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## **THE ÄNGERSJÖ PROJECT — A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BOREAL FOREST VILLAGE**

### *Abstract*

The aim of the project in Ängersjö, a village in north-western Hälsingland, Sweden, is to describe a forest village as a coherent system. The project is run by researchers from the University of Stockholm, Lund and Uppsala and works within an interdisciplinary framework with archaeology, human geography and place-name research.

The area is to be considered as a periphery. Ängersjö village is situated in the moraine plateau where the landscape is dominated by forest, lakes, bogs and large moraine boulders. The Swedish-Norwegian border prior to 1645 lies approx. four kilometres west of the village.

Previous research has dated two probable transhumance settlements to the 12th – 13th century (the earliest known dates of such settlements in Sweden) and five iron production sites to the 14th – 16th century. Part of the interest is focused on the origin of the village, its material standard, the nature of its economy and its relations to the outside world. Other important questions are the function of the transhumance settlements and their relationship to the village, the communication network of the forest and the territorialization process with border formation. As brought together, the studies will hopefully present the forest village and its outback activities as a system.

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### **Introduction**

The forest is the largest cultural milieu of the countries around the northern Baltic. In Sweden, the interest for this specific setting is steadily increasing and several research projects within archaeology, human geography and various applied sciences are under way.

The physical remains of forest land use are seldom of a monumental scale. We might find traces of iron smelting, tar- and charcoal burning, swidden cultivation, haymaking, hunting, fishing, food preparation and transhumance, as well as earlier stages of forestry.

More permanent structures like water-mills, de-

serted farms, crofts and hamlets are to be found as also the routes of communication that connected them: hollow ways and corduroy roads. The woodlands were also borderlands and we might find border markers like cairns.

Many of these elements have been studied by various scholars, but more often than not each category has been studied separately and excluding the others. Attempts to approach the forest milieu from a holistic standpoint, to study forest dwelling and land use as an inter-connecting system, is very rare. This project aims at breaking new ground in this respect.

The objective is to use a forest village of the southern taiga for a case study of forest land use and its organization in a household-economic per-

spective, both through the physical remains and an analysis of factors of change or stability over time. For a holistic, systemic and diachronic study of this kind, interdisciplinary research is absolutely compulsory.

## Scientific background

The research base and inspiration of the project is also multi-faceted. The project has some of its main roots in three different prominent and prolific Swedish research traditions:

*the human geographers*, with names like David Hannerberg, S.-O. Lindquist, Ulf Sporrang and, lately, Mats Widgren, but also the important theoretical advances made by Torsten Hägerstrand,

*the ethnologists* of the early and mid 20th century, with prominent scholars like John Granlund, Sigurd Erixon and Nils Lithberg,

*the historians*, especially the scholars connected to the Nordic Deserted Farms Project (Brunius, Bååth, Salvesen, Sandnes, Skarin, Sundström, Österberg and others), but also scholars of cadastral history, like Ingvar Jonsson and economic history, like Janken Myrdal and Johan Söderberg, are important.

The qualitative settlement research that was the mark of nobility of scholars like Granlund and Erixon must be considered to be a research niche abandoned by today's ethnologists. Instead, archaeologists are beginning to fill that niche. The most prominent example of this in Sweden is Stig Welinder, who during the last few years in two separate volumes (1992a, 1992b) and a number of articles has launched what he terms as "historical ethno-archaeology", working with qualitative settlement analyses, using 19th and early 20th century material and applying a strict archaeological method for the sake of method and theory development.

It is also necessary to mention the widening fields of interest within the National Survey for Archaeological Monuments, where for example crofts and various production remains from post-medieval times are getting registered and at times protected. Especially the name K.-G. Selinge should be mentioned, who laid a base for this development through his studies of deserted farms and pit-trap systems.

## Organization

The project emanates from the meeting of university scholars and the local inhabitants of Ängersjö village interested in their history and its applica-

tion in local tourism development. The project layout was drawn up in 1991 and a request for financial support was sent to the Central Board of National Antiquities. Support was granted in time for the commencement of field work in 1992. Additional financial support was granted by the municipality of Härjedalen in 1993.

The project is conducted by a group of five scholars (the four authors of this article and Dr Stefan Brink), representing archaeology and onomastics and the universities of Lund, Stockholm and Uppsala, as well as the Central Board of National Antiquities.

It is supported by an interdisciplinary reference group comprising specialists from the fields of human geography, history, economical history, forestry, archaeology, medieval archaeology and ethnology.

The field work has been carried out by students from Stockholm and Lund universities and young archaeological fieldworkers from Västerås.

Actual fieldwork is subdivided into three major tasks: a major excavation of a supposed deserted transhumance chalet (*fäbod*) named *Gammelvallen*, the investigation of the present village of Ängersjö and an intense field survey for sites. Partly integrated in this structure and partly as separate minor sub-projects some of the work is carried out by the students as seminar papers, including field work as well as archive and literature search. So far five such reports have been finished (Johansson, Lagerstedt, Lindh, Stenquist, Zetterström) and at present four more are under way.

Parts of the project data will be included in a doctoral dissertation on the landscape of power in Hälsingland (Mogren) and the area will also be used as comparative material for a dissertation on settlement in Medieval Värmland (Andersson).

## Work before the project formation

Before the outset of the current project, the parish has been surveyed twice for sites by the Central Board of National Antiquities. In addition to this, quite a lot of archaeological work has been carried out in Ängersjö by one of us, Gert Magnusson. One of our main sites, *Gammelvallen*, has been partly investigated during two campaigns. A previously unknown type of pithouse was documented and <sup>14</sup>C-dated to the 12th – 13th centuries. If the interpretation as a chalet is correct, this would be the earliest date known in Sweden. Another similar site in the same parish is of the same age (Magnusson 1989). In addition to this one bloomery furnace has been fully excavated



Ingeborg Svensson from Halla drives the cattle to pasture in 1966.

(Magnusson 1986, 125–127) and four others have been dated. The datings are concentrated in the late Medieval period, ca. 1350–1550.

A pollen analysis from lake sediment, carried out by Ingemar Pålsson, show both cultivation and pasture evidence from the 12th century, which fits well with the datings from *Gammelvallen*. Of importance is also the discovery of a deposited craftsman's tool chest from the 8th century at Stora Drocksjön in Ängersjö parish, which gives evidence of early outback activities.

### Research objectives

Our research falls into five major fields of study: 1. the supposed chalet *Gammelvallen*, 2. the present village Ängersjö, 3. the outback economic activities, 4. the communication systems, 5. the territorialization process with border formation.

The problems addressed include the prerequisites of settlement in the area [which might have its origin in the numerous stone age camp sites found (cf. Lindh 1992)], the emergence of sedentary settlement, its dating and economic parameters, the nature of the supposed chalets and their

relation to the sedentary settlement by the lake, the various elements of the composite "a little of everything-economy" required to support the settlement and the nature of external contacts including the level of state influence in the area and its chronology (cf. Mogren 1992).

### Ängersjö Village: the setting and the economy

The area of study in the project is the village and parish of Ängersjö. It is situated in the far north-west corner of the historical province of Hälsingland, but is now within the borders of Jämtland county. The area is a periphery in every aspect of the word. It is situated 120 km from the coast (as the crow flies) and the former, pre-1645 national border between Sweden and Norway forms the western parish border.

The entire parish is occupied by a hilly moraine plateau around 400 meters above m.s.l., with numerous bogs, tarns and lakes. The area is partly covered with large moraine boulders. The vegetation is coniferous forest. The village of Ängersjö is situated at the shore of one of the larger lakes, on a pocket of sandy soil. Its settlement is dis-

persed and seems to have always lacked a common village ground. Cadastral records tell us that it had four assessed farms in 1542, six in 1571 and 1610 and seven in 1616. In 1813–1815 this had increased to eight farms and one croft. The 19th century involved a rapid expansion of settlement in the village periphery. In 1891 there were nine farms and several crofts. The population had increased five-fold in just a century — from 51 persons in 1799 to 247 persons in 1900. Today the population is around 60.

We know that animal husbandry and meadowlands were dominant over arable up to and including the 18th century. It is easy to presume however, that supplementary economic activities were necessary to support these farms.

We also presume that the Ängersjö settlement was founded already in the Middle Ages. One of the farms from the 1542 record was sufficiently rich to have had a longer history than just one generation and a number of <sup>14</sup>C-datings give evidence of activities in the area throughout the Middle Ages.

### The surveys

As the knowledge of the cultural remains of the forest has increased since the surveys of the area were carried out it is important that complementary exploration is undertaken. Using the earlier surveys as a base, the project aims at intensifying the surveying in order to get a more profound knowledge of earlier land use. A minor survey has already been carried out by one of us, Sofia Andersson, and the work will continue. So far work has been concentrating around the village, but the objective is to cover the entire parish. In such a survey it is compulsory to work in close cooperation with the villagers who know the forests well.

Up to present 88 sites have been registered: 14 bloomery furnaces, 11 sites comprising 56 pit-traps, 4 charcoal stacks, 3 borderline cairns, 4 memorial stones, 10 road stones, and also deserted roads, mill ruins, deserted farms and places with tradition.

### Gammelvallen

*Gammelvallen* seems to consist of two, possibly three, chalets in one site. It is situated in a northern slope at around 500 meters above m.s.l. The pit-houses are typical of the site. They can be found with or without stone lining, with or without fireplace. In addition we have found a stone-sill struc-

ture for a timber building and a low soil wall of unknown function but probably connected to some kind of building. The areas around the buildings are cleared from rocks and boulders. There are also terraces in the slope, which has led us to hypothesize that the site might have been something more than just a chalet, that there could have been cultivation.

The questions raised by this enables us to discuss the possibility that we might stand in front of a hitherto unknown form of settlement antedating the village formation process of which present Ängersjö is a result (cf. Zetterström 1993).

### The village

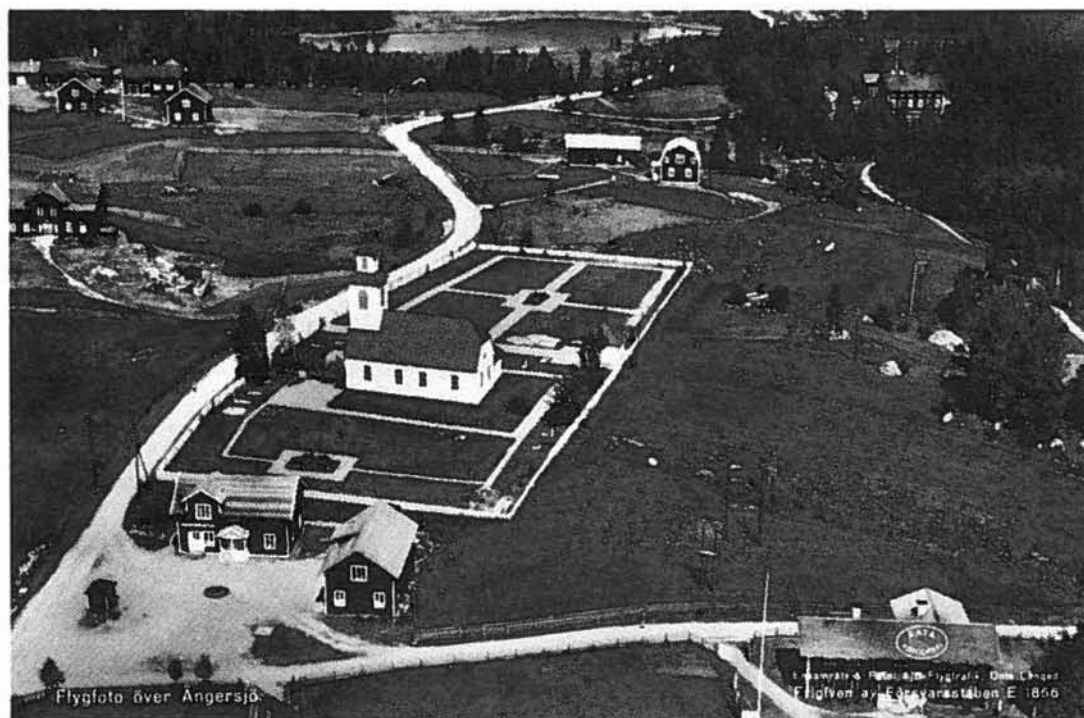
The village has been investigated through map studies and field surveys (cf. Johansson 1992), which have provided a useful base for further fieldwork. We have also concentrated on dating the outset of cultivation in the village by cutting trenches through a number of lynchets formed by the combined forces of plowing and erosion on sloping fields. The pattern almost always shows a thin stratum of charcoal-mixed soil, from the original clearance of the field, on top of a typical podzol profile with eluvial and illuvial strata. We expect the oldest lynchets to be at least from the 15th or 16th century, but no datings have been given yet.

Of great interest is the possible site of a water mill at the very centre of the village. It is known as a 19th century saw-mill, but there is reason to believe that this may be the bund of a mill dam mentioned in a 1637 map. It will be excavated this summer. A 15th to 17th century dating would imply a bad state control in the area, since peasant mills were forbidden and either destroyed or taxed. The cadastral records from 1542 on mentions nothing about a mill in Ängersjö (cf. Lagerstedt 1992).

Some attention has been given already to the road network of the parish (cf. Stenquist 1992), but this line of research has not fully commenced yet. Excavations of a timber built track in a bog, *Storoxbron* ("Great Oxen Bridge") is scheduled, however. We will try to date this structure through dendrochronological analysis.

A number of border cairns are also known in the area. This is a type of monument that from time to time has interested historians, but it has been totally neglected by archaeologists. A document from 1273 mentions border markers in the area, but the national border line was disputed well into the 15th century and we do not know the





View over the church and the Ängersjö village in the 1950's.

age of the existing cairns. Our intention is to develop methods for dating them.

The project will run for another two years and is also scheduled to include an onomastic study and a study of a comparable area on the other side of the former Swedish-Norwegian border. The report proper will have to wait until fieldwork and analyses are finished.

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