

NOSAS Newsflash – Jan 2012

And a Happy New Year to All!!

First of all apologies for the ad hoc nature of this newsletter, as yet an editor has not been found so it has fallen to Anne and myself to compile a quick update of what has been happening and intentions for the year to come. The first topic to be aired then is the newsletter – is there anyone out there who would like to edit the NOSAS newsletter? You do not need to have any particular experience, just an enthusiasm and a willingness, neither do you need to come to committee meetings as there will be lots of contributors anxious to feed information to you. Phone Anne Coombs 01862 810431 or email annecoombs1@gmail.com with offers or to discuss. Now to the nitty-gritty:

For the Future

- MAD evenings** – continue to be held every month at 7.30pm at the Strathpeffer Community Centre. All welcome.
THIS WEEK: Thurs 26th Jan – “The Bowels of the Earth” – archaeology of caves – Simon Gunn
Thurs 23rd Feb – “Industries of the Highland” a look at this extensive subject with few short presentations and more to be visited in the next session.
Thurs 29th March – topic to be confirmed
- Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments Scotland Review** – as many will know a review on the RCAHMS is underway. The importance of the work the RCAHMS carry out is not in doubt, the question is: are there alternative ways the same service could be delivered more efficiently and at a reduced cost? We are launching a comments and discussion space on the NOSAS forum and, as the Society we are going to respond to the questionnaire on the website. The questionnaire is mostly about how we as a community use RCAHMS. The committee encourages responses from individuals too. More information and the questionnaire is on the link <http://www.rcahms.gov.uk/news/rcahms-review> The deadline for responses is 8th Feb
- Woodland Expansion Advisory Group** – this group was set up to advise the Scottish Executive on the way forward for their plan to expand forestry cover in Scotland to 25%. Obviously there are strong feelings about this and NOSAS as a group, along with many individuals, have expressed their feelings by writing letters. Our response can be seen on the NOSAS web site in the members section. More information on <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/weag> A meeting is to be held in Inverness on the 29th Feb when WEAG will answer questions. Several members will attend and would be delighted if others would join them, however interest has to be registered on the website <http://www.centuralscotlandgreennetwork.org/Latest-News/woodland-expansion-advisory-group-update.html>
- We are working up a **programme of regular small events** in addition to the ongoing projects.

It is helpful to know how many people are coming to each so please contact the organiser and in any case check with them if the weather looks doubtful, contact details for each event are as noted.

Friday 3rd Feb – Mills and water management at Contin – investigation of mills and lades around the village and a possible hydro-scheme at Coul House. Meet at 10am at the church car park (on the island). We will visit the church first; it was originally established in the 8th century and dedicated to St Maelrubha, it is possibly one of the oldest religious sites in the Highlands. Close at hand is the site of a former mill, lade and weir. We will then move on to Coul House Hotel where there are the remains of a lade which extends c2kms into Torachilty forest. Come prepared for rough walking (4 – 5 kms) and for rough weather. Bring a packed lunch, although we will finish the afternoon with tea and scones at Coul House Hotel – more info from Meryl M at mm.marshall321@btinternet.com

Sunday March 25th - A day trip prospecting above Glen Beag (Glenelg)

All members are invited to join a spotty rock hunting day on the plateau north of Glen Beag. There are two recorded cup marked rocks in Glen Beag and a huge cup marked outcrop in Glen Bernera, to which we have added two single cups on slabs. These were both discovered in 2009, then we received a tip off of another cup marked stone on the plateau between Glenelg village and the brochs in Glen Beag. Trina and I had one unsuccessful go at finding it in February 2010 being frustrated then by deep snow drifts, and we have never managed to get back since.

It is fine open country on the plateau, but bracken in places makes summer prospecting impossible. There is an awful lot of rock about up there with a lot of natural cups that could fool anyone. That said the elevation is right for rock art on the plateau - around 250m OD, and there are springs feeding burns that run to all points of the compass. Several hut circles are known on the Glenelg Peninsular to which we added a few more during the Loch Hour survey, and there is a chambered cairn in Glen Beag. Our tip off came from a Glenelg dog walker who regularly walked the 3Km over the plateau between the village and the brochs. So only about 3 sq Km to search! It is great country and not too difficult underfoot. If there is a big turn out we can split up, and there is another promising south facing area north of Balvraid Farm in Glen Beag that we could include.

More details nearer the time but the meeting place will be beside the Glenelg War Memorial at NG 8095 1917, time 10am. Return when the owls start hooting. Tel John for more info nearer the date: 01997 423273 or john.wombell@btinternet.com

There have been lots of other ideas but at the moment the rest of these events need to be confirmed, details will be sent by email and posted on the events diary of the web site:

April – **Invergarry village and Glen Moriston** (walking 5 mile section of military road at Ceannacroch) this will be able to be taken either as a full weekend or as separate days – Hector M and AC

May – plane tabling **Ormond Castle** at Avoch - MM

June – plane tabling **motte at Invershin** - AC

July – walk through multiperiod landscape at **Klibreck**, Sutherland – AC

July, August and Sept – lots of potential for surveying and recording in the summer months

Sept/Oct – **Strathdearn/Tomatin** forays – looking for archaeology, also a weekend in **Sunart** has been suggested

Oct/Nov – weekend in the west

At this stage we are not aware of many, if any, opportunities this year for major excavations in Highland but then the same was said at this point last year! As always keep an eye on emails and the web site.

From the Past

5. **Tarradale Project update** – Test pitting in November proved the existence of a large shell midden with well preserved deposits that included not only shells but also bone and antler. The test pitting together with later auguring has revealed a much larger and potentially significant Mesolithic midden. The big question is what do we do next? And a steering group is to be set up to move this forward, but in the meantime the intention is to have a programme of field-walking over the next 2-3 months.



6. **Dulnain Bridge walk – 'One thing leads to another'**

This is often the way with archaeology, and this is a typical instance. During last year's HAF, George and John lead a walk from Dulnain Bridge up onto Laggan Hill, attended by nearly 30 guests. This all began with John asking George 'was there limestone somewhere about this part of Speyside?' That question followed on from the discovery of a number of ruined lime kilns in the valley of the nearby Duthill Burn. George's response was that just about every farm and croft around Dulnain Bridge had one or more lime kilns in the past and that there were three commercial lime kilns in the middle of the village. Then spotty rocks came into it. Laggan Hill above Dulnain Bridge has one of the few known groups of cup marked panels on rock outcrop - as opposed to on erratic boulders. A day was arranged early last year when John and George had a reccy up onto Laggan Hill. There they not only found the recorded rock art and doubled the count, but also found themselves in the vast dolomitic limestone quarries that once supplied the local lime burning industry.



One large cup marked boulder sits teetering on the edge of a quarry. There are cup marked boulders and outcrops on Laggan Hill. Much research followed into the old lime working industry hereabouts, and there were 2 more reccies to prepare for the HAF walk. Several very knowledgeable guests came along on the day including a local historian and a geologist, and their knowledge added greatly to the event.



The rock art looks out in spectacular fashion towards the Cairngorms above the waters-meet of the Dulnain and the Spey. The high fields in which the outcrop rock art occurs are fine and green due to the proximity of the limestone, bounded by ancient banks that almost have a Celtic ring to them. Then they are overlain on a different axis by drystone walls postdated again by the lime stone workings. We are always studying sites in abandonment and in one quarry on a reccy George discovered the remains of the last pile of limestone chunks that never made it to a kiln. The quarries are almost completely greened over now and easy to access. Everyone who came along seemed to enjoy the event so the leaders and helpers had their reward also. An exhibition of photos, papers and geological samples was set out in Dulnain Village Hall that was hired as a base.

7. Christmas Dinner 2011- BB reports

About 35 members braved snowy conditions to pay a return visit to Coul House Hotel Contin for the annual Christmas dinner on December 9th. After an excellent meal, Alistair Jupp gave an informative illustrated talk on his trip to Machu Picchu. Next morning some members re congregated for a short walk in the Kinellan area, guided by John and Trina Wombell. After walk hospitality was provided at Nether Kinellan, rounding off a very successful and enjoyable Christmas event.

8. A Boxing day WALK ON THE WILD SIDE - Hilton of Cadboll to Rockfield

We thought today was going to be a wild day but in fact it turn out fine with the sun on our faces and the wind at our backs. We left the cars behind and walked along the track, although a little muddy but very level as it runs along the coast. Our first stop was at the Hilton Pictish Stone and we discussed and pondered. We looked at the Chapel site next to it and tried to imagine what would have been built there.

The sea was in a boisterous mood and the seagulls were rafting and surfing the waves. A peregrine was heard. The talk along the shore was of otters and geology. We lunched in Tarrel Cave and it appears to go under as far as the eye can see.

We looked at the old settlements and discussed what they might have been. We had a welcome cup of coffee and mince pies at Rockfield with Denise and Steve Carrol where we looked at a roundhouse being built.

Jonie, Secretary of NOSAS



Bits and Pieces

- **New password** – the password for the members page on our website has been changed and all members informed – please contact Trina or Jonie, jonie.guest@gmail.com if you have not received it
- **Anna's hut circle test pitting** project - congratulations to Anna W and Loch Broom Field Club for the successful outcome of their application for funding of this project. Anna will no doubt will be in touch when she needs volunteers
- **Future Projects Plan** - NOSAS is presently applying to HS and Leader for funds to support the intention of commissioning a development plan
- **Farigaig project** is on hold as, for the moment, we were refused permission to gain access to the Dunmaglass Estate policies
- **NOSAS surveying equipment** – is now with Jonie – jonie.guest@gmail.com . John W continues to have the majority of the excavation equipment