

Coming summer's excavations – an introduction

What we know so far

We have now been digging four years in a row in Eke, this year will be the fifth year. Little by little, we have got into the story of the site, the picture is gradually becoming clearer, but it should be noted that it takes many years and extensive investigated areas to clarify the history. We can note that the oldest dates we have are from the transition period Bronze Age-Early Iron Age, where an area within the embankment itself in the form of a huge pit with soot and charcoal is dated to about BC 800. We have a fireplace under a house, which in its turn is located under a grave, in the northern part of the ramparts which is from about BC 500. A hearth under the grave that was examined by Uppsala University a number of years ago has given a date to the time around the birth of Christ. All these dates are from the area inside the wall-enclosed area.

If we head south from the embankment towards the sea, we have house remains from the 500s to the 700s and then in the embankment itself there are graves from the late Viking Age - early Middle Ages.

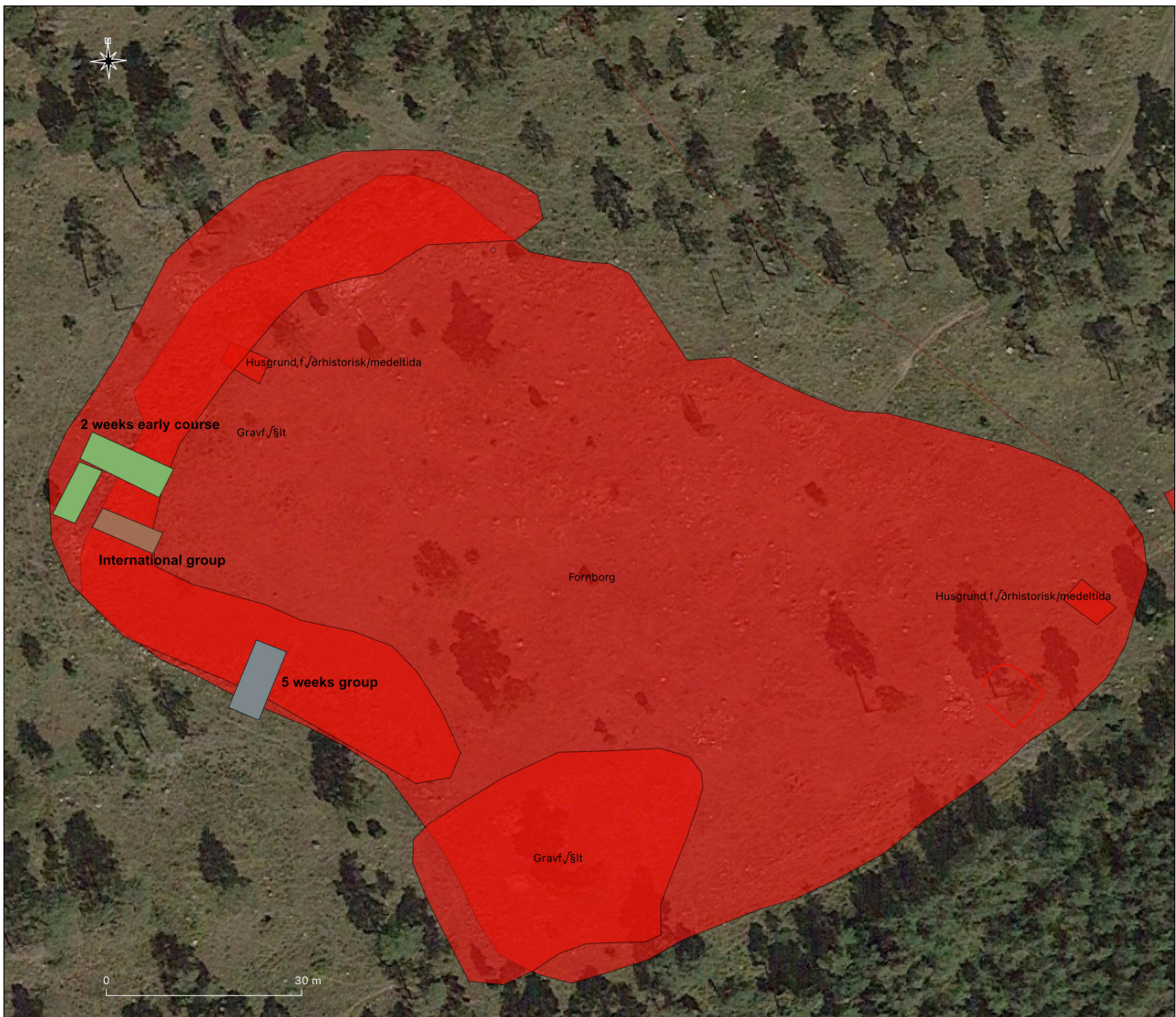
The period that is missing here, ie the later part of the Vendel period and the older part of the Viking Age, is clearly found further west, where we dug house remains, towers and other strange remains a couple of years ago. In addition, we have medieval, fine ceramics and other traces from the area in the forest west of the second area.

If you now weigh all the surveys we have done, the picture is starting to become pretty clear, both in terms of function and timing. But it is a dating that is missing which means that we do not have the picture completely clear to us - we do not know the age of the wall-enclosure (hill fort) facility!

This year's excavations in Eke

The purpose of this year's excavations in Eke is thus to clarify as far as possible the construction of the stone wall itself - a task that will not be easy. The stones themselves do not say anything about when they were stacked on top of each other. In order to at least get an answer to that question as far as possible, we will concentrate our efforts in Eke on the north side of the ramparts of Gudings slott. As many of you know, the wall here is strong to say the least, maybe up to 5-6 meters wide and almost 1 meter high, completely filled with stones. It will be very heavy work this summer, but we will as far as possible use a tractor to help.

What can one then expect to find that can date the construction of the wall? The only thing that could give a direct dating of the wall is if we encounter some form of construction of wood that can be linked to the wall. If not, it is very much about clearing up what is on top and what may be below. This means, such remains can say that the wall was created after something or before something.



The areas to be excavated at Gudings Castle, as a start. The question of where the second 2-weeks course will be digging will be decided when we have the results from the first two weeks of investigations.

A second, and at least as important question concerns why there is such a large difference between the northern part of the wall and the southern one, where the wall in the north is many times larger than in the south. What we have been able to ascertain in the shafts we have made through the wall in the south, among other things, is that it is a form of shell wall, about 2 meters wide, with filling of stone into one, possibly two layers. The difference in the extent of the wall can be due to at least three different interpretations, where the purpose is to clarify which of them is most likely.

One interpretation is that the large amount of stone in the northern part is due to the fact that stone was picked from the south side when people were buried at and in the wall in the north. This would then mean that the wall in the south has been significantly higher and stronger than it is today.

A second interpretation is that the wall was originally much stronger in the north than in the south, as a form of Potemkin scenery for those who came from the north down to the wall enclosure. As is well known, the southern side faces the sea, while the northern side faces land, ie from the direction from which the people of the area came. According to this idea, the wall has thus been built in such a way that it was strong in the north and leaner in the south and this has



The main question concerns how the wall and the graves are connected, how the wall originally looked like, and how the burial of people in the northern wall and its surrounding construction was carried out. The image gives one possible solution, meaning that the wall originally was smaller, like in the south, and that the stones covering the dead and the wall is a secondary construction. Drawing Alice Rosa Brusin

then been used for burials during the Viking Age. It was simply easiest to bury here because there were already lots of stones that could be used.

Finally, the third option. As the wall looks like in the south, with one or two layers of stone inside a shell wall, it has looked around the entire facility from the beginning. That is, the wall has had the character more of a marking of the place than having functioned as a strong and built wall. If this is the case, the situation must be interpreted in such a way that the today strong wall in the north is the result of burials during the Viking Age. That is, when people were buried in the area, stones were picked from the surroundings to cover the skeletons, which led to the area in the north housing significantly more stone than other areas. In this context, it can be noted that there are no traces of graves in the southern part, where the wall is at its lowest.

In other words, we should, as far as possible, try to explain why the wall in the north differs so markedly from the wall in the south. Here it can then be added that the embankment that is located at Ronnings further west, is a direct copy of Gudings castle with regard to the fact that it also has a strong wall up to the countryside and an almost invisible wall out to the then sea. They are also more or less the same size. The area of the enclosed area in Eke is roughly 1,26 ha, the area in Grötlingbo (Ronnings) is about 1,38 ha.

This year's excavations in Grötlingbo

An important question scientifically is whether the history that is beginning to emerge in Eke is unique to the place or whether it is a general pattern along the Gotland coast. I have previously mentioned that conditions at Ronnings and also in Rone, the neighboring parish to the east, apparently have clear parallels with the conditions in Eke, which is indicated by last year's investigations. This year's investigations in Ronnings thus mean that we must try to prove that even here there are graves in and next to the large part of the wall up to the countryside. A filed survey of the area gives clear signs that there might be graves even here. There will be rather limited investigations, as it is planned now, and it will be the delicate task for the *Trial group* to cope with.



The investigation at Ronnings, Grötlingbo, will be in the northern end of the hill fort, marked with green areas. Red dots are supposed graves, black line stone walls. As one can notice, the hill fort is totally covered in forest, but on its way to be open up by the landowner.

Depending on how it goes during the first two weeks at Gudings Castle, and also what emerges at Ronnings, it is possible that part of the late 2-weeks course may continue at Ronnings. The focus of the excavations will, however, be on the ramparts of Guding Castle.

Welcome this summer to create new knowledge about Gotland's prehistory!