

# NOSAS NEWS



[www.nosos.co.uk](http://www.nosos.co.uk)

The Newsletter of the North of Scotland Archaeological Society SCO44585

August 2016

**A note from the new editor.** Some of the information you may have already via our Facebook page or BLOG or by the Secretary, James, or received by being on subscriptions to web sites so there may be duplication. For those of you who have not I will try to give all the relevant information that I receive. If there is enough news then I hope to produce 3/4 newsletters per year. Please send to me any archaeological information that you wish to publicise to members. **Jonie Guest**

Subscriptions are due on **1<sup>st</sup> September 2016**

## Dates for the Calendar

**MAD evenings**, the first one is on a **Thursday** and the remainder are all on **Tuesdays**.

**Thursday 22 September, and all Tuesdays are 22 November, 13 December, 24 January 2017, 21 February and 21 March.**

**More information on these discussions to follow.**

## Winter Walks

**Sunday, 6 November 2016** - Struie Lead Mines - lead Roland Spencer-Jones

**Saturday, 3 December 2016** – Glen Banchor – sheilings, townships, and a fort. Then a tour of the Store at Am Fasgadh (Highland Folk Museum) built in 2013 the founder “Dr Isobel F Grant Collection”.  
Newtonmore Lunch will be soup and sandwich. Cost for both £10.00 – lead Meryl Marshall.

**More information to follow on both of the above.**

**The remainder of the Winter Walk dates for 2017 – 6/7 January, 10/11 February, 10/11 March and 7/8 April.**

**7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> October 2016** – The Pictish Arts Society Conference will take place in Inverness. Details later. Speakers include Dr Gordon Noble, Cait McCullagh, Candy Hatherley, David Anderson, Leanne Demay, Daniel MacLean, Judiette Michell and Matt Ritchie. Details to follow.

**1-16 October 2016** - The Highland Archaeology Festival will take place in Inverness, with the Seminar on **15-16 October**. Information on the web site Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands (ARCH).

[www.archhighland.org.uk](http://www.archhighland.org.uk)

**NOSAS Annual General Meeting will be on the Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup> October immediately after the Seminar** - details of time and place to follow.

## **21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> October 2016**

The Neolithic of Northern England - Royal Archaeological Institute Annual Conference, Tullie House Museum, Carlisle, [www.prehistoricsociety.org](http://www.prehistoricsociety.org)

**5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> November 2016.** The Nautical Archaeology Society and the SCAPE Trust will be holding a joint conference in Glasgow. [www.ssharp.co.uk](http://www.ssharp.co.uk)

## **Book**

James has managed to get hold of a new book and the link is

[http://whittlespublishing.com/3D\\_Recording\\_Documentation\\_and\\_Management\\_of\\_Cultural\\_Heritage](http://whittlespublishing.com/3D_Recording_Documentation_and_Management_of_Cultural_Heritage).

Once procured it will be available for members to borrow from the NOSAS collection.



3D Recording Documentation and Management of Cultural Heritage

**Efstratios Stylianidis, Fabio Remondino**

- an integrated treatment of cultural heritage recording, modelling and conservation
- a timely benchmark publication when so much heritage globally is under threat
- perfect tool for understanding and planning conservation
- numerous examples

**22 July 2016 to 2 April 2017** National Library of Scotland - has a major map exhibition at the main National Library of Scotland exhibition- hall in George IV Bridge, Edinburgh from. [www.nls.uk](http://www.nls.uk)  
September 2016 Kelvin Hall in Glasgow will be opening their new library. [www.kelvinhall.org.uk](http://www.kelvinhall.org.uk) and at [www.nls.uk/using-the-library/kelvin-hall](http://www.nls.uk/using-the-library/kelvin-hall).

I was recently down in Northumberland having a look at the archaeology. An interesting web site I recently came across was North of the Wall Tynedale Archaeology Group whose Hon. President is Dr Stan Beckinsall whom some of you will know from the Rock Art books which he has written.

<https://tynedalearchaeologygroup.btck.co.uk>

## **MEMBERS ARTICLES BELOW**

**Report on Aigas – Roland Spencer Jones**

**Continuing Aigas Survey – Jonie and Richard Guest and Roland-Spencer Jones**

**Ormond Castle – Meryl Marshall**

**Cromarty Medieval Burgh Excavations 2016 – James McComas**

**Helmsdale Weekend – Anne Coombs**

## Report on Aigas - Roland Spencer-Jones

### **Aigas Forest Survey, winter 2015/6**

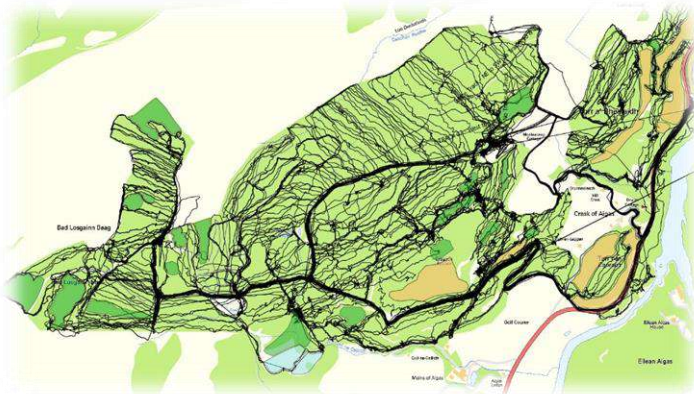
#### Background

On March 5th 2015 Aigas woodland, 5 miles west of Beauly in Strathglass, was bought by the local community from Forestry Commission Scotland. Almost all of Aigas Forest was planted by Forestry Commission Scotland in the 1960's around several older sections of woodland, replacing some previous felled woodland and also planting on open moorland. The forest had been poorly managed in the previous 20 years however, and there are significant management challenges ahead.



An archaeological survey was required as part of the purchasing process, in order to identify archaeological features, and to understand and describe the history of land use on this site. The Forest Trust turned to NOSAS..... who formally adopted the survey in November 2015, recognising Anne Coombs and Roland Spencer-Jones as co-leaders.

We surveyed in the forest over 7 days during the winter and early spring of 2015/6. The weather was, well, seasonal! We



experienced snow, rain, wind and very occasionally sunshine. We learnt how to walk 15m apart, on a bearing, looking for archaeological "stuff" despite gradients, ploughed furrows, marsh and the dreaded wind blow. Each participant recorded every metre of their track on a GPS device, the resultant.gpx files being entered into a QGIS mapping programme. The accumulated result looked a bit like spaghetti, or a drunken spider on a spree! It also meant that "big brother", i.e., Roland, was able to see exactly what each participant got up to as they wandered round the forest. So, what did we find? Well, for starts, a lot of trees! And amazing they were too.



Although almost all of them were planted within a few years of each other, and yet some were huge, and some were a wee bit in need of a tonic. Some had toppled over, and some were remnants of previous forest that preceded this 1960's one.

We found evidence of use of the forest area before the trees were planted – peat cutting, forest banks, fine old metal fences and gateposts. We walked the Victorian trails put through the forest as the land became a Victorian sporting estate, and imagined the Victorian ladies walking them. We found shooting butts and deer fences. We found bridges over the burns for the tracks and roads leading to the moor. And, we found a few buildings. Only a few, though, much as had been predicted. And, we found no prehistory, again as predicted.

Many, many thanks to the 27 people, both NOSAS and local forest volunteers, who turned up so enthusiastically each survey morning, often despite the weather. They together surveyed for 79 days. They were wonderful.

A total of 200+ significant findings have been identified, about half of them important enough to protect during any future forest operations. The resultant spreadsheet has already been shared with the Trust, and a full report will follow.

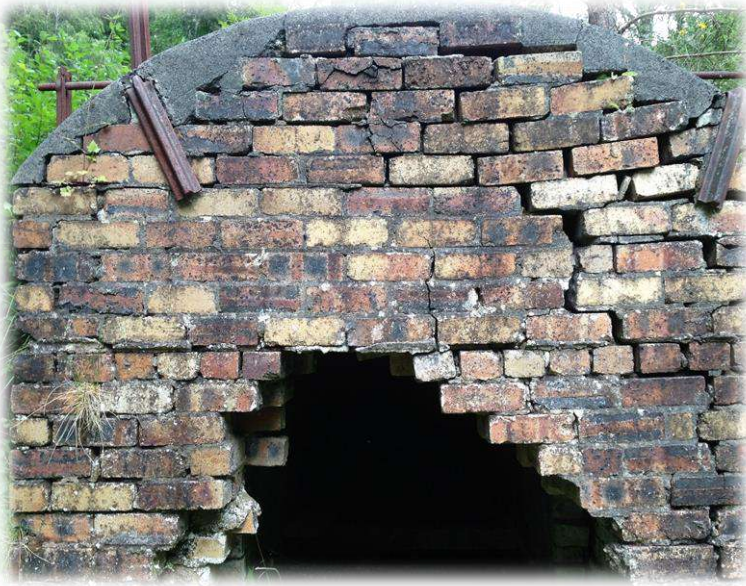
There will be two talks about the results of the survey in the autumn:

- **29<sup>th</sup> September 2016** at Fortrose - Roland will present: *The archaeology of the forest with particular reference to Aigas Forest. This will consider the life-history of Scotland's Trees, a broader area than just Aigas.*
- **6<sup>th</sup> October 2016** at Aigas Field Centre - Roland and Anne will present: Archaeology of Aigas Forest. This will consider the history and heritage of Aigas, and the way that the forest has fitted into that story. Details of both talks are on the **NOSAS website**.



### **Aigas Forest Survey - Jonie and Richard Guest and Roland Spencer-Jones**

A couple of final surveys were needed to complete the work in Aigas forest. One was a strange brick building which appears to be some sort of furnace. The other was a stone arch bridge.

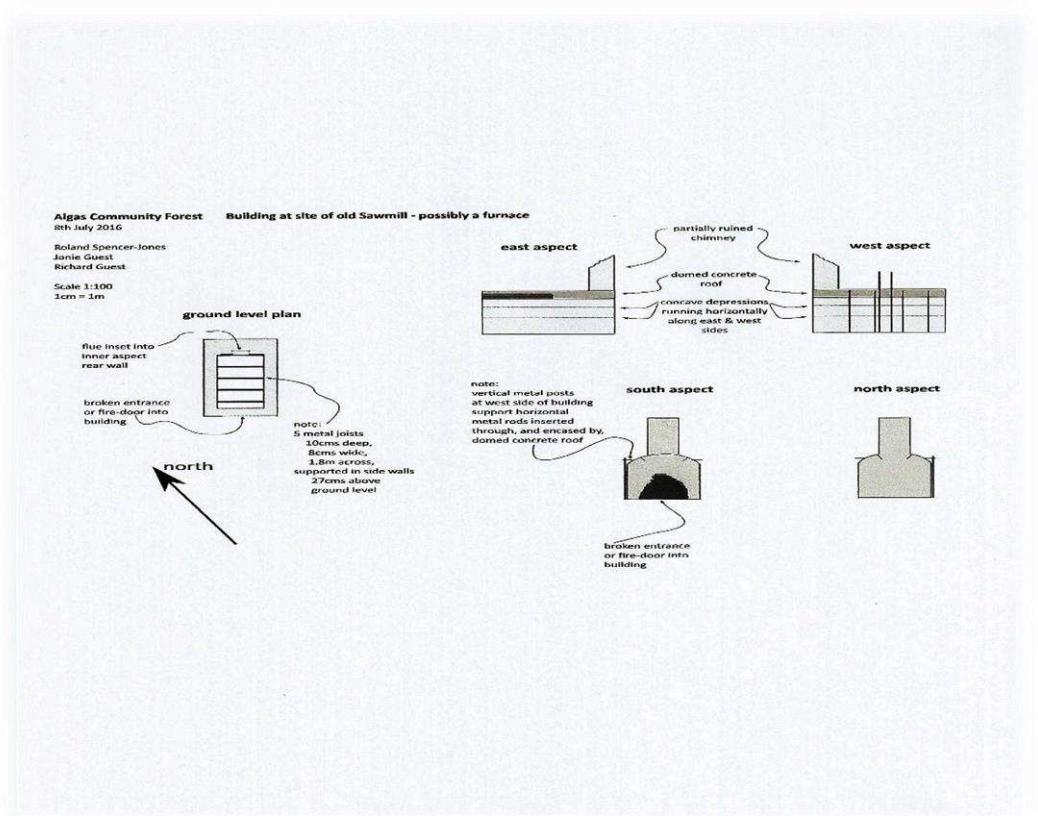


The brick building is associated with the saw mill of which there is now no evidence on the ground. The walls are 4 courses of brick thick and the roof is a brick arch covered with concrete.

© Jonie Guest

There are vertical steel channels on the outside, tied together by steel rods at roof level. There is a chimney at one end and the opposite end is open. Inside there are steel beams at floor level across the width. We have absolutely no idea what this structure was used for but it appears it must have been to house a fire, rather like a large oven.

© Roland Spencer-Jones,  
Jonie Guest and  
Richard Guest



The stone arch bridge is a well-built structure on a track crossing over Allt Cuil na Cailleach.

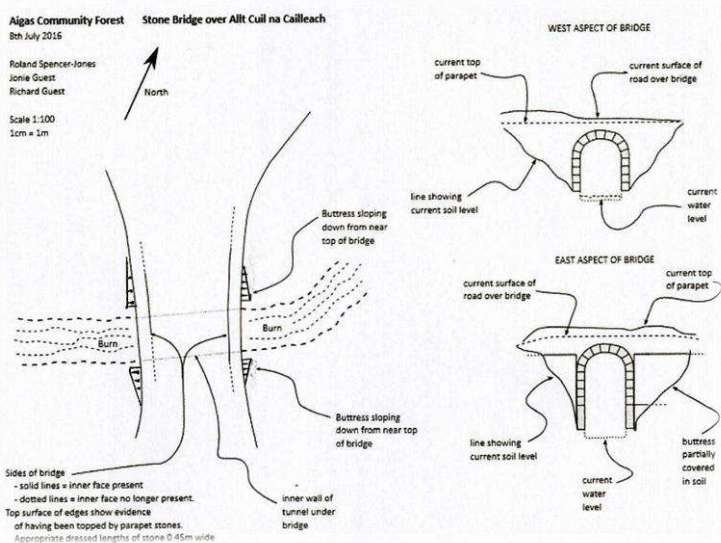


© Jonie Guest



© Jonie Guest

The quality of the bridge indicates that this has been an important route at some point in time. The parapets are missing but there is dressed stone laying in the burn which has probably come from the parapets. The bed of the burn was originally stone paved but the down-stream half is now missing. There is erosion of the foundations and a few arch stones are missing making the structure rather precarious. The bridge was surveyed using tape and offsets and vertical measurements were taken in order to draw elevations.



© Roland Spencer-Jones, Jonie Guest and Richard Guest

While surveying this bridge we noticed up-stream a concrete dam, not previously recorded. It appears to have been a water supply intake.

### Ormond Castle - Meryl Marshall.

The North of Scotland Archaeological Society (NOSAS) and Avoch Community Archaeology (ACA) group joined forces in March 2016 to survey and photograph Ormond Castle, GR NH 6963 5358 (HER ID: MHG8226, Canmore ID 13572). The castle overlooks the village of Avoch on the Black Isle and commands good views across the Moray Firth to the south and the former ferry crossing between Chanonry and Ardersier in the east.



To date Ormond castle has not received the attention it deserves. It is traditionally associated with William the Lion (1143 – 1214). He built two castles on the Black Isle in 1179, one at Redcastle and a second which is thought to be this one. Andrew de Moray was owner of the castle in the 13th century and principal commander of Scottish forces in the north during the Wars of Independence in the late 13<sup>th</sup> Century, but was mortally wounded fighting alongside William Wallace at the Battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297. In 1455, after being in the hands of the de Moray family and the earls of Ross, the castle passed to royal control and in 1481 James III granted it to his son, the Marquis of Ormond, from whom the present name derives. The castle was destroyed by Cromwell's forces in 1650 and the stones were transported over the firth to build the Citadel in Inverness.

Only the foundations of the walls remain today. The HES scheduling document for the site states that “the monument is of national importance because it is a fine field monument of a type rare in Scotland; it is said to have been one of the royal castles built c.1179 and ..... the clearly defined remains have the potential to increase understanding of 12th century fortification techniques and military history.” Also of interest are the ditches and banks around the northeast side of the site, reminiscent of those found on some Iron Age forts and suggesting the possibility of the site having had earlier occupation.



In 1883 the castle was investigated by Angus Beaton, but the excavations carried out remain unpublished and the plan produced was inadequate. A further sketch was drawn in the 1960s, but it too is not very detailed and does not give an indication of the complexity of the site. Our task to carry out a measured survey using plane tables was ambitious; not only was the site complex, but it was also big (150m x 65m), covered in thick vegetation and had considerable height discrepancy. The local ACA folk were enthusiastic making a good job of clearing the vegetation and on a calm but cold weekend in March 20 people, from both NOSAS and ACA, gathered at the site. Many had no experience of using a plane table but, after some training, they quickly got into the way of it and the

task was completed in 2 days using 5 plane tables. Nine PT stations were needed to cover the site and these were carefully linking together on the drawings.

Inevitably the height variations meant that the PT positions were not quite correct in their relationship to each other, but this was overcome by making adjustments at the “drawing-up” stage of the plan using the processed aerial photographs taken from a quadcopter flyover on the second day.



The flyover also produced some impressive 3D images of the castle and its features which gave a greatly enhanced overall picture of the fortification. These images also revealed a few more features which we were able to fill in “by eye” on the two return visits which were needed to verify and adjust the drawing.



This survey was only part of the first non-invasive phase of the Avoch Community group project; we wish them all the best with their future plans and look forward to working with them again.

**Well, well, well. A fantastic feature at the Cromarty Medieval Burgh Excavations 2016 – James McComas**

It was a fourth and final season at Cromarty this summer to resolve the earliest medieval phases at the site. I was there for the last nine days of the dig and this proved to be as enjoyable and thought provoking as ever with some great finds coming up.



Mid way through the last week Mary uncovered a large oval pit cut through the medieval ash midden. Further excavation revealed the feature to be stone lined and a flight of steps leading into it gradually emerged.

*The structure mid excavation.*

More excitement was generated when bones of a large animal were revealed near the base of the structure. The skeleton has since been identified as having belonged to a female pony.





*Bones of the pony (dubbed Shergar) appearing at the base.*

Part of the baulk now had to be taken away to reveal the top steps. Meanwhile Mary painstakingly removed the skeleton and bottomed out the pit until it filled with water. There now could be little doubt we had a well and the deposition of the pony seemed to mark the point of its abandonment.



*The well fully revealed on the final day of the dig.*

I took the opportunity to take a selection of over 20 pictures from a succession of views around the structure in order to build a 3D model using photogrammetry.

I was able to make good use of my new pc, as well as skills honed with the help of this year's excellent NOSAS training day. Below are a couple of views and the full model, created with Agisoft Photoscan, can be seen at <https://sketchfab.com/models/69dec5e1dcf84b6f87cb5e4d2dcc04ef>. There is a Cromarty Medieval Burgh Project seminar on the **12th November at the Cromarty Stables**, where the archaeological team and specialists will present and discuss the project results. I am sure further arguments will be aired then about the use and abandonment of the well and I will be keen to find out what results of the post ex add to the story. Visit <http://www.medievalcromarty.org/> for information.



## Helmsdale weekend – Anne Coombs

The NOSAS summer weekend started on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> June in truly Scottish summer fashion with torrential rain. However the archaeology did not disappoint. Glen Loth is a mile or two south of the scattered township of Loth itself. The glen cuts due north through the hills of east Sutherland from the main A9 Brora/Helmsdale road to the Strath of Kildonan.



We all met up in the layby just before the glen turn off road to read the carved stone which claims to mark the site where the last wolf in Sutherland was killed by a man

©Richard Guest

called Polson in 1700. A trip up the eastern end of Glen Loth took us to three ‘wags’. These enigmatic mounds are more of a speciality of Caithness than Sutherland; the most well-known is the Wag of Forse. They are thought to be late Iron Age houses, sub-rectangular aisled buildings with usually an associated circular structure. The three in Glen Loth are close together and appear to be unexcavated and have not been planned, just described. Thomas Pennant, (1726-1798) a Welsh naturalist, traveller, writer and antiquarian visited them in 1776 and records an old hunting lodge. Pococke, 1887 suggested the name of one wag Carn nan Uaig which means Cairn of the Tomb suggests that it was a chambered cairn. [www.her.highland.gov.uk](http://www.her.highland.gov.uk)

We then moved on to the Standing Stone ‘Clach Mhic Mhios’ (Clach-Mac-Mese) where it stood alone in the bleak misty dreich terrain on the moor.

© Jonie Guest

After some brief speculation and searching for rock art the rain became too heavy even for the hardest NOSAS members and we retired to that other haunt of the archaeologist, the coffee shop. We dried out in Timespan and then moved onto La Mirage for an excellent evening meal arranged by Beth. Some people even managed a dessert!



Saturday dawned dry and sunny and we set off early to drive to just north of Kinbrace and began the ascent of Ben Griam Beg. Beth, our trusty guide and hill safety expert endeavoured to instil the need to keep together. We managed to behave reasonably well on the flat walk into Greamachary where we stopped for coffee but once the climb began it was very clear who was fit and who was .....sensible and paced themselves! However we all got to the top and the 'sensible' ones got a very



warm welcome on finally achieving the summit. Lunch consumed and breath regained we set off to explore the structures around the top of the hill. The wandering walls enclosing the top and the lower walls which often seem to have not logical pattern are a puzzle and many ideas were discussed throughout the rest of the day with no real

©Jonie Guest (both photos)



conclusions being reached apart from the 'it's not a fort'. Eventually we slowly walked back down the hill and re-convened at Greamachary before the walk back to the cars.

© Richard Guest



Sunday was another glorious day and this time we went to the west end of Glen Loth to a group of hut circles. The morning was spent walking round to identify the huts and associated enclosures scattered across an area which was later cultivated with extensive rig and furrow. Our tour finishing at the 'homestead'; this consists of 3 conjoined huts enclosed by a low stony bank. All the huts are in a reasonable condition and had not previously been fully and individually recorded. In the afternoon we did several drawings.



Some weeks later Anna Welti, Anne MacInnes and I returned and completed the recording with Anna's forms.



The new information will be added to the national and local record data bases. When the drawing was finished we went off on a short fossick to see what else we could find and had a look at the extensive cairn field on the east side of the road. As often happens with fossicking we went further and further up the burn trying to find the inevitable still site.

© Richard Guest

*Jonie, Paul (Richard taking photo)*



We didn't find a still but Paul did find a very fine previously unrecorded corn drying kiln. Finally we set off home and left the hill to the deer. But we will return one day to find the still, and the shielings which must be hiding somewhere in the corrie above the site. We also plan to go back and plane table the 'wags' once the vegetation is down and rain is not forecast.