

Please check monthly calendar to keep up to date on www.nosas.co.uk.

MAD evenings have now commenced for the season.

The 20 Year Celebrations Conference Looking Backwards, Looking Forewards, 23rd/25th March 2018. www.nosas.co.uk/20Years.asp

ARCH is holding new courses in Experimental Archaeology: Learning about Technologies in the Past, funded by HES and HLF. Check out web site www.archhighland.org.uk

The Highland Archaeology Festival highlandarchaeologyfestival.org took place from 30th September to 15th October 2017. As usual several the workshops, poster sessions and walks were led by NOSAS members. The conference took place on the weekend of 14/15th October 2017. After several interesting presentations, the last session was delivered by John Wombell about the Scottish Rock Art Project. Some of these events follow later in the newsletter.

The Annual General Meeting was held on Saturday 14th October and the Trustees elected were as follows for 2017/18.

Roland Spencer-Jones – Chair, Alan Thompson – Treasurer, James McComas – Secretary, Vice Chair and Webmaster, Anne Cockroft – Membership Secretary, Jonie Guest – Newsletter Editor, Susan Kruse – Library Maintenance, Tim Blackie, Anne Coombs, Rosemary Jones, Duncan Kennedy, Karen Kennedy, Meryl Marshall, Sue Walker.

TARRADALE THROUGH TIME – Exploring 8,000 years of Archaeology tarradalethroughtime.co.uk

AOC was contracted to lead the excavation. Lachlan McKeeggie was appointed as Outreach Coordinator, James McComas was appointed to run IT, the Web site, Facebook and Twitter accounts.

The first year of the 3-year funded project by HES/HLF began on the Launch Day on 13th September 2017 at the Muir Hub.



Following this the excavation started on 24th September to 9th October to explore the possible site of Tarradale Castle and the Mesolithic Shell Middens. Volunteers worked tirelessly digging all the trenches and washing and sorting finds.

There was a disappointment not to find any evidence of the castle in the trenches but there were exciting rare finds in the midden trenches.



The finds included Antler Tools, Lithics, Ceramics, Metal and Slag. There was a very successful Open Day on Saturday, 30th September with over 100 visitors.



CLACHTOLL BROCH PROJECT



After many years of investigation, discussion, planning, emergency work to the entrance and south wall, and hours of form filling for permissions and funding the major phase of the Clachtoll Broch Project got off the ground in July. The main aim for 2017 was to conserve and stabilise the surviving structure and in the process to excavate the interior and the area out with the entrance. Post excavation analysis together with the provision of improved access and interpretation are to follow in 2018 and 2019. The entrance works in 2011 had suggested that a catastrophic collapse and fire at some point in the last

few decades BC brought occupation to an end, so we expected that after a couple of weeks or so removing the fallen rubble we would come down on to the destructive layer and below that the occupation layers going back to the earliest phase of the broch.

Rubble removal proved even more time consuming than expected leading to a 6 week long refrain that 'by the end of next week we should be down to the destruction layer'.

However, 3 months and 300 metric tonnes later the broch's interior had been excavated down to the bedrock and the internal walls and chambers stabilised for the future. The work threw up many surprises and puzzles, some superb finds and hundreds of samples for processing over the next 12 months.

Here are a few key points

- The catastrophic collapse and fire theory was vindicated.
- The burning upper floors and roof collapsed and were then covered by falling stonework which sealed the burning layer and left it smouldering, leading to the remarkable preservation of charred timbers, grain, matting, bags or baskets and other materials which should reveal a great deal of detailed information following post-ex.
- As expected the bedrock inside the broch was far from even, stepping down some 2m from west to east. The internal west wall was built on the crest of the bedrock.
- The east wall in particular showed evidence of several partial collapses and alterations during the occupation periods of the broch - earlier walling topped by irregular coursing of different workmanship, an enlarged east chamber, narrowing of the stacked voids over the east and south chambers etc.
- All the internal walls were both fire damaged and had clearly suffered further damage from falling stonework which in most areas had collapsed against the wall opposite with such force that walls were shunted out of true.
- A mounded area of the destruction layers a little to the west of centre overlay the



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uppermost of three hearths suggesting that there had been a hearth on the bedrock from a very early stage in the broch's occupation. The topmost hearth would have been very close to the first floor if that extended across the full width of the interior.

- Beside the hearth were the remains of a probable water tank and at lower levels the suggestion of some kind of channel running between the tank and the entrance.

- The lowest bedrock step on the east side had been converted into a souterrain which showed signs of changes of plan and the entrance to the east chamber was above the level of the top of the souterrain. Had a timber structure roofed the souterrain and provided a bridge to the chamber?



- Beside the souterrain, close to the entrance a large knocking stone (for dehusking grain prior transfer to querns for milling) had been set within a discreet and edged clay platform overlying paving.

Finds included

- 9 quern stones, 9 lamps or bowls, 36 spindle whorls, a strike a light, pot boilers and other stone tools
- Whale bone some worked



- Worked and un-worked Red Deer Antler including a particularly nice comb
- Worked and un-worked animal bone including pins
- Decorated pottery fragments of various kinds
- 2 Iron dress pins, 1 socketed axe, 3 sickles (2 with partially surviving wooden handles) a large knife or saw and other items yet to be identified

- Copper alloy pin
- Waterlogged timber from lowest level hollows in bedrock



Some work was not completed this year because of the extra time taken up removing the rubble overburden! The excavation of one of the chambers off the entrance passage and the area outside the entrance will hopefully be done as part of next year's programme.

Historic Assynt is a partner in the Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape Partnership. The contractors for the project are AOC Archaeology. Funding has come from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Environment Scotland, SSE's Sustainable Development Fund, Highland Council through the Landfill Communities Fund, the Pilgrim Trust and private donations. We are very grateful for their help and support.

We are also very grateful to the team of 52 volunteers (including a good many NOSAS members) who together put in 1,750 hours of work on site this year.

KEN BOWKER - SARTORIAL ARCHAEOLOGISTS: DAPPER AND DIPPY

Jean was watching as I emerged from the depths of the open-cast charcoal mine known as Clachtoll Broch, tripping over my boots and ruining the archaeology, scratching my nose and rubbing my forehead with sodden black gloves. Sticky mud dripped off my orange roadman's trousers and my ancient yachting jacket. Jean glanced across to where Roland - who we all know keeps an ageing portrait of himself in the attic - was tap-dancing out of the fire-blackened pit in his white suit, his highly-polished Balenciaga boots gleaming in the sun, a tiny fleck of dust falling off his Saville Row togs as he floated across the burnt, ankle-breaking wreckage of the broch. His hardtop hat fell off as he took a bow by the entrance. "Why does Roland always look dapper and ready for a black-tie dinner, whilst you always look like Worzel Gummidge?" Jean asked me. I shrugged, aggrieved by this scathing remark from my very own Aunt Sally, and splashed off to lunch, where I asked Roland the same question. He gave me his 'Quizzical but Inscrutable' look, honed by years of tolerating irritating hypochondriacs like me. "I wouldn't call you Worzel ...", he said, after some consideration. "I would say 'shambolic.'"



NICK LYNDSAY - GUIDED WALK ALONG THE COFFIN ROAD, FROM CLYNEKIRKTON TO OLDTOWN, STRATH BRORA

The weather held fair on Sunday October 8th, 2017, when 36 people attended Clyne Heritage Society's guided walk along the Coffin Road from Clynekirkton to Oldtown, Strath Brora, as part of Highland Council's annual Highland Archaeology Festival. This year is the 24th year of the popular

festival; with the Society holding festival events since 1999.

Meeting at Brora Heritage Centre at 10.30am, the walk leader, Dr Nick Lindsay (Clyne Heritage Society Chair and NOSAS member) explained the plan for all cars to be driven initially to the end of the walk at Oldtown. Half of the cars would be left there and all of the group would squeeze into the other half of the cars and be driven to the start of the walk at Clynekirkton.

Transport operations completed, the walk commenced in fair sunshine at the old church ruin at Clynekirkton. The Old Coffin Road (also variably known as the Old Drove Road or the Garlet Road, which describes its topography in Gaelic as Rough Slope) was the main thoroughfare from Strath Brora to the parish church, well before the village of Brora existed and before the Clearances (1809-21) and the English names it is known by today shed some light on its use.

The gentle walk along the track took the group behind the West Clyne crofts and overlooked those of West Clynelish, or London Street. It was explained that this name had nothing at all to do with the UK capital, but was another anglicised corruption of the Gaelic 'Sraid Lunndan' or Green Wet Street.

The first proper stop was made after around $\frac{3}{4}$ mile at Cregan a' Chorp (the Body Stone), where coffin-bearers from Strath Brora, en route to funerals at Clynekirkton, would take a refreshment break, usually the uisge beatha (whisky), having placed the coffin on the flat stone to prevent the soul of the deceased departing into the ground. Examining the top of the stone closely, the group were shown some man-made marks cut into the surface. It was an Ordnance Survey Bench Mark, and is one of several made by surveyors during a levelling traverse along the Coffin Road and back over the top of Socach Hill in the early 1870s. It denotes a known height, this one is 546.6 feet above sea-level datum and can be seen on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1872.

Crossing over the Bealach, superb views of Strath Brora and its loch, Carrol Rock and Ben Horn came into view and Killin Broch was soon reached.



Commanding a magnificent view overlooking the strath, lunch was taken at the spectacular 23m (75 feet) diameter pile of stones, with a 1.5m high cairn on top, which would once have been a towering Iron Age circular fortification, standing up to 15m (50 feet) high.

To build this size of structure, there must have been plenty of labour

available to quarry, transport the necessary building material and also to build the broch. The group marvelled at the feat of engineering, and the organisation and planning which must have been crucial to the success of the project. It was incredible that there was a knowledge of how to construct such an enormous building and, when completed, it would have been a striking mark on the landscape, denoting power and wealth, directly across the Strath from another broch at Carrol.



After visiting a solitary Standing Stone, the next stop was a large rock, into the upper surface of which had been carved four small cup marks, more generically known as 'rock art'.

They generally occur throughout Atlantic and Mediterranean Europe, with a fine concentration in the Highlands of Scotland, on natural slabs or erratics, i.e., large boulders dumped by glaciers as they melted during the last ice age, but their purpose is unclear.



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It was noted that it was disappointing that our own John Wombell wasn't on the walk, as his input into their interpretation would have enlivened the discussion. In his absence, NOSAS Chairman, Roland Spencer-Jones, took the lead and explained some theories, but that there is much conjecture regarding their origin.

The group were led through the township of Sallachy (Willow Place), a little-known old township set high above Loch Brora, and shown the enigmatic remains of several buildings, including longhouses and corn-drying kilns. The township is enclosed by a low, linear turf and stone bank, which is part of the complicated and extensive head dyke system, extending for over 4km. It separates the living areas and cultivatable land (infield) from the common grazing of the open hill (outfield). The dyke also acted as a barrier from water draining from the hill, as it had a ditch on its uphill side, which carried the water away from the areas of cultivation.

In the Post-Medieval period, from around AD1600 onwards, at the end of what is referred to as 'the Little Ice Age', the climate became warmer again. Thus, higher places, such as Sallachy, became more favourable for permanent habitation once again. It was often the case that the familiar and already established shieling grounds (summer dwelling and cattle grazing) were used as places to construct a permanent dwelling or two, along with areas suitable for cultivation of oats, bere, kale and potatoes.

The only map evidence we have to tell us that this township actually existed was made by David Aitken in 1772, to record the boundary between the estates of Carrol and the House of Sutherland during a dispute over its exact position. It appears that Sallachy was inhabited then as there are cultivation strips marked on this map, however, the very comprehensive Old Parish Registers, which record the details of 3,200 births and marriages in over 100 locations in Clyne parish between 1782 and 1855, do not have a record of Sallachy, indicating that it was probably uninhabited by 1782. It may be that the township had been cleared by Captain Sutherland for the wider outreaches of his newly established Killin Sheep farm, which had already been started by the time the map was made, as the boundary dyke, built in 1771, is clearly marked.



As a direct result of the removal of the people from their ancestral townships, when the great sheep farms were created for incoming sheep barons, circular, stone-built sheepfolds began to spring up throughout the land. The group visited the one at Sallachy, still standing mostly to its 1.8m original height. Thus, they are typically dated to the Post-clearance period, i.e. early 19th Century and were constructed for the protection of the sheep from the elements, although this one may be contemporaneous with the existence of the early Killin Sheep Farm. The stone used in its construction would undoubtedly have been robbed from the

nearby broch.

Evidence for the earliest settlers at Sallachy was seen next as a distinctive low circular wall, which the group were told is the tell-tale sign of the site of a Bronze or Iron Age roundhouse or hut circle. This one, which may have been later re-used as a sheep pen, has an internal diameter of 9m and it has an entrance in its SSE quadrant. NOSAS's Meryl Marshall offered an alternative theory that it was a much later sheep stall, associated with the township, rather than a prehistoric dwelling. Nick Lindsay explained that, as in many cases, excavation would be the only method of establishing exactly what some of these structures actually were.

At the north end of the township are a collection of mounds, which would normally be interpreted as clearance cairns, heaps of stones cleared from an area of cultivation, exactly as modern-day farmers do when ploughing their fields. However, the group were shown that at least 2 of these cairns had 'hollow' centres, having been excavated in search, literally, of buried treasures. A Golspie Minister from 1866 to 1914, the Rev James M Joass, was a keen antiquary who was sponsored by the Society of Antiquarians to go about the countryside excavating archaeological features. He opened up many a cairn and excavated several brochs in search of antiquarian relics, many of which are displayed in the small museum at Dunrobin Castle. It was explained that it wasn't an unusual sight to see Joass's 'hollow' cairns on the local hills. The two cairns examined were probably burial cairns, dating to the Bronze Age.

It was back to the Coffin Road for the final few stops, where a recent muir fire had exposed clearly another hut circle which was magnificently located opposite the impressive Carrol Rock. On top of a nearby knoll, the group were shown a cist burial, (pronounced kissed!), a stone-lined coffin, set into the ground, into which Bronze Age people placed their dead in a crouched position.

The recent fire had done the group a further archaeological favour. Perhaps the most recent archaeological discovery in the Highlands had been exposed by the fire which had burned off the deep heather. A rectangle of boulders marked the foundations of a building measuring 9m x 3.5m. Set on an exposed ridge, high above the loch, the group tried to imagine how tough life would have been for its inhabitants.

The final glance at archaeology was at another, previously unrecorded hut circle, set on a natural platform, but buried in deep heather, where the fire had not reached, on the way back down to Coffin Road and the short walk to the cars.

It had been a great day out, with people being shown the hidden archaeology of a very special area and, most importantly, the weather had stayed fair.

ANNE COOMBS -THE MULTI PERIOD LANDSCAPE OF GLENMARKSIE, STRATHCONON.

On 10th October a group of 26 people and at least 3 dogs met at Luichart Power Station at 10.30. The weather was perfect, not cold, dry and we set off to follow our leaders, Meryl Marshall and John Wombell. Although there were several NOSAS members in the group, most were not members and Meryl's introduction to the walk was excellent.

Before crossing the dam, we looked down on the remains of the supports of the original hydroelectric pipeline built in 1925 and supplied electricity to several places including nearby Dingwall and even as far as Dornoch.

The original dam was 2m high in contrast to the present dam which gives spectacular views down the river although our attention was diverted to the bird of prey sitting very still on the building. After several minutes of concentration, we realised it was plastic to scare the seagulls.



Climbing up to the ruined farmstead of Soulmarksie we divided into 2 groups, one stayed at the farmstead while the other went up to the rock shelter. The farmstead had been occupied until the end of the 19th century. Sadly, the central dividing wall has deteriorated since NOSAS recorded the building during the Strathconon survey. However, it provided a rare chance to see how the wall had

been built.

The outer face of the wall has fallen off and exposed the turf and stone layers inside and we realised that what had appeared as lichen covered mortar was actually the turf layers extending to the outer face of the wall.

Once the shelter group came back down, the rest went up to shelter and we all speculated once again as to when the shelter dated to, was it old, even prehistoric, or simply a shepherd's hut. Or, more romantically had it been (another) Bonnie Prince Charlie cave. Whichever, it was coffee time, and then just as we were leaving Bob saw some initials carved in one of the outer wall stones. The initials KMK are clear but lichen covered and Meryl had no records of anybody with a corresponding name had lived at Soulmarksie, another mystery.

Onwards once more we followed the Improvement wall dividing the Soulmarksie land from that of Glenmarksie.

Still a very substantial the wall runs for over 1km.

John told use about the rock art discoveries on the other side of the valley. Despite the now sharp wind we tucked in behind the piles of brash created by the recent tree felling and ate our lunch. We then split into 2 groups again, one taking the low route back to the cars while the 'fitter' ones went up to the dun overlooking the junction of the Altt a'Ghlinne with the Conon. The really fit ones quickly disappeared up the hill while the more genteel among us took their time.





John let out a yell. He had found a new cup mark rock with at least 14 cups, considerably eroded but definitely there. The recent clear felling of the forestry had removed enough of the turf to expose the decoration. This rock suggests there are likely to be more decorated rocks in the area. Once we got higher up the hill we looked back down and saw previously unrecorded rig and furrow and a possible structure near to the burn. The removal of the trees has revealed even more archaeology than we had previously recorded.

The dun sits in a commanding position with dramatic steep drops on all sides except the west side. There appears to be a distinct wall on the edge of the summit on the west side forming a closure to the easier access.

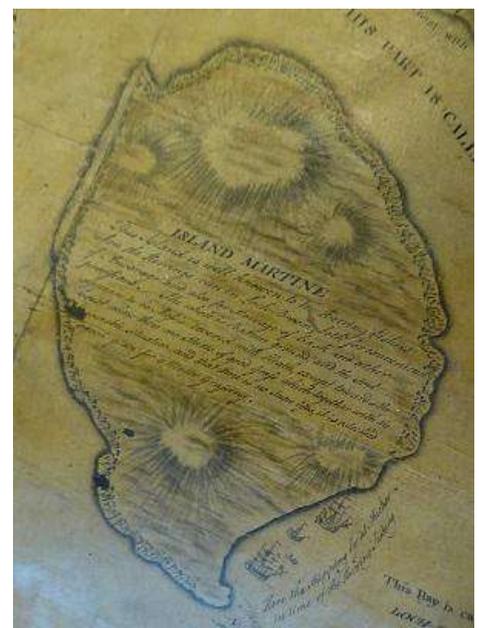
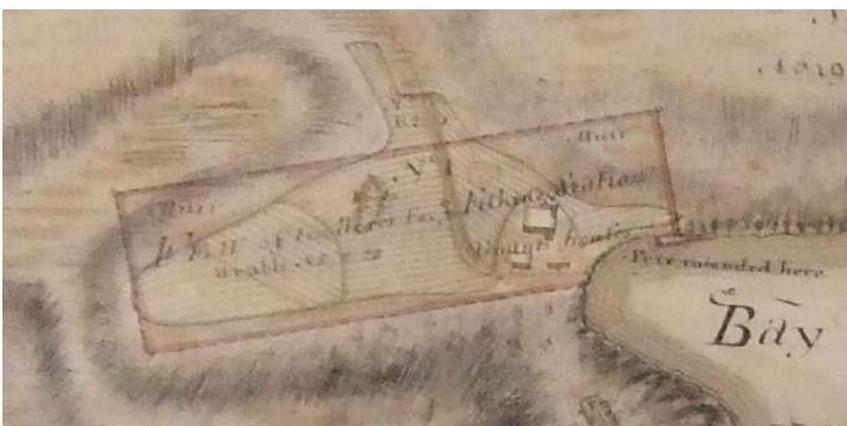
On the way down to the track we saw a possible shieling with a small enclosure although there was speculation as to whether it was a goat keeper's house as these were often away from the main settlement. We re-joined the track and passed through an area of old coppiced hazel trees and onto the mica mine. By now time was marching on and after looking at nearest exposure we continued to the cars.

We thanked Meryl and John for their efforts guiding us through a great landscape with amazing archaeology and got into our cars just as it started to rain.



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**Cathy Dagg - Tanera Mor and Isle Martin
Community Projects and Private Ownership**



Tanera Mor in 1785 and Isle Martin in 1750s from maps held in Castle Leod. Thanks to Steve Husband and Meryl Marshall for the copies.

Over the years NOSAS members have done a huge amount of important work finding and researching the archaeological evidence for the herring fishing in Loch Hourn in the 18th-19th century. This included looking at the remains of herring curing stations on the west coast, and some NOSAS members will remember going over to Tanera Mor, off Coigach in Wester Ross, on 20th October 2007) this is on the [web site nosas.co.uk](http://www.nosas.co.uk) (**NOSAS Report (incomplete) of an Archaeological Survey of the Island of Tanera Mor**) to carry out a measured survey of the substantial standing ruins of the curing station, built in 1784.

Tanera Mor is one of the earliest herring curing stations in Wester Ross. The first was Isle Martin, in 1775 with Culag at Lochinver in Sutherland established a short while later, then Tanera in 1785 and eventually the fishing village of Ullapool in 1788. The greater part of the Isle Martin buildings were converted to a flour mill in 1937 then completely demolished. Culag fishing station lies under the Culag Hotel. The great red herring curing house in Ullapool was truncated by about 1/3 to broaden the entrance to the ferry car park and converted to Calmac offices in the 1970s, without any building survey or photographic record. Tanera Mor, although roofless and much reduced after Frank Fraser Darling's demolitions in 1939, remains as the last curing station in the Lochbroom area which might give archaeological evidence for the curing industry. This flourished only briefly but was enormously significant on a local level and also for the role it played in international affairs.



short piece about the project on BBC Alba.
website: islemartinprojects.org

This Spring, the Isle Martin Trust received a Heritage Lottery Fund grant for a community heritage project. Volunteers have been researching the history of the island, creating a space in one of the old buildings for a micro museum, devising fictional narratives based on real events and characters, designing a heritage trail around the island and much more.

Ullapool: red herring curing house in 1970s

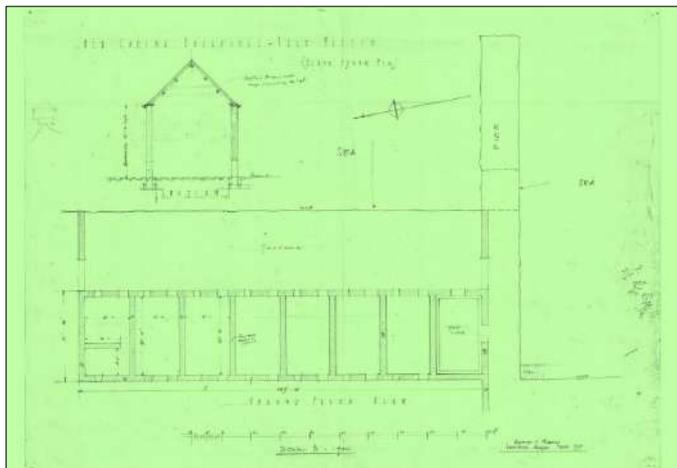
You may have caught a Check out

One of the most interesting challenges has been working out exactly how the buildings were used in the process of curing red herring. Why a doorway there? Was this 'tank' a part of the process? Are these bricks contemporary? Very fortunately, we found a set of architect's measured sketches of the ruined buildings, made in 1937, in order to convert them into a flour mill, these have offered some clues. We're planning some modest test pitting which may answer some of our questions, in collaboration with Ullapool High School.



Isle Martin: curing house converted to flour mill 1940s

Measured plan of Isle Martin red herring curing house, drawn in 1937



Meanwhile on Tanera Mor. You may have read that in the Spring of this year the island was sold. The new owner has big plans, none of which have yet reached the stage of application for planning consent. Fortunately, Ullapool Museum approached the owner with the offer of carrying out some historical research. I was able to take the opportunity to convince the owner of the need for a detailed audit of the island's heritage resources, including carrying out a full archaeological survey to fill in the gaps left by previous surveys. I have not gotten very far yet,

after only two trips to the island, one in pouring rain, but have managed to do a study of the island's buildings, (excluding shielings and enclosures), which come to about 46. I hope this will inform the owner in his plans for conversion of ruins to holiday accommodation. It raises the question of how best to preserve our more recent built heritage: convert to modern use, consolidate, or leave as crumbling ruins in the landscape?

The herring station itself raises the most urgent questions. This is a Grade B Listed building, the last (relatively) unchanged curing station in Lochbroom. The south range, consisting of the store for barrels, nets, salt etc crashed to the ground one night around 1875. The north range looks fairly stable after it was reduced in height by Fraser Darling. There is a thick layer of deposit on the floor which could contain a wealth of information about the curing process. I have been stressing the importance of respecting the Listed status and of having archaeological supervision on any site clearance, but am working at present without any sort of official brief.

Tanera Mor Curing Station, interior to manager's house



There was a delightful gang of Romanian workmen living on the island when I was there and when work is quiet they are found things to do, such as strimming the burial ground and clearing out ruins. A few weeks ago, they cleared out half of the south range, exposing the original stone floor. This had been cleared by Fraser Darling in 1939 to create his 'walled garden' so the workmen were only removing the overburden of sixty years. But Fraser Darling had made no mention of the broad, shallow brick gutters laid against the outer face of the wall, presumably an original 1785 feature.



The central row of bricks forming the drainage channel were laid flat. On either side, four rows were set on their sides, rising at a shallow angle. Here the inside three brick rows have been removed when a shed was built in the 1970s. The gutter ends in a sump against the far wall, which was not

cleared out. Stone slabs leading to the archway entrances in the lost wall on the right appear to have been laid directly onto the gutter.

Tanera Mor: brick gutters along exterior of south range north face, wall collapsed in 1870's.

Fraser Darling wrote in 'Island Farm': *'As we reached the eastern corner of the courtyard the rubbish grew deeper, and when we almost reached the wall the paving suddenly stopped. It was the edge of the kiln where peat was burnt to produce the red herrings for which Tanera was famous. The kiln was three feet wide, nearly three feet deep and nine feet long, and even now was full of ash. We mixed this with soil and lime mortar to form the body of what is now an herbaceous bed overlying the kiln and the few feet of paving west of it'*

Now, Fraser Darling had a very hazy notion of how the red herring were cured. For a start the curing house, divided into compartments, was the tall north range not the lower building with large arched entrances he was clearing out. It is documented that oak was the best wood for the smoking process. Other hardwoods were acceptable, but oak was preferred and offcuts from the shipbuilding yards of the south were brought in as back cargo. Fraser Darling frequently mentions in 'Island Farm' the degradation of the fragile landscape by all the peat cutting for the curing station, but centuries of ordinary people cutting for their home fires were probably to blame. In addition, fires were not set on a 'kiln' for the smoking.

So, what was Fraser Darling seeing in 1939 and what did the Romanian workmen uncover? There is a low row of stones, placed onto the slab floor, which I interpret as the edging for Fraser Darling's flower bed. Behind this the stone paving does indeed stop, but jaggedly, as if all the slabs east this point were lifted. The coarse orange sand that the slabs were originally bedded into survives under a layer of lime mortar rich dark soil. But, slightly higher than the level of the slabs, is a setting of bricks forming a semi-circle, with some adjoining residual stone slabs in situ. What this obviously isn't is a 'kiln' measuring 3'x9'. The diameter of the brick semicircle is 3.4m, or 11'.

Tanera Mor curing station, interior features at east end of storehouse range



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I was very good and only cleaned exposed features, though the temptation to go deeper was strong.

This just a tiny example of what archaeological treats may be waiting here. If planning consent is given for conversion to luxury holiday accommodation, we need to get in there fast and efficiently. I will be pushing for a full programme of archaeological investigation whatever the final plan is.

The proposed final plan is, of course, a sensitive conversion to holiday accommodation. The external appearance of the building may well be kept the same, and it may guarantee its preservation for many years to come, but what will have happened will have been the privatisation of an important historic building, part of our local heritage. That's worth a public debate.

Roger Piercy - Teanagairn Henge

With the formation of the Culbokie Community Trust (CCT) in 2014 it was felt that the appearance and usefulness of the web site would be enhanced by showing



the history of Culbokie. It was soon decided that the topics would form a series of chapters but there was never any intention to publish a book as it would be out of date before it was printed.

Volunteers then started to write chapters on subjects on which they were knowledgeable and happy to research and elaborate with progress being monitored by a small informal group.

Given the amount of archaeological knowledge within the Group and content on the ground this was the focus of one of the earliest chapters with the Carn Mor Dun and the Teanagain Henge featuring. Within CCT there was another group concentrating on the improvements to the woodlands around Culbokie with a view to improving their accessibility and pressure was put on the Forestry Commission to improve the situation at to the Carn Mor Dun, which is probably the best iron-age hill fort on the Black Isle. This led us to the conclusion that the time was right for the Teanagain Henge “to be put on the map”.

We had photographic evidence that the site was clear of vegetation in 2006 with the landowner carrying out the clearance. By 2014 the site was well and truly overgrown. Our own first site visit was in April 2016 and for yours truly the most exciting part of the visit to an overgrown site was the incredibly clear ancient trackway leading up from the A9 past the site through to the B9169, admittedly not the ‘top’ part.

Knowledge of our interest had filtered through to some of the local members of NOSAS who volunteered to share their knowledge and the recommendation that we involved the archaeologists from Adopt-a Monument (A-o-M). Following a site visit in February 2017 from A-o-M they expressed interest in assisting us and plans started to be made for clearing the site.



In May a call for volunteers for a clearing squad went out and was well heeded - in fact we are in the fortunate situation of never being short of volunteers. Supported by two archaeologists, Phil and Becky from A-o-M, a squad of loppers, pruners, strimmers and luggers of cut vegetation set to and made an impressive impact, only some stubborn gorse bushes beat us.

finished off cutting the gorse whilst a start was made on strimming the fresh vegetation which was considerable. By this time, we had had our arm twisted to take part in the Highland Archaeology Festival fortnight and we offered a Drop in Session for one day which meant that it was all hands to the strimmers etc to make the site look presentable.

In September, Phil and Becky called in on their way north and



The day went well; we were blessed by good weather which allowed the spectacular views from the site to be appreciated and we had 19 visitors who were all very complimentary of the Henge and our efforts. The henge has the reputation of being one of the largest in the Highlands.

We now have to work forward to fund raise to provide a stile/gate into the site, the trackway is on one landowner’s ground and the Henge is on another, plus we need to improve the entrance gate from the B9169 at the start of the track which is onto garden ground of another landowner. Fortunately, we have been able to catch the imagination of all three landowners who are very supportive. Finally, we will need to prepare and install an interpretive board. Next Spring will see the start of spraying to control the Rosebay Willow Herb, Gorse, Dockans and Raspberries.

In view of the fact that “a picture is worth a thousand words” I would suggest going to the CCT website www.culbokiect.org opening the “History of Culbokie” menu and clicking on “Culbokie History Index” where you will find a link to “Teanagairn Henge” showing a wide range of photographs representing the visits described above. Please feel free to explore the site.

Steve Birch – Rosemarkie Caves

This was the second consecutive season of excavation by the Rosemarkie Caves Project in the series of coastal caves between Rosemarkie and Eathie. Four caves were chosen for targeted excavation by the team. This included further work in Smelter’s Cave (2B) where the Rosemarkie Man discovery was made last year (see [blog post](#)), along with substantial evidence for early medieval metal working.



Some of the best evidence for the use and function of the caves to emerge this year related to the 19th century, including the usual leather shoe soles and leather off-cuts, snips of metal, and working in bone/horn.



Unfortunately, the hard work to uncover further evidence of the metalworking activity outside (2B) failed to materialise, we found evidence for the deposition from material generated within the caves through time such as fire-cracked stones, charcoal and ash, shellfish, animal bone (cattle, sheep and pig) and some large fish (including cod and ling). This area, below the drip-line of the cave, was also probably quite a dangerous place to carry out any activities. A number of large rocks were uncovered here that had fallen from the cliff above. We did recover some metalworking residues including a hearth base, three pieces of iron slag, and one fragment of vitrified furnace wall.

As usual, potentially important discoveries were made on the last day! In (2B), around 1.5 metres away from where we had recovered Rosemarkie Man in 2016 we uncovered articulated ribs within a roughly-built, cist-type structure. By the end of the day, it was obvious that these remains were animal, probably from cattle or deer. We now have a good sequence and date for the animal remains, which proved to be from an adult red deer.

A post-medieval hearth had been constructed in the back of the cave, between two bedrock ribs on the natural sand, and using a large and flat inclined slab of rock. At some stage during the use of this feature, a pit was cut through the ashy spreads to the west of the hearth and the almost complete (the only bits missing were the cranium and one lower mandible) articulated remains of the red deer was laid on its side. The pit did not quite accommodate the animals remains, so its legs protruded upwards at an angle to rest on accumulating midden deposits. A stone setting some 1.4 metres long was then constructed over the animal using angular rocks, aligned North/South on the same alignment as the animal remains. The deer's spinal column was partially covered by the setting on the east side, while stone were placed across the limbs on the west side. Therefore, the setting did not contain the animal, but rested on top of it – after which two larger stones were placed within the setting covering the lower abdomen area, and smaller stones over the chest area.



The second upper hearth was built to the east of the stone setting covering the animals remains, using the stones on its east side as a back for the hearth (to which were added additional smaller stones to form a more circular setting on this side of the hearth). Ash from the use of the hearth had filtered down into the cist-like feature, after which midden and floor deposits accumulated, completely burying the setting and hearths.



Excavation of the deposits within the stone setting produced glass, ceramics, clay pipe fragments, a small button, burnt wood, a couple of copper-alloy nails, iron nails and leather off-cuts. When the lower half of the rib cage was uncovered the complete leather sole of a small shoe or boot, proving that the carcass of the deer was deposited during the post-medieval period.

So, the million-dollar question why place the remains of a complete deer carcass in the back of the cave, where you were living and carrying out craft activities. Cave (1B) is the largest of the Rosemarkie caves at around 21x10x5 metres high. In the upper deposits a number of hearth/spot fire settings were found dating to the 19th C period of “traveller” occupation. We also uncovered layers of bracken matting and a number of evocative artefacts. This is a previously dug test pit in 1B that was re-excavated this year. It originally reached a depth of 1.4 metres with a possible stake hole at the base. The substantial charcoal rich/ashy layer close to the bottom yielded 7th to 9th century dates.

Some further excitement for this year's dig was provided by the appearance of the BBC to film us for Landward and Scotland Outdoors.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b097thcg>

