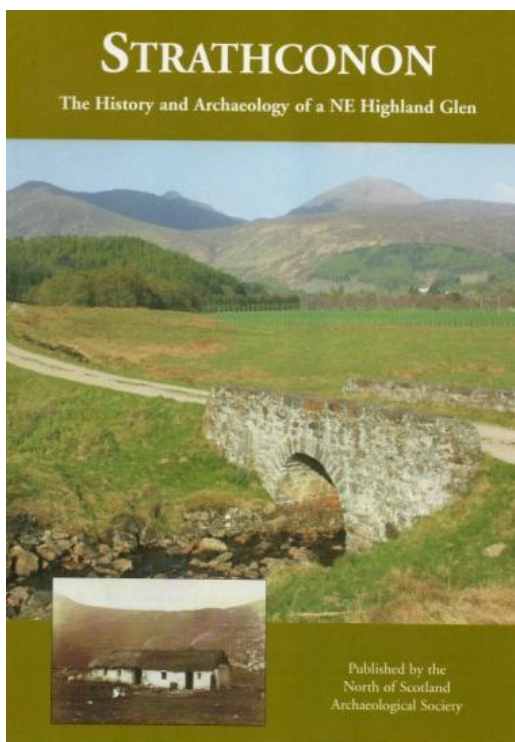


The launch of 'Strathconon, The History and Archaeology of a NE Highland Glen'

At last "the book" is finished and to hand! It has been a labour of love but I am well pleased with the result. For those who were around a few years ago it follows the same format as the Glen Feshie book – semi-glossy, A4 size, with lots of photos and maps.



For those who have not been involved in the project or who are new to NOSAS the book is the culmination of our 3-year project to identify survey and record the archaeology of Strathconon. By the end of the project we had unearthed so much that was new and exciting that it was felt appropriate to make it available to everyone in the form of a publication. The book tells the story of the glen and its population at a time of great upheaval and controversial change and relates it to the archaeological sites that are seen on the ground today.

The book will be formally launched at the Strathconon Highland Games, Dalbreac, on Saturday, July 30th 2011 and signed copies will be on sale. This will be a good opportunity for members to get together, so do come along; we will have a booth at the Games.

Following the Strathconon Games copies of the book will be available from me, from local retailers in Ross-shire and Inverness and hopefully from the Amazon website. The retail price is £9 (£10 p&p) but to NOSAS members it will be available (from me) for £8.

Meryl Marshall
mm.marshall321@btinternet.com

Kinlochourn 2011

Just when we thought we had found everything on Kinlochourn Estate, yet more shielings turn up, and this situation is what we shall probably find happening elsewhere when Anne's much anticipated transhumance project gets under way. The latest discoveries were made in February this year whilst some of the usual suspects were returning along the Coire Reidh (and Scurr na Sgine) stalkers path from a trip to look at a small planting of Scots Pine away in the wilderness.

Over the past 20 years I have been up and down this path a good number of times on foot, on a quad, and driving a quad. On foot one is watching one's feet as well as the landscape, as a passenger on a quad one is usually hanging on for dear life, and when driving a quad you have to keep your mind on the job or dire consequences may follow. But this February I was sitting up high on the back of an Argocat when I spotted ruins quite close to the path that we hadn't noticed before.



Looking down onto the Bracken covered shieling grounds in Coire Mhogh Sgeir, Loch Hourn, June 2011

To cut the story short, Colin Miller, Anne Coombs and myself got the chance to return and record the ruins in June. The place has no known name and no nearby features named on the OS map, so we have called the shieling 'Airigh nan Eun' as we sat down on a boulder for lunch right beside an owl pellet.



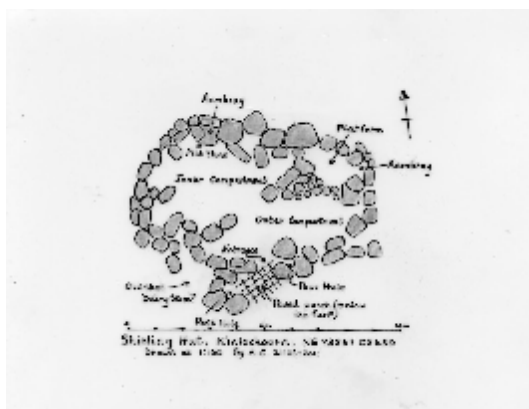
Small simple design shieling hut at Airigh nan Eun, Kinlochourn June 2011
Note entrance near right carefully blocked

There are just three substantial structures in the group, two of which are somewhat extraordinary as shieling structures go. The site is part way up Buidhe Bheinn, the well known Corbet that towers above Kinlochourn, situated in pretty awful ground - mostly Purple Moor Grass, Deer Grass and scruffy Heather with a little Bracken. Two of the structures are built within a postglacial outwash of boulders and big stones. There appears to have been little or no disturbance to any of the structures since abandonment. The smallest building is unremarkable - see photograph, about 2m square internally and the entrance was carefully blocked on departure - so someone thought then they were coming back.

The larger structure in the outwash is most unusual as shieling huts go, as can be seen from Anne's sketched drawing. It is big - 7m x 3m internal, oval in shape, with a tiny external porch and entrance, (paved beneath the sod), then a sort of vestibule with what looks like a sleeping platform off it in one gable corner and another larger compartment at the other gable separated by a partition that runs diagonally across the structure. Outside there is a tiny outshot with an external entrance that we interpreted as a dairy. Two postholes were evident on either side of the porch. All rather sophisticated for a shieling hut.

News from Applecross

The Applecross Community Archaeology Training Project got underway this month. Despite clashing with the Ullapool Tall Ships and Lochcarron Games, a small and dedicated team carried out two days of investigating corn kilns in Applecross.



Plan of Shieling Hut, Kinlochourn

The third building lies nearby but outwith the outwash fan. It is rectangular in plan, of good size - 6m x 2.5m internal, squared corners inside and out, with an external cut off ditch on two sides, and the building appears to have been constructed entirely of turf, with the only use of stone being a single large stone at either side of the entrance, and what looks like a stone dresser at one end of the building. The tussocky back turf wall remains upstanding, to about 0.6m in height. Other bits and bobs were found in and out of the outwash fan - nooks between boulders that may have been used as pens, and we discovered a fine path that lead to the shieling group from the main Arnisdale /Glen Beag/ Glen Mor to Kinlochourn path in the valley bottom below, built then abandoned long before the staking paths were constructed.

Over two days we discovered several more sites and re-visited several more shielings found in 2004 for a closer look, including high up in Coire Mhogh Sgeir where we did battle once more with near vertical slopes and 8ft tall Bracken. Inside two of the latter we noted small circular mounds faced with flat stones that we hadn't seen before. Burials possibly? If poor old Jock died at his shieling 15 miles from home and he wasn't found for a few weeks - well - I'll leave you to think about it.

The whole of Kinlochourn Estate as recent as 200 years ago was laid out as various shieling grounds that were attached to farms as far away as Sandaig on the coast facing Skye, at Arnisdale, and in Glen Mor to the north up to 15 miles distant over mountain passes.

John Wombell



Work in progress at Torgarve Corn Kiln

On Day 1 we cleaned off the vegetation and removed some rubble from the Torgarve kiln, which will be a feature of the archaeological trail, then did a measured plan and photographic record for the HER.

On Day 2 we visited four more kilns in north Applecross, and had long and interesting discussions about various uses for kilns, including kelp, and kilns possibly associated with illicit distilling.

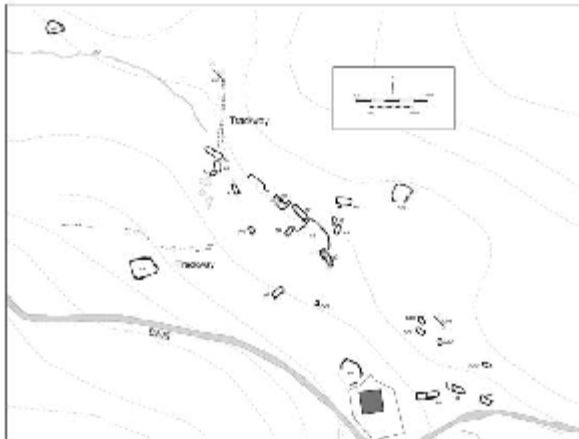
The next training session, September 10th and 11th, will be a weekend of learning about geophysical survey techniques with Rose Geophysical Consultants from Orkney.

The training will cover gradiometer and resistance survey, and we hope to carry out a plane table survey of the visible features of the Langwell depopulated township at the same time. All NOSAS members are welcome to come along. It would be good if you could let me know if you plan definitely to come, so we have an idea of numbers.

Cathy Dagg

Digging into Assynt's Past

The 'Life and Death in Assynt' project is focussed on a programme of excavation and consolidation at three of Assynt's classic sites, Loch Borralan East Chambered Cairn, Clachtoll Broch and the Glenleraig Pre-clearance Longhouse.



Glenleraig

Historic Assynt's long-term aim is to investigate, interpret and improve access to the important archaeological sites of the area and eventually to create a network of well-researched and accessible sites across the parish. With the late medieval /early modern period already represented by Ardvreck Castle and the other conserved structures at Inchnadamph the present project will draw attention to the extensive Neolithic remains in the Ledmore area, the concentration of Iron Age sites on the coast and the parish wide spread of pre-clearance settlement remains.

After several months of delays and frustrations negotiating the labyrinthine processes of different funding agencies, we are up and running! Everything is now in place and work will begin on 8 August under the direction of AOC Archaeology.

Excavation dates

Clachtoll 8 – 26 August

Borralan 28 August – 16 September

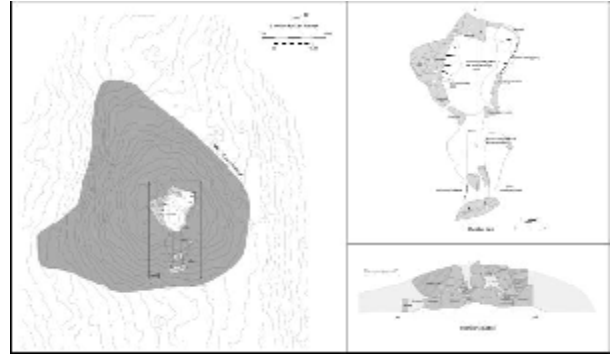
Glenleraig 16 September – 8 October

NOSAS Volunteers welcome

but please book through Gordon Sleight

01571 855207

gordon@gsleight.freeserve.co.uk



Loch Borralan Chambered Cairn

The excavations at the Chambered Cairn and the Longhouse will be single-season investigations with some consolidation of the structures. However we hope that this year's work at Clachtoll Broch will be the first stage of a more extensive programme of investigation and conservation over several seasons. This year we will be concentrating on the unstable entrance area, dismantling and then rebuilding the most precarious parts of the structure and at the same time excavating deposits within the walls and passageways.

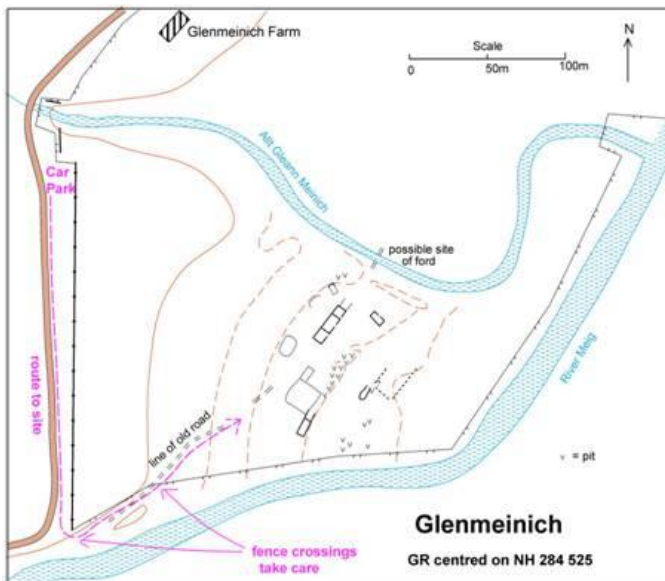


Clachtoll Broch

Gordon Sleight

Excavation of possible tattie pits at Glenmeinich Farm, Strathconon, June 2011

The weather was kind to us - no rain and plenty of sunshine but windy - at least the midges were kept at bay! There are 19 pits at the Glenmeinich site and three trenches that targeted five pits with a variety of features, sizes and shapes were opened up.



Glenmeinich, Strathconon

83 pits had been recorded during the NOSAS survey project in Strathconon. The pits were located at 6 different settlements and varied in size from 1m to 2m diameter and from 0.5m to 0.8m depth; all are situated in airy positions on the edge of well-drained terraces or moraines. Similar pits occur throughout Highland glens particularly in the NE and it is generally assumed that they were for storing root crops e.g. potatoes or possibly turnips.

The construction of the pits excavated at Glenmeinich proved to be much more complicated than we had anticipated; in retrospect we were over ambitious in our targets as we did not have time to complete all five pits and two had to be abandoned.

Deturfing revealed a quantity of stones at the bottom of all five pits, but in only two was it possible to say that the stones were deliberately cobbled; in the others the stones may have been clearance material. In the three pits that we excavated more fully there was an

orange/ brown soil underneath the stones. This was between 20 – 25cms thick and most of the finds of pottery, glass (including a bottle neck fragment), bone and charcoal were located here. Following removal of the orange/brown soil we came down onto another stone layer. In two of the pits this was a discrete “structure” of loose medium sized stones, which was approximately 80cms diameter and 20 to 25cms thick. Voids in between the stones suggested a sump or soak-away.



Excavation of a ‘Tattie Pit’ in progress

This soakaway would have been constructed to improve the drainage of the pits and it was speculated that it had been covered by straw or heather in order that the voids should be retained. The soil layer above may have accumulated from the storage of potatoes over the years, the various pieces of pottery and glass finding their way in with soil adhering to the potatoes, but it may also be that it was part of the drainage system with the upper layer of stones part of the primary construction. On the other hand this upper layer of stones may have been a later addition in order to maintain the drainage as the pits became shallower through accumulation of soil.

The banks surrounding the pits appeared to be mainly natural material, probably upcast from the initial digging of the pits. We did not find firm evidence of the use of bracken, heather or turf as a covering or lining to the pit although this is not ruled out as there was some organic material in the bank, also there were small mounds nearby which may have been covering material that had been set aside when the potatoes were accessed.

Two of the five targeted pits had been selected because they had what appeared to be “entrances” or gaps in the surrounding banks. Both of these

“entrances” were cleaned down to a well beaten surface, probably an indication that the pits had received a considerable number of visits in the course of a winter and most likely over a number of years.



Recording details of a 'Tattie Pit'

We have learned a lot about the pits from this excavation but we must be careful about drawing firm conclusions as there are still many unanswered questions. We still have no firm evidence that the pits were used for storing potatoes and we are unsure of their sequence of use and reuse and how this had an impact on their construction.

Thanks to all those who took part - we plan to make a further visit in the future.

Meryl Marshall

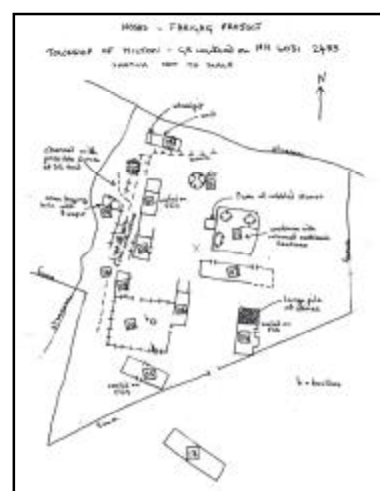
Farigaig Project

Several NOSAS members, mostly from the Inverness area, set out early this year to look at sites in Strathnaim in order that we might locate archaeology that were worth investigating further and in greater depth. Our wanderings resulted in us “homing in” on Cairn Ardochy, a small hill of 4 km² area enclosed by the River Farigaig and the road, which runs along the line of a Wade road to the west. Eleven sites, which include three groups of hut circles with field systems, have previously been recorded in the area; seven of the other sites were picked up either in the First Edition OS Project (FESP) of 1998-2002 (a desk based study) or on aerial photographs, so no previous visits had been made.



Exploring the remains of the mill at Milton - the ranging pole is in the wheel pit on the left, the building is on the right and part of the lade can just be seen bottom left

We have already had two exploratory visits to the area and made a start on recording the township of Milton, one of the many Miltons in the area (indeed of the Highlands): this one is Milton of Dunmaglass. The township of Milton comprises 12 buildings, a mill with wheelpit and lade, a corn-drying kiln and two enclosures



Milton, Building 04, looking south



Milton, Corn Drying Kiln

Our next foray is on **Monday 8th August** but if the weather looks bad or if circumstances change we'll make it later that week. I'm off on holiday Thursday 14th July and back in circulation again on 1st August.

Any members interested in joining us on future field days please contact **Elsbeth Kennedy**, 01463 234808 or email: emacg.kennedy@btinternet.com

Ross-shire Rock Art Project

Not a lot to report. A disastrous winter and early spring for rock art research. Snow cover ruined most of the best months in terms of good natural lighting for us.



New discovery at Fleuchlady, near Dingwall by Paul Young, ecologist, spring 2011, now recorded for the rock-art project.

Just a few outings grabbed at short notice, and a reconnaissance in Strath Rory that was interesting enough but produced no rock art. The next task is to input all our information into a database - hardly a job for the summer time.



Small cup marked stone discovered on the Heights, Strathpeffer a few years ago. Photo taken this spring late in the afternoon to show the advantages of good natural light.

Two new cup marked stones turned up during fieldwork in Strath Sgiach, which has the lion's share of them in Ross-shire.

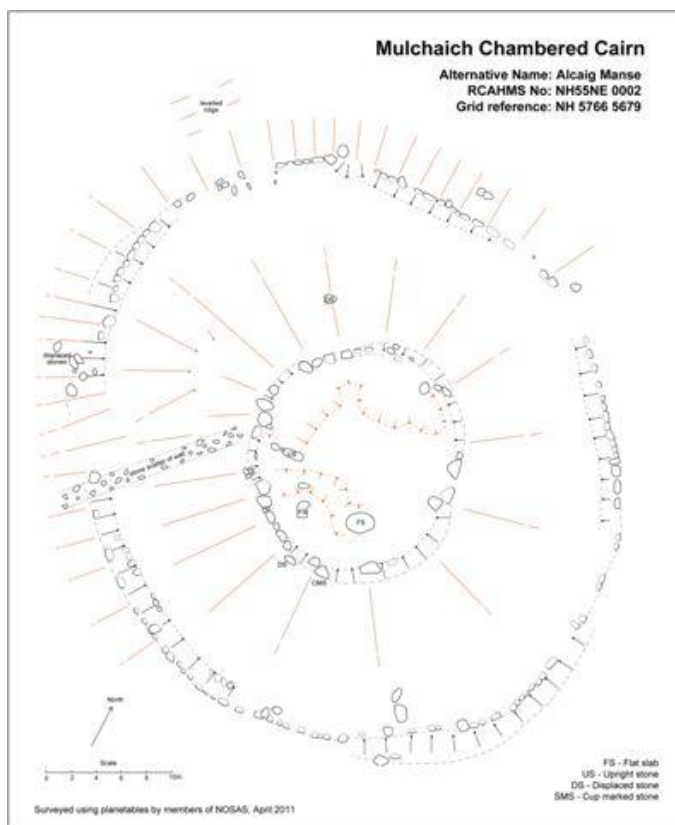


Here is a photo of Joni Guest, delighted to have just discovered her first, not far from the Balnacrae chambered cairn. Linda Lamb discovered the other 'new' stone a short distance away. We had to take thigh waders to cross the river that day and the lighting was no use to show you a close up of either discovery.

John Wombell

Mulchaich Cairn

A highly successful day was held at Mulchaich in April when 14 NOSAS members using four linked planetables completed the survey of the scheduled chambered cairn.



Returning to the site earlier this month (July) we were very pleased to see the results of our blackthorn and bracken eradication measures.



Mulchaich, July 2010. Before clearing the bracken.

Meryl Marshall

North Of Scotland Archaeological Society

Another NOSAS Success Story

When Meryl first took me on a tour around Mulchaich 3 years ago we discussed offering to cut the Whins off the Lower Settlement and Blackthorn off the adjacent cairn.



Mulchaich, July 2011. After clearing the bracken.

Last year Historic Scotland generously covered the cost of herbicides and a couple of days were spent spraying the Blackthorn and Whins when there was no livestock in the field. The Bracken control has exceeded all expectations with a 99% plus kill and the few fronds that have emerged this year have been pulled out by the roots. The Lower Settlement and the cairn are now grassing over naturally.

As the cairn is a Scheduled Monument we hope to meet with HS to discuss the possibility of carefully removing some vegetation from the kerbstones. There is a possibility that some of the kerbstones may be decorated, in a way similar to that of the cairns at Clava. And then there is the huge stone lying amid the wreckage atop the robbed out cairn. This may be a capstone, there is no decoration on the exposed surface as it lies but what might there be on the hidden side? The capstone at Corrimony is decorated with cup marks, there might be more to come at Mulchaich, so 'watch this space'. I'm sure there will be further announcements from Meryl before long. Well done and thanks to all who helped.

John Wombell

Discovery and Excavation in Scotland

The new volume of *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland* (Volume 11, 2010) should be of particular interest, featuring reports by a number of NOSAS members and with a detailed description of the Road through Ross-shire Project and Jim Bone's aerial reconnaissance of Strath Sgitheach.

Further details and Reports are available on the Historic Environment Record website at:

<http://her.highland.gov.uk/>

To access information about the Road through Ross-shire and Cairds Cave Projects click on the Community Projects tab on the left hand side of the main HER page.

Information about past and present NOSAS projects is also available on the Society's webpage:

<http://www.nosas.co.uk/>

Discovery and Excavation in Scotland is the Journal of Archaeology Scotland. Membership details and information about the organisation's work can be found on their website:

<http://www.archaeologyscotland.org.uk>

Cairds Cave Update

We now have our dates for Cairds Cave, a bit older than we expected. The most significant dates are from the bottom layer, 10, of Trench 2, which is in the entrance of the cave. We sent 2 samples from this layer, a piece of bone and a piece of charcoal. These have different methods of analysis, but they corresponded very satisfactorily, to about 300BC. A piece of bone from a higher layer came to 300AD while bone and antler pieces from the MacLean Collection at the National Museum of Scotland came to about 6/700 AD, which fits in with the pin with amber inserts.

These results would seem to imply that MacLean took a metre or so off the top layer of the floor of the cave, which was then laid in the big spoil heap at the cave mouth. Fortunately, he didn't go down to the very bottom of the cave, as we did in Trenches 1,2 and 5, which enabled us to get to the older, deeper deposits. Effectively, this takes usage of the cave back to the Iron Age.

Simon Gunn

North Of Scotland Archaeological Society

Fasagh Trip

There was a wonderful turn out on Saturday 11th June when a group of 20 met at the car park at Kinlochewe to walk along the side of Loch Maree to the iron working of Fasagh. A typical NOSAS day out with folk coming from as far away as Aviemore and Inverurie, Brora and Gairloch and in spite of the dire warnings the rain kept away until we were well on our way home.

The general miasma of anti-midge spray was reasonably effective and although the bracken limited our opportunities to see the several archaeological sites along the route the local Ranger showed us the spring at Tobar Mhoire.

The Gaelic experts among us debated the meaning of the dramatic waterfall and burn Allt na Still, the obvious whisky implications being misleading. The iron-working site is extensive and complex and although we had some drawings what remains on the ground is difficult to interpret.

The use of water in the hammering of the smelted ore was described in the records of the site but its route was difficult to imagine giving the variety of ground levels but as the site was being used in 1609 perhaps we should not be surprised that what remains is perplexing.

After returning home some closer reading of the reports into the history and the excavations in the late 1990s helped answer some of our questions but it is a subject that I think a number of us would like to return. I definitely feel a MAD night subject coming on! The visit was completed with a visit to the nearby Cladh nan Sasunnach that even my limited Gaelic could work out as the English burial ground. This site again raised questions as it resembled more a pre-historic burial site but here the excavation report had a description of a coffin shaped scatter of nails more in keeping with a later period. All in all, a great day out.

Anne Coombs

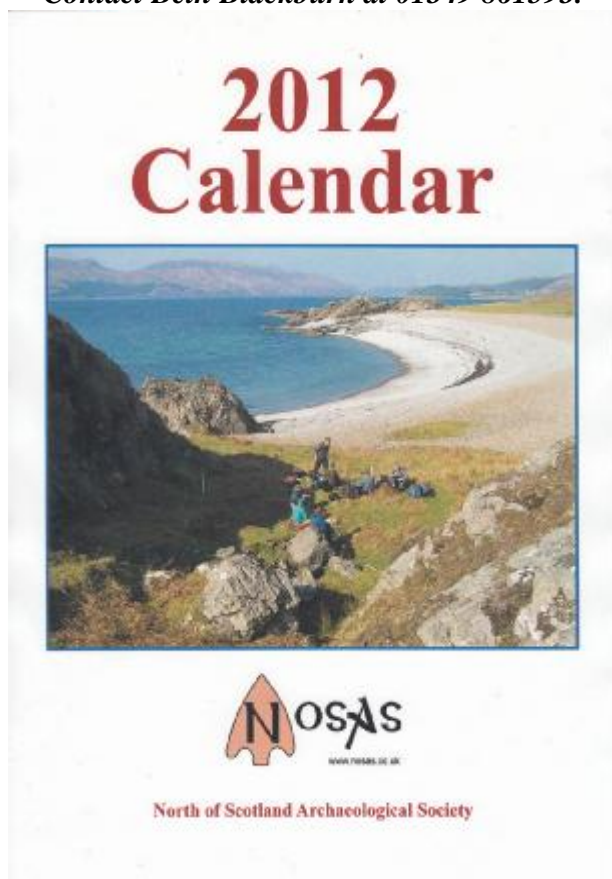
Congratulations

Congratulations to Hector Rogers who was awarded his Archaeology Honours Degree(2:1) from Aberdeen University this July.

Congratulations to John Wombell for the write-up of the Loch Hour Survey in the current issue of 'Archaeology Scotland'

NOSAS Calendar

The NOSAS Calendar for 2012, illustrating a variety of NOSAS activities and projects, is now available. The Calendar will be on sale at the AGM and at other Society events. The price is £5, or £6 if you require it to be posted to you. Contact Beth Blackburn at 01349 861593.



Dates for your diary

September 2011

SCOTTISH ARCHAEOLOGY MONTH

Events throughout Scotland for everyone.

<http://www.scottisharchaeologymonth.org.uk>

1 - 16 October 2011

HIGHLAND ARCHAEOLOGY FESTIVAL

Events around the Highlands for everyone.

Highland Council Archaeology Unit

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

North Of Scotland Archaeological Society

NOSAS AGM

The Society will be holding its AGM on Saturday October 15th, during the HAF seminar. The agenda and last year's minutes will be circulated in September.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the members to consider joining the committee. Nomination forms will be attached to the agenda or speak to a member of the committee. We meet every two months and travel round to member's homes and we offer to reimburse reasonable expenses for travel to meetings.

I look forward to seeing you all at the AGM and the various events during HAF

Anne Coombs

NOSAS Subscriptions

NOSAS Annual Subscriptions are due on September 1st. Membership renewal forms and standing order directions are available on the web site.

NOSAS Committee 2010-2011

Chairperson
Vice Chair
Treasurer
Secretary

Anne Coombs
Meryl Marshall
David Findlay
Cait McCullagh

Committee Members

Beth Blackburn, Paul Dungey, Lynn Fraser, George Grant, Simon Gunn, Janet Hooper, Susan Kruse, Allan Mackenzie, Alastair Morton and John Wombell