

Where was the battle of Gestilren in 1210?

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Summary

The battle in which King Sverker Karlsson died in 1210 was fought at a place that was referred to as *Gæstilsren*. The name is in all probability identical to *Gästre*, the name of a village in the parish of Frösthult in western Uppland, and developed as follows: *Gæstilsren* > *Gæstilren* > *Gæsteren* > *Gæstren* > *Gæstre*. Of these forms, *Gæstilsren*, *Gæstilren* and *Gæsteren* occur in sources that name the site of the battle, while *Gæstilren*, *Gæstaren*, *Gæstren* and *Gæstre* are name forms recorded in references to the village. The name *Gæstilsren* could mean ‘the edge of a hollow called **Gæstil*’, an interpretation that is supported by the topography in the vicinity of Gästre. *Gæstilsren* is a name of an unusual type, and it is extremely unlikely that there would have been two identical names with this form in medieval Sweden.

The spelling *Ghesteren*, found in a collection of annals from the early 15th century (in a manuscript of the Västmanland Law), is another possible link between the battle site and the Uppland village, as the scribe appears to have replaced a form *Gestilsren* in his original with *Ghesteren*, which probably reflects a contemporary pronunciation of the village name. This points to the existence of a living tradition at the beginning of the 15th century about the battle of 1210 having taken place at Gästre. An annotation by Johannes Bureus, linking King Sverker’s death to Gästre and suggesting that a battle was fought there, indicates that that tradition, in a weaker form, still existed in the 17th century.

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