

Mats Anglert & Per Lagerås (red.): *Människorna och skogen. Arkeologiska platser i Örkelljungatrakten*. Riksantikvarieämbetet, Lund 2008.

The archaeologically little-known forest regions of northern Scania, Sweden, were settled during the Early Middle Ages by people moving from the established agricultural regions of southern Scania towards the north in search of new farmlands and pastures. Even if the soil of this region was less fertile than in the south, it could be cleared for farming and the forests offered complementary means of livelihood.

Forest regions are commonly thought of as a sparsely populated periphery, oblivious to changes in the more densely populated areas, but the research conducted at the Örkelljunga region in northern Scania demonstrate that this notion should not be taken for granted. The past few centuries in particular have caused numerous changes in the landscape and population of the region. Signs of past human activity can be found almost everywhere. Even if they are (from the point of view of archaeology) not very old – at most a few hundreds of years in age – they are associated with a way of life that was fundamentally different from ours and, in fact, function as bridge between the past and the present. According to the authors of the present volume, archaeological interest in the forested regions has increased recently, but they are still inadequately recognized in cultural resource management.

Our contemporary age and the prehistoric past are separated by a long period of time, from which a range of written sources have survived. However, the archaeological remains of this period are less well-known. The authors state that by conducting archaeological studies of post-Medieval sites it is possible to both develop archaeological research methods and re-interpret or correct ideas concerning the events and nature of the Historical Period. Because of the nature of the different source materials, it is necessary to study them in parallel, as otherwise our view of the past would be fragmentary and one-sided. In the book, the archaeological results of this multi disciplinary project are examined in the light of historical documents, historical maps, oral tradition and the results of palaeoecology.

The book *People and the forest: archaeological sites at the Örkelljunga region (Människorna och skogen: arkeologiska platser i Örkelljungatrak-*

ten) consists of seven papers written by altogether eight authors. It stems from a salvage archaeology project, in which the landscape and post-Medieval population and economy of the municipalities of Örkelljunga and Skånes-Fagerhult were studied. The impetus was a major road construction, the building of the southernmost part of Highway 4 through the province of Scania.

In the course of an archaeological survey related to roadworks, a large amount of previously unknown sites – most of them dating to the Historical Period – were found particularly in the northern parts of Scania. A number of them were selected for further study. These sites, located along an over 50 km long stretch of the highway and representing various types destined to be destroyed by roadworks, were investigated between the years 1993 and 2003.

The introduction by Mats Anglert and Per Lagerås includes a review of the natural history and landscape of the region, as well as a summary of its population history and the social organization of the landscape.

In a paper titled *Archaeological points of departure (Arkeologiska förutsättningar)*, Thomas Andersson presents the archaeological research situation of the area. The majority of the previously known sites consisted of Bronze Age burial cairns and Stone Age sites located on agricultural lands in the southernmost parts of the region. To the north, the most characteristic sites are fossil fields and large concentrations of rock heaps related to field clearance, whereas burials are almost completely missing. Furthest up north, in the forest regions (within which the municipalities of Örkelljunga and Skånes-Fagerhult lie) that extend towards the border of the Småland province, the most common archaeological remains consist of features related to the production of iron, charcoal or tar, as well as remains of abandoned houses and villages of the historical period.

Rolf Larsson sheds light on the range of livelihoods in the forest region, including their historical backgrounds, in a paper titled *A fragmented unity (En splittrad enhet)*. The history of population and livelihoods in this remote border region is intimately connected to the shifting fortunes and political/economic relations of the two Scandinavian states of Sweden and Denmark. Aside from a brief period of time during the 14th century, Scania belonged to Denmark since the Middle Ages until the year 1658, when it was conquered

by Sweden. The integration of the province into the Swedish kingdom – which at that time was a major power in Europe – brought about many changes in the life of the frontier region.

The remaining four papers concentrate on individual sites that were selected for further research. They consist of dwelling sites of the Historical Period (croft and farmhouse sites) and associated remains related to various livelihoods. The two papers by Annika Knarrström (*Grisavad, en torp åt skogen* and *Torpet Rosts täppa*) present, in effect, microhistorical studies of life in the forest regions during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Given the nature of salvage archaeology, the research questions and sites studied in this project were more dictated by land use and development than the objectives of archaeological research. Thus, regardless of the interesting observations made in survey, the croft site of Grisavad could only be subjected to some measure of mapping and small trial excavations. Excavations at the croft site of Rosts täppa were somewhat more extensive. The author notes that in order to get a good general view, it would have been important to study also the signs of later human activity in the areas destroyed by the roadworks.

In her paper *A populated landscape (Ett befolkat landskap)* Sofia Lindberg examines life in the forest regions through the daily chores and economic activities at the crofts – the family as a work community, the allocation of various tasks, men's and women's work, and so forth.

The most interesting chapter of the book – at least from the point of view of an archaeologist who has struggled with cairns – is Moa Lorentzon's work on Medieval clearance cairns at a 19th century croft site (*Medeltida röjningsrösen vid ett 1800-tals torp*), where she reflects upon the problems related to the identification, dating and morphology of said cairns. Out of the altogether 120 low and small cairns surveyed, a dozen or so were investigated and subjected to radiocarbon dating. The survey was aimed at locating prehistoric clearance cairns as these would have offered the best grounds for arranging salvage excavations, but it turned out that cairns that looked old were not always prehistoric. Some interesting observations emerged from a comparison of old maps and dwelling remains found in association with the cairns. It turns out that historical maps fail to show some farms that were abandoned after the Middle Ages but were later re-inhabited.

The results of palaeoecological research on the agricultural history of the cairn area offer new insights on the discrepancy between archaeology and historical maps. No clear signs of Medieval occupation were found at the cairn area in either archaeological fieldwork or by studying historical maps, but the pollen record of a nearby bog bears witness to continuous agriculture and other human activity. The mid-14th century plague epidemic, which caused depopulation in Sweden and surely had an effect also in the forest regions, is not reflected in the pollen indicating farming. Only in the 1950s is there a clear decrease in farming activity, accompanied by rising levels in spruce pollen, reflecting the decline of agriculture at the expense of modern forest industry. These cases demonstrate well the necessity of examining different types of source material at the same time, as well as the good results that can be thus obtained.

For centuries, the forest (together with small-scale farming and animal husbandry) formed the economic basis of life in the northern parts of Scania. Production of iron (out of bog and lake ore), charcoal, tar, and potassium was practiced in the region throughout the Danish period, beginning in the Middle Ages. The conquest of Scania by Sweden in 1658 meant, together with numerous other changes, an end to the wide spread and locally important iron industry, even if some degree of iron production for household purposes continued until the 19th century. The reason for the termination of more large-scale production was probably related to the good-quality iron ore now available from northern Sweden, which satisfied the demands of the ironworks. As a result, the significance of the other resources acquired from the forest increased, but so did the grip of the Swedish crown on the forests of Scania. The forest resources dwindled in spite of limits set on charcoal production and slash-and-burn agriculture. With the diversified exploitation of the forest resources, a mobile work force emerged in the region – people used to irregular periods of work and moving around in search of work. This type of exploitation continued until the beginning of the 20th century. After that large numbers of people moved away from the region and the ensuing forest industry – focused on the production of lumber and paper – offered means of livelihood only to a small portion of the population. A large number of farms and villages were deserted and became forested.

The authors note, among other things, that in the forest regions clearance cairns,croft foundations, stone walls, etc. were fairly easy to recognize and identify during fieldwork, whereas subsurface sites were difficult to find and tilled fields suitable for making observations were few in the areas traversed by the planned highway. Sites of the historical period located in areas that have since become forested are often very well-preserved, generally better so than in agricultural areas, but are probably underrepresented in surveys because they are difficult to find and exposing them under survey can be too time consuming.

The authors also criticize the tendency of concentrating research on the oldest signs of clearance and farming instead of acknowledging the entire chronological range of the agrarian milieu. Moreover, several writers are critical of the wavering criteria used in selecting sites for excavation. The choice is of course always difficult, as everything of interest cannot be studied. The debate around rescue archaeology – what is to be researched and how extensively – has been going on for a long time and no doubt will continue.

Two publications presenting results from the same research project, edited by Mats Anglert (2008) and Sten Skansjö (2011), were reviewed by Eva Ahl-Waris in *Fennoscandia archaeologica* XXVIII (2011). In addition to them and the book discussed here, two more publications on the results of the project have been prepared by the Swedish National Heritage Board (Riksantikvarieämbetet): *Det förlorade järnet: dansk protoindustriell järnhantering (The lost iron: Danish proto-Industrial iron production)* by Bo

Strömberg (2008) and *The ecology of expansion and abandonment: Medieval and post-Medieval agriculture and settlement in a landscape perspective* by Per Lagerås (2007).

All in all, it can be said that the results of this extensive rescue archaeology project have been made public in a range of multifaceted publications, with an eye also for the wider readership. No tangible archaeological sensations came to light, but the achievement of presenting the previously poorly known – but surprisingly varied and rich – history of habitation and economy in a region thought to be a forested periphery is in a way a sensation on its own right. The book ought to be of interest to anyone, whether a professional or a layperson, who encounters archaeological sites of the historical period.

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