

August 13, 2001
Kensington, Minnesota, USA

Announcement of a New Runestone, the “AVM Stone”

A runestone that is believed to have been inscribed by Norse explorers or traders in the 14th century was found on May 13, 2001 near Kensington, in Douglas County, Minnesota. This newly discovered stone is in addition to the Kensington Runestone, found in 1898 by farmer Olof Ohman and his son when grubbing out trees. The new discovery, dubbed the “AVM Stone,” was found by Janey Westin, a stone carver and sculptor of Minneapolis, while examining and visually surveying stones in and around Kensington Runestone Park. She was accompanied by her father, Bob Johnson, a retired research scientist who is now in the Geology Department on the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota. The stone is a granite gneiss boulder with a central band of darker gneiss material, and weighs approximately 2,000 to 2,200 pounds. It was located on private property on a small island in the park’s vicinity.

Janey Westin and Bob Johnson had gone out to the island two weeks earlier on the hunch that this was in fact the island referred to in the inscription on the side face of the Kensington Runestone (KRS). It reads: “Have ten men by the sea to look after our ship 14 days journey from this island, year 1362.” A theory put forth by Hjalmar Holand in 1940 states that the high hill where the KRS was found, had been an island in 1362, and that water levels at that time must have been 15 to 20 feet higher than today to make it so. This idea has been generally accepted for many years. Westin and Johnson did not agree with Holand’s theory. Four years ago, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources flooded the bottomlands to the north and east of the high hill as a wetlands restoration project. At that time, a partially wooded grassy knoll to the north of the hill became an island. Without water, the knoll had not been previously perceived as an island by the casual observer.

On the 13th of May, as Westin and Johnson examined possible mooring stone boulders and made observations of where past water levels may have been, the afternoon quickly passed and the sun was dropping lower in the western sky. It was time to carry gear back to their waiting kayak and drive back to the Twin Cities. As Westin headed toward the boat, she looked down at a large boulder and stopped in her tracks, not believing what her eyes saw-- the letters “AVM” inscribed on the stone. A few other marks were visible as well. The boulder was heavily covered with yellow lichens, obscuring anything else that may be there. She immediately yelled to her father, “Daddy! A stone! It has AVM on it! Come here!” Johnson quickly rushed over to the stone, and the two of them pulled out their cameras, hurrying to photograph it before the angle of the sun changed. Previously that day, as well as two weeks before, Westin and Johnson had looked at the very same boulder among many others, and had not seen the significantly weathered inscription because the light conditions were not optimal. Late in the day on May 13th, the sun was low and at the ideal seasonal latitude. A healthy growth of nettles on the west side of the boulder had not grown tall enough to shadow it yet. All conditions were at their best.

Two weeks later, Westin and Johnson returned with geologist Scott Wolter of St. Paul, to document the stone and carefully remove some of the lichens to reveal the full inscription. It reads as follows: AVM:

The “AVM” means “Ave Maria,” as also inscribed on the Kensington Runestone. The four pentadic numerals, , indicate the date of 1363, one year later than the Kensington Runestone date. The first runic letter in the second line is not definitely determined yet, due to its pronounced weathering. It may be the runic letter “ar,” or perhaps a version of “X.” The second runic letter is an “S,” and the third runic letter is either a “U” or a “V.” The second line may perhaps be “XSU” or “XSV,” representing a short Christian prayer to Christ. Dick Nielsen of Houston, Texas, a linguist who has been researching the Kensington Runestone inscription for many years, is currently working on the AVM stone inscription also.

In June, a group named the AVM Stone Special Committee was formed to direct further activities regarding the AVM stone. It operates under the auspices of the Board of the Kensington Runestone Museum Foundation in Alexandria, Minnesota. The committee contacted a number of archeologists in the upper Midwest to gather opinions and advice. It was decided that the best course of action was to map the stone’s location, thoroughly document it at the site, and then remove it from the island for safekeeping, which was done on July 9, 2001. A preliminary, phase one archeological dig was arranged to be carried out on July 25, 2001. A phase one dig is one day of conducting shovel samplings of soils at gridded locations in a standard format. This was done by three archeologists: Mike Michlovic of Minnesota State University, Moorhead; Christina Harrison, a professional independent archeologist of Minneapolis; and Dean Sather of the Becker County Minnesota Museum, as assistant. A minor number of Native American artifacts were found, but none of Norse origin.

After today, the AVM stone will be brought to a lab in St. Paul, Minnesota for further analysis of surface weathering and aging of the letter forms, as well as complete documentation of the inscription using high magnification photography, in addition to other methods. This stone will eventually be on loan to the Kensington Runestone Museum in Alexandria, Minnesota to be viewed by the public later this year. The full meaning of the AVM stone is not yet known. Further study and discussion is needed within the scientific community.

For further updates on the AVM Stone as well as the Kensington Runestone, check out the Kensington Runestone Museum website at:

<www.runestonemuseum.org>