

ALTHING CAOOP

Suppose

... you just happen to have a bit of pasture, or can sweet talk someone into letting you lease a piece of theirs for "historical improvements." Maybe you have one of those permanent sites that seem to be cropping up here and yonder in the SCA. If the idea of a real historical shelter-structure appeals to you, you might want to consider this idea.

If this structure will be on someone else's land, remember that the main Viking-style tent goes easily home with you, or stores on site fairly compactly. If the site has sod and fieldstone, you don't need a whole lot else besides a few basic tools and 8 or 10 pressure treated boards (a modern substitution, yes, but the Vikings too had a way of preparing wood to resist rot and insects). You also will need a bale or two of hay, some grass seed, and some enthusiastic friends.

The Tent

You'll need a Viking tent to begin with. How-to directions for making one can be obtained from Medieval Miscellania (703) 642-1740. They have an excellent book out now on period patterns—for less than \$15. The size of your tent will determine your foundation size and shape, so you need to build the tent first. The following plans and directions require a tent with a 10' x 10' floor.

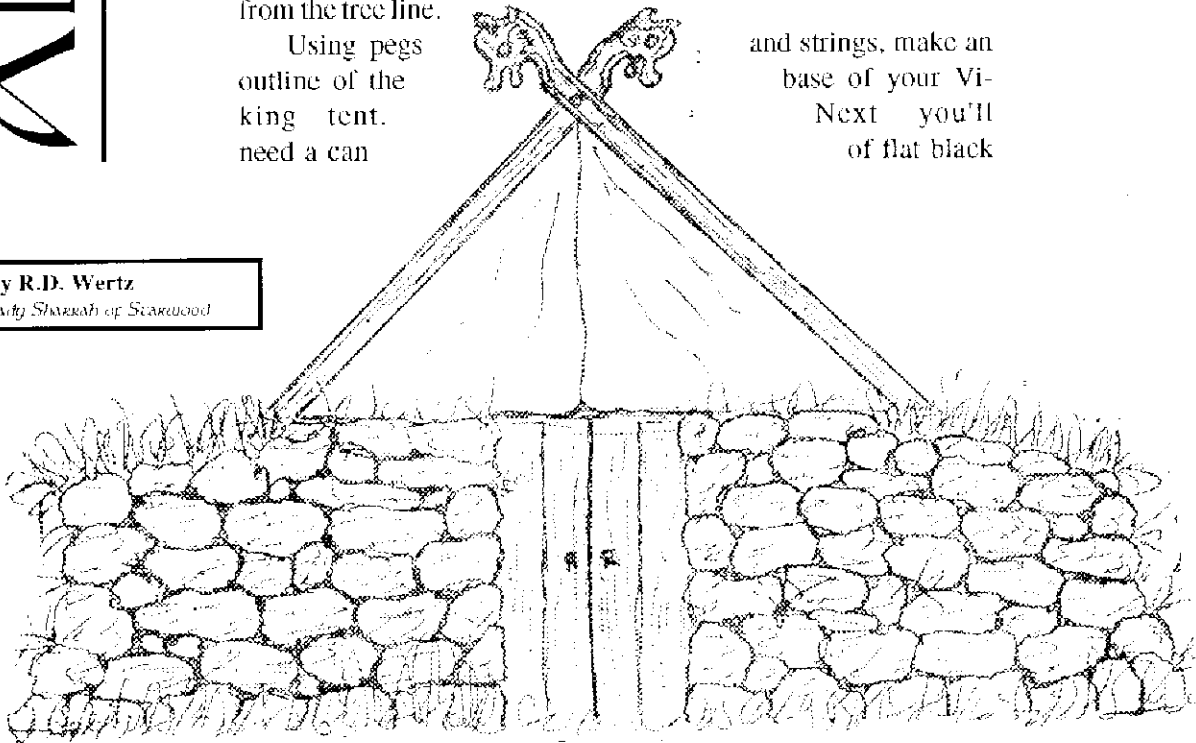
Select the building site

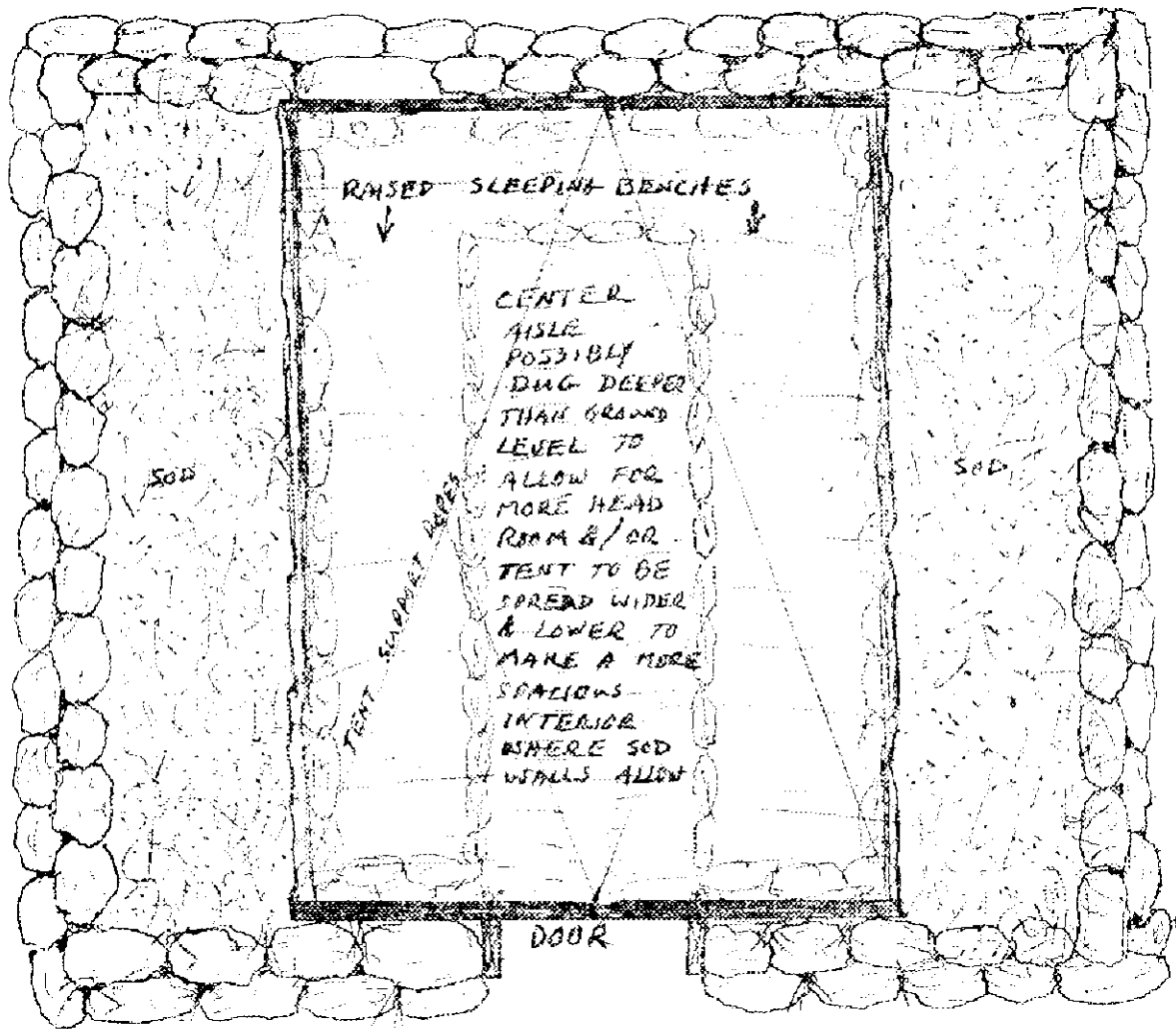
I'd suggest somewhere out of the way, along a fence or tree line with a slight slope to allow for drainage. Stay at least 20 or 30 feet from the tree line.

Using pegs outline of the king tent.
need a can

and strings, make an base of your Vi-
Next you'll
of flat black

By R.D. Wertz
Lady Starrah of Starwood





spray paint. Spray the grass directly under the strings. Remove the pegs and strings so you don't trip over them.

Lay out the Door

About 6" inside this set of lines, make another set of lines. Locate the center of the front wall and spray a line mark about 1 1/2' to each side of it, then connect the inner and outer lines. This will be your doorway, framed by pressure treated 2" x 12"s.

Construct the Sod Walls

Add another set of lines 1 1/2' in, where the tent will rest. Measure 2 1/2' from the lines marking where the walls of the tent will fall, and complete the outer rectangle.

Now the real work begins.

The sod needs to be cut and moved into place to form the real walls. For this you'll need a long handled

"edger" (available at most garden shops). Wrap a piece of electrical tape 4" from the cutting edge to mark the depth of cut.

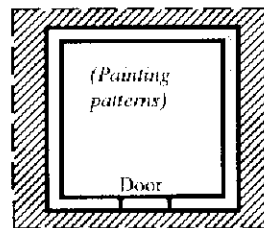
Turn to the digging and stacking pattern on the next page. Now, starting at the rear line, use foot pressure on the back of the edger blade and cut your first strip of sod 1 foot wide by 2 feet long. To make this and subsequent steps easier, cut a board 1" x 12" x 2' long to use as a template.

The first piece of sod needs to be cut in half, making two 1-foot squares. You only need one of these squares to begin. Save the other one for later.

Use the edger to undercut each new section of sod to a thickness of 4". Once

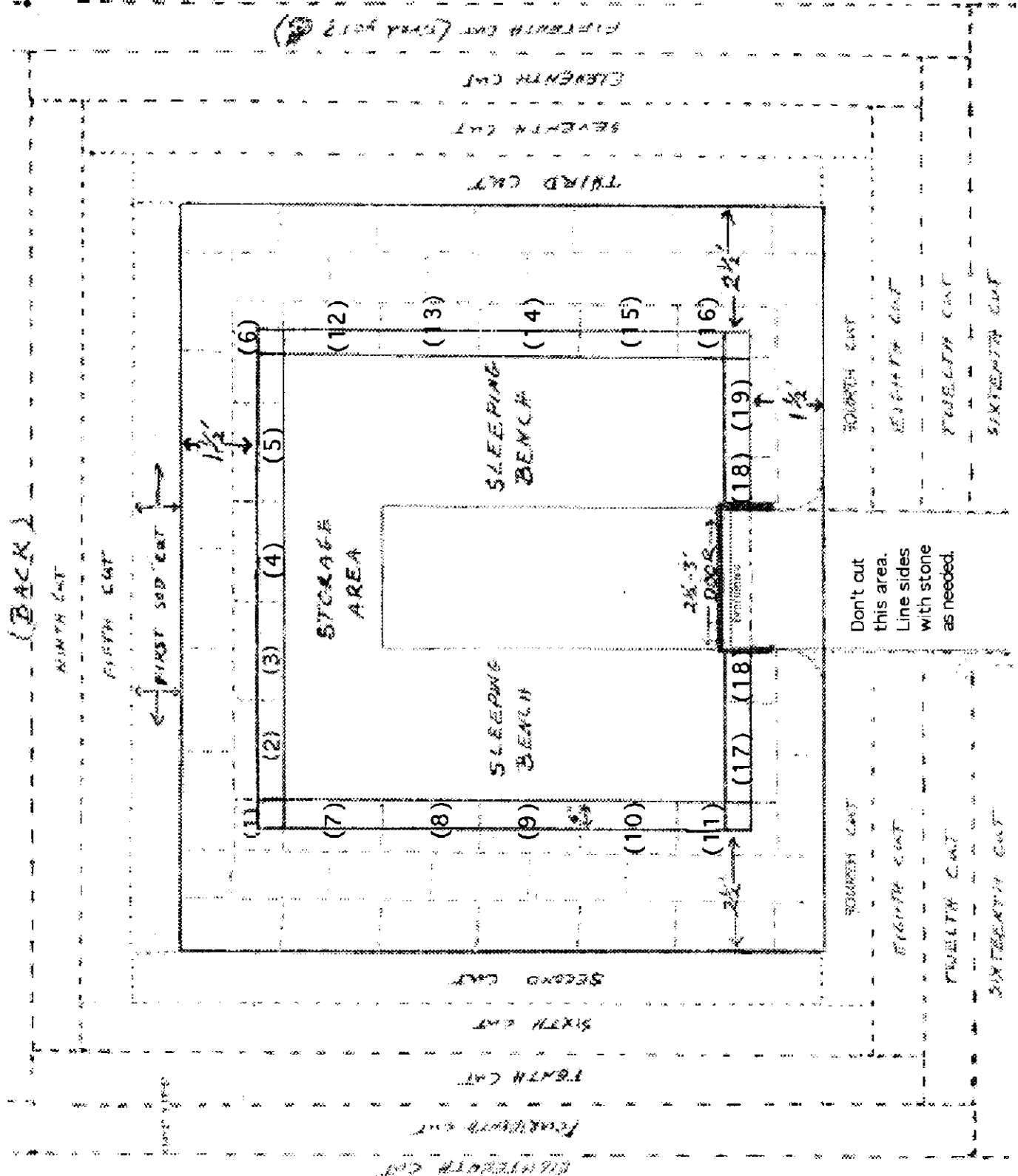
a strip is cut, you'll need two people and the board to get the sod up.

Place your square tile at the spot marked (1) on the digging and stacking pattern, on the rear corner of the structure. Continue to cut and lay subsequent tiles as



continued

Sod Digging/Stacking Pattern



shown on the digging and stacking pattern.

Building the first wall of sod

After placing the first line of sod, you'll have 2 1/2 tiles left from the first cut. From here on, you will use the sod sections as you build the inner walls.

* Make the second sod cut in the area shown, and lay the sods along the left perimeter of where your tent will go. You should have two sections left over.

* Cut the third sod cut and lay the pieces along the right perimeter of your living space.

* Place the pieces from the fourth sod cut (at the front of the tent) along the front of your living area, leaving the doorway clear. Here, you will use only two full tiles and both of the halves created in previous cuts.

After marking the perimeter of your tent, you should have four complete tiles still unused.

Cut the next (fifth) course of sod, and continue laying down the tiles, stacking them on top of the first course, and proceeding in the same direction as you did when making the perimeter. Start at the left rear corner and work across to the right rear corner, then down the right side toward the front of the tent, and so on. Remember, you are laying sod "bricks" and they need to overlap.

Continue cutting and laying on the sod until you have a wall that is 1' wide and 2' tall. At 4" thick tiles, this will require a stack six tiles deep all the way around your building. Leveling adjustments can be made easily by cutting the sod thicker on one side.

The outer walls

You may now continue stacking sod up to the full 3-foot to 4-foot height—in which case I recommend you hammer a 3/4" sapling stake into the walls every few feet to hold the turf together—or you may want to begin the second wall of sod now.

Build the second wall outside the first one, using the same overlapping technique. Butt the tiles against the inner wall. You may want to stop here, but keep in mind that the actual camp side walls in Iceland averaged 3 feet thick.

The second wall should be at least one tile shorter than the inner wall, and the third wall should be one tile shorter than the second wall. This gradient allows water

to run off. Use a mixture of hay and mud to round off the sharp angles. Sprinkle the whole wall with grass seed appropriate to the pasture.

Controlling the sod-cut areas

Spread some hay over the cutting areas while you work, and later replant this area with grass seed. Consider working some spagnum peat and lime into the bared soil and planting a garden with herbs, vegetables and fruit trees, bushes or vines. The lime will counteract the acidity of pine straw, if you use the straw for mulch.

The Living Space

First, place two 6 1/2 foot sleeping benches inside the structure. You may want to dig out the area between the benches, but I suggest you build the walls higher instead, and make raised (sod) platforms for the benches if you want them higher.

I strongly suggest you add some pressure treated boards along the inner perimeter of the walls that will brace and hold the benches in place, with pressure treated wedges hammered into the ground

at each end. After you have set these "frames" into the ground, add a layer of sod to cover them.

Adding Stonework

You may want to add sod tiles and hay-mud to your outer walls to create a 60 degree slope. You will use the slope to support the field stones that you will use to face your outer walls.

The stone laying technique is super easy. Put an extra tile of sod all around the base of the outer wall to serve as a footing. You want the largest stones around the base, then simply build upon them where and however other stones fit. Unlike drywall stacking, what you put where isn't really important (except for how it looks).

The Door

Use pressure treated 2" x 12"s to make the door frame. You might be wise to make the frame earlier, and set it in place to hold the sod walls upright. Make a rectangle about 6' tall, nailing or pegging the top and bottom pieces inside the vertical pieces. Now attach some 1"x 2"s to each of the vertical frame pieces to seal off the sides of the door when closed. Peg them in place.

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Archaeological evidence suggests that all cooking, etc. was done outside. These camps were primarily used for sleeping, storage and as merchant stalls for the Althing.
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Continued on next page

You also will want to add a draft board across the bottom of the door frame (see detail). Hinge the door so the base hangs about 2" above the base of the draft board, to allow for easy clearance. Install the draft board loosely so you may remove it in good weather.

You may also want to add a draft board atop the frame for carving (such as runic inscriptions).

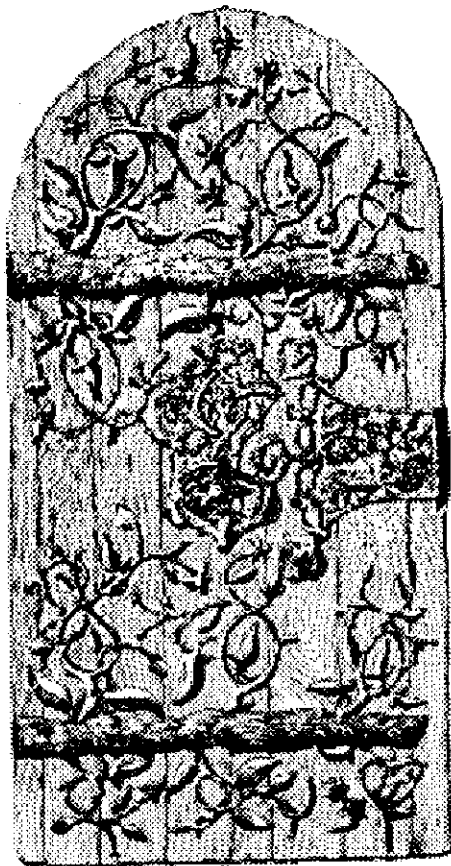
Make the actual door in two panels that swing inward like a saloon door (see detail).

Finally, drill holes at waist level in each door panel and run a 3/8" rope through each panel. Leave enough inside to tie the ropes together. This will be a sort of original 'Norse' door with the front opening of the tent forming the upper portion.

Moving in and living "as they did"

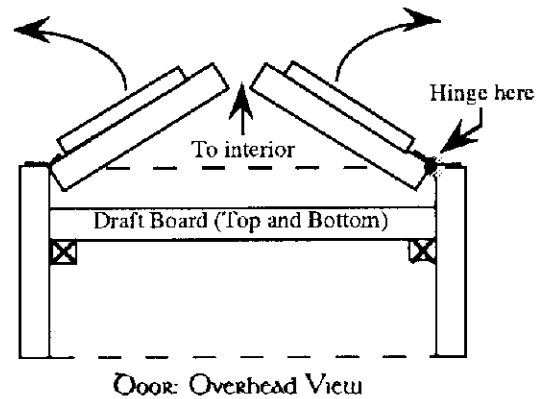
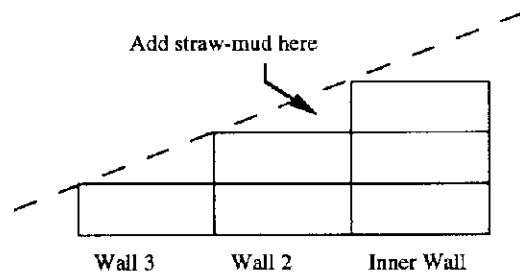
Now erect your tent atop the mound walls. Stake the tent down. Drape the front door flaps around your door frame (which you may want to carve).

Archaeological evidence suggests that all cooking, etc. was done outside. These camps were primarily used

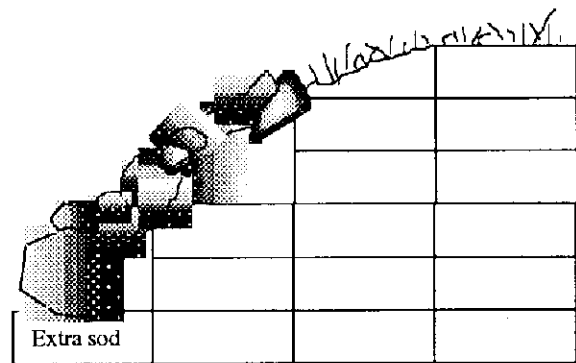


Oak Door—Nuremberg

Althing Camp Details



Door: Overhead View



Adding Rock Facing to Sod Walls

for sleeping, storage and as merchant stalls for the Althing.

Sources

McRaven, Charles. *Building with Stone*, (New York: Lippincott & Cromwell, 1980).

Seymour, John. *The Forgotten Crafts*, (London: Dorling Kindersley Ltd, 1984).

Berglund, Magnus. *Stone, Log and Earth Houses*, (Conn: The Taunton Press, 1986).