



Investigations at Sindi-Lodja

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INTRODUCTION

The Sindi-Lodja area, located at the confluence of the Reiu and Pärnu Rivers, is an archaeologically significant region due to both stray finds and known settlement sites. In the first half of the 20th century, a large number of prehistoric, mainly Stone Age, stray finds were collected from the area (Glück 1906, 275–276; Bliebernicht 1924; Indreko 1926; Indreko 1932). They are diverse and include bone arrowheads, harpoons, spearheads, fish hooks, cutting tools, hoe- and adze-like implements with shaft holes made from antler, tooth pendants, some art objects, etc. The bone and antler artefacts vary in age, with available radiocarbon ages ranging from approx. 8700 to 5900 BC (Jonuks 2013; Jonuks 2016; Manninen *et al.* 2021; Jonuks *et al.* 2023). The items, originating from multiple settlement sites of different periods, have been deposited in river sediments due to water-level changes in the Baltic Sea (Ancylus Lake and Litorina Sea phases) and in the flowing water bodies over time (Veski *et al.* 2005; Rosentau *et al.* 2011; Nirgi *et al.* 2020).

The Stone Age settlement sites were discovered in the years 2000 and 2002.¹ Two of them (Sindi-Lodja I and Sindi-Lodja II) are buried beneath the sands of the Litorina Sea, while the third (Sindi-Lodja III), the youngest, lies directly under the present-day topsoil layer. All three sites have undergone small-scale archaeological excavations (Kriiska *et al.* 2002; Kriiska 2022). From the perspective of the work conducted in 2024, the Sindi-Lodja I settlement site, located at the confluence of the Reiu and Pärnu Rivers on the left bank of the Pärnu River (Fig. 1), is of particular importance. Excavations carried out 2001–2003 identified multiple phases of human habitation at this site (Kriiska *et al.* 2002; Kriiska & Lõugas 2009).

The earliest phase is distinguished by a 0.05–0.35 m thick cultural layer containing artefacts and animal bones, which is buried under different sediments (gyttja, peat, and sand) and is located 0.5 to 3.35 m a.s.l. According to radiocarbon dating, this site was inhabited around 7000–6600 BC (Kriiska & Lõugas 2009, 170). However, isolated finds were also recovered from the gyttja and peat covering the cultural layer and indicating that human activity

¹ In the early 20th century, several attempts were made (in 1905, 1929, 1938, and 1939) to discover settlement sites in the lower course of the Pärnu River, but none were successful.

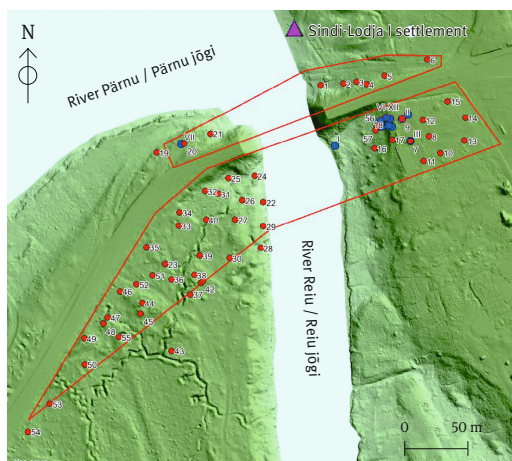


Fig. 1. The 2024 preliminary survey areas (marked with a red line) with archaeological test pits (red dots) and geoarchaeological sampling locations (blue dots), and the sieving site at the Sindi-Lodja I settlement (marked with a purple triangle).

Jn 1. 2024. aasta eeluurigute alad (piiratud punase joonega) arheoloogiliste prooviauakudega (punane täpp) ja geoarheoloogilised sondeerimise kohad (sinine täpp) ning sõelumiskoht Sindi-Lodja I asulakohal (tähistatud lilla kolmnurgaga).

Base map / Aluskaart: Estonian Land and Spatial Development Board / Maa- ja Ruumiamet

Drawing / Joonis: Alar Rosentau

Paikuse Stone Age theme park, caused irreparable damage to the Sindi-Lodja I settlement site (Kriiska 2023). The goal of the 2024 rescue works was to investigate a damaged section of the riverbank and to sieve through a pile of soil that had been stored there and which the builders had not spread out before their work was halted. During the same fieldwork season, archaeological and geoarchaeological preliminary surveys were also conducted in the protection zone of the Sindi-Lodja I settlement site and its vicinity in relation to the planned construction of a new Sindi-Lodja bridge (Fig. 1).

THE RESULTS OF WET SIEVING AT THE SINDI-LODJA I SETTLEMENT SITE

At the Sindi-Lodja I settlement site, a heap of soil containing archaeological finds, which had been piled up in 2023, was examined by wet sieving (Fig. 2). From a few cubic metres of soil, 133 finds were recovered, including 116 artefacts.³ More than half of the finds (72) are pottery sherds, including seven pieces of hand-made pottery. These are small fragments, which makes it impossible to date them more precisely than to the Iron Age period. In any case, these sherds confirm the earlier hypothesis, based on previously collected finds, that a settlement existed near the mouth of the Reiu River at some point during the Iron Age (Kivimäe *et al.* 1998, 41).

continued in the vicinity afterwards. As the water level of the Baltic Sea rose, the Sindi-Lodja I settlement site was flooded, and the cultural layer was buried under up to several metres of sand. With the following decline in sea level starting after 5300 BC (Nirgi *et al.* 2020, 46), the site was reoccupied during the Stone Age and repeatedly used in later periods. Finds from archaeological excavations indicate human activity in the Early Modern period, starting from the late 16th century (Kriiska *et al.* 2002, 31). This site served as a river crossing, where a pontoon bridge was built in the early decades of the 19th century, and in 1832, an inn was constructed nearby (e.g., Männikov 2022, 89, 93).

This knowledge formed the basis for placing the Sindi-Lodja I settlement site under state protection² and for establishing the Paikuse Stone Age Village theme park there (Riismandel 2012). Unfortunately, this was not enough to protect the site from destruction. In spring 2023, the construction of a harbor pier and a massive concrete-framed stone promenade at the mouth of the Reiu River, under the guise of developing the

² The Sindi-Lodja I settlement site has been under state protection since 2003, registration number 27039 – <https://register.muinas.ee/public.php?menuID=monument&action=view&id=27039>

³ Including five artefacts found during the site inspection in 2023.

The remaining pottery finds consist of fragments of wheel-made vessels (56 body and six rim fragments), 19 of which are glazed. Three fragments are decorated: two with straight-line patterns and one with a wavy-line design. The sherds can be dated to the medieval and Early Modern periods based on analogies. One of the fragments can be classified as the so-called whiteware pottery. Such vessels were produced during the medieval and Early Modern periods in Russia, primarily in the Moscow area but also in other regions where kaolin-rich clays suitable for their production were available (e.g., Summanen 2018, 20, fig. 1). Whiteware pottery likely reached Estonia only after the Russian–Livonian War in the second half of the 16th century (Tvauri 2004, 401, and the references cited therein).



Fig. 2. Wet sieving at the Sindi-Lodja I settlement site. In the background, the information boards of the Paikuse Stone Age theme park can be seen, presenting the history of the area.

Jn 2. Vesisõelumine Sindi-Lodja I asulakohal. Tagaplaanil on näha Paikuse kiviaja teemapargi stendid, mille tutvustatakse piirkonna ajalugu.

Photo / Foto: Aivar Kriiska

The next largest group of finds consists of flint finds, totaling 36 artefacts, including seven that are burnt. The majority (27) are flakes (Fig. 3: 4). The origin of the material was determined in 27 cases: 15 from Silurian, eight from Carboniferous, and four from Cretaceous deposits. In total, three flint blades were found, two of which have identifiable origins – one is of Silurian origin from Estonia, while the other is from the Carboniferous region in central European Russia. Additionally, two cores (Fig. 3: 1) made of Silurian flint were discovered.

Among the retouched tools, there are three scrapers (Fig. 3: 2–3), two made from Silurian and one from Carboniferous flint. One scraper has a high-end edge, while the other features high edges both at the end and along the sides. The processing method was identified in

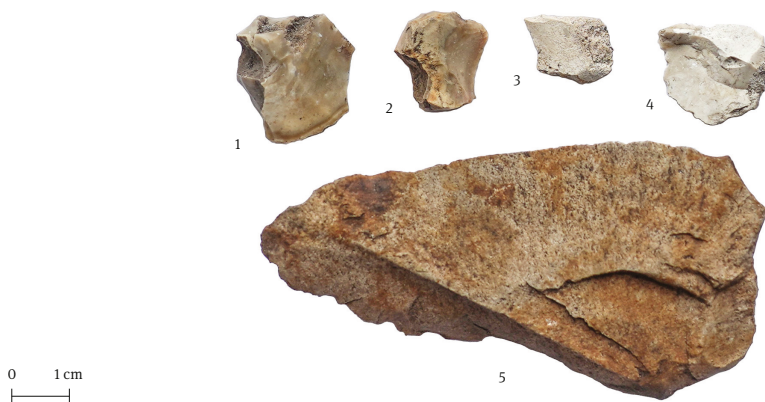


Fig. 3. Artefacts collected from the soil pile at the Sindi-Lodja I settlement site, made of Silurian flint (1–4) and stone (5). 1 – core, 2–3 – scrapers, 4–5 – flakes.

Jn 3. Sindi-Lodja I asulakohalt pinnase kuhilast kogutud Siluri tulekivist (1–4) ja kivist (5) esemed. 1 – nukleus, 2–3 – kõõvitsad, 4–5 – killud.

(PäMu 40427 A 2702: 83, 82, 130, 79, 75.)

Photo / Foto: Irina Khrustaleva

24 cases, all of which involved platform techniques. Of these, 12 were further specified, with seven resulting from the use of a soft hammer and five from a hard hammer. Most of the flint finds are dated to the Stone Age and given the broader context of Stone Age finds in the lower course of the Pärnu River and Estonia, they likely belong to the Mesolithic period, probably roughly contemporaneous with the Sindi-Lodja I settlement site, dated to around 7000–6600 BC (Kriiska & Lõugas 2009, 170). Additionally, one flint piece, likely used to start a fire, probably dates from later historical periods after the Stone Age.

Quartz is represented in the finds by three fragments and two flakes (Fig. 4), while other lithics are limited to a single stone flake, which shows signs of use along its edge (Fig. 3: 5). These are likely all from the Stone Age.

White clay pipes are represented by a single bowl fragment, which, based on analogies, likely dates from the 18th century (Duco 1982; for Estonian pipes, see, for example, Russow 2005; Kriiska 2008). The only wooden item is a round plate with a hole, measuring 46.4/47.6 mm in diameter. There are also 17 animal bones, five of which are unburnt and 12 burnt.



Fig. 4. Quartz artefacts collected from the soil heap at the Sindi-Lodja I settlement site.

Jn 4. Sindi-Lodja I asulakohalt pinnasekuhilast kogutud kvartsesemed.

(PäMu 40427 A 2702: 71, 72, 73, 74.)

Photo / Foto: Irina Khrustaleva

PRELIMINARY SURVEYS RELATED TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW BRIDGE

The second fieldwork site in 2024 was the area for the planned construction of the new Sindi-Lodja bridge, covering approximately 32,000 m² on both banks of the Reiu River beside the existing bridge. To determine the presence or absence of archaeological cultural layers and to prevent the destruction of archaeological heritage during construction work or unplanned costs and work interruptions due to excavation, archaeological and geoarchaeological surveys were conducted. In total, 57 test pits, each measuring 0.4 × 0.5 m and up to 1 m deep, were dug in the study area (Fig. 1). In the protective zone of the Sindi-Lodja I settlement site, on the right bank of the Reiu River south of the current bridge, cobblestone pavement – an old road – was found in two test pits. From an area south of Paide Road on the right bank of the Reiu River, a small worked Silurian flint flake was found in a test pit dug into the slope of the river valley at an altitude of approximately 3.9 m a.s.l., indicating a nearby Stone Age settlement site. No cultural layer or archaeological finds of value were discovered at greater depths in other areas covered by the archaeological test pits.

Geoarchaeological testing was carried out at 12 locations within the study area (Figs 1; 5: A). The deposits were sampled using either a manually operated vibro-corer or a drilling rig Dando Terrier operated drop weight system (Fig. 6) with a window corer of 0.05 m

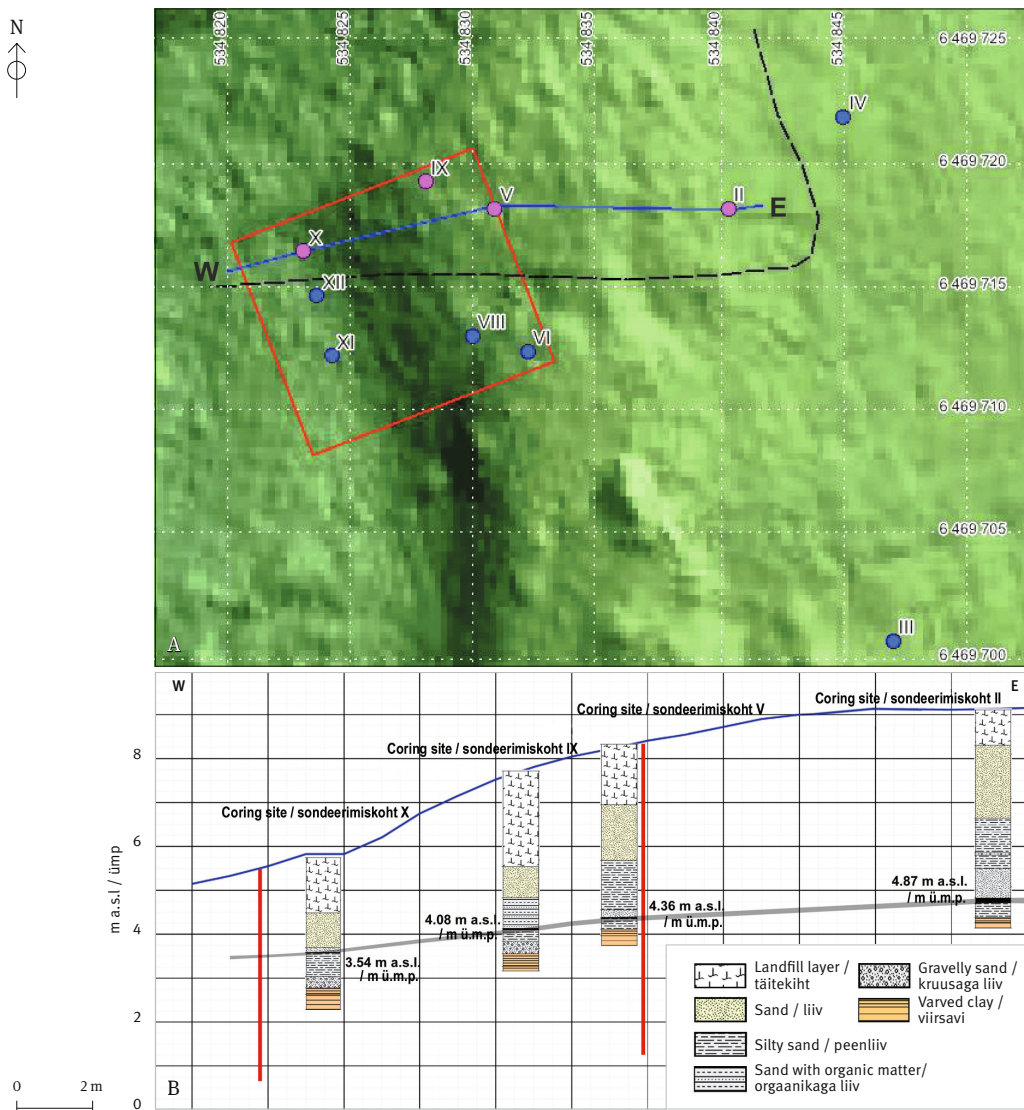


Fig. 5. Geoarchaeological investigations. A – Study area for the planned load construction of the new Sindi-Lodja bridge (marked with a red square) with sampling locations (dots); purple dots mark coring sites with a buried layer rich in organic material and black charcoal particles, blue line marks the location of the geoarchaeological cross-section shown on Fig. 5B, black dashed line marks the supposed southern and eastern boundaries of the settlement site. B – Geoarchaeological cross-section with four logs shown on Fig. 5A, black line with elevations marks the level of a buried layer rich in organic material and black charcoal particles (supposed cultural layer) and red lines marks the border of the planned load construction of the new Sindi-Lodja bridge.

Jn 5. Geoarheoloogilised uuringud. A – uurimisala kavandatava Sindi-Lodja silla kandekonstruksiooni kohal (tähistatud punase ruuduga) koos sondeerimiskohtadega (täpid), lillad täpid tähistavad sondeerimiskohti, kus esineb orgaanikarikas must sõesakestega maetud kiht, sinine joon tähistab lõiget, mis on näidatud joonisel 5B, must katkendjoon tähistab oletatavat asulakoha lõuna- ja idapiiri. B – geoarheoloogiline läbilõige nelja puursüdamikuga, mille asukoht on näidatud joonisel 5A lillade täppidega, must joon tähistab orgaanikarikast musta sõesakestega maetud kihti (oletatav kultuurikiht) ning punased jooned tähistavad uue Sindi-Lodja silla kavandatava kandekonstruksiooni piire.

Base map / Aluskaart: Estonian Land and Spatial Development Board / Maa- ja Ruumiamet
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Fig. 6. Geoarchaeological testing in the sampling location IV with drilling rig Dando Terrier operated drop weight system.

Jn 6. *Geoarheoloogilised uuringud sondeerimiskohas IV Dando Terrieri puurimiseadmega.*

Photo / Foto: Aivar Kriiska

and 0.1 m in diameter, correspondingly. On the right bank of the Reiu River, southeast of the current bridge, a buried layer rich in organic material and black charcoal particles was discovered beneath marine sands at four sampling locations (Fig. 5B). This layer is very similar in colour, composition, and depositional conditions to the cultural layers investigated at the Sindi-Lodja I and II settlement sites. The layer is located at the depths of 2.12 m (on the river side) to 4.25 m (on the flat river terrace) below the modern surface, at an altitude of 3.54–4.87 m a.s.l. The cultural layer slopes towards the Reiu River (and thins in the same direction), indicating the presence of the river in that area already at the time the settlement was in use. This marks the southern and eastern boundaries of the settlement site.

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UURINGUD SINDI-LODJAS

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Reiu jõe suudme lähedal paiknev Sindi-Lodja on arheoloogiliselt tähelepanuväärne piirkond. Sealt on kogutud rohkesti kiviaegseid juhuleide, mis on kanud Reiu ja Pärnu jõgede setetesse nii Läänemere kui ka vooluveekogude muutuste tõttu mitmetest ja eriaegsetest asulakohtadest. Kuni 2024. aastani oli sealt teada kolm kiviaegset asulakohta. Kaks neist (Sindi-Lodja I ja Sindi-Lodja II) on mattunud Litorinamere liivade alla ja üks (Sindi-Lodja III) paikneb vahetult praeguse mättakihi all. 2024. aastal toimusid arheoloogilised päästetööd Sindi-Lodja I asulakohal ning eeluuringud sama asulakoha kaitsevööndis ja lähimbruses Reiu jõe mõlemal kaldal (jn 1).

Päästetööd tingis muistise lõhkumine sadamakai ja promenaadi rajamisel Reiu jõe kaldale 2023. aastal

kevad. Meie tööde eesmärgiks oli sõeluda läbi üks pinnasehunnik, mis sisaldas arheoloogilise jälgimise kaevatud alalt kokku tõstetud leide (jn 2) ning uurida pisteliselt jõekalda ala. Pinnakorje ja vesisõelumisega koguti mõne kuupmeetri suurusest kuhjast 133 leidu, sh 116 esemeleidu. Enam kui pooled leidudest on savinõukillud. Nende hulgas on 7 rauaaegset käsitsikeraamika ning 62 kesk- ja varauusaegset kedra-keramika kildu. Tulekivileide saadi 36, neist 27 kildu, 3 laastu, 2 nukleust ja 3 kõõvitsat (jn 3). Kivimi päritolu oli võimalik teha kindlaks 27 juhul: 15 on Siluri, 8 Karboni ja 4 Kriidi ladestutest. 25 juhul oli määratav lõhestustehnika. Tegemist on ainult platvormtehnikaga, kusjuures 12 juhul oli võimalik tehnikat täpsustada: 7 juhul on lõhestamine toimunud pehmes ja

5 juhul kõvas lööktechnikas. Enamik tulekivileide on kiviaegsed, Pärnu jõe alamjooksu ja laiemalt Eesti kiviaegset leiuvainest arvestades mesoliitilised ja küllap põhiosas samaaegsed Sindi-Lodja I asulakohalt varasematel kaevamistel kogutud leidudega, mis kultuurkihist võetud orgaanika radiosüsiniku dateeringute alusel pärinevad vahemikust u 7000–6600 aastat eKr. Lisaks leiti üks tule lõõmiseks kasutatud Kriidi tulekivitükk, mida pruugiti arvatavasti kiviajast hilisematel ajalooperioodidel. Kvarts on leiuaaines esindatud 3 killu ja 2 laastuga ning muud mineraalid ja kivimid ühe kivikilluga (jn 3: 5), mille serval on kasutusjäljed. Küllap pärinevad need kõik kiviajast. Leiti ka valget värvi savipiibu kaha tükk, mis analoogide järgi pärineb 18. sajandist. Ainus puitese on väike ümar auguga plaat. Loomaluid leiti 17, neist 5 põlemata ja 12 põlenud.

Teine välitööde objekt oli kavandatava uue Sindi-Lodja silla ehitustegevuse ala Reiu jõe mõlemal kaldal kokku u 32 000 m² suurusel alal. Seal tehti nii arheoloogilisi kui ka geoarheoloogilisi uurin-guid. Välitööde käigus kaevati kokku 57 prooviauku (jn 1). Sindi-Lodja I asulakoha kaitsevööndist Reiu jõe paremkaldal praegusest sillast lõunas tuvastati kahes prooviaugus munakivisillutis – omaaegne tee.

Reiu jõe paremkaldalt Paide maanteest lõuna poole jäävalt alalt leiti ühest Reiu jõe oru nõlvale kaevatud prooviaugust töödeldud Siluri tulekivi kild, mis viitab läheduses asuvale kiviaegsele asulakohale. Teistelt aladelt ei avastatud arheoloogiliste prooviaukudega kaetud sügavuselt kultuuriväärtuslike leide ega arheoloogilisi muistiseid.

Geoarheoloogilist sondeerimist tehti uuringualal 12 kohas (jn 1, 6). Setteid sondeeriti nii käsitsi opereeritava vibropuuriga kui ka puuragregaadiga kuni 6,1 m sügavuseni. Reiu jõe paremkaldalt praegusest sillast kagus avastati neljast sondeerimiskohast mereliste setteliivade alla mattunud orgaanikarikas musta värvi söeosakesi sisaldav kiht (jn 5). Suure tõenäosusega on tegemist kiviaegse asulakoha mattunud kultuurkihtidega. Avastatud ladestus on värvilt, koostiselt ja lasuvustingimuste poolest väga sarnane Sindi-Lodja I ja II asulakohal uuritud kultuurkihtidele. Kiht paikneb praegusest maapinnast 2,12 m kuni 4,25 m sügavusel, absoluutkõrgustel 3,54–4,87 m ü.m.p. Kultuurkiht on kaldu ja ka õhenev Reiu jõe suunas, osutades jõe olemasolule sellel suunal ka asulakoha kasutamise ajal. Tegemist on Sindi-Lodja IV asulakoha – jätkates sealsete kinnismuististe senist tähistamist –, lõuna- ja idapiiriga.