

*Press text, Monday, 25th March 2019*

## New Viking Age ship burial discovered in Vestfold

**A ship burial, presumably dated to the Viking Age, was found in-between the monumental grave mounds of the Borre Park. The discovery was enabled by the use of ground-penetrating radar (GPR) data, which clearly show a ship-shaped anomaly in the ground.**

– The discovery of a new Viking ship in Vestfold is a historic event that will attract international attention. Vestfold is renowned for its rich Viking Age heritage. The County Council has undertaken important and extensive steps to preserve this heritage of national and international value, says Minister of Climate and Environment Ola Elvestuen.

In total, 13 ship burials dated to the period between AD 570 and AD 1050 are known in Europe. Together with the findings at Jellestad in 2018, the discovery of yet another probable ship burial at Borre increases the number on this exclusive list to 15. Only seven of these can explicitly be associated with the Viking Age (AD 800-1050), three of which are located in Vestfold county.

- You do not find a new Viking ship every day, so this is really exciting. But for us in Vestfold, this does not come as a surprise. There are many treasures from the Viking Age hidden in the grounds of our county, says Mayor of Vestfold County Rune Hogsnes.

### **Ground-penetrating radar enables Viking Age discoveries**

The Viking initiative in Vestfold, started in 2003 is still ongoing and several million NOK have been allocated for surveys, management and dissemination. GPR has been extensively used at Borre and the discoveries are spectacular. Besides the ship burial, at least four hall buildings have been found in the last years. A research collaboration between the Vestfold County Council, the Austrian Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Archaeological Prospection and Virtual Archeology (LBI ArchPro) and the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU) has in the last nine years forged the basis of these successes.

- The GPR data clearly show the shape of a ship, and we can see weak traces of a circular depression around the vessel. This could point to the existence of a mound that was later removed. How much of the burial that still is preserved in the ground is not known. We are now going to investigate the burial further with the GPR and other non-invasive methods, says Terje Gansum, leader of the department for cultural heritage management in Vestfold County.

- We want a good cooperation with the Directorate for Cultural Heritage and the Cultural History Museum. They will decide whether invasive investigation methods will be applied, says Gansum.

Viking ships are per definition 15 meters or longer; vessels below that mark are termed as boats. The Borre discovery is based on GPR data, which only allows a preliminary estimate of the ship's lengths.

### **Comments of leading politicians of the Vestfold county council:**

Deputy County Mayor Kåre Pettersen (V): "With this discovery, Vestfold's unique Viking Age ship burials have further underlined their potential for admission to UNESCO's tentative world heritage list. All international approval requirements were in place in the previous round. This time, admission should be within reach."

Ellen Eriksen (FrP), committee leader for culture, sports and public health: "Today I am happy, because this shows that our commitment is successful. We put Vestfold on the international map, because we know how much interest the Viking Age generates internationally."

Hans Hilding Hønsvall, group leader for KrF: "I have to admit that it makes me a little proud that we have found another ship of this size. We read a lot about the Viking Age, but the fact that our commitment now actually shows concrete outcomes is great. If we keep looking, we'll find even more".

---

For more information, please contact:

Rune Hogsnes, County Mayor, Vestfold County Council  
Mobil: +47 916 33 552 / e-post: [rune.hogsnes@vfk.no](mailto:rune.hogsnes@vfk.no)

Terje Gansum, Leader of the department for cultural heritage management, Vestfold County Council  
Mobil: +47 934 45 975 / e-post: [terjega@vfk.no](mailto:terjega@vfk.no)

---

## More information about the Viking Age discovery

### How common are Viking Age ship burials?

In total, 13 ship burials dated to the period between AD 570 and AD 1050 are known in Europe. Together with the findings at Jellestad in 2018, the discovery of yet another probable ship burial at Borre increases the number on this exclusive list to 15. Only seven of these can explicitly be associated with the Viking Age (AD 800-1050), three of which are located in Vestfold county; Oseberg, Gokstad and Borre respectively.

### The discovery was enabled through the use of ground penetrating radar

The area was surveyed with a single-channel GPR mounted on a trolley – the same technology also applied on the larger motorized vehicles. Through its cooperation with the Austrian LBI ArchPro and NIKU, Vestfold County Council has been part of an international research coalition to further develop the use of geophysical prospection in cultural heritage management.

### More about Viking Age ship burials

The ships were laid to rest in an oblong trench dug in a first step, that provided support for keel and hull, and subsequently covered with earth and stone.

Boat builder Svein Erik Øya explains: "If stern and bow have towered above the ground, while the hull had been completely buried with the top plank being on ground level, one can assume an additional 50 cm on both ends, in addition to the stern width. If the ship has been buried in a mound and it is just the bottom of the ship we see, as it was the case with the Tune ship, then it must have been 1-1.5 meters longer at each end, plus the length of both stern and bow. That would mean that the two to three top hull planks must have been located above what is today's ground level. "

Viking ships are per definition 15 meters or longer; vessels below that mark are termed as boats. The Borre discovery is based on GPR data, which only allows a preliminary estimate of the ship's lengths. After more than a thousand years in the ground, it can be assumed that the initial shape of the Borre ship has been deformed and that its stern and bow are not as pointed as they once have been.

Read more about the Viking Age in Vestfold: <https://www.vfk.no/meny/tjenester-og-fagomrader/kulturarv/vart-ansvar/vikingtid-i-vestfold/>