

NOSAS 1998-2008

NOSAS celebrated its tenth anniversary in style with a buffet at the Kenneth Street Church Hall in Inverness after the Annual General Meeting on October 18th during the Highland Archaeology Festival.

After a brief welcome from the Chair, Emma Sanderson, and Secretary, Meryl Marshall, Professor Martin Carver proposed a toast to NOSAS and its continued success. The event, organised by Susan Kruse, attracted a large number of members from across the region and notable guests including Professor Carver, Noel Fojut from Historic Scotland and Trevor Cowie of the National Museum.

Professor Martin Carver toasting the continued success of the Society



NOSAS members had already been actively involved in all aspects of this year's Archaeology Festival; organising field trips from the Spey to Caithness, from the Black Isle to Assynt, an exhibition in Rosemarkie but the highpoint of the Festival was the Conference, held this year in the Waterside Hotel.

Standing alongside the great and the good of Scottish Archaeology, Ronnie Scott's presentation on the Laikenbuie Ring Cairn, Anna Welti and Gordon Sleight's description of the work at Braemore Square and John Wombell's intriguing insight into the study of cup-marked stones in Easter Ross gave the audience an idea of the breadth of fieldwork and study in which NOSAS members are involved. But, above all, it was Anne Combs' presentation "Digging Deeper into the Archaeology of the Highlands" that served to underline the outstanding contribution made to Highland Archaeology by NOSAS over the last 10 years.

Digging Deeper into the Archaeology of the Highlands

In 1994 Aberdeen University's Department of Continuing Education began a distance-learning course on field archaeology based in Highland with the very active support of the Highland Council Archaeology Team led by John Wood, Dorothy Low and Allison Fox.

The students had such an avid enthusiasm for archaeology that they went on to form the North of Scotland Archaeological Society. The inaugural meeting took place on 29th September 1998 and the first Chairman was Chris Neill. One of the first events was a day spent field walking at Conon Mains Farm with finds including 2 beautiful flint arrowheads. This was a good omen as an arrowhead had already been adopted as the NOSAS logo.

Early members learnt their skills at the coalface of the Easter Raits excavation with archaeologists Janet Hooper and Olivia Lelong where the planning frame and plane table were simple but effective tools to record a site. These, possibly now, old fashioned but inexpensive and readily available pieces of equipment, still form the basis of much of NOSAS's work.

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The Society's regular autumn and spring weekends have visited most areas of the Highlands. They frequently include prospecting for unknown or unrecorded sites but also visit well known sites, such as the Sunart Woodlands, Camas Nan Geall and the Shielfoot vitrified fort. Single day or half day events are used to pass on and develop skills. Plane tabling forms an effective way of getting to grips with a single structure or a complex landscape. Alongside the traditional methods we are lucky to have Meryl Marshall's unique planning system, which gives a very accurate and clear visual record of a landscape.



In spring 2001 John Wombell introduced us to Loch Hourn. This single event has developed into a considerable project. With the support of SCAPE and Historic Scotland we surveyed the north shore and found 282 sites between the shoreline and a quarter of a kilometre inland along eight kilometres of the inner loch. We also surveyed the burial isle and began the process of learning about the history of the estates around the loch. Staying at Kinlochhourn Lodge meant that no matter how wet we got and we got very wet many times we were able to dry out by the morning. We have returned several times not just for more of Eileen's famous sticky toffee pudding but also to survey the south shore adding yet more sites to the record and to excavate some of the structures.

One of the theories we have developed is that many of the features around Loch Hourn are associated with the herring fishing dating from the 18th century. This has led to many other visits to other fishing sites at Eilean Horrisdale and Torridon and lots of research into herring fishing and has included me falling out of boats on several occasions. This year we reached the outer loch and the end of the project is, faintly, in sight. This project, like so many of our activities, is deeply entrenched in the local community whose knowledge and support make our visits so enjoyable.

In 2004 Meryl Marshall led us into another area, that of Glen Feshie and the scandal of the Duchess of Bedford and Landseer. We did not concentrate solely on the scandal but we found and drew up plans of the infamous huts and then moved onto the urgent matter of planning and conserving the chimney of another hut that was in danger of falling down. That completed we looked at other sites in the glen and in 2004 and 2006 spent a week excavating 2 shieling sites. It is possible of course that we created our own small scandal by swimming in the river at the end of a very hot days digging. I should add that we were all decently clad.

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The culmination of Meryl's research was the production of the Glen Feshie book, produced with the support of the Cairngorm National Park Authority and NOSAS. This in turn has led to success in the Marsh archaeological awards last year, a success that belongs primarily to Meryl.

At present NOSAS are involved in the Scotland's Rural Past project surveying Strathconon. To date the group, led by Meryl, have added 930 sites to the Sites and Monuments Record. Community involvement has been hugely important with local knowledge helping us to discover the how and why of many sites. It is also an opportunity to collect oral evidence, yet another new skill

Following on from the Strathconon project is our association with the Forestry Commission Scotland and the Workers Education Association. We have surveyed a deserted township at Rogie, contributing to the historical landscape interpretation for walkers and cyclists. Surveying and recording are the foundations of what NOSAS does and Susan Kruse and the Workers Education Association have researched the archives relating to the sites NOSAS has surveyed. This has greatly expanded our understanding of the structural remains, adding real people to the stones and wonderful vignettes of the lives they lived. This serves to underline the inevitable mix of archaeology and history, always so difficult to separate, if we want to know what really happened and that is what NOSAS does want to know.



Rogie, a conjectural visualisation

A sample of recent events that members have taken part in includes recording mottes in Ross-shire, digging at Learnie caves and gravestone recording. NOSAS members continue to be involved in digs run by other organisations. Birnie is still a regular event and although Laikenbuie is finished Applecross, Brora and Braemore Square still have a place in the calendar. HAF of course with Archaeology month is a chance to share our interests and favourite places with a wider public.

We continue to develop new projects, the investigation of the old road through Ross-shire is in its early stages but it will grow during the coming year. Cup marked rocks are popping up all over Easter Ross, as John Wombell will tell you. The autumn weekend will be in Strath Brora this year. But if you have a pet project let the committee know and we will be interested and hope to visit your area.



NOSAS
www.nosas.co.uk

Membership Secretary and Librarian - Trina Wombell
Social Secretary – Brigitte Geddes
Newsletter Editor - Dave Rendell

Soils Skills Building, Loch Ussie

Modern communications mean we can email the newsletter to members although we are happy to send it out by mail if preferred. There is also a regularly updated web site. In the near future it is planned to re-locate the extensive NOSAS library into the new Dingwall library to make it more accessible to members.

Development of new skills and renewal of old ones are important to the continuation of NOSAS. We have continued to learn new surveying techniques, GPS and digital cameras have meant we have changed our recording methods, some of us have even partially learnt how to use power point. Many of our members are involved in running local YACs enthusing the next generation. Recent day courses have been run by Scotland's Rural Past with the Royal Commission after NOSAS asked for their assistance in continuing the development of our surveying skills. The Forestry Commission Scotland through Brian Duff provided us with a whole new landscape at Rogie to investigate. Understanding the landscape is essential and people like Jim Kirby of Sunart, Graham Tully and Peter Quelch have shared their knowledge of historic tree management to inform our interpretation of sites. Trees enable us to date a site but also were used for everything from cattle grazing through to the provision of cruck frames and a smokeless fuel for illicit stills. A desire to understand how human activities changed not just trees but vegetation led several members to participate in a two-day soils course run by Stirling University, supported by the Skills Building for the Future. In theory now we understand our podsols from our bioturbation, maybe.

In conclusion we have measured, dug, walked, fallen out of boats, crawled, hitched lifts, met the locals all over the Highlands during the last ten years. But above all whatever the weather, and it has been wet, cold and sometimes very wet indeed, we have always had lots of fun.

Anne Coombs

Annual General Meeting, 2008

34 members attended the Society's AGM, held on Saturday 18th October in the Waterside Hotel, Inverness at the end of the afternoon session of the Highland Archaeology Festival Seminar.

Emma Sanderson was in the chair.

Meryl Marshall (Secretary) and Allan Mackenzie (Treasurer) gave their reports and John Wombell, on behalf of Trina, gave a report on the current situation with regard to the Society's Library.

George Grant and John Wombell indicated that they wished to stand down from the Committee. The following members of Committee were then elected:

Chairperson - Emma Sanderson
Vice-Chairperson - Anne Coombs
Treasurer - Allan Mackenzie
Secretary - Meryl Marshall

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Committee members

Brian Duff, David Findlay, Lynn Fraser, Janet Hooper, Paul Humphreys, Susan Kruse, Cait MacCullagh and Alastair Morton

Pam Draper won the draw of those who had filled in the membership questionnaire and her membership fee is waived for the next year.

The only other item under AOCB came from Anne Coombs, who told us about the Autumn Weekend she is arranging for the Society at Brora (November 22-23),

Meryl Marshall



Meryl Marshall welcomes members, friends and guests to the Anniversary Buffet

Strathconon

A very successful **Field Day** took place in Glen Meinich on Wednesday 22nd October. This glen was one of the first areas to be cleared and advertised as a sheep walk in 1810. We were able to drive right up to the top of the glen so saving a lot of footwork. Seven of us divided into 3 teams and between us we recorded 70 features, from stills and shielings to deserted crofts and sheep stells.





A still site in Glen Meinich

I spent an intensive day at the **National Archive of Scotland** in Edinburgh in October and located several useful documents some of which I was able to have photocopied:

1. A Rental of 1717 relating to the upper glen that mentions names and places. This was in the papers of the Forfeited Estates, the Estates having been confiscated by the Government following Seaforth's part in the 1715 rebellion.
2. Photographs of 1880, showing several houses with thatched roofs.
3. The detailed specification for the mill with waterwheel and kiln at Miltown dated 1854 (yet to be surveyed).

The **NOSAS/HAF walk to Glen Marksie** was very well attended. Over 40 people did this short circular walk which including a great variety of sites - an early (1920's) hydro-electric scheme, a farmstead and all that goes with it, the rock shelter, the footings of earlier buildings, culturally modified trees and mica mines. Nearly everyone said how much they had enjoyed it and those who live on the doorstep said that they had never known there was so much history to the place!!

A few of us are to be interviewed for a **BBC Radio Scotland** programme about the Strathconon Project and our findings. The programmes will highlight some of the SRP projects. We will be visiting some of the sites in the glen with the BBC later in November and recounting some of our experiences and the history of the glen.



The view above Achlorachan,
looking down towards Loch Meig

As far as the future is concerned no more Field Days are planned just yet - I am trying to get to grips with the reports for the first two phases of the project and the **Scotland's Rural Past Conference** which takes place in Dunkeld on the 15th November.

If you are interested in receiving information via the email circulation list please let me know, conversely if you wish to be taken off the list please let me know.

Meryl Marshall

NOSAS FIELD NOTES

Inverlael

Until 1788, and the development of Ullapool as a major fishing centre, population in this part of Wester Ross was centred around the head of Loch Broom.

Cathy Dagg has been researching the area around Inverlael and Gordon Sleight and Anna Welti took the opportunity, during the Highland Archaeology Festival Fortnight, to take the Historic Assynt Survey Team to Inverlael and carry out a survey of the deserted settlement.



Despite heavy rain and high winds the team, and a number of interested visitors, managed to survey the main structures and place them within the context of a rapidly changing economic and social landscape.

The Green, Eday

The June number of NOSAS NEWS had an item in which BEVARs (British Excavation Volunteers and Archaeological Research Society) asked for volunteers to dig on a Neolithic site at Green, on the Isle of Eday, Orkney, during either the first or last week in August.

I volunteered, and was accepted, for the last week, being unavailable for the first one.

I joined the BEVARs, and, after lots of e-mails, duly arrived on Eday on the early morning ferry from Kirkwall one Monday morning, to be greeted by Ronnie Scott; this was a pleasant surprise, as I knew Ronnie, and he was a great help to a "new girl" at a dig which had already run for three weeks. Ronnie was Site Manager, and responsible for deploying his diggers and drawing and photographing the site.

This was the second year of digging on this site, which was discovered, by Peter Mason and Chris Squires on their own land several years ago, since when they have not ploughed it. A trial excavation in 2007 had convinced the Site Director, Mick Miles, that this was a Neolithic settlement site, and this year's dig uncovered the walls of part of two rooms, probably of different dates, and two hearths.

Finds were sparse but did include an super incised stone bearing some similarities to the symbol stone from Pool on Sanday, a miniature axe head, and a polished knife. Charcoal should provide radiocarbon dates for the site.

I enjoyed the trowelling on the four beautiful fine days which we were blessed with (and only a very short spell of midgey plague), and the two wet days were usefully occupied with wet-sieving and finds analysis. Eday is a lovely island, though shortage of time on the sunny days prevented me from exploring it all. Being the last week of the dig, we had to cover up the whole site with sand (earth) bags and plastic sheeting to prevent the weather, and worse, the rabbits, damaging the site, where digging is, hopefully, to resume next year. This work was too heavy for me so I was "odd jobs" person for the final day.

Our accommodation was a modernised cottage within about 300 metres of the site, and was comfortable for the seven participants of the last week; this was about the average size of group throughout the dig, I gather.



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Working at Eday, 2008

Several new and ongoing Neolithic sites are being dug each summer on Orkney - the Neolithic centre of this part of the world - making it a most exciting place to visit (quite apart from the superb bird life on the islands).

Pamela Draper.

**The next Committee Meeting is on Tuesday,
December 2nd.**
Members of the Society wishing to raise any issue(s) should contact the Secretary, Meryl Marshall
Meryl.Marshall@tesco.net

A Dyker's Hut on the South Kintail Ridge

On the 31st of May this year Trina, Colin Miller and myself went off to look for dyker's huts on the South Kintail Ridge.

It was a glorious day. Having parked at the Malagan Bridge, we followed the line of the old military road below the present day main road, parts of which survive in good condition.



The Old Military Road

Scaling Craig na Damh (918m), more or less straight up as I recall, we followed the line of a derelict iron fence rather than a footpath. Heading west along the ridge we found the remarkably well-preserved remains of a dyker's hut just below the ridge, facing south, in accordance with our prior stalker's intelligence, which we duly recorded.



The dyker's hut, South Kintail Ridge

John Wombell



Excavation in progress during the Birnie Open Day 2008

As usual NOSAS stalwarts played an active part in the excavations at Birnie this year and the Open Day turned into an impromptu NOSAS meeting, with members from across the region taking the opportunity to see the site and catch up on the latest news of NOSAS activities in the Highlands.

Lynn Fraser informs us that the excavation now has its own website at: http://www.nms.ac.uk/discover_celts_romans_birnie.aspx where you can catch up on the very latest news and interpretations of this important, and ongoing, project.

Books for Archaeologists

Most members will have heard of and probably used Amazon.com as a good source for archaeology and history books. Two other sources of note are Oxbow Books: <http://www.oxbowbooks.com/home.cfm/Location/Oxbow> and Postscript Books: <http://www.psbooks.co.uk/>

Oxbow Books, based in Oxford, are publishers and booksellers with an extensive range of archaeological books, some of which are greatly reduced in price. Postscript is a long-established mail order company specialising in good quality publishers' overstocks and remainder books at discounts of up to 80% off the published price.

Doctor William Maclean

Chris and Dave Rendell are trying to complete their work on Dr Maclean, the original excavator of Caird's Cave at

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Rosemarkie, and are desperately seeking a photograph of the man himself. Details of the research to date can be found on their website: <http://www.iterations.co.uk>

Information about possible sources of photographs would be much appreciated.

Contact Chris or Dave on 01349 867006 or email them at dacamacsys@btinternet.com

NOSAS DIARY

**NOSAS Autumn Weekend
22nd and 23rd November 2008**

Come to our annual weekend, the first in a series of events planned to celebrate our 10th anniversary. We will be doing a walkover of Grudie, a deserted settlement in Strath Brora on Saturday and on Sunday we will survey several structures in the settlement. There is something for everyone from a stone circle, hut circles, burnt mounds, mounds of iron slag, longhouses, kilns and mills. But of course before the weekend is over it is likely that we will have found several more buildings, shielings and even a cup marked stone or two.

If you have never been to a NOSAS event now is your chance. We hope that people will be keen to come for the whole weekend but if that is too much come for a day or part of a day. We will be refreshing our identification and plane tabling skills and there will be people there to teach anyone who has not done plane tabling before.

There is accommodation in Brora and Golspie.

Meet 9.30 Saturday and Sunday at the gate south of Dalreavoch Lodge (just north of the bridge over the River Brora) NC 7548 0889. Packed lunch and clothing appropriate for a day on the hill.

Further events, workshops, surveying days and visits, are in the planning stage but if you have any pet sites you would like visiting please let me know as there are several spaces in 2009 not filled yet.

To book your place and for further details email me or phone: Anne Coombs: Anne.Coombs@scotland.gsi.gov.uk 01862 810431.

**SRP two-day training course on
Historical Document Research.
Edinburgh, 11th -12th December**

This course will introduce participants to the principal sources available for the study of deserted rural settlements in Scotland and how to access them.

The course is FREE and limited funding is available towards the cost of travel and accommodation expenses where necessary.

If you are interested in attending, closing date for applications is Friday 21st November. Course numbers are limited to sixteen and if over-subscribed, preference will be given to those who are already participating in an SRP project.



This course is run twice a year: the next course will be held in June or July 2009 – dates will be advertised on our website <http://www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk> once they have been confirmed.

Ishbel MacKinnon
SRP Field officer
John Sinclair House
16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 9NX

NOSAS Christmas Dinner

Saturday, 13th December 2008

6.00 pm for 6.30 pm

at

The Red Poppy Restaurant

British Legion

High Street, Dingwall

£19.95 per person

Booking with payment direct to Allan Mackenzie

(by Tuesday, 9th December)

Braeval, Brae of Kinkell, Conon Bridge

Ross-Shire IV7 8HZ

Meryl Marshall will talk about Glen Feshie and the CBA Marsh

Award at the end of the Dinner.

Further details and queries to Brigitte Geddes

01955 605055

study@allezweb.co.uk

Membership Subscriptions 2008-2009

A reminder from the Treasurer that subscriptions for the current year, 2008-2009, are now due.

Contact

Allan Mackenzie

Braeval, Brae of Kinkell, Conon Bridge

Ross-Shire IV7 8HZ

£12.50 (couples at same address £20.00)



**NOSAS Christmas Dinner
RedPoppy @ the Legion**

Deep Fried Brie



THE MORAY
SOCIETY

ELGIN
MUSEUM

Beakers, Bones & Birnie

Archaeological Conference

