

SMÅLANDSSTENAR GRAVE FIELD

At Västbo rural community centre, founded in 1902 and thus the oldest one in Sweden, you find the largest grave field in the area. The location, previously known as Skäppekullen, changed name in the 1820s to Smålandsstenar. Behind the new name was the rural dean Daniel Nordin who had a great interest in ancient monuments. The name is a corruption of Smale stenar. Smale is an old word for sheep and goats and shows that the area was used for grazing by small livestock.

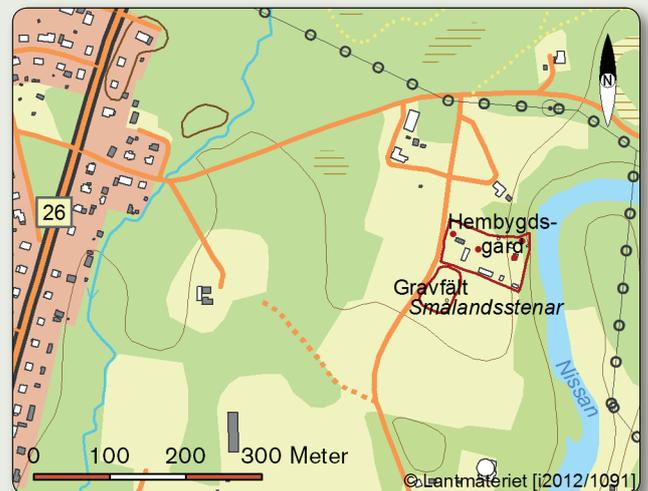
The grave field in Smålandsstenar is from the Iron Age and comprises five stone circles and one isolated stone. The stone circles are between 8 and 20 metres in diameter and are made up of an odd number of large stones. Many of the stones are missing today, but holes in the ground show where they were located. The stones were probably removed at some point and used for house building or similar. One of the largest stone circles contains a large boulder that in an older tradition was interpreted as a sacrificial altar.

The stone circles in Smålandsstenar have not been investigated, but archaeological excavations in other locations show that they were erected to commemorate people who had been cremated. The underground burial pits contain the burnt bones as well as objects such as potsherds, clay vessels, knives, combs, dress pins and gaming counters. Based on previous excavations in the county, these graves are believed to be from between the 3rd century to the 7th century A.D.

Ever since stone circles were first constructed in the Bronze Age, people have been fascinated by them. Carl Linnaeus, for example, thought that they were thingsteads, while others believed that they were intended for healing illnesses, sacrificial offerings to the gods, ancestor worship, astronomical studies or gathering places for large feasts. In local tradition, some stone circles are referred to as Danish graves, relating to the Danish military expeditions in the 1560s. Today, the grave field with stone circles is one of the hidden gems of the county and the scene of the annual local Walpurgis Night celebrations.



Aerial photo from the south-west of Västbo rural community centre and stone circles in Smålandsstenar. The river Nissan flows behind the screen of trees. Photo: Leif Gustavsson/L.G.foto.



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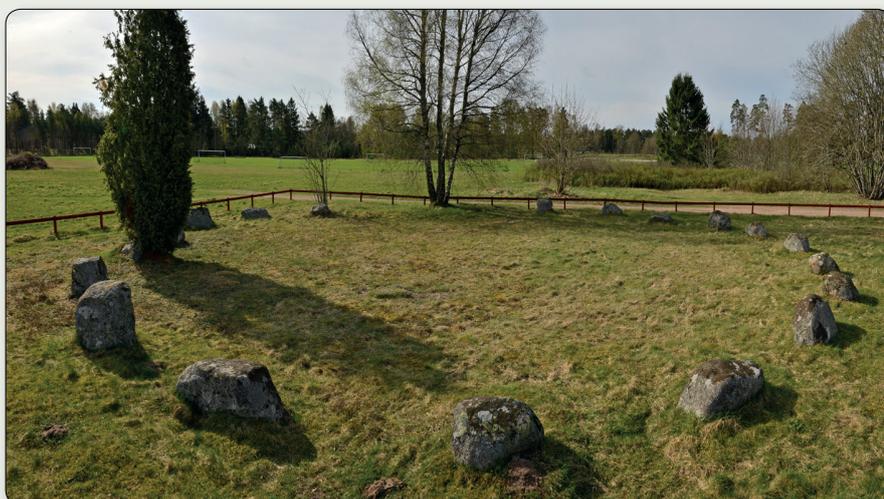


HOW TO GET HERE

Drive along Nissastigen (Road 26). Turn east at the directional road sign, approx. 1.5 km north of Smålandsstenar.

Coordinates:

N 6337618 / E 404952
(SWEREF 99 TM) // N 57°
10' 18.86", E 13° 25' 40.93"
(WGS84)



One of the stone circles in the grave field in Smålandsstenar. Photo: Jönköping County Museum.

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HIDDEN GEMS

There are so many things to discover in the countryside! Here, Jönköping County Museum presents some of the cultural environment and heritage attractions in the county.

They include well-known cultural monuments such as Habo Church and the Smålandsstenar Stone Circles, but also lesser known gems such as log-driving remains in the river Valån and Stengårdshult Church. Around the county you can find evidence of how people lived and worked in the past, everything from castles and manors to abandoned embankments and clearance cairns in forest areas.

The idea with Hidden Gems is to tempt you to make excursions in the cultural landscape – here you find our history, revealed in different ways in the physical environment. This heritage is worth experiencing and protecting. Bit by bit, we will be adding more sights under the heading Hidden Gems, both for people living in the county and visitors from further away. The more people who discover these gems, the better chance that they will be preserved for the future.

FACTS

In Jönköping County there are more than 4 000 registered ancient remains, 87 cultural environments of national interest, close to 130 listed buildings, around 150 churches, some 100 rural community centres with old settlements, a large number of industrial heritage sites, and two cultural reserves. There are also a large number of cultural environments with buildings worthy of conservation. More information about the sites can be found on the websites of the County Administrative Board, the municipalities and the local heritage societies.

GOOD TO KNOW

Access to the Hidden Gems varies. Some sites are well signposted, with easy access and proper parking facilities, etc. Others are more challenging to reach. Visitors may have to walk some distance, sometimes through scrubby forest, only to be met by a broken sign (if there ever was one) when they reach the site. All the sites, however, have an exciting and interesting history.

Please note that many of the cultural heritage buildings are privately owned and can only be viewed from the outside. Also, please respect private land. Many churches are open in the summer. During other times of the year, the churchwarden may be able to open the church for you.

