

NOSAS Projects, Forward Planning Meeting At Strathpeffer

In January this year your Committee finally managed to overcome the vagaries of the weather and had a meeting with members who are either currently running NOSAS adopted projects or who are seeking to develop projects or events.

A large and encouraging turn-out joined us in Strathpeffer where Cait McCullagh and I explained the process by which projects are adopted by NOSAS and then opened-up the meeting to the members for their ideas and were delighted at the variety of projects people were keen to pursue.

There were 27 different suggestions ranging from potential events, the archiving of NOSAS's many records through to the complexity of Tarradale's archaeology. An example of the sort of project that was brought to Strathpeffer for consideration is Elspeth Kennedy's survey of Upper Strathnairn. Meryl Marshall offered to run a small reconnaissance and the report below describes some of their finds.

As explained, once a project proposal is submitted to the Project Sub-Committee they will consider the initial idea before they move to the stage of detailed project design and execution. Using this process it is hoped that the society will have the man-power and equipment necessary to support the ambitions of all members.

Current Project Co-ordinators have a great wealth of experience and are very willing to help people get started. Details of ongoing projects and their leaders are on the web site and information about the NOSAS Committee can be found at the foot of this page.

Anne Coombs

NOSAS Committee 2010-2011

Chairperson	Anne Coombs
Vice Chair	Meryl Marshall
Treasurer	David Findlay
Secretary	Cait McCullagh

Committee Members

Beth Blackburn, Paul Dungey, Lynn Fraser, George Grant, Simon Gunn, Janet Hooper, Susan Kruse, Allan Mackenzie, Alastair Morton and John Wombell

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A Visit To Strathnairn

This area south of Inverness is scenically very attractive and topographically intricate. It has long been settled by man and has no shortage of archaeological sites! Several members got together and explored some of the sites on a calm but cold day in early March.



NOSAS Reconnaissance Team at Duntelchaig

The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Scotland had surveyed and recorded the sites in an area of 100 km² in 1996, so armed with a copy of their summary report we set off. The intention was to look for post medieval townships but on the way we took in a variety of other sites too.

They included:

- **Tordarroch** kerbed cairn and cup marked rocks
- **Dunlichity Church** with its watch tower and nearby “font” which proved to be a flat rock with a huge cup or “basin” 25cms in diameter
- **Township of Midtown** at the north end of Loch Duntelchaig, this was the disappointment of the day as most of the buildings on the early map had been replaced by modern residences and the remains of only one original building was identified
- **Township of West Town**, also on the shores of Duntelchaig, compensated for the disappointment of Midtown. A lovely site, it had the remains of several stone built longhouses and a large corn drying kiln, but for me the “ghost-like” outlines of at least four earlier buildings was the icing on the cake

- **Dalcrombie** on the north shore of Loch Ruthven where we were looking for a possible early township that had been recorded.



West Town Township

We certainly found the feint outline of several large buildings in the close cropped heathy terrain but they didn't appear to be particularly early. This was an interesting south facing slope with lots of hut circles and field systems with lynchets, but by this time it was getting late and even colder!!

So we will return to continue our quest – lots to explore in this beautiful landscape
If any members are interested in joining us on Thursday, April 14th please contact Elspeth Kennedy, telephone 01463 234808 or email to emacg.kennedy@btinternet.com

Meryl Marshall

Clachtoll Broch

Many thanks to all those who have expressed an interest in being involved in the proposed excavations at Clachtoll Broch, Borrolan Cairn and Glenleraig Longhouse in Assynt.

We're hoping to get funding sorted by the end of May and if all the funds materialise the three digs will take place over the summer and early autumn. As soon as we are more certain of the timings of the funding decisions a draft schedule will be worked out and circulated to all NOSAS members.

Gordon Sleight

Roads Through Ross Project

As many of you will know this project has been ongoing since 2008 and is being undertaken with the aim of characterising and recording a series of double embanked features, believed to indicate a possible network of relict route ways in Easter Ross. The main objectives are to identify a new monument class of early roadways in this part of the Highlands and to gain understanding of their creation, use, re-use and abandonment.

Following informal walkover surveys of the linear earthworks, it has become apparent that, for the most part, they possess features distinguishing them from simple tracks. At other places along the continuous route from the Beauly to the Dornoch Firths the route-way is preserved in currently used wide paths and field boundaries. The project's coordinators believe that the configuration of these fragmentary features reflects Davies' observation that even disconnected lengths of route-ways found at some distance from each other can be considered to form elements of a continuous route (2002, p.32),

Initial walkovers followed the trajectories suggested by the positioning of these features. Additionally, surfaces were probed for sub-surface cobbling and bottoming stones, using a stainless steel survey arrow. The results have been variable and, until a benchmark roadway sub-surface can be identified in the area, further investigation is being concentrated on desk based assessment of the historical cartography, aerial photographs and the District Roads Trustees' Minute Books and the Roads Commissioners' Reports, in order to clarify whether these features represent pre-parliamentary and 18th century military roads. In addition, measured surveys are being conducted of a representative sample of the double embanked roadway fragments and likely associated features along the route.

The defining characteristic is the relative straightness of the main thoroughfare at the centre of the network. Changes in direction occur fairly frequently but in between these changes the road generally takes a direct route from point to point. Most of the road, where it is identifiable, is delineated by parallel turf embankments, of no more than one metre in height, on either side of a levelled surface of between five and eleven meters in width. There is no discernible camber.

These double embanked linear features have been identified at the locations given below. To the north of the Beauly Firth, parallel embankments, conforming to the description given

above, have been identified at NH 56887 50573, continuing 1.86 kilometres NNW to NH 55067 51063. Similar double embanked features have been identified at Balavil Wood, in the vicinity of David's Fort beginning at NH 53782 52308 and continuing NNW for 1.29 kilometres to NH 53692 53608 and again at Tallysow Wood beginning at NH 52987 55338 and extending 613 metres to NH 2682 55888.



Continuing northwards, parallel embankments, defining a levelled route-way have been again identified, this time in the vicinity of Meikle Ussie at NH 51802 57918, extending for 70m to NH 51792 57968 and again at Coill an Rìghe, beginning at NH 51727 58398 and extending, northwards again for 423 metres to NH 51452 58688. Here the route reaches a fording place on a tributary burn of the River Peffery, which runs in a WNW direction down the slopes of Knockfarrel. Here, the project's coordinators' have identified what may be the stone remains of a simple bridge abutment. This feature requires further survey. At St John the Baptist's Well, just below the shoulder of Knockfarrel, the route appears to coincide with the Fodderty 'Corpse Road'. Here the parallel embankments and levelled surface begin at NH 51397 58883 and continue down the N facing slope for 150m to NH 51452 58993.

At the part of the suggested route-way that continues along the high ground above the N shore of the Cromarty Firth, a double embanked line has been identified beginning at NH 55216 60511, in the vicinity of Tulloch Mains, continuing eastwards for 356 metres to NH 55566 60631. Within the policies of Foulis Castle, double embankments have been identified at NH 58347 63056, traversing a line NNE for 40 metres, terminating at NH 58368 63090. At Skiach, further

embankments are visible at NH 63617 68360 and can be traced, for 220 metres to NH 63808 68432.

The characteristic features are picked up again in the vicinity of Kincaig House, starting at NH 68430 70842, continuing for 662 metres and terminating at NH 68825 70932, and also at Brenachie at NH 75745 76049, where it extends NNE for 244 metres until NH 75935 76194.

At NH 7664 7795, the projected route coincides with The King's Causeway, the fragmentary remains of a cobbled roadway evidencing, in part, two ditches running either side of a 7m (approx.) wide, occasionally cambered, surface. This is described on the Historic Environment Record of the Highland Council as a Post-Medieval Road, dated to between 1560 and 1900. A slightly earlier terminus post quem of 1527 is given in both the Old and New Statistical Accounts, where the cobbling of the route is described as being necessary in preparation for a pilgrimage of King James IV to the Sanctuary of Saint Duthus, Tain (OSA, Vol.3, p.394; NSA, Vol. 14, pp.288-89).

The creation of this surface infers an attempt to sustain the route across what was, presumably, marshy ground, as is later depicted on Alexander Sangster's Map of Tain, c.1750 (Tain and District Museum, 2005). It may also be taken to imply the maintenance of a precedent road-way.

It is proposed that the suggested route-way does indeed continue to coincide with the pilgrimage route, terminating at Tain a significant locus of sanctuary in the 15th century but also possibly as far back as the 11th century (Slade, H. G. 2000, p.7).

Although archival research is ongoing, examination of the topography of some sections of the proposed route-way indicates pre-modern construction and use. For example, heading southwards, it appears to follow a line from Tulloch Castle to Fodderty Lodge and thence across the valley of the Peffery, thereafter climbing a steep hillside and thus avoiding the area around Dingwall which is believed to have been tidal marshland until the later Medieval period (Bain 1899, 10ff; MacRae 1923, 336-8).

Early interpretation suggests that the route, although surviving physically only in part, is a roadway linking the whole length of the former Earldom of Ross, extending approximately 50 kilometres from south to north. A number of medieval castles and apparently later 'grand' houses sit either directly on this route or very close to it. It would appear to be the main communication route through the former Province of Ross.

The project's coordinators are aware that a substantial, possible early roadway, variously known as 'The Wine Road'; 'The Comyn's Road' and '*Rad na Pheny*', believed by some commentators to be capable of supporting wheeled transportation, has been identified in the southern Highlands (Hoffman, B. 2005). However, we have not recovered any evidence for the similar identification of an extensive early linear communication feature in Ross-shire.



In this last year we have worked together to develop 'Pathways into the Past' with colleagues from Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands (ARCH). The programme comprises a series of community learning sessions and fieldwork workshops. Through these ARCH offers participants from seven of the communities situated along the Easter Ross thoroughfare of the route-way network, opportunities to learn how to research and record the feature as it occurs in their area. Participants are also being helped to display and publish their findings. The research and fieldwork findings are being publicised in a series of roaming exhibitions the first of which has taken place in Muir of Ord. We wish to thank Janet Hooper and Cathy MacIver, for their collaboration and for their hard work in supporting communities in Easter Ross to research into what we believe may be a new monument class for the Highlands.

A programme of further research, walkover and measured surveys is scheduled for winter 2010 through

to summer 2011. We will be inviting NOSAS members to get involved in surveying some of the associated features in close proximity to the route. These features all lie within the Dingwall to Evanton stretch of the route-way. The surveys will take place each month from February through to April 2011. Funding will shortly be sought for the costs involved in undertaking the surveys, which will comprise – walk-over, plane tabling, aerial survey and metal detection.



Final details of dates and locations will be circulated in due course to members who have indicated an interest in the project.

Cait McCullagh
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Allan MacKenzie
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Mulchaich Update

The Mulchaich Project, as originally intended, has now been completed but, as is sometimes the case with NOSAS projects, it has developed a few “off shoots”!

Mulchaich Phase 2

We have made a start on a second phase which aims to interpret the site and develop it as a visitor attraction under Archaeology Scotland’s “Adopt-a-Monument” scheme. The farmer, Morris, is very encouraging and keen to accommodate the idea which will involve fencing around the area of the buildings and the chambered cairn, laying down some walkways particularly over the boggy bits and providing some sort of interpretation information. For much of this work we will need professional advice and input, and that is where the involvement of Archaeology Scotland and the Adopt-a-Monument scheme comes in. Discussions have started but it is early days yet. So watch this space.

Mulchaich Chambered Cairn

The vegetation has been cleared from the cairn over the winter and before the growth gets going again it is proposed to survey this interesting and unusual cairn with the cup marked stone in its kerb by planetable. A day has been fixed for Tuesday 12th April, so if you are interested in helping whether it be a whole day or half a day your input would be appreciated.

Meet 9.30am park “prettily” at Mulchaich Farm. The usual stuff about suitable clothing and footwear applies and bring picnic.

Please contact me if you intend to come so that I can plan ahead (01349 861824). I will be away until Thursday 7th April but you can leave a message or email me at james.marshall786@btinternet.com

Meryl Marshall

SRP Conference 2011

Scotland's Rural Past Final Conference will be held on Saturday 18 June 2011. The day conference will be at the [Birnam Arts and Conference Centre](#), Birnam, Perthshire, and the evening champagne reception, dinner and dance will be held at [Blair Castle](#), Blair Atholl, Perthshire. Our final conference is about celebrating the contribution of all the SRP projects and events and activities will be run throughout the day to showcase work from projects across Scotland.

More information on the SRP Website, <http://www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk/>

There will be no excavations at the broch this summer. In fact, the courtyard features and deposits are now safely covered by a huge pile of the very earth we painstakingly removed, waiting to be spread and sown with grass seed. There's been some very hard work put in to that, and although it's sad to see, it is the best way to protect the archaeology until the next phase of excavation (Summer 2012?) There is now a visitor-friendly path round the site, with approaches from both the campsite and the Hebridean barns. It's made of crushed Kishorn stone, a bit red at the moment but will no doubt weather in. It remains to be seen how much the visitors stick to the path and how much damage may still be done to the exposed stonework. The winter frosts have not been kind to the stones, which highlights the responsibility that Applecross Archaeology have taken on. If you're passing by this summer, make sure you go up to the broch and have a look. Well done to Owen, Nick, Martin Wildegoose and probably many more for all your hard work

Meanwhile Applecross will not be falling off the archaeological map entirely this summer. ALPS (Applecross Landscape Partnership Scheme) will be implementing and funding a Community Archaeology Training Project, designed to introduce a range of archaeological skills and initiate projects relating to the archaeology and history of Applecross. Although these will be primarily aimed at locals, visitors will also be welcome, particularly to the two 'events' we hope will take place this summer. We hope that by the time of the next NOSAS newsletter there'll be some more information and possible dates. Contact Sam Bridgewater (01520 744 482) for more details

Cathy Dagg

The NOSAS Calendar

The calendar committee had a wonderful time sifting through over 100 photos submitted for the proposed 2012 NOSAS Calendar.

Some photos show NOSAS members involved in a variety of activities. If anyone objects to being in a calendar photo, please let us know.

Beth Blackburn, Simon Gunn, Marion Ruscoe

So far this year we have managed to avoid any cancellations and the MAD evenings are going from strength to strength.

We discussed all things round in January and concluded that we probably are no wiser about brochs than anyone else. However Alistair Jupp entertained us with some excellent views from his collection of broch photos. February was devoted to funerary practises and Cait had us enthralled with her tale of grandpa sitting beside the fire in his cist. John brought us up to date with gruesome descriptions of body snatching and mort safes but nobody's appetite for tea and buns was impaired by the rattling of chains or bones. This month Eric Grant introduced us to the complexities of the archaeological landscape around Tarradale. He agreed to do this after the January projects meeting when there was not sufficient time to explain the range of opportunities this site has to offer. After an hour and a half and much tea drinking not only were we convinced there was a wonderful potential project but I think most people would have been ready to start immediately had it not been too dark to see flints at 10.00pm.

There is one more evening planned on **April 15th** before we all get out into the field again. John Atkinson has agreed to come to Strathpeffer and talk to us about iron smelting. John was our long suffering supervisor last autumn at Craggie in Sutherland when we had an opportunity to dig an iron bloomery under the sponsorship of the Forestry Commission. Hopefully John will have forgotten the midges and mud but I am sure it will be a very good evening to conclude our season of talks. There will be other events during the summer, days out and walks are in the planning so keep checking the emails and Events Diary on the web site. But if you have a burning desire to discuss a subject please let me know, the lists for the autumn are empty at the moment. Meanwhile I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the leaders and the attendants who have made this series of MAD nights such great fun.

Anne Coombs

NOSAS Archiving Project.

NOSAS have been offered archiving facilities at the Highland Archive Centre in Inverness.

This will mean that all the original survey documents relating to projects carried out by NOSAS members over the years can be put into the archive for safe keeping, but more importantly be emptied out of our cupboards and from under our beds.

I started up this idea because we can hardly move in our own office for old survey records. We have at least 7 files for the Kinloch Hourn survey of 2002 alone, and many smaller survey reports.

The Archive Centre in Inverness will take rolled maps, large plane table drawings, old type photographs and CD's etc.

The material has to be 'prepared' before it goes onto the Archive, labelled and maybe copied for the NOSAS collection in the Dingwall Library. The fine detail of the process is still being discussed. Everything will be catalogued under the NOSAS name.

If you would like your archaeological surveys and reports to be kept 'safe' for future research or if you have access to a sheet-fed / duplex scanner please contact me at john.wombell@btinternet.com.

Trina Wombell

Caird's Cave

We are still in the Post Excavation phase of the 'Caird's dig'. Seven pieces of bone and one piece of charcoal have been sent away for dating analysis and we are still waiting for the animal bone report. Once these have been returned the main excavation report can be finished.

There are 19 caves on the stretch of coast between Rosemarkie and Eathie, including Caird's Cave. Starting in May it is planned to survey each cave before any decision is made on further excavations. The survey will start at the "Learnie Buttress", which contains six caves, Learnie Caves 1A, B and C and 2A, B and C.

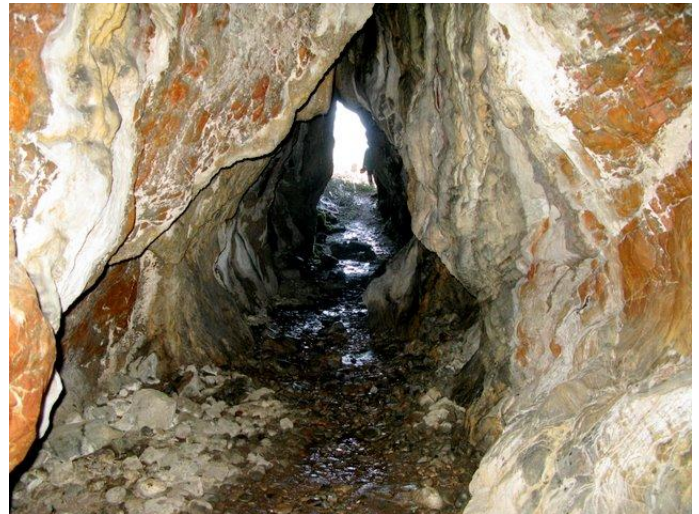
The survey will consist of measured drawings of floor areas and elevations. Photos will be taken of interesting features, including graffiti.

I have contacted the Cave Project Steering Group and last summer's diggers, several of whom have told me that they would like to continue working on the caves. Some of us are free to survey during the week but it is planned that most of the work will be on a Saturday. It is not anticipated that the survey will take a

long time but, if required, it will be easy to extend the project into the autumn.



Learnie Buttress



Interior of coastal cave at Learnie

If you are interested in taking part in this survey, please email me (simonjgunn@hotmail.com) or call (01381 610 309).

Simon Gunn

For further news about NOSAS and its activities, see the NOSAS website
<http://www.nosas.co.uk/>