

A large, weathered rock with red ochre petroglyphs in a forest setting. The rock is the central focus, with various symbols including circles, lines, and abstract shapes. The background is a dense forest with green foliage.

PREHISTORIC WALK NEAR TOWN

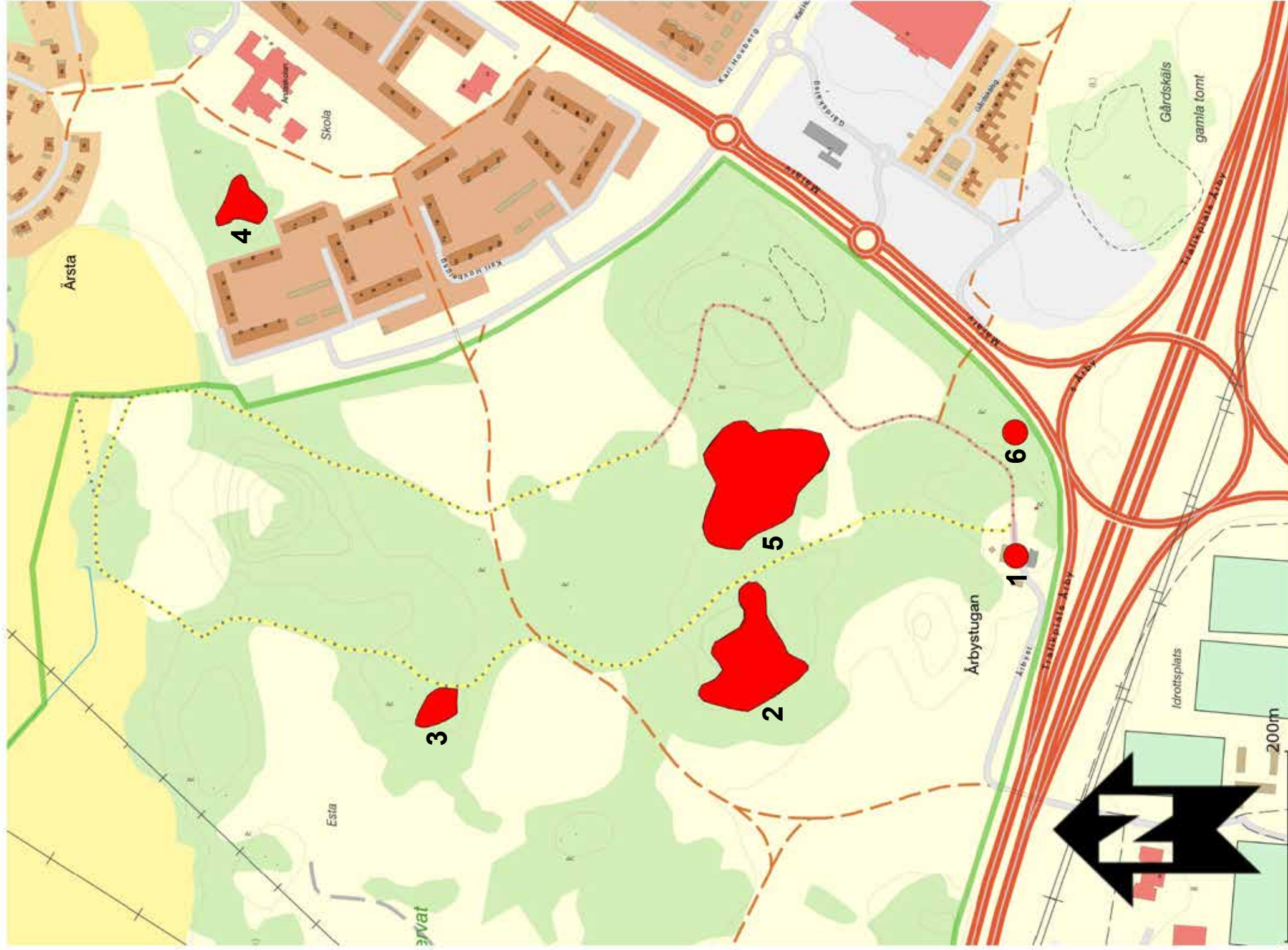
Eskilstuna

Årby

—

AROUND 3.5 KM

Sites 1 – 6, areas with prehistoric or historic remains



SITE 1

Årby

Next to the motorway, behind some shrubs, lies Årby farmstead. Records of the Årby locality exist since the 14th century, and it was a farm until the middle of the 20th century.

Activities on a farm included sowing, harvesting, threshing, slaughter, berry-picking, growing vegetables and fruits, hunting and fishing, felling trees, chopping wood, milking cows and making cheese, looking after cattle, cutting hay, fetching water, making tools, maintaining the farm's buildings and implements, shearing sheep, spinning, growing and preparing flax, weaving, sewing etc.

Since the Bronze Age at least (almost 4 000 years ago) farmers in Sweden used ards, a type of light plough, to loosen the soil before sowing. In the Viking Age farmers began using a heavier plough that also turned the soil, but this type of plough spread very slowly in the country. It was only towards the end of the 19th century that it became a common tool in Swedish agriculture.



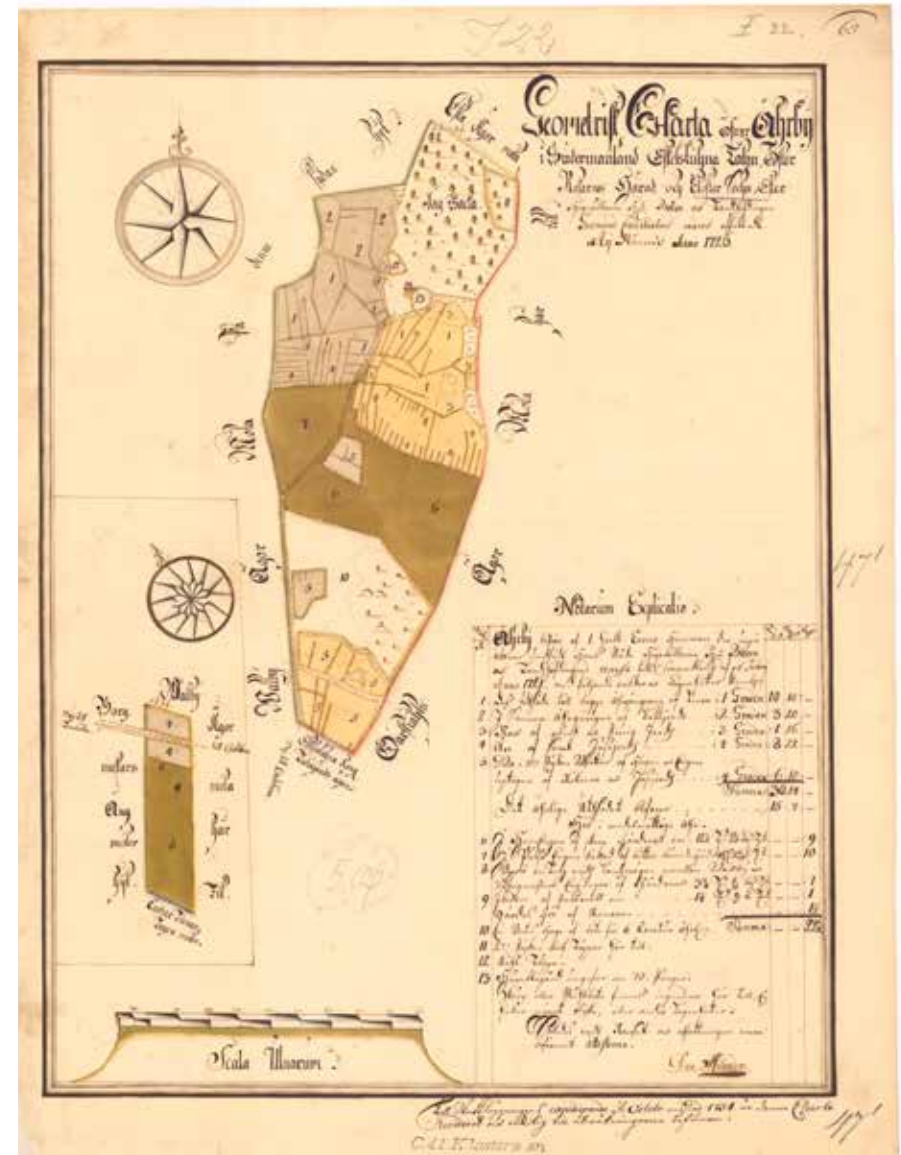
Rock carving with a farmer from the Bronze Age.

IMAGE: VÄRLDENS BILDER



A farmer i Egypt around 3 200 BP.

IMAGE: ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Historical map of Årby from 1726.

IMAGE: LANTMÄTERIET

SITE 2

Årby forest

In Eskilstuna municipality there are around 2 500 known preserved graves and burial sites from the Iron Age. The forest by Årby and Skiftinge is a nature preservation area and has six known burial sites and 21 singel graves. There are probably many more graves hidden beneath the turf. It can be assumed many have been destroyed over the years by agricultural activities, gravel extraction and plundering.

The graves in Årby forest are between 2 500 and 1 000 years old, and of different types. The photograph below shows a stone setting with a boulder in the middle, which may be about 2 500 years old. The photographs on the right show graves with standing lump and a square stone setting, both of which may be around 2 000 years old.



Square stone setting some 2 000 years old.



Stone setting on the crest of the hill.



Graves marked by lump stones.

SITE 3

Graves

Stone settings were a common type of grave during the Iron Age. Stone settings are often difficult to identify in the terrain today, but you can just make them out as larger or smaller patches of raised ground. Often graves will look like the one in the photograph when archaeologists have carefully removed all the soil and grass that has covered them over time.

During the Iron Age the most common way of preparing the dead for burial was to cremate them. Often the bones would then be collected and placed in an urn. The dead would also often be accompanied by burial gifts. These might be food in a ceramic pot, meat or fish, but also personal objects such as a comb, a pair of tweezers or a razor, a neck ring, beads or other jewellery.

The last part of the Iron Age is known as the Viking Age. In the early 10th century an Arabic emissary, Ahmad Ibn Fadlan, described how on one of his journeys he had seen the burial of a Viking chieftain. The dead Viking was burned on a ship (which had been pulled up on land) along with fine burial gifts, and a burial mound was then built on top of the grave.

Common finds in graves of Viking Age men include neck rings of iron with Thor's hammer pendants. Women might be buried with glass beads of different colours. The beads were often imported from the Middle East.



A grave at an archaeological site in Nyköping

PHOTO: JONAS WIKBORG, SOCIETAS ARCHAEOLOGICA UPSALIENSIS



Fragments of a Viking Age comb made of bone or antler.

PHOTO: CAMILLA EKBLOM, STIFTELSEN KULTURMILJÖVÅRD



A Thor's hammer neck ring from the Viking Age.

PHOTO: HISTORISKA MUSEET



Beads from the Viking Age.

PHOTO: LINDA WÄHLANDER

SITE 4

Settlements and food

The people who were buried in Årby forest had almost certainly lived nearby. During the Iron Age people mainly lived out of farming and breeding animals. Archaeologists have found bones of domestic animals such as pigs, sheep, goats, cattle, horses and hens in Iron Age settlements. But people also fished and hunted, and gathered honey, seeds and plants in nature.

By analysing sherds of pottery, researchers have found traces of what people ate during the Iron Age. We therefore know that people in Sweden during the Viking Age grew peas and beans as well as various cereals. But wild plants and seeds such as we rarely eat today were also used.

At several sites archaeologists have found carbonized bread, which shows that people baked bread from barley and other seeds, which they ground and sometimes mixed with blood.

Hearths and cooking pits were used to cook food. In the later Iron Age, pots made of iron began to be used for cooking food.



The sea level was higher 2 000 years ago. Årby was then on the edge of a bay.



Hand mill for crushing and grinding seeds and plants.

PHOTO: SKANSEN

SITE 5

Viking expeditions

Towards the end of the Iron Age, during the Viking Age, it appears that the population grew. This may have been because people had access to more fertile land to cultivate as the sea level dropped. Methods for cultivating the soil also improved.

The Viking expeditions or raids are well known. Probably it was those without any land to inherit who set out on such journeys. The most important aim of the journeys was to trade goods, but the Vikings are also known for plundering villages and monasteries.

The Vikings travelled in light wooden sailboats that they could also row. They travelled west to Britain as well as east to “Miklagård” (Constantinople, today Istanbul in Turkey). They brought furs, honey and slaves that they traded for silver and glass beads to bring back home.



A Viking Age silver hoard.

PHOTO: GABRIEL HILDEBRAND, KUNGLIGA MYNTKABINETTET

SITE 6

Runes

By the old road from Årby towards Gårdskäl and Skiftinge stands an old rune stone which is a little over 1 000 years old. It is one of the about 400 rune stones in Södermanland. These were often raised along the roads of those days, so that many people would see them. Most historians believe that runes were developed from the Romans' Latin alphabet.

The oldest runic inscriptions in Sweden are around 1 800 years old, and are fairly unusual. Back then runes were probably seen as magical symbols. Runes became more common later in the Iron Age, when they often told of Vikings who had died on their journeys in other countries, but also of good deeds that Christian Vikings had done at home. In the latter case the runes often tells about someone who built a road, or a bridge across marshland, so that people would be able to get to church.



The rune stone in Arby.



The later (Viking Age) runic alphabet, or futhark, with 16 characters.

IMAGE: RIKSANTIKVARIEÄMBETET

Reflections

1. What might everyday life in the Medieval times have been like on Årby and the other farms around Eskilstuna?
2. Why did more and more people, from the Medieval times on, choose to live in towns and cities rather than off what the soil could provide?
3. Who gets to be buried? And who doesn't get to be buried?
4. What does it signify to lay burial gifts alongside the dead in the grave?
5. Why were some people buried with rich burial gifts while other graves have none at all?
6. What does it suggest when archaeologists find coins from the Byzantine Empire, the Islamic Caliphate and other places in Viking Age graves?
7. What does it signify when people began writing characters and letters?

Where are there heritage sites?

You can use the Swedish National Heritage Board's search function "Fornsök" to get information about all known and registered prehistoric remains and other heritage sites in Sweden, on land and in the water. The register is updated regularly, www.fornsok.se

**All ancient remains and heritage sites in Sweden
are protected under the Heritage Conservation Act.**

This means that it is illegal to alter or ruin an ancient remain or a heritage site, for example by digging on it. The reason why ancient remains and heritage sites are protected is so that everyone will have access to the story that each one of them tells, now and in the future.



LÄNSSTYRELSEN
Södermanlands län

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