



## NEWSLETTER October 2013

### Dates for your diary

28 September - 13 October

#### **Highland Archaeology Festival**

Many events planned, see

<http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/conservation/archaeology/highlandarchaeologyfestival.htm>

NOSAS led walks:

Tuesday 8 October, 2 pm meet at Castle Leod car park (NH487591)

- **guided walk round Castle Leod policies** with Meryl Marshall

Friday 11 October, 10 am meet at Kilmorack Village Hall (NH 48360 44726) for car sharing

- **walk to two duns on the Beauly Braes** with Roland Spencer-Jones

Sunday 20th October, 10 am meet at Kilmorack Village Hall (NH 48360 44726) for car sharing

- **walk to the complex multi-period settlement at Urchany** with Roland Spencer-Jones. (This walk has been postponed from Friday 11th October.)

3-28 October at Eden Court

#### **Wedigs exhibition: Exploring Prehistoric Roundhouses in Wester Ross**

- Anna Welti

12 and 13 October

#### **Highland Archaeology Festival Conference**

Highland Council Chamber, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness

Tuesday 22 October, 7.30 pm at Strathpeffer Community Centre

#### **MAD: The Lordship of the Isles and Urquhart Castle**

- Andrea Finlayson and Craig, Urquhart Castle guides

Tuesday 19 November, 7.30 pm at Strathpeffer Community Centre

#### **MAD: Neolithics**

- Graeme Wilson and Hazel Moore of EASE Archaeology

Friday 13 December at Coul House Hotel

#### **NOSAS Christmas Dinner**

No details yet, but put the date in your diary.

Tuesday 21 January, 7.30 pm at Strathpeffer Community Centre

**MAD: The archaeology of Fortriu - Excavations on the Tarbat Peninsula**

- Candy Hatherley

Tuesday 18 February, 7.30 pm at Strathpeffer Community Centre

**MAD: Discussion on henges**

- Roland Spencer-Jones

Tuesday 18 March, 7.30 pm at Strathpeffer Community Centre

**MAD: to be arranged**

### **Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) update**

It is that time of year again and the AGM agenda has been circulated. I expect, as in previous years, that the turnout will be excellent. This year is a bit different as we will be voting on whether NOSAS will change its status and become a SCIO. The committee have tried to give you information about this process throughout the year. Roland has put a special page on our own web site with all the details and the links to the SCIO and OSCR (Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator) web sites which have the official explanation of SCIO and the implications for NOSAS members. However I am taking this opportunity to remind you once more what we will be voting on and why.

The committee is proposing that we apply to OSCR to establish a new organisation - North of Scotland Archaeological Society SCIO. If they accept our application we will wind up the existing society and immediately transfer the membership and assets to the new society. We have prepared a new draft constitution which we have put forward for your comments and which we expect to be acceptable to OSCR. We are asking you to vote on the new constitution within the resolution to move to be a SCIO. The founding members of NOSAS put an extremely good constitution in place which in essence is much the same as the new draft constitution, just much very much shorter. The draft constitution is very similar to the sample constitution provided by OSCR with minor changes to suit our specific needs so we expect the draft constitution will be acceptable to OSCR. The committee unanimously accepted the draft constitution and the proposed resolution and hope that at the AGM you will accept it so we can begin the final stages of becoming a SCIO. The resolution allows the committee to do the transfer without a second meeting of the members but we need a 2/3rds majority of the people present and voting at the AGM before we proceed.

One of the reasons we are making this change to the society is that at present NOSAS is an unincorporated association. Members (and in particular the officers) may be personally liable for the actions or debts of the association (society). Becoming a SCIO makes NOSAS a legal entity in its own right, with limited liability in a similar way to a limited company. The society has ambitions to undertake bigger projects and therefore potentially will be handling larger sums of money in future, and the committee wish to remove any possible concerns about personal liability. As a SCIO we would be a charity which is a sound basis from which to apply for funding, and also gives a small financial benefit through the reclaim of gift aid.

At the AGM as usual you will have a chance to become part of the new committee which will be formed under the present constitution. We always hope there will be plenty of willing volunteers and to date have not been disappointed. The members of the new committee must be prepared to become the first trustees of NOSAS SCIO if the resolution is passed. All committee members will need to complete the Trustee Declaration Form, which will be submitted to OSCR with the application to become a SCIO. A nomination form to become a committee member is attached to the agenda.

Roland has reminded you that we voted to change the membership fees at the 2012 AGM. You asked the committee to look at alternative options, tiered membership etc. The committee have discussed a variety of ideas and we have put down a resolution which proposes that we will charge under 25s half the new fee in the future. We hope that this will encourage the younger generation to become members. If the AGM accepts the resolution to become NOSAS SCIO all members will be asked to sign a declaration (NOSAS Membership transfer form) stating that they wish to transfer to NOSAS SCIO when the changeover date is fixed. We cannot transfer membership without this and we will contact you with this form.

I look forward to seeing you all at the AGM but for those who are unable to be there we will keep you informed of the result of the resolution. Finally I would like to thank the committee for their hard work this year. A large amount of work has gone into preparing for the planned change to SCIO and if you support the committee in their intentions I think the process will be completed simply and quickly.

Anne Coombs, Chair

### **HAF Strathpeffer Archaeological Trail with John Wombell on 30 September**



*The view from Knock Farrel*

*Beth Blackburn*

## Caen Excavation 8-23 June 2013

When I first got notification of this excavation, I thought I might need my passport. But this site is a clearance township in Kildonan, about 2 miles from Helmsdale. I packed my bags and went north for four very pleasant days digging in the first week and managed back for one day during the second week. The excavation was undertaken by Timespan as part of the Translocation celebration and supervised by Dr. Keir Strickland of Orkney College UHI.

Three trenches were opened up to explore a longhouse and another building which was at right angles to the house. There was a good number of volunteers and with the exception of one afternoon, the weather was very good, so there was little to interrupt the digging. We did have to have 'bird breaks' during the first week, however, as there was a nest with fledglings close to one of the trenches and we moved away periodically to let the mother bird feed the chicks.

The two trenches in the longhouse identified the size of the building the location of the doorway and the hearth.



*Byre end of longhouse, with doorway and hearth towards the far end.*

*Marion Ruscoe*



*Cobbling at the doorway*

*Marion Ruscoe*

The ground was quite wet and the walls were more roughly built at the byre end. It was speculated that the building had been shortened because of the damp ground.



*Hearth*

*Marion Ruscoe*

At the far end of the building was an interesting variety of floor surfaces with more cobbling at the very far end. The reason for this was unclear. Remains of peat stacks against the outer wall were also found.

The other building was probably a barn, as there was no hearth, but the finds suggested that farming activities, including distilling may have been taking place there.



*Barn. The pile of stones in the left background is a long cairn.*

*Marion Ruscoe*

I was delighted to find a clay pipe, which caused great excitement as clay pipes provide excellent dating evidence. The following day someone else found another, more decorated clay pipe, this time in the barn. Several metal objects were also found, some difficult to identify, but during the first week there was more excitement when the strapping of a tun was found in the barn which led Keir to suggest that the occupants were distilling their own whisky. We could imagine the crofter puffing on his clay pipe while making the next batch of the water of life!



*Living end of longhouse with a variety of floor surfaces, including cobbling, at the far end. Barn off to right at nearer end.*

*Marion Ruscoe*

There were more finds than expected, and certainly more than I remember having found at Easter Raitts all those years ago. A large amount of broken pottery and glass was found particularly in the longhouse, which suggested that the people had moved out in a hurry before the walls of the building were pushed in.



*Clay pipe*

*Marion Ruscoe*

Another really exciting find was some leather which was found in the living end of the longhouse.

The finds were taken back each day to Timespan where they were washed and laid out on tables for display. Jacqui Aitken published photos and a commentary on the progress of the dig on the Timespan facebook page and some of the photos can still be accessed through <http://timespan.org.uk>.

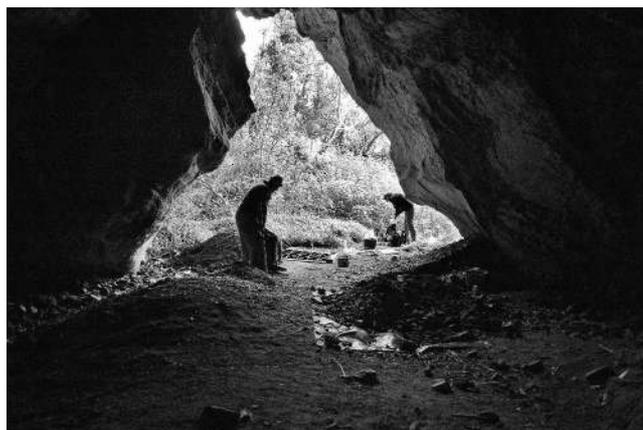
Keir is hopeful that there will be a further excavation at Caen next year.

Marion Ruscoe

## Test-Pitting in the Learnie Caves

The Rosemarkie Caves Project team have an interest in the history and archaeology of 19 caves along the coast from Rosemarkie. There have been two excavations carried out (Learnie 2B and Caird's Cave), after which all the caves were surveyed. We are now at the stage of digging test pits in caves we consider to be the most likely to have been used in the past. The purpose of these is to see which caves might have archaeology worth exploring further and to find how far back they have been in use.

We believe that the caves have been high and dry for 5000 years. These former sea caves are rising with the Scottish landmass and some are now 8 metres above the beach. The last cave we worked on was Learnie 1B, which is the largest of the group and is 10 metres across, 5 metres high and goes back 21 metres. We dug three test-pits down to bedrock.



*Learnie 1B*      *Rosemarkie Caves Project*



*Learnie 1B test pit*      *Rosemarkie Caves Project*

The photo shows Steve Birch's pit at the entrance, which not only went down for 1.4 metres, but had good charcoal for sampling down at the bottom. We will get this and similar samples dated. In our Caird's Cave excavation we found that the cave had been in use as far back as 300 BC, the Iron Age and about the time of Alexander the Great.

Simon Gunn

## Excavation Tarrel Dun 7 to 13 September 2013

This was the third excavation this year in the Pictish Fortriu Project carried out by Aberdeen University in partnership with Tarbat Discovery Centre. The other two excavations were at Easter and Wester Rarichie in April and July. All the excavations were led by Candy Hatherley, who is doing a PhD at Aberdeen University on the Northern Picts in the Tarbat Peninsula.

The Tarrel site is situated on a small rocky outcrop below the cliff edge on the south of the Tarbat Peninsula in Easter Ross. Underneath the outcrop is a large sea cave with a flat dry floor and plenty evidence of human use, including a small rock-cut bowl, dividing walls and shot holes from rock blasting.

Well what of the top of the outcrop? It is noted on Canmore as a Dun but the site is very restricted with vertical drops on the seaward side and a very steep slope to landward. There are two ways to access the summit: one up the western ridge, very steep and exposed; the other a steep sloping ramp up the eastern side and probably the original site access.



*View of Dun Tarrel from cliff top looking south  
David Findlay*



*Tarrel Dun excavation looking south  
Candy Hatherley*

As soon as the warning tape was up various trenches at different heights were opened on the steep face of the outcrop. As these trenches progressed it became clear that each trench contained walling in various states of collapse, with some sections of good construction. Interestingly the walling seemed to follow the contours of the hill rather than being formed into horizontal courses. The whole of the landward face of the hill could indeed be a series of spiral walls and terraces.

The lower trenches revealed a few finds, all probably fairly modern: glass, ceramics, iron and slag, shell and a piece of clay pipe. There are records of the cave being inhabited as late as the latter part of the 19th century. The foreshore area along the peninsula is also known to have been inhabited after the Clearances.

Trench 1 on top of the mound was supposed to reveal the Dun but unfortunately the walls found were reluctant to form a circle. By the end of the last day the structure consisted of a fairly straight wall up to a couple of meters in from the landward edge of the mound, but with very little on the seaward side. The wall led down the slope at the eastern end and then turned towards the sea in a semicircle. At the lower end of the crescent was a blocked entrance which corresponded to the possible site access up the eastern ramp.

Finds in Trench 1 were few: a small blue glass bead and a cap badge for Clan Gunn in the topsoil.

Is this structure an early chapel built at a later date on top of the original Dun? It certainly has the correct sort of shape and is aligned almost east west, although that is pretty well predetermined by the lie of the mound.

Or is it all to do with the cave underneath? The choice of site and reasons for its adoption for a structure still remain a complete mystery. It is well below the top of the cliff only 50 meters away and the top of the knoll is so small that only a very small building could ever have stood there.

At least 11 NOSAS members and Aberdeen University students lent a hand on the excavation in spite of its rather remote location.

Candy is hoping to carry out more excavations in the Tarbat Peninsula next year and is planning to look at Castlehaven, Cnoch Tigh and Morangie Dun in April, July and September depending on landowner consent and other issues.



*Lunch on the beach*

*David Findlay*

David & Susan Findlay

## **Cromarty Medieval Burgh Community Archaeology Project**

The Cromarty Medieval Burgh Community Archaeology Project was developed after winter storms and high tides in December 2012 revealed extensive medieval and post-medieval archaeological deposits on the east side of the town. The erosions from the storms also revealed a stone wall, post and stake-holes and a possible boundary ditch.



*High pole view of Area 1 showing post-medieval walls and drains on south side of Thief's Row  
Cromarty Medieval Burgh Community  
Archaeology Project*

We have recently completed our first season of excavations in Reeds Park, adjacent to the shoreline erosions, and the results so far are superb! The hard work by our volunteers and archaeologists has enabled us to uncover the post medieval / abandonment phase of archaeological remains in this part of town including Thief's Row, a road running through the medieval burgh, and the robbed-out remains of three houses, which are shown on the 1880 Ordnance Survey map sheet.

Results from the excavation are helping us to learn more about how Cromarty folks lived during the 18th-19th centuries by analysing the artefacts recovered - many of which are personal objects from the inhabitants, some of whose names we know from old house lists and Census Records – and animal bone, fish bone and shellfish forming a part of their diet.

Below the 18th-19th century layers, we have located significant medieval remains, including the stone-built foundations of substantial buildings. The preservation of the medieval archaeology is excellent, supporting our belief that Medieval Cromarty was an important burgh, probably sustained by the fishing industry. Small finds from the medieval deposits on the site include ceramics dating to between the 12th and 15th centuries (including imported wares from the Scottish Central Belt, the Low Countries of Europe and Yorkshire in England), iron fish hooks and knives, stone and ceramic spindle whorls, stone pot lids and rotary quern stones. The quern stones have all been found built into the medieval buildings, which may display the re-use of convenient stone.

One particularly large lower quern stone had been built into the wall of one of the buildings facing into the interior at floor level.

We were incredibly grateful (as we have been to all of our supporters!) to be visited by Derek Hall and George Haggarty, both Medieval and Post Medieval ceramics specialists, during the excavations. Derek and George conducted a rapid preview of some of our finds and may have identified our own locally-made Redware pottery! Some of their observations and comments are supportive of our initial interpretations of the site, indicating that what we have uncovered so far in the Reeds Park site may have been an industrial area for



*Lower rotary quern stone built into the foundations of a substantial medieval building, with a hearth and areas of burning relating to an underlying timber building of unknown date  
Cromarty Medieval Burgh Community Archaeology Project*

Medieval Cromarty. It appears that the fishing industry may play an important role in these activities, which is supported by the amount of shellfish remains (most likely used for bait), fish bone, stone pot lids, dense ash layers and a lack of domestic cooking pots.

We look forward to more digging on the site next year to learn more about the medieval burgh. In the meantime, we will be processing the results from the first season and continuing our research into primary documentary sources - so watch the website for updates as we progress on post-excavation work ([www.medievalcromarty.org](http://www.medievalcromarty.org)). Finally, we would like to thank our sponsors including SCAPE (including their team on site of Jo, Ellie and Natalia), our site supervisors, John Nightingale (landowner), Sandy MacDonald (tenant farmer on the land), NOSAS and ARCH (for the loan of equipment) and of course the people of Cromarty and northern Scotland for their valuable support as volunteers.

Steven Birch & Mary Peteranna  
Cromarty Medieval Burgh Community Archaeology Project

## Caledonian Canal Project: A personal view

This began in 2012, with an email asking for volunteers to help the Canal Trust with a survey of the Caledonian Canal. This was to be a pilot project: all buildings and 'artefacts' such as winches, bridges and bollards, were to be visited so that the records held by the trust and on Canmore could be updated. It was envisaged that the survey work and updating of records could be done in 12 months. An archaeologist, Andy Phelps, was employed on a 12 month contract. The canal is a scheduled monument, so Historic Scotland was involved.

I wanted to get involved because I am very interested in economic history, and the chance to get some 'hands-on' experience in this, while doing some lovely walks along the canal, was something not to be missed!

Two workshops followed, in October 2012, in Fort Augustus and Inverness. The list of sites involved was divided between the participants, giving each pair of volunteers 8 each. Bob and I had sites in and around Muirtown: the 1930s bridge, 4 buildings (which when visited turned out to have been demolished), the Scott II shed, some winches and '8 and 9 Canal Street'.

We first visited the sites that, it transpired, were already demolished, and entered them on Canmore. Entering information on Canmore is straightforward, as long as all you need to do is enter text; when we tried to update sites with text and photographs and/or drawings, we met problems. The first thing to do is enter the information using the SRP (yes, I know this has ceased) form. As there is no record of what you have typed on the form once you have pressed 'send', best practice appears to be to type it in Word and 'copy and paste'. Then you can uplift photographs and scanned drawings. Next you have to send a quick email to Susan Hamilton advising her that the entry has been made, she checks it is in the correct format and contains the necessary information regarding the volunteers involved and approves the entry onto Canmore.

There was a big problem with photographs. Despite a message advising people looking at Canmore that the photographs would be available soon, they never appeared. Several months later, it transpired that there was a problem with copyright. This was overcome by the photographers signing the copyright over to RCAHMS and so over to Canmore.



*Andy above Neptune's Staircase      Bob Jones*

After this problem was overcome, we entered the rest of the sites we had visited, including the Muirtown Swing Bridge and its control cabin. Inside the cabin was fascinating: it's currently unused and under threat of removal, so we had a very long, careful look together with Andy Phelps.

