



Ancient Relics

Ancient relics are traces of human activity in the archipelago. Some of them can be easily spotted, but often they are covered by vegetation or hidden under the ground, in places like thick spruce forests, for example. Human activity in the archipelago is closely related to fishing, seal hunting and seafaring. Our harsh archipelago, which is very rocky and has relatively scarce vegetation in places, creates unique conditions for ancient relics, and, due to the land uplift, the environment is also very young.



STONE OVEN AND TOMTNING REMAIN, AT THE MICKELSÖ-RARNA ISLANDS. PICTURE: MIKAEL HERRGÅR

The relics in the archipelago include stone mazes, compass roses, remains of temporary dwellings, stone ovens, remains of boats, storage pits, boundary marks and net-drying poles, some dating back to the Middle Ages. The most common finds are the stone ovens, or Russian ovens, as well as the remains of the temporary dwellings related to fishing, seal hunting and seafaring.

In places where boats were beached, you can still find remains of boats. They are located at the point where the water's edge was at the time. The boats are surrounded by protective walls built of rocks. Remains of fishing villages can be found

in sheltered harbour locations, which distinguishes them from the remains related to seal hunting.

Remains of Temporary Dwellings (Tomtning Remains)

Tomtning is a wide concept, both in terms of meaning and age, that is used to refer to a variety of remains. In the Kvarken area the term is mainly used for the foundations and other remains of the simple dwellings related to seal hunting and seasonal fishing that were used as overnight shelters and storages.

The most basic form of a tomtning was a simple hut-like dwelling built of materials found at the site. Stones abound in the Kvarken archipelago; that is just about the only material available in the outer islands, which might be one of the reasons why there are so many remains still left.

You can find a large number of open stone huts in the area, probably used by 16th-century fishermen as shelters against rain and wind and for staying overnight. The metre-tall huts have three walls, one of them often made of a larger stone, and there is no roof. The stones border the round stone-free floor area, which lies at ground level or is slightly sunken. At Skrävelbådan you can find similar remains with a log frame; they were mainly used as salting sheds. Similar frames used to exist at Ritgrund too.

At Storskär, you can see stone huts in three places: Finnskatan, the northern tip of Lillskär and Bergbådan. The islands of Ljusan and Storsand also have remains of huts close to the ancient shoreline.

In the Kvarken archipelago, such remains can be found 2.5 metres from the shoreline, so the earliest they can have been built is the 18th century. Remains of dwellings can be found at different heights above sea level. The layout can be square, rectangular or completely round, and the area varies from a couple of square metres to 12–15 square metres at the most. Some of the huts were built of larger blocks of stone.

Large circular prehistoric remains of temporary dwellings can be found in Björköby and Panike. At Storskär you can explore the seal hunters' ancient cooking sites. The hunters had some permanent bases for use during the hunting trips that took them to the edge of the fast ice: one of them was the wind shelter built on the peak of Storskär, where the spring sun first chased the snow away.





Stone Mazes

Most of the stone labyrinths in the Nordic countries are located on the coast, on the furthest windswept islands in the outer archipelago. The stone mazes are usually found in pairs, as in the Bogskär area. Some 150 stone mazes have been found in Finland, all of them in the Swedish-speaking areas. “Many traditions strongly indicate that the labyrinths have had a clear link to the behaviour of the sea. They have represented a magical culture. The purpose has been to prepare for the capriciousness of nature as regards weather and fisherman’s luck,” wrote John Kraft at the Bottnisk kontakt seminar in 1982.

The stone mazes are spiral-like labyrinths on the ground, formed of stones. In Swedish, these constructions are called ‘jungfrudans’ (maiden’s dance). The Finnish name ‘jatulintarha’ means a “giant’s garden” (comes via German, as *jatul* = giant in German). Stone mazes are found along the Finnish and Swedish coasts and on the Åland Islands, and they are usually built next to a cobblestone area. The Finnish mazes are mainly on the coast, whereas in Sweden some mazes have also been found inland near churches.

The labyrinths have been built of stones about the size of a human head. The simplest mazes are spiral-shaped. The classic labyrinth is based on a cross-shaped pattern with an entrance in the middle. While being labyrinths, you cannot get lost in these stone circles since a correctly built maze only has one route from the entrance to the centre and back. The labyrinths may lead to a turnaround point in the centre or straight through the labyrinth and out the other side.

Speculations abound as to when and why the stone mazes were built. It has been possible to date the labyrinths based on lichen measurements (lichenometry) and the weathering of the stone surfaces. The oldest coastal stone mazes go back to the 14th century and the youngest to the 19th century.

According to folklore, the stone mazes were built just for fun, or perhaps they were built by sailors and fishermen waiting for the wind, or by local people. According to old legends, the labyrinths were built by giants or fairies. Some researchers think the stone mazes are related to some rites and beliefs that lived on among



STONE MAZE. PICTURE: MIKAEL HERRGÅRD

the people knocking about in the harbours and fishing spots.

However, the tradition of building labyrinths has a long history. The oldest labyrinth traditions originate in the Bronze Age cultures in the Mediterranean, such as the Minoan culture on Crete. Each spring, the Earth goddess was symbolically freed from the labyrinth of the Sun god in a ritual ceremony to ensure fertility. The labyrinth pattern is also known in America, India and Asia, and is associated with Sun cults and fertility rituals. The tradition of building labyrinths spread all the way to the Nordic countries. It may be that the Vikings brought the tradition back from their journeys to Constantinople. Labyrinths were often constructed close to old places of cult worship. Many medieval labyrinths were built in the vicinity of Bronze-Age stone heaps.

According to Greek mythology, there was a famous labyrinth in the Palace of Knossos on Crete. The legend says that the labyrinth was occupied by the Minotaur, a creature that was half bull and half man. Every nine years, seven young girls and seven young boys had to be sacrificed to the Minotaur. Finally, a hero called Theseus went into the labyrinth and killed the Minotaur, finding his way back out with the help of a ball of yarn.

Stone Ovens

A Stone oven is a simple stone oven made with dry masonry. The ovens usually have similar shapes and are 1.5–2 metres wide, with some variation in the size of stones used. In all of the

areas in which these ovens are found, you can also find circular stone constructions nearby. Sometimes these constructions – about 2–8 metres in diameter – extend directly from the oven to form a semi-circular shape. In times of war, the Russian galley fleets sailed along the Gulf of Bothnia coast and left these Stone ovens in locations that were suitable for these weakly built, weather-sensitive vessels to beach. In bad weather the vessels had to wait for more favourable conditions.

Land Surveyor Gullic Wislander’s map from 1763 shows that there were four Stone ovens at the Mickelsörarna Islands. The map description also mentions that the shallows had no owner and the Russians lost both their vessel and their crew in 1720; only some remains of their baking ovens are still to be found.

There are remains resembling a galley dock in Björköby, and there is a harbour site from that time nearby. There are numerous stone ovens in the Kvarken archipelago; in Björköby alone there are some 200 ovens, but only three of them are still in good condition. There are Stone ovens on the north-eastern side of the island in the Malskåret-Tvärören area, and in groups at Malskåret, Skarftagrånn, Lillhamngrånn, Lillhamnbrolandet and the Storhamn area. Individual Russian ovens can be found at intervals of about 200–300 metres from each other.

Nowadays it can be difficult to spot the ovens as they have collapsed and become overgrown with vegetation. The oven locations have mostly been taken over by dense spruce forests.

