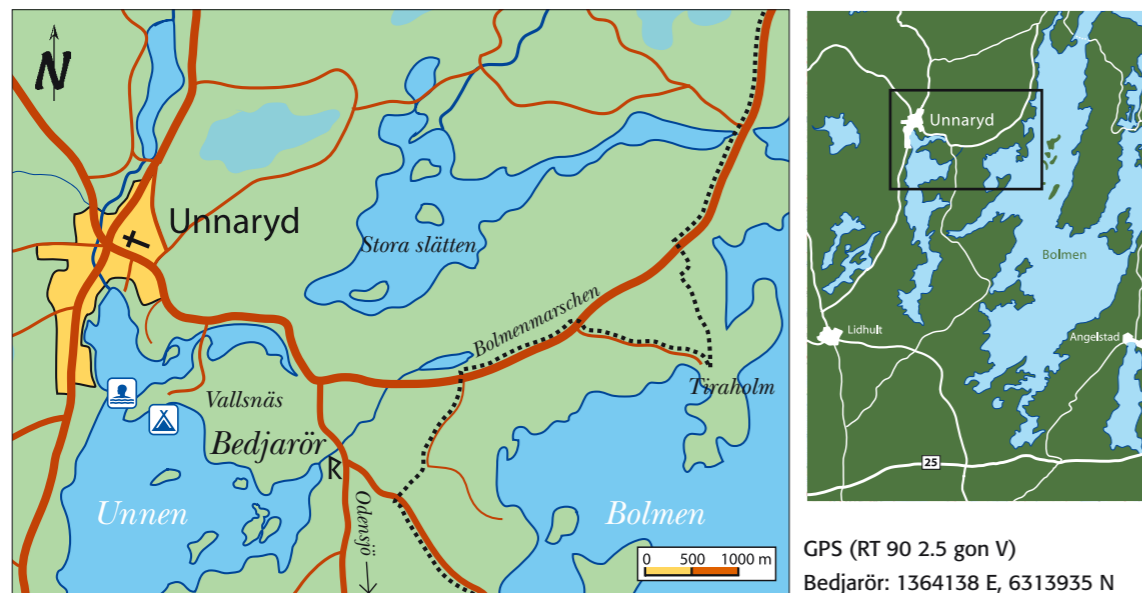




IN THE WAKE OF EBBE SKAMMELSON



GPS (RT 90 2.5 gon V)
Bedjarör: 1364138 E, 6313935 N



2000 years of history

Bedjarör is a place that deserves a visit. The cemetery is about 1,700 years old! People were buried here for generations while the nearby farms have continued to be managed, generation after generation. The Bolmen area is the only area in Sweden where the Iron-Age cromlechs can be studied.

The space by the large cairn is an ideal place for a picnic. It is beautiful and the lush leafy trees nearby offer shade in the summer. Every visitor will feel the tranquillity of Bedjarör and sense the atmosphere of ancient history. Stay for a while and imagine the past.

Other interesting places nearby:

Vallsnäs and Tiraholm.

How to get there?

Bedjarör is located along the road between Unnaryd and Odensjö, about 5 km from Unnaryd. There is a road sign indicating a place of interest. It is possible to come by boat on Lake Unnen too, as Bedjarör is located just a few hundred metres from the lake shore.



"And in South Säfsås Forest there is a large pile of stones (called Bedja Rör) and many large rocks dug into the ground and erected. At this strange place, some of those living now say that they have heard from the voices of their ancestors - that this was once, at the time of heathendom, a cult place of worship."

Translation of a story told by Anders Johansson and others in 1844. Published by Knut Samuelsson in the Yearbook of Unnaryd – Jälluntofta Local Society for Cultural Heritage 1972.

Illustration on cover: Bedjarör. Photo: Karin Tengnäs. **Main sources of information:** The County Administrative Board of Halland; Lennart Carlie, Landsantikvarien, Halmstad; About the farming system: "Det svenska jordbrukets historia. Jordbrukets första femtusen år" by Stig Welinder, Ellen Anne Pedersen and Mats Widgren. Natur och kultur/LTs förlag. **Research:** Malin Ekwall and Bo Tengnäs. **Text:** Karin Tengnäs. **Photo:** Bo and Karin Tengnäs. **Illustration of the iron age environment:** Willy Lindström. **Logotype:** Lars Lidman. **Design:** Tecknargården/Willy Lindström. **Production:** Naturbruk AB/Bo Tengnäs. **Project coordination:** Bitte Rosén Nilsson, Hylte kommun. **Copyright:** Naturbruk AB. **Year:** 2006.

The brochures "In the Wake of Ebbe Skammelson" are available on www.unnaryd.com and www.hylte.se

A fascinating ancient relic



The Iron Age. In the Nordic countries the division into different historical periods differs from that of the Mediterranean countries. In the Nordic countries the Iron Age commenced about 500 B.C. and lasted until about 1050 A.D.

The moraine soil was perhaps not ideal for farming but was at least cultivable. The yields were low so large areas were required. The fields were not yet completely permanent. Birch was one of the effective colonisers of fallow land as it produces plenty of seed and thrives in open areas. As the fields remained temporary there were no clear boundaries between the intensively cultivated areas near the settlement and more distant areas. Such divisions emerged later in the Swedish landscape. Most likely, there was also no clear division of land between different owners. Each person or group probably had access to as much land as he or they could manage.

Tools

The manufacture of iron brought new tools into use. Long-shafted scythes with 35–40 cm long blades were used and so were rakes, threshing devices and wooden ploughs.

Buildings

People lived in so-called “long-houses” during the Iron Age. There was probably a long-house, built with poles, near Bedjarör. Such houses were often 20–25 metres long. Livestock was kept outdoor most of the year, perhaps even year round. Hay as well as human food supplies was kept dry under the roof. It is quite possible that a number of such long-houses have existed sequentially at different spots. Still, in other parts of the world, it is a common practice to move settlements within a designated area from time to time. One advantage with such a system is that the fertility that accumulates under and near the building becomes available for farming while, after the transfer, fertility builds up at a new spot.

Bedjarör is a cemetery from the Iron Age. There is a unique collection of graves within a relatively small area. The favourable conditions around the large Lakes Unnen and Bolmen made the region attractive for settlement. Houses were built. Livelihoods were based on fisheries, farming and rearing of livestock. Farms could remain in the same area for hundreds of years. For a long time, Bedjarör was the graveyard for people from a settlement nearby. The cemetery originates from the 3rd and 4th centuries AD.

There are scattered remains of Stone Age settlements in the area west of Bolmen.

However, there are very few indications of human activity here during the Bronze Age and the earliest part of the Iron Age. It is only from the 3rd century that there are various remains indicating settlements. The indications of human activity are again scarce from the 5th century to the Viking Age starting in the 9th century. Put simply it seems that these areas were temporarily more intensively colonised during the third and fourth centuries followed by a period of about 500 years when there were few permanently settled people, if any at all. It was during the Viking Age that people moved in again.



The large cairn

The cemetery covers an area of about 55 metres by 40 metres. A large cairn is at the centre. It is about 15 metres in diameter and 1.6 metres high with a shallow depression in the middle. It is this cairn that is specifically known as Bedjarör. Perhaps this is the funerary monument for a more prominent person from the area.

Other ancient remains

It has been estimated that there are about 75 ancient sites within this area. In addition to the large cairn, there are several square as well as small round cairns, stone circles and Iron Age cromlechs. There are also erected stones.

Stone circles

Each stone circle consists of between four and nine stones that were originally erected in a circle. Many of these stones have now tipped over. A stone circle usually contains one or several cremations. In Sweden this kind of monument is known as a “judge’s circle”. That name indicates the popular belief that these circles were once the place for the local court. There is, however, no scientific proof that verifies that belief.

Iron Age cromlechs – only in the Bolmen area

The Iron Age cromlech consisted of a rock-lined, square depression with one side open. A large flat rock was placed on top of the other three, resulting in a coffin-like structure with an opening on the southern side. Many of the large, flat rocks in the grave-field are, most likely, remnants of cromlechs which have been damaged over the years. Most cromlechs now consist of one or two erected stones. The Iron Age cromlech is a very special form of grave. In Sweden it is only found in the area around Lake Bolmen and in the catchment area of the Lagan River. Bedjarör is one of the most westerly locations of this kind of grave and it is one of the Iron Age cemeteries with the largest number of this kind of cromlech. It is therefore a unique spot.

What did the area look like in the third and fourth century?

The forests

The rich forests of the Bronze Age with oak and lime trees had during the Iron Age by and large been succeeded by

vegetation dominated by birch, hazel and other light-demanding species. During the first centuries AD such forests were found all over the highland area of southern Sweden. The occurrence of light-loving trees was partly attributed to the fact that much land was used for farming, as meadows or as grazing land.

The agricultural landscape

There are many areas in the forested southern Sweden where clearance cairns made as people cleared the stony ground, show that the land was cultivated long ago.

