

Appendix 2: Forts and Duns in Context: Re-assessing Argyll's Iron Age

One of the main themes highlighted when discussing future research into the Iron Age in Argyll was the need to reassess the results of past excavation work undertaken within forts and duns across the region.

The general consensus was that a relatively non-intrusive method of investigation would involve the reopening of trenches from previous excavated sites. This would have the potential to date the internal sequences within the targeted sites whereby the material previously excavated would be given chronological context and subsequently re-analysed within an absolute dating framework. The work would also afford the opportunity to undertake environmental analysis within the sites including the collection of bulk sample or pollen cores, analysis of sediments through thin sections, and recovery of possible in-situ material.

In order to facilitate this potential reassessment work a list of sites where excavation has previously been undertaken was compiled. From this a short-list of the sites has been drawn up selecting sites that offer the highest potential to inform any reassessment work. The criteria used were basic, including relative artefact densities and or the presence of internal stratigraphic sequences, both of which might offer the greatest potential for obtaining dating and other material. The information has been gleaned from the existing excavation reports especially concerning the stratigraphic preservation/potential of each site which in many cases has had to be inferred from the written reports, plans and notes where they can be accessed.

Of the sites that have previously been excavated 14 sites have been selected:

1) **Dun Mac Sniachan, Fort** [Canmore ID 23234, Site Number NM93NW 2, NGR NM 9032 3822]

This vitrified fort was excavated by R. A. Smith in 1873-4 (Smith 1872-4).

No extant plans of the trenches are in Smith's published account of the excavation. Smith gives a description of excavating a 'compartment' with soil to a depth of seven feet, possibly the well described by RCAHMS in the Argyll inventory. Finds included a quern of 'crude kind', bones of cattle and horse and charcoal along with several metal objects including a tanged iron sword, an iron dagger, and an enamelled bronze circular mount. All surviving finds in the National Museum of Scotland (NMS) (Accession numbers; HH47-51).

The presence of animal bone and charcoal suggest that surviving in situ deposits could provide dating. The site is obviously multi-phase with vitrified material, in an exemplary location with potentially relevant coastal structures below the rock knoll on which it sits.

2) **Suidhe Chennaidh, Dun** [Canmore ID 23466, Site Number NN02SW 1, NGR NN 02954 24230]

This was excavated by David Christison in 1890 (Christison 1891)

Christison cleared out entrance and part of the internal area 'the greater part of the free inner space of the fort was excavated down to solid rock or hard earth'. Several hearth positions were discovered with associated charcoal as well as fragmentary bones of horse and deer (red and roe). It is not known if the finds survive. A series of internal ledges were only partially examined and could represent secondary internal structures.

The presence of animal bone and charcoal and the multiple hearths in various locations suggest that surviving in situ deposits could provide dating, although it is questionable that any of these deposits survived Christison's workmen.

3) Leccamore/South Fort Luing, Dun [Canmore ID 22629, Site Number NMRS NM71SE 2, NGR NM 7507 1078]

This was excavated by Dr Allan MacNaughton in 1890 and 1892 (MacNaughton 1891, MacNaughton 1893).

Workmen cleared out the entrance and some chambers as well part of the internal area, although how much not specified in the original report. A "scarcement" in the interior was built like a wall of inferior masonry against the inner face of the dun wall (MacNaughton, 1893, 376) and likely represents secondary activity. Finds from the excavations included stone implements (Big Quern, small quern), coarse pottery, slag, charcoal hammer stones, pounders discs, a point sharpener, lots of charcoal, a bone pin, worked antler tines, a brass (cu alloy) pin, a fragment of an iron blade, as well as a quantity of animal bones (1 red deer, 2 pig, 3 cattle, 4 roe deer, 5 seal, bird) and shells, limpets, periwinkle and oyster. Most of the finds are in the NMS. The SW entrance has a cup-marked jamb, and the interior appears to have an accumulation of material still.

The deposits over the floor appear to be relatively artefact rich and would likely to provide dating.

4) Dun an Fheurain, Midden [Canmore ID 22654, Site Number NMRS NM 8244 2659, NGR NM 8244 2659]

Excavation by John McDougall, 1895, 1904 finds, Murray 1950, Lorne A Soc 1963.

At the base of the stack on the west side is a midden deposit which has been excavated on a number of occasions, the finds falling into two distinct groups. The earlier group, which includes a sherd of Samian ware, a bronze pin with projecting ring-head, a bronze finger-ring and a bronze strap loop, possibly by Roman origin, indicates a date about the second century AD for the building of the dun. The second group of finds, which includes an antler pottery-stamp, some bone pins with globular heads and a fragment of a composite bone comb suggest a second occupation of the site in the 6th century AD or later. Animal bones include those of dog, horse, sheep/goat, pig, red deer, roe deer, crane, mackerel and salmon. Other finds include a netting needle, bodkins or borers, antler tines a broken quern with triangular mould and a whetstone.

Finds are in Gallanach House, the National Museums Scotland (NMS Accession numbers: HD393- 419, (comb HD393 on loan to Kilmartin Museum), Glasgow Museum and Campbelltown Museum (Accession number; OBAN1995.111)). Any reinvestigation project should partially excavate the actual site on the stack to help tie the midden deposit to the structure itself.

5) Ardifuir, Dun [Canmore ID 39153, Site Number NR79NE 9, NGR NR 7912 9739]

Excavated in 1904 under auspices of David Christison (Christison, Anderson and Ross 1905).

Paving found in entrance way but no description of internal deposits in report. Finds include a fragment of samian (2nd Century AD) a bronze ring, whetstones, a polisher, sandstone whorl, perforated schist discs, crucible fragments, coarse pottery and one sherd of E ware.

Potentially there may be pockets of in situ archaeology across the site, including under the preserved paving. The main area of interest would be between the wall of the potentially later internal slab-revetted structure and the original wall of the dun. The whorl is on loan to Kilmartin Museum (Accession number GD20).

6) Druim and Duin, Dun [Canmore ID 39160, Site Number NR79SE 1, NGR NR 7811 9130]

Excavated under auspices of David Christison in 1904 (Christison, Anderson and Ross 1905)

No description of internal deposits. Finds include a steatite cup, polished pebbles, a possible strike-alight, flat discs, a perforated disc of sandstone, the upper half upper of a rotary quern, and a quern base. The finds are in the NMS (the cup and pebble on loan to Kilmartin Museum Accession numbers; GR4 and GR12).

Potentially there may be pockets of in situ archaeology across the site, and a detailed assessment of the walls of this structure could help elucidate multiple phases of use.

7) Duntroon, Fort [Canmore ID 39450, Site Number NR89NW 10, NGR NR 8029 9597]

Excavated in 1904 under auspices of David Christison (Christison, Anderson and Ross 1905).

Report describes vitrified material only on the inside wall, excavated to natural internally but no description of internal deposits beyond wall collapse. Finds included saddle querns, flint scappers, core and flakes, jet, hammerstone, polishers, whetstone, sinker? The finds are now in NMS (Accession numbers HH54-81 querns, H82 jet).

Potentially there may be pockets of in situ archaeology across the site since the excavation is described as "clearing of debris" (Christison, 1905, 275) and there may be the possibility of obtaining samples for archaeomagnetic dating.

8) Dunagoil, Fort [Canmore ID 40291, Site Number NS05SE 4, NGR NS 08479 53127]

John Marshall carried out excavations in 1913-4 (Marshall 1915).

Trench 1 described as – '14ft by 6 ft' in the 'middle of fort near the end' the soil described as a dark brown loam containing bones and shells 'scattered throughout'. Finds included polished stone axe heads, a Late Bronze Age stone mould, ring-headed pins of bronze and iron (150 BC-1st AD, an Early Iron Age brooch (3rd cent BC), bronze spiral ring (late IA because of Alloy), bronze tweezers, spear butt moulds 3rd-5th AD), glass bracelet (2nd AD), 2 glass beads (globular and toggle), shale bracelet and working pieces, coarse pottery, crucibles, spindle whorls were found during the excavation. The finds are now in Bute Museum, Rothesay [<http://www.butemuseum.org.uk/>].

One photo in the RCAHMS collection appears to show backfilled trench over the rampart (SC 723455).

The site offers high potential for in situ deposits and dating material to be recovered from the sides of the previously excavated trenches.

9) Ugadale Point, Fort [Canmore ID 38760, Site Number NR72NE 9, NGR NR 7851 2851]

Excavated by Horace Fairhurst in 1939 (Fairhurst 1956).

Excavations in a 16ft strip along top of northern rampart some 30ft to entrance at south. Describes dark friable rabbit disturbed soil, at least 3 feet down with no discernible stratification. Finds include perforated schist disc, small quern (pot quern?), spindle whorl, a crucible fragment and glass beads, carbon slag, small iron fragments, unworked flint, possibly from disturbed contexts along with other later material. Coins of James IV and Elizabeth 1579, bronze needle, shale armlets. The finds are now held by Campbeltown Museum (Accession numbers; CAPTM 0221, CAPTM2014.76-79).

While occupied at a relatively late date the depth of some of the described deposits suggest long term occupation and potential to provide dates from the earlier sequence. There was also a later rectangular building dated possibly to the 16th or 17th century, so the potential exists for a long chronology on-site.

10) Little Dunagoil, Fort, Bute [Canmore ID 40280, Site Number NS05SE 14, NGR NS 08648 53324]

Excavations were carried out by Dorothy Marshall 1958-61 (Marshall 1964).

Finds include a late Bronze Age socketed axe mould (Roseberry Topping variant of Sompting type 9th century BC), a mould for a knobbed spear-butt, shale working (whorls and bracelets), rotary quern, E ware, iron objects, bone tools, Samian ware, coarse pottery, glass toggle bead, and a comb fragment, probably Norse, 12th - 13th century. The finds are in Bute Museum, Rothesay [<http://www.butemuseum.org.uk/>].

The site offers high potential for in situ deposits and dating material to be recovered from the sides of the previously excavated trenches.

11) Dunan Breac, Skipness [Canmore ID 39290, Site Number NR85NE 17, NGR NR 8984 5820]

Plan and section AGD 244/3 and 244/4 in RCAHMS

Excavations were carried out on the southern side of plateau by Graham in 1914 (Graham 1915).

During excavations it was estimated that the wall was c.3.0m thick, but the entrance to the dun was not located. The entrance discovered was either secondary or a refurbishment of the original. Clearing of the southern half and test-pitting in the interior revealed internal walls, paved areas and different levels and types of flooring. The internal walls included stones standing on edge and encompassed an earth and stone habitation floor (Graham, 1914, 53-54). Paved floors and possible post holes probably belonging to two periods of occupation were uncovered in the interior, and the excavation recovered a small piece of iron slag, a hollowed stone and two quartzite strike-lights of a type frequently found in brochs and duns. The finds are now in the National Museums Scotland [<http://www.nms.ac.uk/collections-research/collections-and-research-policies/>]

The presence of a horizon of charcoal, bone and a lot of tumbled stone (Graham, 1914, 52) and the excavation technique of test-pitting suggests deposits could still survive on this site.

12) Kildalloig Glenramskill, Dun [Canmore ID 38708, Site Number NR71NW 11, NGR NR 7453 1904]

This dun was excavated by William Bigwood 1963-65 (Bigwood 1964)

Dating of occupation was provided by a 2nd century AD Roman (Robertson 1970) bronze stud-head fibula beneath paving at the outer base of the W wall, below a midden. A similar chronology may also

be assigned to a bronze spiral finger ring, an iron pin with a glass bead head, fragments of cannel-coal bracelets, a bone pin, and sherds of native pottery. From a potentially later period came sherds of Dark Age imported pottery and other finds suggesting occupation in the Early Medieval period, and also a Neolithic axe, probably from Ireland. The bronze spiral finger-ring is in Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum [<http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/kelvingrove/Pages/default.aspx>].

The site has multiple internal structures that were not removed and thus the potential for accessing in-situ deposits for dating and other analysis.

13) Dun Fhinn, Dun [Canmore ID 38467, Site Number NR63SE 10, NGR NR 6572 3064]

This dun was excavated by William Bigwood 1966-9 (Bigwood 1966)

This suggested at least two periods of occupation while the presence of post-holes may indicate the existence of timber buildings against the inner face of the wall, ~~or~~ a fully roofed structure. The finds include three small fragments of Samian ware, two bronze penannular brooches and a blue glass toggle bead.

The excavations were undertaken using a box method, considered unfinished in the RCAHMS Inventory, which is still visible as depressions on-site and would preserve excellent sections for dating and other analysis.

The finds are in Campbeltown Museum (Accession numbers; CAPTM 1415-1425).

14) An Caisteal, Dun, Mull [Canmore ID 21757, Site Number NM32SE 2, NGR NM 3874 2141]

Partial excavation was carried out in 1960 by Horace Fairhurst and the Mull Field Club (Fairhurst 1964).

A drawn plan and section are in the report. The entrance and the SW part of the interior were examined, and a section was cut through the dun wall on the S. Apart from three crude hearths at different levels, the portion of the interior examined contained no significant structures. Peat ash and charcoal were noted. The artefacts recovered during the excavation included three small sherds of coarse native pottery, the upper stone of a rotary quern, and a small fragment of micaceous schist bearing a cup-shaped depression possibly a friction stone.

The presence of hearths and burnt deposits indicate carbon dating could be obtained for the site. Re-opening and cleaning the section would offer valuable wall construction details.