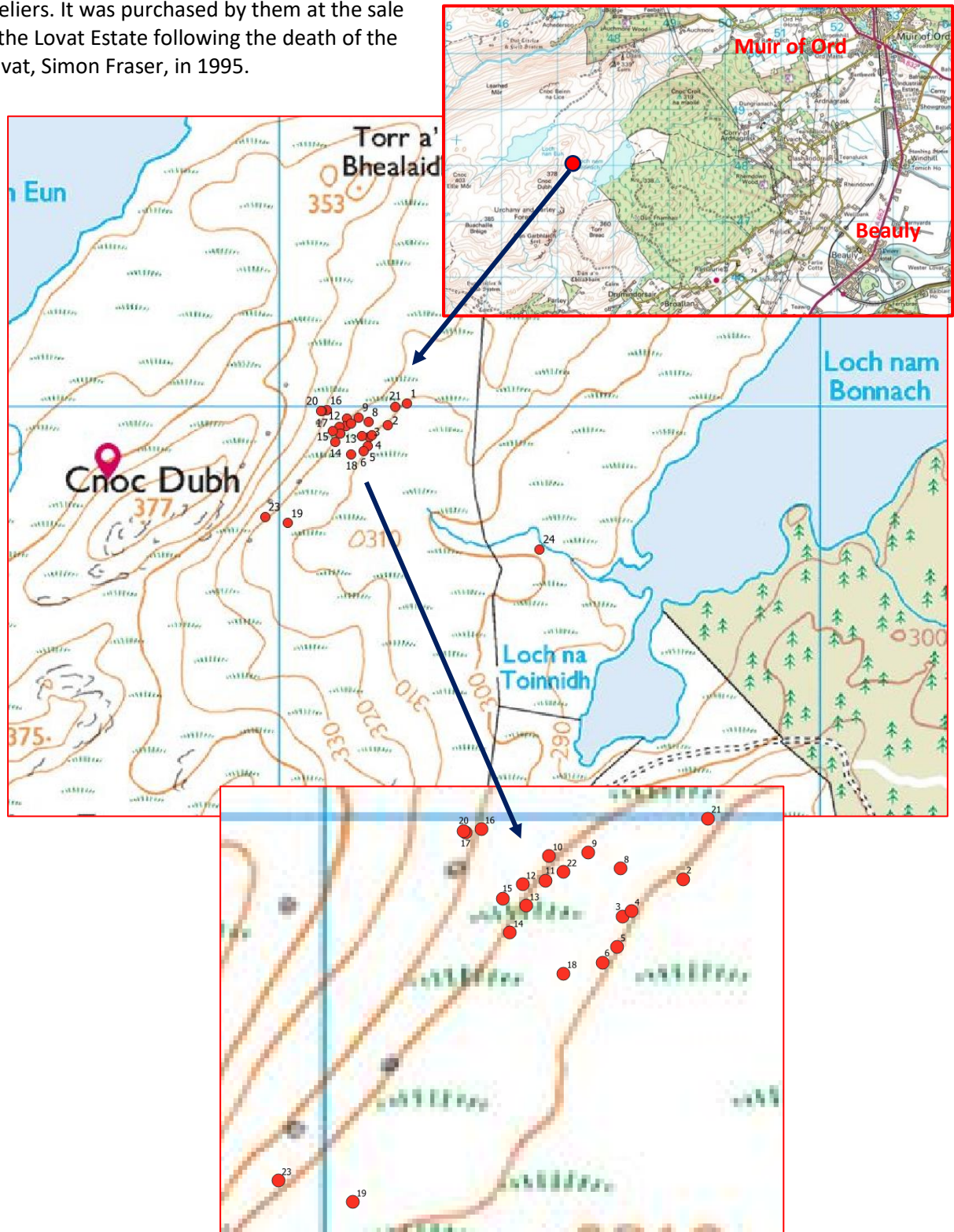


Loch nam Bonnach Shieling Site

Background

In March 2021 a NOSAS member was walking on the NW side of Loch nam Bonnach on the moors above Beauly, west of Inverness. He identified some platforms on the SE-facing slope of a low ridge and thought they could be shieling platforms. This was subsequently confirmed by further visits to the site by other NOSAS members.

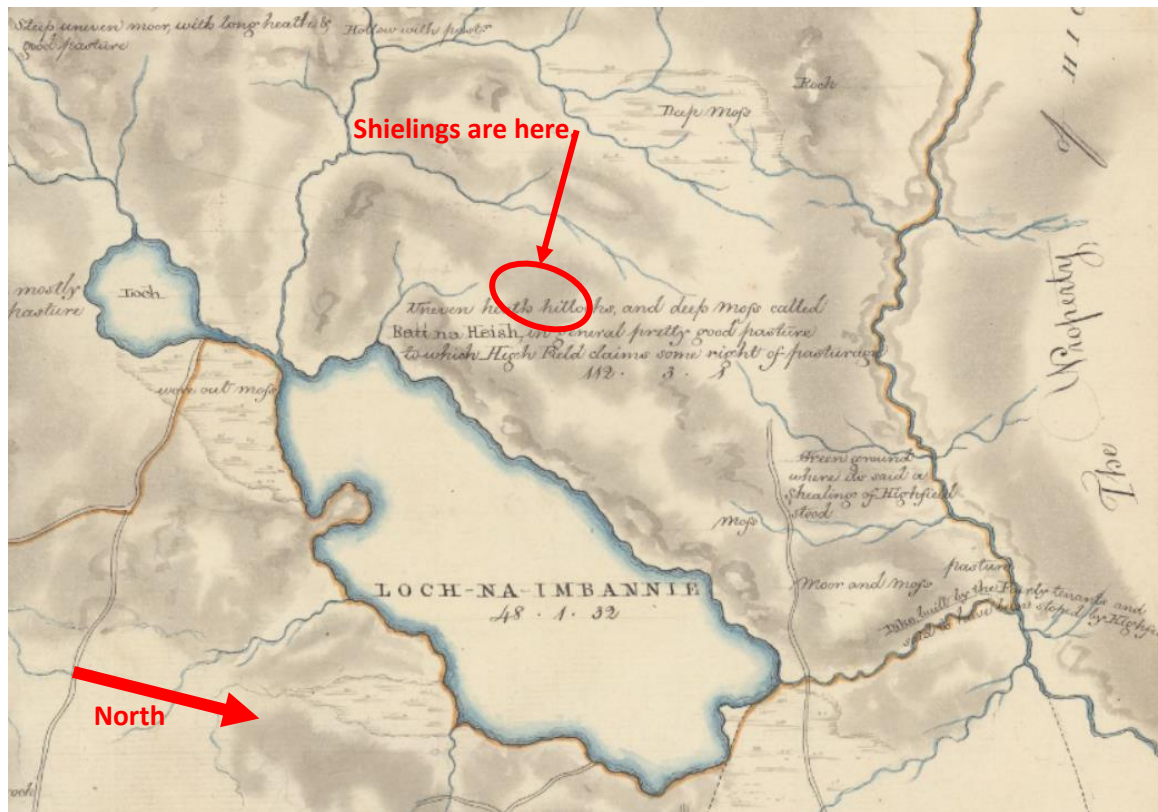
Although Loch nam Bonnach is frequently visited by walkers from Beauly and Muir of Ord, this is usually to the eastern or northern shores. The NW side is less frequented, although there is a track westwards from the N end to the even more remote Loch nan Eun. The land, part of the Farley Estate, currently belongs to the Walduck family, London hoteliers. It was purchased by them at the sale of much of the Lovat Estate following the death of the 15th Lord Lovat, Simon Fraser, in 1995.



The Shieling Site on Maps

Lovat Estate maps from 1800 onwards include the land on which the shielings lie as being within the estate boundaries. At that time the area was called *Bad na Heish*.

1800 Estate Map surveyed and drawn by George Brown



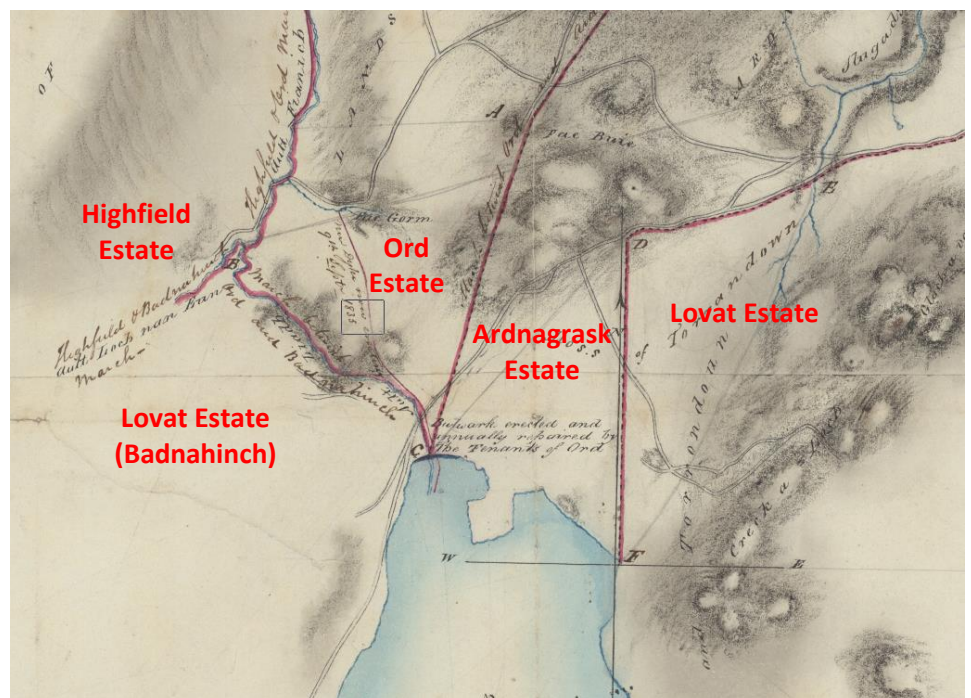
The shieling site is indicated. Note that N is towards the bottom right. The handwritten text below it says: “Uneven heath hillocks and deep moss called *Bad na Heish* in general pretty good pasture to which Highfield (Estate) claims some right of pasturage”. There is further text written just north (ie below) of it “Green ground where it is said a shealing of Highfield stood”.

1835 Estate Map, unsigned

This map details the complicated estate boundaries at the north end of Loch nam Bonnach, as shown.

- Highfield – George Gillanders
- Ord - Thomas Mackenzie
- Ardnagrask – Thomas Mackenzie
- Lovat – Thomas Fraser

On an estate map of 1852 the land is called “Farley Hill Ground”. The Ordnance Survey maps – 1st edition 1872, 2nd edition 1902 – show this area as featureless.



Description of the Site

NW of the lower end of Loch nam Bonnach is a low ridge at 300m asl, running SW-NE. Parallel to this and rising to the peak of Cnoc Dubh at 377m at the SW end is another higher SW-NE ridge. Between the two is a shallow bowl of lower green ground, through which an un-named small burn flows to the SE to drain into Loch nam Bonnach. On the lower slopes of the higher ridge, facing to the SE, are a variety of structures.

A total of 20 structures on this slope were identified and then surveyed and photographed on 19th May 2021. They are described in detail in the table on pages 4-5 . In summary they are:

- 13 platforms, probably shieling huts (*Structures 2, 4-13, 18,23*)
- 1 circular stone structure, probably a roundhouse (*Structure 3*)
- 3 small circular structures, possibly dairies (*Structures 16, 21, 22*)
- 2 stone- defined platforms of indeterminate function (*Structures 17, 19*)
- 1 stone-defined pit, possibly a lambing pen (*Structure 14*)

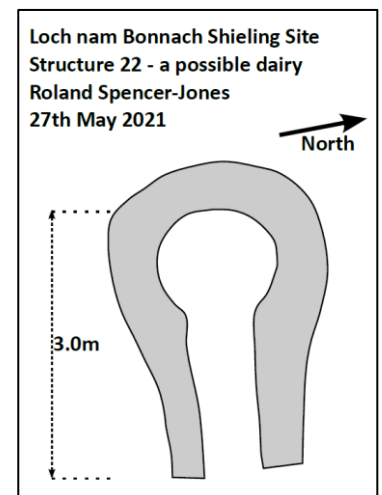
The thirteen platforms were set out from the slope often with a recess into the bank on the uphill side and buttressing on the downhill side. They tended to be rectangular or sub-rectangular, orientated SW-NE, constructed of turf with, or occasionally without, a stone base. Entrances were rarely identifiable as the walls were invariably eroded and insubstantial, usually 0.2 - 0.6m high, suggesting that these structures are quite old. Expert opinion on site suggested >200years old. The main identifiable features were the platforms jutting out from the slope.

In the centre of the group of rectangular or sub-rectangular structures is one round structure, Structure 3, with stone walls comprised of massive stones. The 1.3m wide walls currently stand to 0.6m, highest in the west. There is a probable entrance in the east, although upslope in the west there is also a break in the stones, possibly caused by tumble and/or animal damage. This may represent a pre-historic hut circle dwelling. Just outside this structure, to the SE, is a flat platform on which stands the remains of an oval building (Structure 4), with 1m walls up to 0.5m high. It is not clear whether these two structures are contemporaneous. Or, if Structure 3 is pre-historic, Structure 4 could be a later shieling.

Amongst the shieling huts are three rounded scoops built into the slope, with an elongated entrance or channel downslope. A dimensioned sketch of one of these, Structure 22, can be seen to the right. The walls are of stone, up to 0.5m high, 0.5m thick. These relatively small structures could not have been dwellings. They could possibly be lambing pens, or more likely dairies in which butter and cheese were made or stored.

Two of the platforms (Structures 17 & 19) had traces of stones on them, which could be the remains of shielings or could possibly just be natural platforms in the slope with tumbled stone. Lastly, Structure 14, is a small circular ring of large stones, 1.0m x 0.8m, with walls 0.8m thick and up to 0.25m high. The centre seemed lower than the surrounding ground. There was no entrance to this structure, which could represent a lambing pen.

Illustrative photographs of these structures are reproduced in the pages that follow.



Structure	BNG	Height ASL, metres	Orientation	Aspect	Internal Dimenstions, metres	Wall Width, metres	Wall Height, metres	Entrance in...	Construction Materials	Notes	Structure
2	NH 47198 47963	306	NE/SW	SE	3.9 x 2.5	0.8	0.4	?	Stone base	Raised, prominent platform. Oval or sub-rectangular (s-rtr)	Shieling
3	NH 47164 47942	307	-	E	3.9 x 3.8	1.3	0.6	Prob E	Stone	Prominent circular structure with probable entrance in E, although upslope at W there is a break in the stones, possibly caused by tumble. The stone walls are constructed of massive stones. This may be a hut circle, ie permanent residence. Outwith the E wall there is another oval structure, Structure 4, possibly an enclosure, or possibly an outer wall of this building.	Roundhouse
4	NH 47169 47945	307	N/S	E	4.6 x 2.5	1	0.5	NW	Stone base	A raised oval platform, possibly linked to, and on the E side of, Structure 3.	Shieling
5	NH 47161 47925	308	NE/SW	SE	3.0 x 2.1	0.6	0.2	SE	?	Prominent raised platform built out of the slope with buttressing on the downslope S & SW sides.	Shieling
6	NH 47153 47916	307	NE/SW	SE	2.5 x 2.2	0.5	0.3	Prob SE	Stone base	Prominent raised platform built out of the slope. Large stone at SW. E end peters out. Base of structure sloping downhill.	Shieling
8	NH 47163 47969	308	NE/SW	SE	4.8 x 2.6	0.6	0.1	?		Sub-rectangular platform set into the slope. Buttressed on downslope SE side. Three large stones in S.	Shieling
9	NH 47145 47978	313	NE/SW	SE	4.6 x 2.4	0.7 - 1.2	0.6	S end of SE wall	Turf on stone base	A large s-rtr building, with the end walls well preserved, higher than the long ones. Platform set into slope with some buttressing downslope.	Shieling
10	NH 47123 47976	317	NNE/SSW	SE	3.1 x 2.2	0.6	0.1	SE	Maybe just turf	A platform with low edges/walls, heavily vegetated. No visible stones. On 20210527 NH 47107 47974	Shieling
11	NH 47121 47962	314	-	SE	2.6	0.5	0.1	Prob NE	Maybe just turf	Raised platform on a slope. One stone visible in N. On 20210527 NH 47115 47973	Shieling
12	NH 47108 47960	315	NE/SW	SE	3.0 x 1.8	0.7	0.15	W	Turf on stone base	A platform with low very spread edges/walls. No visible stones.	Shieling

13	NH 47110 47948	315	NE/SW	SE	4.0 x 2.0	0.5	0.1	NE	Maybe just turf	A raised platform built out of the slope with buttressing on the downslope.	Shieling
14	NH 47101 47933	311	E/W	SE	1.0 x 0.8	0.8	0.25	-	Stone	A stone-lined pit, constructed of massive stones producing thick walls. Sunk into the slope. Possible lambing pen	? Lambing pen
15	NH 47097 47952	312	NE/SW	SE	2.7 x 1.7	0.6	0.15	?	Stone base	A raised platform built out of the slope. Stones on downslope S side.	Shieling
16	NH 47085 47991	321	-	E	1.3 x 1.4	0.3	0.1	?	Turf on stone base	A circular enclosure set in shallow gully. Heavily vegetated. Large possible barrow upslope from it. Similar to 21 & 22, so a possible dairy.	? Dairy
17	NH 47076 47989	323	-	SE	2	0.3	0.1	?	Maybe just turf	A circular platform. No obvious stone.	Platform
18	NH 47131 47910	305	-	SE	2.8 x 2.5	0.5	0.1	?	Maybe just turf	Indistinct walls on a raised platform, possibly a shieling base. Two prominent stones in W	Shieling
19	NH 47013 47782	305	E/W	SE	2.5 x 2.0	0.5	0.2	?	Turf on stone base	Base still on slope, ie not a good platform. Stone setting in wall most clearly seen on downside. Upside less distinct.	Platform
21	NH 47212 47997		NE/SW	SE	2.5 x 1.5	0.5	0.2	S	Stone	S-facing scoop in the SE slope. Visible stones at E. Stone lined on W. Entrance facing S. Possible dairy.	? Dairy
22	NH 47131 47967		NE/SW	SE	3.2 x 2.6	0.8	0.5	S	Stone	A key-hole shaped structure, orientated NW-SE. Possible dairy. See Inkscape Plan	? Dairy
23	NH 46971 47794		E/W	SE	5 x 2.5	0.5		?	Stone	A scanty platform on the steep slope of the S facing hillside.	Shieling

A Sample of Photographs from the Shieling Site



Structure 2, a shieling platform, looking N



Structure 3, a probable hut circle, looking S



Structure 4, a probable shieling platform, looking W



Structure 5, a shieling platform, looking NE



Structure 6, a shieling platform, looking W



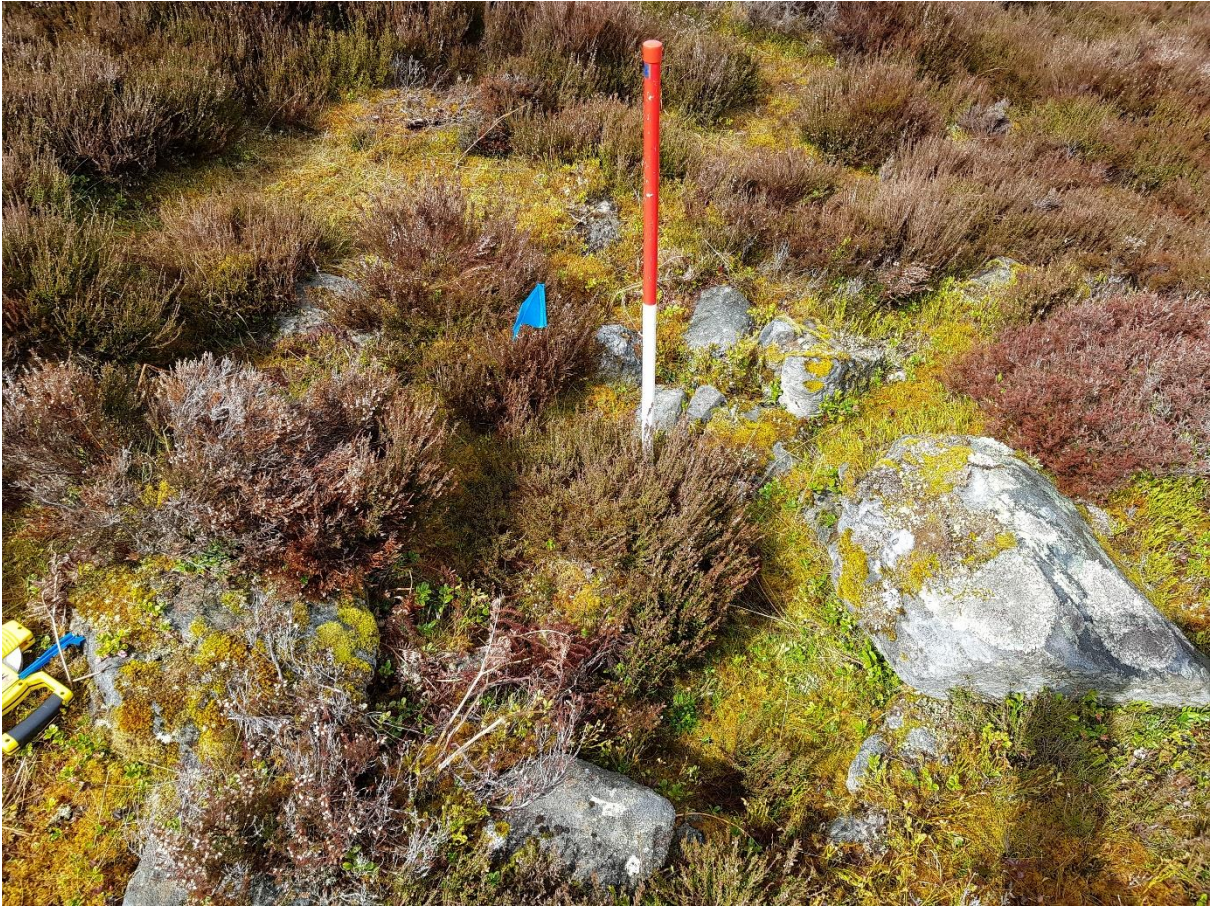
Structure 7, a shieling platform, looking E



Structure 9, a shieling platform, looking S



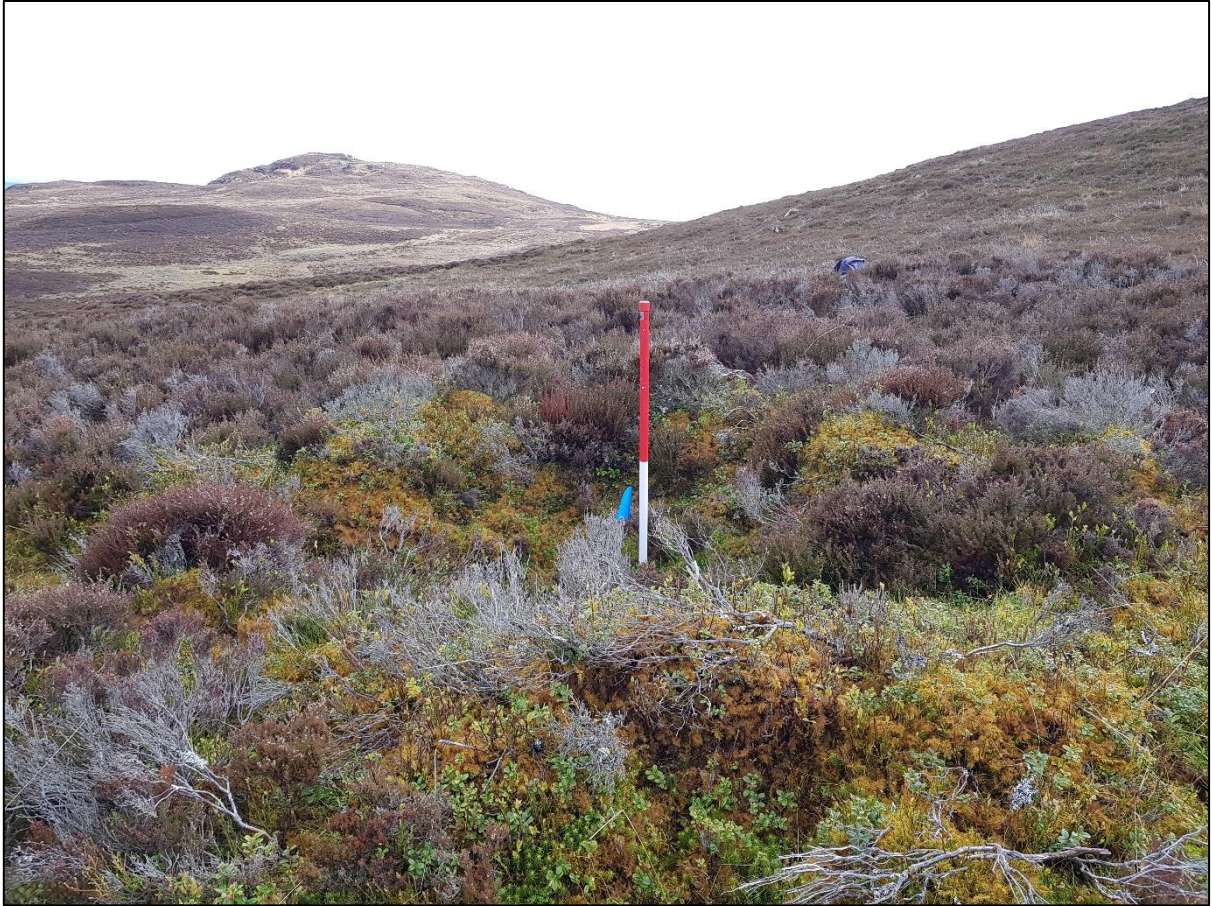
Structure 12, a shieling platform, looking SW



Structure 14, a possible lambing pen, looking N



Structure 15, a shieling platform, looking N



Structure 16, a stone-lined scoop out of the slope, a possible dairy, looking S



Structure 21, a stone-lined scoop out of the slope, a possible dairy, looking S



Structure 22, a stone-lined scoop out of the slope, a possible dairy, looking E



Structure 23, a scanty structure on a platform, possibly a shieling, looking S