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## Smugglers' Glen Uncovered

29 July 2011

A local Highland history group have found the remains of a hotbed of the Scottish whisky distilling and smuggling trade in Strathconon, a remote glen to the west of Dingwall.

Evidence of the extent of this illicit practice was discovered by the North of Scotland Archaeological Society (NOSAS) and researched in detail with help from the Scotland's Rural Past (SRP) project, whose team of experts provided training and support for NOSAS volunteers in identifying, recording and raising awareness of historic rural settlements and landscapes.

Private distilling became illegal in 1780 and, for over half a century, Strathconon glen hid a thriving industry producing whisky on a massive scale. It was only the introduction of large-scale sheep farming and the 1846 potato famine that finally broke up this secret community. In the course of surveying the glen, NOSAS volunteers discovered evidence of large malt kilns and barns, and over 50 bothies where the whisky was distilled and stored.

The survey results have now been published by NOSAS in *Strathconon – The History and Archaeology of a Northeast Highland Glen*, which also recounts the attempts by the locals to outwit the Customs and Excise authorities by camouflaging the still bothies, bribing landlords and smuggling the whisky to its waiting customers.

*"The area of Strathconon was an ambitious target and our survey work took three years to complete,"* said Meryl Marshall, the author of the book. *"But, by the end of it, we had unearthed so much that was new and exciting that we felt we had to make our discoveries available to everyone in the form of a publication."*

Tertia Barnett, SRP project manager, said *"NOSAS members have researched and written the history of an entire glen, which is a wonderful achievement. The Strathconon project and publication demonstrate the key aims of SRP: working with local community groups to record and promote our rural past."*

NOSAS plan to continue the project in the future by excavating specific areas of interest. *Strathconon – The History and Archaeology of a Northeast Highland Glen* will be launched at the Strathconon Highland Games, Dalbreac on Saturday 30 July 2011.



### Links

- [North of Scotland Archaeological Society](#)
- [Scotland's Rural Past Website](#)
- [Scotland's Rural Past Conference 2011](#)