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SURVEYS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN SOUTHERN SAVO

Abstract

This paper discusses the results of the surveys of prehistoric sites in southern Savo in south-eastern Finland. The first modern surveys were undertaken in the early 1980's and they have been carried out systematically by the Savonlinna Provincial Museum. Though 18 municipalities had been surveyed by the end of 1992, there still remain 7 municipalities without any surveys at all.

In 1984 a catalogue of all prehistoric sites in southern Savo was published. By then only two municipalities had been surveyed and 189 prehistoric sites were known. Now the number is over 600, most of which (431) are prehistoric dwelling sites.

The ceramics found at the sites are in most cases Comb or Asbestos Ware, but recently some Textile Ware which is dated to the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age has also been found. A small but very important group are the Late Iron Age sites; the history of that period in eastern Finland is still unclear. The numerous stone cairns are the most problematic of all. So far no established classification has been created for stone cairns, neither have any protective measures been taken to preserve them.

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Introduction

In 1984 the Regional Council of the Province of Mikkeli published a catalogue of all prehistoric sites in southern Savo (Huurte 1985). After it was published the number of known prehistoric sites in this region has increased considerably. In this paper we aim to outline the steps that have been taken in order to enlarge the archaeological record of this region. At present all archaeological sites are recorded on topographical maps which are on the scale of 1:20,000 and cover an area of 10 x 10 kilometres. The cartographic system in Finland is founded on these base maps.

The region of southern Savo covers almost the same area as the province of Mikkeli. There are 24 municipalities in the area. The area of operation of the Savonlinna Provincial Museum covers the same number of municipalities (see Fig. 1). Most of the work that has been carried out in the region has been done by the Provincial Museum which was established in 1985. Most of the archaeological work in this region has therefore been carried

out during the last seven years.

The main hydrological source in the region is the Saimaa lake complex that belongs to the Vuoksi river basin. The western part of the region belongs to the Kymijoki river basin which is connected to the Päijänne lake complex. The history of the two river basins differs, which means that the archaeological sites that were situated near the shoreline, especially the dwelling sites, are situated on different heights above the present sea level. In some places ancient dwelling sites are now submerged. Because of the shore uplift that occurs in the Saimaa lake complex, very few Mesolithic sites have been discovered in the southern part of the lake system.

First surveys

The first surveys of archaeological sites in southern Savo took place at the end of the 19th century. At the time it was customary to send scholars to different parts of Finland, for example to southern Savo, to collect ethnographical and historical ma-



Fig. 1. The region of southern Savo. The municipalities with systematic surveys of archaeological sites by the end 1992 are shaded in the map.

terial. Two studies on this region were actually completed (Paasonen 1889; Pelkonen 1903). In some areas of the region they can still be considered the most recent surveys.

New surveys in the 1970's and 1980's

After these surveys it took almost 70 years before any further surveys were undertaken. In the meantime, many archaeological remains were found by chance by the local people. Yet, it was not until the 1970's that the systematic search for ancient sites continued. These surveys were carried out by FL Matti Huurre from the National Board of Antiquities; they took place both in Mikkeli and in Sulkava.

In the early 1980's the municipalities of

Pieksämäki, rural Pieksämäki and Juva decided to pay the expenses of the surveys that would take place in their respective regions. These surveys led to discoveries of some two dozen prehistoric dwelling sites. In rural Pieksämäki where previously no ancient sites had been known, many of the new sites were found by an amateur archaeologist, Mr Pekka Tarkiainen. These findings were important also on a psychological level: people began to believe that it was possible to make new discoveries in the region, and that it was possible for an amateur to make them.

By 1984 our knowledge of the prehistoric sites of southern Savo consisted of the following sites (see Table 1): 82 prehistoric dwelling sites (roughly half of them were located in regions where surveys had previously been undertaken), 10 rock-paintings, 9 areas with Lapp cairns, 10 Iron Age

Table 1. Archaeological sites in southern Savo in 1984 and 1992. Sources: Etelä-Savon esihistorialliset suojelukohteet and SOAR-database.

* The number differs depending on the counting system.

** This sum includes three rock-paintings that were found at the beginning of the year 1993.

Type of site	1984	1992
hunter-gatherer occupation sites	82	431 *
hunting pits	6	43
cup-marked stones	46	94
Late Iron Age sites (cemeteries and dwelling places)	10	c. 17 *
ancient hillforts and guarding posts	7	27
rock paintings	10	20 **
stone cairns (registered areas; some of them incl. several cairns)	9	50
total	170	682

cemeteries (most of them situated in the Mikkeli area), 7 ancient hillforts, 6 hunting pits, and 46 cup-marked stones or sacrificial stones (Huurre 1985). It has been suggested that in western Finland these cup-marked stones belong to the Iron Age, but it is possible that in southern Savo they are associated with medieval times.

Savonlinna Provincial Museum 1987-

The systematic surveys of archaeological remains by the Savonlinna Provincial Museum began in 1987. The present material is essentially the result of five years of work, the last four of them being the most intensive. We are very grateful that during these years we have been assisted by an excellent team of surveyors. The dramatic increase in the number of sites is primarily a result of their work. Many eager amateurs, students and professional archaeologists have also greatly assisted with our surveys and have found several important sites.

The surveys that the Provincial Museum have undertaken are primarily surveys of prehistoric sites; in many places they are the first archaeological surveys that have been done. In the last few years two surveys have concentrated on the historical period: the first one is a survey of iron furnaces by the Savonlinna Provincial Museum and the second one a survey of defensive works by the Regional Council of the Province of Mikkeli.

The surveys of prehistoric sites understandably require a large amount of financial support and skilled fieldworkers. The situation in Finland is different from the one in Sweden because in Finland the state does not provide any subsidies for archaeological surveys. All the financial help for

such work comes by way of voluntary contributions.

In the Finnish law for the protection of ancient remains (law number 295/1963 which is in fact 30 years old) it is stated that the areas which are subject to planning must be checked out in good time for any existing archaeological remains. The same applies to large-scale building projects: the builder must have the area checked out for possible archaeological remains before the construction begins. Despite this law it is common for builders not to recognize archaeological features and they usually ignore them. Those who are caught violating this law are far from being severely punished.

In southern Savo the financial support for the surveys is provided in an exceptional way compared with other parts of Finland: in southern Savo the main source of funding is the Provincial Government.

It is our aim that all the municipalities of southern Savo will be surveyed at least once by the year 2000, and that the areas which are subject to planning and construction will be surveyed even more effectively.

The map in Fig. 1 indicates the municipalities where surveys have taken place after 1983. It must be remembered that none of these municipalities have yet been completely surveyed; however, the surveys should be completed in the future. In general, each survey has been carried out by one archaeologist working in the field for a month on average.

The areas which have been most successfully surveyed during the four years of work are the ones that have sandy soils and ridges as a common feature. The surveys have been directed to these areas since it is rather easy to find prehistoric dwelling sites there. A further and more crucial

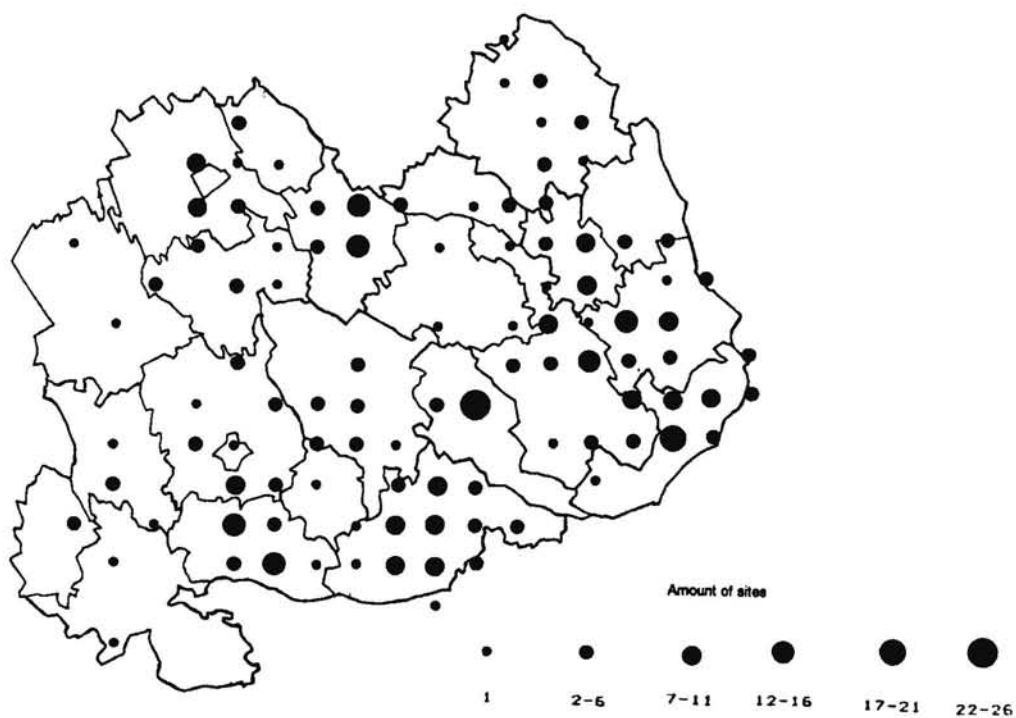


Fig. 2. Occupation sites of hunter-gatherer populations in southern Savo by the end of 1992.

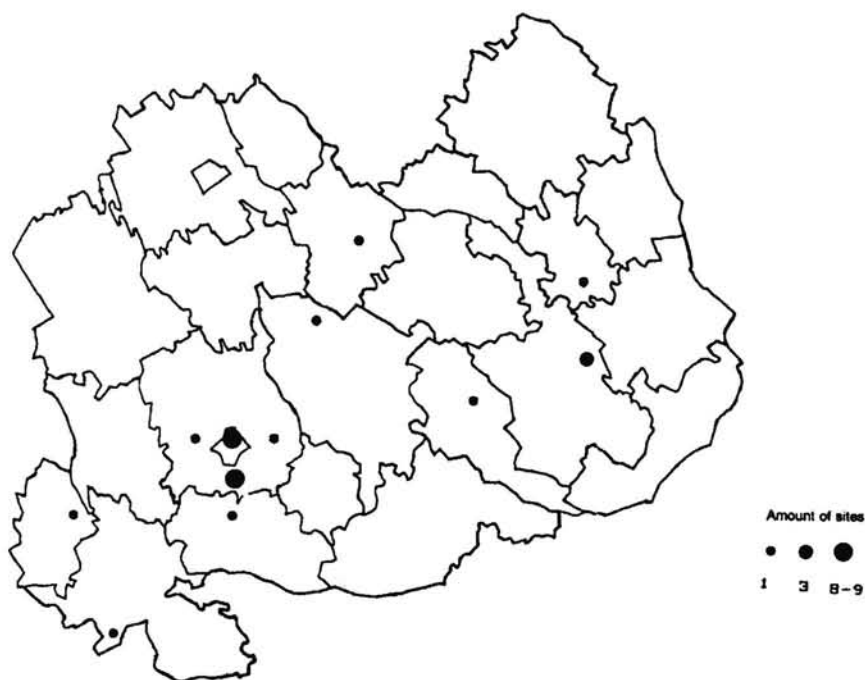


Fig. 3. Late Iron Age sites in southern Savo by the end of 1992.

reason for surveying these particular regions is that they remain under a constant threat of destruction because of the intensive use of sand. The occupation sites of hunters and gatherers which can be dated in southern Savo from the Neolithic period c. 4000 BC to the Iron Age c. 500 AD are often located in these areas.

One of the main methods in our search for sites is the surveying of road cuttings, sand pits and other areas where the ground has been disturbed. Making test pits is a daily routine for an archaeological surveyor. The sites can often be hundreds of meters away from the present shoreline, and that is why it is very important to do the map analysis before the fieldwork.

Besides looking for occupation sites we have searched for cup-marked stones, Lapp cairns, rock-paintings and several other types of archaeological remains. Such remains can be found by going through the most suitable places and by asking help from the local inhabitants. The biggest problem that we have had in the cataloguing of the archaeological remains is how to determine the age and the function of stone cairns of different types which are frequent in this region.

Archaeological sites of southern Savo

To summarise the situation at the end of 1992 there are altogether 682 known archaeological sites in the region of southern Savo, and 431 of these are interpreted as occupation sites of hunter-gatherer populations. The number of sites has increased by 349 in eight years (see Table 1 and Fig. 2). The archaeological remains were registered on computer by using the SOAR-database program. The database contains presently almost 3,000 archaeological sites from the Lake Saimaa area. At the moment c. 90% of the archaeological sites that are known in the province of Mikkeli are within the database, including all the sites found in 1992.

The ceramics that we have found at most sites are either Comb Ware, e.g. Typical Comb Ware, and/or different kinds of Asbestos Ware. During the last few years several sites with Bronze Age eastern and western Textile Ware (Tomitsa Ware and Sarsa Ware) have been discovered. Hut floors, which can be detected as round or oval depressions in the ground, have also been found at many of the occupation sites. They are probably the remains of prehistoric huts that were once built on these depressions.

The map in Fig. 3 shows the Late Iron Age sites. There is a concentration of sites in the Mikkeli area that has been known since the 19th century. During the last few years some very im-

portant Late Iron Age sites have been located in southern Savo. These new sites were discovered in Iitlahti in Sulkava and in Tynkkylänjoki in Savonlinna. They provide us with a great deal of new information on the Late Iron Age period in eastern Finland.

By the end of 1992 altogether 50 stone cairns were registered in southern Savo. As mentioned before, they represent only a small portion of the stone cairns in the region. It is very difficult to classify stone cairns because they may represent burial cairns or possibly the remains of field cultivation that can be hundreds of years old. As for the Lapp cairns, certain details about their location have been noted. For instance, in the southern part of our research area in Ristiina it was discovered that the Lapp cairns were located next to the occupation sites. In many cases they were rectangular in shape and small cells could be detected inside them (Sepänmaa 1993).

Unfortunately our surveys have not led to discoveries of prehistoric cemeteries. We suggest that this may be due to the general difficulty of finding graves that belong to hunting cultures. At the moment only one unconfirmed Neolithic grave is known in the whole region. It was discovered during the excavation in Vilkaharju in Sulkava in 1990 (Karjalainen 1992).

Seven ancient hillforts were registered by 1984. Sites which could be definitely interpreted as ancient hillforts have not been discovered since 1984. However, there are roughly 20 new sites that can be regarded as ancient guarding posts on account of their location and name.

The number of known hunting pits is at present 43. The dating of these sites is problematic. In Kerimäki, however, a hunting pit was excavated by the Provincial Museum in 1992 and a sample of organic material from a relevant layer was radiocarbon dated to 2605±90 BP (SU-2180). The number of cup-marked stones is now 94 and it seems that in our research area they are concentrated in the easternmost Savo (see Fig. 4).

At the beginning of 1993 the number of known rock-paintings was 20. So far only one rock-painting has been found during the surveys organized by the Savonlinna Provincial Museum. Most of the rock-paintings have been found in the 1970's and most of the latest discoveries have been made by an amateur archaeologist, Mr Risto Kupiainen, during the last three years. The latest discovery, a rock-painting which consists of two swans, was made in Savonlinna in spring 1993.

Besides the surveys of archaeological sites the Provincial Museum has carried out a survey of archaeophytes, or in other words, a survey of plants that are connected to the Iron Age and me-

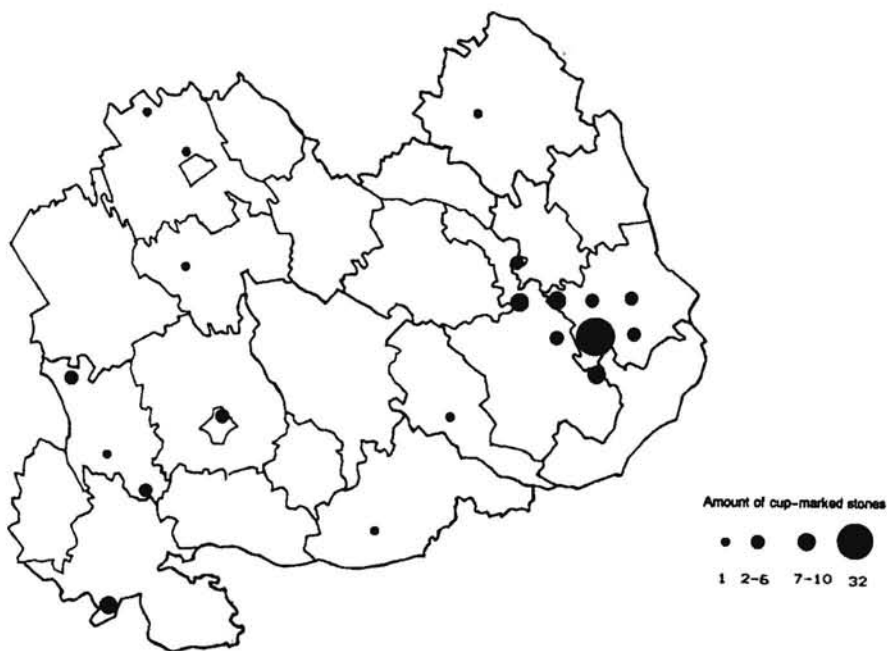


Fig. 4. Cup-marked stones and cliffs in southern Savo by the end of 1992.

dieval settlements. The project was undertaken by FM Kimmo Seppänen. The material has proved to be very useful when studying the settlement history of the Late Iron Age period up to the medieval times (Seppänen 1991; 1992).

The study of the material remains that have been found in southern Savo is essential for any attempts to explain the settlement history of the area. In some regions we have discovered dozens of sites around a single lake. Such information, for example, can help us to create ideas on how the men and women in prehistory used their environment and how large an area each settlement covered. A research project which deals with settlements more extensively has just started at Helsinki University and we find it most encouraging that as a direct result of our surveys the subject will be studied in more depth.

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