



NEWSLETTER September 2014

Dates for your diary

For further details about these events see the WHAT'S ON section of the NOSAS website.

TRAINING DAYS

Friday and Saturday, 12 and 13 September at Banchor, near Tomatin (2 separate days)

Free training, covering identification and interpretation of sites, recording, sketching and plane table survey led by Eve Boyle and Piers Dixon of RCAHMS

- register interest with annecoombs1@gmail.com asap - numbers now limited

ADVANCE NOTICE

Friday 12 December, 6.30 for 7 pm at the Culloden House Hotel

NOSAS Christmas Dinner 3 courses, £35

followed by a talk on the history of Culloden House by Norman Newton

and preceded by viewing of remains of old house in the basement at 5.45 pm.

Special rate for NOSAS for B&B at the hotel is £60pp double/twin, or £85 single, bookable direct with the hotel: reservations@cullodenhouse.co.uk. Or arrange your own accommodation if you prefer, ready for the winter walk next day.

Tuesday 16 September 19:30 at Seaforth Lodge, Station Square, Fortrose, IV10 8SZ

Groam House Lecture: Cromarty Medieval Burgh Community Archaeology Project 2013 and 2014

- Steve Birch

HIGHLAND ARCHAEOLOGY FESTIVAL (HAF) EVENTS

Sunday 28 September to Sunday 12 October, 12 noon-4pm at Cromarty Courthouse Museum

Exhibition about the Cromarty Medieval Burgh community archaeology project

Thursday 2 October 10 am - 4 pm

HAF event: discover the Canadian Lumberjacks Camp in the woods of Spinningdale

and, using plane tables, plan some of their buildings.

Email annecoombs1@gmail.com

Saturday and Sunday, 4 and 5 October, 9.30 - 4.30 at the Highland Council Chamber, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness

Highland Archaeology Festival conference: recent research and discoveries

Email helen@rowan-tree-consulting.co.uk

Monday 6 October 10 am - 4 pm

HAF walk to the multiperiod site of Glenarigolach

Email mm.marshall321@btinternet.com

NOSAS AGM

Saturday 4 October, 5 pm (after day 1 of HAF Conference) venue to be confirmed, but near by

MADs Tuesdays 7.30 - 9.30 pm at Strathpeffer Community Centre

21 October **The archaeology of Tarradale** - Eric Grant

18 November **Embo boats and other SCHARP activities**

- Ellie Graham-Allsop of SCHARP/SCAPE

20 January 2015

17 February

17 March

Winter walks

Saturday 1 November **Garbeg** - James McComas

Saturday 13 December **Neglected cairns at Clava** - Anne Coombs - followed by light lunch at Cawdor Inn and possible visit to **Highlander Museum at Fort George** - Meryl Marshall

Sunday 11 January 2015 **Rosemarkie Caves** - Simon Gunn

Thursday 5 February

Saturday 7 March

Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) update

The changeover to a SCIO was completed as planned on Friday 1 August 2014. So now the name NOSAS refers to the new Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, and the previous, now dormant, society becomes Old NOSAS.

The very few members who have not signed up will not become members of NOSAS - from 1 August they will remain members of the dormant Old NOSAS. From September all renewals of membership will be to NOSAS, the new SCIO. From now on it's business as usual, and for the great majority there'll be no discernible change.

MAD Consultative Evening

This was held earlier in the year in Beaulay to discuss how members would like to see NOSAS grow in the future years. What did the members want to get out of NOSAS?

After what I believe was an 'eventful' dinner (something to do with water coming through the ceiling), everyone congregated through to the back room of the Lovat Arms Hotel for the evening proceedings.

After a briefing on what was required from us, we got ourselves into small groups where we were given questions to answer as individuals: what we liked to do and what we wanted to do.

For 10-15 minutes each group discussed the outcomes, and the ideas and suggestions that they came up with together were then collated by the group facilitator. It was a very informative session and the group I was in came up with some excellent ideas and suggestions:

- Courses on archaeological procedures (drawing, report writing, sorting of finds, photography) - see TRAINING DAYS in Dates for your diary.
- Qualifications - one off courses which could lead to certification.
- Re-training on archaeological techniques. Some folks thought revision courses would be handy. Not all members can use their skills on a regular basis - see TRAINING DAYS again.
- More site visits and/or field trips - see Winter walks.
- Arranging the above not just during the week, but at weekends as well, which could engage more members to attend who are unable to do so due to personal or work commitments.

All the suggestions and ideas from all who attended have been looked at by a subcommittee which has produced a report - see next article.

After a refreshment break, needed after all that hard brainstorming (just like being at work!), we were given an excellent presentation by Steve Birch about the Landscape setting of High Pasture Cave.

I would like to thank the committee in arranging this meeting and to Steve for his very informative talk and look forward in seeing the final report in the future.

Sue Walker

Development Plan 2014 - progress

Since the Consultation evening we (Roland, Lachlan and I) have been working to update the NOSAS Development Plan, and a full draft is currently with the Committee for approval.

Without waiting for the plan to be completed, some of the conclusions from the Consultation evening are being implemented. For example we have:

- ensured members are clearly notified of relevant training opportunities and courses (via website and newsletter)
- spoken to leaders of excavations etc. to ensure they are aware of members' training wishes
- begun to plan a more extensive range of winter walks, including a 'social' element (eg meal together) where possible
- arranged our Christmas event, in a different location to previous years
- agreed our contribution towards Highland Archaeology Festival
- sought specific ideas and suggestions for visits to known sites of interest further afield (possibly a 'long weekend')
- considered how to establish a programme of specific training events. This may include one off events, programmes of training (perhaps in collaboration with for example ARCH) or more ambitious weekends (eg on artefacts).

We do however have to recognise that we are all volunteers. If members want something to happen then in general we need someone willing to volunteer their time to arrange or lead it. It is a strength of NOSAS that we have a group of willing, able, and enthusiastic volunteer/leaders, and they have already responded to many of the suggestions emerging from the Consultative evening.

There is a lot more we could do. When you read the Development Plan, think about how you can contribute as a leader as well as a participant.

Alan Thompson

Highland Hillforts

The Atlas of Hillforts in Britain and Ireland project

Hillforts are one of the most prominent types of prehistoric monument seen across many parts of Britain and Ireland, and this hillfort project has recently been set up with the aim of producing a paper atlas and an online searchable atlas linked to Google Earth. It is a collaborative four year project between the Universities of Oxford and Edinburgh, and contributions from members of the public, either as individuals or as part of local field groups, are welcome. Several members of NOSAS were interested in this project and a field day took place in May which nine attended. We visited three forts in the Drumnadrochit area which James McComas had suggested. The day was a great success even though the weather didn't exactly co-operate and the overall impression was "damp" to say the least! The three forts of Dun Scriben, Craig Mony and An Torr were very different from each other – we took photos, made rough sketches and filled in the (reputedly) tortuous form provided on the website. The form proved to be not as formidable as we had anticipated and has been submitted to Strat Halliday who is the Scottish and Irish end of the project. If any members are interested in participating in the project or in joining the next NOSAS field day please contact Meryl Marshall.

More information about the project is available on the website

<http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/hillforts-atlas.html>

The form to fill in is available at

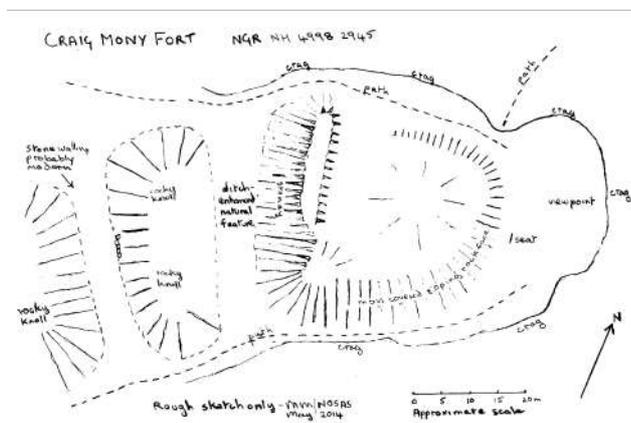
<http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/files/hillforts/survey%20pro-forma%20web%20final%20v2.pdf>

and notes and guidelines are at

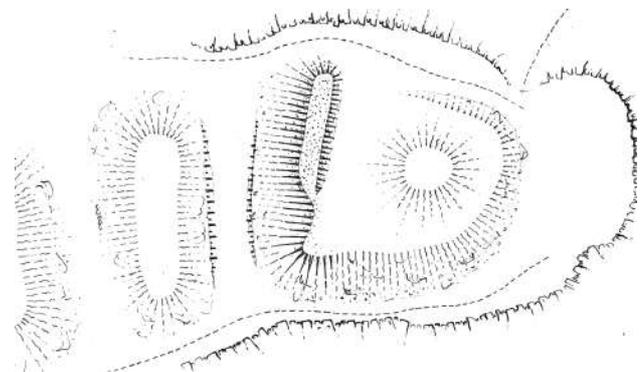
<http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/files/hillforts/survey%20notes%20for%20guidance%20web%20final%20v2.pdf>

Producing drawings of hillforts

A drawing or sketch of a site, even if it is not precisely to scale, gives so much more information than a written description. Ideally it would be good to produce a plane-table drawing but this is not always a convenient method as it is time consuming and involves carrying heavy equipment to remote and inaccessible places. So when doing the recent surveys at Drumnadrochit we experimented with several methods of survey: using tape and offset, pacing and GPS waymarks. A draft sketch on permatrace was produced but, as usual, it was a bit messy - the words "dog's breakfast" came to mind! A tidy final drawing was needed, so using a further piece of permatrace and a 4H pencil, I traced the site using hachuring as per RCAHMS guidelines, with annotations to clarify some of the features; I then scanned the result, see sketch of Craig Mony Fort. For me this method of drawing up is new and I have not perfected the technique yet, but Ian Parker of RCAHMS was helpful in giving advice and suggestions, and also his own drawing below.



Meryl Marshall



Ian Parker

For those who are interested I'm sure Ian wouldn't mind me sharing some of his comments:

"In general it is important to make clear distinctions between man-made features and natural features especially with hachures, adding a bit of stipple on a rampart to indicate a stony bank for instance (in his drawing Ian has traced my drawing of Craig Mony showing how he might have drawn it - MM). One thing I have found over the years surveying these types of sites is that a great many have been robbed and very often what you are surveying is a demolition site with a bit of archaeology remaining. So it's important to try to tease out what is quarrying and robbing and indeed antiquarian howking. The longer you spend on a site the better you get your eye in and start to understand the site. This is the advantage of doing measured drawing survey as it forces you to spend time on site and make decisions about depiction. Every time I go back to a site I surveyed in the past I think I would do it differently if I was to start again!"

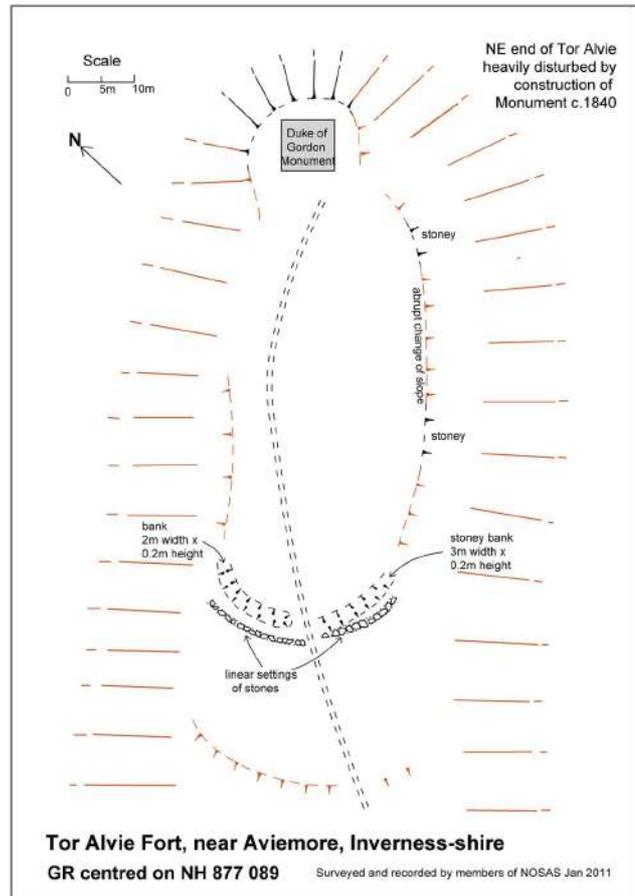
Tor Alvie Fort

This newly recorded hillfort is at NGR NH 87701 08854 (Canmore ID 339862, Site Number NH80NE 104). It is situated on the summit of the obvious hill just to the SW of Aviemore; the hill is also topped by the prominent Duke of Gordon's monument. The fort has a commanding position at the centre of the valley and was previously unrecorded until 2011 when NOSAS members recorded it, drawing the sketch below at the time. In April of this year Ian Parker from RCAHMS and a group of interested local volunteers surveyed it using planetables and made a much better job of the drawing - see the digital image at <http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/339862/>

The fort is more or less surrounded by a stony bank which encloses an area of roughly 85m x 30m, very much the same shape and size as Craig Phadrig hillfort near Inverness or Barry Hill fort near Alyth in Angus, both recognised as being Pictish forts. However no vitrification was found at Tor Alvie and it is not possible to date the fort from the surface remains. But what is exciting is that it is just 5kms NE of Dunachton and Loch Insh. For those with an interest in Pictish history, Dunachton is now thought to be the site of the Battle of Nechtansmere – see "Dun Nechtain, Fortriu and the Geography of the Picts" by Alex Woolf in *The Scottish Historical Review* Volume LXXV, 2: No 220: October 2006, 182-201. The battle of Dun Nechtain was fought in 685 AD between Ecgrith, King of Northumbria and the Picts. A quote from Bede writing 50 years after the event tells us that

"the enemy (the Picts) feigned flight and lured the king into some narrow passes in the midst of inaccessible mountains; there he (the king) was killed with the greater part of the forces he had taken with him."

For the last century or so the battle was thought to have taken place at Dunnichen in Forfar-shire but Alex Woolf in his paper argues very convincingly for it to have been fought in the North. Dunachton in Strathspey fits the bill admirably and, if it was Pictish, Tor Alvie Fort must surely have played a significant part!



Meryl Marshall

A visit to Kinloch Hourn

The now the familiar road to Kinloch Hourn was a great introduction to the walk led by John Wombell on the 29th June. Henry Birkbeck has always been very generous to NOSAS and once again he offered us the use of the Lodge for the whole weekend. Please don't get me wrong: the camp site by the riverside is perfectly acceptable but it was much more comfortable and midge free in the Lodge. What resulted was an extended long weekend which turned into a typical KLH event and my apologies to those who were unable to attend but you missed a very good time.

The Lodge is self-sufficient with its own water supply which also runs the hydro-electric scheme providing all the electricity for the house. The weather was glorious and had been for some time, and the absence of rain meant that the burn was very low. This resulted in much hilarity as we discussed the various water economies we could employ. Bath sharing suggestions of course produced much nonsense but with a great deal of care we avoided that by just staying dirty!

We did get dirty when we spent the Saturday doing garden duties: the ladies dug out the steps to the hydro dam. These were threatening to disappear in the lush undergrowth but are now clear and ready to provide safe passage for another few years. The gentlemen spend a happy few hours playing with a gate, an engine and a culvert. In the afternoon we went for a nostalgic walk along to the viewpoint to sit overlooking the narrows for a while until the midges drove us back to the Lodge. Sunday dawned sunny and hot again and we were joined by Hector and his wife and James and set off round the garden. The garden at Kinloch Hourn was planted in the late 1800s and early 1900s and like so many lodges on the west coast of Scotland was extensive and gave an opportunity to plant the new 'exotic' plants arriving in Britain at that time. Rhododendrons predominated and as we now know the use of *R. ponticum* was a mistake, a bad mistake. By the time the Wombells arrived a ?? number of years ago there was no real garden - just a vast sea of *ponticum*. Over the intervening years with the help of a 'garden team' and now more specialist help the garden is being once more revealed without the rhodies. John, Trina and Graham Tuley guided us round the garden and although I have visited the Lodge several times over the years it was still amazing to see the changes in the last couple of years. Graham was full of knowledge and information about the rare and unusual trees and Trina added a lighter note describing the many pits she had fallen into over the years.



Anne Coombs



Anne Coombs

After the garden we walked along the north side of the river, seeing a small site we had excavated now under bracken, and on to the bridge where we had lunch. Then a visit to see the remains of the oldest creel house sites at Loch Hournhead which we found during the early surveys. We discovered new sites we had missed the first time round. Mind you, the conditions were very different! Instead of the wall to wall rain we had in 2006, this time we had wall to wall sunshine. Next was a quick look inside the steadings at Loch Hourn Head where the cobbles form interesting patterns. When we have visited in the past the gates have been shut but were open this time as the café was open for the summer.

Then out along the Barrisdale path and another new site unrecorded! This time a previously unseen boat landing with a possible winter naust, and we didn't have the excuse of bad weather, we just had never seen it. But it is now recorded and added to the list. Finally we reached Skiary and walked round reminiscing on previous visits and noting changes and explaining it all to James. In our day they didn't do Strawberry Teas at Skiary and even on the day of our visit the folk were busy elsewhere so we weren't in luck.

Home was reached only slightly later than planned after an excellent day. We all sat in the evening sunshine thoroughly enjoying the cups of tea we managed to squeeze out of the taps. Monday was another sunny day and we all had another wander round the gardens before finally we made a leisurely departure, reluctant as always to return to reality and 'civilization'.

Our thanks go to John for organising the walk, Trina and Graham Tuley for the informative walk round the garden and of course to Henry Birkbeck for allowing us to use the Lodge and visit his land.

Anne Coonbs

Scotsburn – From dun to.... Well, what, actually?

I first visited the Scotsburn "dun" last December, when I went to see a nearby henge. The nearby henge was, well, under-whelming but the dun was good. And the area around looked as though it contained lot of other interesting structures. Definitely worth coming back to. On that first trip what I could see of the dun was good, but it was a dun in serious need of a good haircut. Whin, bracken and vegetation made it difficult to see much at all.

A NOSAS outing on 15th May to perform the haircut coincided with birds nesting, sadly, so we left the birds sitting pretty and spent the time doing other things – clearing much of the bracken, surveying the dun (Meryl) and a nearby round house (Roland), and exploring the local area.

And then Candy Hatherley of the University of Aberdeen Northern Picts Project team got involved. In 2013 she had investigated three possibly Iron Age sites on the Tarbat Peninsula – a cliff-top fort, and monumental structures on both Easter Rarichie and Wester Rarichie. In 2014 she opened up the Tarlogie dun in April before moving on to Scotsburn and another site (Cnoc Tigh) near Portmahomack in July.



Candy Hatherley Roland Spencer-Jones

Scotsburn is scheduled and Historic Scotland had given permission for a 2 by 20 metre trench to be dug from the NW aspect of the dun across what seems to have been a set of ramparts, like rings, set down the slope. Originally covered with bracken they seemed terrace-like. Within days of opening the trench, the small digging team had identified at least four ramparts set concentrically down the slope from the dun.

The outer wall of the dun was faced with stones, beyond which an approximately 5 metre space separated it from the first rampart. That space contained treasures only discovered later in the dig. The first rampart consisted of two massive stone faces with rubble in between. The second rampart was also of stone, whereas the third rampart seemed to be constructed of earth. The ramparts were extensive, even winding round to the west into the deep gorge of the Balnagown River. This all made a massive surround to the dun at the centre.

By four weeks into the dig, a complicated and fascinating picture began to emerge: the "dun" could be a "broch". The two faces of the central structure were composed of massive outer stones with very loosely packed stones within. Was there a central cavity within these massive walls? Would that make it a broch, not a dun? Opinions were divided.



Looking for inspiration Roland Spencer-Jones

The space between the "dun" and the first rampart turned out to contain parts of two circular walls, suggestive of buildings, with the walls continuing under the sides of the trench. It was frustrating not being able to follow them on. This arrangement was vaguely suggestive of the buildings outwith the broch walls at Gurness, Orkney.

Between these curved walls was one of the star finds of the dig – a scooped out stone, maybe a mortar (says Fraser Hunter). See the NOSAS Facebook discussion, 22nd July and the NOSAS blog: <http://tinyurl.com/kevhj32>
Within the more easterly curved wall a ceramic mould was found, possibly for bronze working activity.



The length of the trench, looking from the outside towards the dun. At the top, the outer wall of the dun. By the soil heap, the first rampart walls. With the two stones on top, the second rampart. In the foreground, the third, earth, rampart. Roland Spencer-Jones



Looking south into the space between first rampart (at bottom) and the outer dun wall. Note the two curved building walls, and the scooped stone (?mortar) Roland Spencer-Jones

Between ramparts one and two, a cobbled "road" appeared, consisting of tightly packed stones and pebbles. This followed the curve of the concentric rampart walls and seemed to continue under those walls.

The overall impression was of massive encircling structures around the broch/dun, leading inevitably to questions about sequence – what came first? The road, the broch/dun, or the ramparts? Maybe the radiocarbon dates will help sort that out in time.

The core team of diggers consisted of Leaf and Vaidutis, both from Aberdeen University, with Candy being there usually on alternate days. Oskar came at times, taking some great aerial shots. NOSAS volunteers included James (many days), me (about a week), David, and Alasdair. Lots of dig memories – being too hot, being too midged, the horses near the parking place, the views south across the Cromarty Firth, the chats over coffee and lunch. I now know something about (Vaidutis's) Lithuania, whereas previously ... ! And Leaf is getting married this autumn!

Plans for the future? During the course of the dig, the dun got much of its hair cut, but there's more to go. So NOSAS will be back later in the autumn to finish the job. Already the dun looks better. And Candy said that she'd love to come back to do a wider, bigger dig on the dun itself. Watch that space for 2015.....

Roland Spencer-Jones

Cnoc Tigh And Tarlogie Dun excavations

These excavations, in April and July 2014, were led by Candy Hatherley and form part of the University of Aberdeen Northern Picts Project.

Cnoc Tigh and Tarlogie Dun are Iron Age round houses situated on the north coast of the Tarbat Peninsula in Easter Ross. They are both on the high ground about 200m back from the coast giving them spectacular views across the Dornoch Firth to Sutherland and up the Sutherland coast. Neither site is naturally defensive and, though both have watercourses to one side creating a gorge and a steep bank to the sea on another side, that still leaves two sides open to the surrounding countryside. They differ from the three duns excavated by the Aberdeen University Team in 2013 in that these were all on the south side of the Tarbat Peninsular and were relatively defensible due to the natural features, although Tarrel is overlooked by the cliff on the landward side.



*The NOSAS team at Tarlogie, looking N
David Findlay*

Both Cnoc Tigh and Tarlogie appear to date from about 400 BC with occupation at Tarlogie lasting for 800 years to about 400AD. I do not know of any dates yet for the latest occupancy at Cnoc Tigh although I understand that suitable charcoal samples have been taken for dating.

The 2014 excavations at both sites reveal severely robbed and damaged stone walls; there are discernible facing walls in a few locations but largely only the fill remains. Both sites show a lot of evidence of the structures changing with time.

Cnoc Tigh is about 14 to 15 meters in diameter with walls that have been considerably thickened over the years. It appears to have a narrow entrance about one metre wide in the south west. An unusual feature was a ledge along the visible inner face of the wall just above ground level, rather like a scarcement ledge in a broch. This could have been to support a timber floor just above the ground which may explain why there is very little evidence of a floor and associated debris at ground level. I understand that there were no ancient finds at Cnoc Tigh.



Cnoc Tigh inner N wall looking W showing ledge
David Findlay

Tarlogie is a larger and even more disrupted structure than Cnoc Tigh.



Tarlogie splayed entrance David Findlay

It has an unusual splayed entrance to the east, probably not the original entrance. Several finds came out over the two sessions including quern stones, a soapstone cup/lamp fragment, slag, an orca tooth and part of an alloy brooch provisionally dated to about 200 AD. Towards the centre of the floor area is a pivot stone and there were several hearths.



Oskar's quadcopter at Tarlogie David Findlay

Oskar Sveinbjarnarson used his quadcopter to take aerial photos of both sites. We will all have to wait until later in the year to hear from Candy on any further progress and results from the finds and samples.

David Findlay

Cromarty Medieval Burgh dig July 12th to August 3rd 2014

The 2013 dig had been great fun, so we offered our help for 2104.

Bob was set to work, using a mattock, a draw hoe and a barrow, though not necessarily in that order. For me, the choice was a little harder: my back is troublesome, but I had been told to keep active, so I was asked to tidy up one of the uncovered 2013 trenches so that it could be photographed. Eventually Paul, the finds 'cataloguer', told me he didn't want my offering of several fish bones, which was all I could find for the first few days. Michael joined me to uncover more of the trench, more tidying. Then things looked up: med pot appeared and half of a glazed, ceramic spindle whorl - I was on a roll. In the wall was what appeared to be part of a quern, then another (which wasn't). I moved onto another trench to do some trowelling where I uncovered a whole quern stone.

Meanwhile my original trench was in danger from Bob and Dave: their dug area had impinged on one longitudinal wall. Hours later there was no trench, just a vast uncovered area, out of which a total of 5 pieces of quern stone were removed, 3 of which fitted together. Why anyone would break such an object is a mystery, but several such broken, and at least one unbroken, were found incorporated into the walls of the buildings. Likewise, Bob, among others, found a broken iron pot with a large stone on top of it, under what appeared to be the entrance to one of the medieval houses. Why would anyone break an iron pot? I can see that you could bury broken pottery, to avoid having to explain how it came to be in such a state, but iron?



Pieces of quern stone

Bob Jones

I moved onto drawing a section and then helping Steve with context sheets. In addition, we all had to do some of the finds washing.

On some days we were treated to talks/workshops from specialists: two on ceramics and one each on glass and bone. All were fascinating, especially as they were using 'our' finds as illustrations. I asked for the title of a simple guide to ceramics for beginners, to be told there wasn't one; yet another gap in my knowledge that will be hard to fill. I gather that any guides there are refer to England and Wales only and are of no use in Scotland.



Site tour

Bob Jones

In addition, every day saw cake being brought for members of the dig by others taking part. Extremely nice cake and much appreciated. Such things sum up Cromarty 2014: it was a very friendly dig, enjoyed by all who took part, whether professional or volunteer and I think most, if not all, of us will be back next year.

By the end of the dig we had uncovered a huge area. On the last afternoon we had a final site tour to see what had been uncovered.



The whole site looking N

Bob Jones



Looking S from Thief's Row

Bob Jones

Finally, my thanks to Steve and Mary for being such good instructors and hosts, and for putting up with all my questions.

Rosemary Jones