Stone Age village in Saarijärvi in a nutshell

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The Stone Age Village of Saarijärvi was opened to the public in 1980. In that time there were no such villages with hunting and gathering cultures as their subject in the Nordic countries. Since its founding, the main objective of the Village has been to popularize and disseminate the results of prehistoric research. The Stone Age Village could afford very good opportunities for experimental archaeology, but unfortunately, this research has been conducted on only a very limited scale, as a by-product of the building and maintenance of the village.

In 1968 a large hotel and restaurant was built on Summassaari island. Already at that time numerous prehistoric finds, mainly from the Stone Age, were known from the area of Lake Summassaari. Risto Vuolle-Apiala, an architect with regional environmental centre at Jyväskylä, developed the idea of utilizing the prehistoric relics and at the same time motivating their protection by making them useful.

Because there is not much to see at real Stone Age sites, a reconstructed Stone Age Village was to be created. This idea was quite new at the time in Finland, because there were no such reconstructions in the whole country.
The tourist board of the municipality of Saarijärvi took on the task. Simo Vanhatalo, a student in archaeology at the time, was appointed to prepare the plans for the village, with the support of a team of experts from the National Board of Antiquities and the Museum of Central Finland.

The first village

The buildings, traps and reconstructed artefacts were the main items from the very beginning. The buildings are the most eye-catching part of the village. In the “original” Stone Age Village there were six buildings: the huts of Ruisili, Narva, Byske, “Hide Hut”, a small pit house and single walled lean-to shelter hut.

A map of the first Stone Age Village.

Some of the huts in the first Stone Age Village. (Photo Lauri Pasanen 1980).
The Räisälä hut

When the Stone Age Village was being planned there was only one known reconstruction of Finnish Stone Age, the drawing of the framework of a hut excavated in 1915 by the archaeologist Sakari Pälsi at the Pitkäjärvi site in Räisälä on the Karelian Isthmus. Pälsi discovered a set of discoloured soil features in a circle, which he interpreted as the post-holes of a conical hut.

The hut of Räisälä. (Photo Lauri Pasanen 1980.)

The “general” conical hut

One of the buildings was a “generalized” conical hut, which was covered with elk skins. It had a very simple structure, with only straight poles connected at the top. The Sámi hut, for example, is more complicated. According to Simo Vanhatalo the model for this reconstruction was to be found in Austria.

The “general” conical hut. (Photo Lauri Pasanen 1980.)
The Narva hut

The model for the Narva hut was borrowed from Estonia. The reconstruction of this hut was based on the reconstruction drawing by N. N. Gurina. In the picture there is an oval-based, birch-bark covered hut with a ridge pole in the middle of the roof. Archeologically Gurina could only determine the form and size of the pit. No organic material was preserved. The reconstruction is based on ethnographic information from Siberian huts. As a matter of fact it can have been a rectangular log structure as well those which we know to be common in Finland the same typical comb ceramic period on which the hut belongs.

The hut of Narva. (Photo the archive of Saarijärvi Museum).

The Byske hut

The Byske hut was named after experiments conducted in the 1960s at the Byske River, in Västerbotten, Sweden, where two Stone Age buildings were constructed, one of the “Finnish type” and the other a rectangular bulwark house based on Danish Neolithic material. The “Finnish” type was a version of the Räisälä hut, of which the

The Byske hut under construction. (Photo Simo Vanhatalo 1980).
“Byske” hut was built as a version with oval ground plan. At that time most of the house depressions known from Finland were oval.

The small pit house

The small “pit house” was based on dwelling depressions excavated in Finland. The archaeologist Torsten Edgren, for example, had discovered two depressions in the earth at the Kolmhaara site in Honkilahti, and regarded them to be the floors of huts. One was L-shaped and 2 metres across. The other was oval and approximately 6 x 3 metres in size. At the Stone Age Village it was built as a very small conical hut and covered with turf. A logger cut down a big tree over the reconstructed pit house in the beginning of the 1990s. The house was not rebuilt.

The single wall lean-to shelter

The lean-to shelter was one of the buildings made for the first village. It was based on the remains Aarne Äyräpää found in Alavus Ojalankangas. The evidence is faint but of course it is possible that they are of single wall lean-to shelter.
THE SETTING OF THE STONE AGE VILLAGE

From the very beginning, the Stone Age Village has been much more than its buildings alone. Because it is a village there should be the artefacts that people have used during Stone Age. Of course there is the problem of the defects of the original Stone Age material. In the acidic soils usually only stone artefacts and pottery remain. Bone survives only when burnt into small pieces. We have very few bog finds of individual artefacts made of wood. But where there are no finds from Finland, material from e.g. Danish Mesolithic axe handles and ethnographic analogies have been used.

In the “original” Stone Age Village there were e.g. Comb Ceramic vessels, stone axes, adzes, chisels, spears, bow and arrows, an elk head mace, knives, and wooden bowl, in addition to larger items such as dug-out canoe, a fishing net made of bast fibre thread. The list is nowadays quite the same, but some things have been added and a variety of things are larger.


There was a trap and snare path behind the village from the beginning. There were e.g. hunting pits, a large falling trap, and snares for grouse and hare. In the lake there was a trap for fish.

Of course, the only traps we really know to have been used in the Stone Age are hunting pits, but there are good reasons to believe that many ethnographically known traps and snares were already known in the Stone Age. The oldest known hunting pit in Finland is approximately 10,000 years old.
Real “Stone Age people” would have made the place even more alive than small things. There are no universities with students in archaeology near Saarijärvi. Some of the local people were hired using employment allowances to do something resembling Stone Age activities. They were not very motivated in their jobs and their activity was not continuing. People were replaced with models of natural size representing Stone Age men, women and a child. These dummies have evoked conflicting emotions.

After this episode the purpose have been to create the feeling of a village from where real inhabitants are only temporarily out for hunting or fishing. Their campfires are still burning when the visitor comes to the site. We can call this metaphorically as a time trip. This is presented also in cartoon format on the way to the village.

Stone Age Village as a department of the Saarijärvi Museum

The municipality of Saarijärvi was provided with a professionally maintained museum in 1986 when Kari Kotilainen was appointed as the director of the museum. The Stone Age village was naturally connected as a department of the museum. Kari Kotilainen immediately realized some innovations. Guiding visitor was problematic, because there were no students to hire for the job. There had been small guide booklets in Finnish, Swedish, English and German already in the first season. Now the guiding was arranged with small personal tape recorders. The guide text was recorded and the visitors played it while walking. The tape told where to go and what there was to
see. This made also possible to have a proper guiding in all the four languages mentioned above.

Already in the “first” Stone Age Village there were demonstrations of Stone Age techniques, for example the making of pottery. (Simo Vanhatalo, email 26. 4. 2007 ). Being a department of the museum, the village provided some activities all the time while open. The visitors could try to paddle the dug-out canoes and try how a stone axe bites into a tree trunk.

![Eila Raesmaa has fired a Comb Ceramic vessel in. (Photo: Olavi Lahtela, Saarijärvi Museum).](image)

After the year 2000 a new kind of activity was initiated for children. An area for “archaeological excavation” was filled with sand and small things were hidden in the sand. Children were given the opportunity to find the objects using small spades and buckets.

Eero Muurimäki, the writer of this paper, began to work at the Stone Age Village in 1989. I have since then been working about four months a year for the Saarijärvi Museum.

THE NEW APPEARANCE OF THE STONE AGE AND THE STONE AGE VILLAGE

In 1990 Kari Kotilainen and I began to consider possibilities to change the Stone Age Village. The buildings in a real Stone Age Village were probably all of the same type; our village was a collection of different kinds of houses. On the other hand, new studies and investigations of earlier finds had revealed that not everything was small and beautiful in the Stone Age. There were now new finds of house floor depressions over 20 metres in size. A 1.5 km long net, probably for sealing, was found at Tuorskylä in Pori, W Finland. Does a society of small family groups make and use equipment of this kind?

We decided to renew the village on the beach but not to abandon the old house types. They were to be rebuilt behind the trap and snare path in the wood. They would not form a village but a collection of different kinds of huts. In the beach area we were to build a village where all the buildings are of the same type, but of different size.
There were two possible sources for reconstruction, both problematic but in different ways. The Isokangas site at Evijärvi excavated by Markus Hiekkanen in the year 1981 and Heikki Matiskainen’s and Timo Jussila’s excavation of a house floor depression at Naarajärvi in Pieksämäki in 1982.

THE NEW RECONSTRUCTIONS

Kotilainen and I decided to make the new conception of Stone Age visible and to build a village with large houses in the year 1992. The problem was that there was nearly nothing left of the structures of the houses at Isokangas and there were post holes in a random cluster in Naarajärvi.

The depression in Naarajärvi was according to Matiskainen and Jussila (1984) 25 m long, the biggest house foundation at Isokangas according to Hiekkanen (1984) 20 metres long. Houses of this size could surely not be conical huts. A conical hut with a diameter of 20 m would require a height of 20 metres. There must have been other kinds of houses, but of what kinds?

The postholes of Naarajärvi are really main roots of dead and dry standing pines or there has been many hoses rebuilt that it is impossible to get information about the structure of the houses. Matiskainen and Jussila presented a reconstruction of the inside of the building. There is a forest of poles in this picture, but it did not tell about the structure of the building. They compared it with the dwellings of the Gilyaks, as Pälsi had done. But with the same kind of structure hut of Räisäla it would have been 20 metres high.

At Evijärvi only the depressions in the ground remained. Thus, if the main thing is to show the new dimensions, why not to do it with Isokangas and take what was available, i.e. the form and size of the depressions. So we made the structures of the buildings so that they correspond the size of the Depressions in Isokangas, they were 12 m, 16 m and 19 meter by diameter.

The construction of a yourt-type building.
Even if there are no traces of posts it is possible that the building was constructed using them. Meinander is surely right that in normal circumstances the posts will disappear, otherwise we should find the much more.

But what kind of structure could there have been at Isokangas? As a matter of fact, the structure of the Räisälä hut is redundant for so small a hut. If a conical hut has a diameter of 6 metres, it needs no frame of upright posts, slanting poles are enough.

We thus took the structure of the Räisälä but changed it’s basic model. When the diameter is the larger than approximately 8 metres, at least two courses of vertical posts are needed for the slanting posts to lean on. And on the place of the outermost course there must be a fold in the roof.

The basic structure would be on upright posts supporting a circle of horizontal poles. The slanting poles leaned on this horizontal, circular frame. The roof is very steep up the first course of vertical poles. Then there is a fold and the roof continues with a gentle slope to the middle of the round building. This makes the building look like a yurt. The largest of the structures required for one more circle in the middle.

The joints were made of a type based on an idea from the Sámi reindeer mosquito shelter, but reversed (Muurimäki 1995). Every detail of the structure was based on analogical reasoning, but unlike as for example R. A. Gould argues, the use of analogy does not limit our theories to what is known from present times! In analogy it is question of a resource, not of identity.

The buildings were a theory or at least the core of the theory, a paramorphic model (Muurimäki 1995) in concrete form, in one to one scale. To be a part of a theory they need a textual description of the source side and the argumentation or discussion why particular items were chosen for models as I have done in my 1995 publication and in
this. But a theory can always give a false picture of the reality that tries to capture. My theory was waiting for new finds in order to be corroborated or refuted. During 15 years new finds have made these reconstruction improbable.

Archaeological research in Saarijärvi

Shortly after the large huts were built the National Board of Antiquities conducted excavations in Saarijärvi, especially in the area of Lake Summasjärvi. The excavations were led by Hans-Peter Schulz in the years 1993 - 1995. He and his team found many new prehistoric features, for example hunting pit system of 60 pits and two Stone Age pit house floors in Summassaari. Previously the Early Iron Age settlement of Saarenpää had been found and cooking pits in places, where the could be connected with the “Path of Prehistory”.

Reconstructed fences between hunting pits.

The path is about two kilometres long. It was designed to be a museum without walls. The information signs were made of the same type as corresponding signs on the walls of museums, large with proper texts and large pictures. Some of the hunting pits were reconstructed with fences.

Exhibitions

Seal hunting diorama in the exhibition room of Stone Age village.
In 1995 the Saarijärvi museum was given the use of the main building of the former Saarenpää farm. It was possible to arrange exhibitions there. First there was an exhibition of prehistoric buildings. In 1998 the Saarijärvi Museum and the Finnish Hunting Museum cooperated on a larger exhibition of the Finnish Stone Age which was first in the Hunting Museum and in the summer months in the Saarijärvi Stone Age Village.

LOG HOUSES

Around the same time as these large houses were planned and accomplished, new information on the structure of the houses of the Comb Ceramic period was gathered both in Finland and Västerbotten, Sweden. The house-floor pits have been regarded round or oval. Now there were more and more information that that the houses themselves were rectangular.

In the beginning of 1990’s Hans-Peter Schulz discovered at Summassaari island in Saarijärvi, a depression which could even without excavation be seen to be rectangular in form. This Rusavierto settlement was situated about 800 metres from the Stone Age Village. This depression was excavated in 1999 and 2000 by Sirpa Leskinen of the National board of Antiquities. The excavation revealed the charred bottom parts of the lowest logs of a rectangular log house. This base was preserved because the house had burned and there were charred residues of the logs left. The house measured 8 x 12 metres. (Leskinen 2002)

Leskinen led the reconstruction work in 2001 while continuing excavation work at the Uimaranta site, about 300 metres from the Stone Age Village. The house was reconstructed with a base of three logs laid on top each other. There were no traces of posts, but for reasons of safety they were added to support the ridge beam. The
structure was covered first with birch bark and turf, as it was experimentally perceived to be the best solution. The “old” yurt-type buildings had to give way to the “new” log-based buildings.

Sirpa Leskinen begun to excavate at the Uimaranta site at 2001 and discovered the new base of a pit house. The site is about 300 m from the Stone Age Village. The reconstruction work was led by her in 2002 when the excavation work continued at the Uimaranta site. The only publication of the Uimaranta building is so far the

The structure of the Uimaranta house in the spring of 2004. (Photo Olavi Lahtela, Saarijärvi museum)

The Stone Age Village in 2005. (Photo: Olavi Lahtela, Saarijärvi Museum)
reconstruction, which was done under her guidance in 2002. The hut is smaller than the Rusavierto house. The structure is of different type than the log buildings, employing four poles. It is like the Räisälä hut in structure, but with fewer poles, which were eight in number in the Räisälä hut. This hut was also covered with birch bark and turf.

Economic factors have always been a problem for the Stone Age Village. The municipality of Saarijärvi is completely responsible for funding. The museum has never been able to employ an archaeologist on a year-round basis. New problems arose with the severe economic recession that struck Finland in the early 1990s. At the Stone Age Village, this led to a partial privatization of its functions. The café, kiosk and daily maintenance were given over to the Suomen Eräpäiväliitto company, which arranging wilderness-related activities. Suomen Eräpäiväliitto has a sauna and services on the area of the Stone Age Village. The Saarijärvi Museum is responsible for the contents of the village and its further development. The staff of Suomen Eräpäiväliitto maintain the café and kiosk and are responsible for keeping the site clean. The archaeologist and the building workers are hired by the museum and are responsible for building, content and information concerning the Stone Age.
A version of this paper, “Stone Age Village in Saarijärvi - an Overview “
with litterature refrerences is to be found in:

Vilkuna, Janne, Taavitsainen, Jussi-Pekka and Heiskanen, Virpi (ed). IV Mittnordiska