

# SKAGAFJÖRÐUR CHURCH AND SETTLEMENT SURVEY

## Næfurstaðir on Hegranes: TP2 Excavation Report 2018



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*Picture on front page – Grace Bello and Grace Cesario excavate the extended portion of TP2 on 18 July 2018*



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**2020**

## Acknowledgements

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We are also grateful to the field crew who participated in both years of excavation. In the summer of 2016, Kathryn Catlin directed a team including Lauren Welch O'Connor and Nicholas Zeitlin in the excavation of the original 1x1. The 2018 crew, directed by Grace Cesario, included Grace Bello, Melissa Ritchey, Tyler Perkins, and Nicholas Zeitlin.

The project was dependent on a number of permissions.

- Minjastofnun Íslands (The Cultural Heritage Agency of Iceland) granted permission for the excavation. Project number: **201606-0051**
- And Þjóðminjasafn Íslands (The National Museum of Iceland) granted the site number used for finds: **Þjms-2018-49**

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## Introduction

A 1x1 test pit at Næfurstaðir (site 442-4), TP1, was excavated in 2016 by Kathryn Catlin, Lauren O'Connor, and Nicholas Zeitlin (Catlin et al. 2017). This excavation was placed near a visible ruined structure and coring showed that there were at least two tephra layers present—the white AD 1104 and the grey-ish AD ~950 (see Catlin et al. 2017:17 for more information and site background).

In 2018, another test pit was opened at Næfurstaðir in order to collect more archaeofaunal and macrobotanical samples (Cesario 2018). Kathryn Catlin and Grace Cesario cored around all sides of TP1 in order to determine which direction the new pit should be placed. Based on the presence of thick midden layers and tephra, the 2018 excavation was placed north and west of TP1, making the original 1x1 the southeast unit of the new pit. Originally, TP2 was opened as a 2x2 excavation, however, after reaching the sterile subsoil, Cesario decided to expand an extra 1x2 to the west in order to ensure a large faunal sample for her dissertation. The total size of the 2018 excavation, including TP1, was 3x2m.

## Sampling strategy

### *Floats*

All float samples came from the NE unit in order to remain consistent with the sampling strategy of the larger project. The SCASS protocol usually only calls for excavation of a 1x1 unit in order to answer questions about settlement date, so samples for flotation come from a 1x1.

Where possible, we took two seven-liter bags for flotation. We did not take any macrobotanical samples from the 1x2m extension in 2018.

### *Bones*

Contexts were sieved through 4mm mesh and bones collected from the screen. In cases where the soil was too sticky or the day too wet to identify bone from rock and other debris in the field, as much soil as possible was sieved off and the rest poured into a bag to be wet screened later. Wet screening used the same 4mm mesh screen in order to keep sampling consistent.

Bones from the extension were given different sample numbers, though the contexts matched up with the rest of TP2.

### Excavation

TP2 was measured, placed, and opened by Melissa Ritchey, Grace Bello, Grace Cesario, and Kathryn Catlin on 12 July 2018. Further excavation crew included Nicholas Zeitlin and Tyler Perkins. The 1x2m extension was opened 17 July and the entire excavation closed on 18 July 2018.

Contexts from the 2018 excavation were numbered sequentially, following the last number from TP1 in 2016. Most contexts from the original TP2 2x2m matched in the extension 1x2m, so no new contexts were made. Contexts from TP1 in 2016 loosely correspond to TP2, though we split more contexts in 2018 than were split in 2016 (see Table 1 below for context correlations).

<b>TP1</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>TP2</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>101</b>	Bioturbated root mat	<b>101</b>	Bioturbated root mat
<b>102</b>	Turfy and bioturbated, includes 1300	<b>109</b>	Bioturbated aeolian to 1300
		<b>1300</b>	Blue-ish tephra
		<b>110</b>	Bioturbated aeolian after 1300
		<b>111</b>	Bioturbated and turfy
<b>1104</b>	White tephra	<b>1104</b>	White tephra
<b>103</b>	Midden, peat ash	<b>112</b>	Dark yellow grey midden
		<b>113</b>	Peat ash midden
		<b>114</b>	Grey midden
<b>1000?</b>		-----	-----
<b>104</b>	LDC midden, mid-orange brown	<b>115</b>	Yellow brown LDC
<b>934</b>	Blue-grey tephra	<b>934</b>	Blue-grey tephra
<b>105</b>	LDC midden, mid-yellow brown, more compact	<b>116</b>	LDC
<b>106</b>	Greasy layer	<b>117</b>	Greasy



<b>107</b>	Midden/LDC mid-red brown	<b>118</b>	Dark orange brown LDC
<b>108</b>	Dark midden plus LNS to subsoil	<b>119</b>	Dark midden
		<b>871</b>	LNS

**Table 1: Context correspondence between TP1 and TP2, including context numbers and short descriptions.**

The first context to be removed was the root mat [101] which matches the root mat from TP1 and is the only context that was given the same number as its TP1 counterpart. This context was entirely shoveled and was quite bioturbated, making the boundary between the root mat and the next context [109] unclear. Context [109] was a bioturbated aeolian deposit that had less roots than the root mat. This context continued until the 1300 tephra and we were able to shovel off the majority of [109] until we got to the interface, where we switched to trowels to clear off the tephra layer. The bioturbation made the tephra patchy, but it was present across the entire unit, though it went deeper in the extension. There is no evidence of human occupation above the 1300 tephra layer at Næfurstaðir, so these contexts were not screened.

The next layer was more bioturbated aeolian [110], followed by a bioturbated turfy layer [111]. The turfy layer was most noticeable in the north and very thin across the rest of the unit. These two contexts were also deeper in the extension. No flotation samples were taken from [110] because of the extensive bioturbation and also because the context quickly gave way to [111] and was not thick enough to sample. The turf bits in [111] had lenses of the AD 1104 tephra, as well as iron staining and small pieces of charcoal. Contexts [109], [110], and [111] were all included in context [102] in TP1, but the presence of the 1300 tephra layer between [109] and [110] and the more turfy character of [111] made us split them into separate contexts for TP2.

Underneath these layers was the white AD 1104 tephra. It was present across almost the entire unit but was truncated in the north unit by turf (Figure 1). It is not clear if this turf represented an *in situ* wall or collapse from one of the nearby structures.



**Figure 1: Photo showing the truncation of the 1104 tephra. Note the distinct line in the northern half of the unit where the tephra is not present.**

The next three contexts were all midden layers that were designated [103] in TP1. However, during excavation of TP2, we split them due to different colors and inclusions. Context [112] was dark yellow grey with wood ash, bone, shell, charcoal, and fire-cracked rocks. This layer thins out in the southwest of the original 2x2m unit and is nearly non-existent in the 1x2m extension. Context [113] was also a midden but was primarily pink peat ash rather than darker wood ash. This context contained small bits of charcoal as well as bone and gravel inclusions. It was thicker in the northeastern part of the unit and also thinned to almost nothing in the southwest and the extension. Underneath this was another charcoal-based midden [114] that had wood ash, charcoal pieces, bones, and bits of turf. This context follows the above two in that it tapers out in the southwest and the extension. These contexts all seem to be part of a relatively short deposition sequence, given their thickness and the difficulty in telling them apart. The presence of ash and both burnt and unburnt bone as well as some fire-cracked rock suggests that these represent deposition from domestic cooking activities.

Below [114] was a layer that was called the 1000 tephra in the 2016 excavation. Samples were taken from TP1 and subsequently analyzed, and it turned out to not be tephra at all. We still saw this layer in TP2, though it was quite thin and not present across the entire unit. It was not recorded as a separate context and was included with context [115] for sieving and sampling. Context [115] was a yellow brown low-density cultural layer with small amounts of bone, shell, and charcoal as well as flecks of peat ash. Directly underneath [115] was the 934/950 tephra

layer. It was continuous across the entire original unit and the extension, though it was patchy in some places.

Below the 934/950 tephra layer was another low-density cultural layer [116]. This context was a yellowish brown and corresponds nicely with [105] from TP1. This layer had some fire-cracked rocks as well as small numbers of bones and charcoal flecks. The layer was mottled with tephra inclusions likely brought down through bioturbation.

The next context [117] was a grayish brown greasy midden layer that matches [106] in TP1. This layer has been interpreted as a hay or dung midden or an animal floor. There were turfy bits and pieces of charcoal mixed in this layer, as well as small amounts of animal bone. Underneath this was a dark orange brown low-density cultural layer [118] that matches [107] from TP1. Small pieces of charcoal were present in the layer, and the boundary between [118] and the layer below was mottled and unclear.

These low-density layers were followed by a dark brownish black midden [119] that was filled with bones. There was a small lens of wood ash in the northwest wall that did not extend very far into the excavation unit itself. This context contained fire-cracked rock as well as charcoal and ash which, together with all the bone, suggests a domestic cooking deposit. Directly below [119] was the landnám sequence, LNS, though the actual AD 871 tephra layer was not continually present. This layer was quite thick in some places but was not a clear layer across the entire excavation unit. In TP1, the corresponding context to [119] is [108] and it includes both the dark midden and the LNS down to the sterile subsoil. We split these in order to separately sample the LNS for flotation.

Overall, TP2 corresponds quite nicely with TP1. We split more of the contexts in order to gain better stratigraphic, and therefore chronological, control. Human occupation seems to have ceased at Næfurstaðir by AD 1104, though after this the site may have been used for livestock activities. Before 1104, there were periods of greater deposition (the midden contexts, [112], [113], [114], [119]) interspersed with periods where deposition was less frequent or perhaps less dense (low-density cultural deposits [115], [116], [118]). Occupation at this site seems to have begun very soon after the LNS tephra fell in 877 +/- 1, as some bone and charcoal were pressed directly into the surface of the tephra layer. Despite the dense deposition of bones, there were very few finds at Næfurstaðir and the majority were pieces of iron too corroded to identify. There were a few lithic flakes found, including some obsidian (find #2) from context [111] and some flakes from a white stone, perhaps quartz, from [112] (find #5, Figure 2).



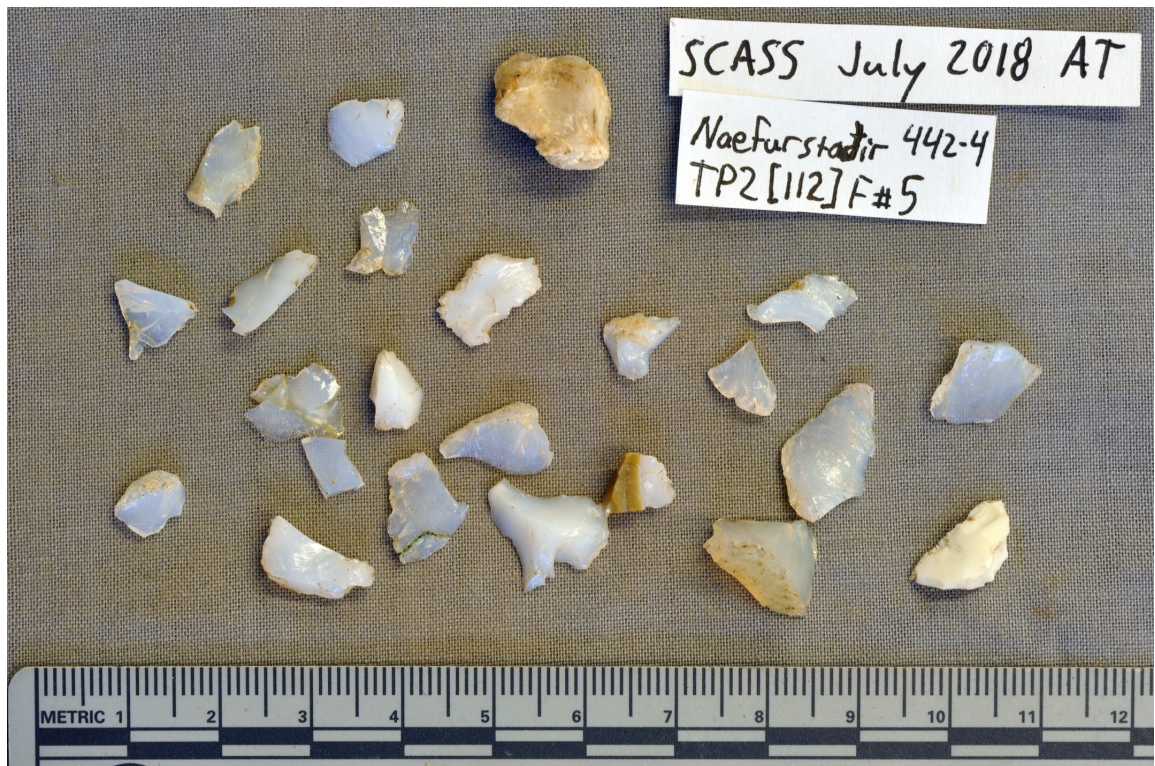


Figure 2: White stone flakes from context [112]. Photo by Josiah Wagener.

## Profiles

### Næfursstaðir - 442/4 TP2 Extension- North Wall

E-479086.28  
N-577784.16

Context	Description	Tephra
101	Rootmat	
109	Bioturbated Aeolian Deposit	----- 1300
110	Bioturbated Aeolian Deposit	..... 1104
111	Turfy Deposit	----- 950
112	Grey Ash Midden	▨ LNS
113	Peat Ash Midden	
114	Grey Ash Midden	
115	Aeolian Deposit	
116	Aeolian Deposit/ LDC	
117	Greasy Midden	
118	LDC	
119	Midden	

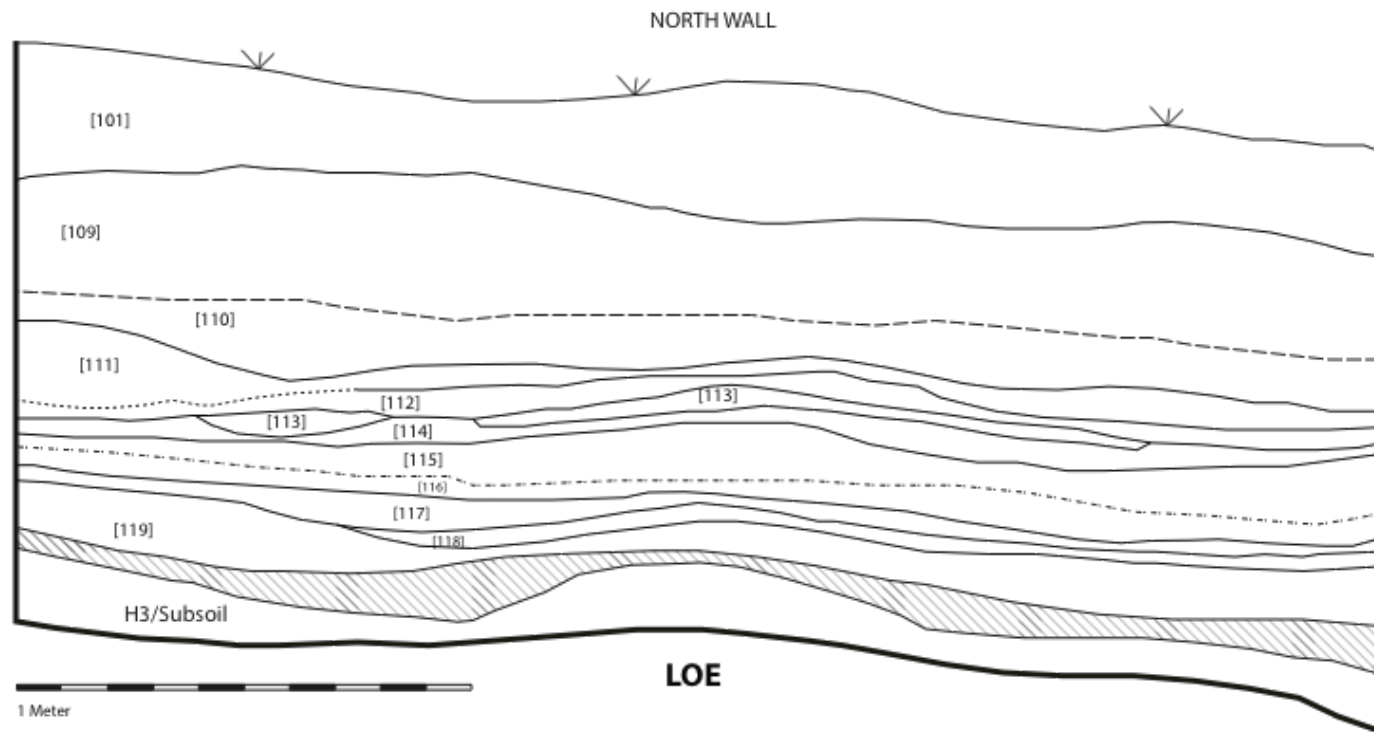


Figure 3: Profile of the entire north wall of the final 3x2m TP2 excavation.





# Næfursstaðir 442/4

## TP2 Extension- West Wall

E-479086.28  
N-577784.16

Context	Description
101	Rootmat
109	Bioturbated Aeolian Deposit
110	Bioturbated Aeolian Deposit
111	Turfy Deposit
112/114	Grey Ash Midden
115	Aeolian Deposit
116	Aeolian Deposit/ LDC
117	Greasy Midden
118	LDC
119	Midden

Tephra and Inclusions	
-----	1300
.....	1104
.....	~ 950
	LNS
	Ash

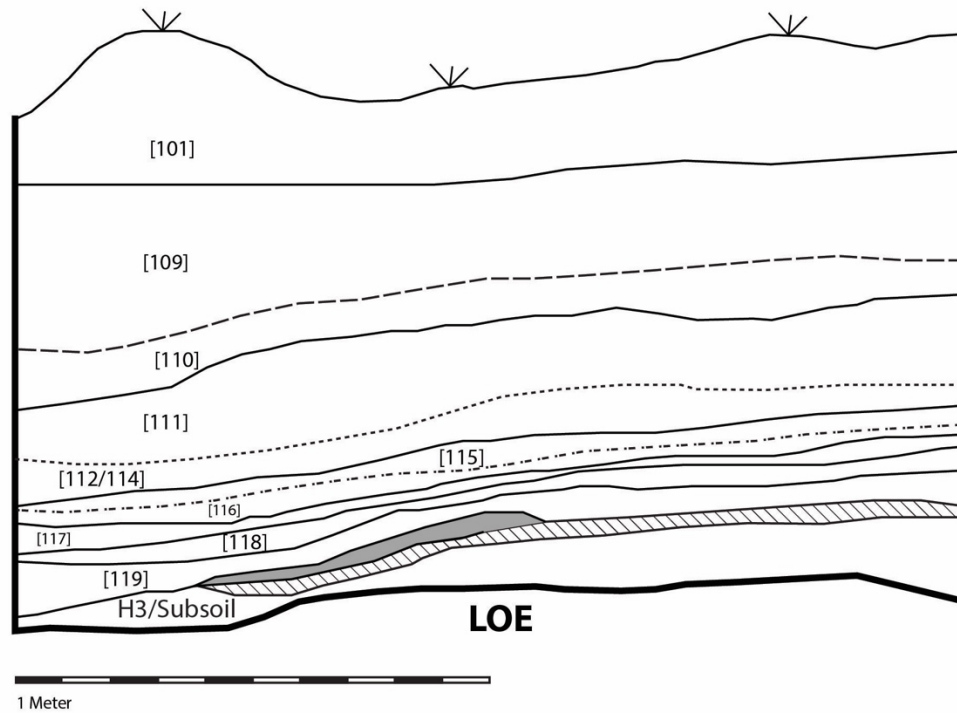


Figure 4: West wall of the final 3x2 excavation unit.

# Næfursstaðir - 442/4

## TP2 Extension- South Wall

E-479086.28  
N-577784.16

Context	Description	Tephra
101	Rootmat	
109	Bioturbated Aeolian Deposit	----- 1300
110	Bioturbated Aeolian Deposit	----- 1104
111	Turfy Deposit	----- ~ 950
112	Grey Ash Midden	----- LNS
113	Peat Ash Midden	
115	Aeolian Deposit	
116	Aeolian Deposit/ LDC	
117	Greasy Midden	
118	LDC	
119	Midden	

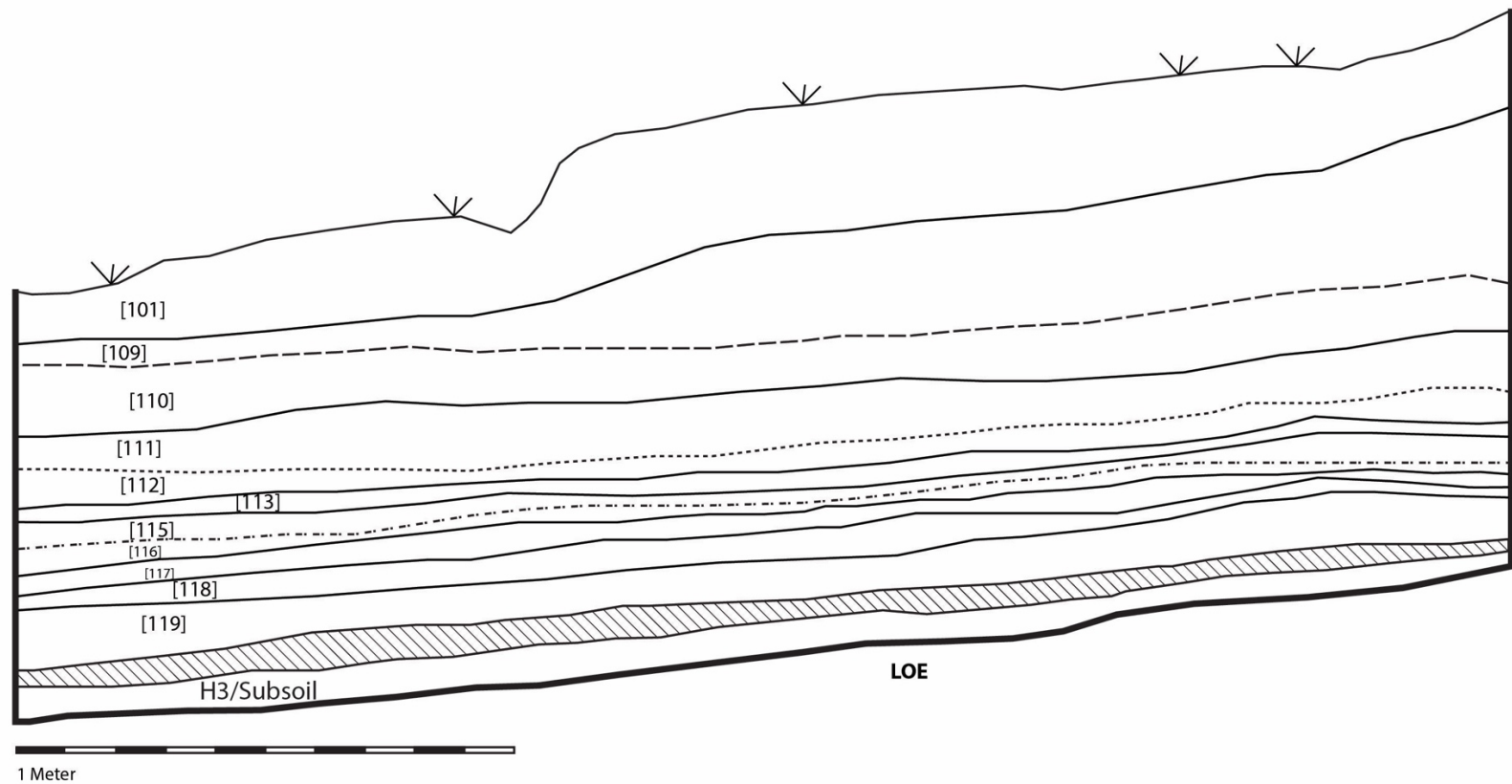


Figure 5: South wall profile. This shows the entire 3 meters of the final excavation unit, including part of TP1.

**Næfursstaðir - 442/4**  
**TP2 Extension- East Wall**

E-479088.57  
 N-577785.28

EAST WALL


**Context**

- 101
- 109
- 110
- 111
- 112
- 113
- 114
- 115
- 116
- 117
- 118
- 119

**Description**

- Rootmat
- Bioturbated Aeolian Deposit
- Bioturbated Aeolian Deposit
- Turfy Deposit
- Grey Ash Midden
- Peat Ash Midden
- Grey Ash Midden
- Aeolian Deposit
- Aeolian Deposit/ LDC
- Greasy Midden
- LDC
- Midden

**Tephra**

- 1300
- 1104
- ~ 950
-  LNS

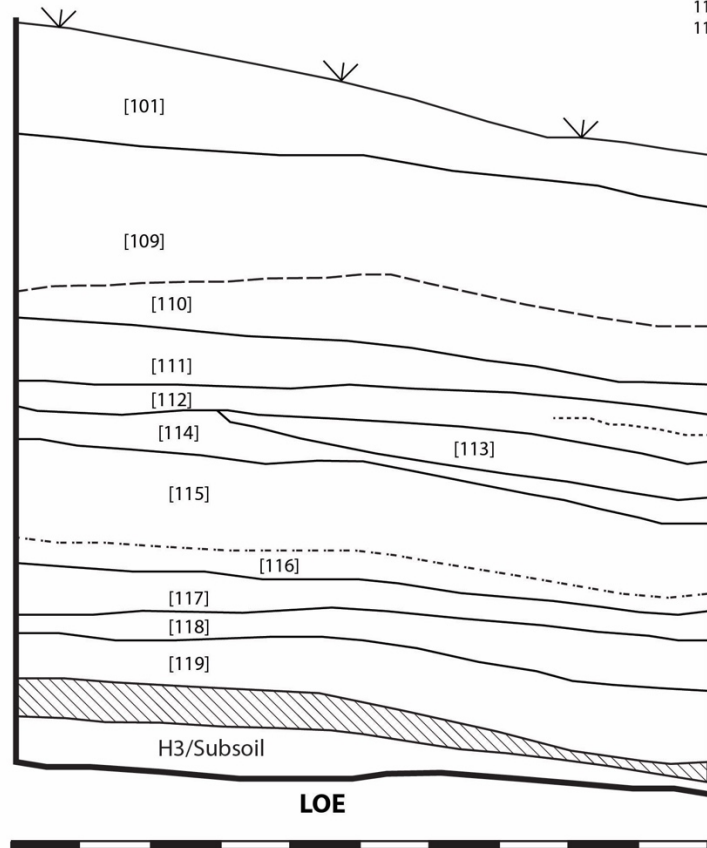


Figure 6: Profile drawing of the east wall. We only drew the northernmost 1 meter of the east wall since the southern half was drawn in 2016 when TP1 was excavated and the profile was damaged by our coring in 2018

## References

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