

10TH ANNIVERSARY KILMARTIN MUSEUM



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Kilmartin House Museum: a 'potted' history!

Sharon Webb – Director and Curator

*"How many museums can you go to where you can examine a Bronze Age pot
and look out of the window and see the burial mound where it came from?"*

Tony Robinson, (Time Team)

As most of the inhabitants of Kilmartin Glen will be aware, this is one of the densest and most important mainland archaeological landscapes in Scotland. Many of these ancient monuments are of international importance & more sites are being discovered every year.

In the midst of this landscape, Kilmartin House Trust was founded in 1994. The Trust aimed to create a centre which would raise awareness of the ecological richness and outstanding archaeological importance of the surrounding area and so to encourage its conservation and wise management. The centre would provide a place where local knowledge and locally-found artifacts could be collected, preserved, interpreted and displayed. Whilst protecting artifacts, this would also provide the local community with an opportunity to take their heritage as a focus from which to gain a sense of continuity, place and identity. Visitors to the Glen could be oriented and informed what there was to see and do, which would enhance their enjoyment and control their impact. The Trust also aimed to stimulate children's interest in the local environment, as well as develop their sense of responsibility towards it. We now also aim to carry out and support research into the archaeology and environmental history of the area and to ensure that the public have access to the results.

Early History

Following several years of fund raising, and a great deal of unpaid voluntary work by the founders, David Clough and Rachel Butter, the Museum opened in 1997. The Trust, which runs the Museum is a registered charity (SCO22744) and is governed by a Board of Trustees (a list of trustees can be found on our new web site) who employ two full-time and one part-time staff. As with most Museums, we also rely on the support of volunteers. Kilmartin House Trust also operates a trading company, Kilmartin House Trading Co. (SC166302

Scotland), which employs around 7 hard working full, part time and seasonal staff in the Museum shop, reception and in the café.

Aside from creating the Museum gallery, collections store, audio visual show and opening the café and shop, we have, over the last 10 years provided an education service for local schools, as well as an events and workshops programme for people of all ages. The Museum has been the venue for a number of temporary art exhibitions by local and non-local artists. We have published books and completed a number of research projects as well as launching our first archaeological excavation at Barnlusgan Dun in 2006 (reported in previous issues of the KIST). There is a publicly accessible library – created in honor of local antiquarian Marion Campbell, which also houses the NHASMA library. In addition to the employment directly generated by the Museum it has been externally estimated that it generates an economic impact in the local area of around £1.5 million per year.

None of this would have been possible without great deal of hard work, much of it voluntary in the early days, as well as a huge amount of support from the local community, numerous volunteers, private trusts and charities, in addition to funding from local and national agencies, not to mention support from local societies such as NHASMA.

One of the major challenges has been finding and generating enough funding to keep the place afloat. The Museum founders aimed to make the centre a sustainable development, with running costs covered by ticket sales, shop and café profits. Much of the early work of the Trust, prior to opening, focused on raising finance for capital development through donations from private and public bodies. After opening, a development phase (1997 – 2000) saw the renovation of the upper part of the house, including the creation of volunteer accommodation, which was funded by various sources, including the Heritage Lottery Fund. In the period 2002 to 2003 various public bodies awarded grants to support the Trust as it attempted to move towards sustainability. Towards the end of 2003 however, it was recognized that self sustainability was unachievable in the short term. Although the financial contribution of the trading company has increased by more than 50% since 1998, it was insufficient to fully fund the work of the Trust. Whilst it is relatively easy to bring in grants for projects, 'core' funding is a challenge for museums the world over. Not a single one is able to survive without some kind of external support, (typically this would come from local or national government, or an endowment) unless of course, they are wholly run by volunteers, and even then some income is necessary to

pay bills, insurance, and so on. Given the rural location and the seasonality of the tourist industry this is especially challenging at Kilmartin House Museum.

2004 to Present

Following a period of uncertainty and job losses, towards the end of 2004, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Argyll and the Islands commissioned a business review, which made recommendations on how the Trust might move forward. Subsequently, in early 2005 a three year funding package was agreed with Argyll and Bute Council, Historic Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage. The Scottish Executive also made a contribution for two years, and the Trust has worked hard to achieve a realistic increase in self generated income. Rather than being dependent on the Trust achieving complete financial self sufficiency, the current funding package was agreed on the basis of the cultural and interpretive services which Kilmartin House Museum provides on behalf of these national and regional agencies. Initial discussions regarding extension of the package beyond 2008 are positive. Indeed, an increase has been agreed with Argyll and Bute Council, as we are to take over the archaeological curatorship of Campbeltown Museum on their behalf. In an area as important in archaeological terms as Argyll, professional staff are vital to ensure curatorial standards are met for what are often fragile collections, and it is a sensible solution to share this to maximise scarce resources. We will be working in partnership with Auchindrain Museum, will look after the later historical material at Campbeltown. In addition, further funding has been provided by Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Argyll and the Islands, the Scottish Museums Council and Argyll and Bute Council to employ a Learning and Access Officer who will work between Kilmartin, Auchindrain and Campbeltown Museums. This funding will also enable KHM and Auchindrain Museums to provide curatorial advice to other Museums in Argyll as and when required, since most are not able to employ suitably qualified staff, and a curatorial advisor is then required in order for these museums to be accredited by the Scottish Museums Council.

An Appeal

The future of Kilmartin House Museum now looks a great deal more secure, and we are happy to be able to use the skills of our staff, and our experiences to help other Museums in Argyll develop and grow. We have lots of plans for the future, including more survey and excavation work, as well as finding ways to promote the extraordinary archaeology of the area to a wider audience. One of the Museum's long term aims is to put the organisation on a more sustainable

footing financially. A strand of this is to reduce outgoings in the form of the mortgage and founder's loan, which would in turn make the organisation less dependent on the vagaries of grant funding. The mortgage was acquired during the development phase of the Museum as it was established and the founder's loan, which is being repaid at a very generous rate of interest, also relates to the early development phase. Ultimately the Trust aims to establish an endowment, however it would not be prudent to raise funds to such an endeavour until the mortgage and founder's loan is repaid. To this end we have launched the 10th Anniversary Appeal. Since its launch in June 2007, nearly £10,000 has been raised by generous donations from our Friends Organisation, and by staff, volunteers and local women taking part in the Glasgow Women's 10K run. The 10th Anniversary appeal is really about the longer term picture. Currently the outstanding balance on the mortgage and founders loan is £100. Paid back over 20 years this will cost the Trust a total of £170 in capital and interest. Ultimately £70 will have been saved if we are able to re-pay the balance this year. If you are able to help please send a donation, no matter how little, every thing will help towards us achieving our target.

The Museum needs the continued support of NHASMA members in all our endeavors, and we would like to take this opportunity to thank the Society's members and committee for all they have done for us in the past.

2007 is a special year for us, as it is 10th Anniversary, but also the Year of Highland Culture. We very much hope the local community will come along and enjoy some of the events and activities on offer.

BIOGRAPHIES IN STONE

ROCK ART, LANDSCAPE AND THE NEOLITHIC/BRONZE AGE TRANSITION IN KILMARTIN

A. Jones (University of Southampton)

Introduction

Rock art continues to be one of the most intriguing, but least understood, sources of evidence for British prehistory. Unlike the study of rock art in Scandinavia, British and Irish rock art has not been integrated within accounts of

prehistory. This is partly due to the fact that in Britain and Ireland rock art largely consists of abstract motifs; cup marks, cup and rings and other curvilinear designs. Coupled with this, there has been a tendency amongst rock art scholars to focus solely on the motifs at the expense of an understanding of their wider archaeological context.

Studies by Richard Bradley (1997) and Clive Waddington (1998) have sought to redress the marginal status of rock art studies by integrating it within our wider understanding of prehistoric landscapes. Furthermore the activities of Stan Beckensall (1999, 2001) and Paul Brown and Graeme Chappell (2005) have not only documented the known examples of British rock art, but have provided new discoveries in regions such as Cumbria and the North York Moors. Despite this, debate still surrounds the date of prehistoric rock art.

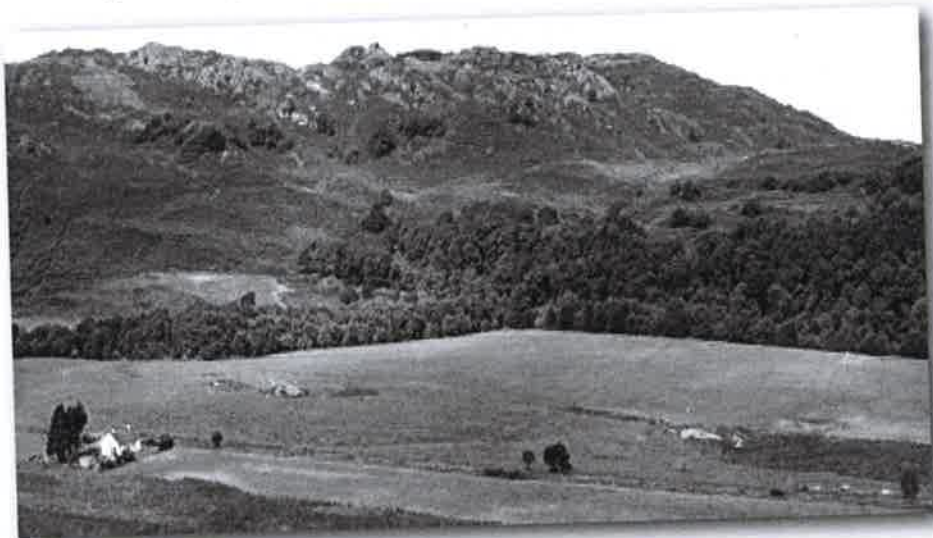
Although an Early Bronze Age date has often been assumed, authors such as Simpson and Thawley (1973), Johnston (1993) and Burgess (1990) argue that rock art originated in the Neolithic, and that many of the finds in Bronze Age contexts represent re-used material. Some writers, such as Waddington (1998) suggest an early Neolithic date for Northumbrian rock art, while Bradley (1997)



The upper panel at Cairnbaan

underlines the similarities between open-air rock art and aspects of Irish Passage Tomb Art.

It is both the abstract nature of rock art and the problem of dating which frustrates attempts to fully understand rock art, and thereby integrate it more fully within our accounts of prehistory. Do we place it within the Neolithic or Bronze Age? At the present it sits uncomfortably betwixt and between the two.



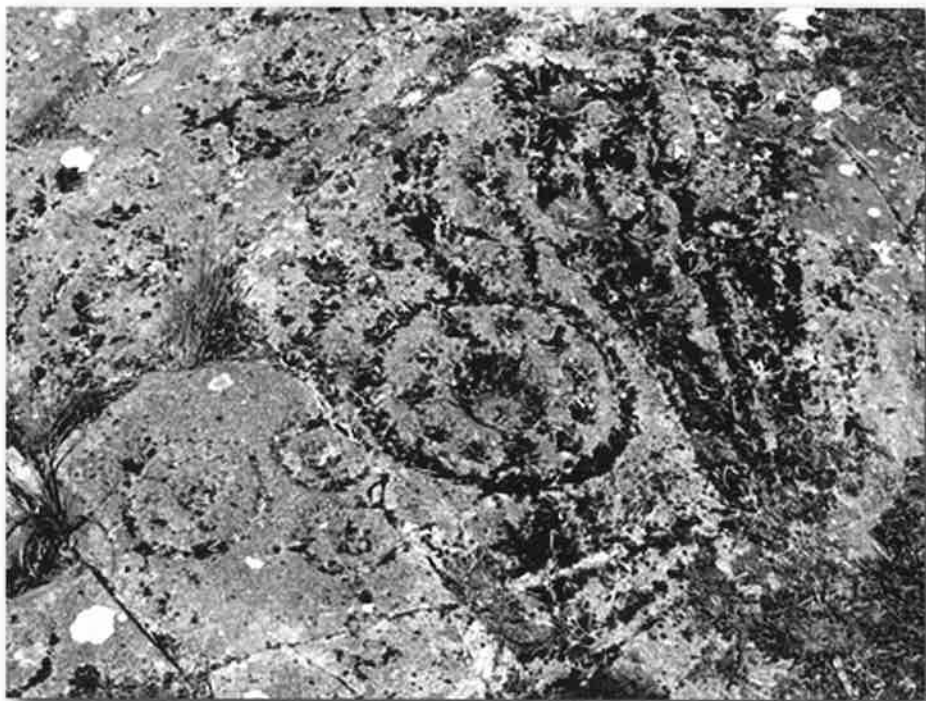
Kilmichael Glen showing Torbhlairean rock art sites (photographs & map courtesy of author)

Rock Art studies in Kilmartin

The landscape of Kilmartin, Argyll is a perfect location to examine these issues since it has the highest concentration of rock art sites in Britain and has rock art in potentially dateable contexts. The Kilmartin valley represents one of the richest prehistoric landscapes in Scotland and is home to a dense concentration of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age monuments including a henge, stone circle, standing stones, stone alignments, chambered cairns and round cairns. It also has over 250 individual rock art panels.

In the Kilmartin Valley, a series of round cairns of Early Bronze Age date is associated with cup marks, linear geometric motifs and - at Ri Cruin, Nether Largie Mid and Nether Largie North - representations of metal axes (of

probable Migdale type). Thus the examples of rock art in these contexts provide a useful terminus ante quem (of approx. 2000BC) for rock art in the region. Although based on the presence of EBA food vessels at a number of sites it is likely that the round cairns of the linear cemetery were the focus of activity until at least 1500 BC. So we know roughly when the tradition ends, but when does it begin?



The rosette motif at Ormaig

Two cup marks and a cup and ring mark have been found on the septal slab of the Early Neolithic chambered tomb at Ardmarnock in the nearby Cowal peninsula (RCAHMS 1988, 39; Stevenson 1997). Slightly further afield, a decorated re-used slab was found associated with a late Neolithic adze of Duggleby type (a type of axe imported from Yorkshire) excavated at Knappers Farm, near Glasgow. Therefore a Neolithic, possibly an Early Neolithic, date for the inception of rock art in the Kilmartin region cannot be ruled out.

This is particularly important as rock art is present on a number of other monuments with a possible Neolithic date, including the standing stone alignments at Nether Largie, Ballymeanoch and Torbhlaren. Probably the clearest date comes from the horned spiral motif on the stone circle at Templewood (Scott 1989), whose origin, on current radiocarbon dates, is likely to begin in the Late Neolithic; having said this, the site continues in use into the Early and Middle Bronze Age with a series of inhumation and cremation burials.

There is a suggestion of some chronological depth from rock art panels in the region such as Achnabreck where differential weathering of motifs suggests at least two phases of carving, with the earliest motifs include concentric rings without a central cup mark, and horned spirals. Bradley (1997, 110) has noted that the horned spiral is a motif which occurs in a number of late Neolithic contexts, including Passage tomb art in Orkney, Late Neolithic Grooved ware in the Thames Valley and the Knowth macehead.

Kilmartin Landscape Project

A conceivable date range from 3500/3000BC to 2000/1500 BC is possible. Questions of dating are critical. Rather than simply slotting the Kilmartin rock art into a chronological horizon the aim of the current project is to: Understand the role of rock art in the evolution of the ceremonial landscape of Kilmartin.

To explore the currency and significance of rock art through a 'biographical' analysis of the treatment of stone.

Let me address the first of these issues: landscape change.

During the Early Neolithic the six known chambered tombs in the area are topographically scattered in both upland and lowland locations. The hints of a coherently organised landscape come later in the Neolithic with the possible cursus or long barrow at Dunadd and the cursus at Upper Largie leading people into the valley at either end.

By the Late Neolithic and into the Early Bronze Age there is more intensive activity in the region and the landscape appears to be reinterpreted and reordered. In some cases Early Neolithic monuments were incorporated into this reorganised landscape, as with the incorporation of the Nether Largie South chambered tomb into the linear cemetery in the centre of the Kilmartin valley.

Activity during the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age occurs in three major zones in the landscape; in the uplands, on the valley terraces and on the valley floor. A series of monument complexes is constructed on the valley floor or valley terraces. The most southerly at Dunamuck and Ballymeanoch appear to be

situated at the coastal gateway to the region on the edge of the lowlying coastal moorland of the Moine Mhor. A further monument complex, which includes the Kilmartin linear cemetery, the Nether Largie standing stones and the Temple Wood stone circles is situated in the centre of the valley further north. The most northerly complex is situated at Kintraw, with two cairns, an earthen enclosure and a massive monolith commanding an impressive view over Loch Craignish.

The side valleys leading off from Kilmartin have smaller complexes of monuments, with a series of groups of cairns and barrows running up the Ford valley and the entrance to Kilmichael Glen at Torbhlaren, with further upland complexes at places such as Glasvaar, Kilbride and Carnasserie. The upper terraces of the valley, particularly on the western side of Kilmartin, are the location for a series of cist cemeteries. The important point here is that each of these complexes in the side valleys includes the same classes of monument, including round cairns or barrows and standing stones or alignments.

Rather than viewing the region as a single unified ceremonial landscape I believe we need to view it as a series of discrete, but interconnected, centres which feed into the main valley complex. How are these valley complexes defined? One way is through rock art panels (Jones 2006). Rock art is often located on outcrops overlooking lowland monuments. Analysis of rock art motifs and their location in the side valleys indicate that specific valleys employ specific motifs in different ways (Jones 2006), as with the rock art panels at the entrance to the Ford valley, and the unusual lowland location of the panels at Torbhlaren.

As Bradley has previously observed many of the most complex panels are situated at or overlooking valley entrances as at Achnabreck, Cairnbaan, Poltalloch, Kilmichael Glassary and Creagantairbh. Sites like Creagantairbh act as foci, and offer views both down Kilmartin valley and into the Ford valley. Continued research has shown that the picture originally offered by Bradley (1997) for rock art in the Kilmartin landscape is more complex, with at least a threefold division of the landscape. Simple motifs are found on the lower terraces, often amongst the monument complexes. Complex sites are found on the upper terraces or immediately overlooking monument complexes. However there are further simple sites in the upland hills as with the panels discovered at Kilbride which do not refer to activities on the valley floor, but instead seem to relate to upland hunting grounds.

Rock art appears to be intimately related to the re-organisation of the landscape. Why is rock art associated with these events, indeed what is its chronological relationship to the process of landscape change that appears to occur around the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age?

There appears to be a sequence relating to rock art in the region. Rock art is associated with standing stones, stone circles and stone alignments. At some point in their lives, some standing stones are broken up and re-used in the burial cairns of the linear cemetery that runs through the valley. At Nether Largie North excavations by Craw in the 1930's indicated the stone holes of standing stones beneath the burial cairn (Jones 2001). Indeed the large decorated stone incorporated into the central burial cist is decorated both with cup marks and motifs representing bronze axes. An undecorated portion at its base suggests that it formerly stood upright. Similar decorated stones occur at nearby Ri Cruin. How does this sequence relate to rock art panels in the region?

Microtopographic analysis of rock art sites

In order to answer these questions it was necessary to consider the wider significance and currency of rock art by examining the cultural biography or 'life-cycle/sequence of use' of stone. We can consider this in two ways, either through a programme of excavations on sites rock art panels or by considering the nature of the relationship between rock art motifs and stone itself.



Let me consider the relationship between rock art and the rock first. Detailed examination of a suite of rock art panels in the region indicates that rock art motifs address the microtopography of rock surfaces in a number of distinctive ways. Detailed recording of the position of motifs on individual rock surfaces suggests that specific types of surface were deliberately chosen (Jones 2005). Counter to expectation rock art was preferentially executed on rocks with cracked or fissured surfaces, despite the availability of smooth rock outcrops nearby in a number of cases.

Field survey in the surrounding area of rock art panels indicated that smooth (and perfectly serviceable) rock surfaces were ignored in favour of surfaces cracked and scoured by glacial action. Not only this, but rocks with specific systems of fissures or cracks were carved on. Three main types of surface were utilised:

1. surfaces with dense criss-crossed lozenge shaped cracks;
2. surfaces with widely spaced rectangular cracks,
3. surfaces with widely spaced lozenge shaped cracks.

There are clear distinctions in the type of motifs on each type of panel:

A. Panels with dense triangular/lozenge criss-cross cracks were decorated with complex motifs, often with passage tomb art motifs (as with Ormaig or the upper panel at Achnabreck).

B. Panels with large rectangular or lozenge shaped cracks are decorated with complex motifs with multiple rings (as at the upper panel at Cairnbaan).

C. Panels with small lozenge or rectangular shaped cracks are decorated with simple motifs, cups with one or two rings and tails (as in the lower panel at Cairnbaan).

The decision to decorate outcrops appears to prevail on sites in the upper and lower terraces, while in the uplands boulders are decorated.

As part of the projects wider interest in the biography of stone a number of standing stone quarries have been located at Torbhlaren Hill overlooking the standing stone and rock art panels at Torbhlaren and another overlooking the standing stone alignment at Ballymeanoch. On the basis of lithology, size, shape and measurement using hand-held magnetic susceptibility the relationship between these quarry sites and the local standing stones seems reasonably secure. The vertical and laminated nature of the geology suggests that these natural standing stones are literally being prized off, walked down the valley sides and re-erected in rows or as solitary stones in the valley bottoms. It seems likely that in this location they are being decorated with cup and ring marks. Having said this, as we shall see below, there is also some evidence that rock art sites are being quarried directly.

Excavations at Torbhlaren

In addition to looking at the relationship between rock art and stone a programme of small-scale excavations around rock art panels was initiated in 2004, and continued in 2006 and 2007, with excavations in the monument complex at Torbhlaren. The complex consists of an extant decorated standing stone, and a further decorated stone now fallen. In addition there are two known

rock art panels (Torbhlaire 1 and 2) and a site known as Torbhlaire 2a (discovered by Van Hoek in 1996, and resurveyed by the project in the 2003 season). All rock art sites are on glacially smoothed epidiorite (a form of metamorphic rock), with the largest, Torbhlaire 2, an especially impressive whale-backed rock.

At the time of writing excavations were undertaken around the east edge of Torbhlaire 1 and the west, east and northerly and faces of Torbhlaire 2.

The results of excavations at Torbhlaire 1 were something of a surprise. A built platform of laid clay with a cobbled stone pavement had been created around the shallow end of the rock. The platform extended for around 1.5m away from the rock edge and was about 0.4m in height. The platform was covered in quartz, both natural pebbles and quartz tools and debitage (knapping waste). Tools included hammerstones and scrapers. In addition six disc-shaped hammerstones made of a specific metamorphic rock were recovered, one deposited upright jammed against the rock face. The hammerstones are fairly fine and seem unlikely to be used for knapping quartz. However in terms of their width they fit the ring motifs of the rock art, suggesting their possible use in the production of certain rock art motifs.

Situated on the stone platform was a small scoop hearth filled with charcoal. This produced a quartz scraper and hammerstone.

In total approximately 50kg of unworked quartz and quartz artefacts were recovered from a roughly 2x4m trench, compared with a virtual absence of quartz from a series of test pits in the surrounding field. Notably the quartz was high quality material and dissimilar to that routinely found in the ploughsoil. Wider survey in the region close to the standing stone quarry on Torbhlaire Hill located a series of quartz outcrops with quarried veins overlooking the rock art sites.

Continued excavation at Torbhlaire 1 in 2006 demonstrated that activity at the site began with the construction of a small post built structure against the rock edge around 1.5m in diameter. The post-hole structure was marked by a spread of orange clay – possibly a floor surface. Flakes of knapped quartz were excavated from this surface. Interestingly, the post built structure was destroyed by fire, leaving a number of charred posts.

At some interval after this a stone-wall revetment was constructed over the site of the abandoned post-hole structure. This is part of the stone and clay built

platform, initially discovered in 2004. Excavations in 2006 demonstrated that the platform encircles the entire eastern face of the rock. This region of the platform also had extensive spreads of quartz. Analysis during excavation indicated that much of this quartz is knapping debris. Both the form of the platform and the presence of shattered quartz over the platform is echoed at other sites in the region, especially the platform around the Early Bronze Age cairn at Kintraw.

The location of this platform around Torbhlaren 1 was all the more surprising, since at first sight it seemed to be sparsely carved with rock art motifs compared to Torbhlaren 2. However once it was analysed using a controlled light source at night it was shown to be a considerably more significant panel, with many complex motifs clustering directly in front of the stone platform.

The presence of deliberately laid platforms in front of the rock art is curious. As the Swedish scholar Lasse Bengtsson (2004) has shown, platforms of this kind are common around a number of rock art sites in Sweden. The platform is redolent of the platforms around Late Neolithic Passage graves in the North of Scotland, and around Bronze Age cairns in the Kilmartin region (e.g. Kintraw). In terms of the laid cobbles and the scatter of artefacts it closely resembles the platforms around the Early Bronze Age cairns at Balnaran of Clava, Invernesshire (Bradley 2000).

Cracks, fissures and quarries

The surfaces of Torbhlaren 1 and 2 are heavily fissured, as we would expect if heavily cracked rocks are being deliberately chosen as carving surfaces. On the basis of excavations around rock art sites in Denmark and Sweden we decided it may be worth investigating the fissures and cracks themselves. In the 2006 season a total of 13 major cracks and fissures were excavated on Torbhlaren 1 and a single major fissure running laterally down Torbhlaren 2. Each of the fissures and cracks had artefacts deliberately deposited within them. In one case there is evidence for a deposit of hammerstones and knapped quartz, which was sealed by clay. Over the top of this clay layer a further deposit of hammerstones and quartz was placed.

The major fissure running down Torbhlaren 2 produced very little except for a deposit including a flint pebble, hammerstone and quartz flake deposited close to a newly discovered cup and ring motif. What is the nature of these kinds of

deposits: is the rock surface being venerated, or is some of the quartz being quarried from the rock?

The possibility that the rock outcrops were being quarried was considered in the 2006 season when we noticed that the large tabular stones at the north end of Torbhlaren 2 appeared geologically identical with the existing standing stone. Not only this, two chock stones – possible evidence of prehistoric quarrying – were still in place behind one outcrop of stone. This region of the rock was duly excavated in 2007 and proved very exciting.

The series of crevices close to the possible quarried stone were excavated. In the lower of these we found incontrovertible evidence of prehistoric quarrying – a layer of hammerstones and smashed quartz above a region of fresh quarried stone – a snapped tabular upright; possibly the location where one of the decorated standing stones was removed. Just behind this area there was a fissure in the stone where wooden wedges had been driven into a gap in the stone, a series of loose stone were still lodged in this area still in situ – either chock stones or flakes of stone removed in the quarrying process. Deposited above this evidence for quarrying were a series of placed deposits including one with a smashed quartz pebble neatly placed either side of a rounded piece of quartz and covered by a hammerstone.

If rock art sites are being quarried it seems then that we can consider a life cycle or biography for monuments in the Kilmartin region which begins with decorated outcrop, which is then quarried and decorated afresh in order to be erected as standing stones in the valley bottom. On the evidence at Nether Large North it seems that some of these standing stones are – at a later date – being re-used as cist covers, and again redecorated; although this time they are decorated with motifs representing artefacts such as bronze axes.

Is it just the rock outcrop that is quarried or are other elements being mined from the rock? We also have evidence from the north end of Torbhlaren 2 that quartz veins are being mined from the rock art outcrop itself. In a large crevice near the top of the rock (some 2.5m up the rock) we excavated some of the richest evidence for quarrying and other activities in the entire project. We were alerted to this area by the concentration of cupmarks around the crevice. Initial excavation revealed the presence of a flake of flint and a tiny flake of Arran pitchstone, a fine volcanic glass which can be worked like flint. It is known to outcrop solely on the Isle of Arran and to be exploited by prehistoric communities from the Mesolithic to at least the Early Bronze Age. This tiny



Decorated Standing Stone at Torbhlaren

flake tells us quite a lot; it indicates that prehistoric communities in the Kilmartin region were engaged in trade and exchange contacts with coastal communities to the west; it also tells us that at the broadest level we are dealing with the prehistoric use of the site dating no later than the Early Bronze Age.

Beneath the layer containing the pitchstone and flint excavators came down onto a layer of deliberately laid clay. On the top of this layer a small flint burin was deposited, covered by a disc-shaped hammerstone. A further flint scraper was found embedded in the clay beneath a region of rock tumble. A small scoop hearth was dug into this clay layer. This was duly sampled and excavated and an amazing deposit of artefacts was found at the base of the hearth, a small disc-shaped stone placed next to a long polished stone.

On excavation these objects looked as if they'd been placed like an enigmatic prehistoric question mark. Once they were recorded and cleaned up the polished stone turned out to be a whetstone, a specific category of artefact associated with beaker pottery (Smith and Simpson 1966), and considered to be a leatherworking tool, used for polishing or smoothing the surface of leather. Again this artefact, while informing us that they were working and making artefacts on the rock art outcrop, also gives us a date for the activity, probably between 2500-2300 BC.

In the clay layer we also found fragments of quartz which retained pieces of native rock – evidence for the mining of quartz. It seems that in this case they were mining the rock for its quartz, then at a later stage depositing quartz artefacts back within the mined fissures. This seems peculiar, but it is something we observe quite often in prehistoric mines, where substances are mined artefacts are often returned to the mine as a kind of gift or offering to the bounty of the earth. It is something we observe in stone axe quarries and flint mines in other parts of Britain.

Conclusion – looking to the future

In conclusion I want to underline the importance of studying rock art in its landscape context. The interpretative framework adopted here – looking at the treatment and significance of stone – has allowed me to look at the connections between open-air rock art sites in the surrounding landscape, rock art on monuments and rock art hidden in burial contexts. We can see that the carving of rock art on living rock and the carving of monuments are related activities; part of the extended biography of stone. Importantly this is similar to the situation in Northumbria where studies of rock art sites (by Stan Beckensall and Richard Bradley) have shown that living rock carved with rock art is used for making burial cists, as at the site of Fowberry. A major conclusion must be that rock art sites are not simply isolated decorated rocks; they are places of intense activity, they are quarries for stone and resources like quartz, and they are also embellished with stone platforms. Furthermore they are places for depositing artefacts.

The use of these sites has a long history, at Torbhlaren 1, activity begins with the construction of a post-hole structure, followed by the construction of a stone platform. Finally, at Torbhlaren 2, we can observe evidence for quarrying of the rock outcrop. While we now have some artefacts which give us a date for rock art use, around 2500-2300 BC, the complexity of activities at the two sites suggests that the site may have been used for a considerable period of time.

Archaeological excavations are not the end of the process of interpretation. They are simply the beginning. What follows now is the process of post-excavation analysis, which can often yield even greater detail than excavation. There are three strands of this post-excavation analysis:

An analysis of the environmental context of Torbhlaren, so that we can understand its location in relation to the meandering river Add which flows close to the site.

An analysis of the quartz, hammerstones and other artefacts from the site in order to discover precisely what they are doing and making on the rock art sites.

Detailed radiocarbon analysis. We now have three locations which provide sufficient charcoal for radiocarbon determinations to give us a more precise date for the use of Torbhlaren.

Coupled with this I plan a more extensive radiocarbon project. Rather than digging yet more sites in the region a better use of money is the analysis of material from pre-existing excavations. Although many of the sites in the Kilmartin area have been excavated from the mid-19th century onwards we still have little precise knowledge of the date of many of the sites, including many of the cairns in the linear cemetery and sites like Templewood and the Ballymeanoch henge. In order to better understand the rock art we need to have a greater knowledge of the date of these sites.

The process of post-excavation analysis will begin, as the project is written up the aim is to provide – from the point of view of Torbhlaren - a more satisfying account of the richest rock art landscape in Britain – Kilmartin.

Acknowledgments

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Barnluasgan Dun and Enclosure: The Story Continues.

R. Regan & S. Webb

In April this year, a team from Kilmartin House Museum once again excavated at Barnluasgan dun and enclosure. The site, which is located in North Knapdale Forest, consists of two stone ring-works or defensive walls. One of these stone rings, known as a 'dun', is oval in shape. This is thought to be earlier than the other enclosure structure, which is smaller and circular in shape (see Fig 1). A presumed 'cairn' also lies to the north of the two structures. The 2007 season was the third phase of investigation at this site. The overall aim of the project is to survey and excavate the dun and enclosure in order to gain a better understanding of the archaeology of such structures in Argyll as a whole, since we know little about them. Permission to carry out a survey and excavation was granted by the Forestry Commission who are the landowners, and also one of the main funders of the work. Funding was also kindly provided by Historic Scotland and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Following a detailed survey carried out in 2005, excavation began in 2006. The earliest evidence of occupation of the site came in the unexpected form of a

group of cup-marks, which had been incised on natural bedrock at the north end of the dun site. Although archaeologists are by no means certain of the date of rock art, it is thought to be some 4 and a half to five thousand years old, much earlier than the assumed date of dun and enclosure sites, which are assumed to date to the Iron Age and Early Historic Period, which begins around 2, to 2 and a half thousand years ago.

Excavation revealed that the walls of the dun were in a very badly tumbled or robbed condition. Footings were revealed in Trenches 1, 3 and 5 and also within Area 1, but no entrance was apparent. The walls of the enclosure were traced on all but the southernmost side, which would appear to mostly lie under a Post-Medieval estate wall. No stratigraphic or physical relationship was firmly established between the two structures, although there was the possibility the enclosure wall abutted the dun wall in Trench 3. With this relationship unclear, only the better preservation of the enclosure wall at the north compared to the

dun wall suggests the former may be later in date. Evidence of occupation activity was seen within a series of dumped / midden deposits located in Trench 2. These deposits pre-dated the enclosure structure and appeared to have been dumped from the south west, suggesting the possibility of occupation evidence surviving in this area. Associated with these dumped deposits was a surface, also located in Trench 2, that continued to the east, suggesting the occupation deposits might survive within the eastern part of the site.

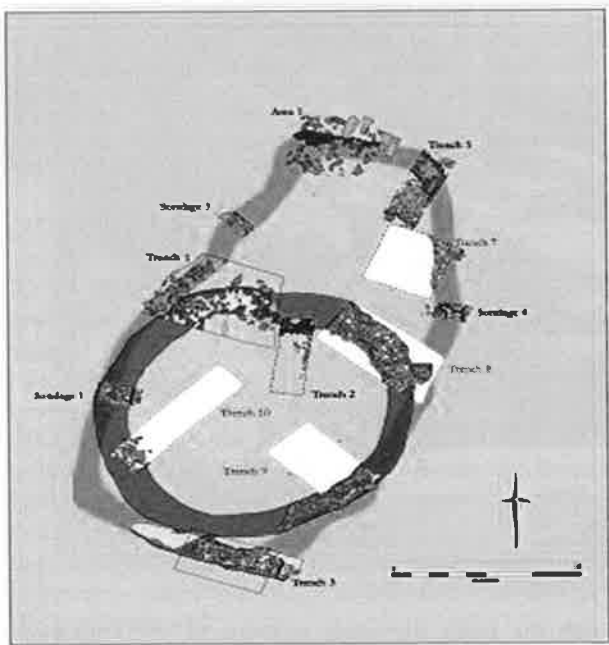


Figure 1. Trench Locations

The possibility of better-preserved deposits within the east of the site was also

suggested by the existence of an internal face of the enclosure wall in Sondage 2. Recovered finds were limited to several stone tools (rubbing or polishing stones) along with fragments of charcoal and a very few fragments of burnt bone. Small fragments of slate were also recovered and as no natural slate occur within the underlying bedrock, it is assumed these were imported, but their source and function remained unclear.

Although there was some findings from the 2006 season, it was rather limited and tended to confirm we were dealing with a much-denuded monument.

Therefore we assumed that the 2007 season would confirm our understanding of the site as having little more to find, however, the four excavated trenches (Trenches 7-10) outstripped our limited expectations, yet again a timely reminder that Argyll's archaeology always has the potential to surprise! The exception to this was Trench 10, which like last year's trenches had thin soils over natural



Enclosure Wall and Buttress (photographs courtesy of author)

bedrock for the most part, with the badly disturbed remains of the enclosure wall at its southern end. The other trenches however, revealed stratified occupation deposits which appeared to be associated with both the earlier dun and later enclosure. These deposits were up to a metre deep within Trenches 8 and 9, with good preservation of the lower deposits. A thick layer of

homogenous dark red/brown subsoil sealed the eastern part of the site and we have interpreted this as an agricultural soil, indicating that the ground had been worked after the abandonment of the structures. This further emphasises the patterns of land use we detected last year in our walkover survey of the

Barnluasgan area where every suitable area along the ridge to the north of the site had been used in rig and furrow cultivation. Moreover, one of the other enclosures on the ridge has clear evidence of rig within its walls. Beneath this thick agricultural soil lay a sequence of collapsed rubble deposits and these in turn sealed the occupation deposits.



The occupation deposits for the most part consisted of very dark grey soils, the colour of which is due to high organic (ash/charcoal etc) content. We should be able to date the structures with C14 dating from these deposits during the post- excavation phase of the project.

Trench 9, Enclosure wall, surface & underlying occupation

If as seems likely, the lower occupation sequence seen within Trench 9 is associated with the dun structure, then the depth (0.40m) of these deposits suggest that the dun was possibly occupied for some time. The time span of this sequence of occupation is of course open to question, but it might be resolved by C14 dating. A couple of substantial post holes were found in Trench 9, within the internal space of the dun. This suggests that there was some form of wooden structure, possibly the dun structure was partially roofed. Similar occupation deposits were associated with the enclosure structure, but the relative shallowness of its associated depositional sequence (up to 0.20m), might indicate that occupation was for a shorter period. Some longevity of occupation is however suggested by the addition of a buttress support on the eastern side of the enclosure wall.

The bulk of the finds were coarse stone tools and included a range of polishers, rubbing stones or grinders, as well as possible palettes. Some pebbles had a highly polished surface and dark staining that may be the result of hide

preparation, as one side of the stone came into constant contact with tallow or fatty residues.



Trench 8, Enclosure Wall.

We also partially resolved the schist/slate enigma. It would seem that many of the fragments were the discard from the production of objects or tools, or were broken tools themselves. Two of the recovered pieces were circular/rounded in shape had centrally pierced holes, suggesting their use as spindle whorls or disc whorls used in the production of thread or yarn. They are similar to those found at Loch Glashan and Dunadd (Crone and Campbell 2005, Lane and Campbell 2000) although it is possible that the finds from Barnluasgan are earlier in date. The edges on some other pieces appear to have been worn smooth through use, although how this occurred remains unclear. Other finds include a near complete upper quern stone of green chlorite schist, which was recovered from Trench 8. The provenance of the quern is problematical as it was recovered from the 'collapsed' material at the south side of the enclosure wall. This suggests the quern could have been reused in the construction of the enclosure wall and was thus collected from the earlier dun phase of activity. The upper face was decorated with two raised collars and had a central funnel-shaped hopper with a perforation to house an upright handle. The grinding surface was worn and convex. A fragment of another possible quern was recovered from Trench 9, although in this case not much more than part of the grinding surface survived. Two fragments of slag or fly ash were recovered from the site,

although as yet it has not been linked with any specific industrial process. Other finds of interest were a corroded iron object, which might be an awl and fragments of daub (burnt clay) with wattle impressions suggesting structural use. The presence of the stone tools, including polishers and grinders as well as the quern and spindle whorls, hints at a degree of permanency of occupation.

It was clear that the original dun structure had been remodelled at some point to construct the more circular enclosure structure. It is probable that the builders used material from the earlier building to construct the later. More problematical is the transitional period between the earlier and later structures. There are, as yet, no identified deposits which suggest the dun was left unoccupied for any length of time prior to the construction of enclosure. It then remains to be seen if the C14 dates indicate continuity or suggest a chronological gap between these two phases of construction. Whatever the outcome, both buildings appear to have been utilised in similar ways in that they were defensive structures that have so far produced 'domestic' occupation signatures if the artefact assemblage and occupational deposits are taken at face value. Beyond this and without secure dates, any comparison with other excavated dun structures would be speculative at this time, although the eventual results are potentially exciting and should considerably add to our understanding of the usage and chronology of these types of structures.

Kilmartin House Museum would like to thank the project funders, and the core team of 'volunteers' who as usual, did most of the hard work.

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Rotary Quern

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North Uist - June 2007

Report of NHASMA summer expedition

Our annual Island adventure demanded an outrageously early start for many of us in order to meet at the Oban ferry terminal at 7.30am on Saturday 2nd June. Intermittent rain and the poor condition of the road surfacing made the mainland journey hairy at times, and the 6-hour sailing to Lochboisdale in South Uist served only to allow the weather systems to unite into a vertical wall of water for our journey to the North Uist Outdoor Centre at Lochmaddy, destination for the week. Bedrooms were Spartan, but companionship is all on these occasions, and before the 23 of us sat down to dinner we were given a well-researched write-up by Moira and a briefing from Douglas. From then on everything – including the weather – was superb.

Our first walk out was to visit one of the Art in the Landscape projects of the mid 1990's called 'Hut of the Shadow', an intriguing camera obscura set into a small hut of reclaimed stone, across a rusty suspension bridge a short distance from the Centre. We visited the young Millennium Forest and with the afternoon ahead of us decided to walk back the long way through the expanse of field and farm, being befriended by some unexpected animals along the way.

On Monday we crossed to the other side of the island to visit the RSPB Nature Reserve at Balranald where the local Ranger gave us a guided tour of the semi-cultivated Machair managed with the cooperation of the local farming community. We were in the company of corncrake, corn bunting, wheatear and lapwing, all able to find shelter in the short growth on shell-sand fields. Oystercatchers, red- and green- shanks and other waders were to be seen on the surrounding dunes where we lunched before walking out around the gloriously colourful headland and looking out wistfully at the islands.

On Tuesday we visited a number of ancient sites including a neolithic chambered cairn at Barpa Langais around which maybe two metres of peat had risen giving the interior a falsely shallow aspect. On the opposite side of the same hillside the stone circle of Pobull Fhinn was still impressive though the ground was boggy. In sight of Ben Eaval - and a "Road End" sculpture - we lunched at Locheport before moving southwards to the fine medieval Temple of the Trinity (partially restored in the early 20th century) at the site of the Battle of the Ditch, of 1601. We didn't find the Wheel-house at Grimasay (most of us) despite the satellite navigation!

Berneray, now joined by causeway, was our next destination. Several of the features mentioned in our dispatches were of the used-to-be variety, but we did discover some blackhouses and other more modern structures of interest. The day however will be remembered mostly for the walk across the machair to the glorious expanse of the west beach; four miles of wide silvery shell sand and brilliant turquoise waters and no other living beings but the birds. On the way back from Berneray we walked across a narrow rocky causeway on a small lochan to Dun Sticer, a ruined broch with another rectangular 16th Century ruin inside.

The following day, before going our separate ways, we met at the Cladach Vallay to visit a circular neolithic remain a short walk across the marshy fore-shore. Perhaps the most interesting "remain" was an owl-vomit pellet which Douglas took delight in dissecting! Thereafter some took the road to Eriskay, some to Benbecula, while others stayed for further exploration of the Vallay. More tales to share in the evening of journeys made, sites explored, pictures painted and "Road Ends" seen.

Our last day was spent on Ceann Ear, largest of the Monach Isles. Our host at the Centre had arranged for a "rib" boat to take us from the shores at Balranald to these beautiful islands, now uninhabited but the second largest breeding ground in the world for grey seals, many of whom came out to greet us! The waters along the silver sands were warm enough to paddle in and the machair provided cover for many species of bird several of which entertained us at packed-lunch time, my own favourite being a redshank who stood on a nearby rock long enough to hold a conversation. At our final dinner that evening – a colourful occasion in the menswear department – we reminisced on the fine weather and excellent arrangements for our week, summed up in my best Lewis Carroll style with the poem:-

The Moyrus and the Barkenter

*There's no such hour as that we rose to satisfy Cal-Mac
And navigate the Oban Road – more like a Drovers' Track.
The dust was grey, the lights were red, the sky of course was black.*

*From Oban to Lochboisdale there was every kind of sea,
And every kind of breakfast, that was far too much for me.
Well – I'm not a morning person, as I'm sure you'll all agree.*

*Then onward to Lochmaddy it was raining c's and d's
And you couldn't see the mountains and you couldn't see the trees.
But then of course on Uist there are very few of these.*

*The Moyrus and the Barkenter, when once we'd settled in
And made our beds and paid our dues and opened up the gin,
Advised us of the week's events – so that's where we'll begin:-*

*"The time has come" the Moyrus said "to cross the shuggy bridge
And see the Hut of Shadows - like a mirror in a fridge –
And the young Millennium Forest just across the other ridge."*

*Then some went home the easy way, some took another course
To meet the road to Berneray and greet the farmyard force:
Rebecca met two pussy cats, the Barkenter? – A horse!*

*The next day was Balranald day, communing with the 'crakes
And the bunting on the machair, and the lapwing on the lakes,
And a lunch-box on the sand dunes – well we all can make mistakes.*

*"Those are the Monachs in the west!" she stated (true to type!)
"Due south lies Barra, there," she said "along the compass stripe."
"I doubt it!" said the Barkenter, and lit another pipe.*

*So after lunch but six of us went walking round the strand
And seven maids with seven mops were left to sweep the sand.
"They'll never do it," Moyrus said "without a helping hand!"*

*The next was all round Eaval; not as ghastly as you think!
A good day that had everything except the kitchen sink –
A cairn, a ring, a temple; and a faulty sat-nav link!*

*"Oh Roysters, come and walk with us" the Moyrus did suggest
"A pleasant walk across the grass." They thought she did protest
too much – and dinner's calling, which was stronger, did the rest.*

*And then they went to Berneray, a day without a care!
They didn't see the Indian, the Coffin or the Chair –
Which isn't so surprising, folks, since none of them were there!*

*But sun there was and sand there was as far as eye could see
And like a clutch of silly kids that's suddenly set free
They frolicked on the sandy dunes and paddled in the sea.*

*"Next day" the Barkenter advised "we head for Cladach Vallay"
and forth into the murky morn the Roysters chose to sally,
but underfoot was wet and not a place to dilly dally.*

*So thence the Roysters all dispersed to walk, to climb, to ride.
The Barkenter walked round the bay until he met the tide.
The Moyrus went to Eriskay and cased it side to side.*

*On Eriskay or Grimasay, Benbecula or Flodda
Some turned to art, some looked the part and some looked even odder;
But bet your last owl-vomit slug they all were tourist fodder.*

*Last day – not least – the Barkenter arranged a water trip
Aboard a rib (for those not versed, a very tiny ship)
And if you missed your footing it was not a lucky dip!*

*And Yes! They were the Monach Isles; and Yes! They were due west.
And Yes! They always save till last the things they think are best;
And the seals were Royster-catchers, and a tame redshank impressed.*

*And when they'd all got back again and washed away the dirt
The men became more handsome and the ladies were more pert.
The Barkenter put on a tie – and Fred put on a shirt!!*

*"Oh Roysters" mused the Barkenter, clutching his 't' and gin,
"tomorrow shall we ferry then? – It seems an awful sin!"
But answer came there none because they all were tucking in!*

Birds seen on North Uist trip, June 2007

List supplied by Val Barker

Red throated Diver, Black throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, Northern Fulmar, Manx Shearwater, Gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Grey Heron, Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Shelduck, Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Tufted duck, Common Eider, Red-Breasted Merganser, Hen Harrier, Common Buzzard, Golden Eagle, Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Common Pheasant, Corn crake, Moorhen, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Northern Lapwing, Common Sandpiper, Dunlin, Common Snipe, Curlew, Redshank, Turnstone, Arctic Skua, Great Skua, Black Headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Kittiwake, Common Tern, Arctic Tern, Black Guillemot, Common Guillemot, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Cuckoo, Snowy Owl, Short-eared Owl, Sky Lark, Swallow, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Robin, Stonechat, Northern Wheatear, Song thrush, Blackbird, Mistle thrush, Sedge Warbler, Black Cap, Willow Warbler, Raven, Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Green finch, Corn Bunting.

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