



NEWSLETTER May 2015

Dates for your diary

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

Proposed repeat of professionally run first aid course, with first aid at work certificate

If you are interested in attending please contact Anne Coombs at annecoombs1@gmail.com Cost around £30. First course was excellent and focussed on outdoor situations we might encounter.

Wednesday 27 May 19.30 - 21.00 at Dingwall Community Centre

A new look at the Pagan Norse graves of Northern Scotland

- Caroline Paterson, an ARCH Highland talk

Thursday 28 May 19:30 - 21:00 at Seaforth Lodge, Station Road, Fortrose

Bodystones and Guardian Beasts - The Pictish Recumbent Stones in Context

The Annual Groam House Academic Lecture by Dr Victoria Whitworth, Centre for Nordic Studies, UHI Orkney

Friday 29th May 10 am

NOSAS day trip: hut circles, field systems and burnt mounts at Ruthven

Please contact James at james@comacodirect.com

Saturday 13 June

NOSAS Field Trip to Skye - a three-day tour of the archaeology of Skye

Sunday 14 and Monday 15 June

More Skye archaeology, guided by Martin Wildgoose

Thursday 25 June 19.30 at Seaforth Lodge, Station Road, Fortrose

Special places - prehistoric rock art in context

- John Wombell, Groam House Lecture

Friday 26th June 2.00 – 4.00 pm at Tarradale House with Dr Eric Grant.

A general introductory workshop on pottery, with aspects of medieval and post-medieval pottery - Dr Eric Grant

Please contact Eric at eandjgrant@gmail.com asap if you wish to book.

Monday 29 June - Saturday 4 July and Saturday 11 July - Monday 27 July, 9.30 am - 5 pm

Cromarty Medieval Burgh Community Archaeology Project dig

Contact the team to schedule dates to attend using the website form on

<http://www.medievalcromarty.org/feedback.asp>

or call 01381 600726 before your visit

Thursday 30 July 19:30 at Seaforth Lodge, Station Road, Fortrose

Snuff making and snuff taking: the material culture of a very Scottish habit

- Dr. Eric Grant, Groam House Lecture

Thursday 27 August 19:30 at Seaforth Lodge, Station Road, Fortrose

The Enchanted Isles: survey, excavation and living with rats on the Shiant islands

- Cathy Dagg and Janet Hooper, Groam House Lecture

2-18 October

Highland Archaeology Festival

10-11 October (provisional)

HAF conference, Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Research (RADAR)

Scotland's Urban Past

Scotland's Urban Past (SUP) is the follow-on to Scotland's Rural Past (SRP). I registered an interest with RCAHMS so that I would be told when the start-date was announced.

A month or so ago, I received an email asking me if I was still interested and, if so, what project I was thinking of doing. I sent a reply stating that I was still interested and, fingers crossed, that I was hoping a group from NOSAS would be involved.

So what we have to do is:

1. Find out who is interested in looking in great detail at a town, building, street or neighbourhood in 'our' area. (NOT Inverness!)
2. Decide what we will look at.

If you are interested please contact me and we can then see where we go from there with support from SUP.

For further details please see <http://www.rcahms.gov.uk/rcahms-projects/scotlands-urban-past>

Rosemary Jones
rosemary@overandabove.demon.co.uk

Brora to Golspie Walk

A group of 18 hardy members rose early enough on the morning of Friday 27 February 2015 to catch the first train north from Inverness, joining it at various stations between Inverness and Culrain. We alighted at Brora where the bracing wind soon had us wide awake. The main purpose of the day was to walk to Golspie to check for erosion of coastal archaeology known to be at risk and to look for any new sites which may have been exposed by recent storms. We followed our leader John Wombell to the first point of interest, which was a large ammonite in one of the corner stones of the Brora war memorial clock tower. The next feature was a series of Bee Boles, small niches in a drystone wall, built to shelter beehives. Someone has protected these with plastic doors but alas there was no honey to be found. We then headed down to the harbour and ice house and peered in through the gate to see the intact cobbled floor inside.

Soon we reached the coast where the southwest wind hit us full on. Although less than a mile into the walk, it had been an early start so we hunkered down just below the cold war wireless listening station, in the lee of the modern rock armouring, for a coffee break. Out on the wave-cut rocky beach were a series of huge boulders, five of them in a straight line parallel to the shore and others at random locations and we surmised that these may have been an early attempt at coastal protection, now some 50 metres out from present day high water.

It was only a short walk to the Salt Houses, now almost completely destroyed by the sea. This site was the subject of a survey and historical research by Clyne Heritage Society and NOSAS in 2004 which found there had been salt production as early as 1598, revived in 1768 and continuing on and off to 1828, fuelled by locally dug coal. There followed four seasons of excavations up to 2011, organised by SCAPE and Clyne Heritage, with NOSAS members playing a full part in the fieldwork. Two salt houses and a limekiln were exposed, with high quality dressed masonry, flagstone and cobbled floors, and mason's marks. There was also evidence of smithing.



An interesting stone

Richard Guest



Remaining walls of salt house *Jonie Guest*

At the "new" salt house two walls are exposed in the dune face. The building was "semi-detached" with two fireplaces back-to-back, one of which provided the fire to evaporate the salt water. Terram laid at the base of the excavation before backfilling is now eroding out of the face.

Of the extensive remains recorded and documented the sea has now destroyed all but the back wall. This graphically illustrates the importance of identifying eroding archaeological features on the coast before it is too late.

At this point we were joined by local crofter George Munro who had been a prominent volunteer throughout the years of survey and excavation.

George led us south along the beach to a firing range which had been used by the home guard during the last war. We sheltered behind a brick wall supporting an earth bank, at right-angles to the coast, which he explained had been cover for the observers who would hold up "lollipop" indicators to show the shooters where they had hit the targets which were positioned above an iron frame (still existing) a few feet north of the wall. The firing position had been about a hundred yards to the south and George also pointed out an embankment beyond the range which is probably full of spent bullets.



Home Guard firing range

Jonie Guest

A little further south George led us inland to his croft house where he has lived his whole life. On the way we passed a well from which the croft used to draw its water supply, and a level platform cut out of the steep banking which formed an earlier coastline when sea levels were higher. No doubt the use of this will be the subject of speculation by future archaeologists; it is in fact the site of a holiday caravan at present in winter storage. George showed us the building, now a barn, which had been the house in which he was born. At one stage it burnt down and the present house was built adjoining it to the south. To the north was the former stable, now demolished but the cobbled floor can still be seen. Here is stored the dressed masonry rescued from the old salt house after the sea washed it out. It is hoped this will eventually be displayed in a new Brora museum. Negotiations are under way to create a new museum in the long disused former school, the most northerly building in Brora village on the landward side of the A9.



Lunch under the cliff

Richard Guest

Bidding farewell to George we returned to the shore and headed south, crossing the Sputie Burn with its spectacular waterfall, to our lunch stop in the shelter of an overhanging rock cliff. We scoured the cliff face unsuccessfully for Pictish symbol carvings. (Well, we found an unrecorded one at Sculptor's cave last year, so why not here?)

The next stretch was unremarkable save for the bitter wind in our faces and uneven shingle underfoot and the party began to string out over a considerable distance, those in the lead with the smell of fish and chips already in their nostrils whilst those behind sought a little more

diligently for eroding archaeology. Bringing up the rear was poor John, who had to retrace his tracks looking for a pair of lost spectacles. They're still lost.

We came upon a timber framed, corrugated iron clad shed full of old lorry and tractor tyres, still somehow surviving the gales despite having lost probably 50% of its cladding. On the shore adjacent is an unrecorded cleared beach boat landing area which may indicate the shed had an original use related to fishing.



Tin shed with cleared beach to right

Jonie Guest

The next feature was the broch of Carn Liath which a few members climbed up to visit but most of us ploughed on into the wind without turning aside. The sea won't be eroding it for a few centuries yet so for the purposes of today's exercise it wasn't relevant (that's my excuse anyway).

The next stretch was populated by a lethargic herd of cows, complete with recumbent and fortunately disinterested bull and a remarkable Highland cow with one horn pointing up and the other down, giving it a quizzical look. They were separated from the beach by a formidable electric fence which crackled noisily. Eventually and with some trepidation we were forced to crawl under the buzzing wire to regain the beach.

In the next field was a second, older firing range with an unusual circular pill-box type structure, still roofed, which it is believed was an ammunition store. Close by are some level platforms raised slightly above field level but these were difficult to distinguish, although they show clearly in old photographs.

Approaching Dunrobin Castle rows of old wooden posts are evident well down the pebble beach. There are some rows parallel to the shore, driven at an angle so they slope back away from the sea whilst others are vertical and at right-angles to the shore. These may have been coastal defences or piers but are all now well below high water, some as much as 50m from the present shoreline though some are closer.



Old wooden posts

Richard Guest



Ammunition store

Richard Guest

Dunrobin Castle was eventually reached. The shore here is protected by old rip-rap masonry which has been breached fairly recently in several places. The foundations of an old stone pier can be seen projecting from the shore and curving to the south west, with a row of timber posts to the seaward side.

A second stone pier still exists (at least its foundations) a little to the south of the castle. The record for this was updated to record the presence of a cleared section of beach about 20 m either side of it.

Reaching Golspie the party was reunited for the final sprint to the fish and chip shop where we arrived shortly after 4 pm for a well-deserved and much enjoyed fish tea. After that it was back on the train for the journey home, well pleased with a winter walk which though cold had remained mostly fine.

Many thanks to John Wombell for his excellent organisation and commiserations for his missing specs.

Richard Guest

Winter walk to Glenmarksie

As part of the NOSAS winter walk programme Meryl Marshall organised an outing to Glenmarksie, Lower Strathconon. This walk promised a wide variety of archaeology including industrial sites such as hydro schemes and mica mines, a rock shelter, farmsteads and associated shielings, stills and agricultural sites including lynchets and coppiced hazel woodland. We were not disappointed. The long history of Strathconon is well documented by Meryl and others. Apart from having fun in the hills the aim of the walk was to revisit, review and possibly identify, note and record new structures more readily visible in winter with less bracken cover. Many of us have enjoyed reading Meryl's 2011 NOSAS publication 'Strathconon: The History and Archaeology of a Highland Glen' which is a great introduction to the area. More detail may be found in another of Meryl's NOSAS publications 'A Project to Identify, Survey and Record Archaeological Remains in Strathconon, Rosshire – Phase 1 Scatwell and Lower Strathconon' which describes a project to survey and record archaeology in that area.

On 2nd March 2015 fourteen folk gathered by the power station at Loch Luichart in excellent weather conditions. Following a thorough briefing from John and distribution of maps and handouts prepared by Meryl we crossed the bridge over Luichart Dam, examining the structure and dramatic views down the loch.



Loch Luichart

George Munro



Luichart Dam

George Munro

This was the site of an early hydro-scheme (c. 1925 onwards) to provide Strathpeffer and Dingwall with electricity. The cradles for the original pipes may still be viewed. We walked on to Soulmarksie where the remains of farmsteads with buildings, enclosures, pens and byres were explored.

John pointed out the fine dun site high above us but, aware of losing the winter light early, we decided we did not have time to climb up for a closer look. There are also impressive cup marked stones in the area but access is treacherous over felled forestry.

More proximate, sixty metres above Soulmarksie, there is an enigmatic rock shelter. A large downward sloping flat rock forms the roof. A small passage at the back allows access to the chamber which is 1.5 metres at the highest point. Well constructed stone walls are built around a large boulder upon which the 'roof' is balanced. There is plenty of natural daylight entering through gaps in this wall with glimpses of the valley below. Many of us climbed down into the shelter. It was perfectly dry and cosy as we sat on a soil and dry vegetation floor covering. Five adults were comfortably accommodated.



Rock shelter

George Munro

The age of this mysterious structure is uncertain. The fine construction is in keeping with prehistoric structures such as duns and brochs; however folk inside observed mortar between some of the stones indicative of more contemporary 'maintenance' suggesting possible ancient origins with more recent use by summer herders or stalkers. Undoubtedly one of the many highlights of the walk. Reluctant to leave we were encouraged out of the shelter by the promise of lunch and illicit alcohol stills.

We climbed down to the remains of buildings and enclosures on the west side of Soulmarksie then on to Upper Glenmarksie where there are the remains both of oval and rectangular shieling huts. We were reminded of the fact that these shielings would have been well established homesteads when the women and children moved up to the summer pastures with the animals and the daily round of life continued, including food production (cheese, butter etc.) and managing animals: sheep, possibly pigs, poultry and the small, hardy black Highland cattle known locally as 'kyloes' (forerunners of the larger red and white varieties). More dramatic events such as birth and death would also have taken place in the shieling huts. Anne pointed out associated lynchets (earth banks) in mid Glenmarksie below. We measured and recorded new hut remains revealed by recent muir burn. John drew our attention to a 'lunky hole' or 'creep' allowing sheep to access the enclosure. We stopped for lunch in the continuing sunshine admiring the glorious views around and below us.



Soulmarksie house

George Munro



Still

George Munro

After lunch it seemed appropriate to seek out those stills and again we were not disappointed. Illicit stills are notoriously difficult to find as is evident in the photograph. The coils and other moveable structures are long gone. Local knowledge combined with the presence of fast running water and well hidden rock ledges may be the only clues. It requires good experience to spot these sites as they were placed to be well hidden from the authorities. Even rising smoke was a potential giveaway and had to be concealed. However it is also suggested that Glenmarksie may have been a no-go area for the excise men.

We continued on down the glen to a large plantation of well established, coppiced hazel. John explained how important these coppiced trees would have been to past rural workers allowing them to use the hazel stems for a variety of purposes including fencing and household artefacts. This beautiful, long managed hazel woodland was another unexpected highlight for me. We then followed a canal like stream with a locked gate into a tunnel. Apparently this was connected to the early days of the hydro scheme dam. Perhaps some form of overflow system?

Having walked many miles up and down hill the group voted whether to proceed to the mica mines and associated spoil heaps which although proximate required something of a challenging uphill hike and scramble negotiating felled forestry. It was ayes to the right and off we went. Near the mine there is a large concrete pillar topped by a triangle of steel - a survey point associated with the dam. On arriving at the mine we discovered the gorge-like area with mica seams running through it, and obviously mined rock faces.

Mica forms as large sheets within the granite rock and Alan explained how this was much valued for its insulating properties, particularly during the second world war when it was used to make the capacitors required for transmitters. It also made good lantern windows. We picked up large pieces and were surprised at how readily the layers peeled back, almost like cling film. I am attracted to shiny geology so this was an industrial highlight for me. Never mind diamonds, mica is now this girl's new best friend.



A large book of mica

George Munro

It was a really good day out; an extraordinary place, a wide variety of archaeology across timelines and excellent weather. The only thing that would have improved the day would have been the presence of Meryl - who had done all the hard work in making the arrangements for the walk but was unable to accompany us.

Karen Clarke

Duns walk, Loch Broom

Saturday the 11th of April was a day of fascinating sites and remarkably changeable weather. We met up at a car park just off the A835 and travelled in convoy to Blarnalearoch at the end of the road on the south side of Loch Broom. We took a short walk back along the road to the first site,



Inside Dun An Ruigh Ruadh D&K Kennedy

Dun An Ruigh Ruadh (NH 1493 9008), which is classed in the NMRS as a galleried dun. This site demonstrates several characteristic features of a typical broch, such as intra mural galleries, a scarcement and internal stairs, although it is unusual in that it is not fully enclosed. The circuit intersects a cliff face, and a section of walling is missing due to erosion. There has been much discussion over the years around whether it was ever a classical round structure or whether the missing section was actually a straight wall along the cliff top, and

this debate continued (without reaching a consensus) within the group on the day. The structure is well sited, and commands excellent views up and down Loch Broom.

We then walked back along the road to visit Dun Lagaidh (NH 1423 9135), a multi-period site with impressive surviving banks and ditches which is scheduled as a castle, fort and galleried dun. Perched on top of a rocky outcrop overlooking good farmland, this site affords excellent views of the loch and must have been quite a statement of status. Here the broch features were less obvious as the earlier dun had been reused in Medieval times as a fort/castle. Lachlan discussed the history of the site, and described some of the excellent finds from it and the surrounding area. We had lunch in the dun, and in the rain.



Lunch in the rain, Dun Lagaidh Beth Blackburn

After lunch we were forced to hunker down as best we could to shelter from sudden, but mercifully brief, snow fall. Once the snow had stopped and the sun had come back out, we made our way down onto the flat land at the foot of the outcrop, looking for evidence of vitrification in the fort wall as we proceeded.



Loch Broom and Ullapool from Dun Lagaidh

D&K Kennedy

Crossing the fields and their impressively large clearance cairns, we reached the remains of the township of Logie (NH 1370 9145).



At Logie township with Dun Lagaidh beyond D&K Kennedy

This township was most likely cleared in the early 19th century. Most of the structures have been extensively robbed of stone for the construction of the large sheep pens which are the most obvious feature of the site now, but many buildings survive as earthworks. The site is overlooked by lazy beds on a very steep section of the hillside, and John Wombell pointed out the likely remains of some small piers protruding into the loch.

We made our way back to the cars via a circuit along the shoreline, by now in glorious sunshine, and past the remains of farm buildings which are thought to date from the time the township was cleared.

Duncan and Karen Kennedy

Garbeg - a very special place

Garbeg is a site which has interested John Wombell and myself for a number of years due to the density of prehistoric and Pictish remains in a relatively small area. The HAF walk led by John and myself in 2012 introduced the site to a wider audience and we must thank the landowner Fiona Younie who is only too pleased to share her archaeology with us. A second NOSAS walk took place in 2014, this time organised by James McComas.

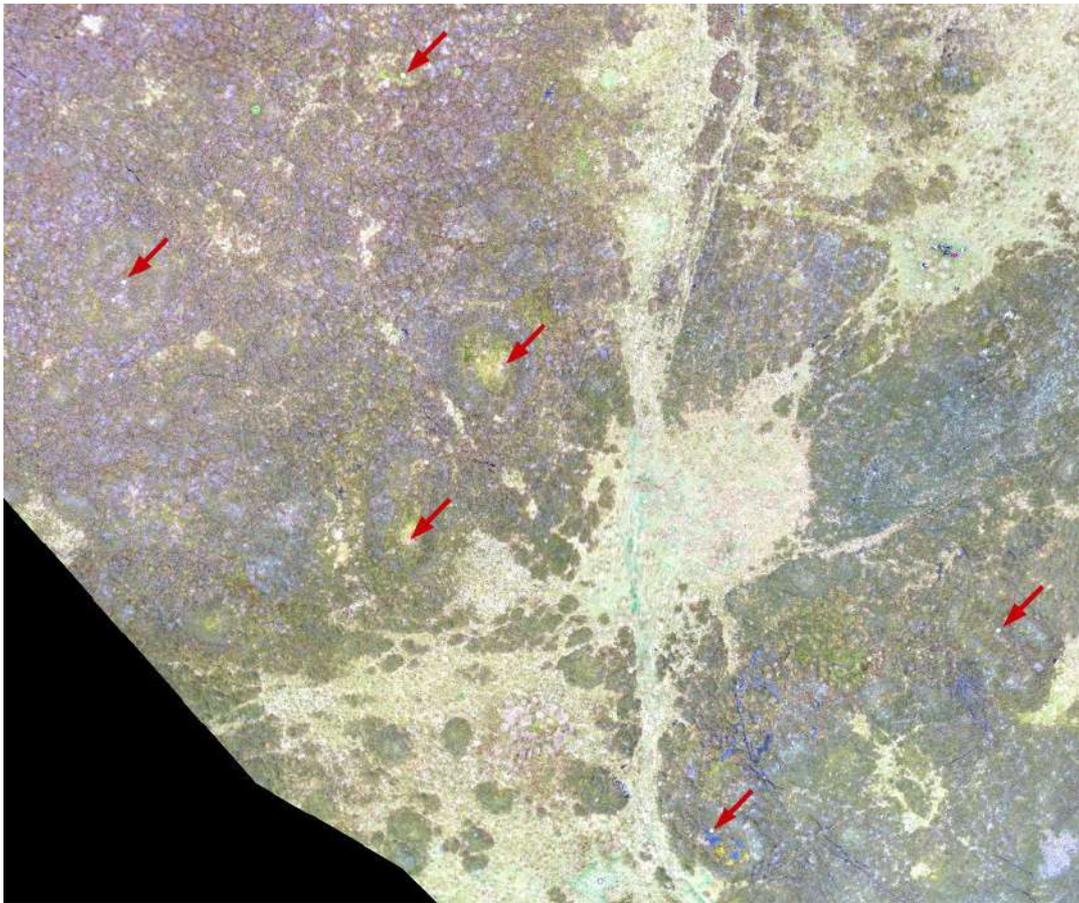
In October 2014 Alan Thompson used his drone, a DJI Phantom 2, to take aerial photos at Garbeg. An approximate grid was laid out at the Pictish Cemetery by placing targets on the ground at roughly 10 m spacing in each direction. The targets were rectangles of cardboard of various sizes painted white, yellow or orange, to see which size and colour was most easily visible on the photographs - some of the targets are shown by red arrows on the aerial photo below.



Garbeg Pictish Cemetery

Alan Thompson

We then went up to the north west moorland area which has other rectangular structures amongst the roundhouses and cairns. Alan positioned himself on the high ground ready to fly the drone. Targets were laid in the centre of most of the hut circles and GPS readings taken. However the targets were not easy to distinguish on the photographs because of the heather carpet - they are indicated on the aerial photo on the next page.



Moorland showing six round and sub-rectangular features Alan Thompson

In November 2014 Richard and I joined other NOSAS members on an ARCH course delivered by Malcolm Standring at AIness. This was a five week course on how to use the open source Geographic Information System, QGIS 2.6. Following on from this Richard and I (with the help of John Wombell in the field) decided to put our new QGIS skills into practice using the archaeology at Garbeg. Our plan was to take GPS readings of numerous cairns all over the field containing the Pictish Cemetery. We spent some 4 or 5 days walking and looking just in the one field. Notes and photographs were taken to differentiate between the various types of cairns, such as clearance cairns, round cairns with outer stones, and dished round cairns.

The various linear features, continuous turf and stone dykes, and isolated linear fragments were walked and GPS coordinates taken at changes of direction. The corners of areas of rig and furrow were also located. A number of control points were surveyed such as existing fence corners which are easy to match up with the OS map.



Linear wall feature Jonie Guest

At the Pictish Cemetery a selection of easily identified points such as the corners of some of the square barrows and the centre of a round barrow were recorded by GPS and added to the OS base map. We then added John's spreadsheet of his recorded sites. Next we added and georeferenced the site plan of all the barrows produced by RCAHMS, using the GPS readings of our 5 selected barrows. Finally we positioned one of Alan's aerial photos.



Square barrow

Jonie Guest



Round barrow

Jonie Guest

The output so far is a series of georeferenced layers which can be viewed together or separately, showing the archaeology on a map base or on the aerial photograph. This adds to the very thorough survey by RCAHMS, and we hope it will enable us to discover more about the archaeology at Garbeg. This is still work in progress as there is a lot more we can do with QGIS and Malcolm has not abandoned us yet!

A big thank you to all those who have participated so far.

Jonie Guest