

# **The orientation of pagan graves in Viking Age Iceland**

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## Part I.

### *The orientation of pagan graves in Viking Age Iceland*

The orientation of graves is a subject that has not been widely explored. While burial orientation is usually recorded in archaeological excavations, little has actually been said about the reason behind the choice of a pagan grave orientation. By contrast, it is commonly understood that Christian burials traditionally have a west-east orientation, with the head placed at the western end of the grave. This is similar to the layout of churches, and in both instances the aim is to view the coming of Christ on the Judgment Day (Rathz, 1977:54). Norse pagan burials have been associated with a north-south orientation (Shetelig, 1912:230), implying that there was also some general ideology or religious belief dictating the orientation. In Iceland, the burials did not follow a fixed rule, as graves could be facing any direction: north, south, east, west etc, with some orientations more common than the others (Eldjárn, 2000:285). However, although grave orientation varied from one cemetery to the next it was usually the same within each, suggesting that grave orientation was not random. In this dissertation, information about Icelandic pagan burials dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries has been systematically analysed, and the orientation of graves characterised. The explanation for an orientation, usually vaguely and in non-explicit terms, has been assumed to be based on local conditions (Maher, 2009:51) or simply indifference. This dissertation will try to look further, and by systematically analysing the landscape surrounding the graves, it will be argued that the orientation of the interred was significant and more often than not, the grave was orientated to look away from the farm. Maps of the burials and their surroundings were produced to allow systematic analysis and comparisons of the burial sites and they form the principal evidence to back up this hypothesis.

#### **1.2 Setting the scene:**

Burials have been characterised as an important and a reliable source of information about past societies for a long time. Many archaeologists have argued that depending on the type and particularly the wealth of the grave, burials can be associated with the

individual's social status, although this idea has been debated (Samson, 1987:121; Cannon, 1989:437, Parker Pearson, 1999). Grave goods may be the possessions of the dead or gifts from the mourner or heir to the dead and they may have been seen as supplies for the dead in the afterlife or to "prevent the dead coming back to haunt the living" (Pearson, 1999:7). More importantly for this analysis, the presence of grave goods has been used to differentiate between pagan and Christian burials, although there are exceptions. That said grave goods are not the sole feature that can signal a pre-Christian burial. Other elements combined have also been regarded as indicators of Icelandic pre-Christian burials. Most prominently, an orientation of a grave different from West-East has been seen as a reliable indicator of its non-Christian nature, although as we will see, there were many pre-Christian burials that had such an orientation (Eldjárn 1958, 1984; 2000:285-288). Another commonly cited indicator is the location of a burial outside a Christian cemetery.

Icelandic pagan burials are relatively numerous and are thus a major source of archaeological knowledge regarding the Viking Age in Iceland. In the 19th century amateurs and scholars, such as Kristian Kålund, travelled around Iceland visiting sites mentioned in the sagas, surveyed and subsequently created archives about pagan burials (Eldjárn 2000:12). However, it was not until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that a comprehensive archaeological catalogue was created, independent of saga citations. The author, Kristján Eldjárn, published his dissertation titled *Kuml og haugfé* in 1956. This is a complete catalogue of the pre-Christian graves, compiled and systematically reviewed. In 2000, Adolf Friðriksson updated *Kuml og haugfé* and added pre-Christian burials discovered after Eldjárn's publication in 1956 and up to 1999 (Eldjárn & Friðriksson 2000; Maher, 2009:11). *Kuml og haugfé* can be seen as an important piece of work, because it is the only full catalogue of Viking Age burials amongst the Nordic countries (Vésteinsson, 2004:31). Since this catalogue is the main source of information about pagan burials in Iceland, the graves published by Eldjárn will be used predominantly in this paper. The Icelandic material is particularly useful for this analysis because it carries a great deal of information about pre-Christian burial, helping us to understand better the Icelanders within Viking society.

### 1.3 Kuml og haugfé and Eldjárn's ideas about grave orientation:

In Kuml og haugfé there are 157 burial sites, in which 96 graves have a known orientation, with the head end recorded. There are also 25 graves with a known orientation in which the head end was not recorded, as well as the Berufjörður burial site, which has inconsistent information regarding the orientation of graves in the Icelandic and the English versions of Kuml og haugfé.

According to Eldjárn the orientation of graves did not follow a fixed rule, however the most common way of burying the dead was to orientate the head to either South or West or SW (Eldjárn 2000:286-288).

The table below shows where the head of the body was placed and also the number of graves following each direction:

South	19
SSW	1
SW	19
WNW	4
NW	12
WSW	2
West	14
North	8
NA	2
NNA	1
East	5
ESE	1
SE	8

In Kuml og haugfé, Kristján Eldjárn referred to the works of the Norwegian archaeologist Haakon Shetelig, regarding the significance of grave orientation. He pointed out that while Shetelig was surveying burials from western Norway, he noticed that many pagan Norwegian graves had the head orientated north and looking south (N-S). He also observed that when the graves included large ships, they were buried with their front facing south, regardless of how this corresponded to the sea.



An explanation for this he found in Snorri's Prose Edda, which stated that "north and downwards was the way to Hel" (Sturluson 2005:7). Thus Shetelig explained that since the way to hell was north and downwards, the Æsir (a collective term for the gods) must have lived in the south (Shetelig 1937:237-239). This Eddic notion served then to explain the reason why a burial orientation N-S was chosen before the spread of Christianity. Although Eldjárn seemed to have valued Shetelig's observation about the Norwegian corpus, he could not solely apply this hypothesis to the Icelandic burials, because not all graves were orientated N-S.

Eldjárn then compared the burials in Iceland to other Norse areas and discovered significant similarities with those found in Scotland (Eldjárn 2000:285-288). For example, in the Orkney Islands at Pierowall, burials were orientated E-W, with the head found in both directions. The scholar Anton Brøgger analysed the burials at Pierowall and argued that their orientation followed the shoreline. Thus Brøgger thought that generally the orientation of burials followed natural features, such as the orientation of a valley, a fjord or water bodies, and they were more important in determining the orientation of a grave. Thus Brøgger used a different approach to explain the orientation of graves instead of relying on Norse cosmology. In attempting to apply Brøgger's ideas to Iceland, Eldjárn argued that mounds or fjords might have influenced burial orientation. However, even if somebody had buried the dead facing south for instance, the idea "south" may not always have been the true "south" but rather a local direction determined by the landscape (Eldjárn 2000:285-288).

Eldjárn then looked at cemeteries where several burials were placed together to see if the orientation was uniform in a given place. At Berufjörður the majority of burials had an orientation E-W but a few were different. At Granagil, 3 burials were orientated N-S and 1 E-W, and the reason for the latter having a different orientation was because of the rise in the landscape turning towards the West. So the landscape influenced the orientation of that particular burial, in harmony with Brøgger's idea. He also noticed that at Hafurbjarnarstaðir a child and a woman were buried opposite each other. Eldjárn argued that in this case not topography but indifference ruled the orientation and the disposal of the corpses. At Dalvík most burials had the head orientated SW, and were alongside a shoreline, thus the burials in this case may have followed the shoreline. To conclude, Eldjárn did not share Shetelig's notion that there was an universal principle that ruled the orientation of graves in Iceland. He approved

Brøgger's idea that topography played a role on how a grave was orientated, however he added that indifference was also a factor. For Eldjárn, local topography, peculiarity or indifference were possible explanations for the choice of an orientation in Iceland (Eldjárn 2000:285-288), rather than a single overarching ideology.

Comparably to his study was Jenny Rita Næss' examination of the orientation of Iron Age graves from the district of Voss in Western Norway. Næss reached a similar conclusion regarding the explanation for an orientation. She rejected Shetelig's idea that there was a fixed orientation principle due to religious beliefs. She argued that there was variation in the orientation of the Voss' graves and suggested that there was a chronological change in orientation, and that local topographical conditions have played a much larger role in orientation of graves (Næss 1968:48-49).

#### **1.4 Was there an orientation pattern in Iceland?**

It was then my turn to go through the data compiled in the 2000 edition of *Kuml og haugfé* and try to answer some of my own queries. In the process of trying to understand if there were patterns in the orientation of Icelandic graves, a number of issues were explored. They included:

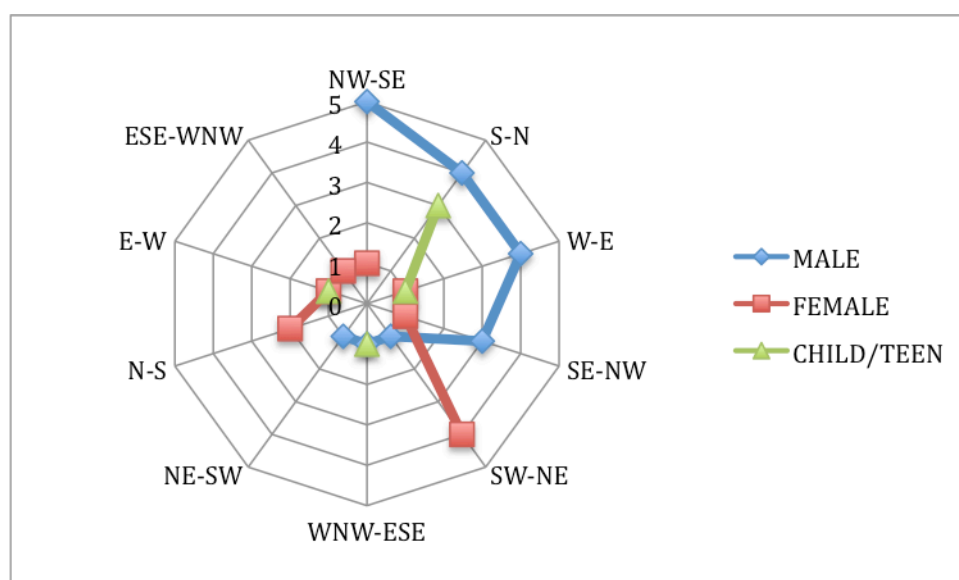
- If males and females were buried with the same orientation;
- If orientation was related to the age of the individual;
- If there were regional similarities or differences;
- If animals buried with humans followed the same orientation;
- And if orientation was determined by the landscape.

It also seemed a good idea to purposefully create maps as a means to answer my research questions (or at least to help answer them), especially regarding the relationship between orientation and landscape. Thus maps of graves with an orientation recorded were created, using information from *Kuml og haugfé* and a variety of other sources, which will be discussed later. Since I am analysing the burial sites and the graves from *Kuml og haugfé*, I decided to use the same numbering system from the catalogue. For example, the first site in *Kuml og haugfé* is Kornhóll and grave number 2 has an orientation recorded; thus 1:2.

Furthermore, I tried to distinguish between individual burial sites and cemeteries. Friðriksson has suggested that burials that contained 2 or more graves were a

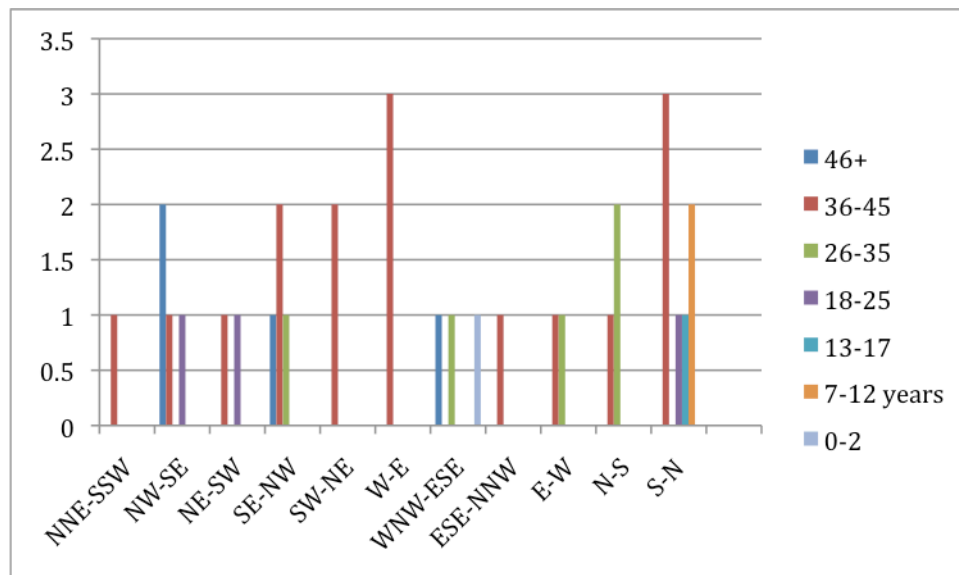
cemetery (Friðriksson 2009:9-21). However he also pointed out that the distinction between an individual grave and a cemetery may be irrelevant since, “the ratio between single burial sites and cemeteries does not accurately reflect the situation in the Viking period. Contrary to the numeric evidence, isolated burials seem to have been the exception” (Friðriksson, 2000:590). In any case, for this study I decided to follow Friðriksson’s suggestion so a site containing 2 or more graves will be considered a graveyard here.

Having decided on the quantity of graves that made up a cemetery in Viking Age Iceland, I began looking at gender, to see if males and females were buried with the same orientation and also at their age. I found that 36 graves with an orientation were sexed. Below is a chart with the results:



Although most men were buried with an orientation NW-SE (found in 5 graves), there was not a huge difference between men buried with orientations W-E (4 of them), S-N (4) or SE-NW (3). As for the women, most of them (4) were buried with an orientation SW-NE. The children and teenagers too were mostly buried S-N (3). On balance, it seems that sex was not a factor influencing the orientation of graves although there are not enough sexed orientated graves to reject this possibility.

In looking at the age of the individual at the time of death, there were 32 graves with an orientation that have been aged. The chart below shows the age categories and their respective orientations:



The following provides the break down of sex, age and the number of graves following each direction:

**Males:**

+46 = 2 NW-SE; 1 SE-NW and 1 WNW-ESE;

36-45 = 3 W-E; 2 SE-NW; 2 S-N; 1 NE-SW and 1 NW-SE;

26-35 = 1 WNW-ESE

18-25 = 1 S-N and 1 NW-SE.

**Females:**

36-45 = 2 SW-NE; 1 N-S; 1 E-W and 1 ESE-WNW;

26-35 = 1 N-S.

**Unsexed graves:**

36-45 = 1 NNE-SSW; 1 S-N

26-45 = 1 SE-NW; 1 E-W and 1 N-S

18-25 = 1 NE-SW

**Children/teenagers:**

13-17 = 1 S-N

7-12 = 2 S-N

0-2 = 1 WNE-ESE

When analysing the orientation of these graves, it does not seem that people of the same age bracket were buried with a particular orientation, neither male nor female or both put together. This is true also for unsexed but aged skeletons. The only potentially interesting pattern is that 3 out of 5 possible graves containing children or teenagers from the age 7 to 17 had an orientation S-N. These numbers are however too small to read anything into them but should be kept in mind when the data set grows.

## **1.5 Regions:**

After having looked at the evidence for gender and age, the comparison of orientation by region was done. They were:

### **Vestmannaeyjar:**

There was only one grave orientated W-E.

### **Rangárvallasýsla:**

There were 5 graves from different cemeteries aligned W-E;

4 graves were aligned SE-NW;

2 N-S and the rest had a single orientation: 1 NE-SW; 1 S-N and 1 E-W.

It seems then that most burials in this area were buried either W-E or SE-NW.

### **Árnessýsla:**

3 graves aligned W-E;

5 graves from separate cemeteries aligned NW-SE; S-N; SW-NE; E-W and SE-NW.

### **Gullbringusýsla:**

There were 5 graves orientated differently: SE-NW; NW-SE; ESE-WNE; WNW-ESE and W-E.

### **Snæfellsnessýsla:**

There was only 1 grave with a known orientation, NE-SW.

**Barðastrandarsýsla:**

There was only 1 grave with a known orientation, E-W.

**Norður-Ísafjarðarsýsla:**

At Tyrðilmýri cemetery, a grave was orientated NW-SE and the other SE-NW.

**Vestur-Húnavatnssýsla:**

There were 2 graves orientated SE-NW and 1 from a separate burial site, orientated S-N.

**Austur Húnavatnssýsla:**

There were 2 graves orientated: NW-SE and WNW-ESE.

**Skagafjarðarsýsla:**

There were 4 graves orientated NW-SE, although they were mostly from Brimnes cemetery; 2 N-S and 5 other graves with different orientations and from different cemeteries.

**Eyjafjarðarsýsla:**

There were 13 graves SW-NE – mainly from Ytra-Garðshorn and Dalvík Brimnes; 3 S-N; 2 W-E and the rest of the graves were each aligned in different directions.

**Suður Þingeyjarsýsla:**

There were 3 graves orientated differently: W-E, E-W and N-S.

**Norður-Þingeyjarsýsla:**

There were 2 graves orientated differently: S-N and NNE-SSW.

**Norður-Múlasýsla:**

There were 4 graves S-N from separate cemeteries and the rest had different orientations: W-E, NE-SW and SW-NE.

**Suður Múlasýsla:**

There are 2 S-N and the others: N-S; NW-SE and WNW-ESE.

**Austur Skaftafellssýsla:**

There were 3 graves orientated differently, E-W; S-N and N-S.

**Vestur Skaftafellssýsla:**

There were 3 graves N-S all from Granagil cemetery and 2 other graves from separate cemeteries, orientated WNW-ESE and NW-SE.

Through this analysis it appears that there were no similarities between regions. Each region had its own category of orientation and they were different from other regions. Although in Rangárvallasýsla and Árnessýsla most graves were orientated W-E, almost all graves in Árnessýsla came from the Traðarholt cemetery.

What became clear throughout was that within larger cemeteries most graves were orientated similarly. In Eyjafjarðarsýsla there were 2 cemeteries containing burials orientated chiefly SW-NE, 11 out of 19 graves in total. There were 7 out of 10 graves at the cemetery of Ytra-Garðshorn (and 1 grave was orientated similarly SSW-NNE and 1 grave SW-NE but the head position was not recorded); and 4 out of 14 graves orientated SW-NE at Dalvík Brimnes, with an grave orientated NE-SW, 1 SE-NW and 3 more graves SW-NE with the head position unknown. This also happened in Barðastrandarsýsla, at Berufjörður, where there were 4 distinct grave fields with 27 graves. Only 2 of these cemeteries, Skáldstaðir and Hríshóll, have the grave direction recorded, although the head end is unknown. At Skáldstaðir there were 6 graves all aligned E-W, and at Hríshóll there are 10 graves, all orientated E-W.

From these examples, it might be argued that each pagan cemetery had its own idea of orientation, in which overwhelmingly graves within the same cemetery were orientated in the same way. There could be many reasons for this, e.g. a predilection for order and neatness which might have no other ideological connotation, but it could also be argued that it had to do with members of the same family choosing to bury their dead with the same orientation, perhaps for reasons meaningful to them but not others.

Shetelig's idea that pagan graves were aligned north-south according to some general belief is contradicted by the fact that in Iceland the graves were orientated in a variety of ways. This suggests that there was no general ideology governing this in the same

way as there is in Christian burials. Nevertheless, the Icelandic cemeteries are far from random in their orientation, suggesting that even if there was no universal principle followed by everyone there were norms about how graves should be orientated. There are exceptions however, such as the anomalous burial. For example, at Sílastaðir there are 2 graves orientated SW-NE, 1 with a very similar orientation SSW-NNE and the irregular burial was orientated W-E. An atypical burial within an ordered cemetery could be explained by chronology – it might be much earlier or much later than the bulk of the graves – for example, the intercutting of graves, or it might be someone who was not welcome in the community. If the grave represented a deviant burial, the deceased could have been an outlaw, an outsider or someone who could come back to haunt the living. There have been many scholars who have claimed that the anomalous grave in a burial site represented deviation; for instance Bryony Coles, who studied the late Mesolithic cemetery of Vedbaek in Denmark. She suggested that by looking at the age and sex of the deceased in a presumably deviant burial site, they did not appear to be from those of an ordinary population. There was a great number of middle-aged people and childbirth deaths but only a few mature adults or children at Vedbaek. Thus Coles suggested that most people were buried elsewhere (Coles 1999:51-57). In Iceland the situation was different but it may be suggested that the same sort of principle applied – although buried in the same cemetery, the anomalous individual received a different orientation. However, further research is needed to support this idea.

After analysing the regions, I then looked at animals (mainly horses and some dogs) that were buried with humans to see if they followed the same orientation. I found that most of them were buried at the foot end of the grave, some to the head end but also some to the left or right side of the grave. If comparing the orientation of the deceased with the position of the animal, it appears that animals did not receive the same orientation as humans; they were just inserted near the deceased wherever seemed more suitable within the burial. Therefore animals did not influence the orientation of the dead in any respect. Below is a table with the position of the animals in the graves, with the numbers denoting the burial sites and graves:



Foot end	Head end	Left	Right
17	75	3:3	72
25:2:3:4	82	15	80
40	121	91	87:3
61			
68			
70			
76			
79:1:2			
85			
87:1:2:8:10			
89:2:5			
89:12			
98:4			
102			
130			
144			
152			

## **Part II.**

### **2.1 The creation of maps with digital and additional burial data:**

Although the previous analyses served to provide some answers to my early enquiries, they did not explain why some graves were orientated differently than the others, particularly at smaller burial sites. It then seemed plausible to create maps of all the sites that had graves with a known orientation and use them to analyse their relationship with the landscape. The maps were also intended to be a catalogue that could be used as reference for others interested in the orientation of graves and grave topography in general. Once all the data was gathered and the maps ready, they were analysed and an attempt was made to describe the possible patterns, which relate to the orientations.

In order to compile the catalogue, I used the burials from Kuml og haugfé, some information from Adolf Friðriksson's field work, including his unpublished phd thesis, draft notes, drawings and general details from sites he revisited; a vast range of GPS data and coordinates of Icelandic landscape features including the burials (kuml), farms, boundaries, old tracks, elevations, lakes and rivers; as well as internet sites such as Google Earth and Zonums. The maps were then created using ArcGIS software, with the burials as a focal point.

The following provides a breakdown of sources used:

The digital data was obtained through FSI (The Institute of Archaeology in Iceland) via various sources, including:

- The National Land Survey of Iceland (Landmælingar Íslands) – where the base map of Iceland was extracted, including waterbodies, lakes and rivers, part of the roads and farms. This is a 1:50,000 scale representation. Drawings of “urban areas” and farms made by Danish surveyors in the first years of last century are also available from LMI.
- RALA (now defunct), which is now called Landbúnaðarháskóli Íslands - farms boundaries were derived from this site. The data was initially derived

from 25m resolutions LandSatelite imagery, and later, 2.5m SPOT2; as well as other maps and sources. Their map/model was based on the Danish Geodetic Institute and were published in the period between 1904-1965 in the scale of 1:100.000.

- Herforingjaráðskort, also produced by RALA – these are Icelandic maps produced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and that is where the place-names and part of the roads (old-tracks) came from.
- Nyttjaland (Land Register of Iceland) – where the farms and part of the boundaries were derived from.
- Google Earth – an Internet tool where the globe is virtually displayed. Google Earth was used to match topographical features from the sources listed above to their virtual geographic features.
- Zonums – a coordinate converter site ([www.zonums.com/onlinekml2shp.php](http://www.zonums.com/onlinekml2shp.php)), used to convert some coordinates from Google Earth that were readable on ArcGis.

Apart from Kuml og haugfé, the non-digital burial data was also extracted from Adolf Fridriksson's unpublished data collection – Topographic Burial Survey 1999 -2009 *“La place du mort. These de doctorat. Université PARIS IV Sorbonne.”*

It is relevant for this study to mention that although all these data sources gives us a better understanding of Icelandic topography and has also enabled me to produce maps of the burials and their surroundings, there are limitations to the use of such data. For instance, the farm boundaries used in the maps are modern boundaries, and it is difficult to be certain if the area demarcated in modern times were similarly divided in the early period. Some of the lakes and rivers projected on the maps are “modern” and may have also changed through time, so their location in relation to the orientation of the grave may not always be accurate. Also the roads (old tracks) come from the drawings of Danish surveyors from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, so the level of error is a point to consider. In addition the grave data may show some deficiency, since the location of the burials are not always straightforward. Some burial records lack a great deal of information and the details we have in Kuml og haugfé is not always identical to other excavation documents. Therefore, there is not only a map-making limitation, there is also resulting limitation in interpretation when such

information is lacking or comes from a contemporary source. However, it was still worth making use of this available data to at least attempt to have an insight into the choices made when burying the dead in the Icelandic Viking Age.

It may also be important to call attention to the selection of the data sets, which was based on the features in the landscape that were closer to the burials. The scale used in my maps was 1:50,000 - based on the maps from Landmælingar Íslands. Most of the maps produced are zoomed into a scale ranging from 1:3,500 to 1:25,000.

The idea was to understand if either natural or man-made features in the landscape, which were probably visible from the grave, dictated the orientation and explained diversity. Although it has been argued before (Eldjárn 1958 and Næss 1968) that the landscape has a role to play concerning orientation, it was thought that by integrated digital and non-digital data together and thus having “a closer look” of the sites, perhaps the maps could reveal some information that has not been noticed before.

## **2.2 Catalogue of burials with known orientation:**

The maps in this dissertation contain all the sites with graves, which have a recorded orientation. Each grave is presented in a systematic way that can have bearing on the issue of orientation. The principal addition to existing data are however the maps which display the location and orientation of the graves in their topographical context. On the map legend, the burials are described as *kuml*; the grave orientation is indicated by the burial symbols (e.g. ↗ SW-NE) and when gender is known, this is shown next to the orientation. The sea is represented in light blue colour, the mainland in white and the island (Kornhóll) in brown. In most maps I have tried to show the nearest historic farm to the grave, and they usually carried the same name as the burial, but in some instances other farms also seemed relevant. This was because sometimes there was not any associated farm with the burial. The evidence for Icelandic Viking farms are usually ruins or farm mounds as well as modern structures sitting on the top of a farm mound considered to be from the Viking Age (Vésteinsson 1998:14). I am aware that the association of a burial site with a farm is not always clear-cut or unproblematic, especially when dealing with modern farmhouses or farms that have moved because of soil erosion. However modern farms were recorded based

on the assumption that Icelandic farms have not changed drastically unless volcanic eruption or landscape change have brought abandonment (Vésteinsson 2002:99-101).

In some maps, the name of the burials and farms were too long and had to be cut down. This was because ArcGis software has limitations regarding the number of characters used to describe a feature. The maps were uploaded on Google Earth, and the website is able to display ground-level view so the burials could be analysed in that way too. Hence, I could test out approximately what sort of terrain was viewed by the person burying the dead, i.e. assuming the terrain has not significantly changed since this time.

Some burial sites have more information recorded than the others, so for that reason there are scenarios in which some information is missing and therefore cannot be added to the maps. For example, some sites have no farms associated with the burial or roads known nearby. One of the main reasons for this is the differences in the amount of data recorded at the time of excavation, the changing approaches to excavation techniques and recording methods – e.g. from antiquarian days up until more modern excavations.

### **2.3 The Maps:**

Below follows a description of the burials and their contents, the maps and a brief discussion of each site:

#### **1. Kornhóll**

Grave 2: a female skeleton orientated W-E

Grave depth: about 50 to 60cm

Grave-goods: twisted wire arm-ring of copper-alloy (and possibly silver), fragments of bone comb, 2 pieces of flint, stone pebble and iron fragments

Excavated by: Mjöll Snæsdóttir in 1992

There was an earlier grave excavated by Gísli Gestsson in 1968 but the orientation was not recorded.



In the Viking Age, the right hand side of the land displayed on the map did not exist. The old track was probably located where the ancient coastline was and the distance between the burial and the original coast although unknown, has been estimated to be approximately from 30 to 40 metres (Friðriksson pers. comm.). The location of the

farm is problematic since the landscape has changed. The information we have about Kornhóll farm (which may be a modern farm) is that it was located south of the burial. In that scenario, the grave would have looked towards the open sea but not facing the farm.

### **3. Kápa**

Grave 1: remains of the lower part of a human skeleton orientated NE-SW

Excavated by: Páll Sigurðsson in 1860

Grave 3: remains of a human skeleton orientated N-S

Grave type: covered with stones

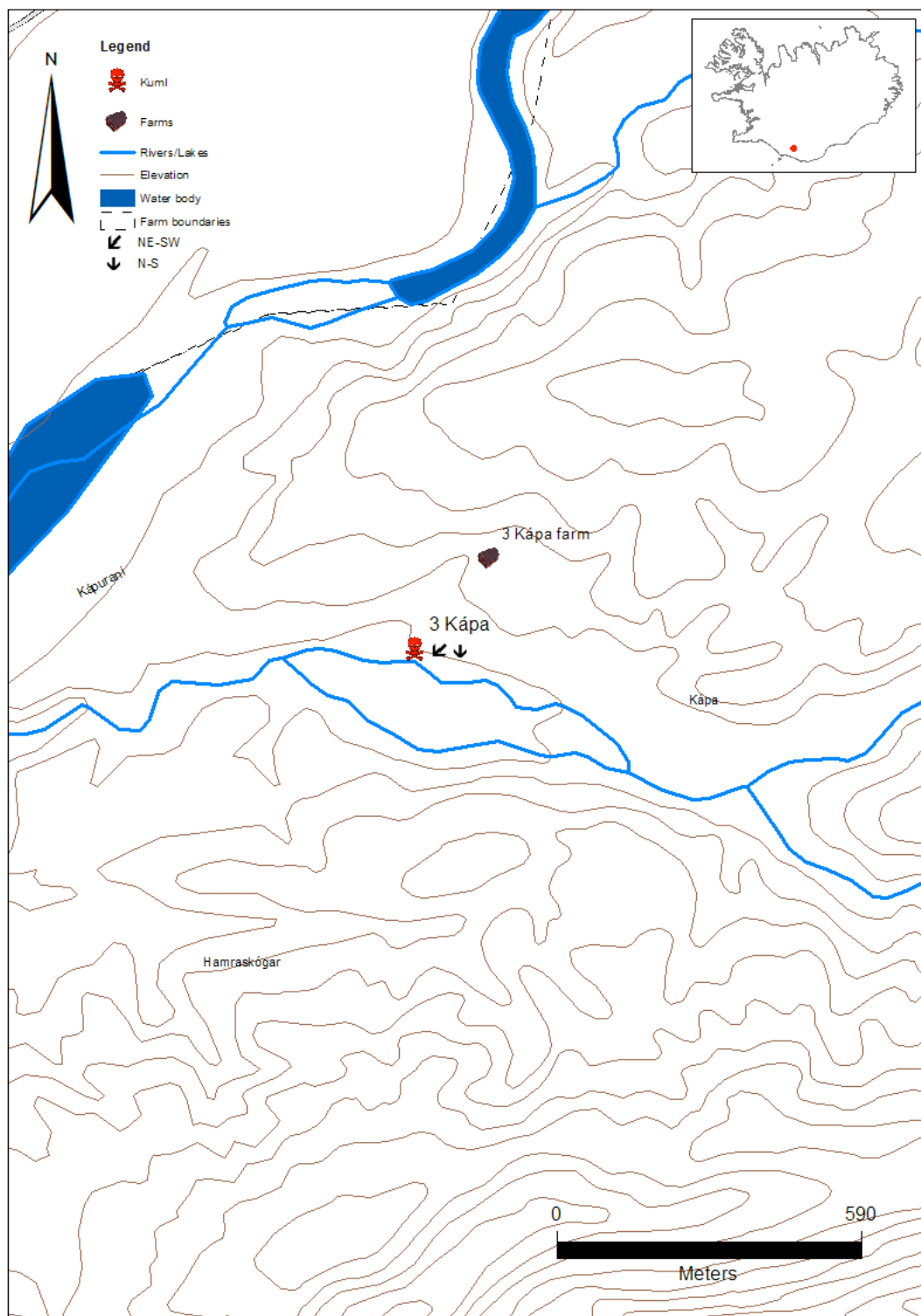
Grave-goods: 3 silver wire buttons, gold thread, spearhead, pieces of charcoal, 2 iron buckles and some iron fragments (possibly the remains of a saddle)

A horse grave was to the left of the burial.

Excavated by: Matthías Þórðarson in 1925.

Other objects were found in this site in 1934 including a gold wire button, copper alloy buckle and lead weight.





These graves were orientated looking away from the farm, not following the river but looking towards it. The burials were located in a valley, on a slope, but the orientations did not follow the slope and there are no known roads in the vicinity.

## 5. Hemla

Grave 1: A human skeleton (aged 13-17), orientated S-N

Position: on its right side, the right hand resting upon the right thigh, legs slightly flexed

Grave-goods: spearhead (Petersen type K 21), axe (type K), shield-boss (Rygh 562), knife, whetstone, scale balance, bead, comb, piece of wood, four pieces of jasper (probably for fire-making), iron bridle-bit, buckle and some iron fragments

There were 2 horse graves associated with this grave.

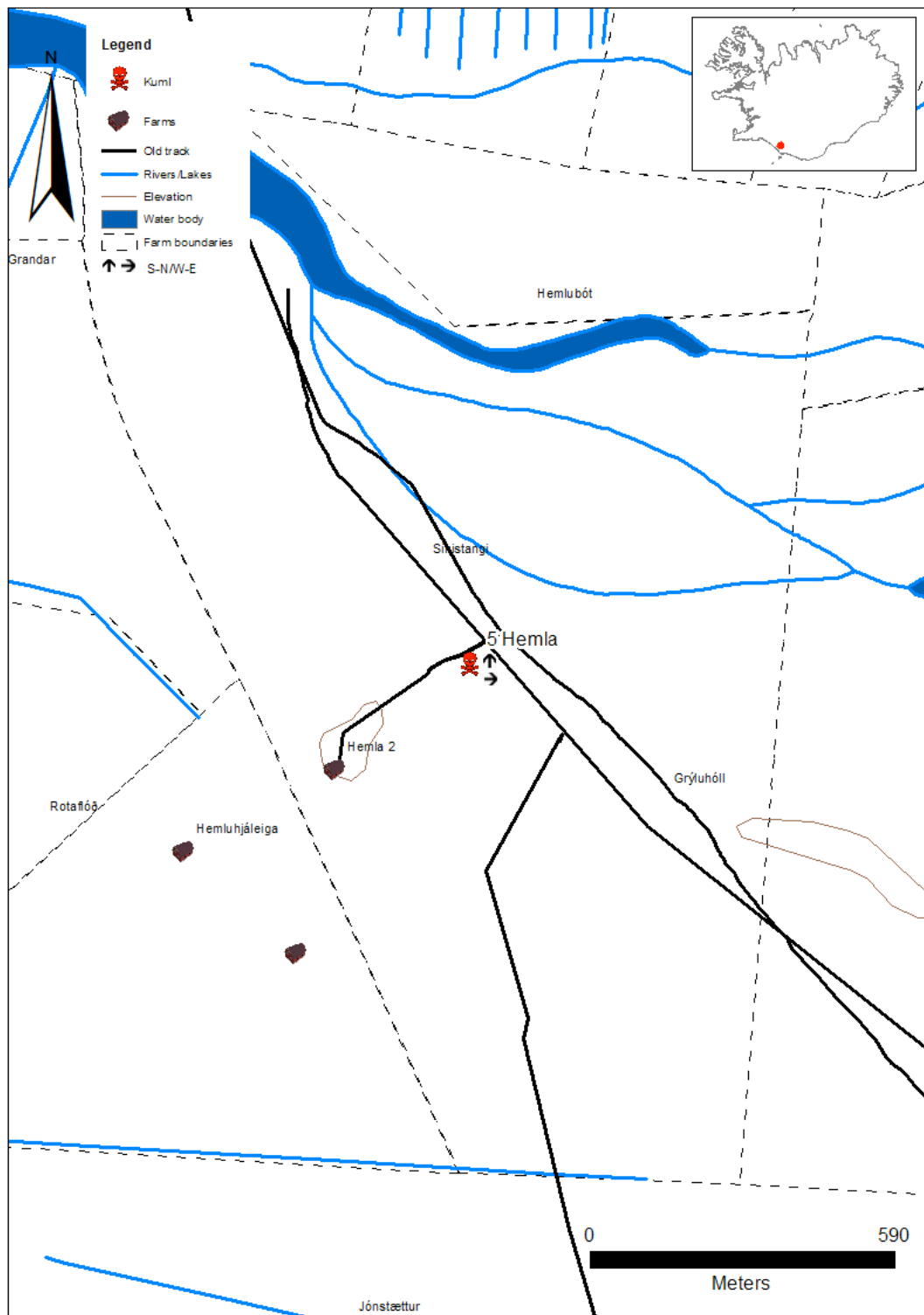
Grave 2: Poorly preserved human skeleton, orientated W-E

Position: slightly flexed supine, leaning towards the right

Grave type: remains of a wooden coffin, 170x40cm

No grave-goods.

Both burials were excavated by Matthías Þórðarson in 1932 and 1937, found 185m NE of the homestead on an eroded hillock.



The graves were orientated looking away from the farm (Hemla), perhaps following the old tracks in different directions, as they were orientated differently. The grave orientated S-N is facing the river but also the grave orientated W-E as the river stretches southwards.

## **6. Strandarhöfuð**

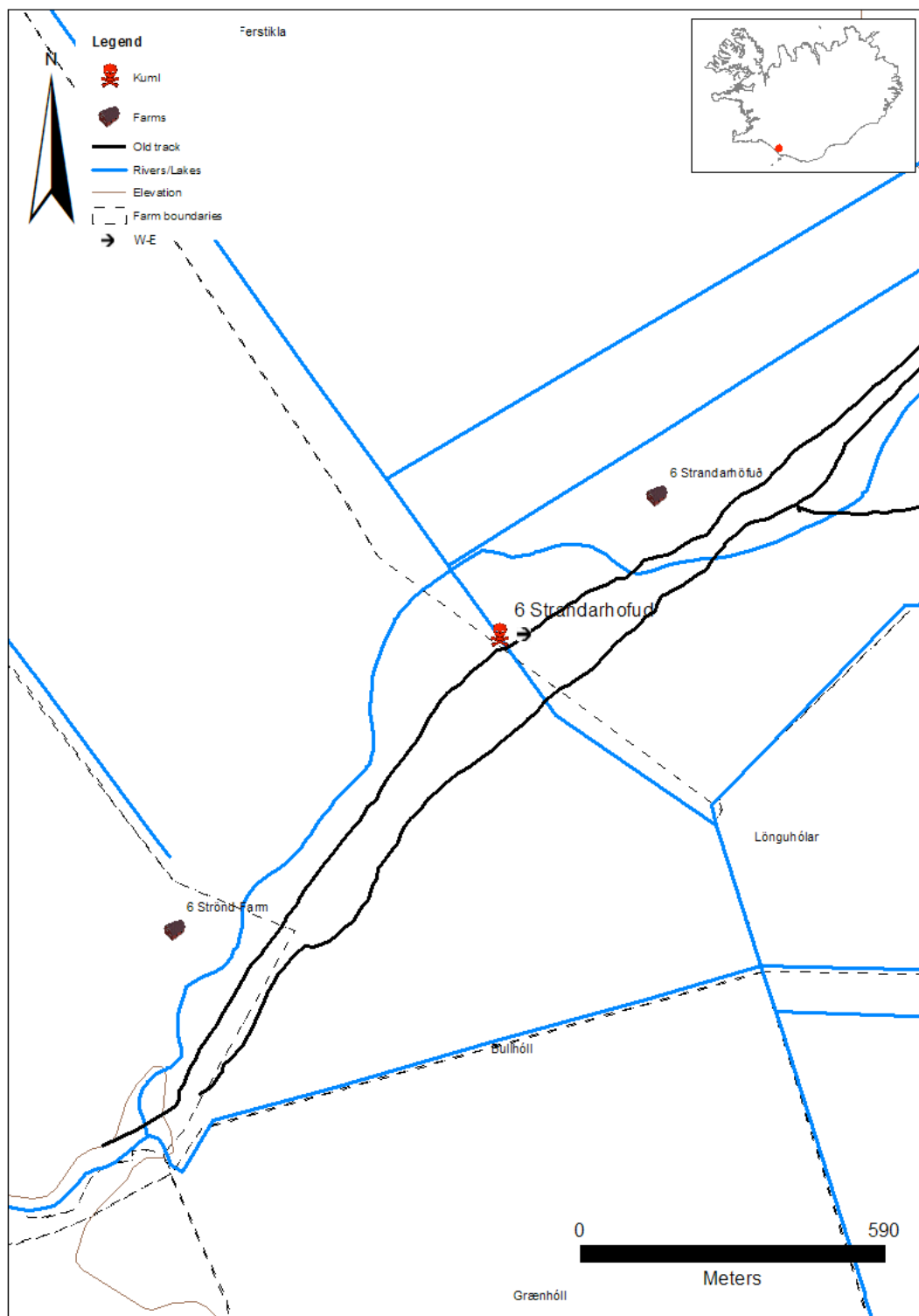
Remains of a human skeleton orientated W-E

Grave measurement: 170x70cm and up to 90cm deep

Location: c. 4-500m from the farm

Grave-goods: small iron fragment and some wood

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1951



This burial neither looks away nor towards the farm (Strandarhöfuð). It was located on a flat area, within its farm boundary and right on the side of the old track, but the orientation does not follow these features in the landscape. Grave goods are scant and it is orientated after a Christian fashion. Could it possibly be a Christian burial?

**8. Dufþaksholt.**

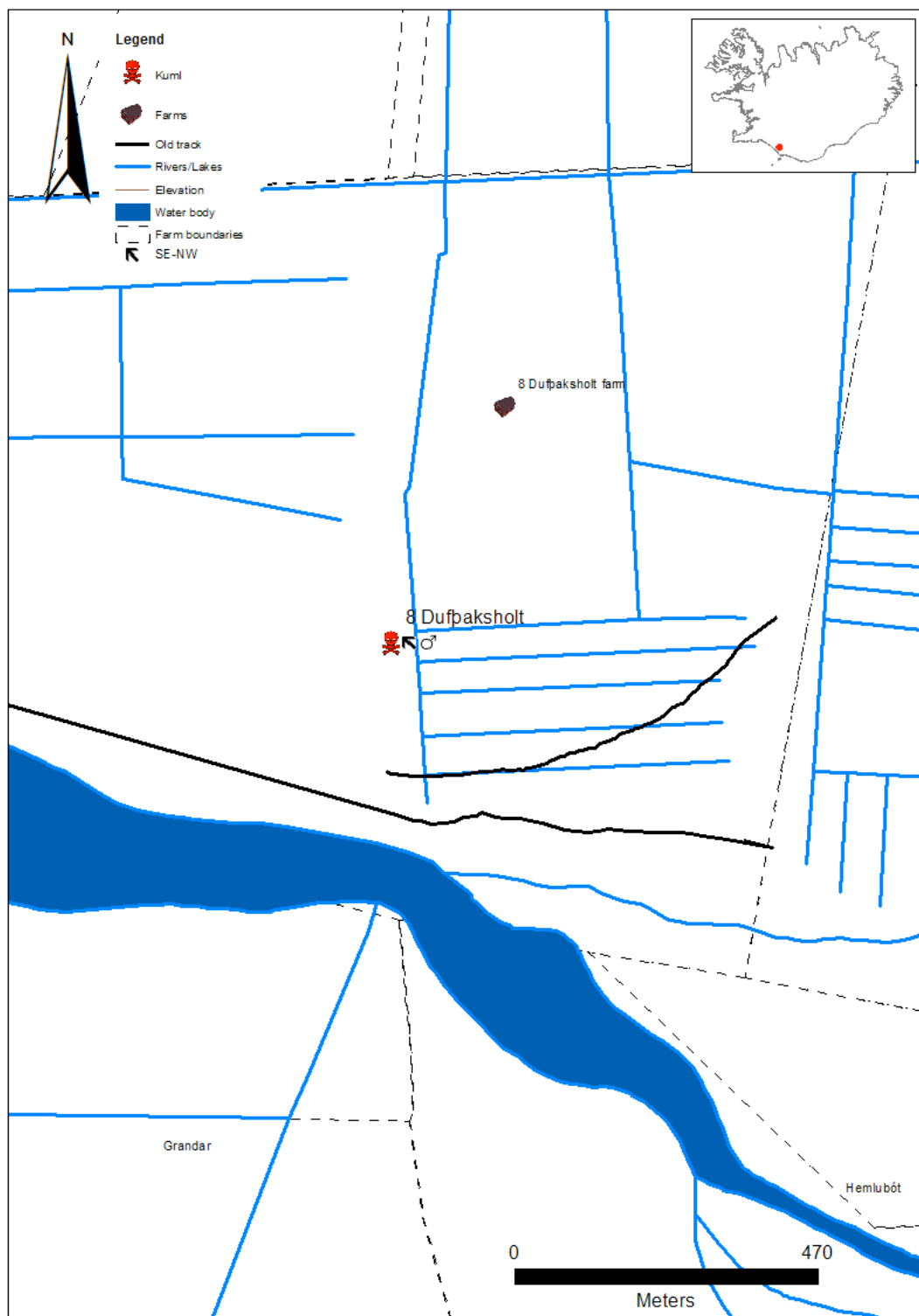
Poorly preserved remains of a male skeleton (aged 36-45), orientated SE-NW

Position: supine

Location: on a small hillock just outside the farm

No grave-goods, but near the foot end there were fragments of wood stained by corroded iron

Excavated by: Matthías Þórðarson in 1940



This grave did not face the farm and it does not seem the orientation followed anything in particular. The grave was placed looking away from the nearest river and there were no grave goods.

## 15. Mörk

Poorly preserved human skeleton orientated W-E

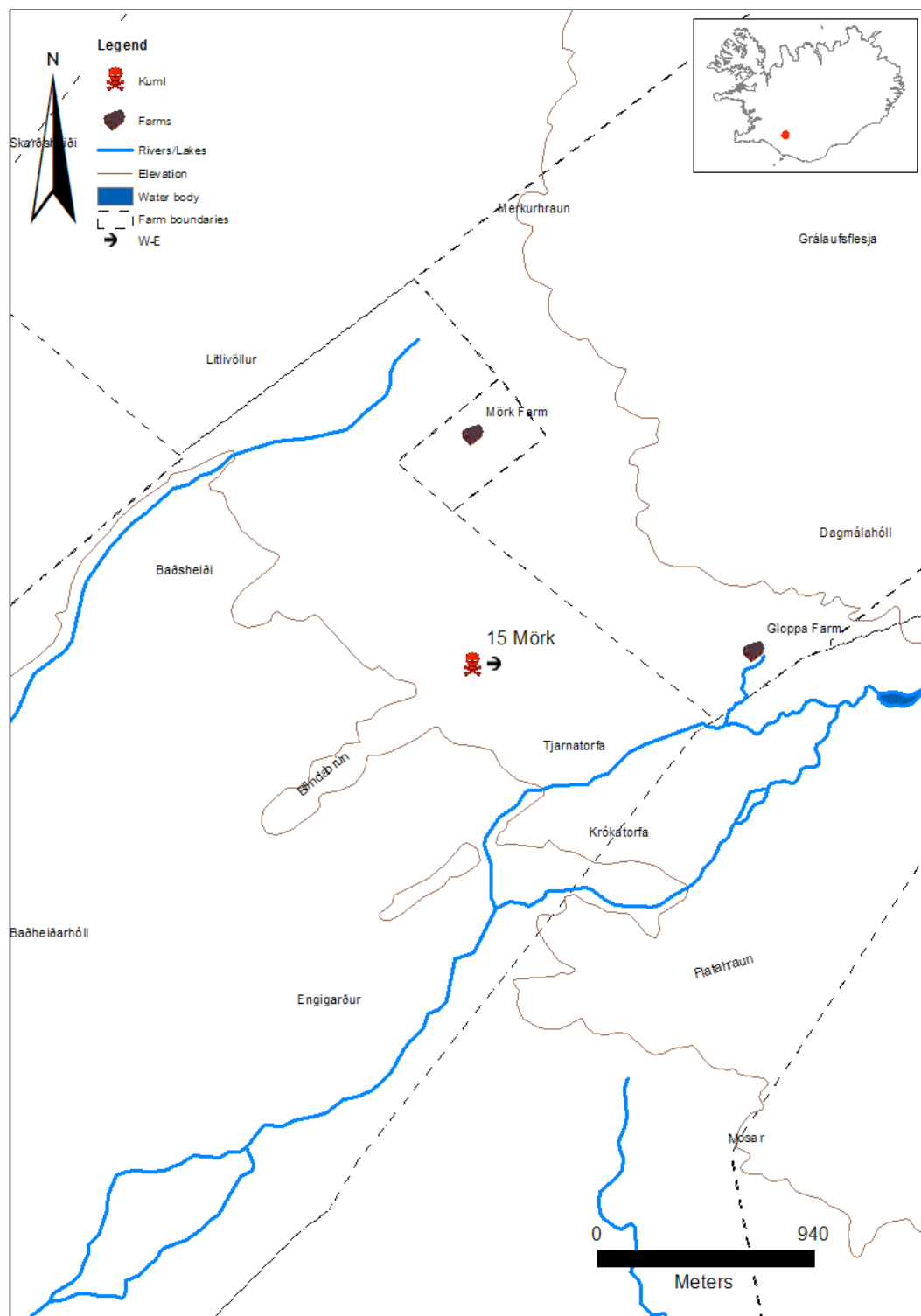
Location: 1 km south of the deserted Mörk farm site

Grave-goods: weaving implement made of iron (type Rygh 413)

A badly eroded horse grave was found 1m to the east of this grave, together with some horse bones and fragments of an iron bridle-bit.

Excavated by: Matthías Þórðarson in 1936





This grave was located on a flat area and information about the old tracks is unknown. The grave was looking away from its farm (Mörk) but directly at a neighbouring farm. However, this is an area where substantial soil erosion has taken place and as a

result, farms have been relocated, sometimes several times. Therefore there is a shadow of doubt if the farm-sites marked on the map are contemporary to the burial.

## **16. Skarðstangi**

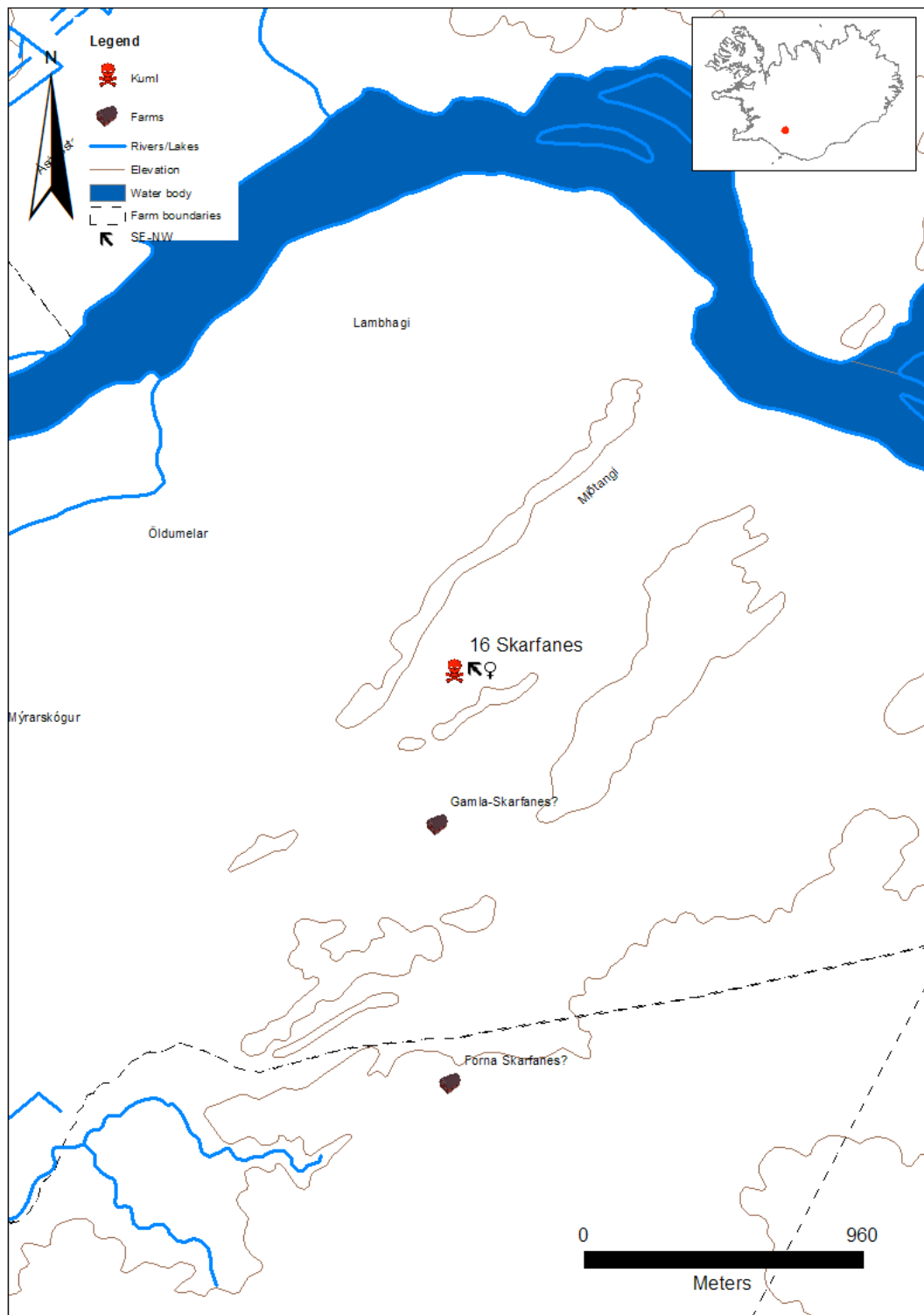
A female (?) grave orientated SE-NW

Position: supine, legs extended and hands resting on abdomen

Grave type: grave covered by wooden planks and turf, spread through the base of the grave

Grave-goods: fragments of 2 bone implements (possibly a comb and a needle case)

Excavated by: Guðmundur Ólafsson in 1989



Located on a flat area, this grave was looking away from both farms on the map. It may be important to point out that these farms are successive sites of older farms that have been moved due to erosion. There are no records of the old tracks and although the grave was far from the river, about 1,400 kilometres, the water was probably visible from the burial site as the grave was orientated facing it.

**17. Galtalækur**

A human skeleton orientated N-S

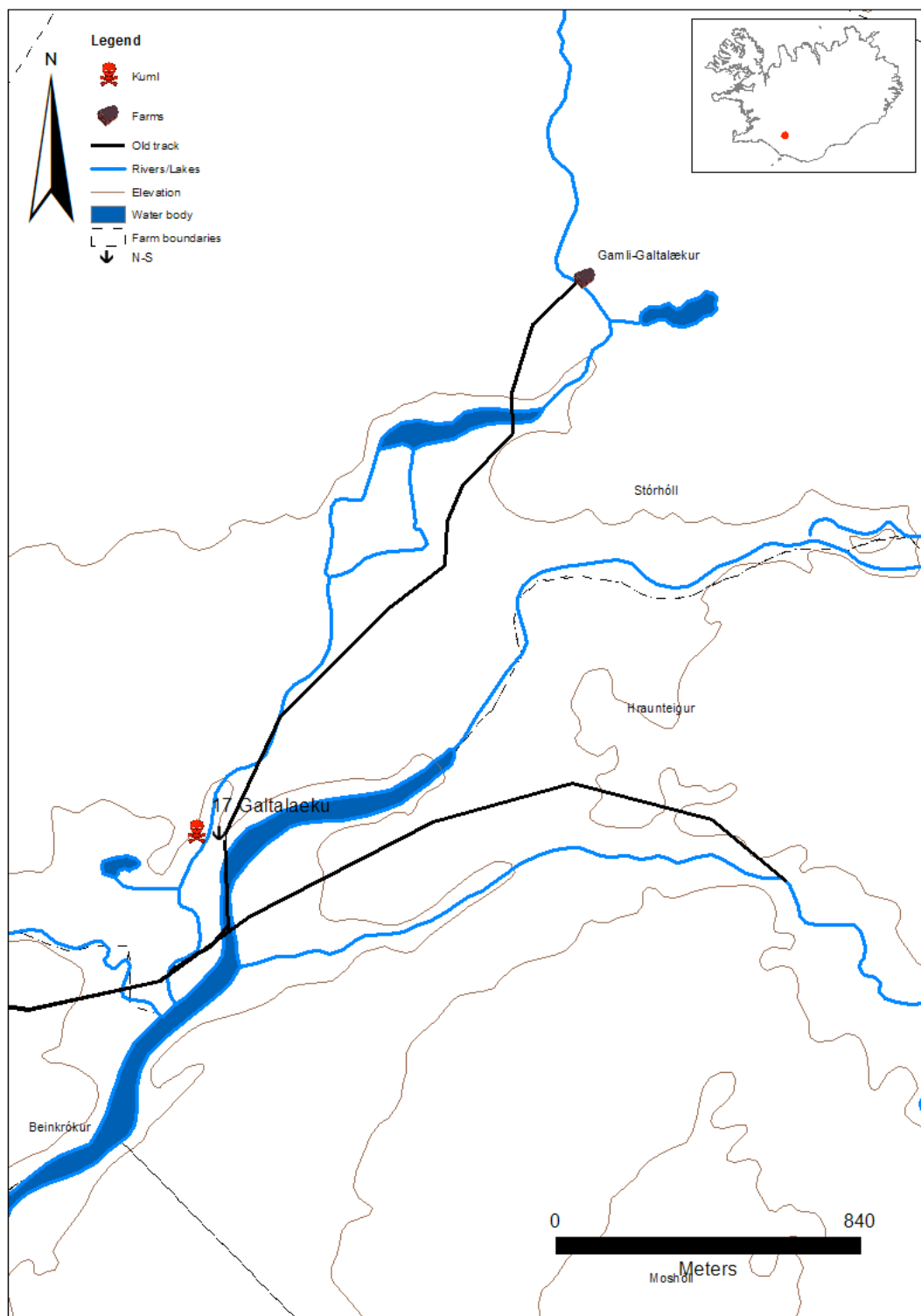
Position: supine, the head slightly elevated and the legs slightly flexed

Grave measurement: 150cm long and c. 65cm deep

Grave-goods: spearhead (Petersen type K 21), shield-boss (Rygh 562), axe (possibly type K), 2 whetstones, 2 pieces of flint (1 has the remains of a strike-a-light attached to it), knife, 4 weights, vices, 3 fish-hooks, 1 iron hook, some pieces of charcoal, iron bridle-bit, buckle and some iron fragments (possibly the remains of a saddle)

A horse skeleton was at the foot end.

Excavated by: Matthías Þórðarson in 1929



This grave was looking away from the farm and perhaps following the old track as well as the river, and both features were visible from the grave.

## 18. Stóri-Klofi

Grave 1: A male skeleton (?) orientated W-E

Position: on the side, legs flexed

Grave measurement: rectangular, 150 x 150cm, approximately 200-300m

Grave-goods: knife, whetstone, jasper (worn on one side) and iron fragments  
(possibly the remains of a strike-a-light)

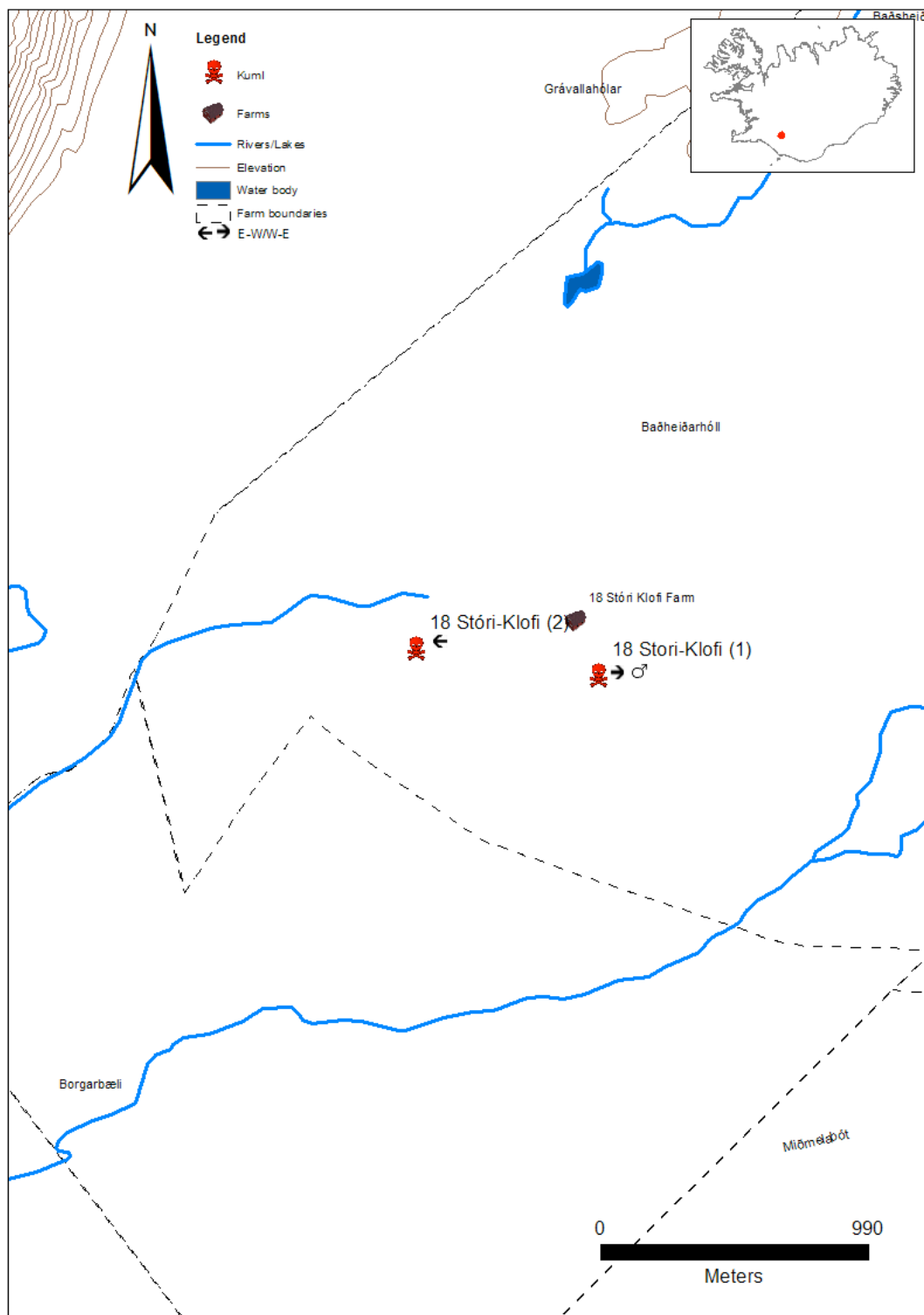
Scattered horse bones were found a few metres from the grave.

Grave 2: A “short” grave, orientated E-W

Position: the body placed on its side in a flexed position

Grave-goods: spearhead (possibly Petersen type K), whetstone, knife, scale balance,  
riveted nail and some iron fragments.

Both burials were excavated by Matthías Þórðarson in 1933 and situated WSW of the farm.



The graves had opposite orientations, but because they were on either side of the farm they both looked away from it. Grave 1 was located below the farm, which was therefore not visible from the grave's position.

**20. Fellsmúli (gamli)**

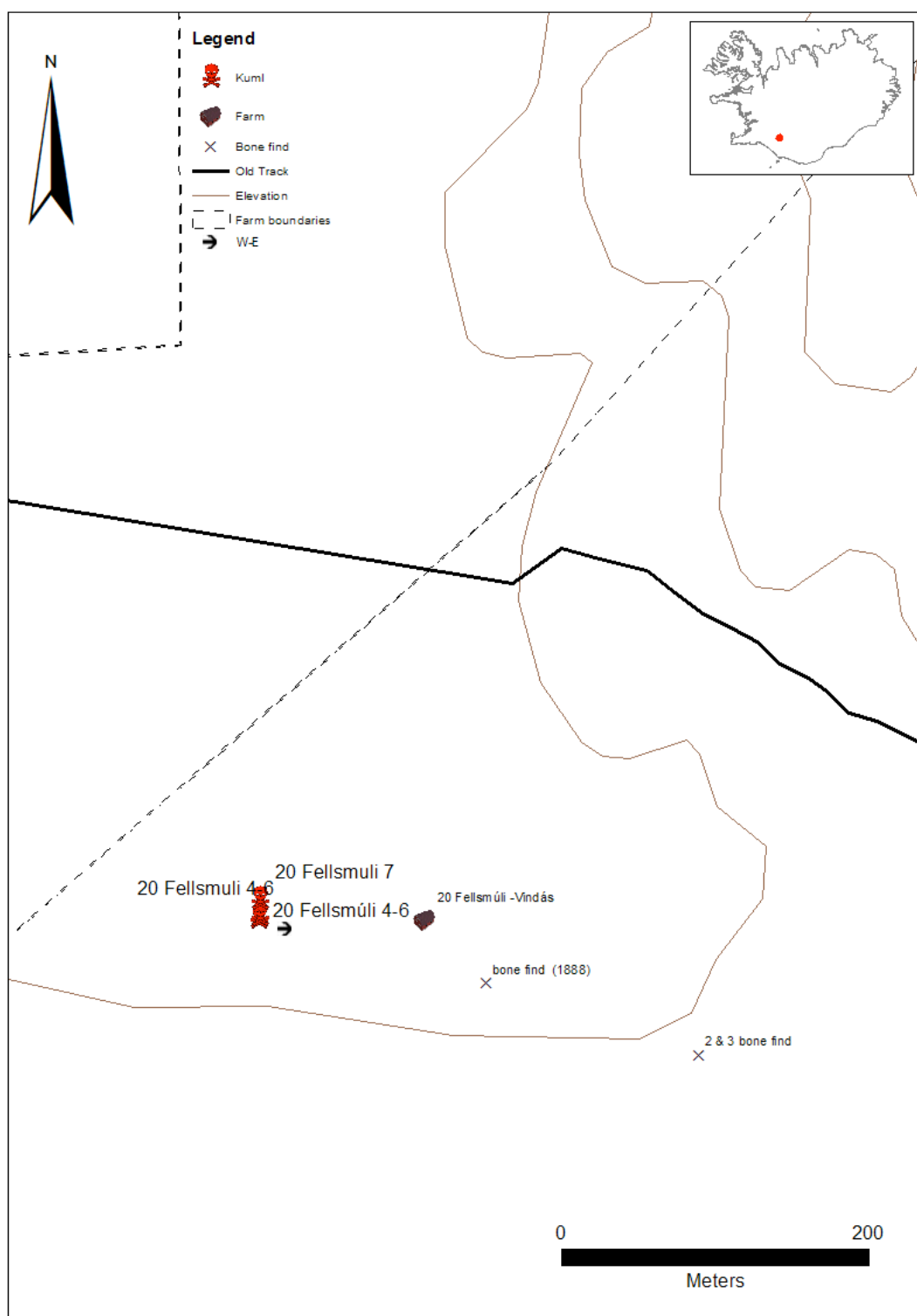
Grave 1: A human skeleton orientated W-E

Position: supine, arms by sides

No grave-goods

A number of graves were discovered between 1888-1930 about 300m SE of the old farm site. There is scant information about these graves and only 1 out of 7 graves have the orientation recorded.





This is a flat, eroded area without rivers. The grave with an orientation seems to be looking directly at the Vindás farm, however the recording of this cemetery is not precise. Also the location of the farm does not fit the description in Kumli og haugfé, e.g. the distance between farm and burial is significantly less than 300m. In addition

there are suggestions that some of these graves could be Christian burials (Friðriksson pers. comm.).

## **21. Karlsnes**

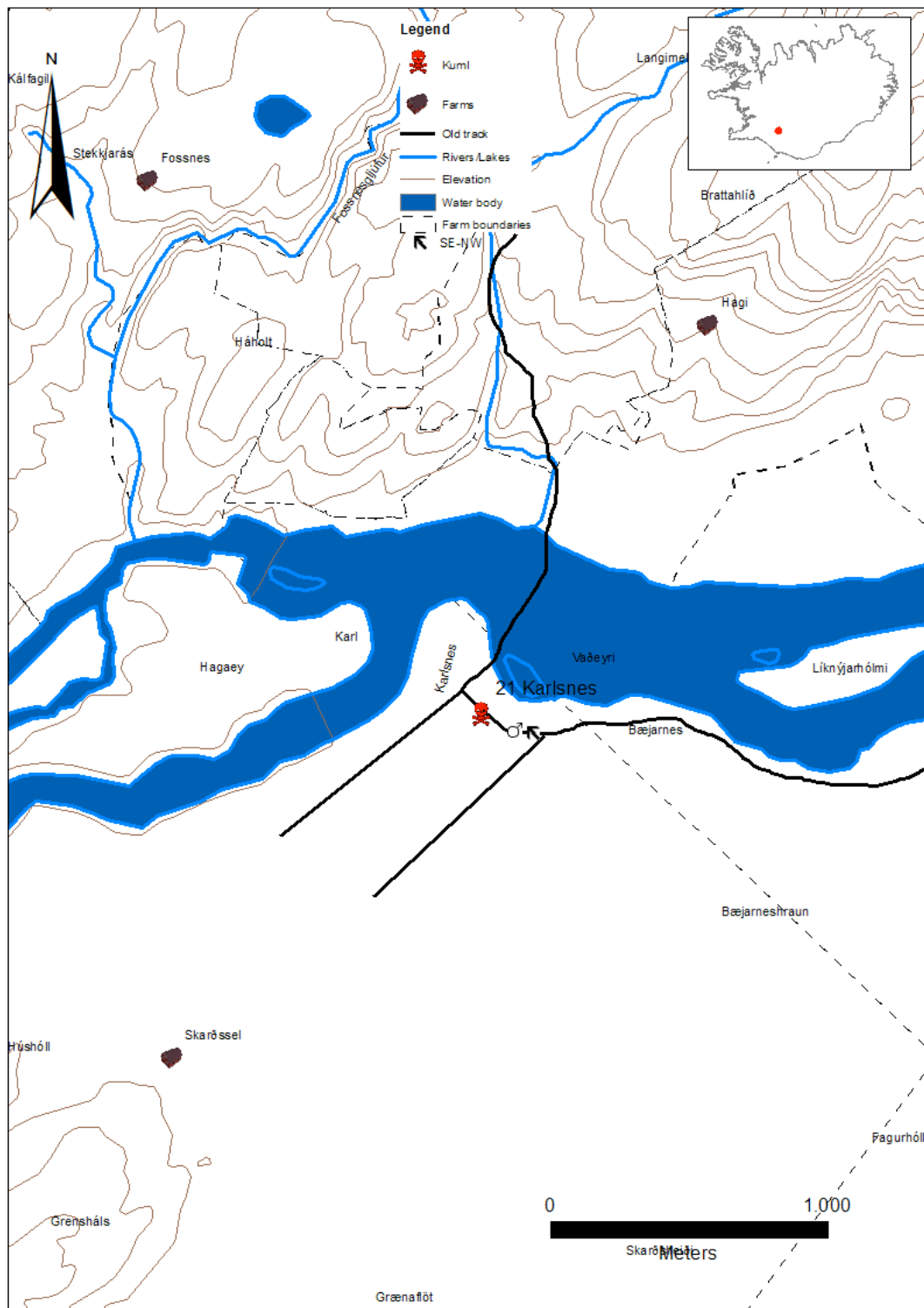
A male skeleton (aged 36-45), orientated SE-NW.

Position: supine, right foot on top of the left and the left arm placed under the back.

Grave measurement: 200 x 75cm.

Grave-goods: spearhead, 2 lead weights, 3 beads, 1 small stone and a knife.

Excavated by: Matthías Þórðarson in 1932.



Skarðssel farm is presumably the associated farm with this burial, since Fossnes and Hagi farms were on the other side of the river (which could have been used as a boundary). Skarðssel farm was 1,652 kilometres away from the burial, and the grave was facing the opposite direction. The grave was facing the river and possibly following the riverbank as well as the old track.

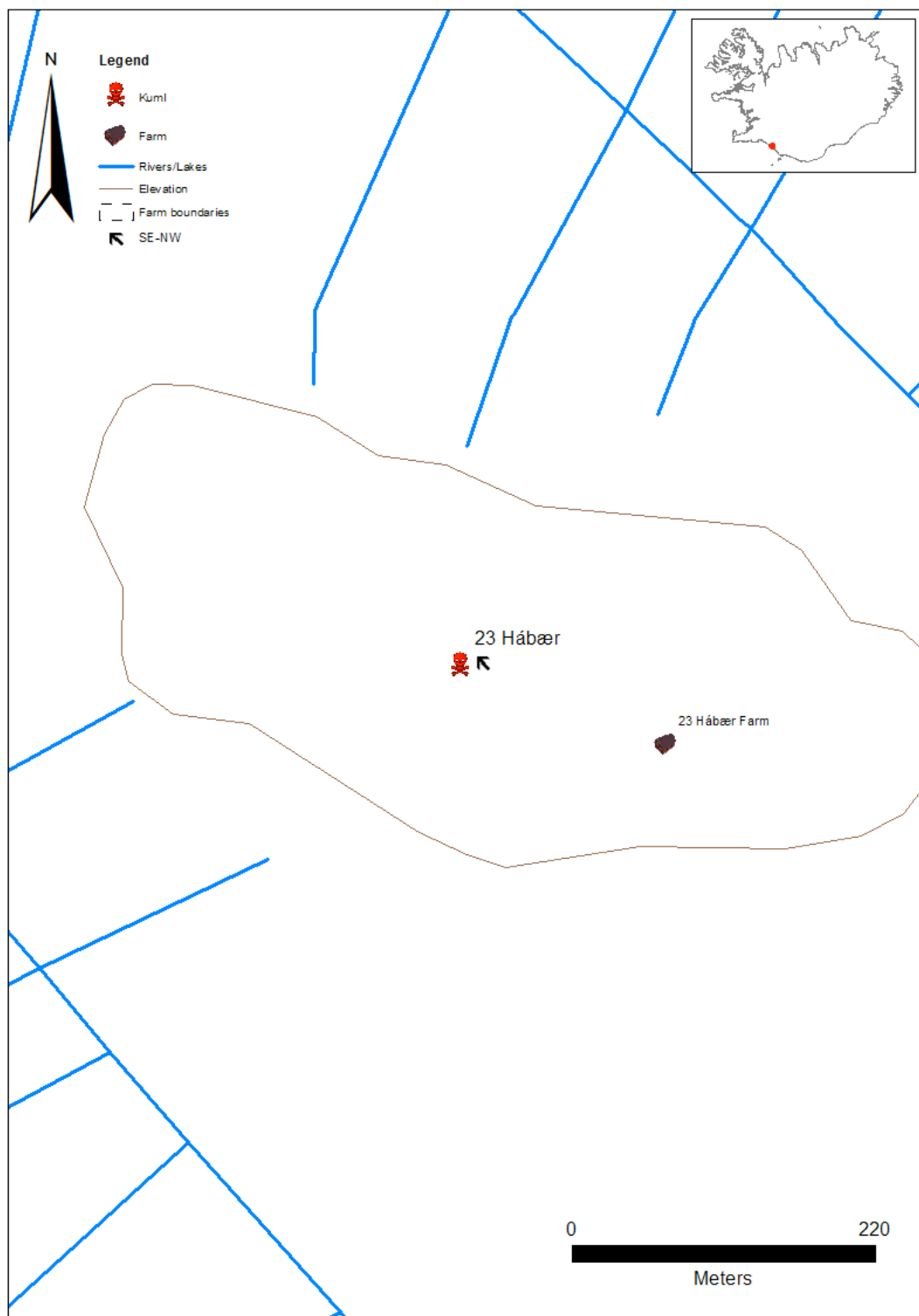
**23. Hábær**

A human skeleton orientated SE-NW.

Position: lying on its side

No grave-goods.

Remains of a pagan cemetery were discovered in this site including grave goods and human remains but only the grave above had the head orientation recorded.



This burial is rather difficult to analyse because the area has been well developed today. This cemetery is in the village of Þykkvibær – the only real rural village from pre-industrial times. Hábær was traditionally considered to have been the main or the original farm (and if so the grave did not face the farm), but there are many other

definitely medieval farms along the street and some could be physically closer to the cemetery.

## **25. Traðarholt**

Grave 1: Poorly preserved human bones orientated W-E

Grave-goods: 13 beads and a length of corroded iron, possibly a sword

Grave 2: Human skeleton orientated NW-SE

Grave-goods: a bridle-bit

A horse skeleton was at the foot end.

Grave 3: A human skeleton orientated S-N

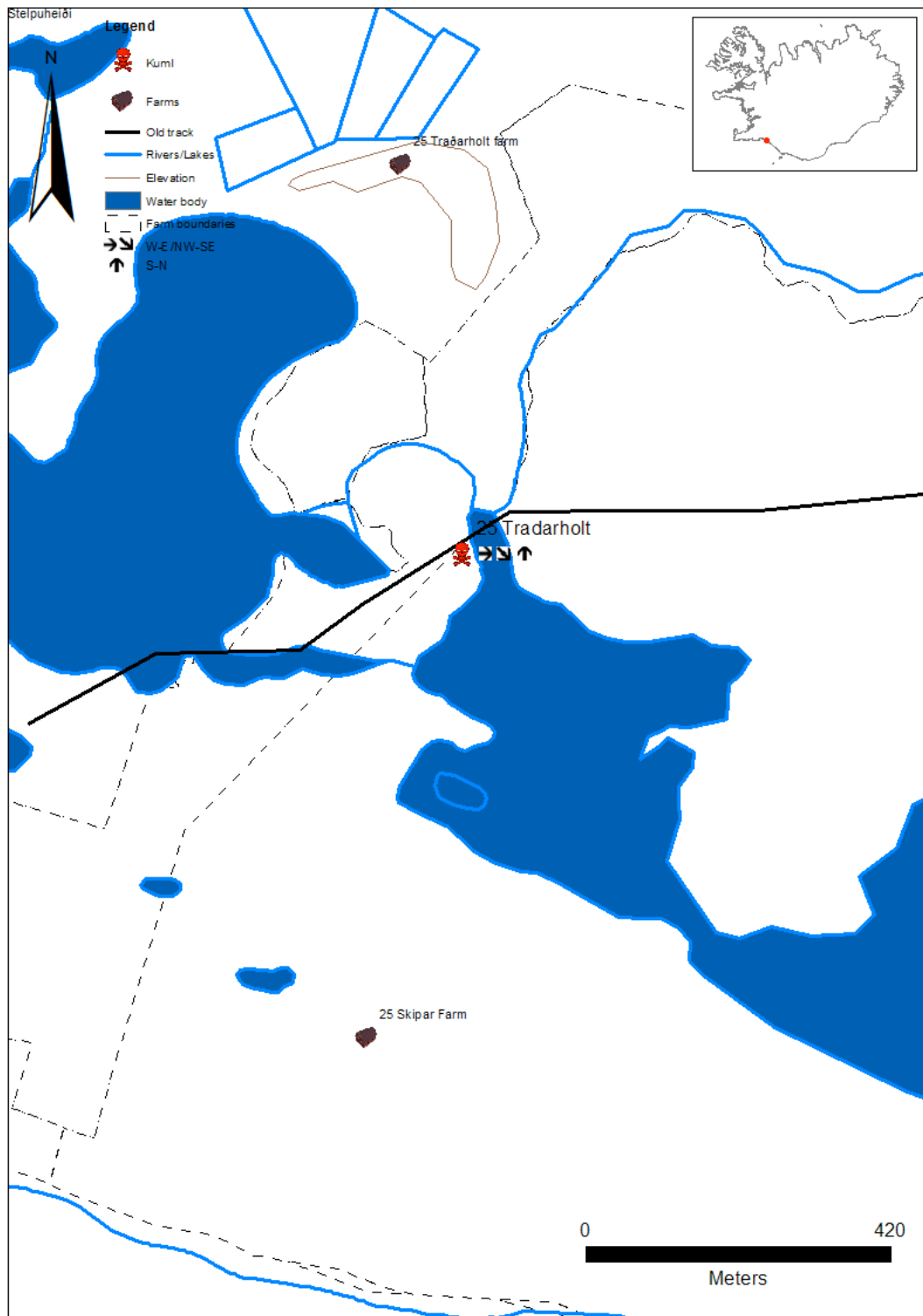
Grave-goods: buckle, bridle-bit, shield-boss (Rygh 562), knife, belt-buckle, a buckle fragment, 4 wooden shafts and 3 dog bone fragments.

A horse skeleton was at the foot end.

Grave 4: A human skeleton orientated W-E

A horse skeleton was at the foot end.

These graves were buried in mounds and were excavated by antiquarian Sigurður Vigfússon in 1880. They were located south of the farm, on a stony rise by the Lake Skipavatn. A spearhead was also found at this site in 1862, which may have come from any one of the above mounds.



The orientations were very diverse in this cemetery and because of that the graves did not seem to follow anything in the landscape in particular. The grave orientated S-N was facing Traðarholt farm although the others were looking away. If the grave orientated S-N was indeed facing the farm it may be argued that it could have been an anomalous burial: why did it not follow the same pattern of most burials? There is

also the problem that the excavation record is old and all orientations were considered by Kristján Eldjárn (2000) to be dubious.

## **26. Selfoss**

Grave 1: A female (?) orientated SW-NE.

Position: probably lying on its back.

Grave-goods: small, round stones and iron fragments.

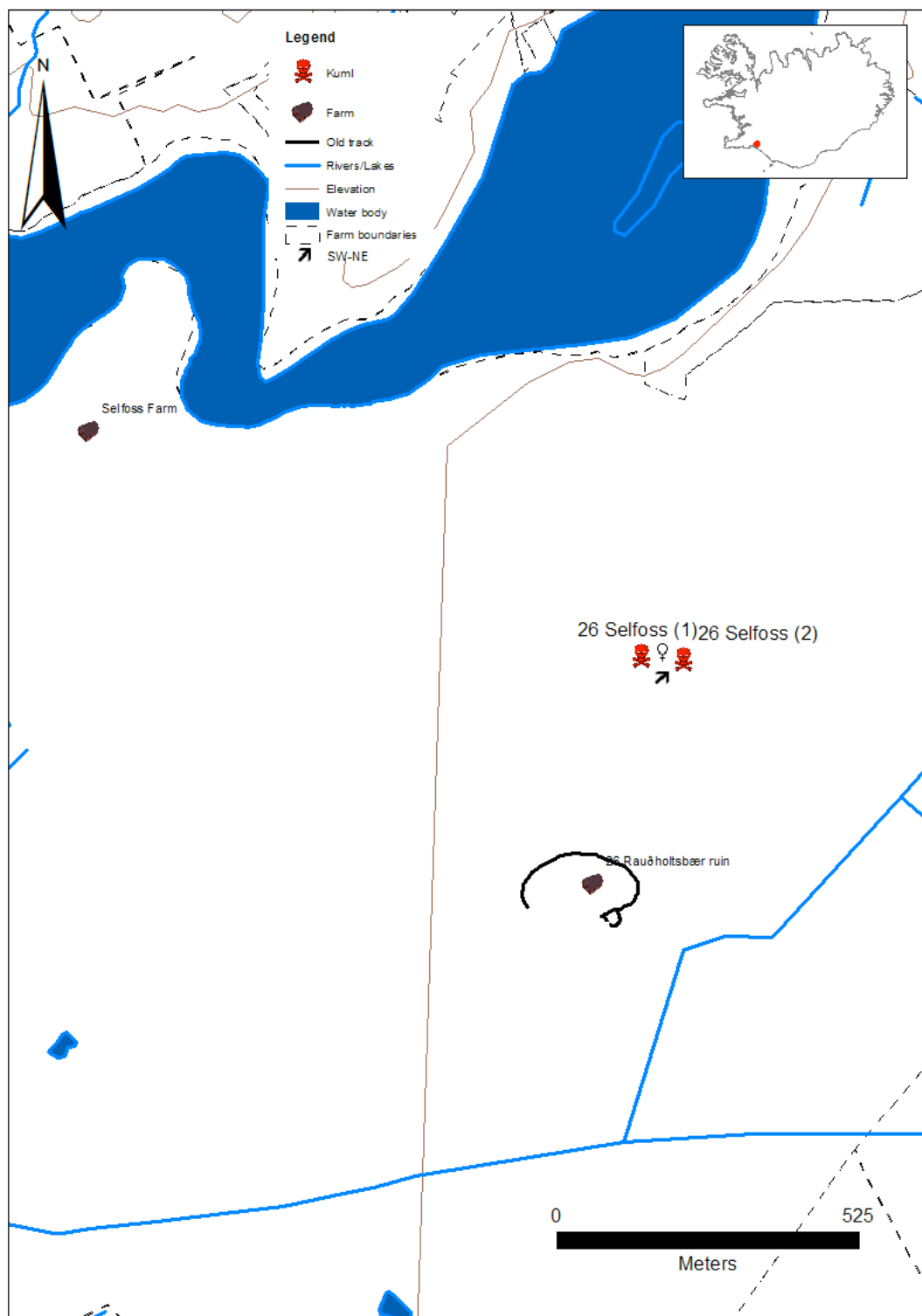
Grave 2: A female (aged 36-45) orientated SW-NE.

Position: supine, c. 150m away from grave 1.

Grave-goods: 12 beads, iron knife, sickle, iron fragments (possibly bands from a wooden chest) and textile remains.

Kristján Eldjárn and Gísli Gestsson discovered the burials and in 1958 and 1962 they were excavated.





The graves were located on a flat landscape, far from the river and neither looking towards the potentially associated farms, Selfoss and Rauðholt. Information about old tracks and boundaries are unknown.

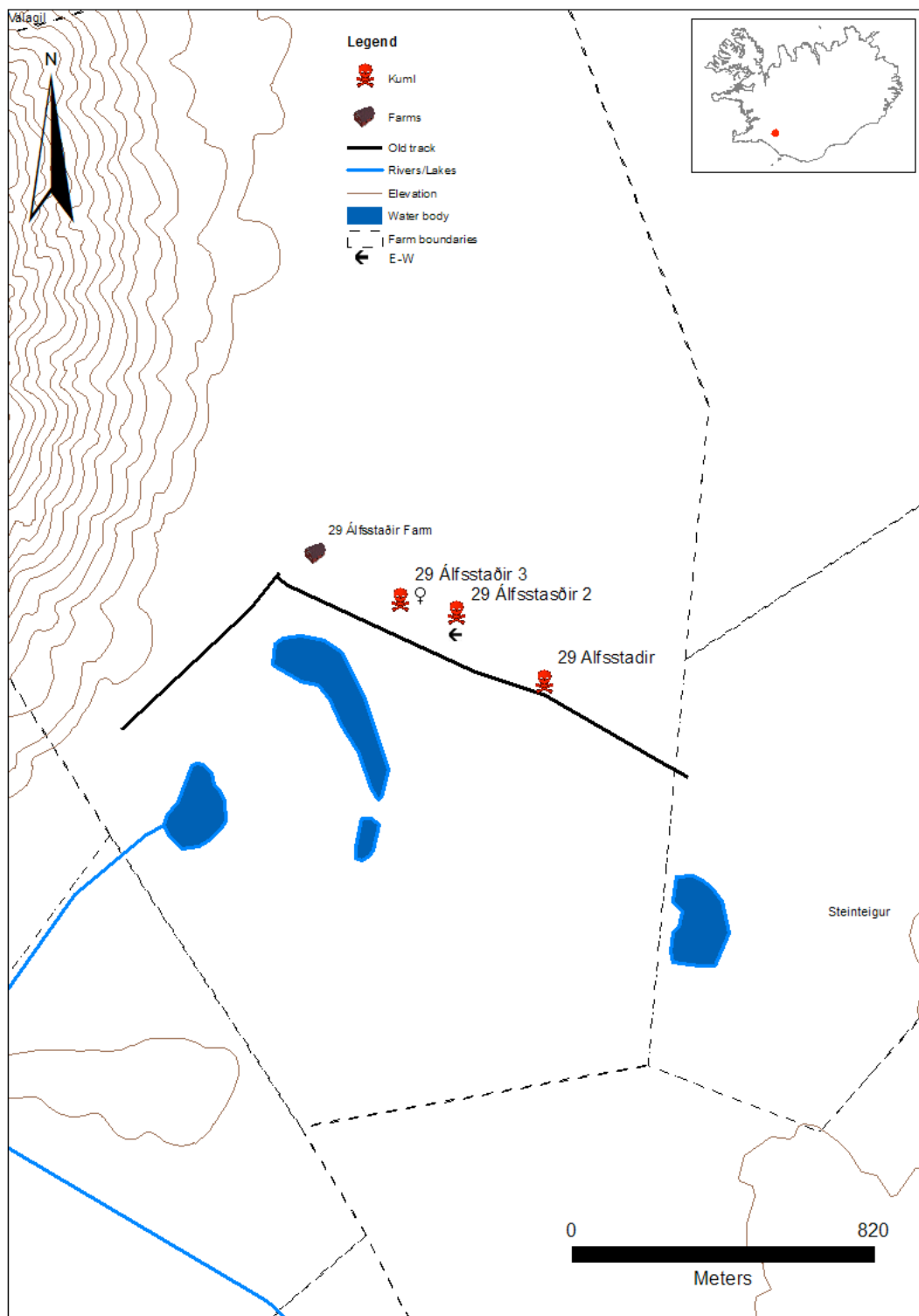
## 29. Álfsstaðir

Grave 2: A human skeleton (aged 26-35) orientated E-W

Location: SE of the farm

Grave-goods: 2 spearheads, axe, belt-buckle, lead weight and 2 buckles

There were a total of 3 graves found in this cemetery. Grave 1 had 3 beads and fragments of human bones but the orientation was not recorded; grave 2 has been described above and grave 3 contained a female (aged 18-25), found in 1947 about 150m from burial 2 but no orientation was recorded.



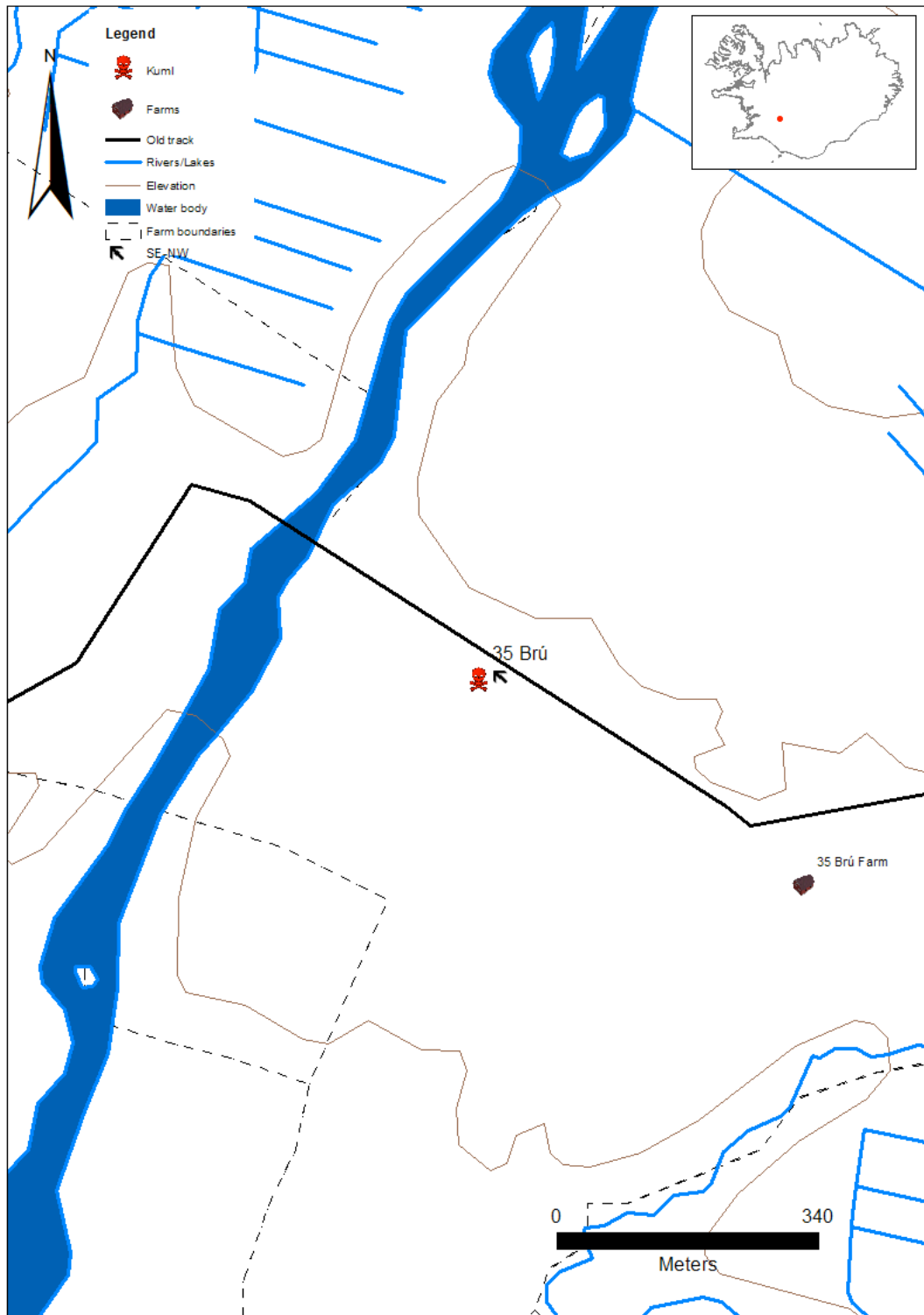
In this grave field only grave 2 has the orientation recorded and the information about the location of the graves came from a local farmer. The graves were located below the farm and it is uncertain if grave 2 was aligned to the old track nearby, although it could have faced the water opposite. Grave 2 may not have directly faced the farm because it sits lower in the terrain.

### **35. Brú**

An eroded burial orientated SE-NW with remains of a horse and a dog.

Location: soil bank, on the top of a hill.

Grave-goods: spear-head (Petersen type K 22), another spear-head, axe (type H or K), shield-boss, 26 beads, copper alloy bell, quern stone, 2 rivets, fragments of an oval brooch (P 51), iron fragments (possibly a cauldron) and a lead fragment.



This burial was clearly orientated facing away from the farm (SE-NW), looking towards the river but not necessarily following it, and it looks like it was following the old track. This site is located near Geysir, so could it be that it is orientated towards it? However, Geysir is not visible from the burial site and we do not have the information if it was erupting in the Viking age.

### 37. Kaldárhöfði

Poorly preserved remains of an adult and a child orientated W-E.

Grave type: small boat.

Location: on the shores of the Lake Úlfljótsvatn, on a low mound made of stone and soil.

Grave-goods: sword (Petersen type O), spear-head (Petersen type I), 5 arrowheads and part of a sixth, axe (Petersen type G), belt buckle (very similar to Rygh 605), strap-end, silver wire, 2 jasper fragments, 80 or 90 rivets and nails, shield-boss (Rygh 562), fragment of a second shield-boss, spear-head (version of Petersen type K), axe (Petersen type H), fish-hook, boat-hook (?), lead sinker, 2 knives, 2 flint fragments, iron fragments, textile fragment.

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1946.



This burial was situated far away from the farm and although the grave was facing in the same direction as the farm, the farm was higher inland, and not visible from the grave-site. The grave was located on the promontory, with the same orientation as the promontory, facing inland, and not following the river.

**39. Gerðakot**

Grave 1: A human skeleton orientated SE-NW

Position: lying on its right-hand side and the feet crossed

Location: on a hillock

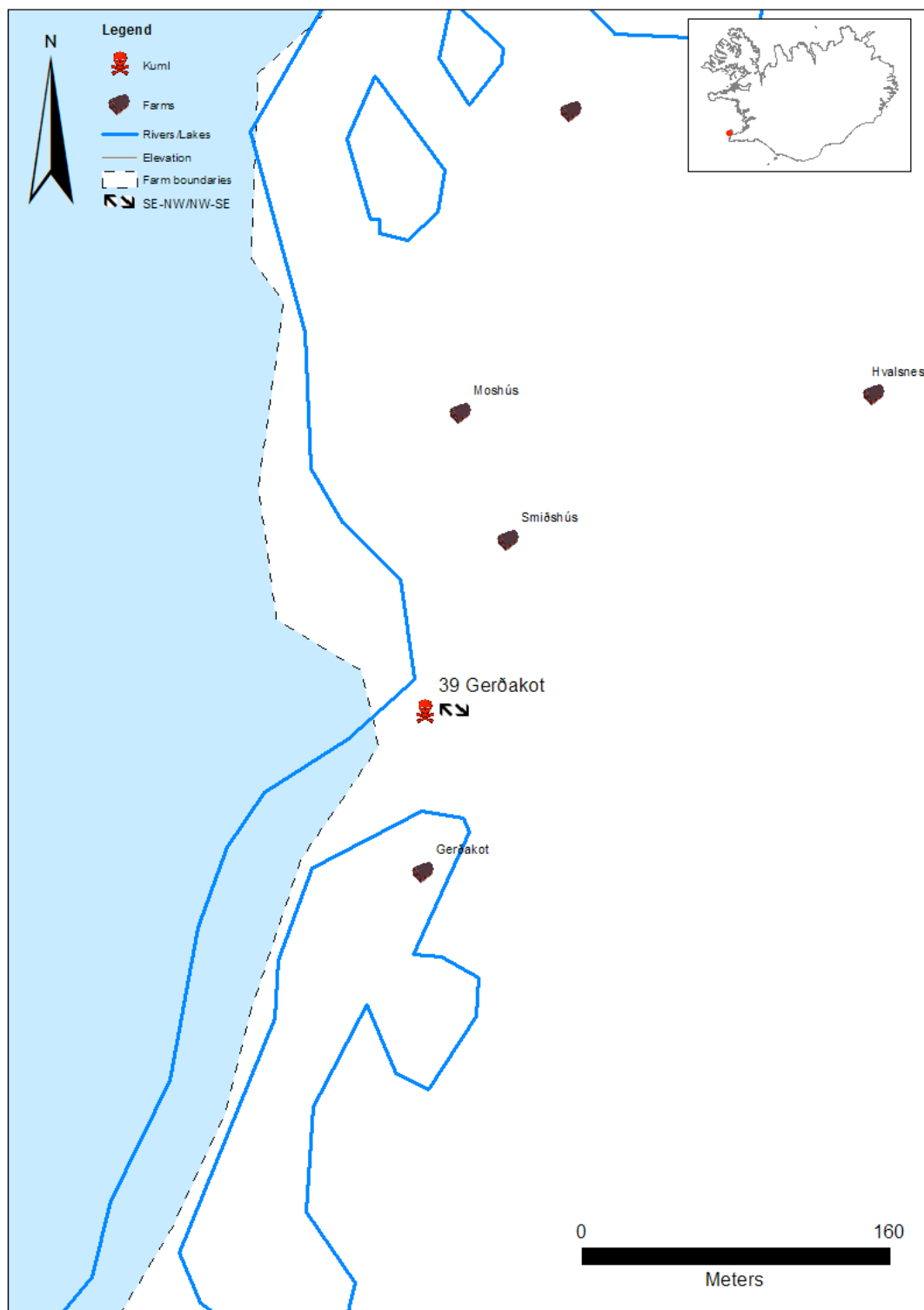
Grave-goods: wooden shaft with iron corrosion at one end

Grave 2. A poorly preserved human skeleton orientated NW-SE

Grave type: vertical stone slabs

Location: on a hillock.





The location of this burial site is uncertain as we do not know if the graves were found on the shore or further inland or even if the skeletons were washed away from somewhere else, arriving at this location and being buried by the sea. There is also hesitation if this was a pagan burial site as the only grave good is the wooden shaft – even Kristján Eldjárn was not convinced about these graves being pagan (2000:94).

We do not know the exact date of the knife; it could be from the Viking Age or from any other period. Gerðakot and Hvalsnes were the main farms in the area and the graves do not seem to be facing either.

#### **40. Hafurbjarnarstaðir**

Grave 1: A female (aged c. 40), orientated ESE-WNW

Position: resting on its right-hand side, right arm extended; the left arm, knees and thighs were flexed. The upper part of the body was covered with a large stone slab and the lower part with a whalebone plaque.

Grave measurement: 110 x 45-50cm.

Grave type: covered with a layer of stones, rectangular in shape, 170-175 x 80cm.

Grave-goods: ringed pin, trefoil brooch, knife, comb, 2 pebbles of unusual shape, 3 shells, iron fragments.

Grave 2: A child (aged 0-2) orientated WNW-ESE.

Position: lying on its right-hand side with arms straight and legs flexed.

Grave type: wooden coffin (20 x 50cm); stone slabs were lined on the sides of the coffin.

Grave 3: A double burial orientated W-E

Grave measurement: 1.25 x 4.40m.

Grave-goods: spearhead (Petersen type K 21), bridle-bit, sword (Petersen type S) with a copper alloy chape, shield-boss (Rygh 562), comb and a comb-case, whetstone, axe (Petersen type K), buckle, iron cauldron (resembling Rygh 731), 4 rivets and iron fragments.

Horse and dog bones found at the foot end of the grave.

This burial site was found on the seashore and investigated between 1828 and 1947. There were a number of other pagan graves at this site, some orientated SE-NW but the head positions were not recorded.



Kristján Eldjárn excavated graves 1 and 2 therefore the orientations are precise. A local priest investigated grave 3, thus there may be a margin of error regarding the orientation. Graves 1 and 2 were aligned opposite to each other containing a female and a child, which makes us believe they were mother and child. The two skeletons were also buried very close together – an anomaly, since in the Viking Age graves

tended to be separated from about 3 to 5m. In this cemetery graves 1 and 3 did not face the farm and grave 2 faced the same direction as the farm, and since this is a flat area, the farm may have been visible from it.

#### **47. Öndverðarnes**

A human skeleton (aged 18-25) orientated NE-SW.

Position: lying on its left-hand side, knees and thighs flexed in a shallow grave filled with sand.

Location: on a low gravel mound by the seashore, in the inlet of Skarðsvík.

Grave-goods: a sword (Petersen type M), spearhead (Petersen type K), shield-boss, knife, bone pin, and some iron fragments.



This burial was located by the seashore, far away from the farm yet within the same boundary, although we are aware it is a modern boundary. It was neither facing the farm nor facing the sea, but rather looking inland and seems to be following the old track. There is also a rise in the lava field with the same orientation.

**52. Brjánslækur**

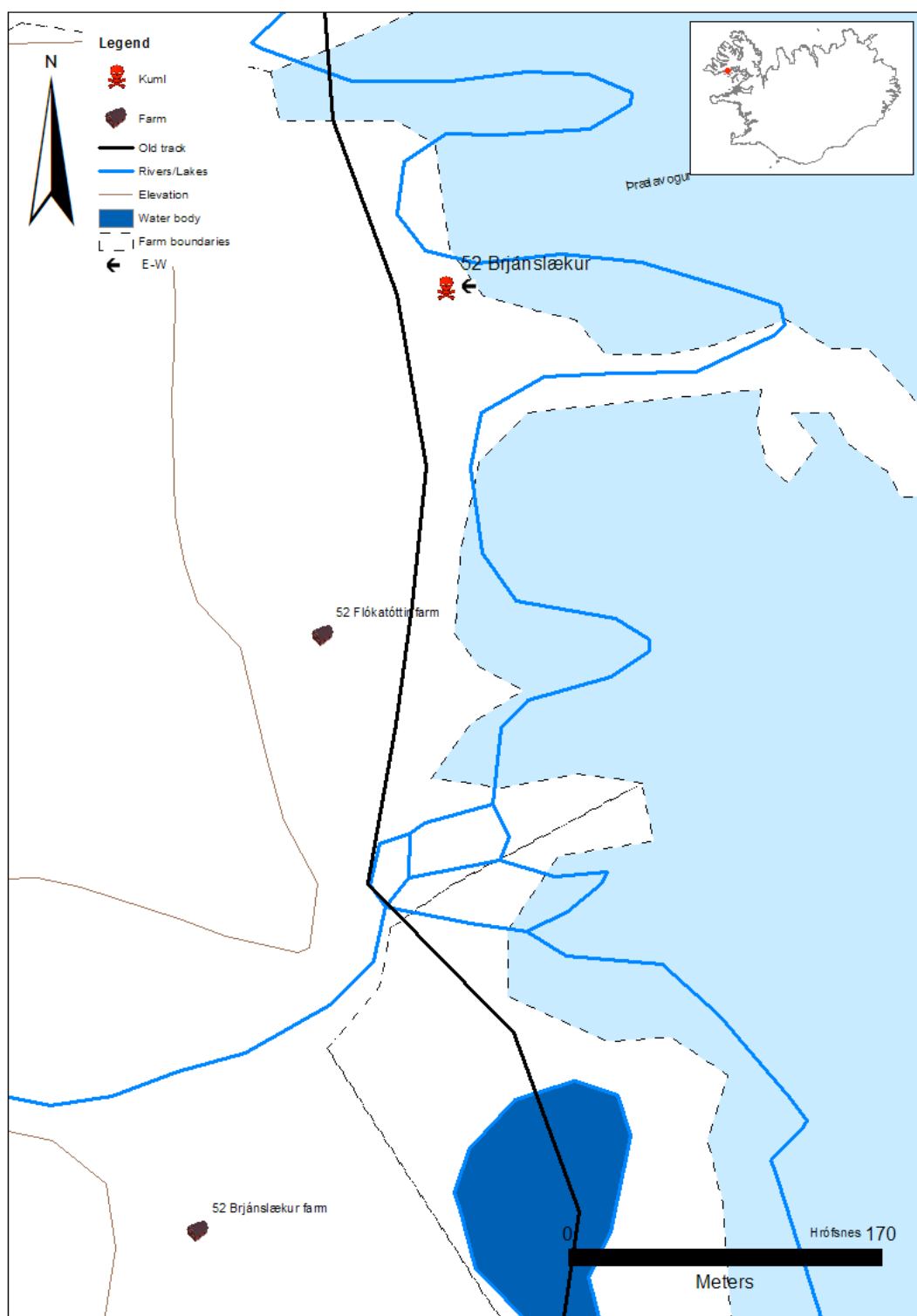
Poorly preserved remains of a human skeleton orientated E-W.

Location: inlet of Þrælavogur.

Grave type: large stone slab on top of its chest and further slabs lining on the sides.

Grave-goods: fragment of corroded iron and pieces of charcoal

Excavated by: Snæbjörn Kristjánsson at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century



This grave was looking away from the sea and not looking towards either farms, but it was facing the old track that run parallel to it. There was a small peninsula where the harbour is now, so perhaps the burial was following the outline of that peninsula.

**56. Tyrðilmýri**

Grave 1: a male (?) skeleton orientated NW-SE

Grave type: covered with three large stone slabs

Grave 2: a human skeleton (aged 26-35) orientated SE-NW

Location: north of grave 1

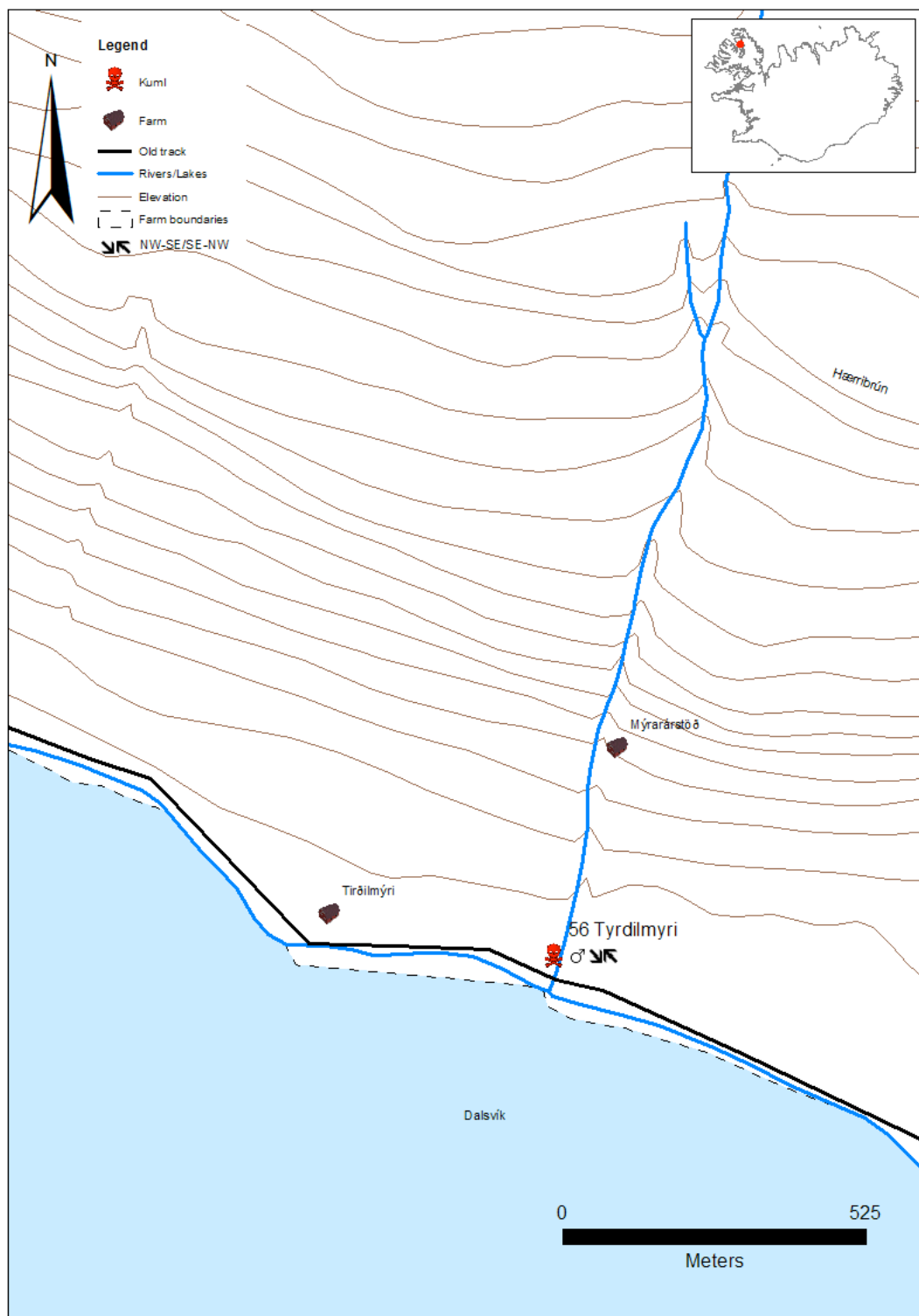
Grave measurement: c. 173 x 35cm, 8-12cm deep

Grave type: covered with flat stones

No grave-goods

Burial 1 was discovered in 1932 and grave 2 in 1935, 15-20m from the seashore.





Here we have two skeletons with opposite orientation (head to head) by the seashore and near the old track, without any grave goods. Grave 1 was not facing the farm and I am unsure if the farm was visible from grave 2. It is difficult to consider them pagan but it will be interesting to see at the end of this analysis if burials without grave goods follow any pattern in orientation.

**57. Urriðaaí**

A human skeleton orientated S-N

Position: supine, legs extended

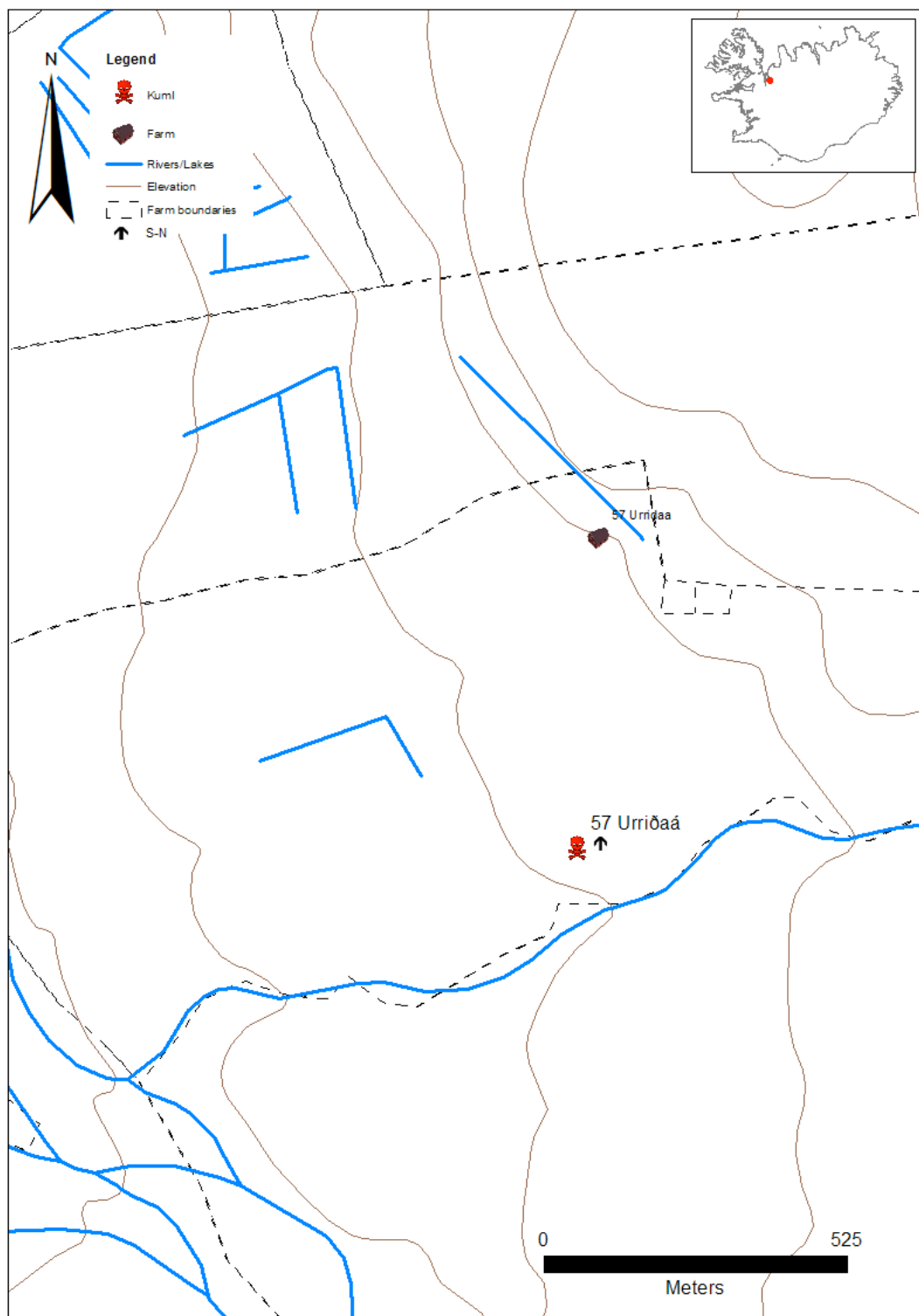
Grave measurement: shallow pit (c. 3-4 m in diameter), depth 64cm, covered with boulders.

Location: gravel hillock, north of the river Urriðaaí.

No grave-goods

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1946

More bones were found in 1961.



This grave was orientated directly looking at the farm with a distance between farm and burial of about 515 meters. However can we consider this a pagan burial since there were no grave goods?

### 63. Kornsa

Poorly preserved female skeleton orientated NW-SE

Position: supine (?)

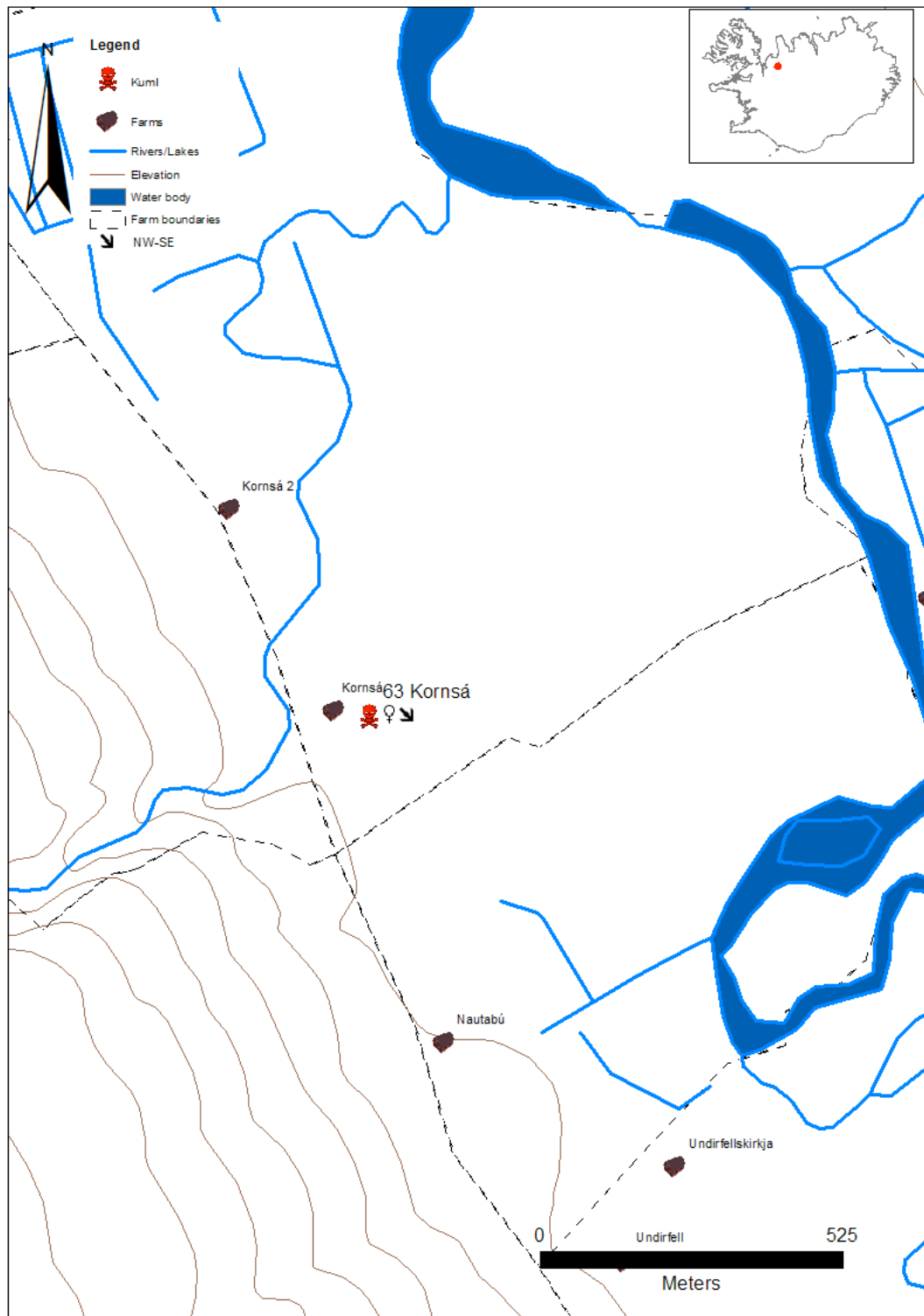
Grave measurement: some 125cm deep.

Grave type: covered with a pile of small stones, presumably overlying a now disintegrated wooden cover.

Location: in a hillock

Grave-goods: iron cauldron, iron shears, weaving sword, comb, scale-pan, 2 tongue-shaped brooches, bell, 33 beads, pair of tweezers, pin (possibly from a brooch, now lost), knife and further iron fragments.

This burial site was discovered in 1879. Horse, dog bones and more human bones were found 3.5m to the east, which may be associated with this grave.



The grave was facing away the farm (Kornsa) and it was looking downwards to the river. However its exact location is uncertain and for that reason it is difficult to relate it any further to the surrounding landscape.

## 65. Smyrlaberg

Grave 1: A male skeleton (aged 46+), orientated NW-SE

Position: supine but positioned slightly towards the left, arms and legs extended

Grave measurement: 200 x 60-70cm, 70cm deep.

Grave type: Traces of wood and six iron nails were found, possibly the remains of a wooden coffin.

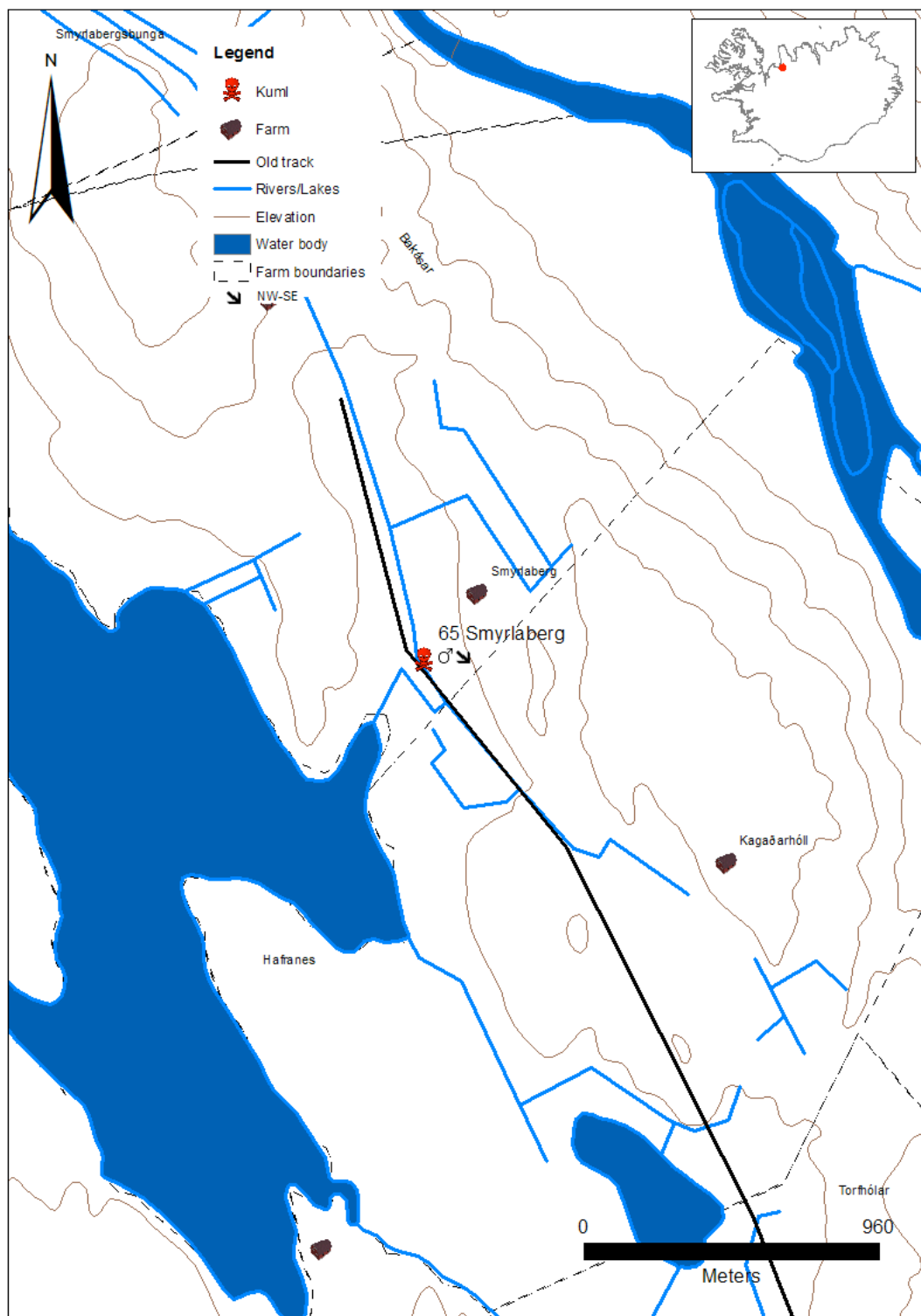
Location: in an old gravel quarry on a rise c. 300 m east of the farm.

A few small stones were placed at the foot end.

Grave-goods: iron knife.

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1954

Another burial was investigated in this site by Þór Magnússon in 1969, but only fragments of bone and iron were recovered.



Although this burial seemed to be facing directly Kagaðarhóll farm, it was located outside the boundary of Kagaðarhóll. This grave was probably associated with Smyrlaberg farm and it looked away. It also seems that the grave was following the old track and looking inland.

**68. Brandsstaðir**

Remains of a human skeleton, orientated WNW-ESE

Grave measurement: 170 x 100cm, 70cm deep.

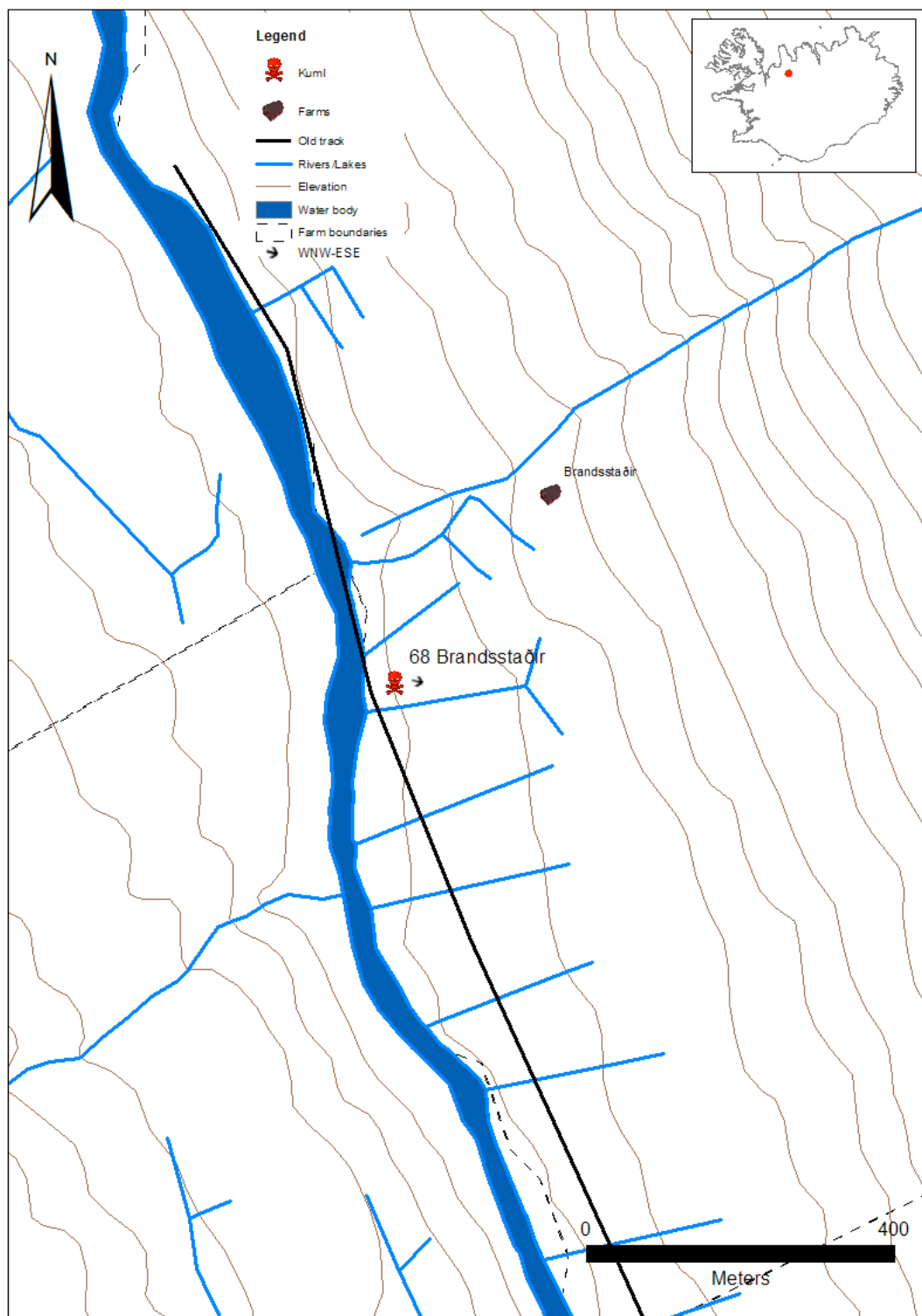
Location: on a low rise, c. 250m SW of the farm.

Grave-goods: corroded iron fragments, remains of wood. Bone fragments from 2 other individuals were mixed in with the deposit.

A horse grave was at its foot end.

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1967.





This grave was not facing the farm, as it was located below it. The grave was situated close to the river but not right on the riverbank and it did not follow the old track, but rather was orientated looking away from both features.

## 70. Sólheimar

Grave 2: a human skeleton orientated N-S

Grave measurement: 200 x 100cm and c. 30cm deep.

Grave type: hummock-like mound made up of boulders

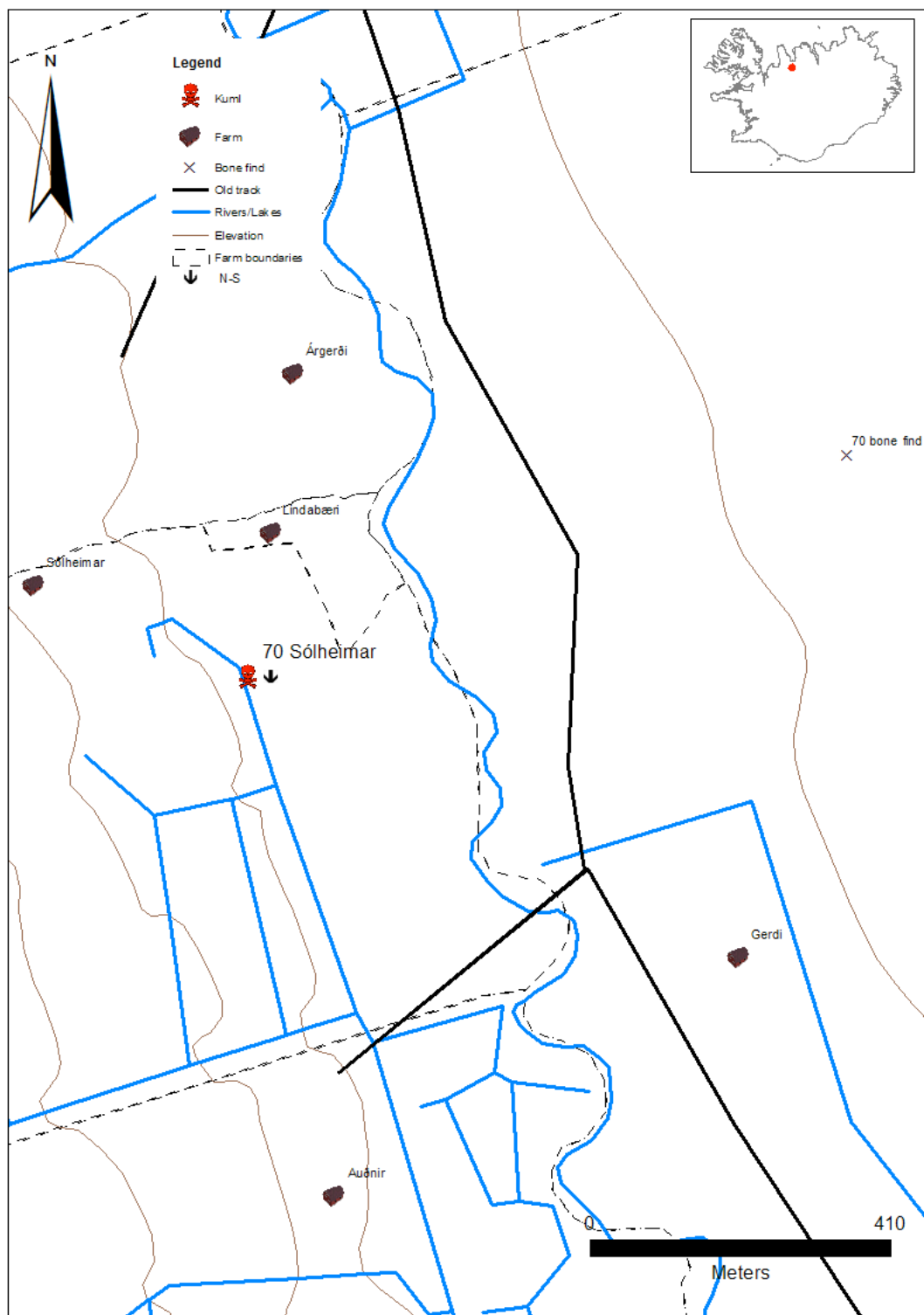
Location: Torfhóll, c. 200m SE of the farm.

Grave-goods in the horse grave: buckle, iron nail and fragments of iron.

A horse grave was about 45cm to the south of this grave

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1956

Another burial containing a male (?) skeleton with horse bones was found but no orientation was recorded.



The grave was orientated looking south and away from its associated farm Sólheimar. Although it was looking directly into Auðnir farm, the grave was not part of the same property. It may have followed the old track, and perhaps it could have been for the purpose of greeting people coming from outside.

**72. Elivogar**

A male skeleton (aged 26-35) orientated WNW-ESE

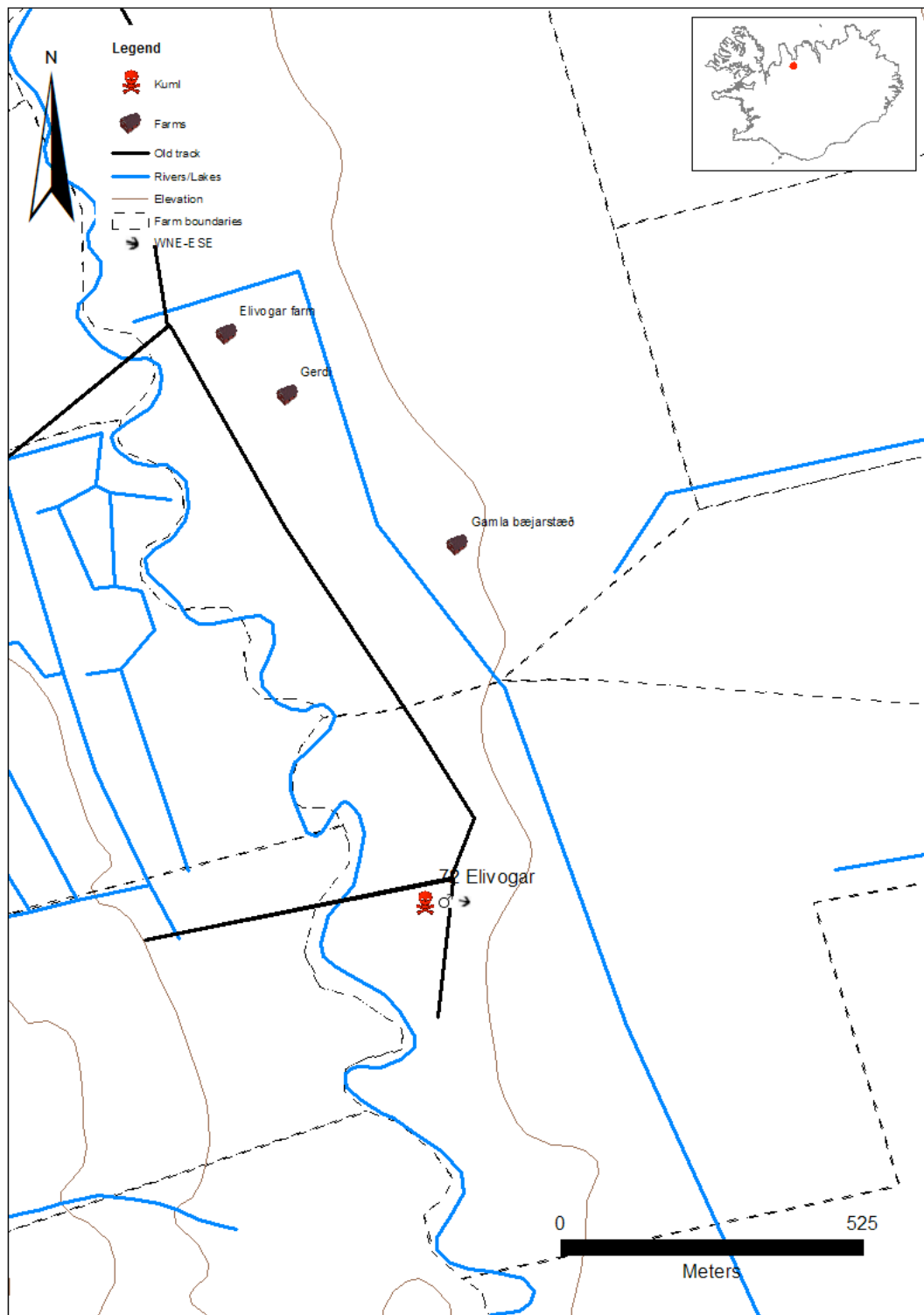
The human bones were in the west end and the horse bones in the east end.

Grave measurement/type: 4m long and 1m wide, covered with some large stones.

Location: eroded gravel hillock south of the farm

Grave-goods: iron fragments.

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1956.



The burial was not looking towards its supposedly associated farm (Elivogar) and it seems there was a boundary between the grave and the farm, although it might be a recent subdivision. Both Gerdi and Gamla Bøjarstædir are abandoned farm but the grave did not face them either. The grave was placed just on the side of the old track and the stream or river seemed to be irrelevant to the orientation of this grave.

**73. Skíðastaðir**

A female (?) skeleton, (aged 36-45) orientated N-S

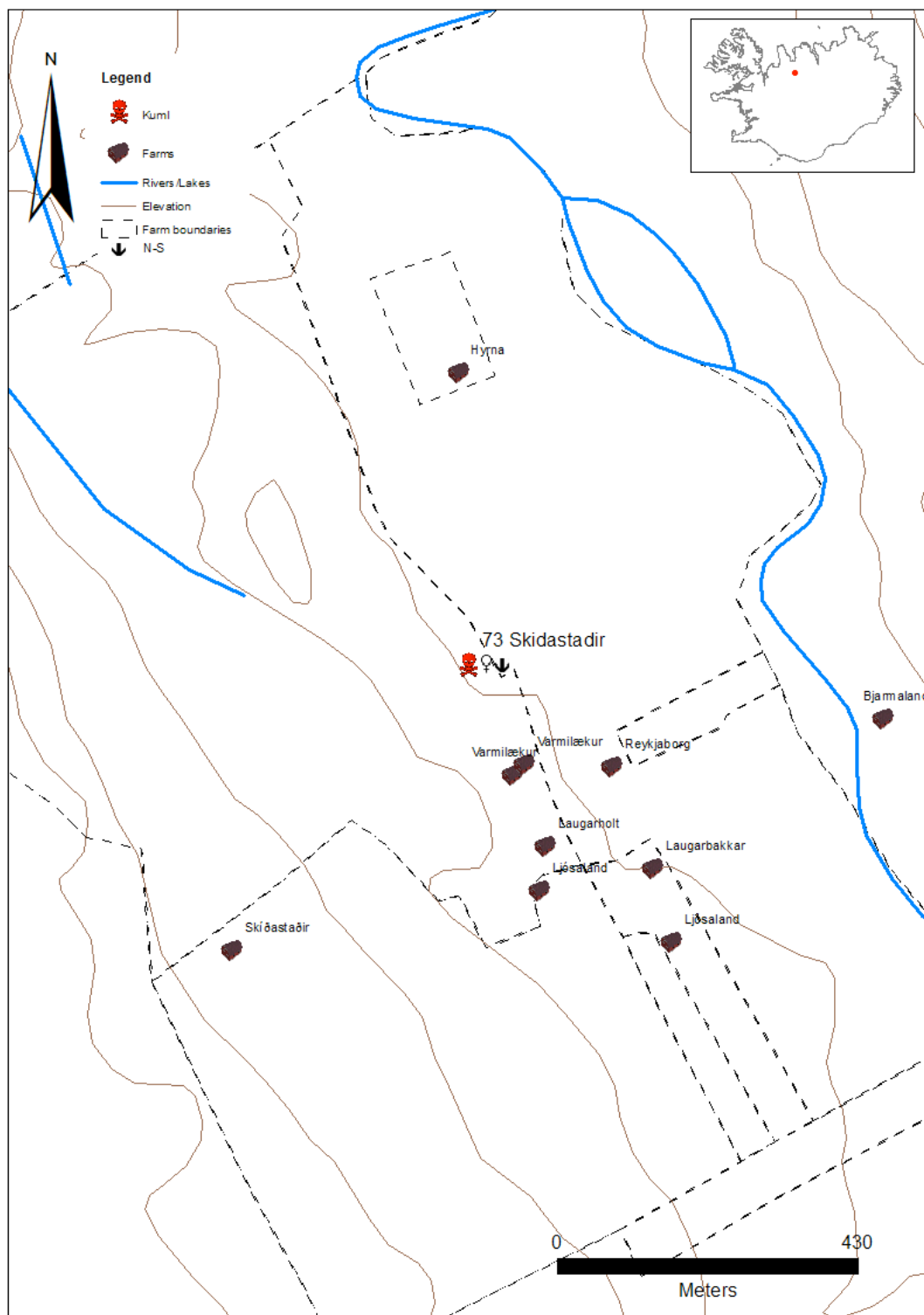
Position: supine, head elevated, right hand resting on the abdomen and the left arm on the chest.

Grave type: in a coffin (width: 25-30cm).

Location: a small hillock c. 150 m north of the farm.

No grave-goods.

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1946



The farms on this map are all modern farms and the grave was not directly facing Skíðastaðir farm but from its position the farm may have been visible. It seems the burial was following the old track and looking downstream.

#### 74. Þorljótsstaðir

Grave 7: A male (?) skeleton (aged 46+), orientated NW-SE

Grave measurement: 200 x 80cm, 50cm wide

Grave type: disturbed grave, covered with stones.

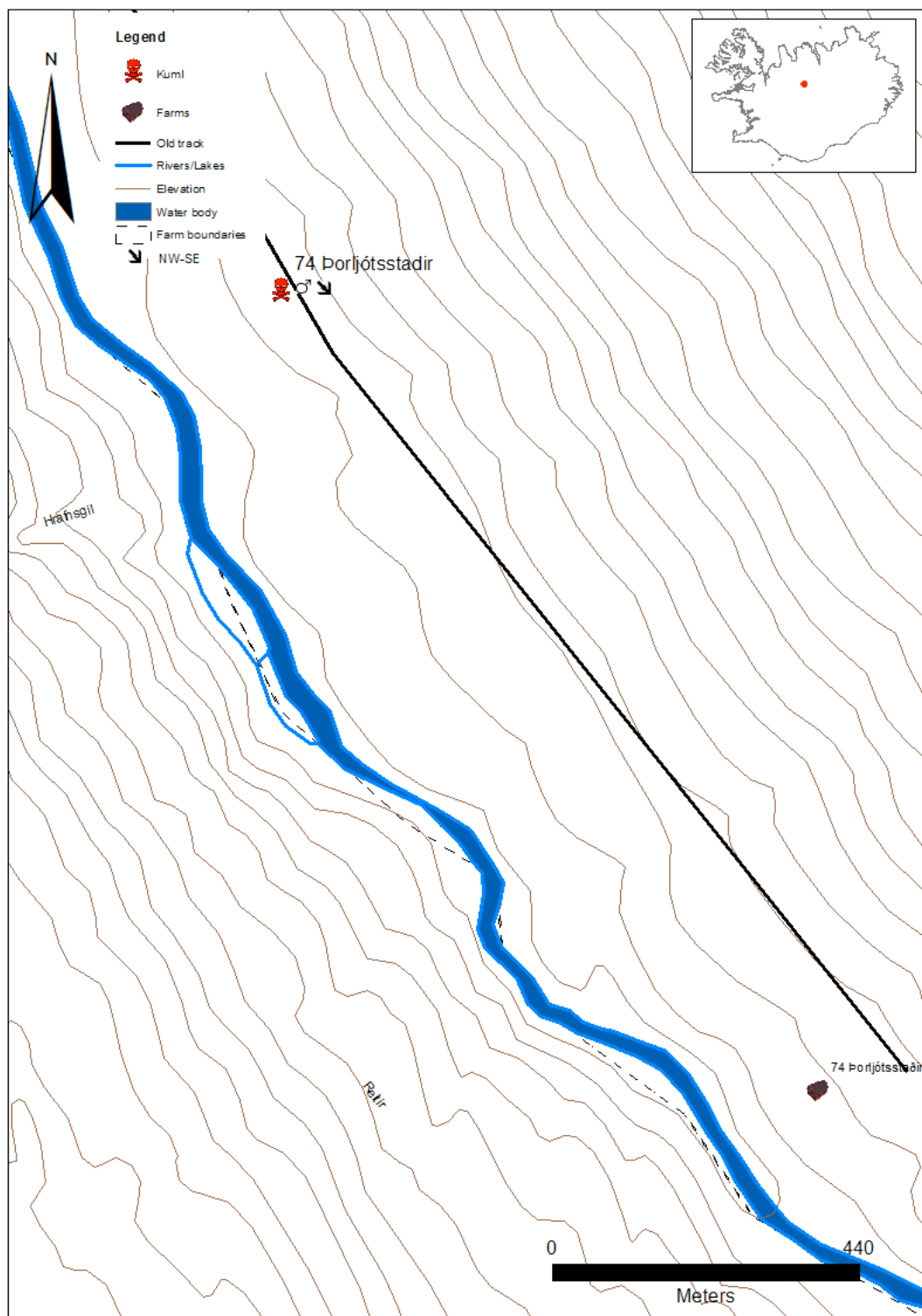
Location: north of the farm

Grave-goods: horse bones, dog bones, fragments of iron cauldron, strap-end, wood and iron fragments. This grave had originally been identified by the farmer around 1900, who had then recovered a round brooch (P 128) and 2 beads, one of which is now lost.

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1948

Another 6 graves were revealed in this site, first discovered in 1869. Sigurður Guðmundsson reported 6 human skulls, a ringed pin (Þjms. 736) and a silver object (now lost).





This grave was far away from the farm and it is uncertain if the farm was visible from the gravesite. The burial faced inland and not towards the sea, which is to the north. The river was far from the grave so it may be irrelevant. It followed the old track and the orientation of the valley seems to be the same as the burial if analysing it from ground level.

**75. Miklibær**

Grave 2: a human skeleton orientated S-N

Position: lying on its right-hand side and probably flexed

Grave measurement: rectangular grave c. 200 x 70cm

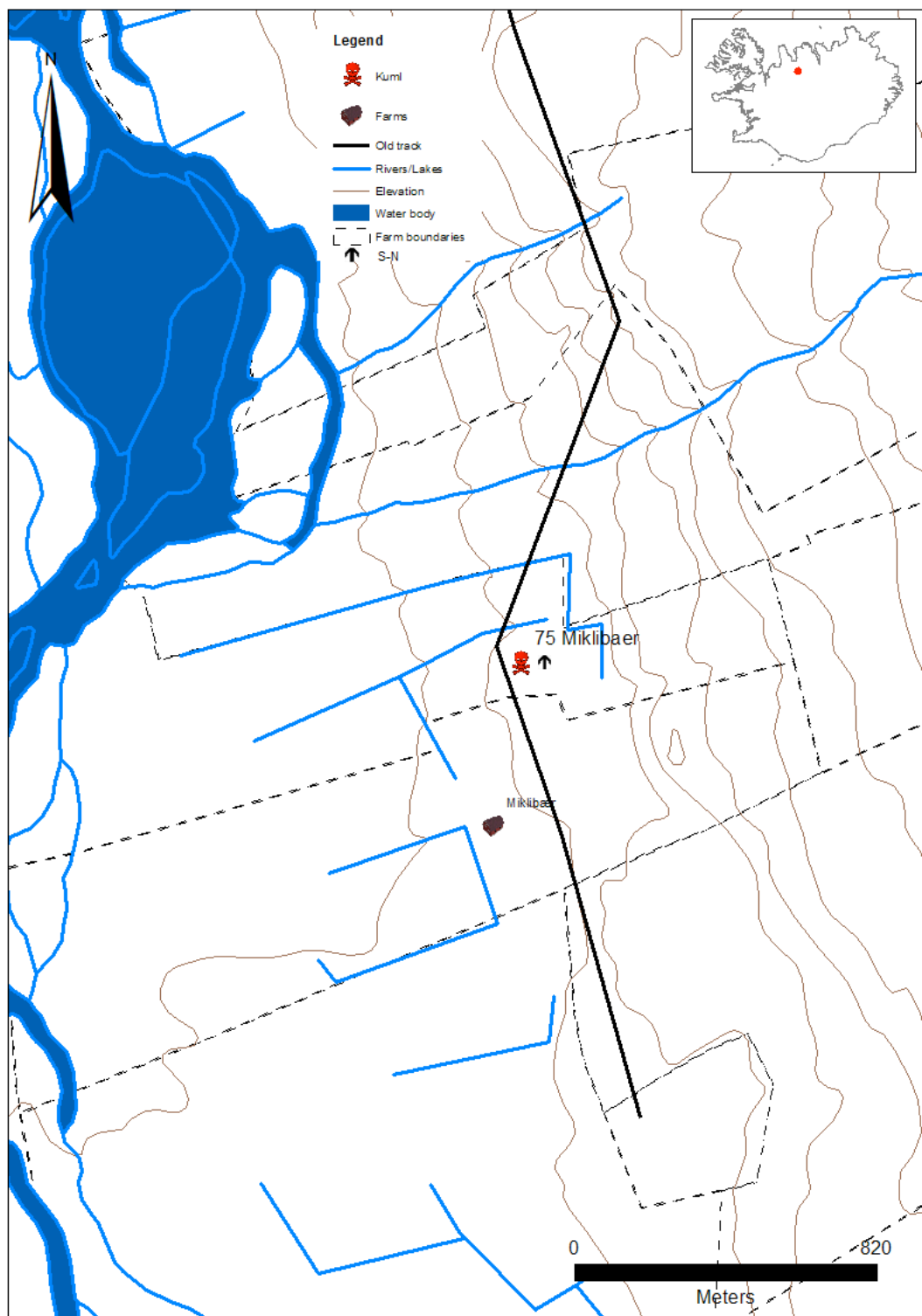
Grave type: burial mound covered with stones, 4.7 x 2.8m

Grave-goods: remains of a knife, large nail.

At the head end there were a number of horse bones, but not a complete skeleton, suggesting that horse meat may have been placed there as a food offering.

Excavated by: Matthías Þórðarson in 1910.

An earlier pagan grave was discovered in this site around 1895-96, but the orientation was not recorded.



This grave was associated with Miklibær farm and it was aligned facing away from it. The grave and the farm were within the same property limits and the orientation was possibly following the old track.

## 76. Öxnadalsheiði

Grave 1: A female skeleton (aged 36-45) orientated SW-NE

Grave measurement: 180 x 80cm.

Grave-goods: remains of wood, 2 beads, 2 buttons, 20 iron fragments.

There was a horse grave at the foot end, measuring 150 x 90cm.

Horse grave-goods: buckle, 3 nails.

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1962

Eldjárn described the remains of another grave there but the finds were just a few human bones and horse bones.



**79. Brimnes**

Grave 1: A pile of human bones orientated NW-SE

Grave measurement: c. 180 x 75cm

Grave type: covered by stones

Grave-goods: spearhead (Petersen type K 21), bridle-bit and iron fragments

A pair of horse skeletons were found in an oval pit, 165 x 125cm, at the SE end of the burial.

Grave 2: Remains of a human skeleton orientated NW-SE

Grave measurement: 90 x 75cm

Grave type: covered by a rectangular layer of stones, 3,0 x 1,25 m.

Location: SW of burial grave 1

Grave-goods: fragments of sickle and a pair of iron shears.

A horse skeleton, 125 x 100cm, was found at the SE end of the grave

Grave 3: A human skeleton orientated NW-SE

Position: supine, but partially flexed

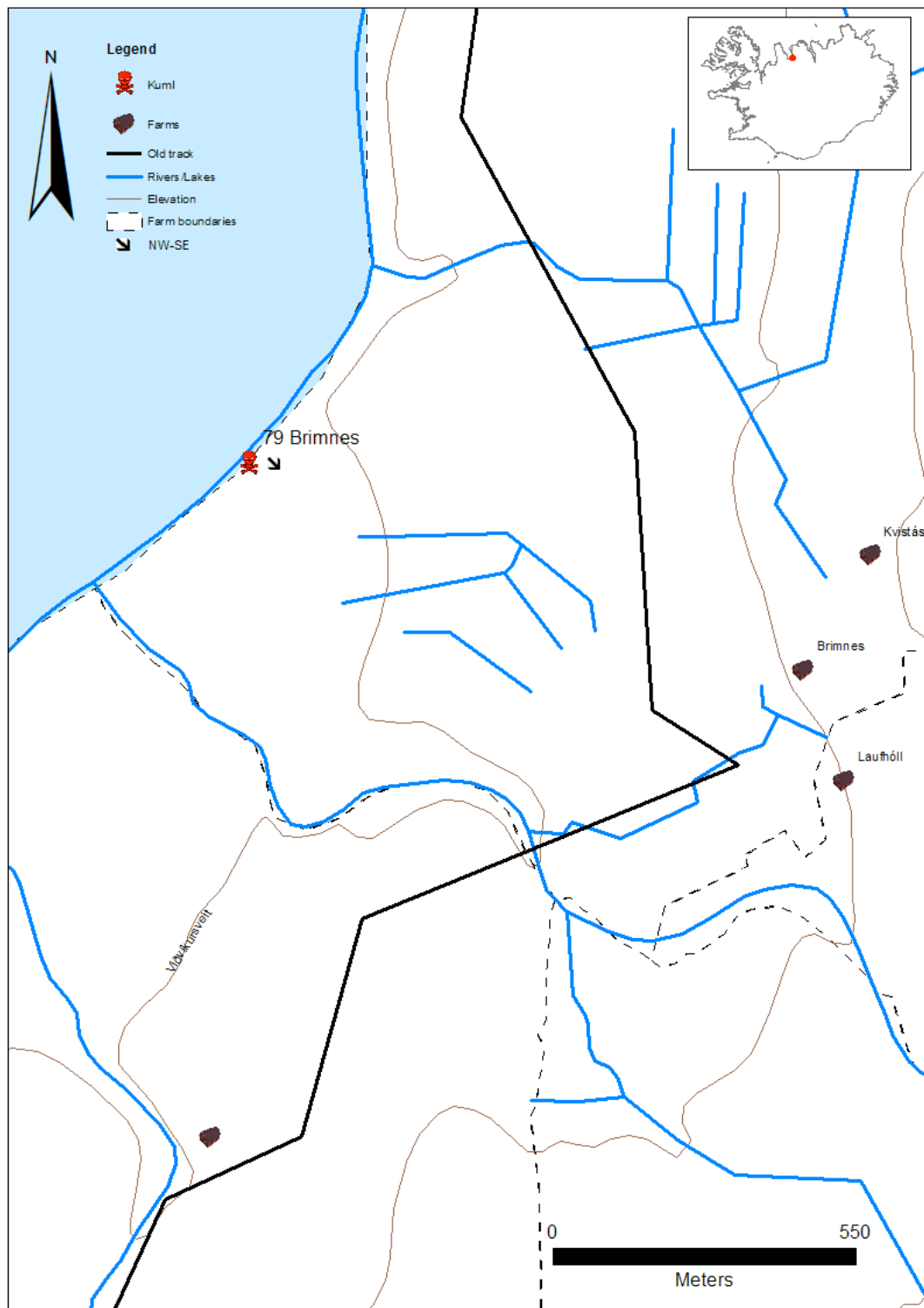
Grave measurement: 140 x 75cm

Grave type: small pile of stones arranged in a circle covered the grave; also remains of birch branches had been placed beneath the corpse.

Location: NE of burial no. 1.

Grave-goods: axe (Petersen type G), knife, fragment of silver ring, 2 lead weights.

Matthías Þórðarson excavated this cemetery in 1937 by the seashore.



The farm associated with this burial was presumably Brimnes farm. It was quite far, 1,060 kilometres from the grave, thus the farm may not have been visible. The grave was facing the farm but if the old track was there in the Viking Age it may have been used as a boundary. The grave was almost on the shore, facing away from the sea and looking inland.

**80. Ljósstaðir**

A human skeleton orientated WSW-ENE

Grave measurement: 80cm wide

Grave type: burial mound

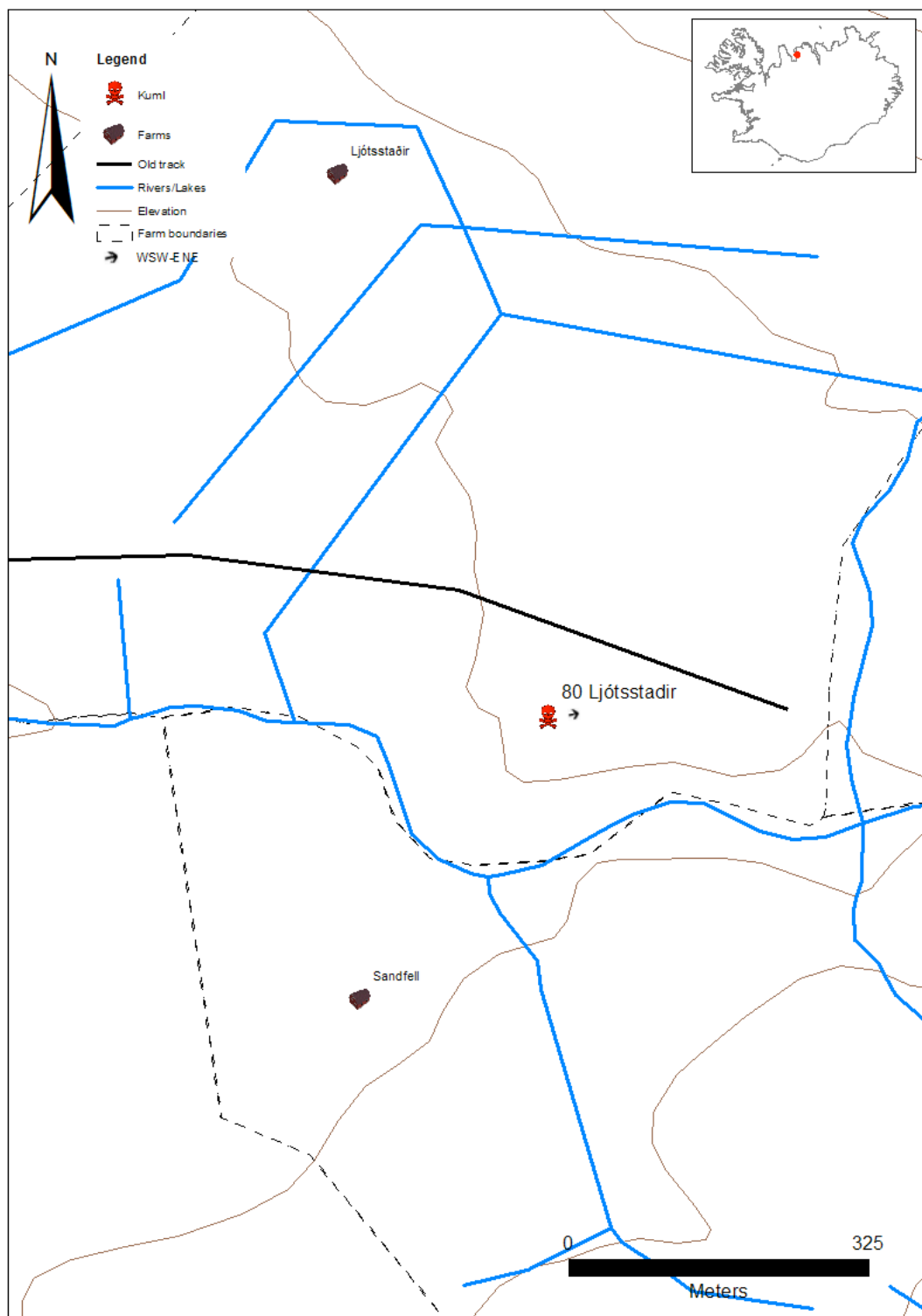
Location: about 1 km from the farm

Grave-goods: small and flat piece of whalebone carved with a Mammem figure, whetstone and some iron fragments.

Horse skeleton found 70cm to the east of the grave measuring 120 x 80cm.

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1959





The burial was facing away from Ljósstaðir farm and located on the same property. It may have followed the orientation of the old track and also the river nearby.

## 82. Austarihöll

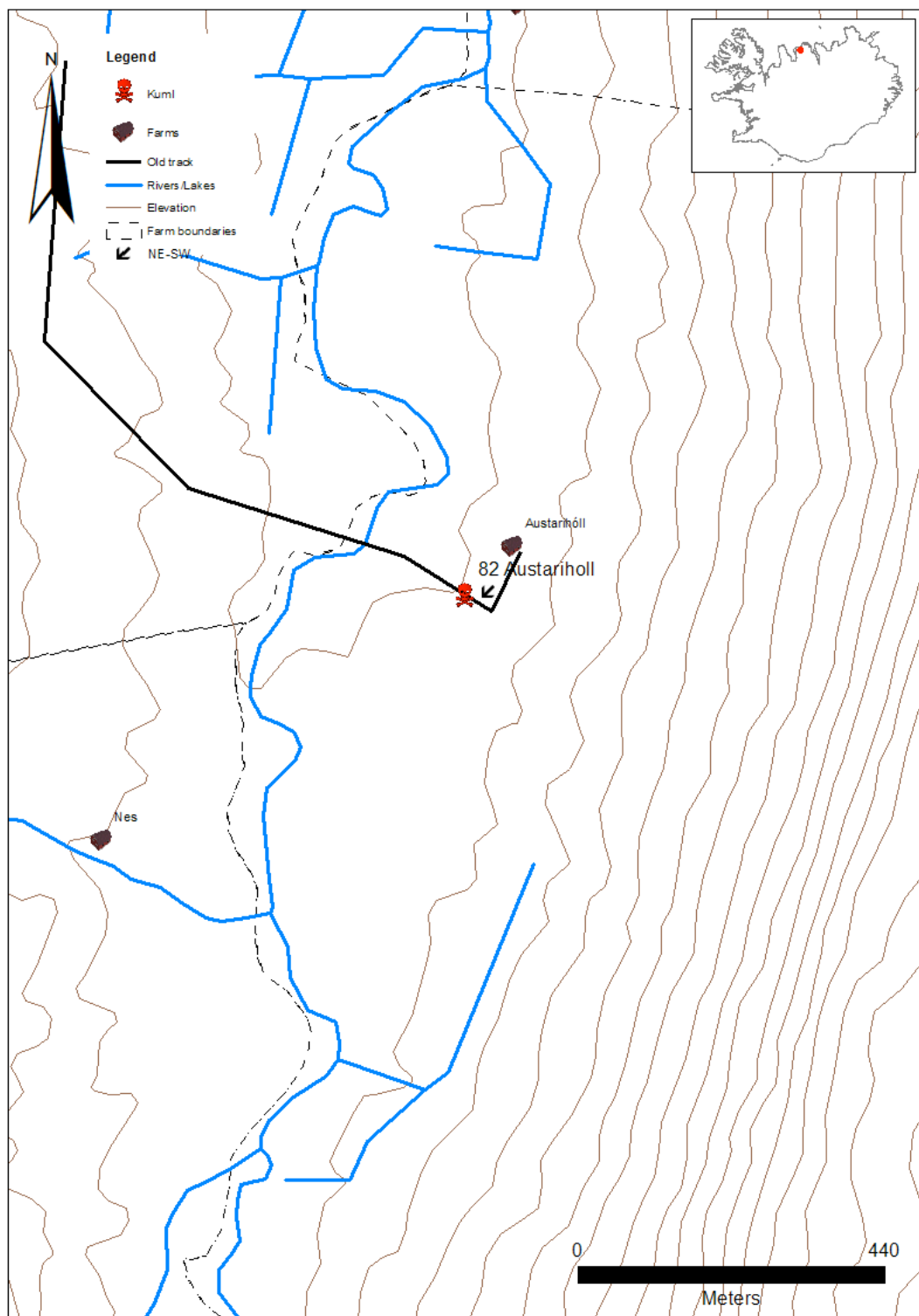
A grave orientated NE-SW, horse bones in its NE end, but no human bones.

Grave measurement: 4 x 1m

Location: c. 100m SW of the farm

Grave-goods: spearhead (possibly Petersen type I or K), 5 arrowheads (Rygh 539), iron shears (Rygh 443), spindle-whorl, 1 nail, 7 pebbles, some iron fragments, fragment of a bone artefact (possibly a comb), crampon (for horse) and pieces of charcoal.

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn.



The grave was facing away from its associated farm and facing inland. The burial was situated in the middle of a valley, fairly close to the river and orientated facing and following the old track.

### 85. Ytra-Hvarf

Grave 1: A grave orientated S-N, but no human bones.

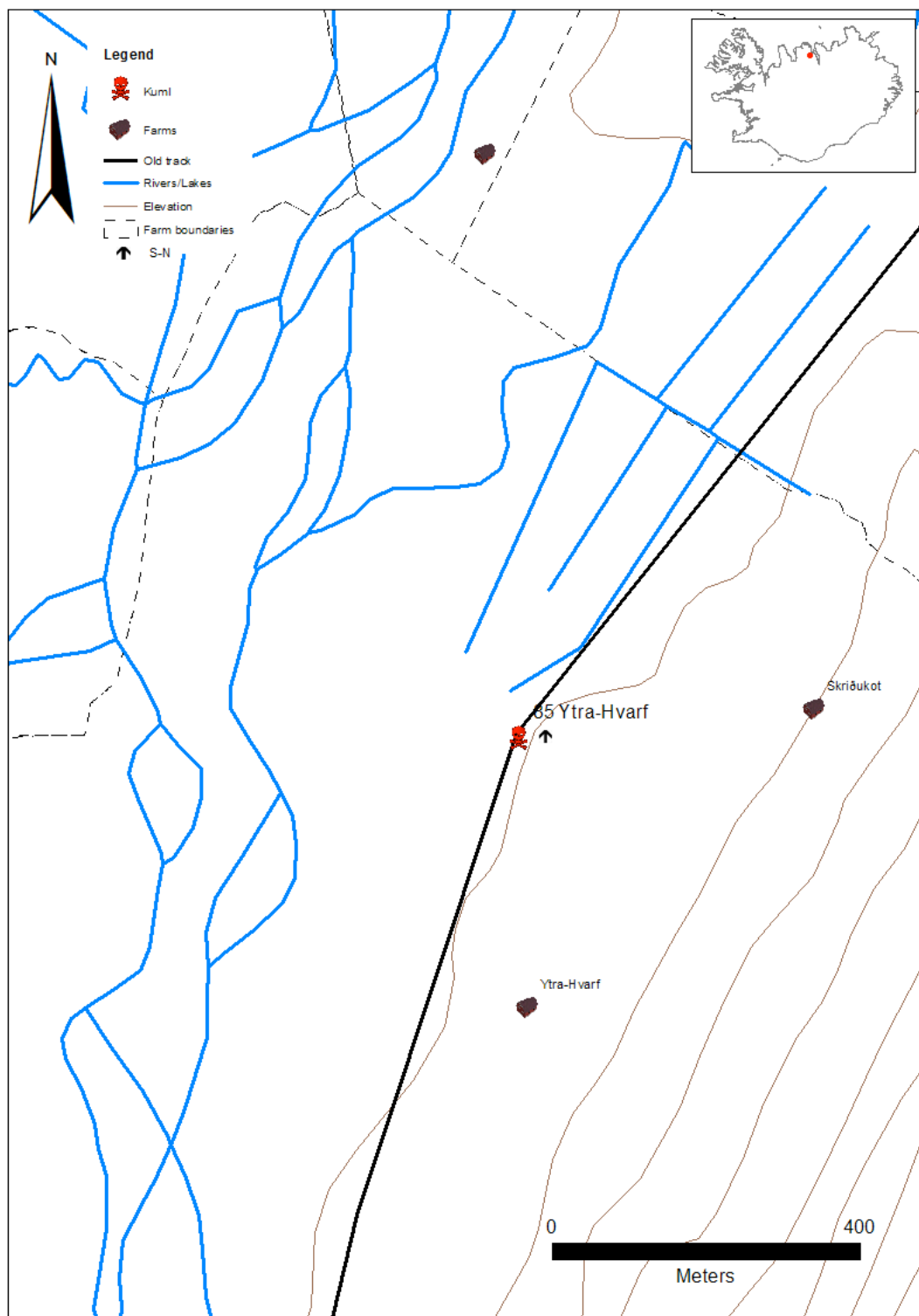
Grave measurement: 475 x 80cm

Grave-goods: a spearhead (probably Petersen type I) and a strap-end found at the southern end of the grave.

A horse skeleton was found in the northern end of the grave, together with a buckle and some iron fragments.

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn

Another grave was found but the head orientation was not recorded. This burial site was found in 1949, c. 350m north of the farm. Eldjárn found further human and horse bones outside these graves.



This grave was looking away from its farm and it was situated close to the river, although the river was not visible from the burial site. The burial was located in a valley and the grave was aligned as if the dead was looking out the valley towards the sea. The grave was on a higher position than the river, on the edge of the land in

which the river passed through (in between the valley). The burial was on the actual old track and it could have followed it.

### **87. Ytra-Garðshorn**

Grave 1: Remains of a human skeleton, orientated SSW-NNE

Grave measurement: 470 x 80-90cm

Grave type: covered with stones

Grave-goods: 2 beads, 3 gaming pieces, scale balance and iron fragments.

A horse grave was at its northern end, measuring 270 x 80-90cm and 80cm deep, containing 2 horse skeletons, 2 buckles, some nails and iron fragments.

Grave 2: Remains of a human skeleton orientated SW-NE

A horse burial was identified containing a buckle and a nail at its foot end.

Grave 3: Remains of a human skeleton orientated SW-NE

Position: supine

Grave measurement: 360-100cm, 50-65cm deep

Grave type: covered by a layer of stones.

Grave-goods: 2 beads, knife, strike-a-light (See Petersen 1951, fig. 231), iron shears, some iron fragments, pieces of charcoal. In the eastern end there was a horse skeleton.

Grave 4: Remains of a human skeleton orientated SW-NE

Grave measurement: 175 x 75cm, 60cm deep

Grave type: covered by an irregular layer of stones.

Grave 5: A child skeleton (aged 7-12) orientated S-N

Grave measurement: rectangular in shape, 160 x 70cm, 70cm deep.

Grave-goods: iron nails, remains of a knife.

Grave 7: Remains of a human skeleton orientated SW-NE

Grave measurement: 320 x 70cm, 65-70cm deep

Grave type: covered by a layer of stones.

Grave-goods: 8 lead weights and fragments, piece of flint, some iron fragments and scattered horse bones.

Grave 8: Remains of a human skeleton orientated SW-NE

Grave measurement: 400 x 75-90cm, 60-70cm deep

Grave type: covered by a layer of stones.

Grave-goods: knife, fragments of comb, a spearhead (Petersen type K). A horse skeleton was placed at the foot end.

Grave 9: Remains of a human skeleton and horse bones orientated SW-NE

Grave measurement/type: 370 x 60cm, covered by a layer of stones.

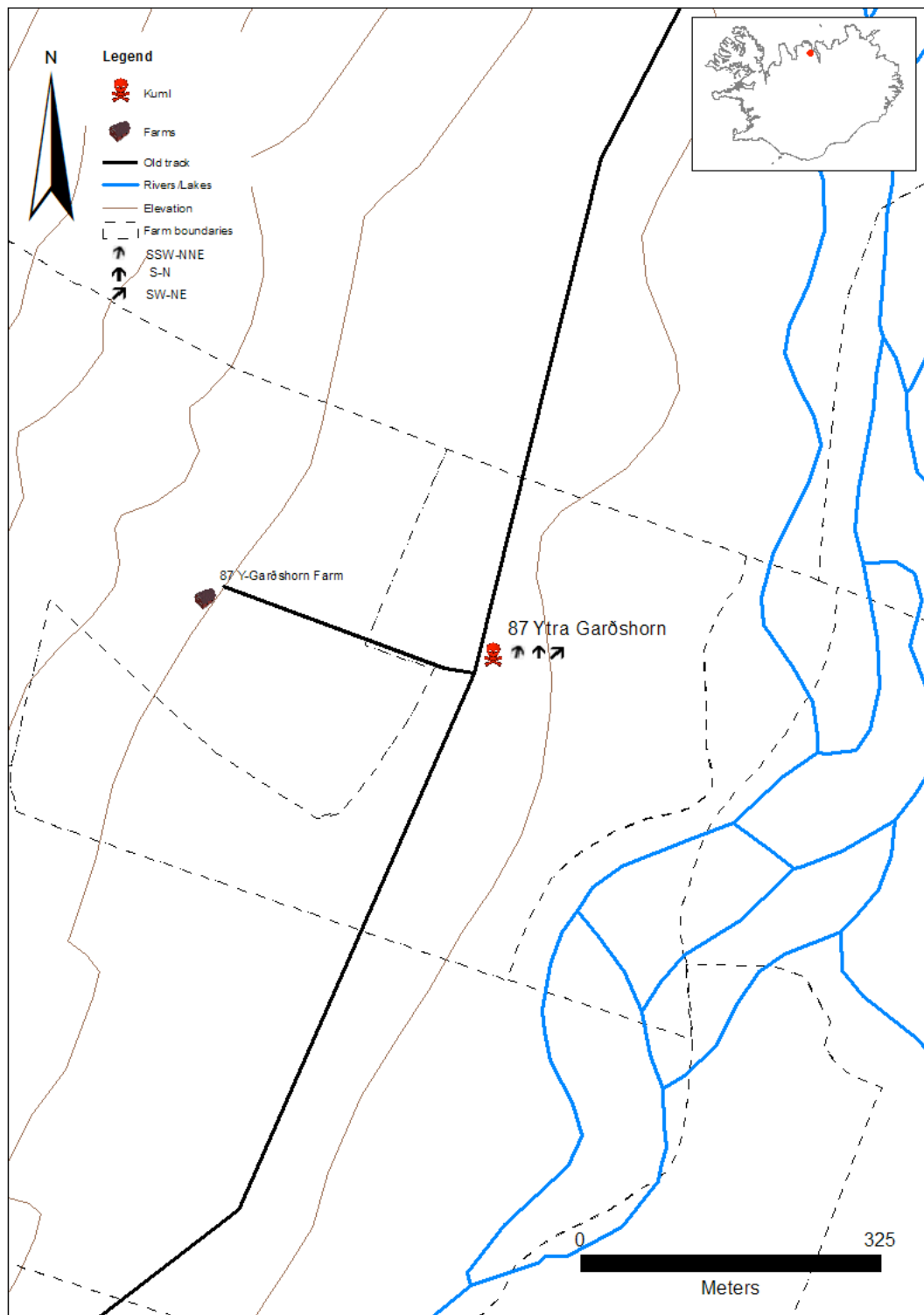
Grave-goods: 25 beads, ring of copper alloy, iron tweezers, 58 small pieces of chalcedony, and a piece of wax.

Grave 10: Remains of a human skeleton SW-NE

Grave measurement: 400 x 70cm

Grave-goods: 4 beads, iron fragments, fragments of comb. A horse skeleton was found in the NE end with 2 buckles and 5 rivets.

This cemetery was discovered in 1952 and located approximately 300m east of the farm. Kristján Eldjárn excavated this site in 1954, 1956 and 1958.



This cemetery was located near Ytra-Hvarf (burial 85) on the same valley but on the other side of the road. None of the graves were orientated looking towards the farm and graves orientated S-N and SSW-NNE seem to have followed the old track. They were also situated on the edge of the land but higher than the river. All graves had the head in the south with a similar orientation. This cemetery resembles the burial site in



Ytra-Hvarf - looking out in the open towards the sea; and they were 2.517 kilometres apart from each other.

### **89. Dalvík (Brimnes)**

Grave 1: A human skeleton orientated NE-SW

Position: sitting (?)

Grave measurement: 136 x 70cm, 45cm deep.

Grave-goods: 10 beads, remains of wood and iron.

Grave 2: A human skeleton SW-NE

Position: supine position, feet extended, right forearm resting on the chest, the left hand on the abdomen.

Grave measurement: 350 x 80-135cm, 45cm deep

Grave-goods: whetstone, knife, 8 lead weights, spearhead. A horse skeleton was found at the foot end together with some iron fragments.

Grave 3: A human skeleton orientated SW-NE

Grave measurement: 160 x 90cm, 50cm deep.

Grave-goods: remains of wood, spearhead, some iron fragments, 3 lead weights.

Grave 5: A human skeleton orientated SW-NE

Position: supine, head elevated

Grave measurement 180 x 80cm, 40-50cm deep

Grave-goods: oval brooch (P 51b), knife, 3 iron fragments, 6 fragments of a stone bowl.

At the foot end a horse grave, 150 x 100cm, 45-50cm deep, was found. Grave-goods: 2 buckles, 3 iron nails.

Grave 8. A human skeleton orientated SE-NW

Grave measurement: 190 x 100cm, remains of wood.

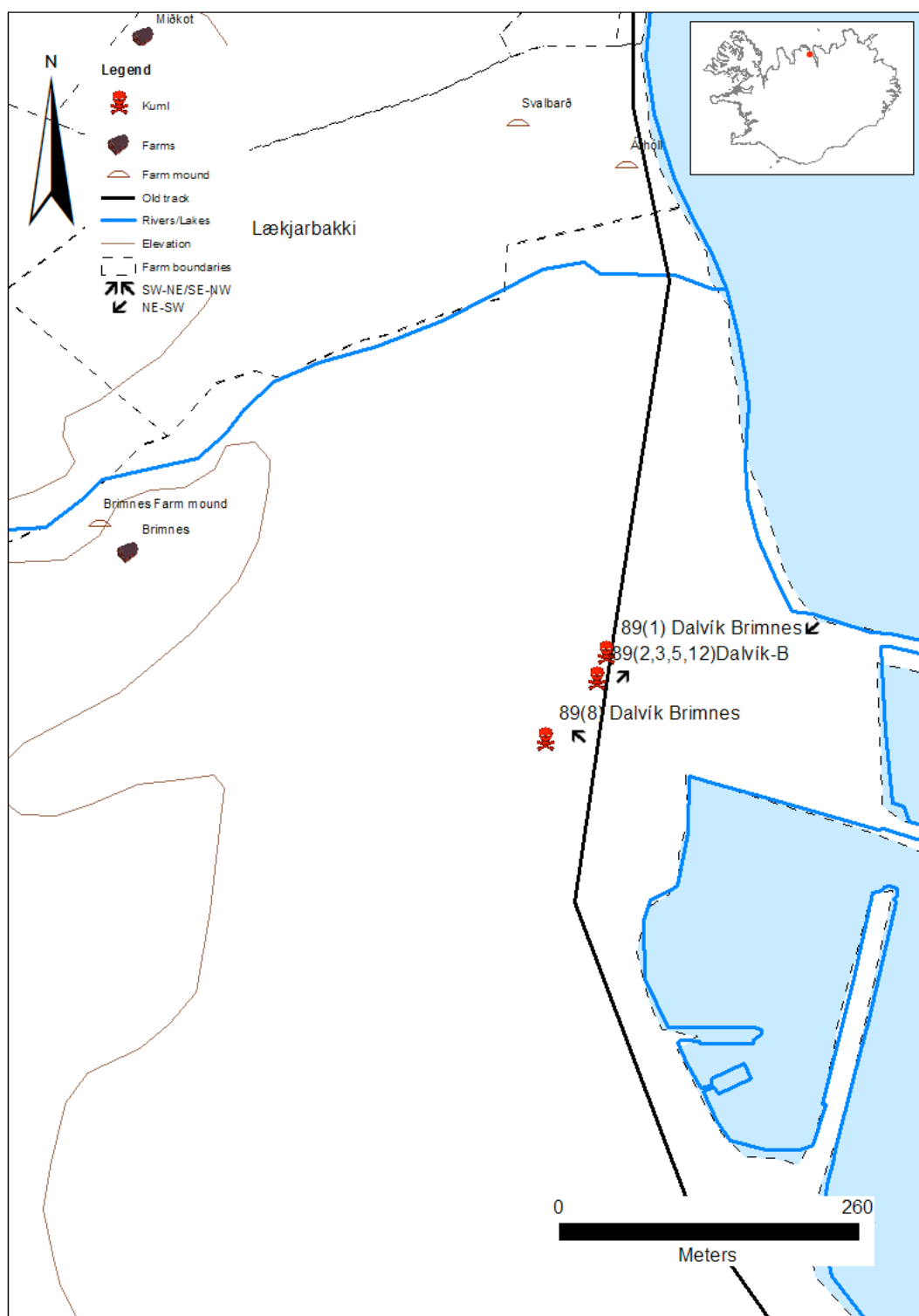
Grave 12: Remains of a human skull in the southern end orientated SW-NE and a dog's skull in the northern end.

Grave measurement: 215 x 120cm, 45cm deep.

Grave type: An oblong mound, 6 x 2m, 50cm high

Grave-goods: 19 gaming pieces made of bone, 3 iron fragments and a whetstone.

In addition there were several graves containing human remains and grave goods but the orientations were not recorded. This pagan cemetery was discovered in 1908 and was excavated by Daniel Bruun and Finnur Jónsson in 1909.



According to Kumli og haugfé grave 1 was orientated NE-SW. However, there has been some confusion with this particular grave as the excavator, Daniel Bruun, gave different orientations in different documents, so this burial will be ignored here. Most of the burials have the orientation SW-NE and they seemed to be looking towards the open sea, apart from grave 8 orientated SE-NW, which was facing a mountain. The

burials were in a fjord and graves orientated SW-NE looked towards the opening of the fjord. There were 3 farm mounds (in the map), and although burials orientated SW-NE were looking away from them, grave 8 (the only anomalous one) seemed to be facing Brimnes farm.

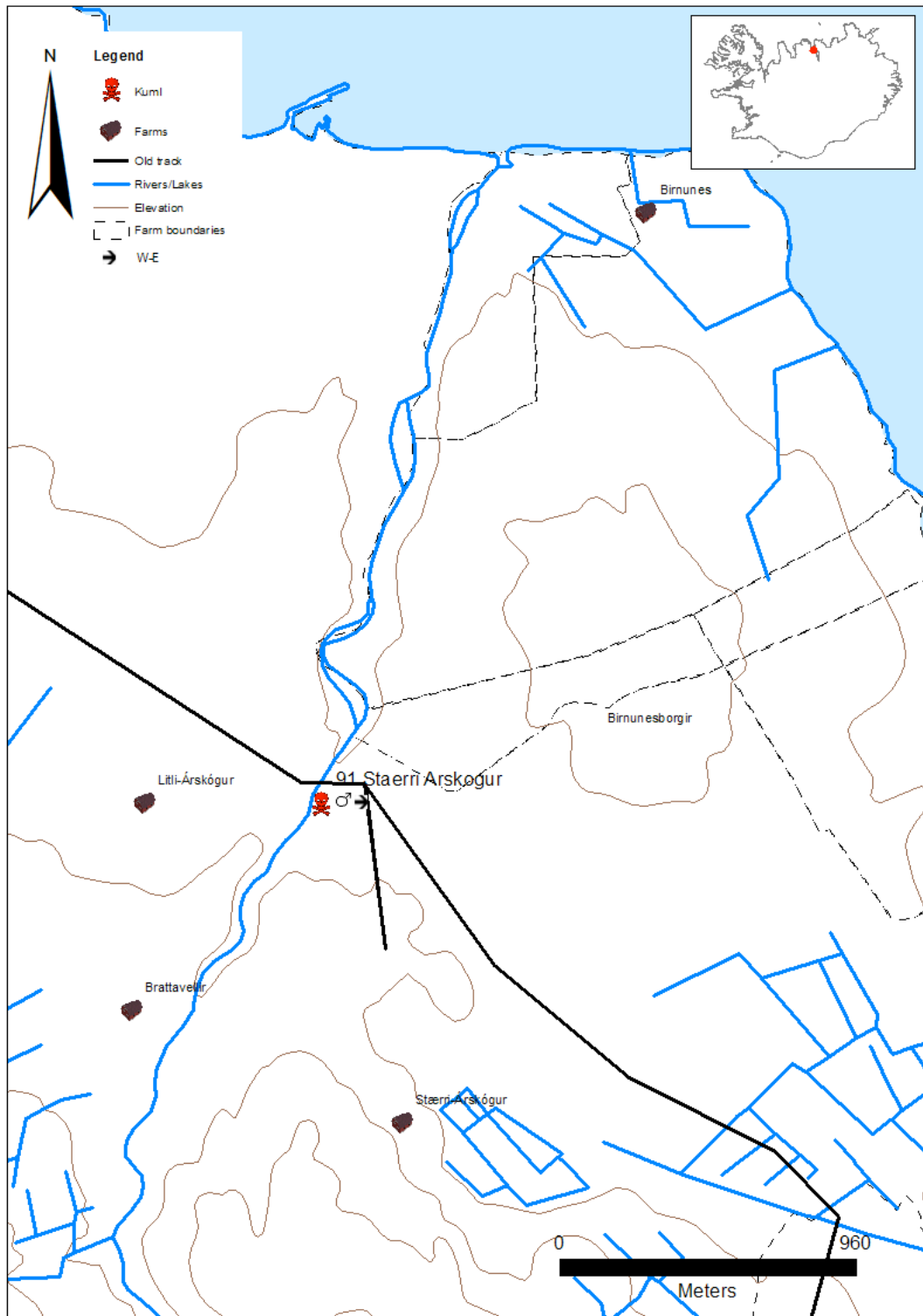
### **91. Stærri-Árskógur**

A male (?) skeleton (aged 36-45), orientated W-E

Grave type: gravel mound

Grave-goods: iron rod, knife. A horse skeleton and some iron fragments were found 5m to the north.

This grave was discovered in 1917.



This grave did not face the farm (Stærri-Árskógur) and did not look towards the opening of the fjord but looked towards the sea (on the right hand-side). The grave was not aligned in the same direction as the river, and the burial was on a boundary (river used as a boundary). The grave was also facing the old track and possibly following it.

## 98. Sílastaðir

Grave 1: A human skeleton orientated W-E

Position: supine, leaning to the right, slightly flexed

Grave-goods: sword (Petersen type M), axe (possibly Petersen type F), another axe (probably I), spear-head (Petersen type K 21), knife, whetstone, 2 buckles, piece of flint, shield-boss (Rygh 562), bark and a quantity of other wood. One of the axes may have come from grave 2.

Grave 2: A human skeleton orientated SSW-NNE

Position: lying on its right side, left arm flexed

Grave-goods: spear-head (Petersen type K), knife, whetstone, jasper, strike-a-light, 2 silver coin fragments, silver-thread, iron fragment, shell fragment, bead, penannular brooch (similar to P 212) and some wood.

Grave 3: A human skeleton orientated SW-NE

Grave measurement: 180 x 90-100cm, 50cm deep, covered with stones.

Grave-goods: 6 beads, iron fragments, knife, 3 fragments of quartz.

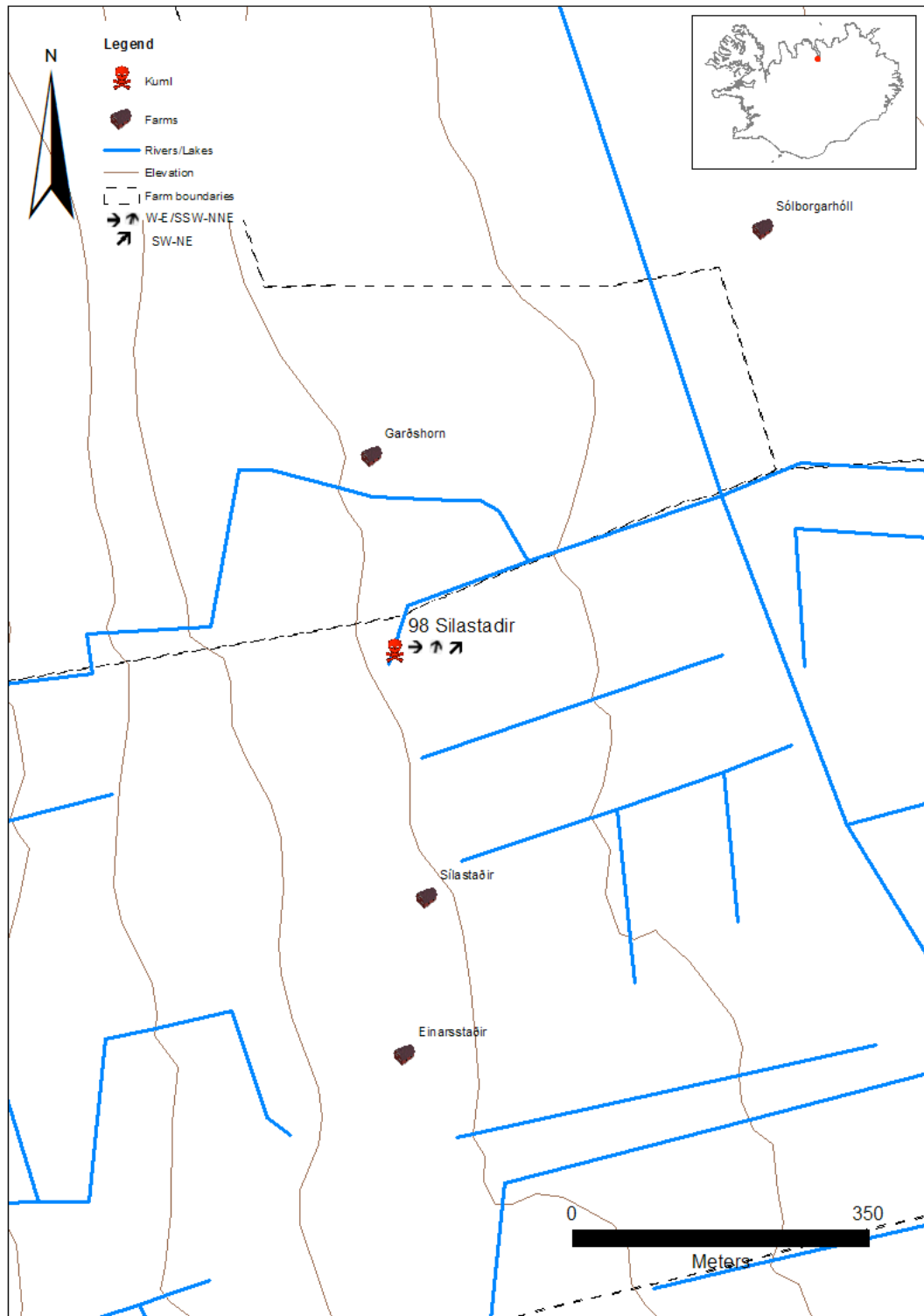
Grave 4: Remains of a human skeleton in the southern end orientated SW-NE

Position: lying on its right side, probably flexed

Grave measurement/type: 370 x 100cm, covered by a hummock with a scatter of stones.

Grave-goods: sword (Petersen type Q), axe (Petersen type G or K), shield-boss (Rygh 563), spearhead (Petersen type K), knife, 2 lead weights, iron fragment, jasper, semi-transparent pebble. A horse skeleton was found in the northern end with a bridle-bit, five nails and a buckle.

This cemetery was excavated by Kristján Eldjárn in 1947 and located about 300m north of the farm.



This burial site was in a fjord and was orientated looking away from Sílastaðir farm. Most of the burials had similar orientation and grave 1 was directly looking towards the sea and the others towards the opening of the fjord.

## 99. Moldhaugar

Grave 2: Human skeleton orientated S-N.

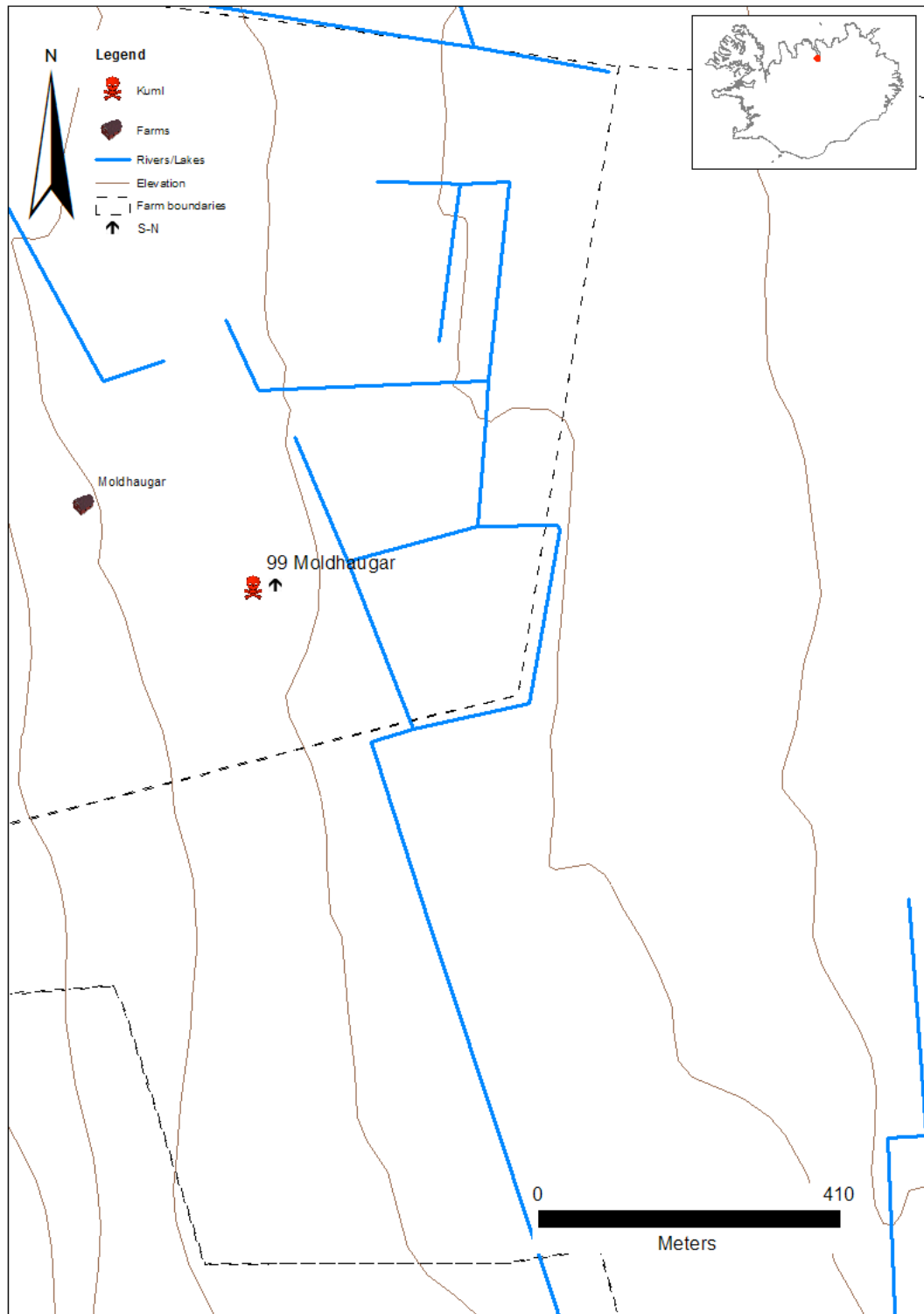
Position: lying on its right side, knees flexed

Location: on a hillock outside the home field, south of the farm.

Grave-goods: 3 shells, some iron fragments, fragment of a comb.

Another grave was found at this site but no orientation was recorded.





This grave was orientated looking north towards the sea, although the nearest visibility to the sea was to the right. The grave did not directly look at the farm, as the farm stood on the side.

#### 100. Syðra-Krossanes

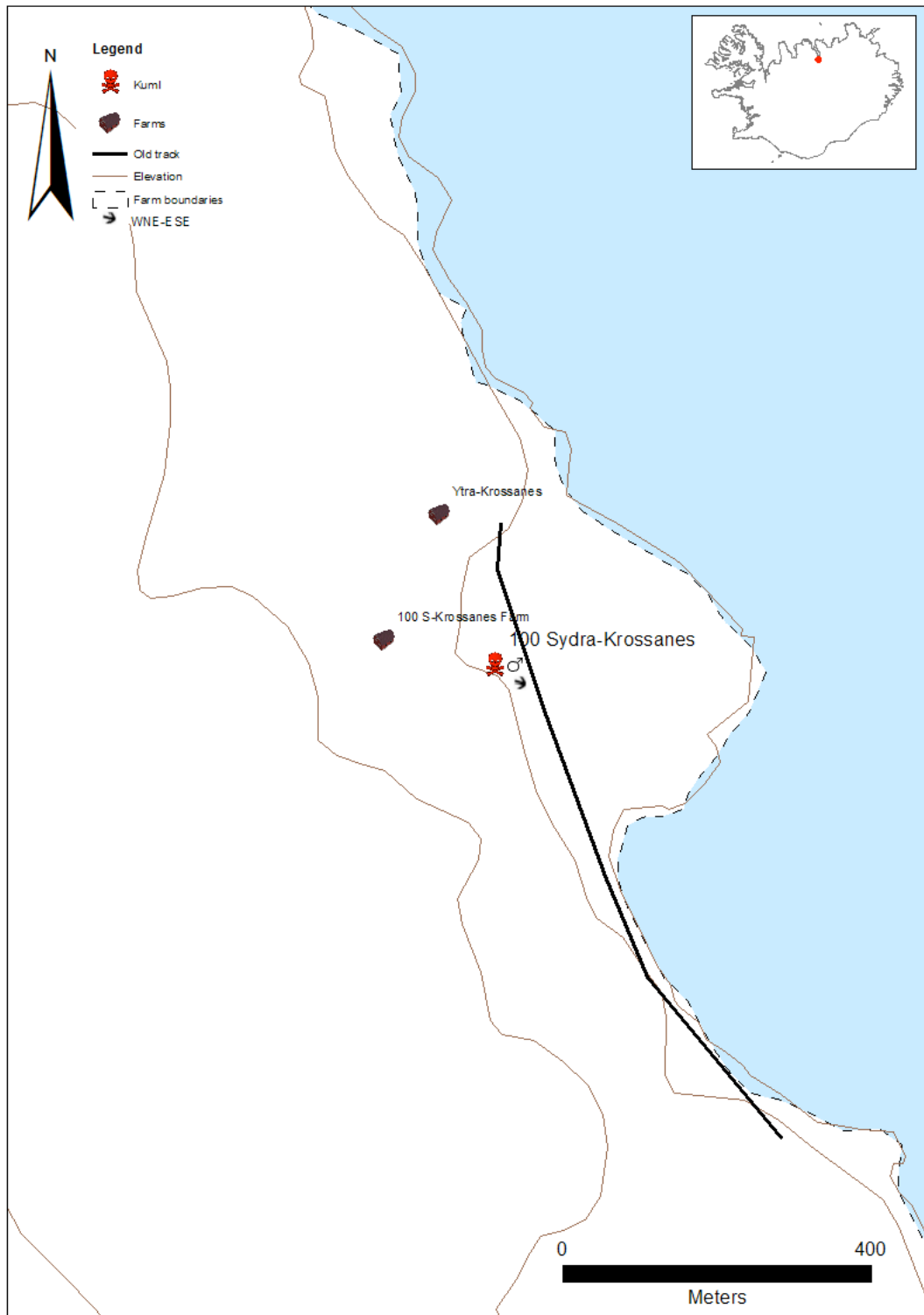
Grave 1: a male (46+) skeleton orientated WNW-ESE

Position: lying on his left side, flexed position

Location: at the edge of the home field, c. 50m east of the farm.

Excavated by: Gísli Gestsson in 1963

Another grave was found in this site but no orientation was recorded.



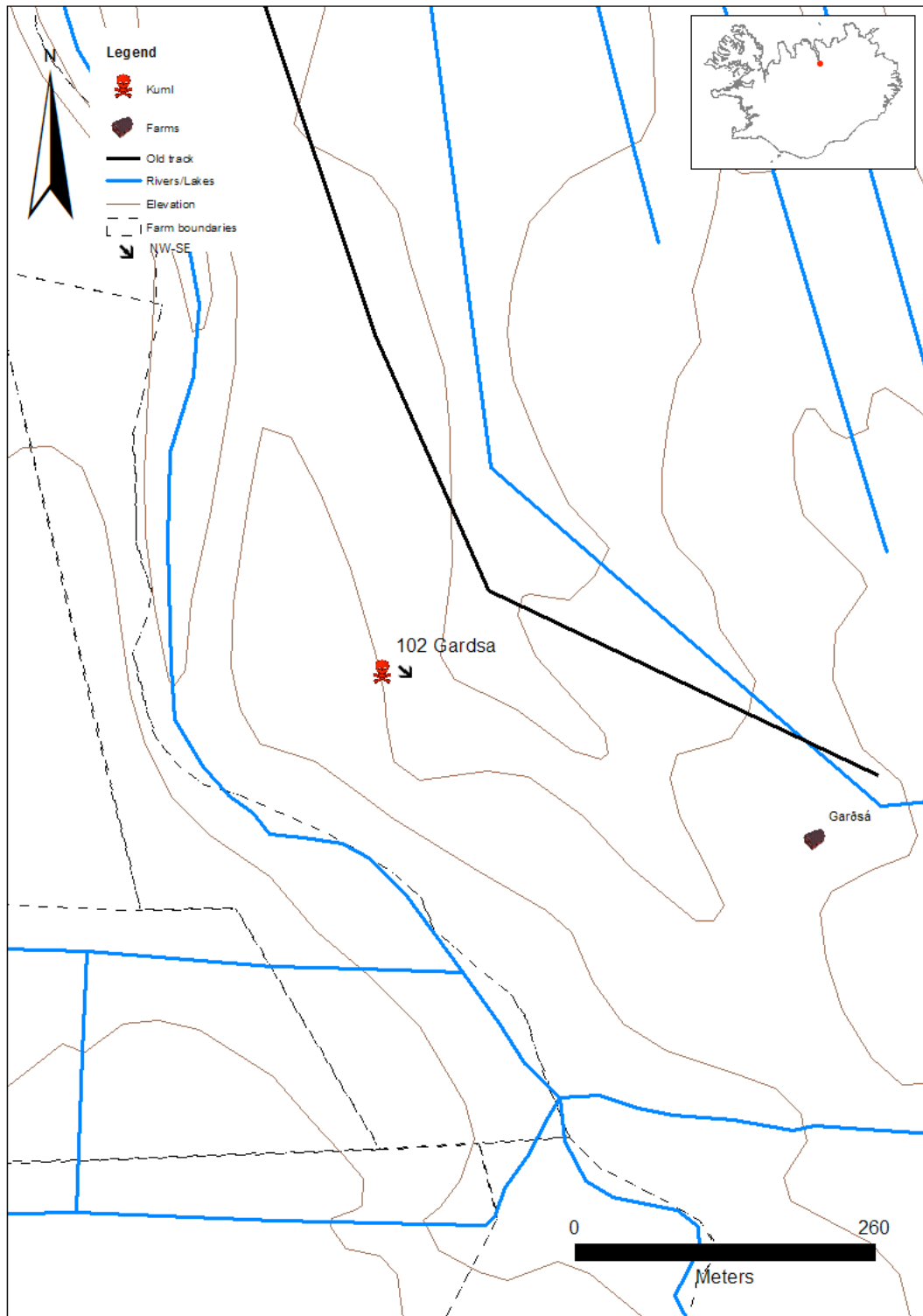
The burial was facing away from the farm and looking towards the sea. However, the grave was not looking at the opening of the fjord nor following the old track, but it was situated right next to the track.

## 102. Garðsá

Remains of a human skeleton orientated NW-SE

Grave-goods: axe (Petersen type I), knife and buckle.

Around 12-15m further south, a disturbed horse burial was identified with a layer of stones on top, 250 x 100cm, 90cm deep, containing the remains of a horse skeleton, a buckle, an iron hook and 2 iron bosses.



This grave was looking towards the farm in contrast with most graves in this study. It was within the known boundary and it was placed fairly close to the old track, about 110 metres, following the same direction and facing downstream.

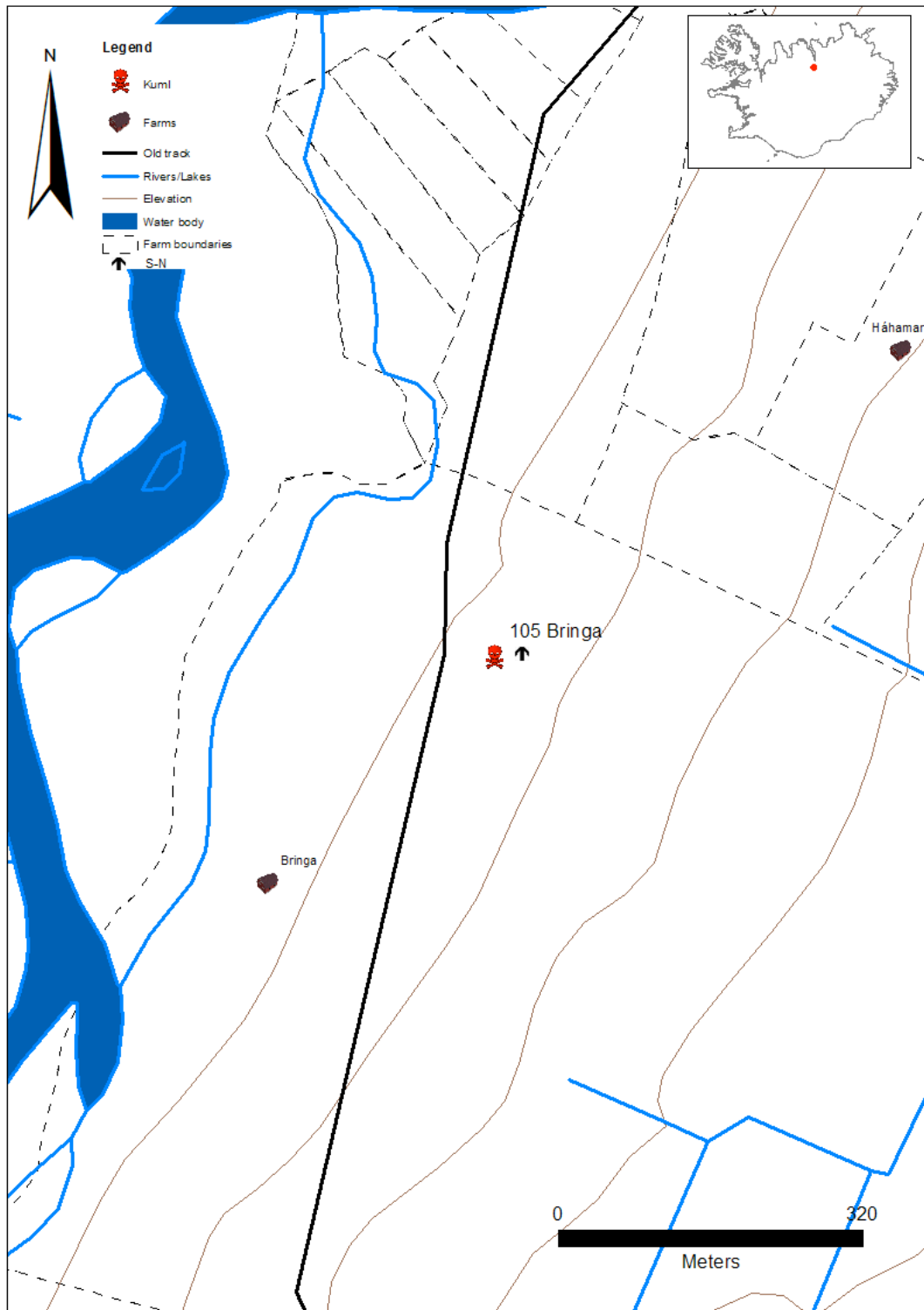
### 105. Bringa

Remains of a human skeleton orientated S-N.

Location: north of the farm

Grave-goods: sword (Petersen type Q), spearhead (Petersen type H).

Excavated by: Matthías Þórðarson in 1937



This grave was orientated looking away from Bringa farm and it was placed alongside the old track and following it. The grave looked towards the opening of the valley and the sea, and it was not close to the present boundary.

#### 109. Draflastaðir

A male skeleton (aged 36-45) in a shallow grave orientated W-E

Position: supine, with the head elevated, left arm and legs extended, right arm placed on the abdomen

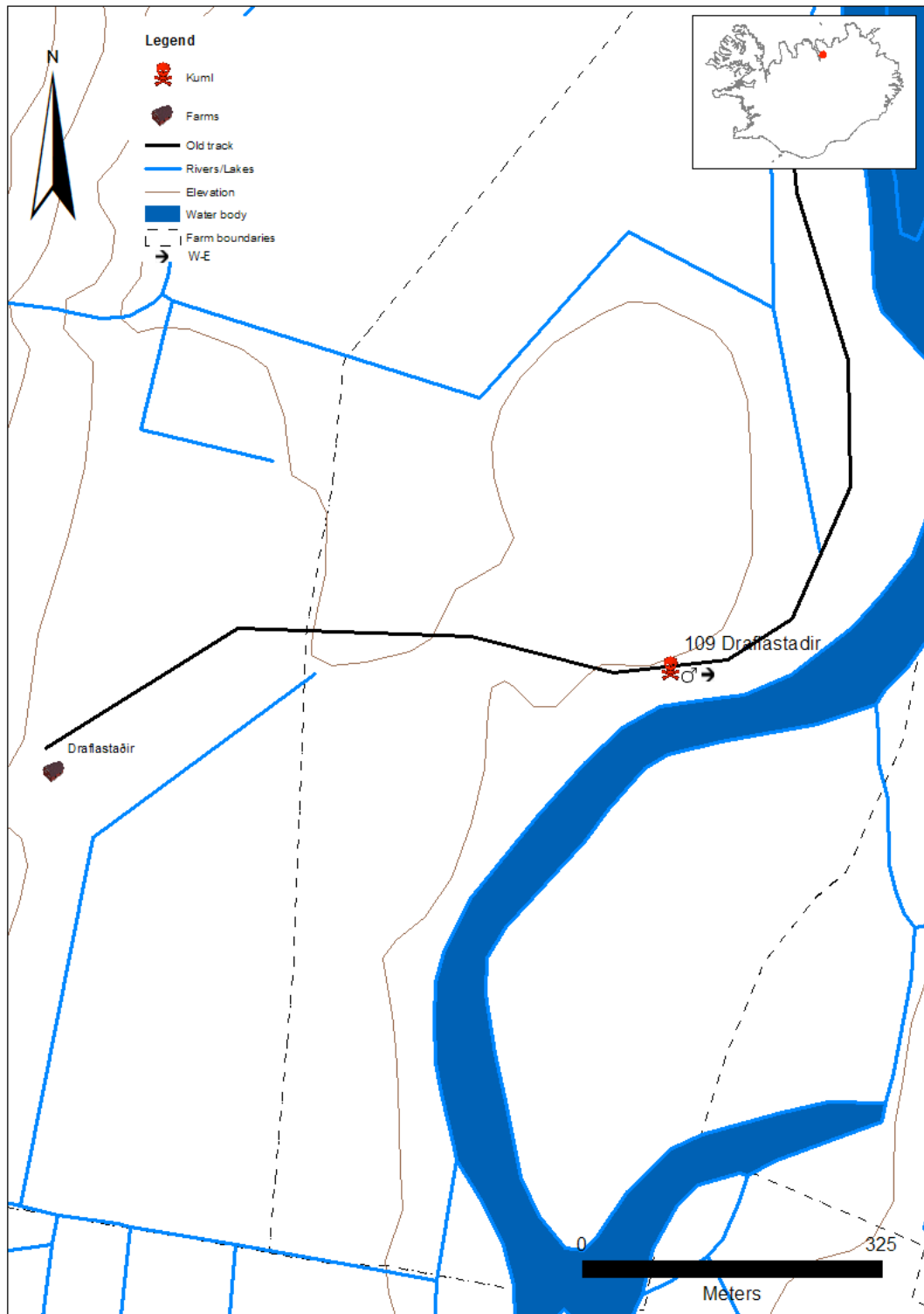
Grave type: A layer of stones covered the grave. Decomposed wood in the soil indicated the presence of a coffin.

Location: an eroded area on the hill of Reiðholt.

No grave-goods.

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1952





There were no grave goods in this burial but Kristján Eldjárn (2000) argued that because of the location of the grave this might be potentially pagan. The burial was also looking away from Draflastaðir farm, was facing the river and following the old track.

**117. Baldursheimur**

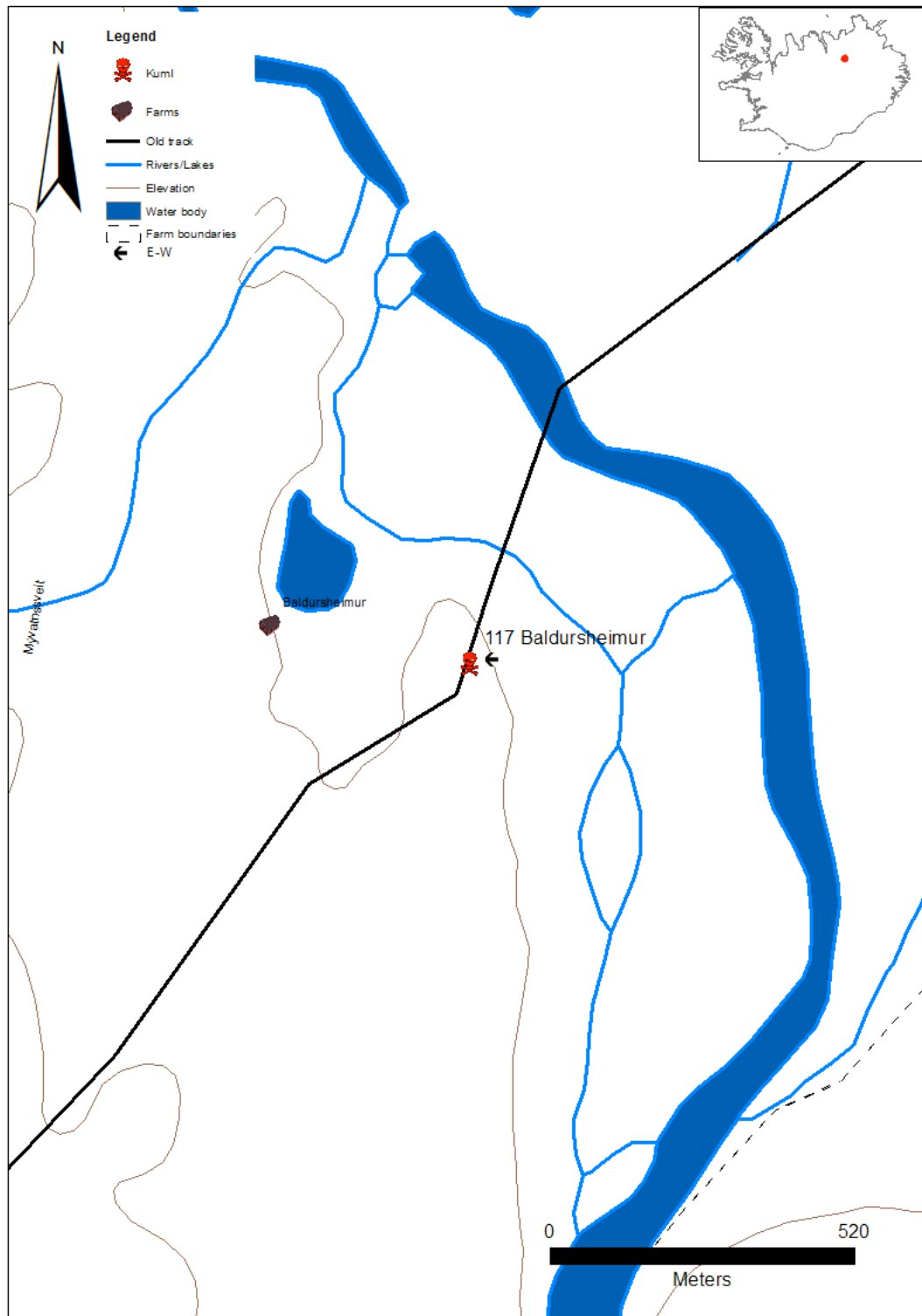
A human skeleton orientated E-W

Position: supine, legs and arms extended

Location: 3-400m east of the farm, associated with the abandoned farmstead of Hrísheimar.

Grave-goods: dice and 24 gaming pieces, sword, spear-head (Petersen type K 21), knife, axe, figurine made of bone, shield-boss (Rygh 562), iron fragment, whetstone, 1 bead (now lost).

There was an additional horse grave. Grave-goods: bridle-bit and a buckle.



The grave was looking towards Baldursheimur farm and away from the river. However, in Kumli og haugfé it says that this grave was associated with the abandoned farmstead of Hrísheimar. The grave was also facing the old track but not following the direction of it.

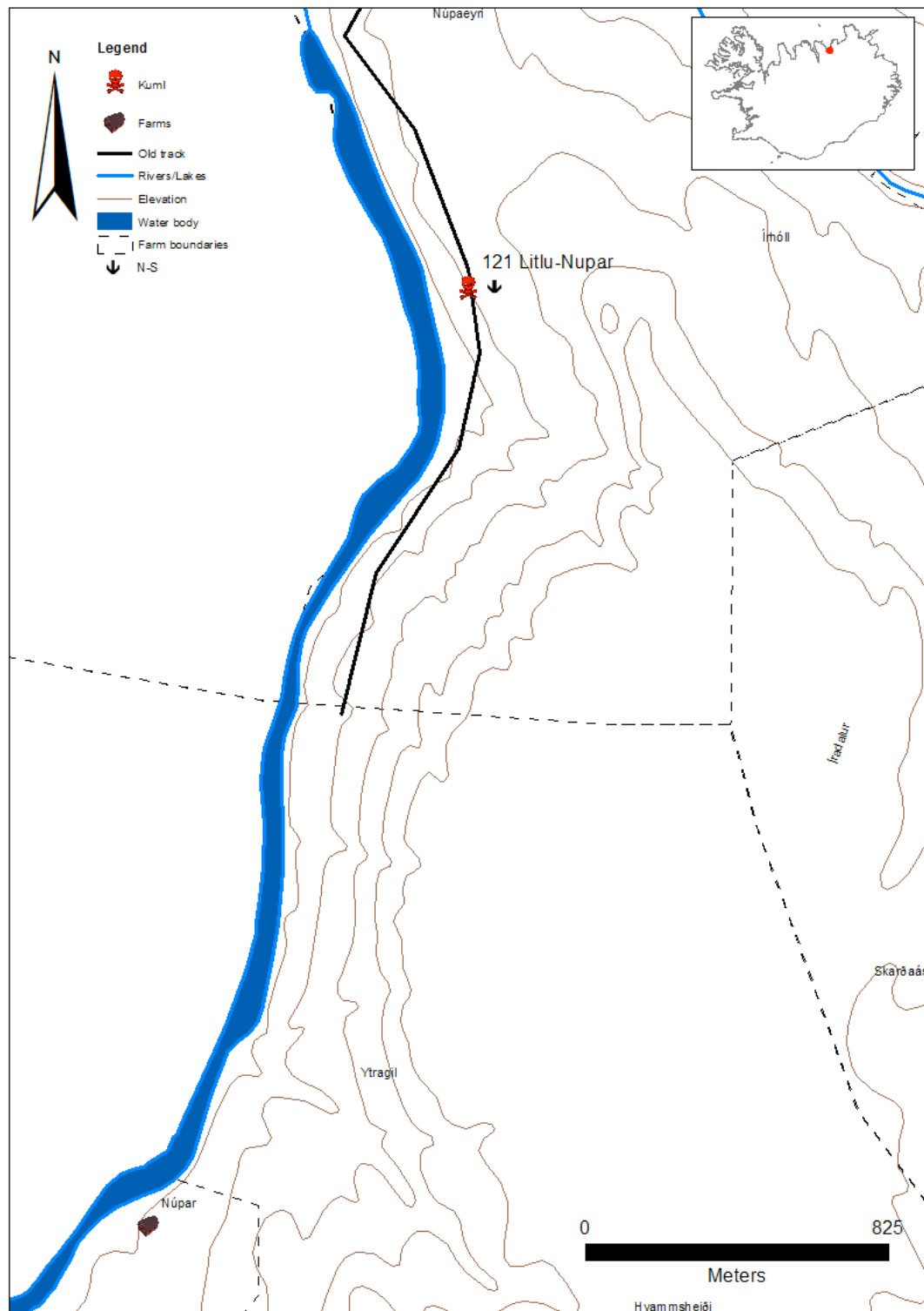
**121. Núpar**

A human skeleton (aged 26-35), orientated N-S.

About 14m to the NW an eroded horse grave was found with the remains of 2 horse skeletons.

Location: inside the home field of the farm

Excavated by: Matthías Þórðarson in 1915



This grave was far but facing the farm and was placed alongside the old track and following it. It was also following the direction of the river but not looking towards the sea (to the north), rather facing inland.

## 122. Grásíða

A male (aged 18-25) skeleton orientated S-N

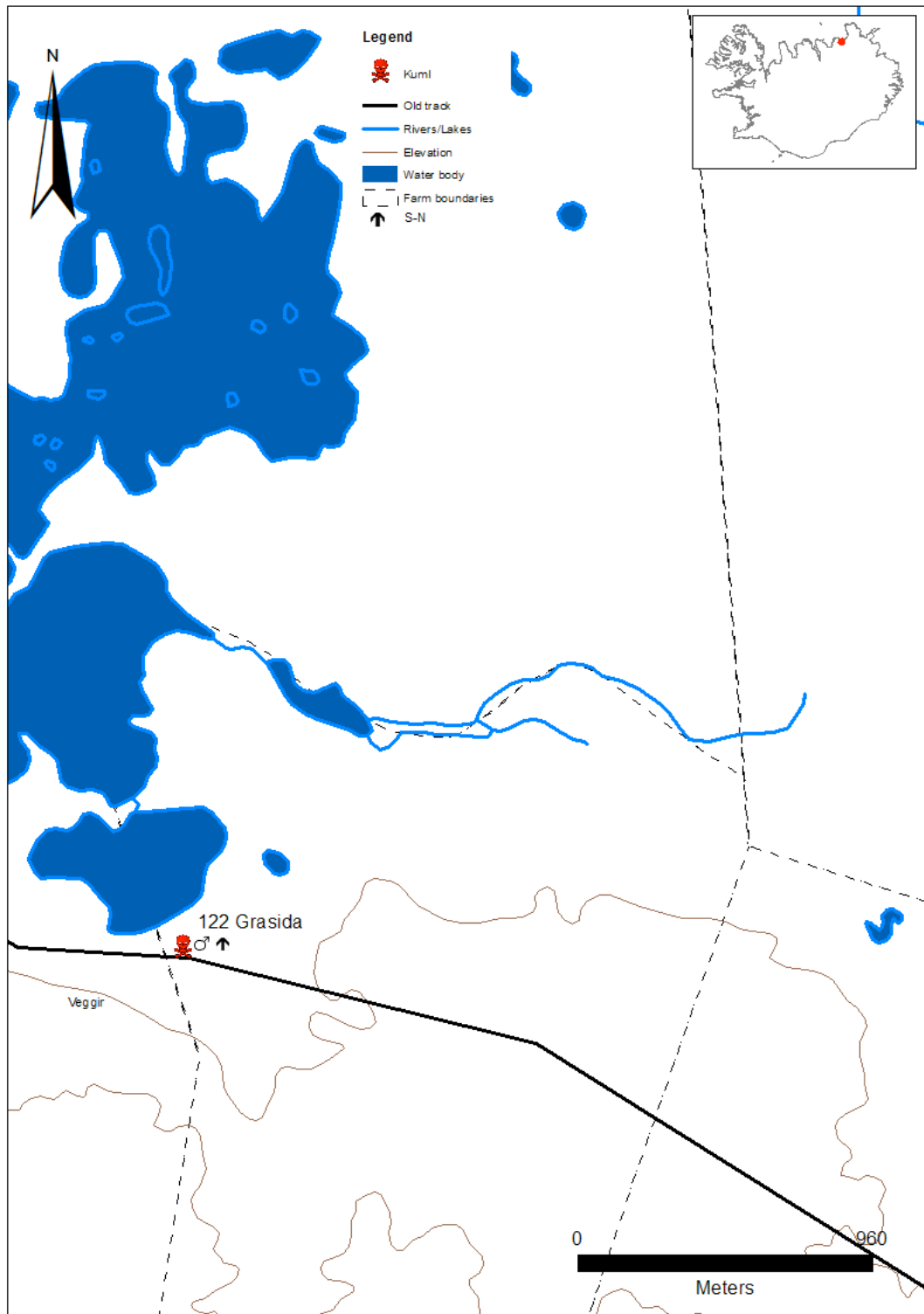
Position: supine, the head elevated, right arm placed on the chest, the left arm on the abdomen, left foot on top of the right

Location: c. 50m south of the SW corner of the home field

There were remains of wooden planking on each side of the grave.

Grave-goods: spearhead (probably Petersen type K 22) and a knife.

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1941.



This grave was facing the lake towards the sea and it was again placed near the old track but not facing or following it. Apparently there are farms associated with this burial, but I was not able to track them down.

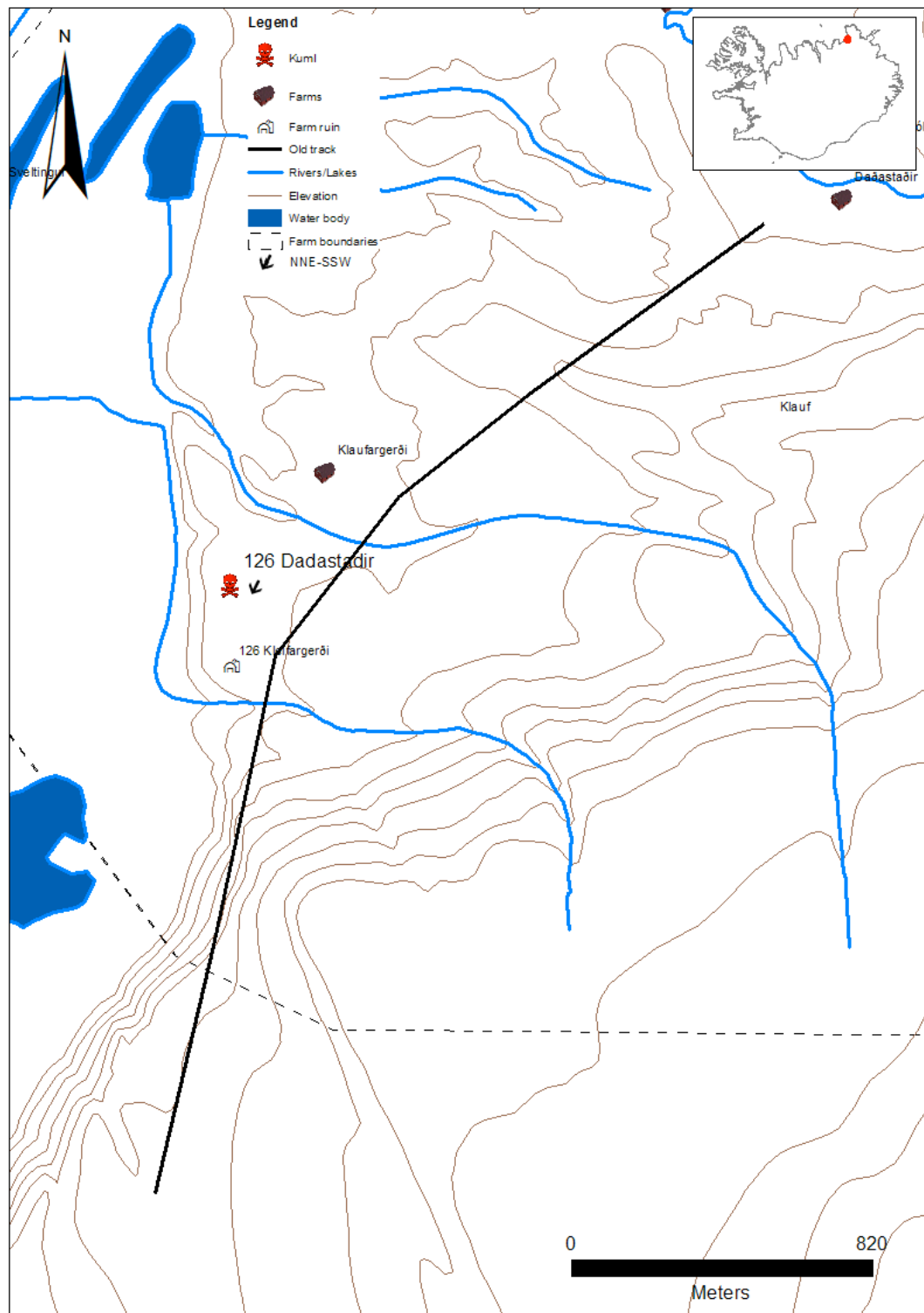
## 126. Daðastaðir

Grave 2: A human skeleton (aged 46+), orientated NNE-SSW

Grave-goods: 2 dog molars, 2 oval brooches (P 51b and 51d), trefoil brooch (P 97), 52 beads, ringed pin, twisted wire arm-ring of copper alloy, belt clasp, bone comb, iron shears, knife, 2 spindle-whorls, iron sickle (Petersen 1951, fig. 83), wool-combs, piece of flint, iron hook, strap-end, 5 iron fragments and a small copper alloy cylinder. Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1956

In addition, remains of a horse skeleton, human bones and a bridle-bit had been found at an earlier date on this site.





The burial was on a high cliff but not following the outline of the cliff. It was 1,382 kilometres away from the sea but the grave faced inland and downstream. The grave was placed near the old track and it might have followed it. There was a farm ruin near the grave but it is unknown if the grave has any association with it. Daðastaðir

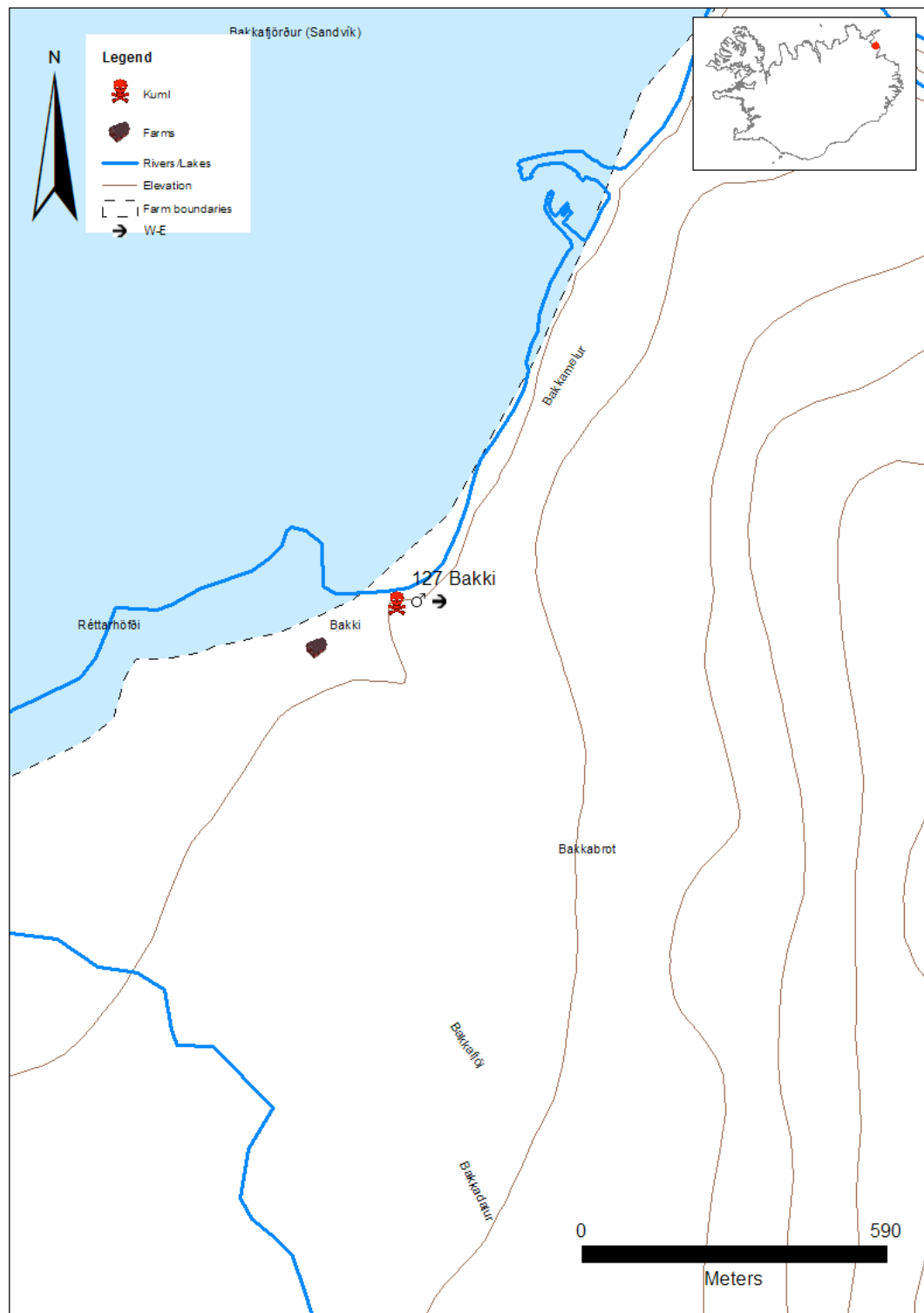
farm was located to the northeast of the burial and the grave was orientated looking away from this farm.

**127. Bakki**

A male (?) skeleton (aged 35-45), orientated W-E

Grave-good: knife

Grave discovered in 1936



The location of this grave is uncertain; there is no information if the burial was found on the seashore or further inland. Also there was only one grave good found, a knife. In any case, the grave looked away from the farm and it could possibly be a Christian burial.

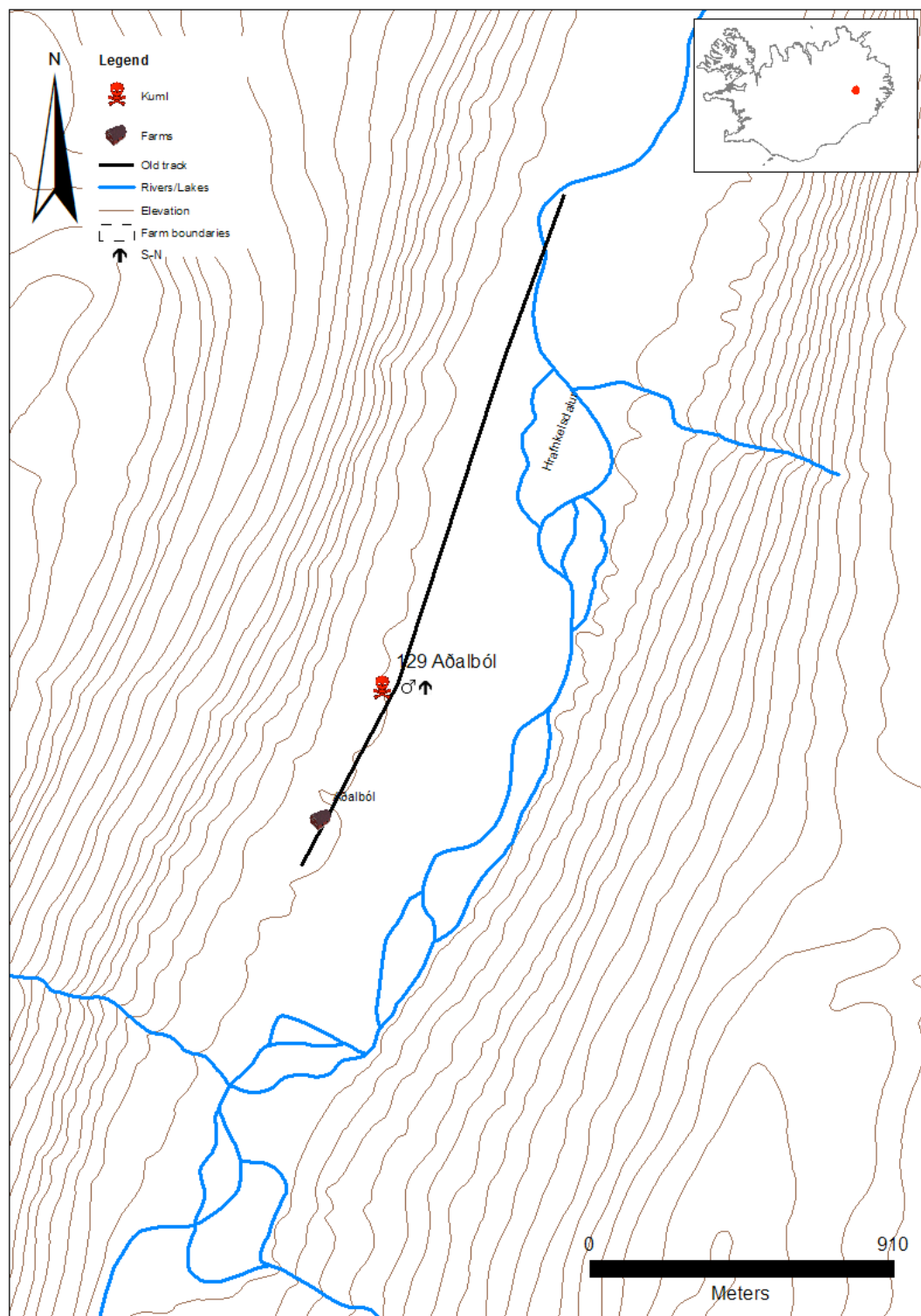
**129. Aðalból**

A male (?) (aged 36-45), and another individual (aged 36-45, sex unknown), orientated S-N

Location: c. 150m north of the farm

Remains of wood (birch) had been laid on top of the grave but there were no grave-goods except for patches of iron corrosion and verdigris in the soil.

Excavated by: Sigurður Vigfússon in 1890



This burial was located on a slope, the grave looked away from the farm and it was facing downstream. It seems the grave followed the old track, which was right beside it.

**130. Reykjasel**

A human skeleton orientated S-N

A horse was buried at the foot end.

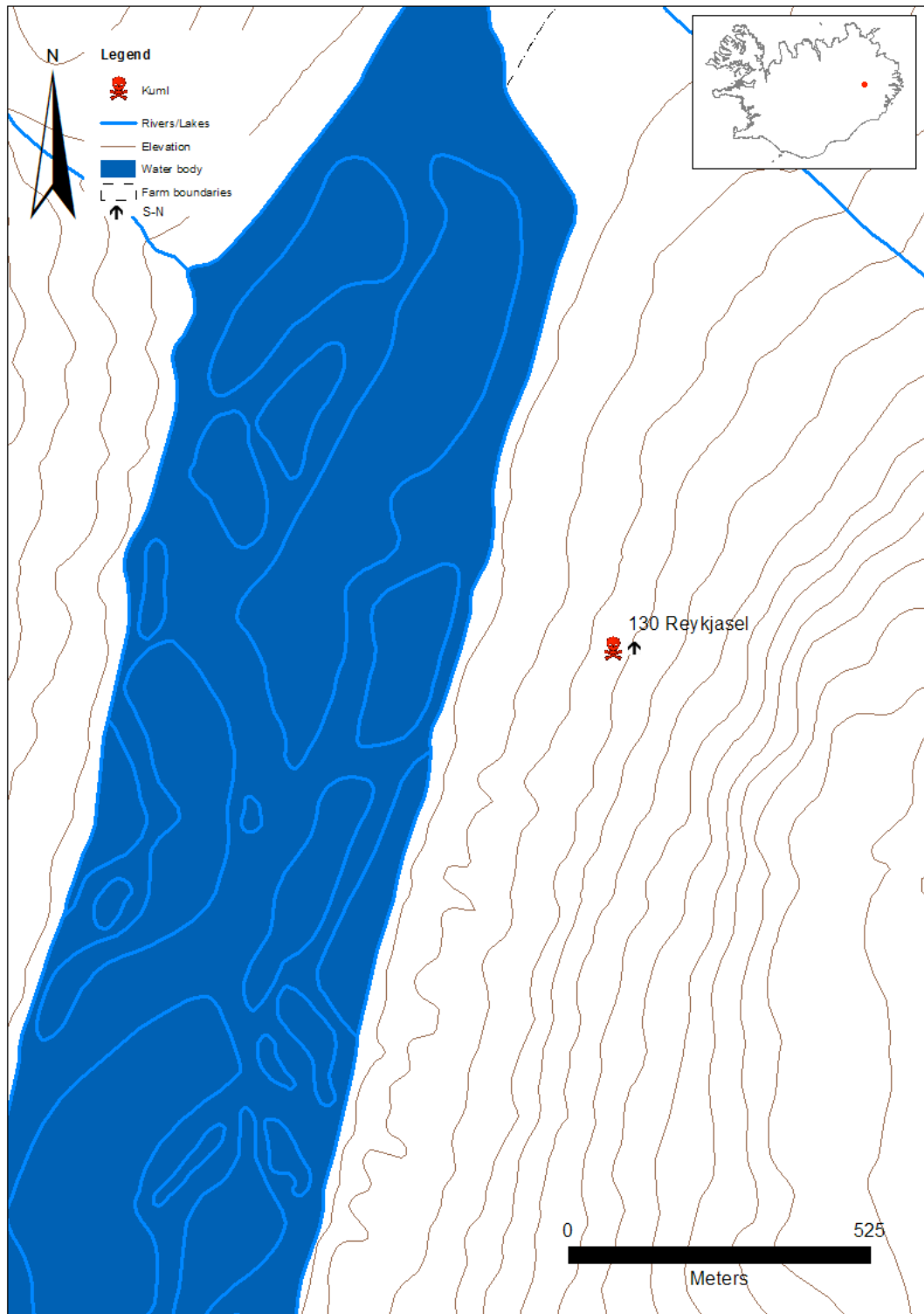
Location: on a small headland by the river Jökulsá.

Grave-goods: 35 beads, oval brooch, textile remains, buckle, iron fragments. In 1975

2 more beads were found as well as an iron fragment

Excavated by: Daniel Bruun in 1901

In addition another pagan grave was discovered in 1918 but no orientation was recorded.



This burial was placed on a slope in a valley. There are no farms associated with this burial or old tracks we know of, but the river was certainly visible from the gravesite and the burial faced downstream.

### 131. Hrólfsstaðir

A male skeleton (aged 36-45) orientated NE-SW

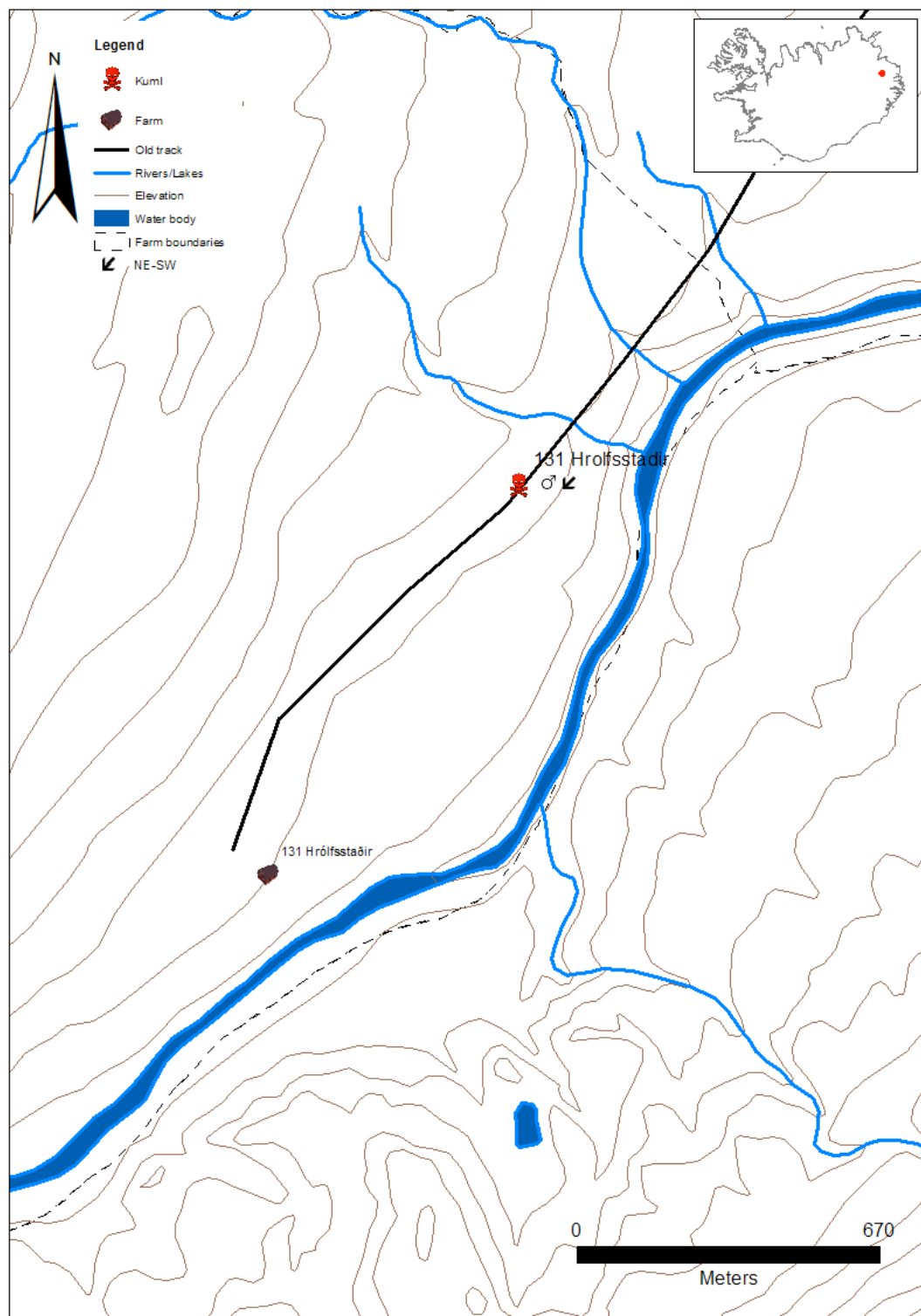
Grave measurement: 155 x 60cm

Grave type: there were stones in the burial, and remains of wood.

Grave-goods: comb, knife, pieces of charcoal.

Excavated by: Guðrún Kristinsdóttir in 1996.





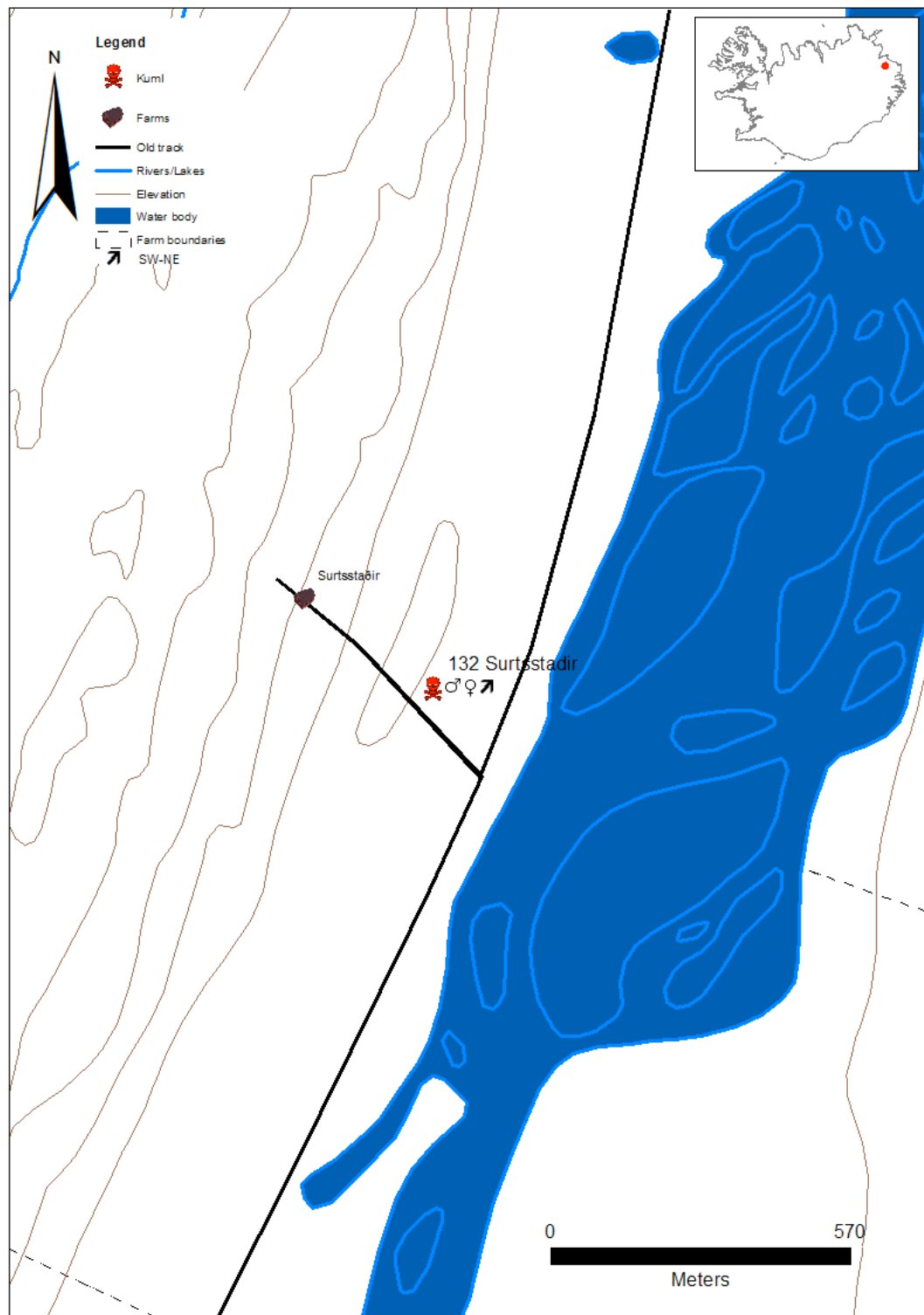
The burial was in a valley, on a slope. The grave was following the old track and pointing towards the farm, although the burial and the farm were on different sides of the track.

### 132. Surtstaðir

Two individuals: one middle-aged male and an adult female orientated SW-NE

Grave-goods: 10 complete beads and 4 bead fragments and a knife.

Excavated by: Jón Steffensen in 1949



The graves were looking away from the farm, facing downstream towards the sea and following the old track.

#### **134. Straumur**

Grave 1: A human skeleton (aged 7-12) orientated S-N

Position: lying on its right side, slightly flexed, left foot placed on top of the right foot

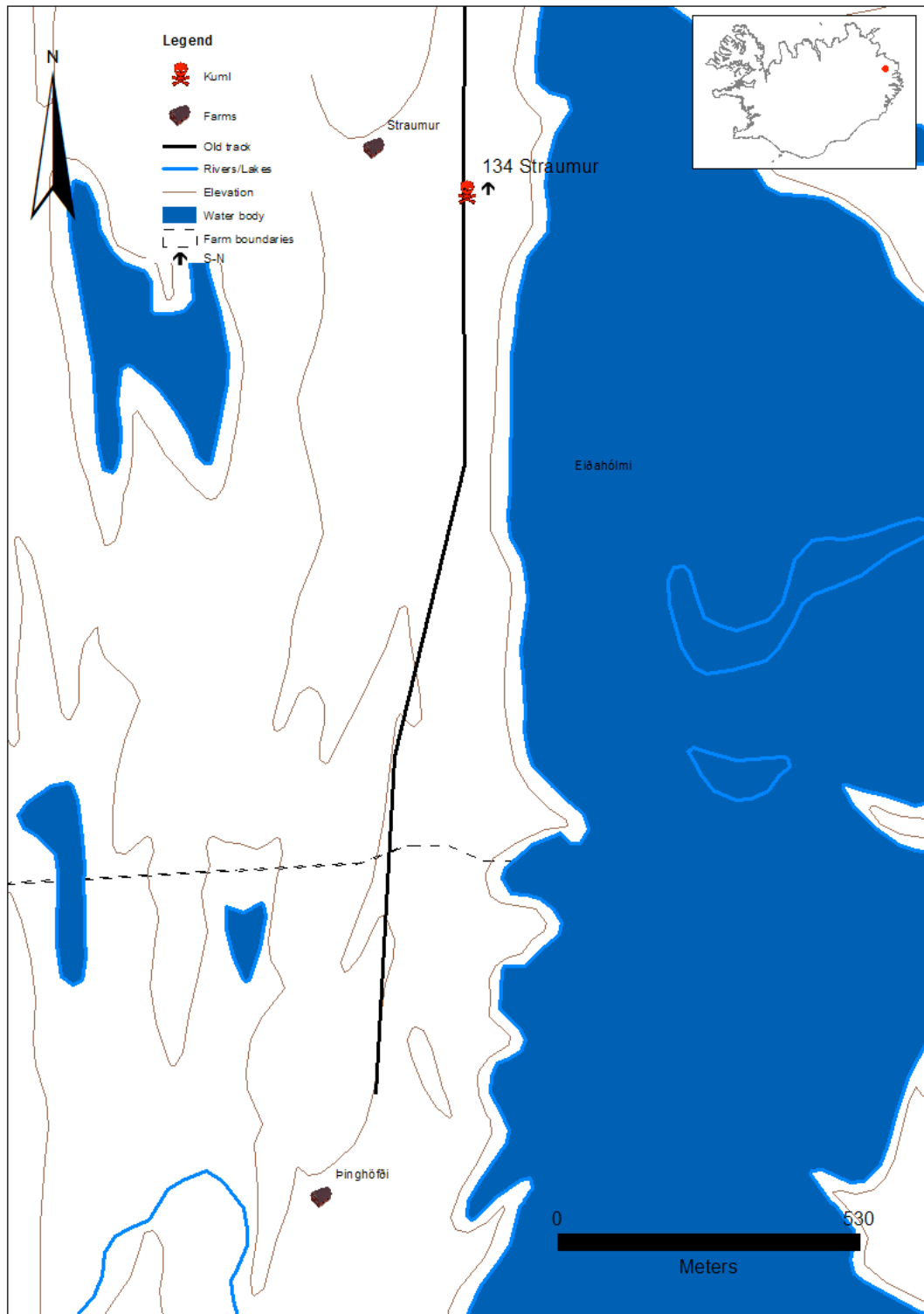
Grave measurement: 150 x 40cm

Grave type: remains of wood (possibly part of a boat).

Grave-goods: small axe (Petersen type K), c. 30 boat rivets, scale balance, 2 pebbles, knife.

Excavated by: Kristján Eldjárn in 1952

There were 3 other pagan graves in this cemetery but the orientation was not recorded.



The burial was orientated looking directly towards the Straumur farm. It was also following the old track and the riverbank and although the grave was not looking at the river, it was looking towards the sea.

### 136. Sturluflötur

A human skeleton orientated S-N

Grave measurement: 190cm long

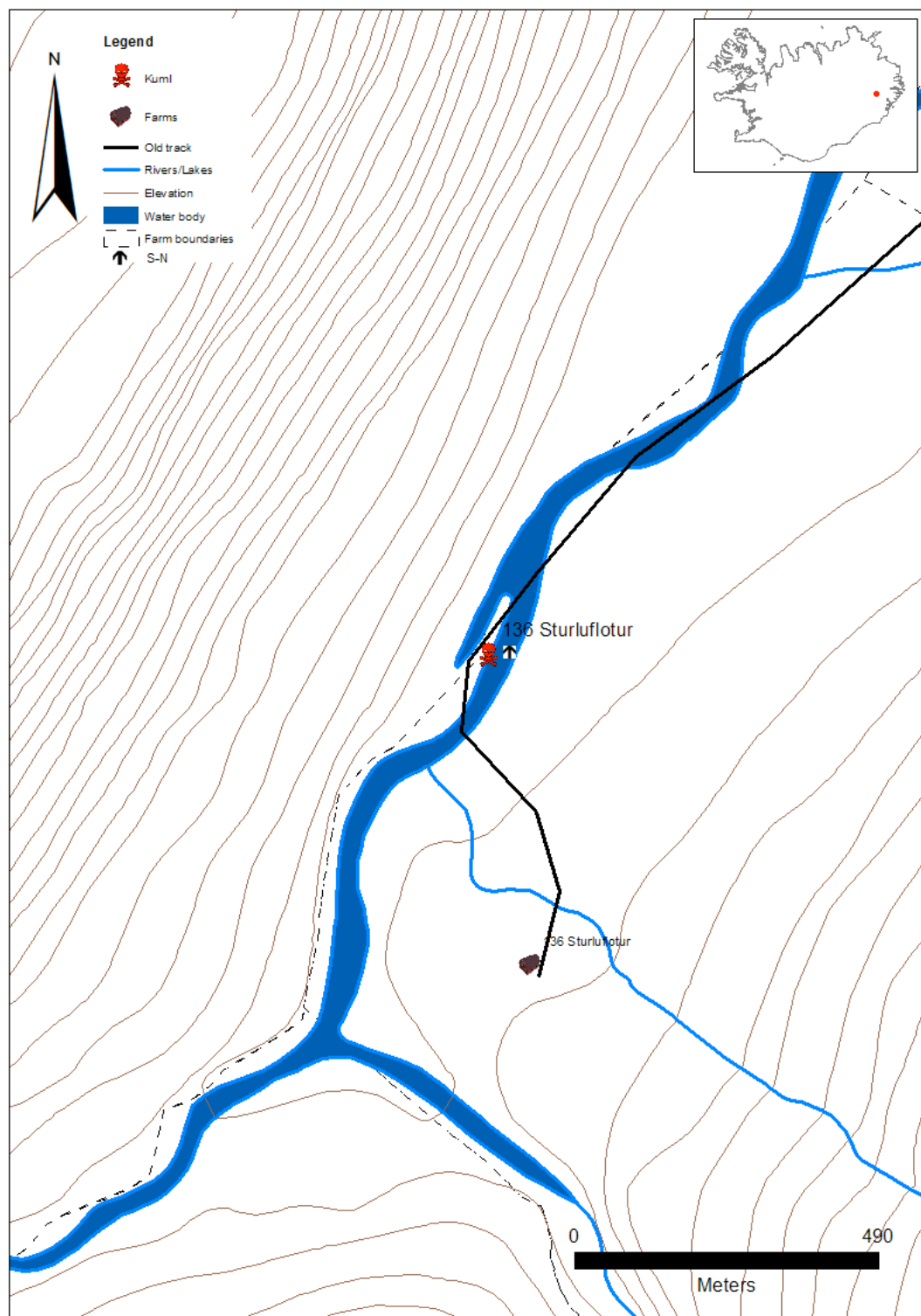
Grave type: covered with a pile of stones

Location: near the Kelduá River

Grave-goods: bead, knife, bridle-bit and iron fragments.

A horse grave, 4.7m long, at its northern end

Excavated by: Daniel Bruun in 1901



This burial was looking away from the farm, looking downstream, perhaps following the old track and the riverbank and looking at the opening of the valley.

#### 144. Eyrarteigur

A male skeleton orientated S-N

Position: supine flexed position

Grave measurement: 150 x 100cm, 40cm deep

Grave type: 50cm high mound

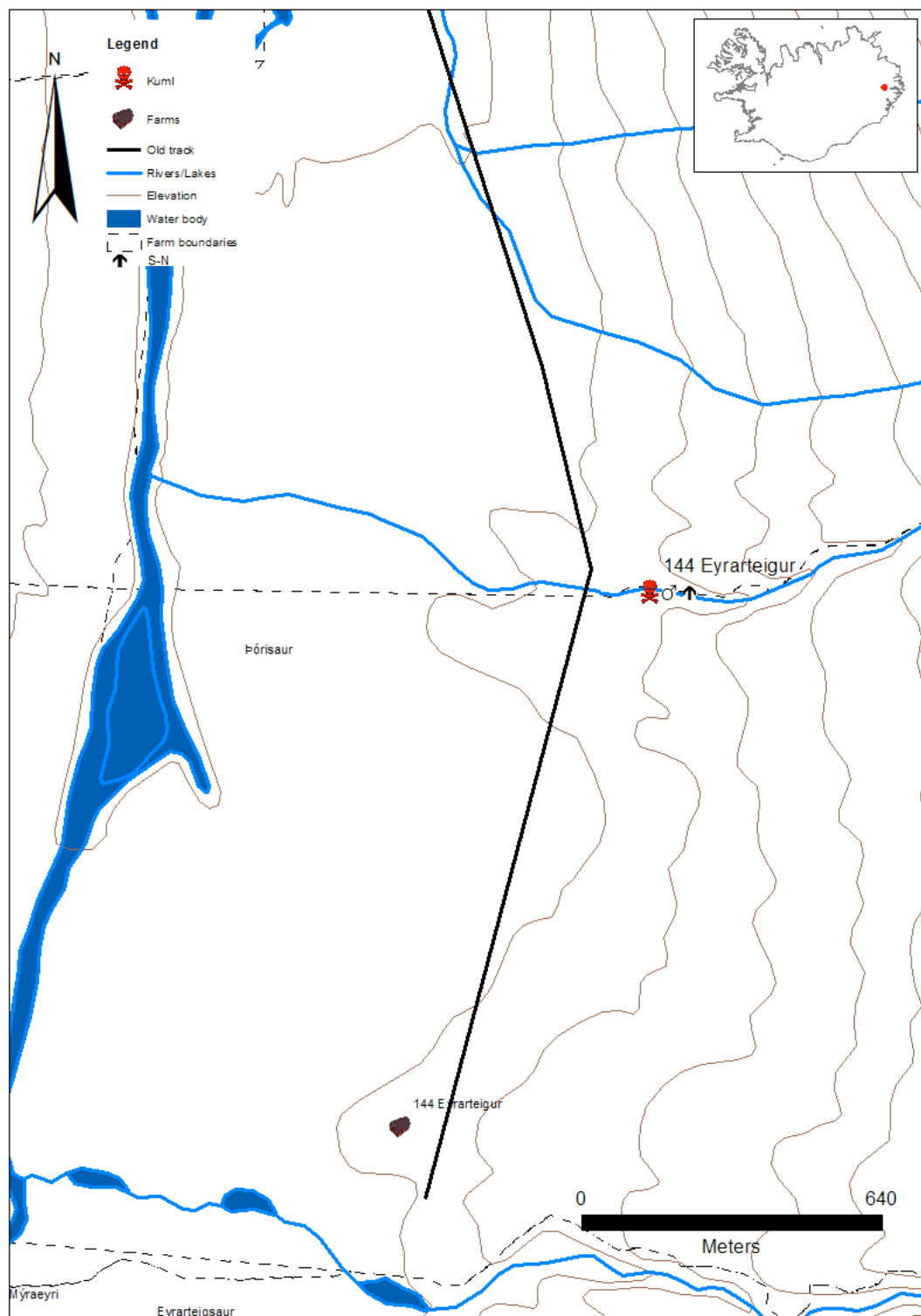
Grave-goods: sword, spear-head, remains of a second spear-head (or possibly an arrowhead), axe, 2 whetstones, ringed pin, belt buckle, strap end, coin (955-975 AD), bead, tin ring, 4 lead weights in a purse, piece of agate, soapstone vessel.

Some 40cm north of the grave, a horse skeleton was found in a grave measuring c.

100 x 100cm. Grave-goods: 2 buckles, 8 nails.

Excavated by: Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir in 1995

In addition a bridle-bit was found but it is now lost. The horse skeleton is dated between 935-1015 AD, according to a C-14 sample.



This grave was looking away from the farm and it was following the old track. The burial was located in a valley and it was looking towards the opening of the valley.

#### 145. Vað



Grave 1: A burial orientated S-N

Grave-goods: disc brooch with chains attached to it, thin sheet of copper alloy and buttons (now lost).

Grave 2: A male skeleton (aged 36-45) orientated S-N

Position: lying on his left side, the left arm straight, the right arm resting on his chest

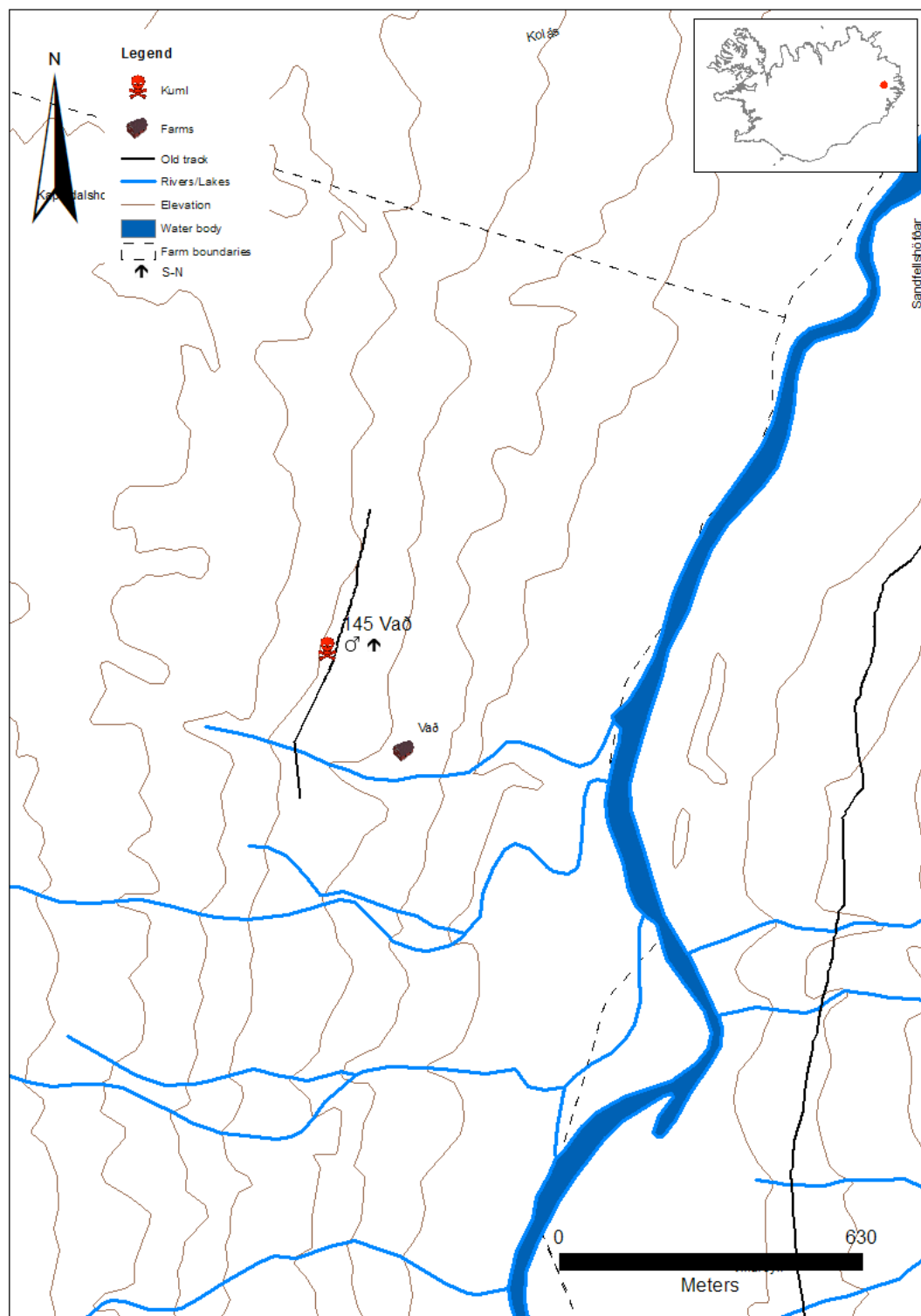
Grave measurement: 40-50cm deep

Grave type: body covered with 2 large stone slabs with boulders were placed on top.

Grave-goods: whetstone, dog bones, remains of wood, a nail.

Excavated by Guðrún Kristinsdóttir in 1986

This burial site was located outside the farmhouse.



The burial was looking away from the farm, following the little stretch (old track we know of), looking towards the opening of the valley and it was in line with the slope.

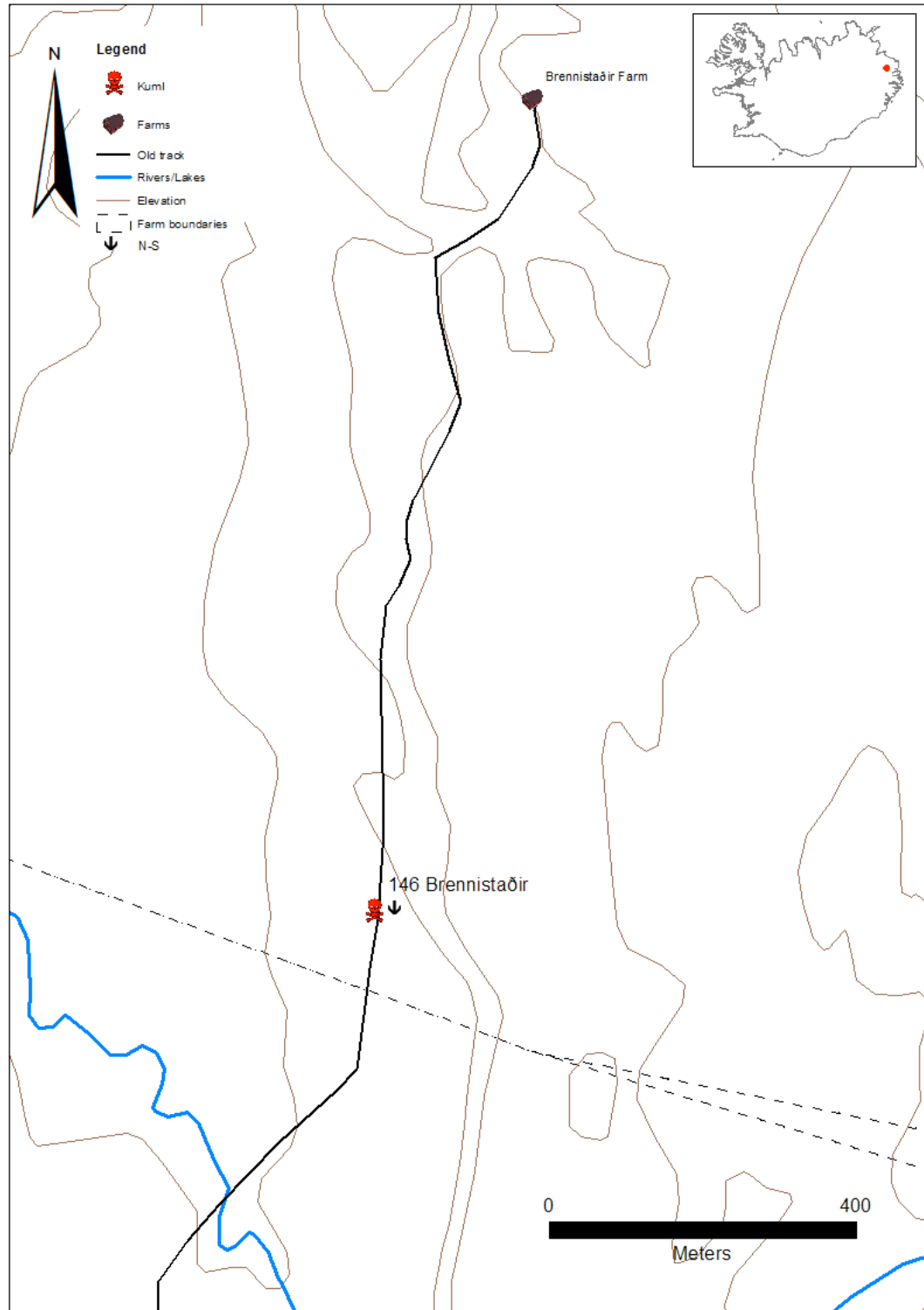
#### 146. Brennistaðir

A human skeleton orientated N-S

Grave type: covered by a small mound without stones

Grave-goods: remains of sword (Petersen type M), spearhead, iron buckle, knife, 2 beads, remains of wood.

Excavated by: Ólafía Einarsdóttir in 1950



Located on a large valley, this burial was looking away from the farm, following the old track, looking downstream and looking inland.

#### **147. Gilsárteigur**

Grave 1: A male skeleton (aged 18-25) orientated NW-SE

Grave-good: knife.

Grave 2: A male skeleton (aged 36-45) orientated NW-SE

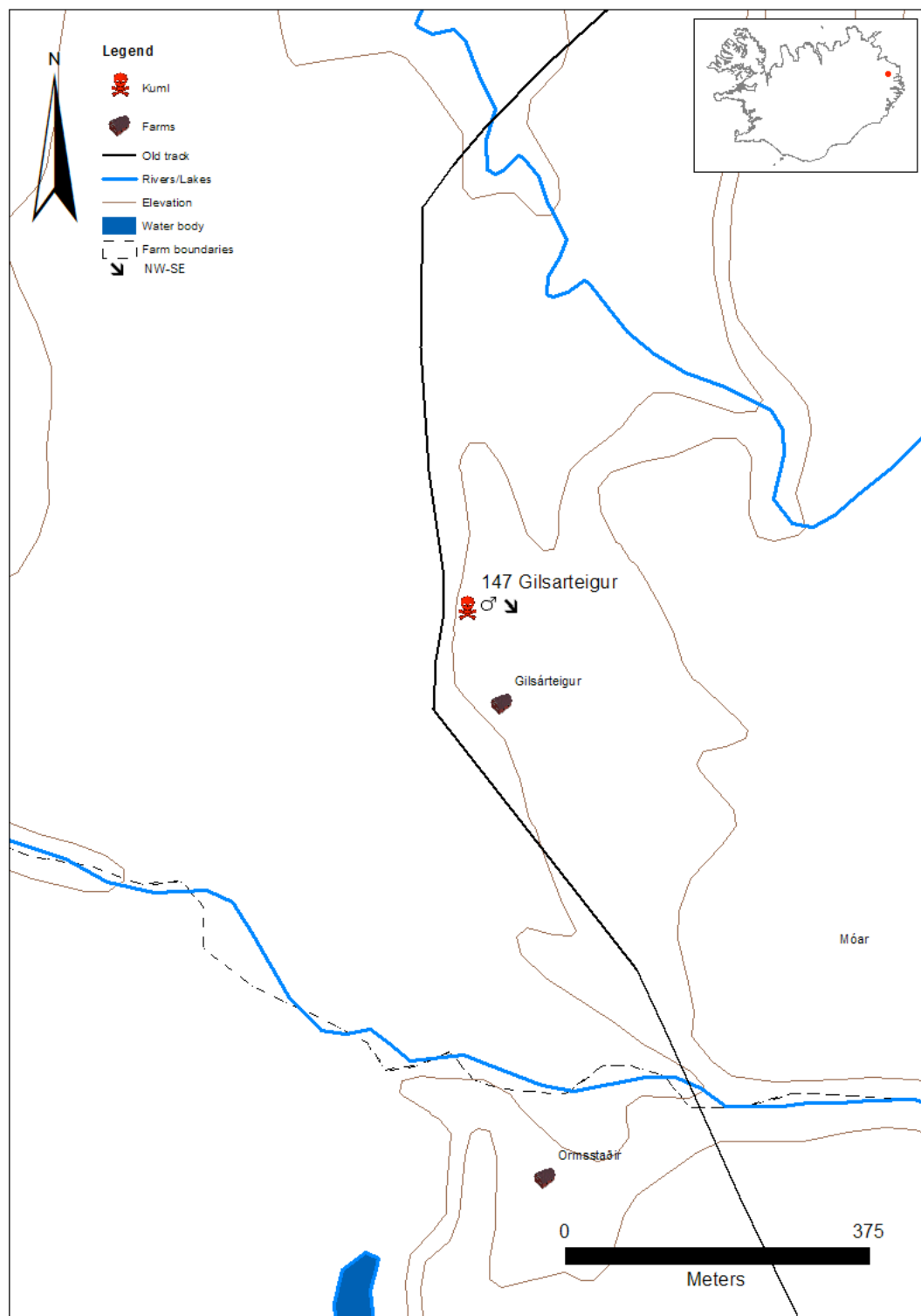
Position: lying on his left side

Location: on a hillock called Smiðjuhóll, some 100m north of the old farmstead

Grave type: remains of a wooden coffin, probably with a lid, 164 x 31cm.

Grave-goods: knife, charcoal, iron slag.

Excavated by: Jón Steffensen in 1957.



This grave was facing the farm, although looking slightly westwards. It was also facing inland, placed near the old track and the orientation may have followed it.

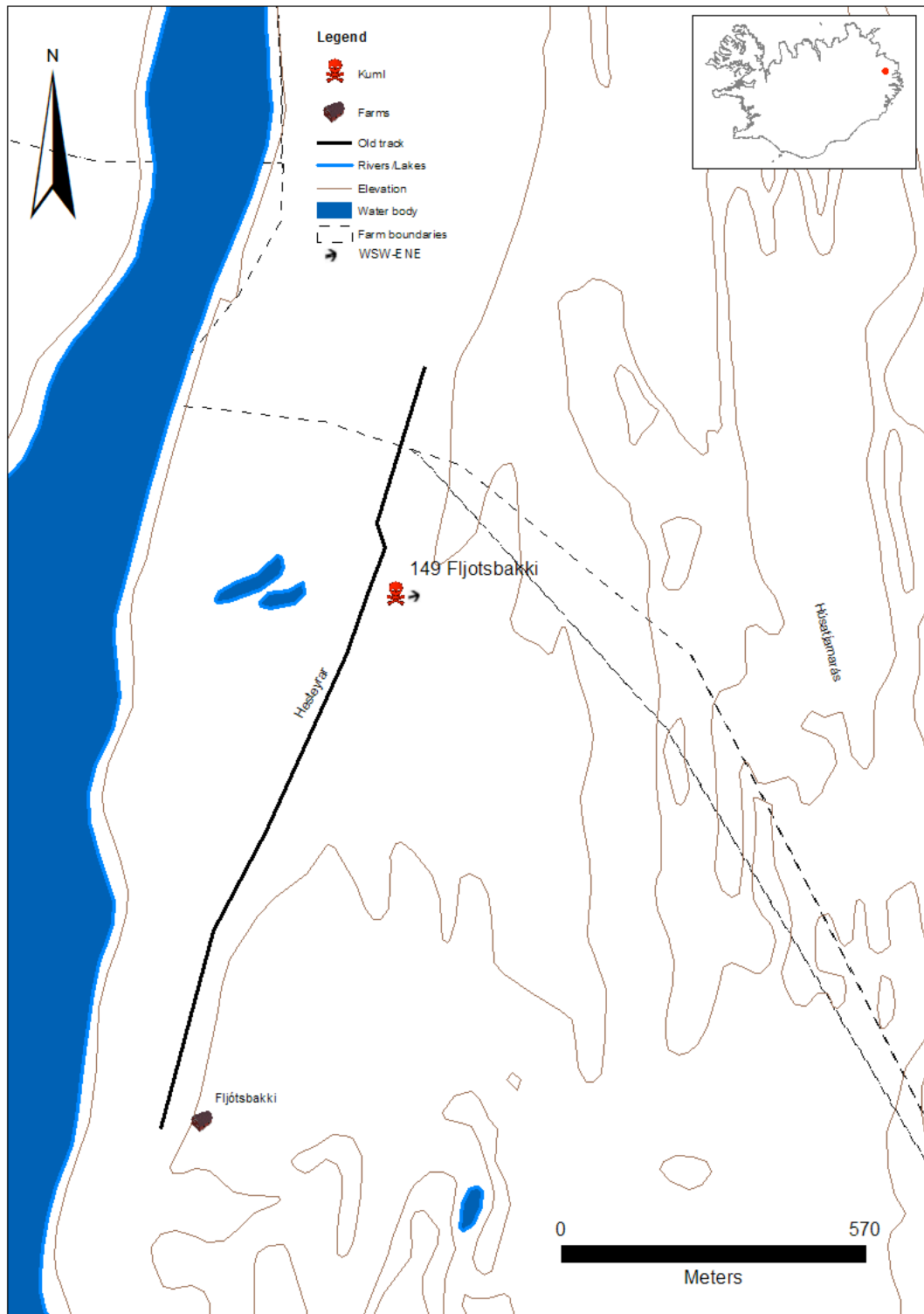
#### 149. Fljótsbakki

Grave 1: A human skeleton orientated WSW-ENE

Location: near Hesteyrarlækur stream.

Grave-goods: knife and 10 to 20 rivets (only 1 has survived).

Another grave was found containing human leg bones only.



The grave was looking away from the farm and was not following the old track. Also, it looked away from the river and was located on a rather flat area, facing the valley side.

### 151. Álaugarey

A female skeleton (aged 36-45) orientated E-W

Grave measurement: 35cm deep

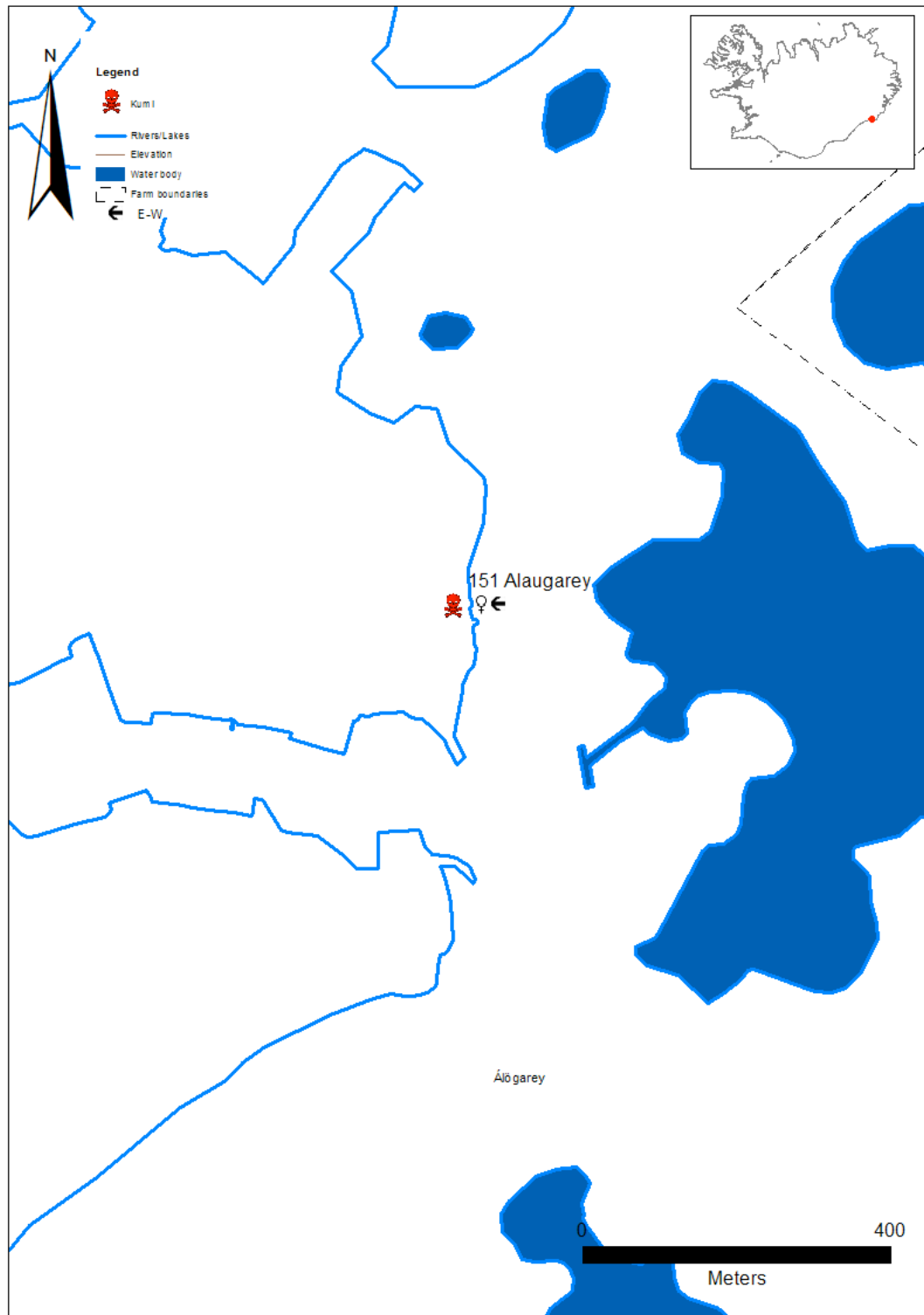
Grave type: a low mound

Location: northern tip of the isle

Grave-goods: iron spit, 2 oval brooches (P 51a), arm-ring made of jet or lignite, bone comb, pair of iron shears (Rygh 442 and 443), knife, iron ring, 2 iron fragments and textile remains.

Excavated by: Matthías Þórðarson in 1934





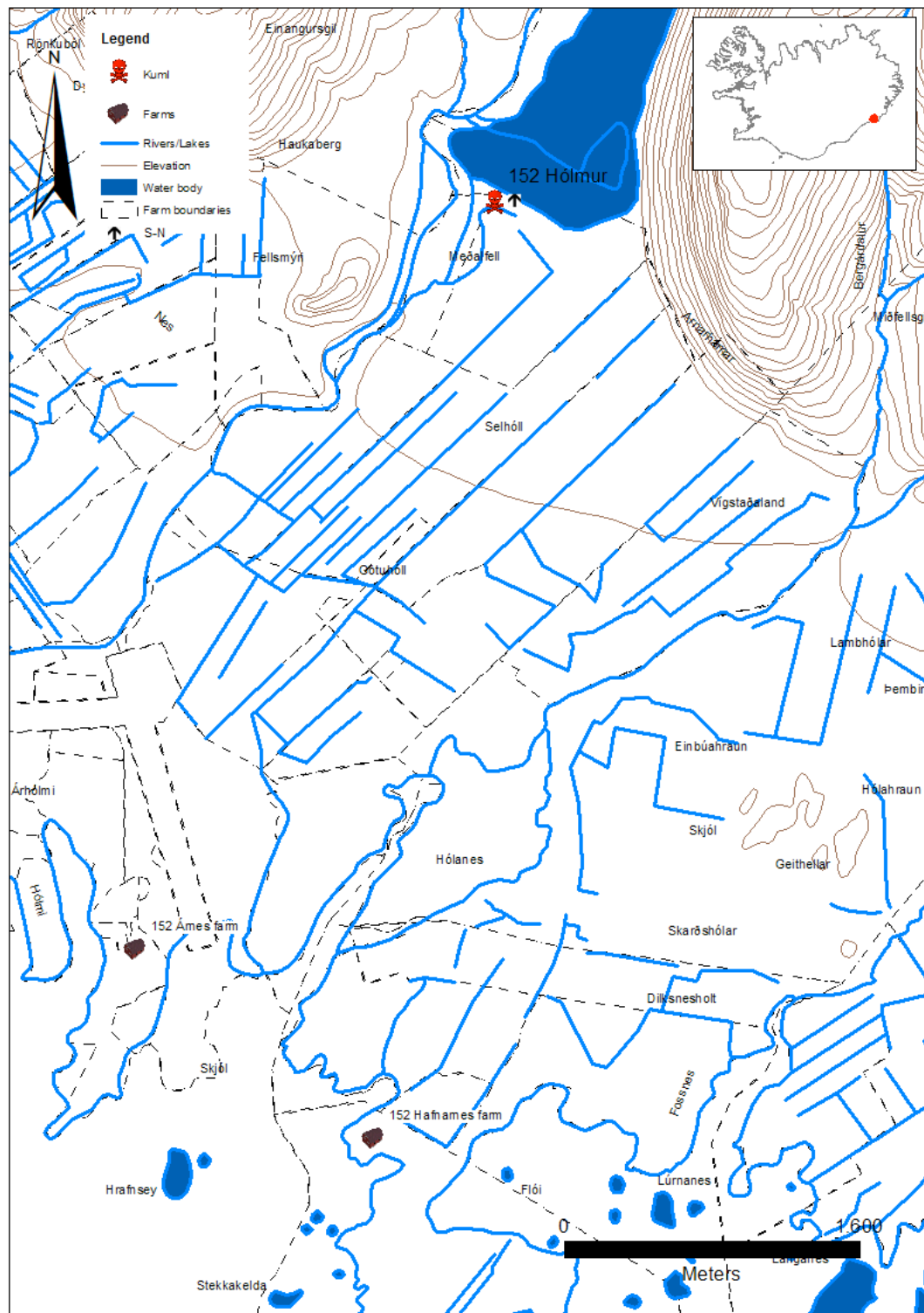
In the Viking Age this area used to be an island. We have no information about any farm or old track and the grave appeared to be facing away from the sea, looking rather inland.

## 152. Hólmur (Árnanes)

Remains of a human skeleton orientated S-N with a horse at the foot end.

Grave-goods: 3 whetstones, 3 beads, iron fragments. All the finds are thought to be lost. A layer of charcoal was observed beneath and around the bones.

Firstly excavated by amateurs in 1894, then re-excavated by Daniel Bruun in 1902.



This grave was not following the ridge, not looking at the interior of the valley and it had an opposite orientation in comparison to the valley, N-S. The grave looked away from the far away farms; Árnæs farm was 4,520 kilometres and Hafnæs farm was

5,135 kilometres away. Although the grave did not look downstream, it faced the river and there is no information about any old track.

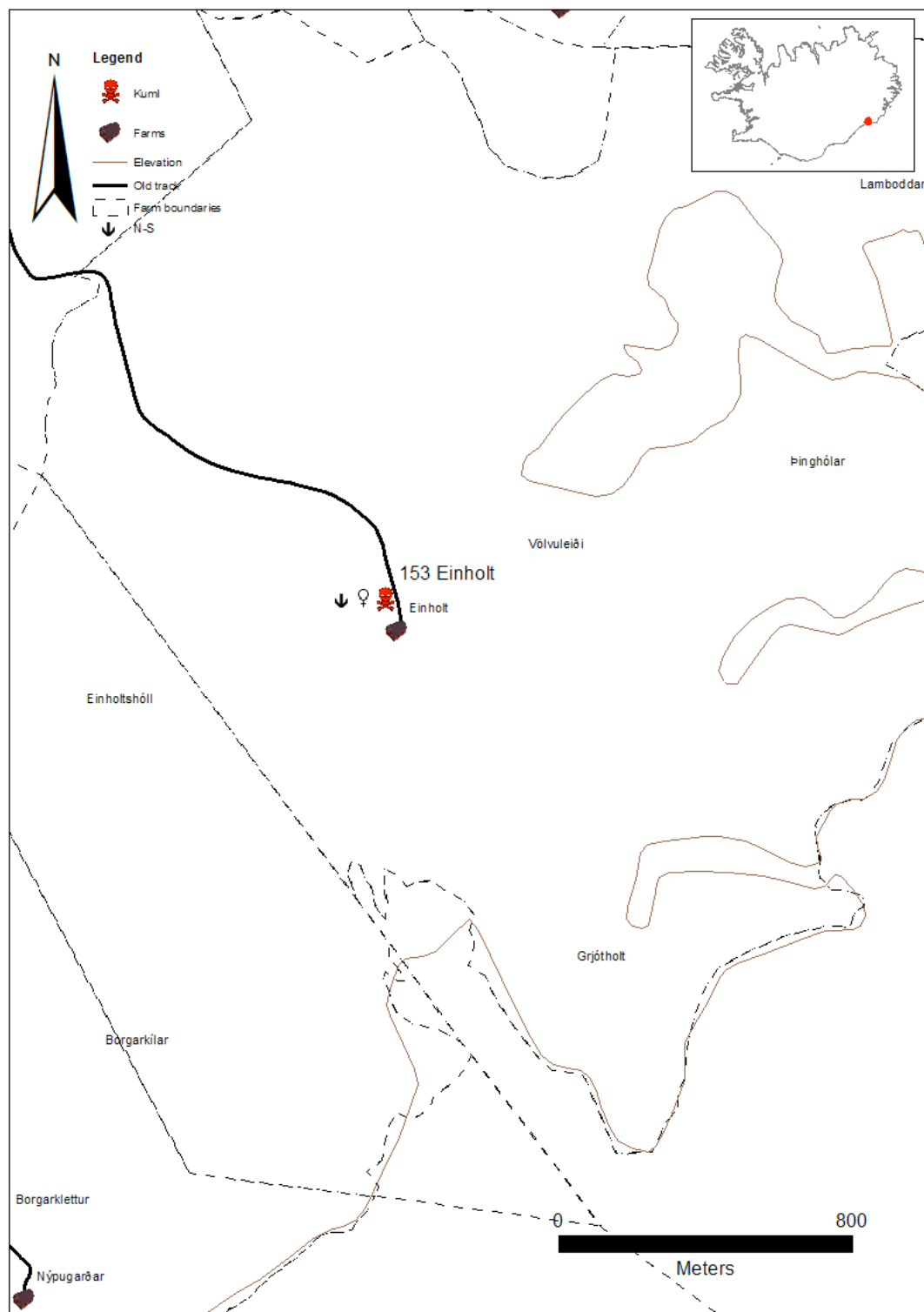
### **153. Einholt**

A female skeleton (aged 26-35) orientated N-S

Location: 90m north of the farmhouse

Grave-goods: iron nail and 1 bead.

Excavated by: Guðmundur Ólafsson and Gunnlaugur Haraldsson in 1979



This grave seemed to be looking directly at the farm and following the old track. This grave was looking towards the sea to the south.

### 155. Hrifunes

Grave 1: An oblong layer of small stones covered an oval shaped horse grave orientated WSW-ENE

Grave-goods: bridle-bit and a buckle.

A tephra layer covered the grave, dating to 934 ( $\pm 2$  yrs).

Grave 4: A horse skeleton in an oval shaped grave orientated N-S

Grave measurement: 220 x 110cm, 70-80cm deep.

Grave-goods: bridle-bit.

This grave is later than the Landnám tephra ( $872 \pm 2$ ), probably around 934 ( $\pm 2$ )

Grave 5: a human skeleton orientated NW-SE

Position: lying on its left side, arms and legs flexed

Grave measurement: 140 x 80cm, 90cm deep

Grave type: covered with a layer of stones

Location: about 40m SSW of grave 4

Grave-goods: knife, 11 beads.

This grave is later than the Landnám tephra, but was dug either during or immediately after the fallout of the E-1 tephra in 934 ( $\pm 2$ ).

In addition 2 other pagan graves were found but no head orientation was recorded.

This pagan cemetery was found on the banks of the Hólmsá River and was investigated in 1958, 1981 and 1982 by Kristján Eldjárn, Gísli Gestsson and Þór Magnússon.



This cemetery was located on the riverbank but since the Viking Age the landscape has changed a great deal. The graves looked away from the farm, looked downstream and there is no information about the old tracks.

### 157. Granagil

Grave 1 to 3: Remains of human skeletons orientated N-S

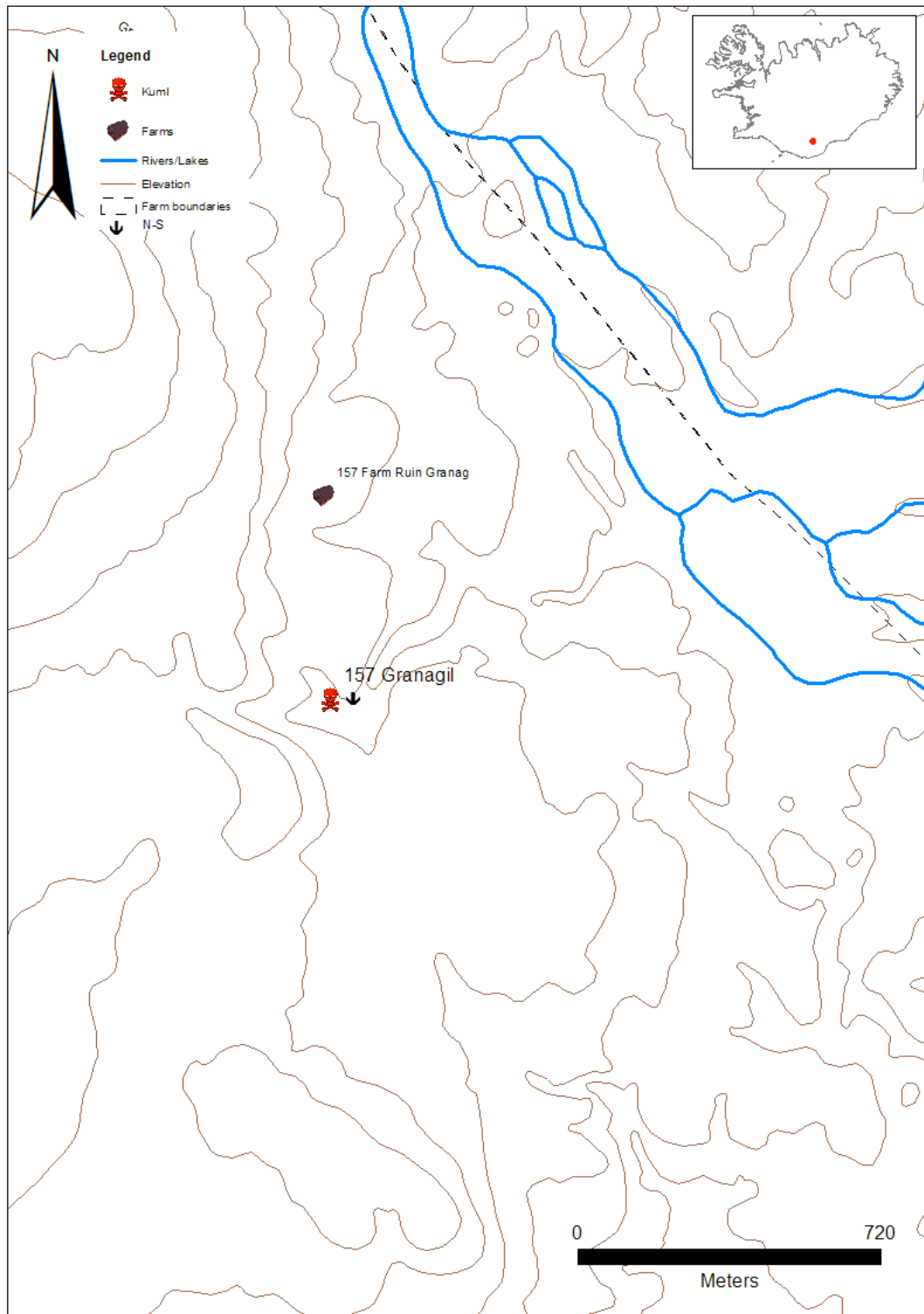
Grave measurement: c. 200 x 125cm each

Grave-goods (not known from which burial): bead, fragments of sword, whetstone, textile remains, 4 pendants (3 of the 4 are P 158 and 1 P 155), 3 beads, fragment of tongue-shaped brooch (or strap-end?), wooden shaft, sickle, knife, lead weight, iron fragments. Plus another grave was found.

This pagan burials site was located NE of the farm of Búland, all lined with stones.

This site has never been investigated.





This burial site was located far from river and even farther from the sea; the graves were looking away from Granagil farm ruin, although the association with this ruin is uncertain since in Kuml og haugfé this burial is associated with Búland farm. Also, there is no information available about the old track.

## 2.4 Results:

Overall, the most evident find is that the majority of the burial sites, containing one or more graves, appeared to be facing away from the farm. However, there were also quite a few sites where the burial looked towards the farm as well as sites where we cannot say for sure if the grave was orientated facing the farm. Furthermore, there was the case when it was not certain which farm was associated with the burial or even when there were no farms at all which can plausibly be associated with the grave.

Below are the gravesites that show these characteristics. In some sites there were graves that both faced and looked away from the farm therefore the site numbers were included in both categories.

### **Graves/sites not facing the farm:**

3,5,8,15,16,17,18,21,23,25,26,35,37,39,40,52,56,63,65,68,70,72,75,76,80,82,85,87,89,91,98,100,105,109,126,127,129,132,136,144,145,146,149,152,155.

Total=45

### **Graves/sites facing the farm:**

20,25,29,40,57,89,102,121,131,134,147,153

Total=12

### **Uncertain:**

1,6,47,73,74,79,89,99,117,122,130,151,157

Total=13

Based on this information, I looked for patterns in the larger groups - graves that faced or looked away from the farm. From the 12 burials *facing the farm*, I found that 4 have unreliable excavation records (site 20,25,29,102). Amongst the 8 graves facing the farm with reliable records, 5 of them have no grave-goods at all or only 1 object interred with the dead. That leaves us with 3 sites (Hrólfstaðir, Straumur and Gilsárteigur) that were facing the farm, that have reliable records and contained grave goods. In contrast, most burials that *did not face the farm* have reliable excavation records: out of 45 sites, 34 have genuine excavation records; in 6 burials sites there is no information about the excavation records (according to Kuml og haugfé) and 2

burials have location unknown, the sites of Kornsa and Bakki. Only 3 cemeteries, Háboer, Traðarholt and Gerðakot, have graves facing away from the farm and have unreliable excavation records. Nonetheless, the cemetery of Traðarholt has 1 grave that faces the farm but the rest looked away. The majority of burials that faced away from the farm contained grave goods: 39 of them, whereas only 8 graves did not contain grave goods at all. Thus this comparison may reinforce the idea that graves were orientated in a way to look away from the farm.

If doing a general evaluation regardless of the farm position to see if graves without grave-goods followed any pattern in orientation, the answer is that they did not. The graves were orientated in a variety of ways, just as burials with grave-goods.

In respect to the location of the burials, they were placed in a variety of settings, including: 14 sites that were situated on a slope; 12 were on a valley; 11 on a seashore and 5 on the riverbank (or 16 if they are put together); 15 on a hillock; 11 on a flat area; 4 on a fjord and 6 on a cliff. The table below shows the burials (with burial numbers according to K&H) and their location:

<b>Slope/rise</b>	<b>valley</b>	<b>seashore/river bank</b>	<b>hillock</b>	<b>flat area</b>	<b>fjord</b>	<b>cliff</b>
3	3	1	5	6	89	47
25	82	8	8	15	91	68
37	85	21	35	16	98	69
59	87	39	39	17	105	76
65	130	40	57	20		126
70	131	47	63	23		127
87	136	52	72	26		
102	144	56	73	40		
105	145	79	80	117		
129	146	89	99	149		
130	149	91	100	153		
131	152	100	109			
132		109	134			
145		127	147			
		151	157			

It also became evident that a great number of graves were aligned facing the water, whether it was the sea or the river, either downstream or upstream. There were 40 burial sites in total that were orientated facing the water or looking down/upstream. There were 31 sites that were aligned following the old track and 25 sites that faced inland. The table below reveals the grave-sites (burial and grave numbers according to K&H) with these characteristics:

<b>Following old track</b>	<b>Facing Inland</b>	<b>Facing water/down(&amp;up)stream</b>
5	6	1
8	20	3
17	23	5
21	26	15
35	37	16
47	39:2	17
56	40:2:3	18
65	47	21
70	52	25
74	57	29
75	67	35
80	68	39:1
82	74	40:1
85	79	63
87	89:1:8	73
91	117	75
102	121	80
105	126	82
109	127	85
121	131	89:2:3:5:12
126	144	91
129	146	98:1
131	147	99
132	151	100

Following Old Track	Facing Inland	Facing water/down(&up)stream
134	157	102
136		105
144		109
145		121
146		122
147		126
153		129
		130
		132
		134
		136
		146
		147
		152
		153
		155

Overall this analysis indicates that the preferred place to insert the dead was on a hill and also on a slope, perhaps suggesting that higher positions in the landscape were seen as a prominent place to bury the dead. But also, there was a great preference for graves to be inserted near water, either by the seashore or near river-banks, and whether the graves were in a valley, they tended to face down or upstream, orientated facing the water.

## 2.5 Conclusion:

Mapping all burial sites with an orientation has been an interesting but also a lengthy job. This was a very good experience because the maps have contradicted my previous assumptions. As the sex, age or the wealth of the deceased did not follow any pattern that could point to the choice of an orientation, it was thought that some natural feature surrounding the burial determined the orientation of a grave, as Brøgger and Eldjárn had suggested. However, as this study developed, it appeared

that the grave orientation was not the heart of the matter, but rather the orientation of the body. Thus, the most prominent find was that the preferred method of burying the dead was to look away from the farm. In the Viking Age, people believed in the afterlife and that the deceased within the grave, could become "animated with a strange life and power" (Ellis-Davidson, 1968:96). So one possibility perhaps may be that it was thought that the dead could come back to haunt the living, and by confusing them, by turning their vision away from the farm from which they came, they were made less likely to come and harass the living. However, there could be many other hypotheses why the deceased was buried facing away from the dwelling of the living, but this can only be determined through much more detailed research. It also appeared that when the burials were in a valley or a river-bank they tended to face downstream. In addition it has also become clear that there was an order in cemeteries and that there was not an imperative ideology that dictated the orientation of the burial, as Eldjárn had suggested.

The orientation of pagan Icelandic burials is a perplexing subject and there is still much to be explored. If this study has not answered all the questions regarding a choice in orientation, it has at least made a start.

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**Internet Resources:**

Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemeteries:

<http://www.eng-h.gov.uk/mpp/mcd/sub/inhum3.htm>

Churchyards, cemeteries, orientation and other burial customs:

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/etc/fcod/fcod11.htm>

ESRI (ArcGis):

[www.esri.com](http://www.esri.com)

Google Earth:

[http://www.google.co.uk/intl/en\\_uk/earth/](http://www.google.co.uk/intl/en_uk/earth/)

Landmælingar Íslands:

<http://lmi.is>

Nytjaland:

<http://www.nytjaland.is/landbunadur/wgrala.nsf/key2/nytjaland.html>

RALA, now called Landbúnaðarháskóli Íslands:

<http://www.lbhi.is/>

<http://groa.rala.is/Kortavefsja/default.aspx>

Zonums:

[www.zonums.com/onlinekml2shp.php](http://www.zonums.com/onlinekml2shp.php)