

ANNUAL REPORT: ARCTIC VIKINGS FIELD SCHOOL 2018 FIELD SCHOOL

Name of Directors: **Dr. Hans H. Harmsen**, Archaeologist/Curator, Greenland National Museum and Archives, Research Assistant Professor, SUNY at Buffalo (harmsen@natmus.gl)
Dr. Christian Koch Madsen, Archaeologist/Curator, Greenland National Museum and Archives, Post Doc, National Museum of Denmark (christian@natmus.gl)



2018 AVFS team (front row, from left to right) Gunnar Grímsson, Randi Sørensen Johansen, Malu Jessen Berthelsen, Emma Harty, Pia Egede, Aka Bendsten, Michael Nielsen; (back row) Frederikke Reimer, Elie Pinta, Christian Koch Madsen (Harmsen taking photo).

The Greenland National Museum and Archives hosted the Arctic Vikings Field School, an international training course in archaeological field methods from 30 June to 31 July, 2018. The main focus of the archaeological investigation was centered at NKAH-5500, a newly discovered Norse farm in the Vatnahverfi region within one of the component areas of the Kujataa UNESCO property in South Greenland¹. Vikings from Iceland settled this area in the 10th century AD and for many centuries survived by raising livestock, farming and hunting. A few centuries later, colonial era Inuit farmers resettled Vatnahverfi and created a way of life very similar to the Norse—a way of life that continues to this day. Earlier reconnaissance of the area identified the remains of several archaeological features exposed due to heavy *foehn*-wind erosion and a possible midden deposit evidenced by a large clustering of bones and artifacts found scattered on the surface of the site. This site was inspected between 2015 and 2016, but more extensive

¹ see *Kujataa Greenland: Norse and Inuit Farming at the Edge of the Ice Cap*; <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1536>

and detailed coring and subsurface testing was deemed necessary to locate the core of the midden area and confirm the state of preservation of any remaining artifacts/features.

Four IFR students and four Greenlandic students were accepted into the Arctic Viking Field School program in 2018. IFR students were all undergraduates—representing universities in Denmark, Iceland and the United States.

Significant accomplishments of the 2018 field work include: (1) the discovery and documentation of several previously unrecorded Norse and Inuit archaeological features in the vicinity of NKAH 5500; (2) a high-resolution areal mapping of the site; (3) systematic sub-surface probing of the site to identify the core area of the midden; (4) the opening of three test trenches; and (4) recovery of several hundred bone, metal and wood artifacts. One particularly significant result of the work was confirming that preservation at NKAH 5000 was extremely high—both metal and bone were identified as possessing very good to excellent preservation at the site. At the same time, wood preservation was observed to be very poor with very few wood artifacts recovered during excavations. Although the exact factors contributing to high preservation for metal and bone are not fully understood at NKAH 5500, it may be due to both the local topography and the well-drained sandy soil found at the site. The large amount of data collected in 2018 is currently being analyzed and expected to provide potentially new and exciting insights into the phasing of occupation at NKAH 5500 as well as offer new questions as to when and why this part of Greenland was abandoned by the Norse in the 15th century.

Because of the high ratio of students to instructors (2:1), students were afforded the opportunity to work closely with staff—often times one on one—and be guided in many of the basic methods of data collection in the field. Students contributions to data collection included feature registration, collecting GPS/dGPS waypoints, taking photos, feature sketches, plan maps and profiles, areal drone photos, artifact recovery and registration, as well as providing much of the heavy labor necessitated for transporting equipment, digging, sifting soil and backfilling trenches. Students also actively interacted with local families and visitors to NKAH 5500 creating a bridge between the field school and the community by providing a welcoming atmosphere and sharing information about the work they were performing. Lastly, all students were actively engaged in the day-to-day responsibilities of camp life; preparing meals, digging latrines, fetching water, etc.

Dissemination of the field school activities is on-going and expected to increase dramatically in the coming months: While in the field, a German film crew visited the site capturing lots of images of the work being performed by the students. This documentary film being produced is directed by German archaeologist, Dr. Natacha Mehler about the Norse in the North Atlantic and expected to air on German Public Television sometime between 2019-2020. On 27-28 August 2018, the National Science Foundation hosted a seminar on increased Greenlandic-US research collaboration and the opportunity was taken by Hans Harmsen and Christian Koch Madsen to discuss some of the summer's field work in a 10-minute public presentation in Nuuk's cultural center, *Katuaq*. Additionally, an invitation has been made to present a field report on activities of the Arctic Vikings Field School as they relate to the loss of archaeological resources due to a changing climate at the *Burning Libraries* session of the Society For American Archaeology's 84th Annual Meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico, April 10-14.