

ROCK ART



THE

KIST 76

EDITORIAL

In a magazine it is always exciting to include a feature which is also highly newsworthy. The discovery of yet more rock art at Achnabreck adds to what is already "the largest decorated panel in Great Britain" (*Stan Beckinsall - The Prehistoric Rock Art of Kilmartin*). This highlights just how important mid-Argyll is in world terms with regard to this ancient art form.

This issue also revives the lapsed tradition of publishing accounts of the fascinating summer excursions which NHASMA organises each year. However, this time, instead of mere paragraphs, we are pleased to include full-length articles from new contributors (see pages 20 - 29). Features on the later excursions will be published in the next issue of Kist.

We are also pleased to welcome Robin Harvey from SAMS (Scottish Association for Marine Science) Dunstaffnage Marine Laboratory, Oban as a new contributor on the subject of natural history.

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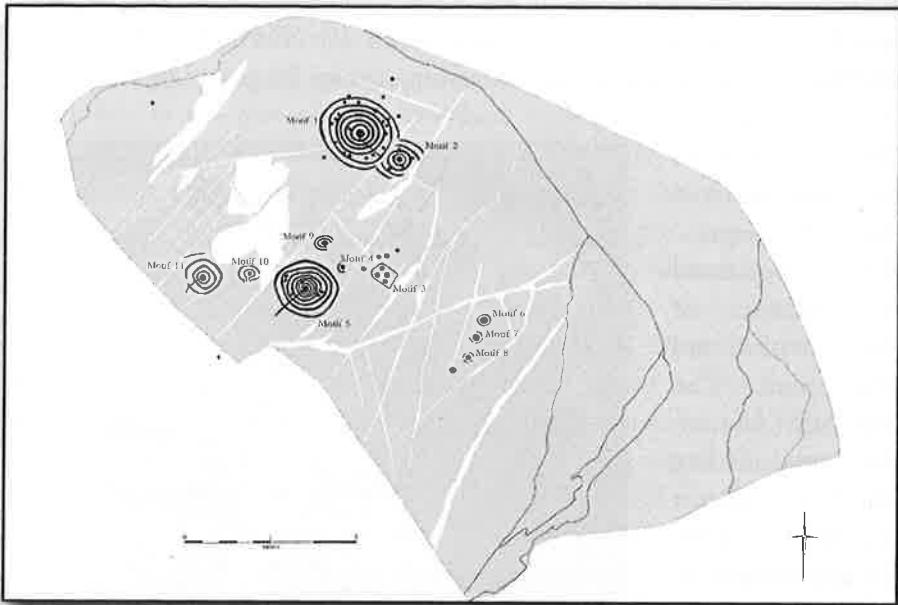
Front cover illustration by: P. Fox Denham based on a photo by A. Watson.

NB: Please note that due to formatting constraints the contents of this particular issue are on page 33

Achnabreck III Rock Art Excavation

Sharon Webb & Roddy Regan

The rock art panel at Achnabreck (NR 85566 90814) was first discovered in January 2008 when severe storms blew over a number of trees in the area. In this case, the storms had blown over a mature sitka which also lifted the root plates of at least three other previously felled trees. The site was first reported to Kilmartin House Museum by Sally Wilkin, and was subsequently reported to the Forestry Commission, who own the land.



Achnabreck Rock Art Panel 2008

The site lay approx 1m away from the Forestry Commission mountain biking track and was therefore vulnerable to cycle traffic. A further ring mark was discovered actually on the cycle track near the first panel in May 2008. The track has been closed since January and was re-located in

early June. The Museum was asked to investigate the site archaeologically by the Forestry Commission. In summary, archaeological investigation comprised of hand-cleaning organic detritus from the newly discovered rock art exposures and the hand-excavation of the sloping ground abutting the base of the exposure. The aims of this project were to identify the extent of the site and explore the nature and character of any activities associated with the construction and use of the site, and recover any material which might be used to date the construction and/or use of the rock art.

The site is located within Kilmichael Forest, approximately 420m NE of Achnabreck farmhouse and it lies within sight of and c150m N of the fenced enclosure surrounding Achnabreck (1) NM 8557 9069 (NMRS NR89SE 2, Scheduled Ancient Monument and Property in Care). The site lies adjacent

(S) to a cycle path and is situated amongst open/thinned woodland that consists of mature sitka and scots pine. The new panel lies on the undulating surface of a rounded outcrop of chlorite-schist. The markings are located at the NE



Achnabreck Rock Art - courtesy of Kilmartin Museum

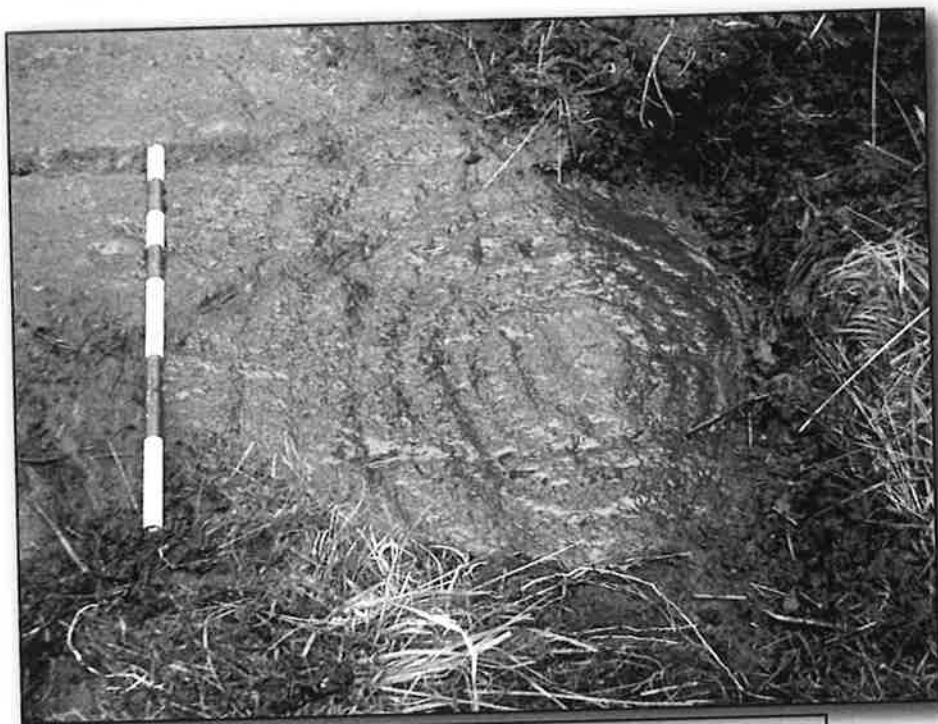
end of a raised ridge of the NE/SW oriented domed outcrop which is c. 12m wide at its NE end. The edges of the outcrop slope off sharply at the N and S but more gently at the SW. A sharp edge bounds the decorated panel at the NE and beyond it, also at the NE, the outcrop is

skirted by an old track and associated dyke. The rock surface is naturally cracked and ice scoured with a fine line of quartz running through it.

The outcrop is one of many in the area that occupy the natural slope of the hill that continues to rise at the north and west of the site. While not occupying the highest point in the vicinity, in the absence of trees, the site would have enjoyed extensive views to Lochgilphead and the sea to the S and to Cairnbaan to the W. The position of the site is interesting as it offers views towards the Cairnbaan rock art site, which are not afforded from Achnabreck (1).

Three areas of rock bore rock art. Much of the main panel had already been cleared of topsoil (most of the overburden actually coming away with the uplifted tree plate). The majority of soil stripping was undertaken at the east of the site where topsoil and underlying subsoil were removed to reveal the underlying rock surface. The panel at this eastern side continued to slope down towards the SE. Here the overburden was as much as 0.49m deep and the presence of tree roots mitigated against the continuation of the trench, although it is likely more rock art would be present. 11 main motifs with associated or surrounding cup-marks were recorded at the site. A further ring motif was recorded to the NW of the main panel (Panel 2, Motif 12) and a single cup on another rock outcrop to the N of that Panel 3. The work has revealed an elaborate panel of rock art and it is probable that more motifs lie under the extensive overburden at the SE of the site beyond the excavated area. The decorated rock panel is quite complex and adds to the extraordinary concentration of rock art in the Achnabreck vicinity. The revealed motifs bear similarities to those on the other previously recorded Achnabreck panels. The largest motif is likely to be one of the largest in Scotland, while the rough circle of cup-marks contained within the motif is unusual but has some similarities to a partial arc of cups seen within the concentric rings of a motif on Achnabreck 1 (lower group E sheet). There is also a parallel with the juxtaposition of motifs seen

within Achnabreck 1 (upper group N end). The concentric rings within one of the motifs appear to have deliberately incorporated some of the cups lying within their circuits, and this is again paralleled within motifs



Achnabreck Rock Art (detail)- courtesy of Kilmartin Museum

previously seen at Achnabreck 2. The line of cups and rings seen within one of the motifs at the new site do not have a parallel at the main panels at Achnabreck, although similar motifs are to be found at Achanarich 1 on the Craginish peninsula and at Baluacraig near Dunchraigaig. In this sense the majority of the motifs have local or area parallels. In particular the larger motifs are strikingly similar to those on other Achnabreck panels suggesting some relationship or shared knowledge between the creators of this important rock-art panel.

The newly exposed rock surface was soft and in parts the surface of the rock was easily removed even with the use of wooden tools (up to depth of 0.5mm). The softness of the rock surface had allowed small roots to penetrate the surface – some of these had worked their way along natural fissures causing further damage. Some of the deeper fissures within the rock surface (the deepest 0.22m) appeared to post date the rock art as some of the Motifs were truncated by the fissure edges. The cause of these cracks is not yet clear, but may have been caused by past root action (not necessarily modern forestry plantation). There has been some recent damage to the rock art, by a machine which has left scrape marks.

A vein of quartz running across the rock panel stood 2mm above the rest of the rock surface indicating the relatively faster erosion of the surrounding rock surface. If the panel had been carved when the surface was level with the quartz band then this indicates the degree of subsequent erosion and the possibly 'worn' appearance of many of the motifs.

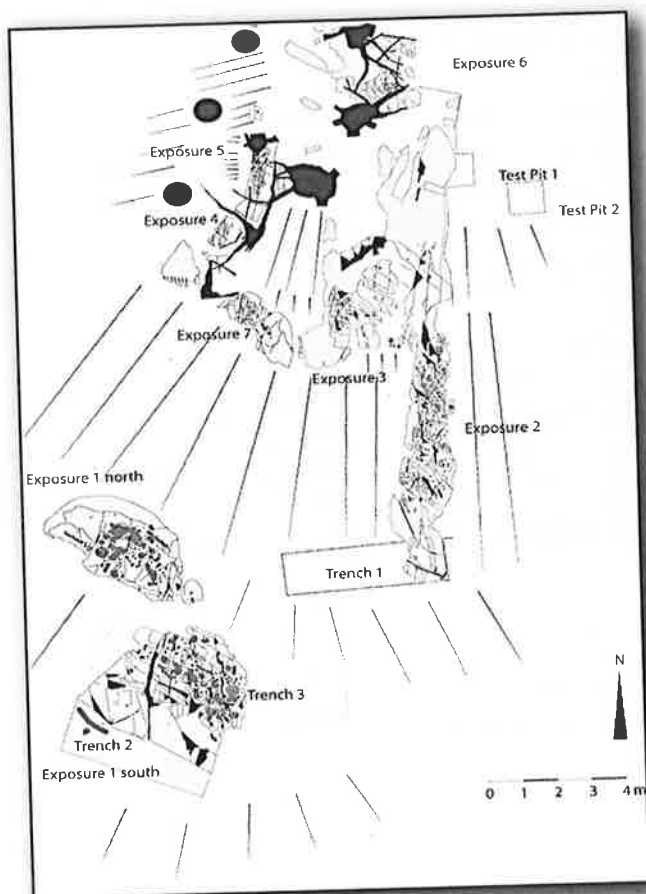
The work has revealed an elaborate panel of rock art and it is probable that more motifs lie under the extensive overburden at the SE of the site beyond the excavated area. The decorated rock panel adds to the extraordinary concentration of rock art in the Achnabreck vicinity, and perhaps re-emphasises its importance as a site in the Neolithic/ Bronze Age period.

We have recommended to the Forestry Commission that sensitive public access could be provided and the site is worthy of interpretive information. This new rock art is of great local and national importance and as such should be recommended for scheduling.

Ormaig Rock art Site

Clare Ellis & Sharon Webb

In August 2007, the Museum undertook an excavation at the Ormaig rock-art site. The project was part funded by the Dalriada Project, and Historic Scotland, and the Museum had various rock-art specialists on board. The site is a scheduled ancient monument, so permission to do the work had to be first obtained from Historic Scotland.



Ormaig (All Panels) 2008

The site, located in the Ormaig Forest, is set on a steep slope surrounded by commercial forestry, aside from a narrow view to the sea, that was created as part of the NVA Half-Life project last year.

Many in the archaeological community have been concerned about the site, both in regard to its state of preservation, and the potentially negative effect of

the sitka spruce plantation, which is very close to the site. The Forestry Commission had planned to fell the surrounding trees, but required detailed archaeological advice about how they should proceed; therefore this project was initiated to help them determine a short and long term management plan for the site, as well as investigate the remains archaeologically.

The project aimed to define the extent of the rock art at Ormaig in advance of felling, to record the existing rock-art, as well as any newly exposed motifs. During the course of our work, new panels, as well as new motifs were found. These were recorded by various methods including tracing, standard planning and laser scanning.

It is possible that further motifs lie underneath the soil and mass of tree roots to the east of the site, however it was deemed too dangerous to remove any more soil in this area in case the extant conifers were undermined.

Readers will remember the recent Kist article by Andrew Jones of Southampton University whose excavations at Torbhlaren have revealed prehistoric artefacts and traces of activity around the rock art site. Therefore our project also aimed to determine the nature and potential extent of any archaeological deposits associated with the rock art panels at Ormaig. It was especially important to determine if any deposits were present, as there was potential for them to be damaged during felling operations. Unfortunately, the excavation did not reveal any further archaeological deposits, possibly all trace of activity was destroyed by the forestry plantation, or contemporary activities at Ormaig were such that they did not leave any significant physical evidence. We also hoped to obtain material for radiocarbon assay if possible, but the lack of negative features, sealed archaeological contexts and charcoal currently prevent the absolute dating of this site.

A number of fragments of quartz were recovered, although the majority of these are probably natural. A number of stones were also found which may have functioned as hammer stones, however, the glacial till contains



Rock Art at Ormaig - courtesy of Aaron Watson

many rounded pebbles of varying sizes and it is likely that many of the possible hammerstones recovered during excavation will turn out to be unutilised natural pebbles. Seven shattered bedrock fragments which had become detached from the bedrock of one of the exposures were found, and these were removed from the site as they contain or were closely associated with cup marks and grooves. If we had left them at the site it is likely that they could have been subject to unsanctioned removal from the site. This was first agreed with the Historic Scotland Monument Inspector, Dr Raven. It may be possible to re-instate these at a later date.

An important part of the project was the conservation study, which was carried out by David Jefferson. The aims of the study were to assess the condition of preservation, integrity and quality of the rock art. Some of the exposures are partially obscured by conifer trees, and in some cases, tree roots fan out over and under decorated panels. As mentioned above, some of the panels have been fractured by tree root activity, which has damaged some of the motifs. Some fracture damage is a consequence of the natural geology.

David Jefferson took samples for petrological analysis and has produced a full conservation report, which has been used to inform further stages of the work. He recommended cleaning of mosses, which was done, following Historic Scotland approval, with great care, considering the fragility of the rock surfaces. Some exposures were not cleaned as it appeared that the roots of the moss cover may be penetrating the rock surface. Encouragingly, the presence of visible glacial striations on the rock surfaces coupled with the result of petrographic analysis of three samples taken from various locations indicates that the external rock surface is altered very little (Jefferson 2007).

It has been concluded by the stone conservator that the rock has a mineral composition prone to physicochemical weathering but the covering of the exposures with lichen has in fact protected the rock surface, and therefore the rock art, from erosion. In some areas, the rock has a shattered appearance, and David Jefferson concluded this was as a result of the rock not having a consistent grain-size – so these areas are more prone to weathering than others. What this does tell us is that lichens should not be cleaned from the rock surfaces, and these were left in place.

The project concluded that the most beneficial long term setting for the Ormaig rock-art site would be mixed, open native woodland that would enable the rock surfaces to rapidly dry under dappled shade and

moderated winds (Jefferson 2007). In addition, a cyclical programme of careful moss and other vegetation removal from the exposures would also prevent the localised trapping and build up of moisture next to the rock surface. Finally the re-colonisation of lichens across all the exposures would be beneficial.

We have proposed further phases of work during and after felling, to assist in protecting the site, and to ensure any newly exposed rock art is professionally excavated and recorded. A long term management strategy is being produced which will also take into account the options for interpretation and public access to the site.

Please note – The Museum would not recommend cleaning of vegetation on rock art sites as in some cases, this can cause severe damage to a site and in some cases is illegal. Vegetation removal should only be done if a professional assessment of the site has first taken place, and it must ALWAYS be done under archaeological supervision.

Seashores of Argyll in a changing world

Robin Harvey

(Part 1 of 2) The glaciation of the west Scotland landscape and its subsequent inundation when sea levels rose has created a complex coastline that provides an enormous variety of marine habitats. Few other places in Europe can provide deep tide-swept sounds such as the gulf of Corryvreckan just a few miles from extremely sheltered inlets such as Caol Scotnish. Add changing tidal ranges along the coast and a variable amount of freshwater inflow to the different sea lochs and we have a template for high biodiversity. This variety, and the options that it provides in different weather conditions, coupled with abundant marine life are the main reasons for the popularity of the west of Scotland with divers.

Britain lies at the meeting point of a number of water masses. There are elements of a 'southern' flora and fauna that may be found on the milder west coast, but not the east. A few of these species reach the west of Scotland e.g. the purple topshell and the much rarer rainbow wrack. Conversely, there are 'northern' species such as the tortoiseshell limpet and stone crab that are not found in south-west England and Wales. This



Purple Topshell - courtesy of Robin Harvey

mixing of species adds to the biodiversity of our waters and gives us a number of 'indicator' species to watch out for as the north Atlantic warms (or cools!).

Apart from sea temperature, the main factors determining the flora and fauna that occur on the shore are exposure to wave action, seabed type, slope of the shore and the tidal range. Mid Argyll has one of the smallest tidal ranges in the UK, with only a 1.1m rise and fall at spring tides in the Sound of Gigha, compared with 4.5 m at Colonsay just 60 km away. This results from the presence of an amphidromic point off southern Islay where the tidal rise and fall is virtually cancelled out. During neap tides in this area, changes in atmospheric pressure may have almost as much effect as the pull of the moon on the height of the tides.

The underlying geology plays an important role in determining the kind of shores we have. Many of the rocks in Argyll are hard, being metamorphic or igneous. These tend to have few crevices and rock pools,

thus providing fewer sheltered niches for less robust species. Glaciation and inundation have also made many shores steep, relatively smooth and difficult of access. Much of Kintyre, and Ardlamont in Cowal are favoured, however, by the presence of raised wave-cut platforms made of somewhat softer mica schists that often have rockpools. Examples in east Kintyre are at Claonaig just north of the ferry slipway and, somewhat steeper, at Carradale to the north of the harbour. On the west coast, Westport has good exposures of bedrock with rockpools.

Wave exposure in the region ranges from very exposed (e.g. west Islay) to – very sheltered (e.g. upper West Loch Tarbert). Although parts of west Kintyre are open to the Atlantic, offshore shallows break the full force of the waves. Nevertheless, species characteristic of high wave exposure can

be found. Westport is an accessible and interesting example of a wave exposed shore. Such shores often appear rather bare at first, with only patchy brown wracks and most of the rock covered by barnacles, limpets and small mussels. Here, the ‘southern’ Poli’s barnacle *Chthamalus stellatus* is abundant on the mid to lower shore. An exposed shore form of bladder wrack without bladders occurs on the more open rock at mid



Barnacles - courtesy of Robin Harvey

tide level, yet only a few metres away there may be enough shelter for the normal form with bladders and even the long greenish-brown knotted wrack that is usually an indicator of shelter.

Thus, the local ‘microclimate’ may have as much influence on the species that can be found on the shore, as it does on land. This leads to a patchy

mosaic of species, whose distribution and abundance also depend on the time at which the young larvae or spores arrived on the shore and what other organisms were already there. Competition for space is intense and the grazing impact of limpets (or lack of it) does much to determine the appearance of the shore. The common limpet may reach densities of 100 or more per square metre and prevent the growth of large algae. Dog whelks consume vast numbers of barnacles; easy prey for a snail that can also drill into small mussels if it has to. Most marine animals synchronise the release of their eggs and sperm into the sea, where they, and the larvae that result from fertilisation, are at the mercy of wind and tide. In contrast, dog whelks lay yolky eggs in capsules on the shore. Look out for them in crevices on the mid and lower shore from spring through to autumn. A miniature snail grows to around 3 mm in length before crawling out of its home and starting its search for prey.

The upper shore is a zone of extremes; the rock can reach temperatures of over 40° C or fall below zero. The tide may only submerge the highest tide levels on a few days a month, restricting the opportunities for feeding, and in between times the shore may be soaked by heavy rain. Yet here we can find Montagu's barnacle, *Chthamalus montagui* with a kite-shaped opening, living just below channelled wrack - the highest of the larger brown seaweeds. The 'northern' barnacle *Semibalanus balanoides*, has a diamond-shaped opening (see figure). It has been estimated that Montagu's barnacles may live for 20 years or more. Close inspection of the upper shore often reveals tiny snails living in any empty barnacle shells. Higher still there may be thousands of small periwinkles *Melaraphe* (*Littorina*) *neritoides* living in crevices in the splash zone. In the spray zone above, algae give way to a colourful array of lichens.

Rockpools frequently appear to be painted pink - owing to a thin layer of algae that secrete lime. There are several species, one of which forms the free-living knobbly 'maerl' that is often found in tide-swept channels below low water mark. A twiggy pink coralline alga *Corallina officinalis*

forms a fringe at the water line in many pools. Each branch is composed of several articulating segments and it often provides a nursery habitat for a range of snails. It thrives on wave exposed shores. Pools provide opportunities for species that would normally occur lower down the shore to extend their range. Red algae, certain sea anemones, and fish such as the Shanny are examples. Being trapped in a pool at low tide can, however, expose the occupants to abnormal heat, cold and varying salinity, so regular pool residents need to have wide physiological tolerances.

There are many books on marine life of the shore and shallow sea. For those with internet access the MarLIN website www.marlin.ac.uk is an excellent point for identifying unfamiliar plants and animals and learning about their distribution and life history. You can also submit your own sightings and digital images after registering and then search the database for species of particular interest. SAMS has been based at Dunstaffnage since 1970 and now has a staff of around 140, two research vessels and access to ocean-going vessels belonging to several nations through collaborative research programmes. In recent years our research has taken us into the Arctic and Antarctic, as well as some of the deepest ocean depths. To learn more about the SAMS laboratory go to www.sams.ac.uk

Editors note.

Part 2 of this article will appear in the next issue of KIST

NHASMA SUMMER ISLAND EXPEDITION JUNE 2008

Islay and Jura diary 2008 - *Rebecca Pine*

This year's Annual Adventure took a party of 24 members to the islands perhaps closest to home. Departing from Kennacraig it was destination Port Askaig and the 25 mile run to Kilchoman, on the Rhinns of Islay. Our evening meal together was at the Loch Indaal Hotel in Port Charlotte, the first of a series of Hotels each of which fed us and accommodated us very well in their own different ways.

On Sunday we convoyed to Portnahaven and the last complete Thomas Telford Church on Islay, in the 'Parliament' style of 1828, complete with paraffin lamps! In the bay outside Seals played with the buoys floating in the harbour. This was the starting point for a series of stop-offs, to climb Ben Cladville, lunch, and walk back via Cill Chiarain (remains) on Ard More and the sand dunes of Machir Bay. It was also our first encounter with herds of cattle who considered they had first call on the highway.

Monday was a 'birds' day. Michael, the RSPB Ranger at the Gruinart Flats led us on two walks around the Reserve, and apart from being a fund of knowledge about the birds, was also able to explain to us the archaeological structure of the land and the usage patterns adopted to maximise both the agricultural advantage and the attractiveness to different bird populations. Several birds appeared at distance but in a sustained woodland we were entertained at close quarters by a pair of Spotted Flycatchers. We lunched at Ardnave Point and some spent more time investigating parts of the Reserve whilst others explored the workings of Kilchoman Distillery!

On the only day of intermittent rainfall we crossed the Islay Sound to the island of Jura and made the journey as far as we could up the (only) east coast road as far as Ardlussa. On the way up we stopped at Jura House to view the attractive Gardens and wild-flower meadows. Along the way up we noted several standing stones, cairns etc., and stopped on the way back at Tarbert where some made the short trek across the isthmus to Loch Tarbert on the west coast, while others investigated the standing stones and chapel ruins by the village. In our car we had the interesting experience of being accompanied for several hundred yards by a female Hen Harrier flying alongside us at hedgerow level.

Our second 'bird' day was on the Oa in the south of Islay. Michael again led us on a tour of part of this huge Reserve, up to the American Monument at the Mull of Oa and around the cliffs to see nesting Peregrines, hovering Kestrels, and a family of Choughs on land and in the air. Later in the day we visited the chapel remains in Kilnaughton Bay and further round the coast the impressive Kildalton Cross. Our evening meal was at the Machrie Hotel seated at the table which once graced the Garrick Club in London. We were made aware of its fine traditions (and introduced some of our own!); sworn secrecy as to the happenings on, around and under the table being the first imperative.

In the following days we visited the ancient site of the Lords of the Isles at Finlaggan, and though the Visitor Centre was still undergoing refurbishment we were able to cross the new wooden causeway to the well-signed remains of hall, chapel, and domestic architecture, and perhaps form a view of a lifestyle 600 years ago. We also explored some eastern areas of the island in search of duns, brochs, crannogs and hut circles with varying degrees of success. We made friends with a tame Alpaca, shared lunch with a very friendly cat and observed a whole drift of pigs. On other excursions we had the pleasure of seeing many different birds, including a pair of Greylag Geese at very close quarters, and other flora and fauna. Architecturally (and spiritually) our various visits

included the round church at Bowmore and the Distilleries round the coastline.

As on the first evening we dined at the Loch Indaal Hotel, on a 'chef's special' of soup and muscles, followed by scallops wrapped in sea bass, topped with apple pie and ice cream. Norman thanked the organisers and I offered the following summation of events:-

NHASMA-Z Islay 2008

A is Antiquarian, the first A in the title
and Annual Adventure which to all of us is vital.
B is Birds and Butterflies and Bugs and Bits of mystery
that grow and crawl and fly around – and that's the Natural History..
Even when the weather's wrong and going's getting tough
the bird of birds for Islay has to be the C for Chough.
D is the Distilleries that Dominate the shore;
Ardbeg to Bruichladdich, Bunnahabhain to Bowmore.
E is the Explorer maps, three-fifty-two and three
that Moisy gives as Evidence for what we ought to see.
F is for Finlaggan chapel, castle and, it's said,
a battle Field and burial ground. And F is also Fred.
G is for the Garrick Table and its Great Traditions
Like 'Pass the Port from right to left' and 'Goodbye inhibitions'.
G again, the Gathering of birds at Gruinart Flats
H is for Hen Harrier and all the Habitats;
and the Hundred other birds that nest and swim and wade and fly
that brought us I to Islay here (and next year maybe Skye?)
J is Jura, Just a trip to see Big Brother beckon
but Just a day too short I think, to reach the Correyvreckan

K is for Kilchoman Church, Distillery and Cross
 and Cottages where we're all guests and Douglas is the boss.
 L the Length of Laggan Bay where golden sand dunes form;
 Loch Ballygrant, Loch Lossit, Loch Finlaggan and Loch Gorm
 M must be for Machir Bay, between Ard More and Coull
 and Mary, Moisy, Marjorie – three little Maids – from school??
 N is Norman; not the Conquest but the Noted Rea,
 but what went on at Shepherd's Cottage Morag wouldn't say.
 O is for the Oa (or should that be the Oh?)
 I had a word with Noah, but he didn't seem to know.
 P is for Ports Askaig, Charlotte, Ellen and the rest
 but Portnahaven, near at hand, is far the prettiest.
 Q, the Quakes, mean R, the Rhinns are on a moving plate
 and S, if we Stay long enough, will surely Separate.
 T, Tom Telford's tiny Church that tops the rugged Rhinns
 where some went for their wonderment and some went for their sins.
 U belongs to all of Us, that sail on Life's canal -
 the pleasure of the company. But V belongs to Val.
 WX for some us. A few of us are thinner
 And most of us are even bigger, after such a dinner.
 Y, it seems like Yesterday we came to Islay. Why?
 Because we've had a super time. (And next year surely Skye!?)
 Z should never be alone; just think a row of Zeds
 And that's the morning chorus from Kilchoman Cottage beds!



Bird list from Islay June 2008

Prepared by Valerie Barker and Morag Rae



Red throated diver, Little grebe, Manx shearwater, Northern gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Grey heron, Mute swan, Whooper swan, Greylag goose, Common shelduck, Mallard, Teal, Tufted duck, Common eider, Golden eye, Red breasted merganser, Hen harrier, Common buzzard, Sparrow hawk, Golden eagle, Kestrel, Peregrine falcon, Red legged partridge, Red grouse, Common pheasant, Corncrake and chick, Moorhen, Oystercatcher, Ringed plover, Lapwing, Common sandpiper, Dunlin, Common snipe, Common redshank, Arctic skua, Black headed gull, Lesser black-backed gull, Herring gull, Great black-backed gull, Common gull, Common tern, Arctic tern, Common guillemot, Black guillemot, Puffin, Rock pigeon, Wood pigeon, Collared dove, Cuckoo, Sky lark, Swallow, House martin, Sand martin, Meadow pipit, Rock pipit, Pied wagtail, Stone chat, Northern wheatear, Black bird, Song thrush, Mistle thrush, Willow warbler, Sedge warbler, Spotted flycatcher, Long tailed tit, Coal tit, Blue tit, Red billed chough, Jackdaw, Rook, Common crow, Raven, Starling, House sparrow, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Siskin, Twite, Reed bunting, Wren, Robin, Dunnock.

NHASMA Summer Excursions 2008

Visit to Baravalla Garden - 20 April

Phil Holt

Those of you who have read Mrs Mackie Campbell's fascinating "History of Baravalla Garden, West Loch Tarbert" in Issue 75 of *The Kist* would have anticipated, with some excitement, an actual visit to The Gardens.

On a fine, bright day during late April, 16 Society members and guests (accompanied by five very well behaved dogs) were privileged to accept the invitation extended by Mrs Gillian Mackie Campbell to visit the "Secret Garden" of Baravalla.

In Mrs Mackie Campbell's own words: - "If you are visiting Baravalla for the first time, you should perhaps be warned. It is a garden of the W's. It is a Wild garden, as far as the gardeners are concerned it is a Weekend garden and is, in consequence, a Woolly garden. Furthermore there is no house within the garden. All this limits what can sensibly be grown to trees and shrubs; maintenance means keeping the tide of natural encroachment within reasonable limits. As it is a slightly unusual enterprise, it might be helpful to sketch in the background of how it started.

One of the hazards of seed collecting in the wild is that you then have large numbers of seedlings. They are your babies, they grow bigger by the minute and they ultimately need a home. When Peter Cox and Peter Hutchinson developed an interest in plant collecting, the idea evolved of a garden in the mild Atlantic climate of Argyll where there would be space to plant generous groups of things they had collected. In addition there would be a chance to grow plants of borderline hardiness that the East coast gardener always envies on the western side of the fence.

In 1968, discussions with the Mackie Campbells, whose family estate was Stonefield and who therefore were no strangers to fine rhododendrons, led to a partnership being set up. Some 20 acres on the shores of West Loch Tarbert were fenced against rabbits and deer and the first serious planting began in 1969. Recently, a further strip of land has been acquired to bring the burn within the garden boundary.

The soil is somewhat poor and thin but the garden is sheltered from the worst of the prevailing winds. Natural oak and hazel surround the old crofting fields which are gradually becoming rhododendron glades and there are a few fine beeches and silver firs.

Planting has continued steadily since 1969 with the emphasis on materials collected in the wild by Cox and Hutchinson. Early introductions from the Assam Himalayas in 1965 include *Ilex nothofagifolia* for the first time and a new species of rhododendron, *Rb. subansiriense*. The SBEC trip to the Cang Shan range in Yunnan in 1981 produced a rich harvest, including the first introduction of *Rb. Sinogrande* since George Forrest and classic plants such as *Rb. Lacteum*.

Since that time the seed of 15 expeditions to the Himalayas, Tibet and China have contributed to the garden. A comprehensive collection of big leafed rhododendrons is being planted in the Lower Wood, epiphytes are festooning the moss-covered rocks as in their native habitat and the Burn Path is home to plants that like as much sun as Argyll can give them."

The following brief descriptions of some of the plant highlights at Baravalla have been kindly contributed by Mrs Penny Airlie (Mrs Greenfingers of The Squeak)

"The Rhododendron collection at Baravalla is a perfect example of the range and size, shape and colour of the Rhododendron species. These number well over a thousand to date and are growing all the time thanks

to the plant hunters of today like the Cox family of Glendoick in Perthshire.

The examples in the collection range from huge specimens like *Rb. Sinogrande* with leaves as long as 30 inches and height up to 80 feet, to the tiny dwarf specimens like *Rb. Yungningense* that creep at ground level or keep a tentative hold on a rock face along with mosses and ferns. Slightly more tender specimens such as *Rb. Arboreum* thrive in the climate of the West coast and were about to burst into flower ranging in colour from red and pink to pure white. The flowers contrast with the dark green evergreen foliage with its silvery-fawn or cinnamon-brown indumentum on the underside. Unfortunately, the earlier varieties had done their bit and flowered before our visit and the later ones, like the yakusimanums, were standing in the wings ready for their own magnificent entrance.

The Magnolias were in fine form only stilted in the full extent of their capability by late frosts. Nevertheless, a spectacular sight was presented by the huge pink flowers of the *M. campbellii* and the smaller white flowers of the *M. x loebneri* 'Leonard Messel'.

The large collection of native and non-native trees added to the enjoyment of the visit. One such specimen was the huge Monterey Pine *Pinus radiata* which grows to a majestic 200 feet. The cones of this tree grow to 4 inches long and will stay on the tree for up to 30 years. The wonderful, multi-coloured bark of two enormous, 70ft eucalypts was a joy to behold."

Welcome refreshments at the close of the visit were kindly provided by Mrs Mackie Campbell and Val Barker. The wind at road level was ferocious and freezing, demonstrating just how sheltered is the Garden!

The Leacainn Muir Forest Drive to Loch Awe – 19 July 2008 *C. Mitchell*

A wonderful drive was enjoyed by eleven Members and guests on the forest road from Loch Fyne to Loch Awe. The forest road can be travelled from Loch Fyne to Loch Awe or visa versa. The following write-up added enormously to the enjoyment as it points out places and things of interest along the way travelling from Auchindrain (Loch Fyne) to Braevallich (Loch Awe). It was prepared by one of our members, Mr Charlie Mitchell, who led the convoy and to whom our most sincere thanks for the following words and guidance on the day! Don't know how he managed it, but it rained whilst driving and then the sun shone when we stopped!

Forest Drive Hide - courtesy of Pat Holt



"The Leacainn Muir Forest Drive is a part of a network of timber extraction roads that was formed in order to take as much as possible of the heavy traffic away from Argyll's unsuitable single-track public roads. To complete a road link, a forest road on Lochfyneside was joined up with the Lochaweside forest road system and this allows timber lorries from there to travel over forest roads to Lochfyneside. This twelve and a half mile route makes a detour of a few miles around a steep ridge of hills, but this can be an added bonus to the tourists and sightseers during the time when the road is open to the public between April and October.

To make the best advantage of the road, there have been viewpoints, picnic sites, car parks and a walk made by it, and also a bird-watching hut has been erected by a shallow, reedy loch. The Loch Fyne end of the drive starts from the A83, opposite the Auchindrain Museum and enters the beginning of the forest across the Leacainn Water. There, an ancient track crosses over the hills to Lochaweside and, it was across this way, during a time of deep winter snow in 1644 that Coll Kitto and his army came on their way to sack Inveraray. The first part of that old road has now been taken over by a forest road and it was there just a short distance up the old road, that one winter's day in the early 1700s, a servant girl travelling over from Lochaweside was killed by a wolf. She had bravely fought back, stabbing the wolf with the sharp-pointed hand-spindle that she had been using to spin with as she walked, and the wolf was found lying dead nearby, but she had also unfortunately been killed. At least, that is how the story that has been passed down through the centuries has it.

Our road runs along the forested hillside and passes an old copper mine that has a fence around a blocked off shaft. When copper was first mined there is not known, but it is marked on George Langlands' map of 1801 and there has been early surface mining done. Then in 1839, the Duke of Argyll employed Mr Petherick, a mining expert from Cornwall, to drive

an adit, or shaft, in order to develop the mine, and that would seem to be this fenced in shaft; though there is also a narrow diameter tunnel driven into the hillside close by, that has its entrance closed in by wire-mesh. Mining carried on there for some three years, and how much copper was taken out is not known, but it was later discovered that the discarded spoil-heaps contained a large amount of nickel. These were sold for £700, and the Craigmure Mining Company formed to rework them extracted

Looking North up Loch Awe - courtesy of Pat Holt



some 320 tons of nickel ore. Very little in the way of spoil heaps can be seen today, but much mining waste would have provided very good road-mending material for the old road that passed by there. This old road, in the days before motor transport, carried thousands of cattle. Some of

these were from the Kilmichael Markets, but many others that were bound for the southern markets, came from as far afield as Kintyre and Islay.

The forest that we are driving through was created during the big forestry drive that took place during the Second World War. Most of the original trees have now been felled and the land replanted, though unfortunately still with the ubiquitous Sitka Spruce. The policy nowadays is to create a forest that has areas of different aged trees and, where possible, different species as that is much better for wildlife and flora. The environs of this older road have a good many wild flowers, especially the moisture-loving ones such as valerian, meadowsweet and marsh ragwort.

Soon we enter a stretch of younger, more recently created forest and climb to an open viewpoint on the shoulder of a hill. Here at a car park and picnic site we are looking out over Kilmichael Glen and the Cowal and Knapdale hills; with Arran in the distance and the body of water we see is Loch Glashan. Below us in the glen is what remains of Carron, with its onetime farm, cattle stance and nearby inn. One of the old farm buildings there has been converted into a bothy for hikers. The old route that we were earlier following branched at Carron, with one branch carrying on down to Kilmichael and the other going over the hills to Kilneuir on Lochaweside.

On leaving the viewpoint, our road swings round to the north and we pass by open Ederline Estate hills on the left. As this is eagle country and a pair often nest in the area, it is worth keeping a lookout for one of these magnificent birds. Dropping down off the hillside, we soon come to the car park for Loch Sidheannach where a bird-watching hut has been built by the water's edge and fitted out for the public's use. There is not a great variety of birds to be seen here, but it is a pleasant spot and in midsummer the lochan has masses of white water-lilies and, you never know, an osprey might drop in looking for a snack. Out from the hide

there is a tiny floating man-made island and such 'islands' are a favourite nesting place for red-throated divers and other waterside nesting birds. Across the road from the car park are the remains of a number of old shielings. These were simple stone and turf summer huts and would have been lived in mostly by young folks from one of the farming communities on Lochfyneside. There they would have herded their family's animals, made butter and done any other work required, while at the same time keeping the animals away from the growing crops on the low ground. Despite the work involved, these summer sojourns in the hills away from parental control were eagerly looked forward to.

On the many stony roadsides that we pass, there are lots of young Sitka spruce seedlings growing; and they grow very readily from the windblown seed: in fact so much so that they become a nuisance. After leaving Loch Sidheannach, we descend slightly and enter Braevallich Corrie, which is a large hollow in the hills, and we are now in Lochaweside lands. The corrie, in its pre-forest days, was home to innumerable rabbits who loved burrowing in its sandy hillocks. One such sandy deposit has been quarried into by the road makers and now a group of sand martins have adopted it as a nesting site and have dug their nesting burrows in its side. The roadside cuttings through such deposits give an interesting look into the recent geology of the area from the build up of peat in recent millennia, back to deposits that were laid down by ice and water. Ice deposited material is usually recognized by the fact that it is a mixture of differently sized material whereas water deposited material is generally all efficiently sorted out by size into gravel, sand and clay, etc.

After leaving the sand martins' quarry, look out for a stone shieling, above a high banking. There are five old ruins there and they would have been the shielings of the Braevallich farmers. Access to them can be got by going back some hundred yards. One of the ruins has had a small stone pen built in it and this was a shepherd's twinning pen that was used

to bond lambs with a foster mother. Ahead we start to drive down Braevallich Glen and on the right, by a car park and picnic site, a short spur road leads down to the main intake for the recently built Braevallich Hydro Electric Scheme. As there is only parking and turning for one motor down at its small dam, it is advisable to walk down if you wish to see it. Back in the post-war hydro-electric scheme building days of the 50s and 60s, a scheme for a large dam just above there was planned. This would have flooded the corrie and connected other water supplies into it. All the surveying and drilling work had been done for the scheme, but with the advent of North Sea oil and nuclear power, such hydro schemes were viewed as uneconomical and were abandoned.

Ahead our road runs along high above the Braevallich Burn and a nature walk has been made along below that gives a good chance of seeing roe or red deer. The tributary burn that we cross ahead is the Meaniglen Burn which drains from several lochs in the hills above. The largest of these is called Loch nan Eilean but, in the past, it was often called Tom Johnston's loch. He was Secretary of State for Scotland during the Second World War and had a holiday hut and boat at it; and even during the war, he would disappear for days at a time up into the hills, fishing. He had a dream of using the Highland's plentiful water and suitable terrain to generate its electricity. At the end of the war he was mainly responsible for setting up the North of Scotland Hydro Board which built hydro schemes all over the Highlands and more or less fulfilled his dream.

From the Meaniglen we swing away from the Braevallich Glen and drive across the hillside. Below is an old stone sheep fank that is a relic from the days when all the land for miles was part of a large sheep farm. Not far ahead we come to what I believe is one of the best views on Lochaweside. There we are looking out over the loch towards Ben Cruachan with Inverliever Forest on the left and Eredine Forest on the right. Below us are the old settlements of Braevallich and Durran with its

heather and rhododendron nursery and fish farm. Ahead is the old Eredine estate house and beyond the onetime inn at Portinnisherrick; with close inshore Innisherrick Island, with its old graveyard and chapel remains. The next island is the Goat or Middle Island and, out in the middle of the loch towards hidden Dalavich, is the small Priest Island with its tiny ruined priest cell. Close inshore on the right can just be seen the old Campbell clan's stronghold of Innischonnel Castle on its island.

Ahead we start to drive through the Ardary section of the Eredine forest and come to another good viewpoint and car park, and then a number of bat boxes on the trees, with beyond many wind-blown trees, both from old gales and the past winter's ones. At an open spot where the forest has been replanted with Norway spruce trees, we have a good view across the loch to the double Innis Stiuire, or Steer Island, which was so named because of the habit of steam boats in the past using it to set a course by. Along the loch side, a short distance to the left, can be seen Fiddler's Point which has an ancient burial ground, traces of a chapel and a rock carving. This carving of two cowed monks with between them an enclosed and handled cross could perhaps be what gave the place its name; that is, if someone had referred to the central carving as a fiddle. Ahead we are running along above the public road and the trees between the two roads have been thinned out and are being allowed to grow to a larger size than is usual in the local forests. The normal practice these days is to fell the trees at about forty years old and then replant.

Soon we reach the B840 which is the end of the forest drive. The park, picnic site and viewpoint at the loch-side make a fitting end to our journey through the forest."

Forthcoming Excavation Project.

In October this year, Kilmartin House Museum begins excavation of Balure Dun, which is located in North Knapdale. We will be running an open day, and there will be opportunities for volunteers, so check the Museum's web site to see how you can get involved (www.kilmartin.org) or contact Katy Crowson at the Museum on 01546 510 278.

Kilmory Oib Excavation Open Day

More than 100 people, including 20 NHASMA members attended the Kilmory Oib excavation open day, run by Kilmartin House Museum in May this year. Kilmory Oib is a deserted settlement close to Loch Collie Bharr. Visitors were given a guided tour of the site and the excavations by site director Roddy Regan. Catherine and Clare Gilles from the MacDougal Trust demonstrated natural dyeing with plants, and spinning. Madeline Crawford brought along a collection of objects from Auchindrain Museum which would have been used by the inhabitants of the settlement in the 18th C, and Sharon Webb showed visitors the finds from the excavation. Children were able to try out the quern stone to grind grain to make flour, as people would have had to do. A very informative day was had by all and the Museum hopes to run more open days with hands-on activities in the future.

A report on the archaeological findings will appear in the next KIST.

The review of Letters by the Packet in Kist 75 omitted to mention how this book may be obtained. Copies may be obtained from Eleanor Harris, Argyll & Bute Library Service, Highland Avenue, Sandbank, Dunoon, PA23 8PB. It is one of a range of local history books published by the Library Service.

Book Reviews & Letters To Editor

Laggan Days, Angus Martin, 2008. Available from author at 13 Saddell St. Campbeltown, PA28 6DN.

This 32-page collection is subtitled: "a series of poems in memory of Tarbert poet George Campbell Hay 1915-1984". Most are intended to be read as if Hay had written them, and give the reader various insights into his life – particularly the troubled times. Hay's work, in both Gaelic and Scots as well as in other languages, is closely associated with the Loch Fyne fishermen, and with the land and seascape around Tarbert in particular.

The young Angus was

Laggan Days

A series of poems in memory of
Tarbert poet
George Campbell Hay
1915-84



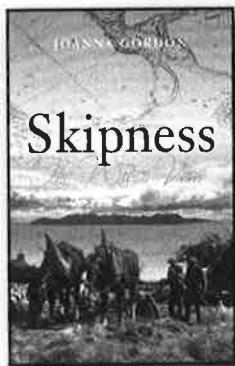
Angus Martin

inspired by his poetry and exchanged letters with him when Hay was living in Edinburgh. The title of this collection, "Laggan Days", refers to a remote loch set in moorland between Tarbert and Skipness. Hay loved to walk this area. Angus – as he explains in his introduction – has made various attempts to visit the loch, each of which, amusingly, ended in failure. It serves as a window into the past, through which Angus gazes, seeking to understand the man behind a prolific series of poems spanning six decades.

To the Editor of Kist. In Kist 75 Gillian Mackie Campbell writes of the purchase of Kintarbert in 1932 by Major and Mrs. McTier from the Campbells of Skipness.

However, Skipness itself was purchased in 1866 by Mrs. Graham, then of Brooksby, from William Thomas Fraser, whose brother James married a Campbell of Dunmore (ref. my book *Skipness, The Wider View*, p.s. 88-91). By 1932 the (Fraser) Campbells of Dunmore were no longer Campbells of Skipness.

My late uncle Robert Francis Graham of Skipness held the Estate until 1936, when it was sold to its present proprietors, the James family. To my knowledge, no proprietor of Skipness has ever had property on the North Side of West Loch Tarbert.



Yours sincerely Joanna Gordon MA, FSA Scot

Editor's note. In 2006 Birlinn published Joanna Gordon's **Skipness – The Wider View**, an illustrated history of the area spanning geology, archaeology, natural history and, above all, genealogy. It sold out soon after publication. We hope that it will be reprinted.

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