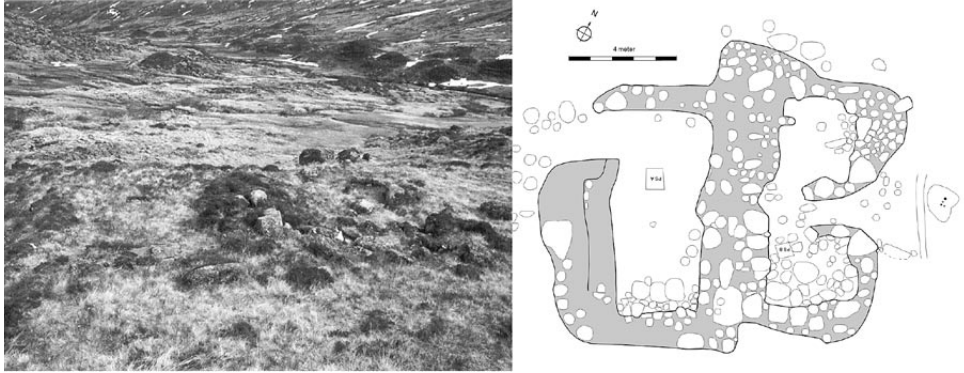


Figure 3. House remain 6.

The buildings were located in two groups according to their topographical location and their relation to each other (Skrede 2002:24) (figure 4). Group I consists of five buildings oriented towards a stone wall and situated lower in the landscape than the others (*ibid.*:32-40). Four of these buildings have one room, only one has two rooms. Group II consists of three house remains with two or three rooms (*ibid.*:40-50). They are situated in a row with the best view down the valley. Eight other house remains were more widely dispersed (*ibid.*:50-68). Most of these have two rooms. Visually, the house remains appear quite homogeneous.

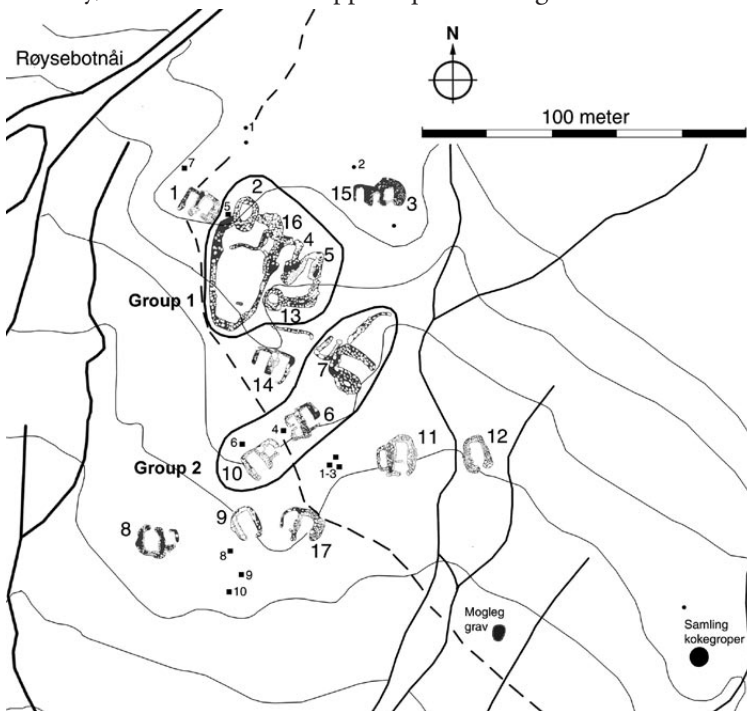


Figure 4. The house remains, cup mark stones (black square) and cooking pits (black dot) at Svølset.

My primary aim was to get a better impression of when the houses were built and abandoned. My method was simply to date the bottom and top of the cultural layers within the floors and preferably in fireplaces.

The house remains stretch over a period of at least 700 years, from the middle of the Roman period (AD 130-410) to the end of the Viking period (AD 885-1010), which is 300 years older than Magnus' results (Skrede 2002:89). In total, there are 21 radiocarbon datings from 11 of the buildings. The three dated house remains in group I, the two dated in group II and four of the more dispersed house remains are radiocarbon dated to the early Iron Age. If we look at the artefacts, there have been found sherds of bucket shaped pottery in two of the remaining house remains. Eleven of the buildings are, at the latest, dated to the Migration period and have been used during the late Iron Age. Still, there *can* have been an increase in building activity in the Merovingian period. One of the house remains is only dated broadly to the Merovingian period (Magnus 1983:96). This is dated by Magnus, and I am unsure as to which layer is dated. This means that also *these* house remains *can* be older. The most recent activities in the area are carbon dated to the tenth century. Pollen analyses indicate, however, that the area was used into the Middle Ages (Kvamme, personal comments).

A few other house remains in the mountains of western Norway are known from the Roman Age (Indrelid 1988, Bjørgo 1992:304), but most of the carbon-dated house remains are dated to the late Iron Age and Middle Ages (Bjørgo 1992:304). It is possible that this is not the complete truth. As we have seen, the house remains at Svolset are generally older than the first investigation indicated. By dating both the oldest and the youngest cultural layer, it is more likely that the results will reveal the period when the building was in use.

Initially, I established five categories of features to be studied in all the rooms in the house remains in order to compare and identify the function of the rooms (Skrede 2002:92) (figure 5).

The categories documented for each room were:

- presence of a fireplace
- solid building, which is built with dry wall
- size of the building (more than 20 square metres)
- presence of a built up plateau in front of the building, and
- artefacts, for example beads made of glass and bucket shaped pots



	Fireplace	Solid building	More than 20 square metres	Built up plateau	Artefacts
Tuft 2					
Tuft 4	x	x	x		
Tuft 5		x			
Tuft 13					
Tuft 16					
Tuft 6A	x	x	x		x
Tuft 6B	x?				
Tuft 7A	x	x	x	x	x
Tuft 7B					
Tuft 7C					
Tuft 10A	x	x	x		x
Tuft 10B					x
Tuft 1A	x	x	x	x	x
Tuft 1B			x		
Tuft 3A	x	x			
Tuft 3B	x?	x			
Tuft 8A	x	x	x	x	x
Tuft 8B					
Tuft 11A	x	x	x	x	x
Tuft 14A	x		x		
Tuft 14B	?		x		
Tuft 17A					
Tuft 17B					
Tuft 9	x	x	x	x	x
Tuft 12		x	x	x	
Tuft 15					

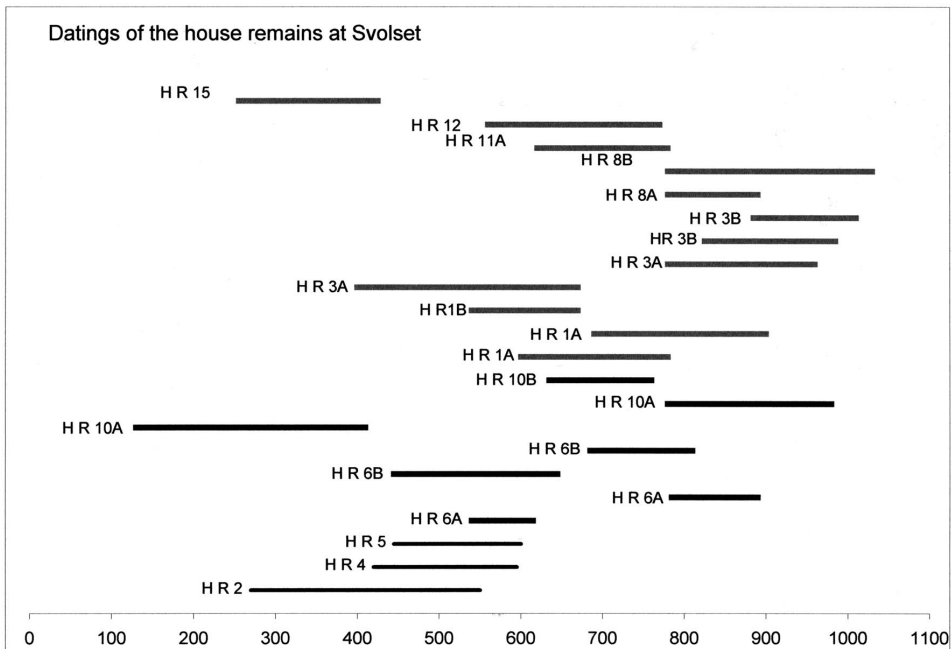
**Figure 5.** Table of investigated categories in the house

Rooms that contained a fireplace usually also fulfilled the other categories (Skrede 2002:92). In such cases, where all the five categories were present, I have concluded that it is probable that the room had housed people. These numbers are minimum numbers as it is often difficult to observe fireplaces and the plateaus without excavating larger areas. Artefacts are not always found in small test-pits. Therefore, I cannot exclude that people have lived in the other rooms. I find it probable that rooms that lack one or two of these categories may also have been used in the same way.

According to these criteria, 11 out of 27 rooms have been identified as being occupied by people. Nine of them are in buildings with more than one room, while two of the single room buildings have housed people. Note that only one of the house remains in group I has been identified as a dwelling. Another interesting phenomenon is that the largest room in the complete house remains in group II has been occupied

by people (Skrede 2002:93). This is also the evidence from most of the dispersed house remains.

Eight of the eleven dwelling rooms have been radiocarbon dated, while nine of 17 of the remaining rooms have been dated (figure 6). According to these dates, it seems as if some of the rooms without dwelling-functions have been in use earlier than the dwellings. When taking the date of artefacts into consideration, it is clear that this is not the case. The dates from all types of room match if we look at both the carbon dating and the artefacts. This clearly demonstrates the importance of considering all the available evidence.



**Figure 6.** Dating of the house remains. Group I is marked with a grey line and group II is marked with a thick black line. The dispersed house remains are marked with a thin black line.

Cup marks appear as a frequently occurring feature in the mountains of western Norway (Bøe 1944, Innselset 2001). They are generally seen in connection with the first pasturing in the mountains. They are, however, difficult to date. As they frequently appear in connection with rock-carvings dated to the Bronze Age, they have been dated to the same period (Solheim 1952:81, Innselset 1995:69, 2001). They may, however, also be younger, from the Iron Age (Mandt 1991:362).

At Svolset, ten such stones have been found (Skrede 2002:73). Three of them lie close together. One of these stones has 50 cup marks in total and differs from the other stones at Svolset, both because of the number of cup marks and the size of the stone (*ibid.*). Two other stones contain respectively 26 and 2 cup marks.

The other cup mark stones, 7 in total, lie more scattered. Five of them are located close to the house remains (*ibid.*:74, 101). Since five house remains have such stones close to the entrance, it is hardly coincidental, and the cup marks were probably made while the buildings were in use (*ibid.*:101). Four of the five house remains have been dated, and all were in use as late as/no later than in the Migration period. Although the function of the cup marked stones is unclear, they apparently denote a symbolic meaning in some kind of ritual connected to agrarian activities in mountain areas during the migration period.

In the early Iron Age, there seems to have been a high level of activity at Svolset (*ibid.*:98-102). As I have shown, most of the house remains were in use at that time, and the cup marks were made at the same time. Moreover, several cooking pits have been dated to the Roman Age and the Migration period. There have possibly been other activities as well. Other artefacts which are found which might have been used in textile production are spinning whorls and loom weights. A bit of slag has been found, which suggests iron-production or preparation of iron. There are also a couple of fields which may have been cultivated – carbon dated to the early Iron Age. Temperate tree types suggest that the climate was warmer in that period, something that can indicate a more extensive use of the landscape and can explain the numerous house remains. By comparison, during the late Iron Age there is little evidence of activity outside the house remains. Several of the house remains were no longer in use by the late Iron Age (*ibid.*:94). Maybe there was a change in the use of the buildings? It seems to have been a change to shieling activity as known from historic times (*ibid.*:104-105).

The site at Heimste Friksdal is more heterogeneous when it comes to the buildings than at Svolset (*ibid.*:80-89). Their form differs greatly. Two of them are almost round; some are rectangular, while some have more than one room. These house remains are generally smaller than the ones at Svolset. Most of them are less than 20 square metres. The house remains at Heimste Friksdal are fewer and lie more scattered than those at Svolset. Today, there are three standing shielings. There are also ruins and several house remains, some of which have been in use until recently. I concentrated my investigation on the oldest sites and dug test pits in five of the house remains. As they only contained a thin cultural layer, only one radiocarbon date was taken in each.

The results show that two buildings stem from the thirteenth century (*ibid.*:85). The thin cultural layer indicates that they were only in use during a short period of time. Two house remains are dated to the late Middle Ages. Only two of the house remains contain fireplaces. Both the archaeological and the pollen botanical results indicate that the area was deserted after the Middle Ages and taken into use again during the sixteenth century.

There are two stones with cup marks at Heimste Friksdal: one with two cups, while the other has 32 (*ibid.*:87-88). Both these stones lie close to the path to Svolset, and I have interpreted them in connection to the Iron Age activity there.



The farms in Leikanger have a complex structure (*ibid.*:106). The resource area belonging to each farm is scattered and intermingled over a large area. To decide which farm or farms made use of Svolset and Friksdal in the Iron Age and Middle Ages, I had to use medieval and later sources and work regressively, using as many sources as possible. I looked at written medieval sources, medieval tax registers, farm-names, ownership patterns, burial mounds and archaeological remains.

After the Reformation, there were two registered farms in Friksdalen that had rights of usage (*bruksrett*) in the valley: Røysum and Henjum (*ibid.*:107). Both farms are mentioned in written medieval sources. The tax-registers indicate that Røysum was an average sized farm in the parish, while Henjum was the largest farm in the Middle Ages. 80% of the properties at Henjum were owned by the aristocracy in 1647. The rest were owned by different churches. Almost 40 % of Røysum was at the same time owned by the King. Looking at the farm-names and the burial mounds, both the farms were most likely already in use in the Iron Age. My small-scale archaeological investigations of lynchets belonging to fossil fields on the farms show cultivation dating back to the late Bronze Age.

Of the two farms, Henjum is the oldest and most prominent, and probably controlled Røysum in the early Iron Age. Henjum is also one of the largest farms in this part of the country, and a focal point within the landscape. It was owned by a magnate in the early Middle Ages and had its own church, located close to the farmyard. After searching through different records, I find it probable that Henjum originally had control over the resources in Friksdalen in at least the late Iron Age and perhaps even earlier. I find it likely that Henjum was in a position to send extra labour to the mountains in the summer. The site at Svolset probably yielded the highest surplus in relation to production. This can help to explain the rich burials from the Migration period at Røysum and Henjum.

In the Middle Ages, it is possible that both Røysum and Henjum controlled Heimste Friksdal. It is further possible that changes in society during the transition from the Iron Age to the Middle Ages influenced the economic activity in the valley. The economy changed character, and the tenant farmers who managed the farms may have set greater store on the work in the infield than on making profit from the distant outfields in the mountain valley.

As the mountain areas around Friksdalen have not been disturbed by modern technology, the area was well suited for archaeological studies. Still, there has been little research on shieling activities, at least from an archaeological point of view. The analysis at Svolset has shown the great potential that exists by studying information from shielings and house remains in the mountains of western Norway. There are many common traits between Svolset and other sites in the mountains, but the number of house remains at Svolset is generally larger than at other mountain sites. The dates from Svolset and Heimste Friksdal match with other dated sites in the west Norwegian mountain areas. However, it is rather unusual with dated shielings from as early as the early Iron Age.

## Summary

There are few archaeological studies that focus on outlying fields, mountain pastures and seasonal agrarian settlement in Norway. Where mountain resources have been studied, it is most often as a consequence of the Cultural Heritage Act. In such cases, it is seldom possible to study the areas in a broader context and according to defined questions and current research problems. This was my reason for studying two sites with nucleated seasonal settlements in the mountain valley of Friksdalen in Sogn in western Norway. My aim was to place them in an agrarian context within a larger resource area, including the farms in the main settlement area near the fjord. Most of the house remains at Svolset can be dated back to the early Iron Age. There seems to be a change in the activity around the transition to the late Iron Age. In the beginning there was an extended shieling activity. The house remains at Heimste Friksdal, used in the Middle Ages and later, differ from the ones at Svolset. After looking at several sources, it seems likely that one of the largest farms in this part of the country, Henjum, originally controlled the activity in Friksdalen, and that Svolset yielded its surplus to Henjum.

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