

# STRUCTURE IN A COMMUNITY: THE OUTFIELD, ITS USE AND ITS ORGANISATION IN THE SETTLEMENT OF GÁSADALUR, FAROE ISLANDS

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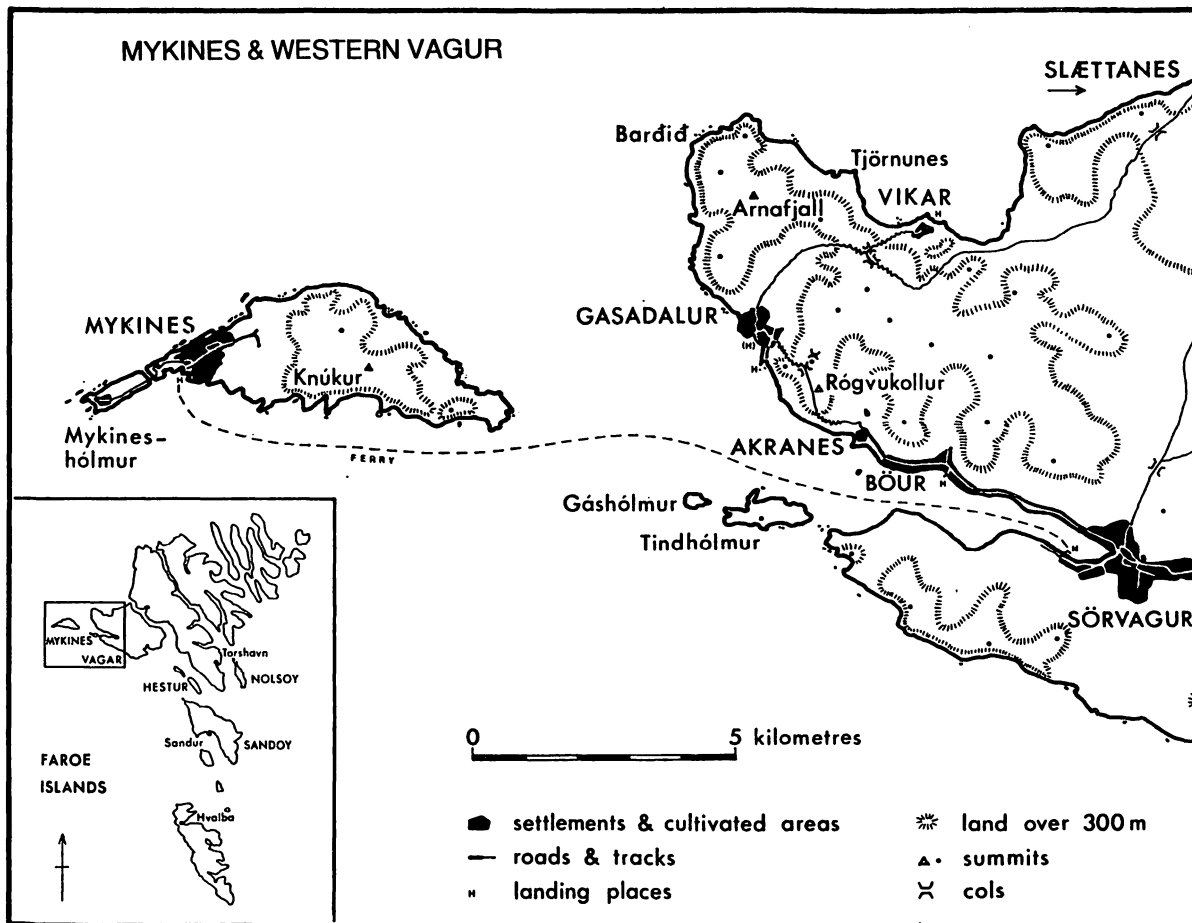
## INTRODUCTION

This paper is based primarily on fieldwork begun in 1970 and continued in 1979 and 1980 in two Faroese settlements – Mykines, the most westerly of all Faroese communities; and Gásadalur which, along with the now-uninhabited dependent settlement of Víkar, is its nearest neighbour across the sound on the north-western peninsula of the much larger island of Vágur [Fig. 1]. Both settlements remain remote and amongst the smaller communities in the Faroes [N.B. Their populations in 1982 were: Mykines – 34 ( $\frac{1}{2}$  over 50 years old) and Gásadalur – 25 ( $\frac{3}{4}$  over 50) – Editor]. With no road access, inadequate boat landings and generally ageing and much reduced populations, they have retained a more traditional approach to life and work than a majority of Faroese settlements. Discussion, drawn mainly from evidence from Gásadalur but with supplementary detail from Mykines, concentrates on traditional outfield use and organisation, whilst taking account of changes that have taken place in recent years. The term ‘outfield’ is used to describe all the land outwith the township dyke; ‘infield’ is used of all the land within.

By way of background, the size of a Faroese settlement is expressed in marks (*merkur*). A few settlements, particularly harshly sited, were valued at no more than four marks (Nordskali on Eysturoy, and Nordtoftir on Borðoy), and only a few were unusually large (the highly fertile Sandur on Sandoy – 97 marks; and Hvalbøur on Suðuroy – 98 $\frac{1}{4}$  marks). Most settlements came within 10–50 marks range – which includes Gásadalur (18 marks) and Mykines (40 marks).

The origins of land measures in Faroe, as in Shetland and other parts of Scotland, are obscure. We do not know whether at one time a

Figure 1. Location map for Gásadalur and Mykines.



*mørk* was a fixed standard measure. What we do know, however, is that as it has come down to us an original mark of land most certainly does not reflect a standard area. It is reasonable to assume that the measurement refers to quality, rather than quantity, so that where land was of a particularly high or low quality, so the actual area would be smaller or greater. This would be true within as well as between townships.

Each *mørk* is divided into 16 *gyllin*; each *gyllin* into 20 *skinn*. Where land was held by the Church, later by the Crown, it was indivisible, to be passed on to one heir and to be held as one unit. Where it was held odally, it was sub-divided in each generation amongst the heirs and became increasingly fragmented. This intense fragmentation has been intensified yet further by the population explosion of the past century, subsequent to the opening up of trade and development of commercial fisheries. What was recognised as a problem in the 18th century had become increasingly anarchical from the mid 19th century – hence the need for reform and the present-day activities of the Matrikulstovan or Land Registry Office. That the population explosion has led also to large-scale emigration merely heightens the problem. Agreement to re-divide the land is difficult to obtain where small share owners live not just elsewhere in Faroe, but in Denmark, North America and elsewhere. And it is this inability to muster agreement to re-organisation that has left many of the proposals lying on the shelf in Tórshavn.

Historically, therefore, the crown tenant (*kongsbóndi*) has been wealthy and influential – a leader of the community. Whilst he will also own a fair amount of odal land through inter-marriage (and this would be split amongst his heirs), the bulk of his land is held in large, indivisible parcels. The main holding may well bear the name *Kongsmørk*, and be amongst the most fertile in the settlement. That it may nonetheless be on quite steep land (flat land is at a premium in Faroe), and also be fairly small in extent, helps explain why the kongs farmer has kept a strong hold on his highly lucrative outfield rights and why, historically, even *kongsbøndur* have not introduced much by the way of larger, more efficient equipment to their arable land. Yet at the same time, where there have been major developments, these have normally come, it would seem, through the *kongsbóndi*. The

*odalsbóndi*, by contrast, was hardly in a position to think of 'introducing' ploughs or carts. A box creel on a wheel was an improvement, where some kind of rough track existed (Baldwin 1973. 24 et. seq.)!

There is much that could be said about the traditional use of the infield, the tools and techniques employed and the roles of different individuals in this work. The general picture, however, is of small-scale activity based very much upon hand-tools and family groups. The considerable care with which specific activities were planned and carried through, and the fact that more recently introduced machines were also small in scale/size, reflects the relatively small amount of cultivable land, the aspect and nature of the land, the restricted and unreliable growing season and the system of land-holding itself. And whilst the former emphasis on barley (later, potatoes) reflects the vital necessity of a basic staple for human consumption, the equal emphasis on hay reflects the crucial importance of livestock to the community. Until the later 19th century and the development of the commercial fisheries, without the infield there would simply have been no settlement: without the outfield there would have been no survival.

Amongst other things, the outfield provided seasonal grazing for livestock; peat (and driftwood on the shore) for fuel; seaweed as a fertiliser and as a food; and seabirds for food, bedding and other domestic uses. Small mills might also be sited there, alongside a modest but steeply-falling stream. In addition, the sea provided fish, seals and ca'ing whales, caught in diverse ways in their respective seasons. Though the sea (like the infield) would form a separate study, all these resources were crucial to the old Faroese economy.

## **STRUCTURES IN THE OUTFIELD**

Before examining 'structure', a look at 'structures' associated with specific activities – peat cutting, water mills, communications, fowling and grazing – can help identify the nature and scale of the exploitation.

### **Peat**

Since 1953, when the first hydro-electric station was switched on

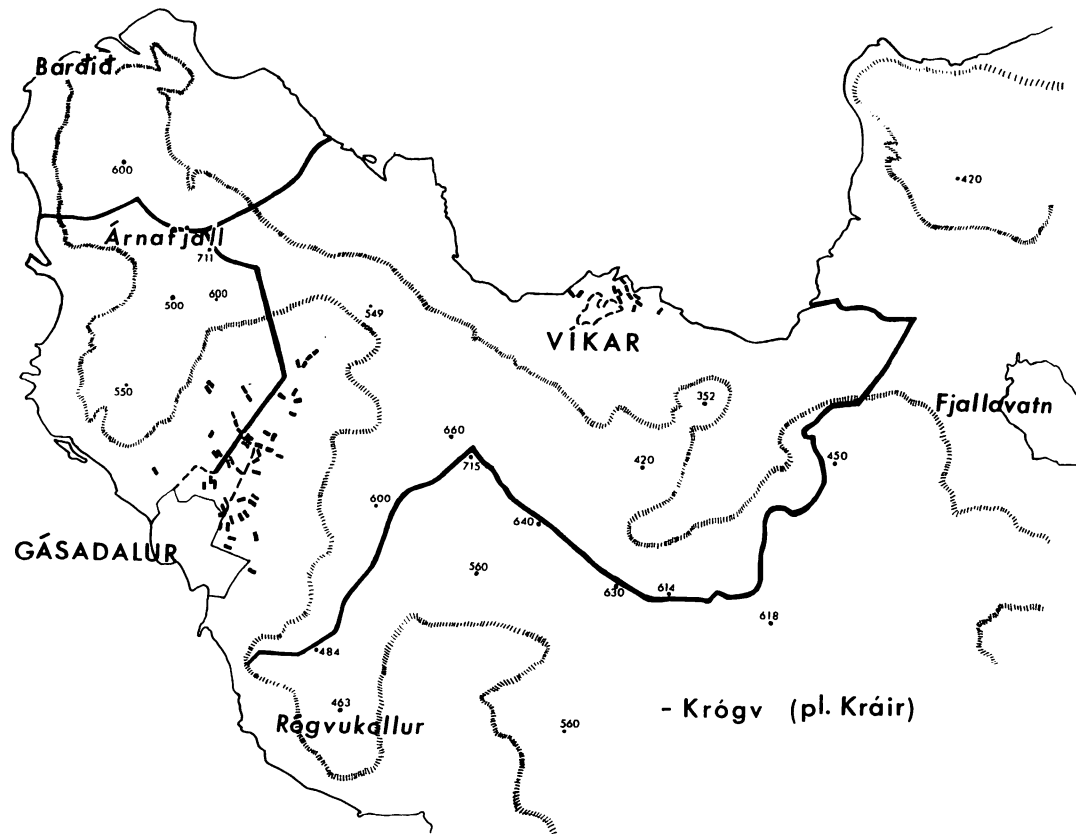
near Vestmanna (originally to provide a power base for fish-related industries), electricity has been taken to virtually every Faroese home. Even most remote Mykines had street lighting by about 1968 – useful to attract young puffins at night for easy capture, if for no other reason! And Gásadalur too has had electricity for over 20 years now, since 1960. The wind dried *skerpikjøt* is stored in the deep freeze! Yet some peat-cutting still takes place here (as in perhaps half of all Faroese settlements) – partly out of choice and partly because the peat banks are within easy, fairly level access not far outside the hill-dyke. A mini-tractor and trailer now brings the ‘crop’ in from the valley.

Peat spades on the Shetland model, with a wing to the blade, were first advocated by Svabo in 1781/82, and seem to have been introduced to Faroe in 1839 (Svabo [1781/82]. 136-8; Ployen 1839. 258 in av Skarði 1970. 67). They continue to be used in Gásadalur to cut two or three (sometimes up to six) depths of peat, the top turf having first been removed with an ordinary *haki* or with a modern mass-produced spade. The Shetland-influenced *torvskeri* did not spread throughout the islands, however, and an earlier type of peat spade, without a wing or feather and with a slightly smaller blade than that of the ordinary digging spade or *haki*, continued long in use (av Skarði 1970. 68).

But whilst the moorland gives evidence of frequent peat-cutting, associated buildings and mounds act equally as identifiers. In Scotland we are well acquainted with peat-cutting: we are also acquainted with peat houses – whether the *cleitean* of St. Kilda for instance, or the *paet-hooses* of parts of Shetland. In the Faroes cut and dried peat could be stored in a stack (*lutur*), in a roofless *krógv* or in a properly roofed *torvhús* or *gróthús*. On Mykines, the *gróthús*, built of stone and roofed with divots, was wide-spread, due in all probability to the highly exposed locations where the peat was found.

In Gásadalur, on the other hand, where the *torvhús* was certainly once known, the usual structure was and still is the *krógv* [Fig. 2]. Known also on Mykines, the *krógv* takes the form of a long, narrow rectangle, maybe 12 ft. – 23 ft. (3.7 m – 7 m) long by 4 ft. (1.2 m) wide and built up in stone on the long sides to 3 ft. or 4 ft. (0.9m – 1.2 m). Generally both end walls were also dyked up, the last being closed when the stack within was complete. The domed top of the stack is

Figure 2. Stone-walled peat stores in the outfield.



covered by huge, upturned and overlapping divots cut out of the adjacent moor, each spanning the entire width of the stack and giving an overall stack height of some 5 ft. (1.5 m). These are weighted against the weather with stones along each overlapping join and just above the wall-head (c.f. Williamson 1948. 62-5).

A few of these *kráir* are still in use, partially rebuilt each year as required. They, and the slightly-raised remnant mounds of earlier generations of peat-stacks, stand amongst the peat-cuttings that spread outwards from the banks of the little river that runs down Gásadalur. Others are sited higher up on the western side of the valley, whilst the distribution around Víkar reflects activity when that settlement was inhabited.

There are many dry-stone structures in and close to the valley bottom in Gásadalur. There is no confusion normally in identifying e.g. the sheep *ból* (semi-circular), the *rætt* (rectangular but squarish in shape with a leader dyke), or the peat *krógv*. But care is always needed. Two *kráir* on the east side of the valley, a little away from the river, are linked by drystane dykes. An earlier use as a sheep fank is confirmed from local tradition, the original fank being partly rebuilt to serve as peat stores. On the other hand, the present-day sheep house on the east side of the valley was apparently a peat house until about 1930!

## Mills

Care is also needed in identifying structures by the river-bank. A close look at the shape of the river, the identification of straight channels, the remnants of a low weir, might suggest that the rectangular ruins alongside served as a mill. Sometimes it is clear that the building spanned an artificial channel or lade, and the stone lintel to the underhouse might survive, as at Víkar; on the other hand the lade may be dry and filled with silt and boulders, and the ruinous building be nothing more than a rickle of stones forming a rough rectangle.

Faroese water-mills were of the horizontal variety, cousins to those in e.g. Norway and the northern and western mainland and

places under differing weather conditions, and the freakish effects of winds deflected off the mountains and funnelled up the sounds and fjords – the general unreliability in other words of sea transport for much of the year, or in emergencies. For they are not easy alternatives. All land routes out of Gásadalur require steep climbing by zig-zag paths moving through shifting screes of quite large angular stones. In addition, sea-fogs and low cloud can obscure the heights for days at a time. In consequence, all the major trackways from Gásadalur, as throughout the Faroes, are way-marked with cairns, *vardar* – large relatively slender but tall cairns built at an increased frequency in the more difficult terrain. That no major cairns indicate the way down from the ridge to Víkar helps to emphasize the lateness of the settlement.

Everywhere now, however, the trackways, *vegir*, are falling rapidly into disuse. Cairns are beginning to tumble, whilst the ravages of the winter weather, always worst on the most difficult sections of the track, are considerable. Though Gásadalur still relies on the climb out under Rógvukollur for its regular mail deliveries as well as in theory for its lifeline, in practice helicopters can now fly in in emergencies and the promise of a tunnel and roadlink, though continually delayed, has led to neglect of the fabric of the steep zig-zag sections of the track.

It is the minor tracks, however, un-marked and in many cases ill-defined, that provide clues to community use of the outfield. And in particular they lead to the major bird cliffs, the *fuglabjörg*, and to the major grazing areas. They criss-cross the north-west peninsula of Vágur, but for the most part are imprinted only on the minds of the local inhabitants. As 'structures' they are largely noticeable by their absence.

### **Seabird Fowling**

The tools and techniques of sea-bird fowling in the Faroes have been dealt with elsewhere (Baldwin 1974. 60-108). Most commonly the birds taken are puffins, guillemots and since 1839 (possible 1816) when they first appeared in Faroe, fulmars (Lockwood 1961. 54). Gannets were taken until around 1970 off Mykines, and young Manx Shearwaters were once taken when they were more plentiful and



accessible. Cormorants too might be caught.

In early June, young puffins (and shearwaters) can be taken from their burrows by hand or with the help of a hooked stick or *lundakrókur* – eggs, of course, will have been taken earlier. Then in July and August puffins (*lundar*) are taken out of the air with a *fleygastong*, a large net on the end of a long pole. On a good day, at the puffinery east of Víkar, a man could catch some 500 puffins, bringing them back over the back of a pony. In 1970, it took two trips with a pony to bring some 400 puffins caught near Víkar back over the pass to Gásadalur – about 100 in each creel per trip. But because only one of the three ponies kept in Gásadalur in 1970 survived by 1980 (it was elderly and simply left to graze in peace), and because manpower is ageing, these north-side bird-cliffs are nowadays little-exploited. By contrast, if the dead birds were carried on the body, in a creel or on a loop of rope fixed by a band across the forehead, a man could bring back some 30 at a time (six groups of five birds fixed in knots in the rope) – exceptionally up to 125 (25 such knots). On Mykines 100 birds (20 clusters) would normally be carried on such a back rope; or 30-40 tucked under a waist belt; 100-150 in a creel or *leypur*; or 400-500 in a large bag, *lundaposi*, slung across a pony's back (200-250 each side).

A slightly larger net is used to catch the fulmar (*havhestur*), but the technique is identical. Fulmars can be caught anytime between November and the end of May, and might equally well be struck across the neck with a stick – as young gannets used to be off Mykines and on Sula Sgeir (north of Lewis), or cormorants from Gásadalur. Elsewhere in Faroe, floating snares might also sometimes be used to catch certain birds, notably guillemots.

The birds can be eaten fresh after plucking, with bread or potatoes, and sometimes stuffed; they can be salted down for a short time or for the winter in brine; or fulmars can be wind-dried like sheep meat. Partial salting or wind-drying would suffice if they were to be eaten within a few days or a few weeks. Nowadays they are equally likely to be frozen in the deep-freeze – either fresh or after wind-drying! On Mykines, puffins have become a cash crop, caught by former islanders who return in the summer for a holiday and also to collect their wool. Freezer-loads are shipped out on the tiny inter-

island boat, the 'Súlan', as regularly as the summer weather will allow. From Gásadalur, too, fulmars are transported to Tórshavn for sale to the 14,000 or so newly-urbanised inhabitants who hanker after certain aspects of their former life-style. A man might catch 100-150 fulmars a day, sold for 9 kr. each in 1980 – 900 kr. per 100 birds at 14 kr. to the £ Sterling, netting £65 – £95 a day. No wonder the Gásadalur men were keen to acquire empty expedition boxes, strong and sleeved – ideal for marketing!

Sea-birds were highly valued in the old economy, and not just for their oil and meat. Feathers, for example, were used for stuffing pillows, and wings acted as domestic hearth or baking brushes. Whereas in most parts of Scotland, even where they were plentiful, sea-birds tended to be very much a subsidiary resource, in the more northerly, steeper, harsher environment of the Faroes, their contribution was primary, and the existence of special structures, partial dug-outs amongst the cliffs, was central to successful fowling. Birds are wary creatures. Sometimes decoys might be used; sometimes fowlers imitated bird calls – *ka-ka-ka-ka-ka* for the fulmar. In most cases on the cliffs, experience had shown the value of long-established, habitual fowling places and partial hides. From these dug-outs – a *fleygasessur* (*lundasessur* or *havhestursessur* according to context) – the fowler rises up to pluck the bird out of the air with his net as it flies past. On Mykines such a dug-out (built of stone and/or grass or turf), can be called a *sneis*, *grevur* or *hola*.

A rather different kind of hide, though to a similar end, is the ravenhide (*ravnahús*), where a watch was kept for ravens and the birds shot – ravens, of course, being considered a prey on young lambs.

### **Livestock: Cattle**

A further major use of the outfield is for the grazing of livestock. Around early May the cattle, weak in the byres through shortage of winter fodder, were taken out along the *neytageil* to the nearer parts of the outfield. This very distinctive structure, the driftway or loaning of Britain – is a necessary feature where the settlement, including the byres, is situated within an unenclosed infield surrounded only by a township dyke. Like the tethering of individual animals, it prevents

indiscriminate grazing of crops and natural grass, and in Faroese settlements it is still very distinctive. A fairly large settlement like Mykines has two major driftways; but even a smaller settlement such as Gásadalur can show long-disused driftways in addition to the major one of recent times. These driftways can help isolate the site of former farms or building clusters (*býlingar*) and in Gásadalur they contribute both to identifying the sites known as *Gásatoft* and *Vidgardur* and to providing clues as to how these former settlements operated. It is only around the third of these early farm-sites, *Gráursteinur*, that the present settlement clusters – the last move having been made about 1902 when a whole house (except the stone footings and turf roof) was returned from Víkar, to where it has been moved from Vidgardur some 150 or so years earlier.

In recent times, dairy cattle have only grazed the short valley bottom and slopes of Gásadalur, the women walking out morning and evening to milk the animals and carry this back to the houses in a wooden pail (*dylla*) covered with a sheep-skin tied on with wool and strapped to their backs. Unlike most other examples of back transport in the Faroes, these containers were carried by a band across the shoulders rather than across the forehead. The *neytagardur*, at the outer mouth of the *neytageil*, was a pound to which the cattle could be brought as required. There is no evidence, therefore, that shielings were ever used from Gásadalur, though in other parts of the Faroes, higher up the valleys and on level parts of the outfield, place-names do nonetheless reflect a one-time system of transhumance similar to that of Scotland, Norway and elsewhere. These names incorporate the element *ærgi* a Gaelic term meaning much the same as Norwegian *seter*, a summer grazing in the hills. One such name is claimed for Mykines, *Argisbrekka*, east across the watershed from the Viking period farm site close to but south of the present nucleated village (Dahl 1970. 362-6).

Bullocks for fattening, however, were grazed on the Holm, a small island now linked to the western end of Mykines by a bridge – 20 were allowed, along with 40 sheep. And they are still grazed by the Gásadalur people on the north side of the north-west Vágur peninsula from June to early October. The cattle route out of Víkar to the north end of Fjallavatn, thence for sale in Sørvágur, was by the more easterly

*Neytagjógv*, not by the way-marked track; and from Gásadalur too, cattle did not follow the regular track zig-zagging up through large boulders and scree, but climbed over the nearby 'green pass', the *Neytaskard*.

Use of pastures away from the settlement simply for fattening, whether for sale or for domestic use, did not require a 'summer-toun' settlement, and I know of no evidence that Víkar was used for dairy animals except when it was a permanent, year-round settlement. Only occasional herding, therefore, would be necessary (perhaps just keeping an eye open when out rounding up sheep), and there would have been no need for a temporary summer dairy. In those areas of one-time Celtic and Norse overlap, explanations for the use of terms for shielings originating in *ærgi* and *sætr/setr* should be sought in the differentiated grazing of those outfield pastures away from the settlement, as well as in linguistic cross-fertilisation.

Finally, as far as cattle are concerned, oral tradition in the Faroes occasionally refers to a *vaktarhús* or watch house. Along the coast west by north from Gásadalur are the *Ytramannseta* and the *Heimeramannseta* – the 'seat' furthest out and that closest to the settlement: watch houses used in the old days to warn of pirates. And when the warning was given that French or Dutch, even Turkish raiders (so it is said) were imminent, the township's cows were moved up the valley and hidden in a hollow referred to yet as the *Kustøða* – the 'cow place'. Such a place should not be confused with a shieling or other necessarily regular grazing area.

### **Livestock: Sheep**

Structures for cattle, however, are greatly outnumbered by those for sheep – sheep fanks and sheep shelters. In the old Faroese economy wool, so the saying goes, was Faroese gold. It was the basic cash crop – once exported in the raw state and later as knitted goods: mainly thick, heavy stockings and seamen's sweaters. It was also of major importance around the home and farm – for clothing and slippers, ropes, laces, halters, hobbles for sheep, nets, sails and so on. And fines could be payable in *vadmal* or homespun woollen cloth. Moreover, sheepskin was used for such as fishermen's clothing, shoes, containers

and lids.

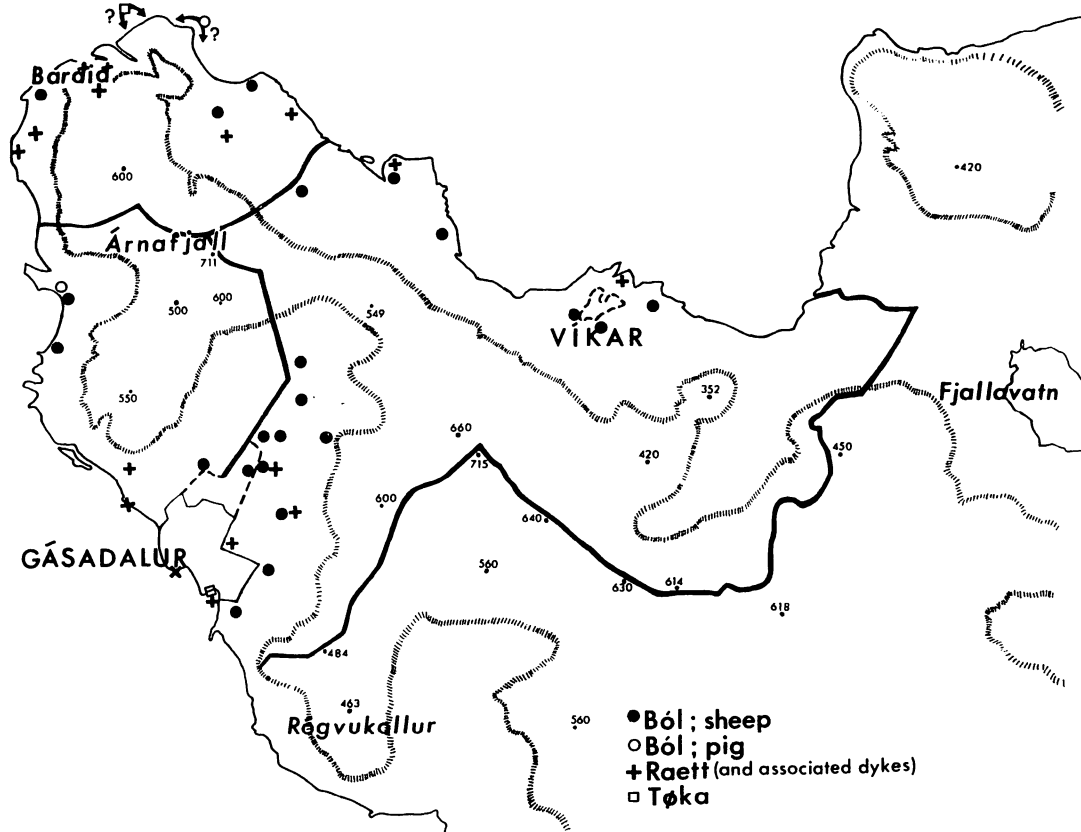
Yet it is curious that although cattle were wintered in a byre, until relatively recently sheep were left outdoors. Perhaps they were considered hardy enough – though the evidence would seem to contradict this, in some years at least: perhaps the need to milk cows was the determining factor – though there would be precious little milk in winter. Perhaps just because cows were fewer, their survival was of greater importance ... or because in early Europe and Scandinavia wealth, traditionally, had been measured in cattle. Perhaps it was simply the unavailability of winter fodder that required sheep to range widely in search of their own survival.

The fact remains that, as elsewhere along the northern and western Atlantic fringes, the roofed winter house for sheep, the Faroese *seyðahús* is a relatively recent innovation. The first built in an outfield seems to date from about 1780 (Jensen 1977. 25), but only within the last 100 years has it become even reasonably common, mainly within the post-war period. There is only one such sheep house in any of the Gásadalur outfields, converted it is said from a peat-house about 1930, though some 600 sheep are still overwintered. The roofed lamb-house within the settlement is also relatively recent – the *kindhús*, said by my informant to be borrowed, at least terminologically, from Iceland. Introduced maybe three generations ago in some cases, in one instance it is known to have evolved out of a potato pit-cum-chicken house, after this was replaced by more specialised structures.

The only shelter for sheep of long-standing is the *ból*, sometimes referred to also as a *støða*. In Gásadalur a *snjóstöða* refers to the place (cf. *kustøða* ... above); *ból* refers specifically to a structure [Fig. 4]. The term *ból* is the same as that used in Shetland (*buil*; *snaa-buil*) (Baldwin 1978. 113-117), and is cognate with Gaelic *buaille*.

Though a good many have been roofed in parts of Faroe in recent years, traditionally it was unroofed, circular to horse-shoe shaped, stone-built to 4 ft. (1.2 m) or so in height and further protected on the outer wall by a thick turf embankment such as also protected the *sornhús* (kilm) and *eplirhús* (potato store). Internal diameter might be

Figure 4. Sheep fanks and catching places; outfield shelters for stock.



10.5 ft. – 13 ft. (3.2 m – 4 m); external diameter 13 ft. – 19.7 ft. (4 m – 6m). The narrow entrance normally faced south, from where the snow seldom came. Here 50–100 sheep could shelter for up to a month and still survive, though in winters when snowfalls were heavy, large numbers of animals could die from hunger (*fellisár*) (Jensen 1977. 24-5). Landt (1810. 316-7) referring to the distinctly larger breed of sheep in northern Faroe, suggested that this dated back beyond the early 1600s to a winter so severe that most native sheep were killed – a mortality he says which was still referred to in the early 1800s as the *svarta-felli* or ‘black devastation’. The southern fjords of Faroe were re-stocked, he suggests, from Shetland whose lambs matured faster: the *Norðanfirdir* from Iceland whose sheep eventually grew bigger.

The *ból* is normally sited in a valley bottom, by the stream, or up above the marshy, boggy ground, either along the sides of a valley or out along and above a lower cliff line. The fact that one place along such a grassy band between the stony cliffs, close to the mouth of the steep short valley of Hvannadalur west of Gásadalur, is still termed *Svínbólsheyggjur*, recalls the long obsolete practice not just of keeping pigs, but of grazing them at some distance from the settlement where their disruptive grazing habits would not interfere with cultivation. A track near Fjallavatn is still called *Svínstíggi* – along which presumably the pigs were taken to their pasture. That the practice was apparently long obsolete in the Faroes by the end of the 18th century is borne out by Landt (1810. 209-10) who can point only to names and ruins.

The other principle outfield structure for sheep is the fank or *rætt* – a stone built enclosure of one or more compartments into which the sheep are driven whether for lug-marking, rooing or drawing off for market or slaughter. In general, only the innermost compartment is called the *rætt*, the ‘ante-rooms’ or ‘marshalling yards’ being termed the *trøð* and *ut-trøð* as appropriate.

The general shape and function is similar to that of the Shetland *kru* or *krø*, though the innermost compartment is rectangular rather than circular. (Faroese *krógv*, peat store, relates to the same Irish/Gaelic term *crò*; O.N. *kró*). On Foula, Shetland, the *kru* was formerly referred to as a *rett* (indeed the older ones are still rectangular in shape) and Foula terms such as *Da Rett*, *Da Rettins* directly parallel

Faroeese *rætt*, *rættenir*. Moreover, Foula's *Da Flør o' Gamlarett* finds a counterpart in Gásadalur's *Gamala Rætt* – an old fank, no longer used. There are two such former fanks *Nordi à Gamala Rætt* (up the valley) and *Nidri à Gamala Rætt*, in the cliff near the waterfall (= ? the *tøka*).

In function and sense, though not in identical terminology, Foula's *gripster* a particularly small catching place amongst the cliffs (Baldwin 1978. 111-115) is mirrored at Gásadalur by the *tøka* or *seyðatøka*. One of these nestles along a steep, narrow grassy band in the *hamrar* of the sea cliff below the houses, just west of the present-day landing place (blasted out of the cliff in 1940 by the British garrison billeted in the school during the 1939-45 War). Four or five sheep at a time could be cornered there and caught – by just one or two men edging along the steep shelf.

More generally, the rounding up of sheep was a massive operation requiring the deployment of manpower across the moors and mountainsides, and the gradual moving in on the sheep from many directions, gathering them and guiding them down to the fank. In many places the terrain is hard and dangerous even in summer: in winter the *fjallstavur* or *píkstavur* was an essential tool for keeping one's balance – 5½ ft. or so (1.7 m) of stout stick sometimes elaborately carved and tipped with an iron spike edged with two or four points. It doubled as an ice-axe. In winter, the Gásadalur men simply cannot carry out two round-ups in one day over separate areas, such as in summer requires at least 14 hours on the hills and in the fanks. Environmental conditions simply do not allow it. For winter they also keep emergency rations in the one remaining building from the former settlement at Víkar, should the weather turn bad. There is a *hjallur* nearby, where sheep meat is wind-dried through the vertical wooden slatted sides in summer, and kept for winter use. Such contemporary use of temporary winter (as opposed to summer) shelters away from the main settlement may cause speculation as to former practice – though references in Faroe to 'wild sheep' (Bergsåker 1978. 86) might suggest that in earlier days the sheep were simply not tended so frequently.

## LAND ORGANISATION AND DIVISION



Such an account of structures and activities in the outfield cannot, however, show how use of the outfield itself is structured. To understand this it is first necessary to turn to the structure of land holding in the infield. Until 1899 all land taxes were based on the infield *mørk*; to this day the communal resources or wealth of the outfield continue to be shared out on the basis of shares in the markland (West 1972. 12).

The original infield is referred to as the *bður*. It is divided into *merkur*. Subsequent intakes of infield land are referred to as *trøð* – a term originally restricted to an enclosure in the outfield for livestock, whether e.g. horses, cattle or sheep (see *rætt* ... above). In Gásadalur the term *trøð* is restricted to later (including very recent) intakes, *tilleg* being used for earlier intakes.

Oral tradition, supported to some extent by 19th century taxation records (Winther et al 1870), suggests that *tilleg* was broken out first, possibly just as grassland adjacent to the old markland, because some of the original *merkur* were very small. This would suggest that any notion of size reflecting quality had weakened, particularly perhaps in the context of increased fragmentation of holdings, and that area or extent had become all-important. *Tilleg* (but not *trøð*) remained separate, identifiable lands allocated to named *merkur*: administratively, however they were simply added to the original *merkur*. By contrast, *trøð*, other than in its more specialised sense as an ‘animal enclosure’, represents land bought or rented from either the government or the *kongsbóndi* at a later stage. There is a clear need for further investigation into the different later categories of infield land and their relationship to the original *bður*. In general terms, however, although the head-dyke was extended as appropriate to take in each new addition to the township’s infield, neither *tilleg* nor *trøð* carried with it outfield rights of any kind. In Gásadalur these belonged only to the owners of the original 18 *merkur* of Gásadalur infield; and in Mykines, to the owners of the original 40 *merkur* of Mykines infield.

On Mykines, a 40 mark settlement, the outfield is divided into four areas, *hagar*, two of which are sub-divided into two. An idea of the complexity of dealings may be gauged from just one example relating to one outfield area. Borgadalur is an attractive but steep

valley to the east end of the island, across the watershed. It corresponds to 10 mk. of infield. This 10 mk. worth of infield is spread across 25 actual mk. of infield which includes three *kongs* holdings, each owned by one person. In total, however, in 1970, those 25 actual marks of infield were represented in the Borgadalur *hagi* by 131 names. Although names tend to appear more than once, since individuals often hold land in more than one designated mark, nonetheless 69 of the names were of non-residents – islanders or their descendents resident elsewhere in the Faroes or further afield. They included several in Denmark, one in the USA and one in Canada.

Further, taking just one actual infield mark as an example, Borgadalsmørkin á Grótsvalum, the owners of land in the mark were entitled to just 12 *gyllin* worth of resources in the 10 mk Borgadalur outfield. At 16 *gyllin* to the mark (and 20 *skinn* to the *gyllin*) they shared in  $\frac{3}{4}$  of one outfield mark, or in  $\frac{3}{40}$  of the entire Borgadalur outfield resources. These fractional resources, in turn, were shared by 16 people, only seven of whom were resident. Amounts of land in the infield varied from 1 gl. 10 sk. down to just 4 sk. – a few square metres.. Half the owners had less than 1 gl., in the main less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  gl. (10 sk.); and so difficult was the identification of individual portions that one 13 skinn strip of infield land was shown as having two owners ( $6\frac{1}{2}$  sk. each), without further differentiation.

If we look at the fragmentation of land in another way, one Daniel Danielson owned 15 separate pieces of land, varying from 10 sk. to 1 gl. 10 sk.; one Olaf Niclasen had 15 separate pieces from 10 sk. to 3 gl.  $3\frac{1}{2}$ sk.; one Benedikt Davidsen had 22 pieces from 5 sk. to 2 gl. 15 sk. By contrast, a *kongsbóndi* Jógvan Abrahamsen owned two entire marks of kongs land, and two pieces of odal land (8 gl. and 1gl.). Herrid Joensen, another *kongsbóndi* with two marks of kongs land, held five further odal pieces of land varying from 4-16 *gyllin*; and a third kongs farmer, Anna Joensen, in addition to four kongs marks, had a further five odal pieces of considerable size. The most impoverished *odalsbondur* such as Karlo Joensen and David Jákup Joensen, possessed just 5 and 10 skinn respectively of original infield land. It is hardly surprising that the latter was in Canada. Most such minimal land-owners over the past decades were primarily fishermen. They have now migrated to better harbours for bigger boats, where

they have not looked further afield.

This complexity and fragmentation is typical of the Faroes: Gásadalur is no different. It is on the basis of holdings only in the original infield of the settlement that rights to the outfield resources are apportioned. And it is to the organisation of these outfield resources that we now turn, concentrating on fowling rights and livestock rights.

## **STRUCTURE IN THE OUTFIELD**

### **Livestock Rights**

As far as livestock is concerned, each settlement had its souming. For Gásadalur, therefore:–

1 horse was allowed for every 2 marks  
= 9 horses (and 9 foals) maximum  
2 cows : 1 mark  
= 36 cows ( + 36 calves). Also 1 bull.  
30 sheep : 1 mark  
= 540 ( + lambs).  
1 ram : 1 mark  
= 18 rams ( + 4 old rams).  
2 geese : 1 mark  
= 36 geese  
1 gander : 1 mark  
= 18 ganders

Presumably there were once pig soumings, and these were doubtless assimilated as have horse soumings in recent years – one horse being replaced by four sheep.

It was sheep that generated the most detailed administration, and although the Sheep Letter (*Seydabrævið*) of 1298, a law established by Duke Hákon Magnusson for Faroe (and probably also for Shetland), refers continually to individual ownership of sheep, by 1698 individually-owned sheep were declared illegal (West 1972. 17). It is the case that there are exceptions on Suduroy and Eysturoy

(Williamson 1948. 192-3), and in recent times a few private sheep have been kept in Gásadalur (one man, for instance, has twelve, which he winters indoors), but common ownership is, by and large, still the rule.

This means that the stock is held in common (*felagsogn*), as also the crop of fleeces and meat. It means that all who have shares in the original infield, and therefore the outfield resources, are required to assist with sheep-keeping duties.

The Gásadalur hill grazing or *hagi* is divided into three [Fig. 5]:-

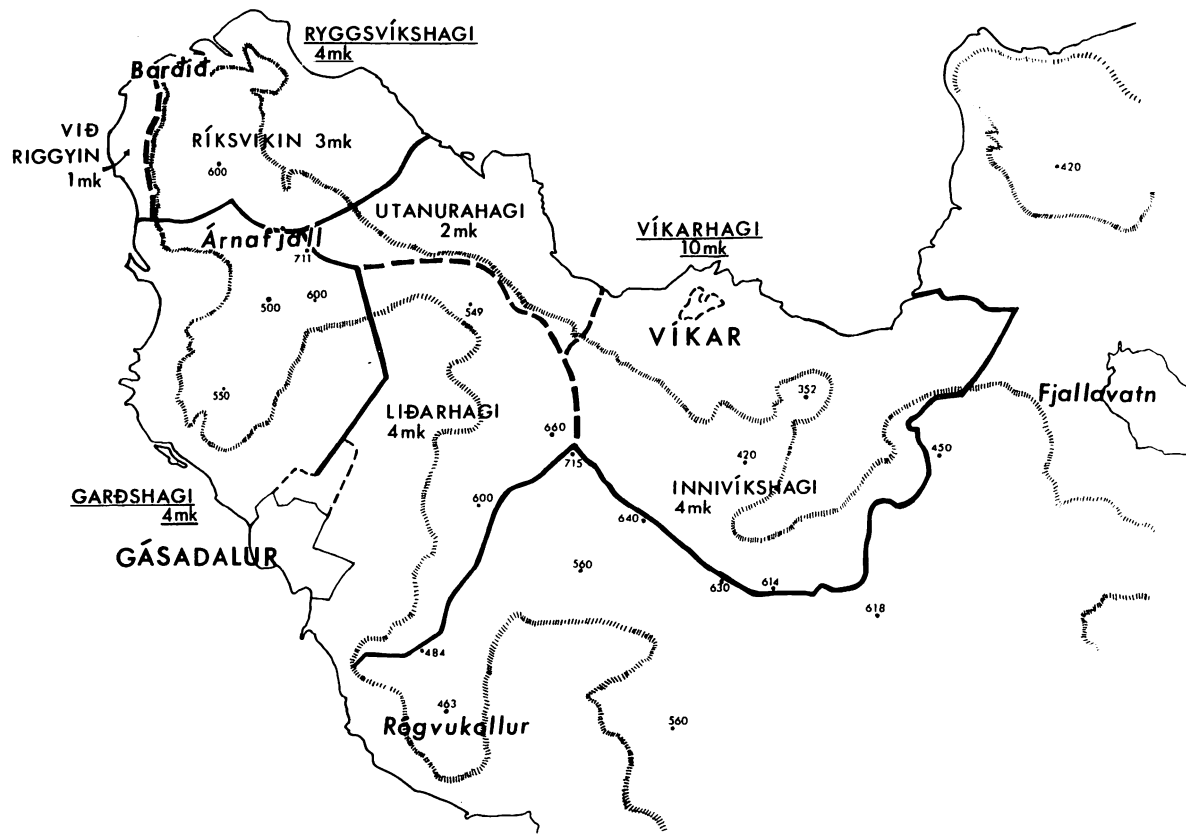
*Víkarhagi* : claiming 10 mk. of infield  
*Gardshagi* : claiming 4 mk. of infield  
*Ryggsvíkshagi*: claiming 4 mk. of infield

Traditionally they had four, two and two community herds respectively, though nowadays one serves for each. Ideally the community herd, *seydamadur* or *hagamaður*, would have considerable numbers of sheep in that particular *hagi*: a vested interest in effective and efficient management as it were.

Individual members of the community held shares in the sheep in one or more *hagar*, dependent upon the allocation of their particular pieces of infield land. In practice, many had sheep on all the *hagar* and would be liable for duty on round-ups over all the outfields – generally three round-ups a year over each *hagi* or section of a *hagi*. In Gásadalur, there would be 18 round-ups:-

<i>Víkarhagi</i>	: 3 sections:	Innivíkshagi; 4 mk.	: 1 lug mark
		: Líðarhagi; 4 mk.	} : 1 lug mark
		: Utanurahagi; 2 mk.	
<i>Gardshagi</i>	: 1 section	4 mk.	{ : 1 lug mark
			{ : 1 lug mark
<i>Ryggsvíkshagi</i>	: 2 sections:	Ríksvikin; 3 mk.	: 1 lug mark
		: Víð Riggýin; 1 mk.	: 1 lug mark

Figure 5. Division of the Gásadalur outfield.



All the boundaries are marked by natural features – rivers/ gills, ridges, hill tops.

However, whilst the hill grazings are broken up thus for the purpose of round-ups, and there is one *rætt* or fank to each of these divisions, it is broken up differently for the purpose of lug-marking, so that each of Víkarhagi, Gardshagi (Vid Gard) and Ryggsvíkshagi (Ríkshagi) has two sets of lug marks – making a total of six sets covering all the Gásadalur sheep, but not therefore corresponding entirely to the outfield sub-divisions. The principal difference is that the two mutually inaccessible sections of Víkarhagi are brought together under one lug-mark; whilst the Gardshagi outfield is split for marking between those sheep in the cliffs and those in the valley.

The manning of round-ups over each main *hagi* is related to its mark-value. Thus Víkarhagi is a 10 mk. *hagi* and requires at least ten men to participate in any round-up, one for each mark. The matter is further complicated by the fact that around the beginning of this century, Gásadalur could not pay for provisions bought from shops in Bøur. One woman, for instance, sold all her 27 gyllin for food. Bøur men own approximately 33% of the Gásadalur infield, and used to have one of their number living in the settlement to make sure the land was kept in good heart. They did not, however, take grass off the land, or cattle, birds or peats from the hill. They took only their share of the sheep in Víkarhagi. Because also of common boundaries, Bøur men, therefore, are always present at round-ups over the Víkarhagi.

Whilst this kind of organisation is the rule for sheep round-ups, there are exceptions. Just two or three men would creep along a grassy ledge in the cliff to catch sheep in the *tøka*, close by the village. And to this might be added the practice of ledge-grazing on the *feitilendi*, fat land, out at the north-west tip of Vágur. Here there are specific grazing rights linked to a kongs holding (Tøvan), where in 1970 four rams were put up on a rope from a boat in the spring, and retrieved in the autumn. That only one ram was put there ca. 1940 either suggests an extension of grass cover or, alternatively, overgrazing. Either way, it indicates flexibility in the system! By 1977, the farmer had ceased to use this highly remote grazing.

One further feature of the organisation of sheep-holdings in Gásadalur is noteworthy, and it relates only to the large, far-flung Víkarhagi. Decisions as to which sheep should be allocated to which parts of the related infield holdings and thus to individual villagers are still based (1980) on a system of annual lottery. The allocations are not fixed. The reason is not hard to find. In 1978, for example, only one sheep is said to have survived the winter on (?parts of) the Víkarhagi, and sharing the risk around helps ensure that tragedies and shortages are shared out amongst the community.

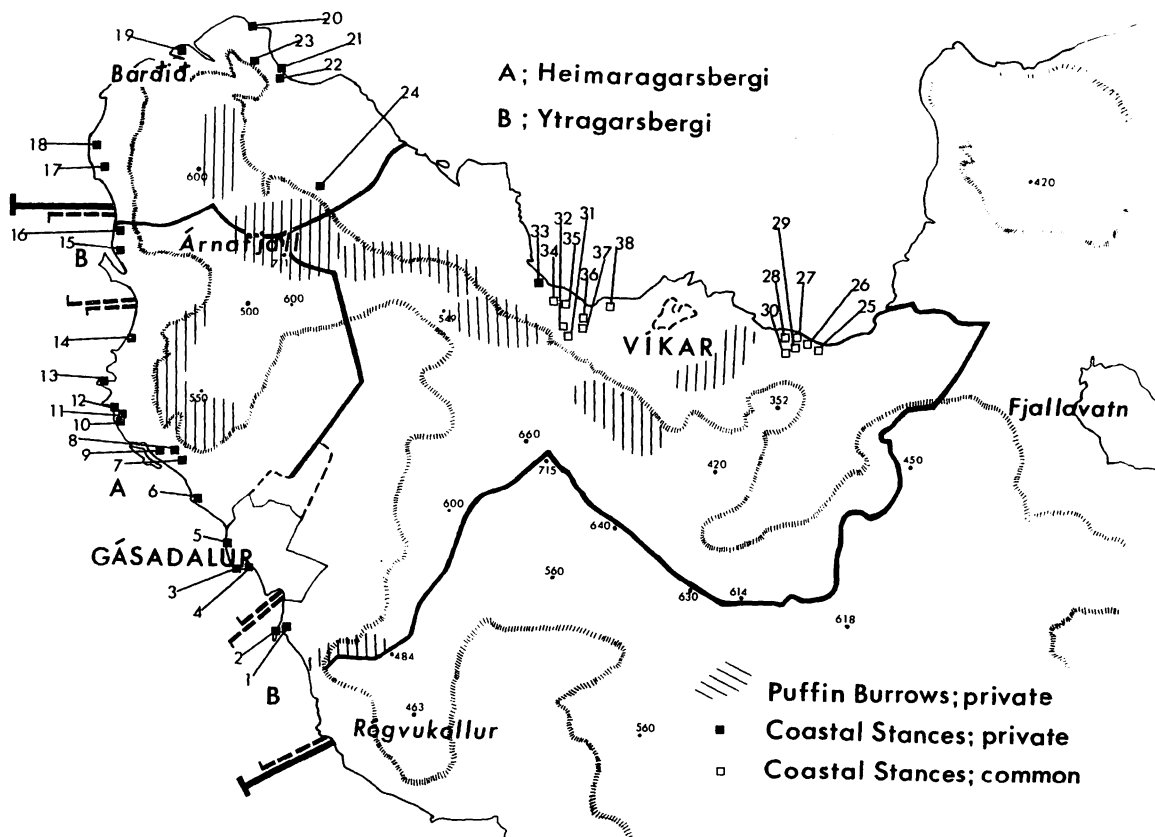
For the purposes of allocation, therefore, the 10mk. Víkarhagi is divided into five equal section of 2 mk. each. On this is based the share-out of meat and wool, and consequently, also, the losses. Five men come together, each representing a 2 mk. share; one turns his back; the other four each choose (silently and without removing, mutually agreeing) one of five small objects laid on a table or the floor. The first man returns and places each object against a piece of paper previously marked for a particular piece of *hagi*. Five bits of paper against five objects which tell the five representatives which part of the hill and its sheep goes with their 2 mk. of infield for the coming year. Subsequently, the further division of resources according to *gyllin* and *skinn* owned can be effected.

### **Fowling rights**

As far as fowling and bird rights are concerned, there are official regulations which identify the fowling cliffs (*fuglabjörg*) allocated to each settlement and the close season for particular birds – normally just the puffin, which can be taken only between 16 March and 31 August. That the taking of e.g. fulmars, guillemots, auks, gannets and gulls is not restricted is academic to the extent that most of them, too, are not all-year residents, nor are they so sought-after. In Gásadalur, the fulmar can be taken anywhere from November to May, outside the breeding season.

Gásadalur cliff rights, enshrined in a law in 1860, extend from the Reipsáfossur where it joins the sea north of the Fjallavatn, right round the north-west tip of Vágur and south to Skarvegjógvsdrangur by Bordsteinur. Within this area there is considerable sub-division of the

Figure 6. Fowling areas and stances for Gásadalur.





## GÁSADALUR COASTAL FOWLING STANCES: FLEYGASESSAR

(Key to Locations in Fig. 6: Informant's spelling and comments)

1. inni á Riggji : fulmars, ca. 1945 (J.J. Gasadal), top of cliff.
2. undur Reyðastýggi : puffins, very old, in urds (talus) below (1).
3. á Høvnakletti : fulmars, ca 1965 (H. Petersen), a little down in the cliff.
4. inidara Rók : fulmars, ca. 1955 (John Joensen & H. Petersen's brother).
5. Steinkolarókin : fulmars, ca. 1880 (H. Petersen's father), in cliff.
6. Rókin á Ratt : fulmars, two stances.
7. á Skriðu Bakkanum : fulmars, ca. 1920.
8. uttan Fyri Skriðu : fulmars, ca. 1974 (H. Petersen).
9. i Eiriks Bergid : fulmars, ca. 1920, a little into the cliff.
10. undur Heimastýggj : fulmars, 1974 (P. Joensen), at top of cliff.
11. Føri Kjalla : fulmars/puffins, old, in cliff.
12. Streymnes stýggi : puffins (now puffins/fulmars), old.
13. Streymnes : puffins, old.
14. under Bólinum : fulmars, oldish, top of cliff.
15. i Steinfløtti : puffins, 1880 (H. Petersen's grandfather).
16. á Lopavegnum : puffins/fulmars, ca. 1900, top of hamar.
17. Stóra Tippi : puffins (now mainly fulmars), old, top of hamar.
18. Savura stýggj : puffins/fulmars, very old.
19. á Bakkanum : puffins/fulmars, 'not very old'.  
(H. Petersen's grandfather)  
[Nord i husi]
20. á Hellutanganum : puffins, old, low down near sea.  
[Uppistova]
21. í Nevinum : puffins, old, down by sea.  
[Nidristova]
22. í Feitiskordum : puffins (and now fulmars), very old, two stances above (21).
23. í Skorinum : puffins, very old.  
[?Stigvun]
24. í Beringarággi : puffins (and a few Manx shearwaters in old days), inland in urds (talus); not many puffins now.
25. í Koytini : puffins, very old, very good.
26. á gamla Bakka : puffins, old, the best place in Gásadalur
27. vinstrahonda  
Bakkanum : puffins, old, good.
28. á Skavinum : puffins, three stances formerly, fallen away.
29. í Nyggjúrini : puffins, old, good.
30. í Midkøddinum : Puffins, not too good a place, young boys taught here how to catch birds.
31. í Nýggjurini : puffins, not old, not good.
32. Kotinum : puffins, very old, good.
33. í Fjærdudalsbakka : puffins, old, not so good.  
[Nidristova]
34. Másasessurin : puffins, very old, good
35. í Ryggjinum : puffins, old, good.  
(Ryggsbergi)  
[Tøvan]
36. í Krønni : puffins, not old, not so good, rocks with no turf – looks like a kregv (long, low, stone-walled peat stack)
37. undir Klettinum : puffins, old, good.
38. Malastýggi : puffins, very old, very good, at top of cliff.

cliffs, including two areas held in common where anyone can catch puffins. One of these areas of *felagsogn* contains seven fowling places; the other six – 13 out of a total 38 mainly coastal locations so far recorded from oral tradition, where seabirds are taken from semi-dugouts or *fleygasessar*. Some of these stances are good for puffins, others for fulmars. Some are very old; some no longer very good; some have fallen away in cliff falls; some are fairly new with *fleygasessar* made in the 1920s and in most decades since. Most of the later stances are for fulmars, the latest dating to 1974[Fig. 6 and Key].

The catch from the common bird cliffs for Gásadalur, both of them on the north side of the mountains and sited one east and one west of the *trøð* land at Víkar, is divided out so that any fowler can keep  $\frac{2}{3}$  of his catch if a total of 30 birds or over (in 1980: 27 or over in 1970), the remaining  $\frac{1}{3}$  being divided out amongst holders of original infield land. For the purpose of allocating birds, the apportionment is not made according to individual holdings of infield, but by dividing the 18 mk. by three, and each 6 mk. again by three, so that birds are assigned to each 2 mk. worth of land, to be shared out subsequently by agreement amongst those concerned. So if a fowler on the common cliff in 1980 were to catch 90 puffins, he would keep 60 and give over 30 for division amongst the 18 mk. If in 1970 he had caught 27, he would have kept 18, leaving nine for the ground – or  $\frac{1}{2}$  puffin per mark. In practice, the community puffins were allocated to individuals in rotation.

In neighbouring Bøur, as on Mykines, the 'common ground' fowler retained only  $\frac{1}{2}$  of his catch, rather than  $\frac{2}{3}$ ; but in many settlements in Faroe, including Gásadalur, this was felt in recent times not to be worthwhile for the fowler. Indeed, in some places, the fowler has come to retain  $\frac{3}{4}$ .

The remaining bird cliffs, the larger part, are fully allocated to the 18 infield marks: they are not held in common. Six major cliffs to a total of 12 mk. value are owned outright, four separately by four families, the other two by a fifth family. The remaining 6 mk. worth of cliff have many part-shares:–

- Uppistova (2 marks) : á Hellutanganum (20)
- Nidristova (2 marks) : í Nevinum (21)  
í Fjórðudalsbakka (33)
- Nord í husi (2 marks) : á Bakkinum (19)
- Tøvan (3 marks) : Ryggsbergi (35)
- ?Stigvun (3 marks) : í Skorinum (23)
- Part-shares (3 marks) : Heimaragarsbergi  
(Fossur – Storagil: all stances)
- Part-shares (3 marks) : Ytragarsbergi  
(Storagil – Steinfløttan  
Fossur – Bordsteinur: all stances)

Owners may catch as many puffins as they like, but only from their own ground. It is the two sets of bird cliffs closest to the settlement that have the largest number of part-shares: from the waterfall below the infield, westwards to Storagil (*Heimaragarsbergi*); and from Storagil further west to Steinfløtan, on the far edge of Hvannadalur, where it meets the sea (*Ytragarsbergi*). Puffins were particularly plentiful on this outer stretch, which originally held a 6 mk. allocation; but they have not been so plentiful in recent times, hence a reduced 3 mk. allocation, which required adjustment elsewhere. *Ytragarsbergi* also includes the stretch from Fossur east to Bordsteinur.

For those taking birds from *Heimaragarsbergi*, *Ytragarsbergi*, *Ryggsbergi* and *í Skorinum*, there is, however, an obligation to hand over 50% of the catch over 29 to the 'ground', for distribution as from the *felagsogn* puffineries. The 'private' fowler keeps 50% for himself.

As well as coastal rights to puffins, fleyged with a net, there are considerable inland ridges and mountain tops [Fig. 6] where rights exist for the taking the eggs and of young puffins from their burrows, either by hand or with a *lundakrókur*. These rights also applied

presumably to young Manx shearwaters where they were to be found: there are very few nowadays. *Heinanø*v, above Gásadalur, is available to those with shares in *Heimaragarsbergi*: Ólavursgjógv being particularly rich. *Knúkarnir* is available to those sharing *Ytragarsbergi*. Otherwise there are some six large areas covering most of the ridges and tops from just east of Víkar along the spine of the peninsular to the heights above Bardid at the north-west extremity. These are all private fowling grounds. Nidristova had, for instance, *Held*, high on the inland cliffs east of Víkar. The highest points of all, *Árnafjall* and the *Flatidrangur*, are private to Uppistova, another kongs house.

## CONCLUSION

This initial exploration of bird and sheep rights gives some idea of the intricacy of the matter. Though even for the Matrikulstovan there are mysteries that go unsolved as far as land ownership and allocation in the Faroes is concerned, there is enough detail to show how crucial the outfield was to survival in the islands.

For the physical environment of Faroes is undeniably harsh – bare, rough, steep mountains, rising directly out of the sea; tiny pockets of cultivable land perched at the head of a small number of modest fjords or more often at the mouth of a steep, short valley or on a shelf along the line of a coastal cliff. The tides and currents around the islands are strong and turbulent; the gales career off the cliffs and render sailing or haymaking a delicate task; the mist and sea fogs obscure the cliffs from the navigator and the fields from the sun.

To the first Irish monks in the early 7th century or to Vikings from Norway, Ireland and the Scottish islands in the late 9th century and after, a primary attraction much have been the teeming masses of seabirds to add to the large numbers of sheep bred from the stocks they brought with them. And it is on these resources that man has depended in the Faroes until modern times.

It is this harsh environment that required and explains the closest possible control of the exploitation and allocation of such resources – a control that became even more necessary as the population expanded

in the late 19th century. That fowling apportionments are nowadays modified to the benefit of certain individuals prepared still to harvest the cliffs, that sheep regulations are weakening to allow extra private sheep or, alternatively, fewer overall stocks, these are straws in the wind. In the less accessible parts of northern and western Scotland we are anything from 100 to 200 years further removed from such obvious reliance on a delicate ecological balance – in many instances exact regulations in Scotland had broken down by the middle of last century, where not before. But even so, it is unlikely from the available evidence that the structure of outfield organisation in Scotland, however precise, was ever quite so complex as in the Faroes. In a modern world, however, the breakdown of such organisation in the Faroes, linked to the programme of land reform, will presumably render the system there as obsolete as those of northern and western Scotland.

Specifically in the context of fowling, St. Kilda is the outstanding and unique Scottish example of a particular community dependent to such a vital degree on one outfield resource for so many everyday needs. What one island was to one country, Scotland, the Faroes, now an independent country, are to Northern Europe as a whole. In the wider context of European civilisation, it is remarkable that such a dependence upon a largely hunter-pastoralist subsistence economy survived so long. Certainly it could not have done so without the physical remoteness and economic isolation of the islands which required the inhabitants to seek out their own salvation and to live by their own strict regulations.

These regulations and practices, though disintegrating, provide not only a valuable window on to several centuries of Faroese ways, but an illuminating parallel for what must have been a similar, though less intensive pattern of life in many of the northern and western islands of Scotland and elsewhere in north Atlantic Europe and Scandinavia. In addition to organisation, however, they tell a good deal about basic responsibility – the necessary, co-operative interdependence of man and his fellow man, within the close and delicate interdependence of man and his natural environment. These are responsibilities which, though perhaps less clearly seen, are as vital today in a complex technological society several steps removed from a

direct relationship with natural resources, as ever they were yesterday in a smaller (though hardly simple) subsistence economy where over-exploitation by one family or one generation might well mean death or death to the next.

## Acknowledgement and Note

I am particularly indebted to the inhabitants of Mykines and Gásadalur and to a number of their 'absent' relatives, both for their kindly hospitality and for their considerable patience in dealing with my persistent questions – these must have seemed at best perplexing, and more often perverse! To staff at the Matrikulstovan in Tórshavn, I am most grateful for making available survey records, maps and air photographs: equally, I much appreciate the considerable amount of survey detail gathered in the field by members of Brathay Exploration Group expeditions to the Faroes in 1970 and 1980. A good deal of the survey information and a still greater number of documentary sources yet remain to be examined in detail.

The spelling both of minor place-names and of ordinary terms in Faroese can be a problem. I have tried in the main to adopt the orthography of Jacobsen and Matras, but there are discrepancies due to alternative spellings given by different informants or, indeed, to my own error.

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