

NORTH OF SCOTLAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



YEARBOOK

1999

On Wednesday 14th April the whole site was back-filled with its own soil over plastic sheeting. It awaits an interim report from Richard, decisions by its funders Historic Scotland as to how to proceed from here and then the return of Richard and his team next year to complete the excavation of the Ring Cairn. Restoration of the monument and upgrading of the access and visitor facilities are the ultimate objectives.

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DISCLAIMER

The views and conclusions expressed by contributors to this NOSAS Yearbook are not necessarily those of the NOSAS Committee, NOSAS corporately, nor of the Editor.

INFORMATION ABOUT NOSAS

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"Have you found anything?" is what many visitors asked. There were many finds ranging from a flint blade to small sherds of pottery to 18th Century clay pipes and 20th Century detritus. No polished axes or skulls so far. The important finds were of charcoal for dating and soil and pollen for analysis.

A section cut through the North arc satisfied Richard that the Platform,, Stone Circle and Ring Cairn had all been built at the same time. "And when would that have been?" Roughly between six thousand and four thousand years ago. I also showed the visitors the section cut under the recumbent stone. Charcoal and charred earth from there, which will date the placing of the recumbent stone and thus the age of the monument, have been sent for radio carbon dating.

Richard's expertise was always at hand. A French visitor wanted to know the best book on stone circles, and he instantly gave her the name of book and author. But did this include the Stone Circles in Brittany? No. He gave her the name of a separate book, and it's also available in French. Mademoiselle was impressed and so was I.

I told them no fairy stories. Well, perhaps one. Early on we thought the recumbent stone was a different kind of stone from the others, and that all ten tonnes or more of it must have been imported, perhaps from two or three miles away. Peter Craig, a local geologist, challenged this and we appealed to Amanda, the team's geologist, who confirmed that the stones are the same. Still, the huge recumbent stone must have been moved from somewhere. Moving that stone two or three metres would be a major operation even today with modern equipment.

shorten the time on the scaffolding and increase the time spent walking round the site. What everyone wanted to know was what the monument was for. Very few visitors knew that the Ring Cairn was used for burials and cremations. Was there any other significance, they asked. Astronomy? What about sacrifice? Can you see other stones or circles from here? I explained that the monument clearly had an important ritualistic function, important enough to command a supply of labour to move massive stones and build a permanent structure, at a time when the people's own houses were built of wood.

As digging progressed the site got more and more interesting, and the visitors' interest increased accordingly. Only about half had come because they knew there was an excavation on. Some had come from England, France and Germany and had no idea what was happening until they got there. All were delighted to find a real excavation in progress. "Time Team" has certainly popularised archaeology.

All visitors loved the situation of the monument, on a hill with breathtaking views in all directions. They were overwhelmed by the view from the North-east side of the circle. The recumbent stone is on the South-west and reflects the shape of the mountain Lochnagar fifteen miles away. Every one of my visitors stood and wondered at this.

The platform, near the recumbent stone is decorated with two pieces of quartzite, a fairly common feature of recumbent stone circles. The visitors loved this and one commented "They'd have had to keep the weeds down if they'd been to the trouble of putting that quartzite there."

THE FIRST YEAR

Chris Neill, President, NOSAS

About five years ago now a disparate group assembled in a classroom in Culloden. There was an ex-pilot, several teachers, some civil engineers, a police inspector, a few housewives and at least one househusband. What we shared was an avid enthusiasm for archaeology. We were assembling to start a three year course leading to a Certificate in Practical Field Archaeology that had been developed by The University of Aberdeen - Centre for Continuing Education in association with the Archaeologists from the then Highland Regional Council and Inverness District Council. The first intake of students was mainly people in the Inverness area, but included people from as far afield as Aberdeen and Tain.

Most of us completed the course and found our commitment and enthusiasm for the course increasing as we progressed, particularly during the second year. Our lecturers for the course were the HRC and IDC Archaeologists who coped very well with teaching stropky and opinionated adults. We were fortunate to have direct contact with our lecturers and each other.

On completion of the course we were keen to keep working in the archaeological field and formed the North of Scotland Archaeological Society (N.O.S.A.S.) with the intention of promoting and encouraging archaeology in the North of Scotland. The University of Aberdeen continue to run their Archaeology courses and many of the students have joined the Society, although membership is not limited to those who have done this course.

The Society has organised field-walking expeditions, site prospection weekends, participation in digs and lectures on archaeological topics. Our members have assisted in helping with Highland Archaeology Week and the activities that members are involved in, either separately or as part of

organised N.O.S.A.S. events, constantly increase.

Our logo is a tanged and barbed arrowhead and on our last fieldwalking trip one of these was found in a ploughed field near Conon Bridge. This was a very satisfying omen. We now have members in Ross-shire, Sutherland, Caithness, Aberdeen-shire, and Inverness-shire.

This is our first yearbook and it consists of articles written by members about archaeological events and topics. I hope you enjoy it. If you are keen on archaeology in the Highland area, this book is for you.

EDITOR'S REMARKS

Jim Marshall

Well, here it is at last – the long awaited Yearbook. Holidays, family matters and pressure at work have combined to delay my contribution.

I must thank all the contributors for taking the time to write and present their articles for inclusion. I must also thank Janet Hooper for her kind assistance and advice.

The articles have been edited here and there, mainly to ensure clarity and consistency. There may still be a few howlers about, I hope readers will be tolerant. Any errors, of course, will be mine!

I hope that this will be the first of many NOSAS Yearbooks – I suppose it won't be too long before the Editor (whoever that is) for the Year 2000 will be looking for submissions.

For this years excavation, which will include another hut-circle and sectioning of the enclosure wall, experienced and non-experienced volunteers are needed and good accommodation (and food and drink) is available nearby. For further details, telephone Hilary Murray, Archaeolink, Oyne, Inch, Aberdeenshire on 01464 851500 during normal working hours.

Visitor Guide at Tomnaverie.

Hugh D Cochran

Tomnaverie Recumbent Stone Circle, near Tarland Aberdeenshire became the subject of a large scale excavation in the spring of 1999 and was also the occasion of my first experience as a Visitor Guide.

On Sunday 21st March 1999, I visited the Circle where I found Professor Richard Bradley of Reading University showing his team of archaeologists the site. I introduced myself and joined the group while he told us what his plans for the excavation were. My offer to act as guide for visitors to the site was immediately accepted and I started on Easter weekend.

By this time things had moved on. A scaffolding "viewing tower" had been built, the site was de-turfed and partly cleaned, and features had emerged. There were three structures, the Platform which extended beyond the rim of the Stone Circle, the Stone Circle itself, with its recumbent stone and flankers, and the Ring Cairn within the Stone Circle. One objective of the excavation was to ascertain if these structures had been built at one time or separately, and a second was to ascertain the date when they were built.

I took my visitors up the tower where they got a brilliant view of the site, and shouted my interpretation above the high wind. Experience taught me to

sheepskins! However, it did mean that the proscribed area of 8m x 8m was stripped very quickly.

Then, under the supervision of Hilary Murray, the Archaeolink archaeologist, Annette and I cleaned back the site while Hilary followed on behind with the planning frame. The structure was long and narrow c. 11.5m x 3.7-4.0m, with internal dimensions of 10m x 2.3-2.5m, with very flimsy walls formed from a roughly built outer face around a rubble core. There appeared to be evidence of collapsed turf wall material in the more sheltered and less eroded north end of the building.

The most surprising element of the excavation were the finds - flint artefacts and debitage! On day 2, I found a lovely, large, bright yellow scraper, just outside the west wall and just below the surface. Thank goodness it was lying flat on the ground as I trowelled back, so that I caused it no damage! There were also a few debitage fragments in the same area. Annette, who was cleaning back the west wall at this point, also found debitage and another piece of worked flint, light grey in colour and long and thin.

A total of 27 flints were found, 17 of which were identified as of late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date. They seem to represent a series of events rather than a single knapping event. At least two other colours of flint - grey and red - were found. Other finds included burnt bone and a few (undiagnostic) pottery fragments.

In contrast, the hut circle excavation yielded only one flint flake, clay pipe fragments, lead shot and a piece of sawn bone, all from the topsoil or rubble. Following the excavations, fieldwalking revealed several more possible hut circles and radial walls travelling up the outer slopes to the summit enclosure wall.

SPRING WEEKEND - 9/11 APRIL 1999 - 1

Loch Sunart Oakwoods

Hilary Hanson

As part of the NOSAS week-end trip to Ardnamurchan in April, 1999, a prior arrangement had been made to meet Mr. Jim Kirby of Forest Enterprise at Strontian. Jim is very keen and knowledgeable about the archaeology of his area and has produced a booklet entitled "An Archaeological Tour of the Sunart Oakwoods". It was this tour that he proposed to take us on.

To the untrained (or even trained!) eye, the archaeological remains were very ephemeral indeed, but Jim's expertise brought the oakwoods alive with a sense of people's use and intervention over thousands of years. For instance, he pointed out the remains of very old trees which indicated use of the woodlands for grazing animals, the timber 'pole' crop being well above their eating height, whereas ground level coppicing indicated earlier, and later, exclusion of animals.

The production of charcoal was one of the most important aspects of woodland management over a very long period of time. The industrial scale on which this could take place is witnessed by the many recessed platforms (there are at least 50) which were almost certainly used by charcoal burners. It is known from historical sources that large amounts of charcoal from the Sunart woods were being taken by the Lorne Furnace Company to Bonawe on Loch Etive throughout the 1790's.

Unsurprisingly, timber was an important element in the construction of buildings in the woods. 'Creel houses' are well documented in the estate records for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These employed a wattle superstructure to support the roof and therefore all that remains,

archaeologically, to indicate such houses, are the very low, moss-covered outlines of the stones that kept the wattle uprights in place.

Other archaeological periods are represented by the robbed out remains of an Iron Age dun and a Bronze Age cairn. Indeed it is thought that the later influx of charcoal burners may well have re-used earlier, prehistoric, hut platforms for their kilns. Later archaeology includes two fine Parliamentary bridges, stone and turf dykes, tracks and settlements.

Within Europe, Atlantic oakwoods like this are restricted to the oceanic fringes of the British Isles, France and Spain, with most occurring in Western Britain. As scattered remnants of one of our most ancient woodland types, these native oakwoods contain some of our least altered soils and plant communities. They have a long history of local management and were highly valued by people throughout their existence, offering both grazing and shelter, firewood and timber, charcoal for smelting and bark for tanning. The disappearance of the last surviving fragments of the oakwoods has now been halted and a large project is underway to restore them to their former glory. In the short space of an hour or so Jim treated us to a wonderful tour through the life of a very historic oakwood. For me, he opened my eyes to new aspects of archaeology and to new methods of identification. It is a tour well worth taking. For further information, contact: Jim Kirby, Forester, Forest Enterprise, Strontian, Forestry Office, Strontian.

So, was my lonely little ruin once the home of the goat wife? I like to think so. Anyway it is a wonderful coincidence and brought to an end a perfect day.

Baldwin, J.R., 1994. *Peoples and Settlement in North-West Ross*.
Edinburgh: The
Scottish Society for Northern Studies, School of Scottish Studies,
University of Edinburgh, 346-7.

Mediaeval Flints? or 'Spring Digging'

Hilary Hanson

In the spring of 1999, one of the NOSAS members visited Archaeolink, the prehistory park near Oyne, Aberdeenshire. While there she learned that a proposed archaeological dig was being held later on in the year and asked to be informed of the dates. So it was that on May 8th, three NOSAS members, Ronnie Scott, Hilary Hanson and Annette Jack joined the staff and volunteers on site at Archaeolink for a few days digging.

Two sites were being investigated simultaneously; a rectangular structure within the lightly defended hilltop enclosure called Berryhill, and a little lower downslope, a hut circle, one of several that form part of a prehistoric settlement complex on the shoulders of the hill. The excavations ran for three weeks and were funded by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, Aberdeenshire Archaeological Services and Archaeolink Prehistory Park.

Due to a shortage of volunteers, the rectangular structure on the summit had not been started prior to our arrival, so we were just in time to start the de-turfing (lucky us!). The problem was that two young fit male members of Archaeolink staff were in charge of the spades, and cut turves the size of

After completing the necessary measuring, sketching and photography (and having enjoyed a lazy lunch in the warm sun), we packed up and headed for Ullapool. In the bookshop there (can't drive past one, can I?), I bought "Peoples and Settlement in North-West Ross", ostensibly for later reading.

At home that night, I couldn't stop thinking about the tiny, divided room that I presumed to be a byre. I related my thoughts out loud to my mother, saying that surely only a calf would have fitted in. She, unerringly replied - "What about a goat?" (Credit where credits due!). That set me off. Picking up the newly purchased book (not expecting to find anything, I might add!), I looked under 'goats' in the index.

Well, you've guessed the rest With the hairs rising on the back of my neck, I read:

"At one time goats were quite widely 'kept' in Coigach - though not normally at the croft on occasion they were kept in a 'park' at Geodha na Cailliché, opposite Eilean Martain - the infield of a tiny, long ruinous cottar settlement where it is said, the old woman (cailleach) regularly climbed the very steep short valley with a creel of either shellfish or seaweed, all the while spinning on her distaff"
(Fraser 1957. A.1. 61-2).

The herd (a total of about 25) were kept there at least since the mid nineteenth century.

SPRING WEEKEND – 9/11 APRIL 1999 – 2

Metal-detecting and Beach-Combing - Camas Nan Geall Chris Neill

The bay known as Camas Nan Geall has long been a magnet for human habitation. A flat area just above the beach attracted most of this, as witnessed by a Chambered cairn, a chapel and early cross slab and associated burials. As the sea retreated light gravelly soils were laid down on the former pebble beach, providing fertile ground easily worked by the plough.

I have for years been interested in metal-detecting and beach-combing and feel that in an area of archaeological interest an interesting perspective on the type of activities taking place may be gleaned by this approach. I only ever use the metal detector between high and low tides on beach sites as this does not disturb archaeological sites, yet recovers artefacts already disturbed and threatened with destruction by the sea.

The metal detector finds from the beach were very sparse with only three items found. Most interesting was a pre-18th century hinge fragment of the type that was needed for heavy oak doors. There was a large iron nail of indeterminate age and a brass window pole end that may even have been attached to wood, which had drifted into the bay, subsequently being used for firewood or decaying on the beach. This result is encouraging because it means that early deposits are uncontaminated by later use of the site. Many beaches produce only modern junk.

The pottery finds were just as sparse, but encouraging for the same reason. There was Victorian bottle glass in various shades of green and blue and white Staffordshire or Chinese imported pottery so popular from the eighteenth century. These represented Victorian occupation highlighted by the deserted houses on either side of the beach. Other fragments were from

stone jars of the same period. Only two fragments of terracotta unglazed pottery could have been earlier. The most interesting find was a worked piece of quartz which seems to be half of a gaming piece. The numerous of quartz on the beach were the obvious raw material for this sort of work.

I visited one of the deserted houses by the stream. It had chimneys built into the gable ends and cruck-slots for a cruck and thatch roof. A midden at the side of the building reflected its use in the 19th-20th century with pottery and glass fragments representing the latest phase of occupation. By the stream was a cast iron and steel scarifier with iron tyres and gearing. It appears to have been horse-drawn.

Lastly I tried to spot areas of early occupation by looking for crop-marks. The area is overlooked from the road and the area to the North-west of the chambered cairn seemed much disturbed with differential grass growth possibly indicating earlier buildings. However circular features just above the high-tide line turned out to be cattle feeding stations.

SPRING WEEKEND – 9/11 APRIL 1999 - 3

Swordle

Meryl Marshall

The Kilmory and Swordle area on the North coast of Ardnamurchan is sparsely populated but yet relatively fertile where limestone outcrops. There are few recorded archaeological sites, so it appeared to be a good place for prospection. Consultation of the OS map had revealed a few likely names - Kiloran, Dun Mor and Dun Mhurcaidh and we had found reference to 3 settlements, cleared in the middle of last century.

From the bridge to the site was about a forty-five minute walk, at first on a metalled track along the riverside. The same track then continued past a large open grassy basin, once enclosed by an old wooden fence, of unusual, but very practical, design. This parkland is separated from the sea by a huge natural ridge and a level area of boggy muir. As we approached the site, the low autumn sun made it possible to identify a few old peat cuttings and lazy beds cut right up to the tiny beach at the foot of the towering cliffs on the north side of the promontory.

The fort itself is highly impressive, but best seen when the bracken is down and the angle of the sun is low. It is flanked by shingle beaches and on the three seaward sides by cliffs, which in places have been revetted by the fort builders. The promontory gives the fort a commanding position, overlooking the island of Isle Martin and out to the sea beyond.

The whole promontory, approximately 100 metres in length by 40 metres wide has been fortified. It is possible to trace the original wall facings of the easternmost (landward) defences for some 17 metres, showing that the wall has been at least 3 metres wide over most of its length.

Impressive as the fort is, my imagination was caught by a single, very humble, dwelling, now ruinous, built hard up against the outer wall of the fort. Its east-west axis was only some 8 metres in length with rounded corners and with two compartments, one a tiny structure attached to the south-east end. Even though so small, this structure had been divided into two. There were no other indications of settlement outside the fort, and the number of lazy-beds/peat cuttings looked to be probably only supportive of, and contemporary with, this one dwelling.

Fraser was his usual friendly and encouraging self as were his helpers Andy and Mike. Volunteers were made welcome. The site is sandy which was kind to the old knees. It was a pleasure to take part in this dig (we even saw the eclipse!!). Fraser is hoping to get funding to come back next year, so watch this space.

Dun Canna and the Goat Wife

Hilary Hanson

I have always believed that archaeology and history are inseparable partners, rather like a marriage. Sometimes uncomfortable bed-fellows, but more often highly complimentary when used in conjunction with each other. Therefore I was extremely excited when this next small example illustrated the point so well.

On a calm, clear late autumn day, Annette Jack and I set off for Wester Ross to carry out a routine inspection of a scheduled ancient monument north of Ullapool. The monument is a large promontory fort, known as Dun Canna, jutting out into the sea between Camas Mor and Camas Beag.

Access is through a private estate, and having telephoned the head stalker in advance to make sure no stalking would be taking place and there was no chance of being shot, we parked as advised at a wooden bridge on the south side of the river. As Annette and I crossed this bridge, a magnificent stag was crossing in the opposite direction, just downstream. He saw us, lifted his head, and with an impressive "dressage" display continued across. An auspicious start to our day.

The afternoon was windy and the area quite exposed. We parked at Kiloran, which disappointingly turned out to be a holiday chalet. Nothing of archaeological interest, apart from some limestone quarrying, was evident. Around us was an extensive stretch of improved land with abundant evidence of rig and furrow cultivation, lazy beds, clearance cairns and many old boundaries.

We split up and went our separate ways, some to explore the "heights" i.e. the duns, others to visit the glens and yet others the headland. We all met up at Uamh Thuill - "the cave of the holed rock" where it is said that St. Columba had converted and baptised a gang of robbers.

At least 7 previously unrecorded sites were "discovered". Photographs were taken and notes made of:

- 2 small townships, one of 4 buildings and the other of 6.
- 2 duns - both well fortified naturally, but with little man-made enhancement.
- 1 limekiln.
- 2 unidentified structures which may have been kilns or cairns.

Shielfoot Vitrified Fort

Alistair Jupp

The morning visit involved climbing a steep vertical maze through the rocks of this large outcrop. After threading our way through wind-stunted oak and birch trees, we reached the northern-most of the forts - a sunken hollow with evidence of vitrification. The view towards Castle Tioram was as though from the bridge of a warship with the river running in spate below. A short traverse southwards along the ridge brought us to the main part of the fort, another hollow hardly bigger than the first one, amidships of the hill. The descent was more obvious and took us down by a series of terraces to level out near a hidden cultivation plot with associated ruined 19th century structures.

The natural position of the fort alone would have provided a good defence even without the addition of walling. The most puzzling question was left unanswered - How was the vitrification achieved on such an exposed ridge?

Wombell. I also had an instructive day assisting Jonathan Wordsworth with the pre-harvesting management survey. I am getting to know the site quite well! Some interesting features have turned up. There are cruck-slots in two of the structures and it appears that the load bearing stone walls of later buildings had been built around the crucks of earlier structures. Other buildings survive as low moss-covered rectangular foundations, which may represent even earlier creel houses. At the top of the site is a very unusual enclosure complex, unlike any present day sheep fank.

The site is now closed whilst harvesting is in progress. This is due for completion towards the end of March. Once this is done, I am hoping to be involved in the detailed survey of the site, the first stage in the ongoing interpretation and management of the site for the public.

Excavation at Birnie

Annette Jack

Archaeologist Fraser Hunter from The National Museums of Scotland was excavating at Birnie again this year, following the discovery of Roman coins in 1996 close to where cropmarks had shown up in AP's. The site lies 400m from Birnie Church, south of Elgin. Fieldwork in 1998 recovered artefacts indicating activity during the Neolithic, Bronze age, Iron age and Medieval periods, (including an arrowhead found by Hilary when she sat at the edge of the field to have a smoke).

The site has revealed a house (well preserved because it had been burnt) and a possible Medieval smiddy. The metal detectorist also uncovered more coins and Roman brooches in the field. The site itself was surrounded by pigs and piglets, who loved the spoilheaps. The electric fence kept the pigs out but the site was covered in piglet footprints in the morning.

Daingean

Hector MacKenzie Rogers.

During last summer, I was involved for quite a time with the settlement of Daingean, above Loch Garry. The site had been discovered 'lost' in the forest and because the area was due for felling, had to be recorded before this could take place.

In the eighteenth century, Daingean lay within the district of Glengarry known as Sleismein, part of the holding of the Macdonnells of Lundie, tacksmen of the Glengarry chief. At that time, there were 6 households occupying Daingean, 4 Macdonnells, a Campbell and a Kennedy. Notice of eviction was served on these families in 1785, along with 49 others from Lochgarry-side. It is not known whether they actually left the site at that time, but it is known that their superior, Duncan Macdonnell of Lundie was one of the leaders of an emigrant group to Canada in 1802, and it is also known that tacksmen sometimes took with them some of their dependants, other than their immediate family. Census returns show that the site continued to be partly occupied into the twentieth century, but never by anybody bearing any of the names of the families evicted in 1785.

As a result of its re-discovery, Daingean has received extensive press coverage and was included in the Landward programme on BBC2, as part of their Agricultural Archaeology series. Local interest was also considerable. I took a party of P5-7s from the local primary school around the site, followed, a week later, by a small party of adults during Archaeology Week.

I 'fieldwalked' the site with Jim Kirby of Forest Enterprise and again with Allison and Janet from the Council Archaeology Unit. I was briefed to mark out the features to be protected with canes and flags, a task in which I was assisted by my good friend and colleague, Jean Lawson and later by John

SPRING WEEKEND 9/11 APRIL - 5

Shielfoot settlement

George Grant

While the other members of the group climbed to Shielfoot Fort, Jim Marshall and I decided to walk the land to the north. The terrain consists of rough rocky outcrops interspersed by areas of very rough, sometimes heathery, sometimes boggy, rough pasture, much trodden by grazing cattle. Rough walking. From the highest point, 64m, no features were apparent or shown on our map.

Walking north past the mouth of the river we were suddenly looking down on an abandoned settlement. This comprised of approximately 35 structures and enclosures, which from the remaining features, seemed to have been occupied over a long period. These ranged from turf covered footings on the lowest terrace to walls standing to 1.5m on the rising ground behind, with the majority standing to about 1m. What appeared to be the most recent house, standing to 1.5m, had cruck slots in the walls and shell mortar pointing inside.

Following the estuary approx. 300m north, through what was probably 2 small fields, we found a well preserved corn kiln, with an associated building foundation. Further on were 2 small islands, barely above HWM, which had clear evidence of lazy beds.

Through the mist and rain could be seen Castle Tioram across the water and although we were all wet and getting cold, this area rounded off a very interesting weekend.

On our return the SMR proved to have the barest of detail on this settlement so a survey might be appreciated.

Any takers?

by the surgeon naturalist Archibald Menzies, and propagated in pots on the voyage home. Five plants went to Kew, and one lived until 1892. We are guessing that the Coire Shubh trees were planted around about 1847, which makes them very old for the species in Britain, as the norm is newer to 100 years. They obviously favour the cool wet climate of the West Highlands, which is presumably similar to that of their native Andean forests.

One possible translation of Coire Shubh, according to Edward C Ellice in his "Place Names of Glengarry and Glenquoich" 1898, is "the Corrie of the Graves", and we have found a scatter of unmarked graves reasonably close to the south-side tree. Was knowledge of this old cemetery passed down orally to a new and caring owner, as we know Edward Ellice to have been, who decided to mark the area with a special planting?

On a different tack, evidence of woodland pasture may be emerging from the Sunart Oakwoods, and I think we may have similar evidence here in the ancient oakwood fragments of Glengarry. Also, how often do you come across hawthorn trees, and holly bushes in association with abandoned settlements and archaeological sites? Many wonderful ancient specimen trees have been recorded throughout Britain, with some of them finding fame in a TV series.

We think there has to be something in this notion of archaeological trees.

An Archaeological Tree is there such a thing?

John and Trina Wombell

There are two specimen trees growing at a lonely uninhabited place called Coire Shubb, (pronounced corrie hoo), lying between Loch Quoich and Loch Hourn, which have had us puzzled for many years. Puzzled is the appropriate word as they are Araucaria araucanas or "monkey puzzle" trees. Chilean Pine is their proper English name. The largest tree stands alone on the north side of a small loch, whilst the slightly smaller tree stands together with an old gnarled holly tree on the south side of the loch. There is a substantial ruined farmhouse 300m away from the nearest tree, with the usual assortment of old stone dykes and dilapidated modern fencing around and about.

But why on earth were these Araucarias planted at this remote place, and why in these odd positions, when we are used to seeing them in designed landscapes and in urban gardens? The 1st edition Ordnance Survey shows small fenced enclosures around where the trees are growing, and informed opinion holds that these particular trees were grown from some of the very first seed to be brought into Britain. Two of the original iron corner strainers and stays remain as evidence of the enclosures. There is no remaining evidence of other trees being planted with the larger tree on the north side of the loch, but some large tree stump mounds remain as evidence of multiple planting around the smaller south-side tree.

As a result of our investigations we think that these trees were most probably planted by Edward "Bear" Ellice M.P. after he acquired Glen Quoich Estate in 1838, grown from seed collected by William Lobb in 1844 and imported by the Exeter nursery firm of Veitch. The very first seeds, just six of them were surreptitiously removed from a dinner table of the Governor of Chile in 1796

AUTUMN WEEKEND 11/13 NOVEMBER 1999

Caithness and Sutherland

Alan MacKenzie

A party of eight NOSAS Members arrived at the Northern Sands Hotel at Dunnet Bay on Friday 11th November. Recent members Paul Humphreys and his wife Mary were on hand to welcome us as was Barbara Hiddlestone, Janet and Callum MacKenzie later in the evening. Bar Suppers over, we enjoyed an evening learning about Caithness history from Paul and examining various artefacts which he had kindly brought along.

Saturday dawned clear and dry, if a little windy. We set off early to look at Robertshaven, Sannick and Freswick Bays. Alistair Jupp somehow managed to find his way to Robertshaven without local guidance from Paul!

We spent a little time at each bay examining middens and sand dunes (not necessarily in that order) trying to quickly assimilate the archaeology of each area. A small piece of flint discovered by Linda Lamb was her first ever "find"!

We then travelled "en convoy" down to Dunbeath Heritage Centre where we met Ann and Edwin Wakeling from Avienore. Our hosts at the Centre were (prospective) NOSAS members Nan and George Bethune. After an excellent lunch provided by them, we set off to try and see all the major archaeological attractions in and around Dunbeath before darkness fell. As a result we were treated to a whirlwind tour of Dunbeath harbour, the beach area, a pre-reformation chapel site, a broch and various artefacts and stone fragments found in and around the Bethune's croft. Finally, as darkness fell we went back to the Centre and enjoyed a cup of coffee and a quick look at the Interpretive display and the Database held by the Dunbeath Trust.

We arrived back at the Northern Sands ready for the excellent meal provided by Chef Barbara Hiddlestone. Barbara's superb meal was complemented by generous measures of wine supplied at her own expense - many thanks Barbara!

Another fairly early start on Sunday saw us saying farewell to the Northern Sands and Dunnet Bay on a wet and bleak morning. The weather brightened up however at Helmsdale as we moved off with members of the Caithness Field Club to walk over and around the various features at Kilphedir in Strath Ullie. We examined a corn drying kiln, chambered cairns, round houses, a broch, a souterrain, plus various indeterminate features. We much appreciated the knowledgeable leadership and friendly companionship provided by the Field Club members and hope to repeat the experience another time.

The day was rounded off by a bite to eat at "La Mirage" in Helmsdale. A bite doesn't adequately describe the magnificent home made doughnuts and meringues supplied to us. Those of us who had used the same eatery on the way North made sure that we shared a doughnut to avoid feeling rather bloated on the way back home.

All in all a most enjoyable and interesting weekend was had by all. Special thanks go to Paul Humphreys for organising accommodation and arranging the various site visits.

Following the very wet 1998 growing season, it was hoped that 1999 would make amends with a drier than average spring and summer. Sadly, it was not to be, and heavy rainfall once again ensured that crop growth was uninterrupted, with no moisture stress at critical growth stages. As a result, crop marks were almost completely absent over most of Scotland. By taking advantage of the occasional 'weather window', it was however possible to photograph a number of upstanding monuments.

Three reconnaissance flights, sponsored by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland and Highland Council, were made from Dalcross last year. The first was on 30 April, routeing south to the Aviemore/Coylumbridge/Boat of Garten area. Several hut circles and cairns were recorded, using a combination of colour slide and colour print film. A second flight took place on 27 July, partly to confirm the absence of crop marks, and to cover some of the extensive developments in progress around Inverness. This flight was extended to the west over Beaully/Muir of Ord/Aigas to observe crops in the fertile low-ground areas, but ripening was even and uniform. The third and last flight was to the south west, following the line of the Caledonian Canal, to obtain coverage of the associated engineering works as far as Loch Laggan. The return was by the Corrieyairack Pass, Foyers and Loch Ruthven. This was an evening flight, giving better shadow definition of a number of hut circles and house sites.

The conditions in 1999 did not lend themselves to 'discoveries'. However, photographic coverage of the Highland area in general is relatively scarce, and these recent prints and slides have been made available to the archive for future reference.