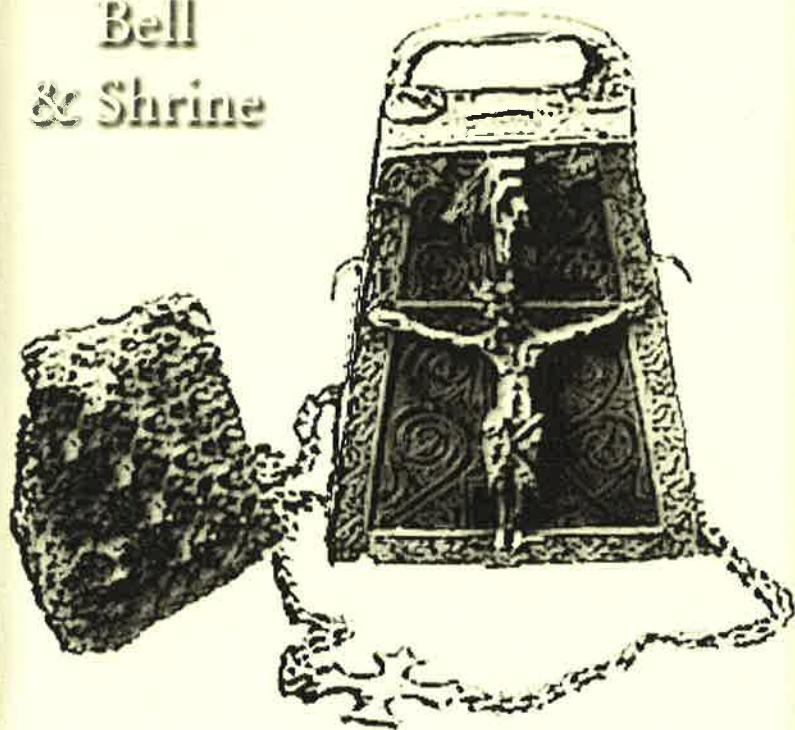


The  
Torbhlaren  
Bell  
& Shrine



THE

KIST 78

## EDITORIAL

We are concentrating in this issue on two important events in mid-Argyll; one stretching back hundreds of years and the other contemporary.

Kilmartin House Museum is hosting an exhibition featuring the ancient Torbhlairen Bell and its Shrine which was found around 1814 wrapped in the remains of a woollen cloth and concealed among stones. It is a must-see: if you haven't been you have until 21st December to view it.

The other event is something that surely has not passed you by: the controversial European beaver trial in North Knapdale. Read the first part of a fascinating article by field officer Jenny Holden.

Our third article was prompted by the NHASMA summer island excursion. During this year's Skye trip they stopped at High Pasture Cave, the focus of ongoing excavation and field survey. The article suggests that the cave could have been a focus of worship both during the Bronze and Iron Ages.

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NHASMA subscriptions (Inc. two issues of Kist): £5 single, £7 couples. Cheques payable to N.H.A.S.M.A.

**Front cover illustration by: Phillip Fox-Denham  
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Museum of Scotland**

## **Introduction**

by S. Webb

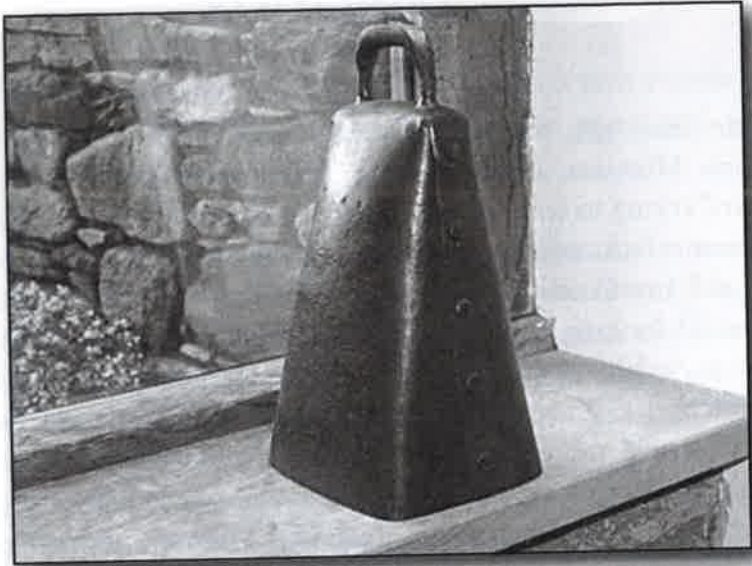
Some years ago, not long after I started work at Kilmartin House Museum, I was looking through early issues of the 'Kists' trying to learn as much about the area as I could. One edition caught my eye, not so much for its textual content, but the front cover image - a line drawing on the front of a splendid looking bell shrine. This was the Torbhlaren Bell Shrine, which had been found in the early 1800's in Kilmichael Glen and contained an early medieval iron bell. As I learned more about the object, I wondered how many local people were aware of its existence, since not long after its discovery, it was taken to the National Museum of Scotland. My next trip to Edinburgh included a visit to the Museum to see the object - and at that moment, I resolved that one day, we would display it in Mid Argyll. That was five years ago, and it is now the Year of Homecoming. Kilmartin House Museum's contribution to the festivities is our temporary exhibition 'Carved Stones and Ancient Bones - the early Christian Church in Argyll', and the centre piece is the Torbhlaren Bell and Shrine. A lot of red tape, £3,000 worth of display case, and here it is - back in Mid Argyll once more - a fitting homecoming indeed.

### **Power & Protection:**

**The 'Torbhlaren Bell', its Shrine & the Relic Tradition**

by Gilbert Márkus

This ancient bell and its medieval shrine were discovered about the year 1814, but there are conflicting accounts of its discovery. One account in 1827 said that it was found on



Torbhlaren farm, about a mile from Kilmichael, which is why it is now usually called the Torbhlaren Bell Shrine. On the other hand, the grandson of the minister at the time stated that the objects were found 'at the back of the manse, about the site of the old Church'.<sup>1</sup>

### **A 'Monument Of Idolatry'**

The assemblage was found wrapped in the remains of a woollen cloth, and concealed among stones. This might suggest that it had been deliberately hidden – as so many bells and other relics were – at the time of the Reformation. Such bells were part of the popular devotion to saints, something banned by the new Protestant authorities. In 1581 the Scottish Parliament banned the cult of saints, forbidding 'the dregges of Idolatrie that remanis in divers pairtes of the realme, be using of pilgrimage to sum chappellis, wellis, croces, and sic uther monumentis of Idolatrie.'

In those troubled times, bells and other 'dregs of idolatry' were hidden by those who treasured them, perhaps in the hope that the troubles would pass and that the loved objects could be retrieved.

### The Early Uses Of Bells

The earliest bells in the churches of the Gaelic world were made of a single sheet of beaten iron, coated in bronze, though bells made of cast bronze were being made very soon afterwards (circa 700 - 900). Typically square bottomed, these bells varied considerably in size, ranging from 6 cm in height (bell from the Broch of Burrian) to 32.6 cm (from Birnie, Morayshire). This suggests that perhaps the bells had different purposes. The larger ones were certainly used to call people to prayer - as described in several writings of the seventh century. The smaller bells, including the bell from Torbhlaren/ Kilmichael, would have been a bit quieter: could they have been used within the church itself, for liturgical purposes?



*Medieval carving shows cleric holding Bell & Crosier - White Island*

### The Bell In Later Use

These early bells were associated with saints who were supposed to have owned them. Soon they began to be treated as relics of

those saints, and the subsequent holder of such relics was entrusted not only with the precious object itself, but also with the authority and power of its original owner. This might include the right to exercise a certain kind of jurisdiction as an abbot or bishop. This use of relics forms the background to early medieval carvings in which clerics are represented carrying bells and crosiers (pastoral staffs), the symbols of their authority.

But the authority of such a relic was not only institutional. A relic of this sort might be detached from high ecclesiastical office, and would then be handed down through many generations of a single family. The hereditary keeper was known in Gaelic as a *deòradh*, the origin of the modern surname Dewar. We have evidence of such 'dewars' holding all kinds of relics - bells, crosiers, books and body-parts of saints.

The twelfth-century shrine in which the Torbhlairen bell was encased belongs to this tradition of relic-use. The bell itself may be rather plain, but the ornate shrine speaks of the honour and reverence in which it was held. At the time this shrine was made, we know that the dewars of such relics were using them to administer oaths, with witnesses swearing on the relic that they spoke the truth. Water was poured into bells and used to heal sick people or animals. The bell of St Colmán of Luachan could guide the dewar in the pursuit of stolen cattle, ringing out whenever he strayed from their track, while another was rung by the dewar as he accompanied the dead to their graves because its ringing chased away demons.

As late as about 1600 we have a record of an event in which

two brothers were about to go to war with each other when a dewar called O'Dornan turned up with St Patrick's Bell in his hand to confront one of them, Eneas Ultagh.

'For your lives,' said Eneas Ultagh to his men, 'move not a step to or fro.' Then he asked, 'What is all this ringing for?'

'This ringing,' said O'Dornan, 'is to curse you and your army for your unlawful insurrection against your older brother Rannell.'

'Pray, holy Clerk, bless me,' said Eneas, 'and I will go and ask my brother's pardon.'

'I will bless you conditionally,' answered O'Dornan, 'on condition that you'll disperse your army and send them back...'<sup>2</sup>

The dewar of the bell clearly has a power which strikes fear into these armed men, the power of the bell to curse those who act against its virtue. Indeed we often see in medieval Gaelic sources that powerful and violent people are brought to ruin by a saint's bell. In the tenth century prologue to Adomnán's Law of the Innocents, homicidal kings who resist the law are cursed by 'the bell of Adomnán's anger':

*O humble, gentle lad,  
O son armed with the Rule,  
strike the bell against Cellach of Carman,  
that he be in the earth before the year's end.*

*O laddie armed with holy orders,  
who have come to noble Maistiú,  
strike the little bell against Domnall,  
that his year should not be complete. 3*

More bizarrely, in the twelfth-century Life of Colum Cille (Columba), when Conall set a mob of assailants on the saint, Columba had bells rung, 'so that someone said, "Conall is getting bells". And because of this he is given the name Conall Clogach ('Conall of the Bells'). And the cleric took from him kingship and sovereignty, and banished his sense and intellect save only for the length of time that he was defecating.' 4 There may not be any record of the Torbhlaran bell or its shrine before their discovery in 1814, but we have a good idea of how such bells were used and revered in medieval Gaelic society, and the sense of power that was associated with them - a power to heal and protect, an antidote to the power of the rulers of this world.

### Bells Coming Home

These early medieval bells appear in modern folk-traditions as home-loving creatures: they don't like to be taken away from where they belong. So anyone who removes St Finan's bell from the altar in its ruined chapel is cursed; and when a man from Rannoch tried to steal St Fillan's Bell from its home at Struan, the bell stuck fast to a rock. The bell of Baile Bhaodáin at Ardchattan

also had a mind of its own. It used to be taken out to heal the sick in the surrounding countryside, but if it wasn't taken back immediately, it would fly back of its own accord, ringing out 'the most melodious music ever heard by human ear'.

Perhaps the Torbhlaran Bell has worked its own wee miracle in having itself brought back to Kilmartin, even if only for a few months, so close to the place where it was honoured for many centuries.





crossier depicted on the seal is almost certainly the Cathbuaidh or 'battle victory', a relic of St Columba associated with Dunkeld, the church where St Columba's relics were taken in 849 AD. Columba is a more likely patron of this bell than Moluag, therefore, but without new evidence there can be no certainty as to who the patron was.

### Who Was The Dewar?

Neither can we be sure which family provided the hereditary keepers of the bell and its shrine. A member of the MacLachlan family, who held Dunadd as their principal residence, was steward of Glassary in 1436 and is described *thoissechdeowra* - a problematic term. <sup>7</sup> The first element is clearly Gaelic *toiseach* 'chief', and the second element may represent Gaelic *deòradh* or *dewar*, in which case the MacLachlan family may have been dewars of the Torbhlaire bell. But there is a strong argument that the second element is actually old Gaelic *doer-rath* 'base-clientship', <sup>8</sup> and therefore that the office of *thoissechdeowra* has nothing to do with dewarship, in which case the bell cannot be connected to the MacLachlans.

Another possibility, however, is the family called MacIndeor 'son of the dewar', who lived in the seventeenth century at Kilchoan, 5 km from Kilmichael. Near to their home is a bay called Port an Deora 'port of the dewar'. This family provided several priests and church officials in medieval Argyll, and Archibald MacIndeor served as 'dempster' of the sheriff court of Argyll in the seventeenth century, uttering the sentence of the court. His legal role may be a survival of the function of a medieval dewar, perhaps the keeper of the Torbhlaire Bell.

### Seeing & Believing – The Visual Theology Of The Shrine

The people who used this bell, the people who made its shrine, were part of a rich and dynamic religious culture in which visual symbolism played an important part in the expression of belief. The shrine articulates some of those beliefs. It shows the crucified Christ, suffering and dying – an image of failure and disaster from the human point of view. But the artist portrays him as wearing a royal crown, indicating that this is actually the moment of his glory (John 17:1), his moment of triumph, as by dying he defeats death itself (2 Tim. 1:10).

From a stylized cloud above his head the right hand of God reaches down towards the dying Christ in a gesture of blessing. This is a common enough motif in medieval art, expressing the presence of God amidst the events that are taking place below. It is a particularly potent symbol at the moment of Christ's death, since he now seems abandoned by God, as he cries out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matt. 27:46); but the shrine tells the viewer that far from being abandoned at this moment, he is completely at one with his Father.

Finally, it is worth noting that the bell and shrine together represent two different strands of the medieval religious imagination. The bell itself provides a symbolic connection to the saint (Columba, or whoever it was) who first owned the bell: it is the power of the holy man which is evoked by the use of the bell. But the shrine made to contain the bell has no visual reference to the saint. It refers to the central Christian narrative of the death of Christ, and by implication his resurrection. It might be thought that there was some

tension here between the cult of the saint and faith in Christ, but such a tension would be alien to the medieval believer. For him or her, the cult of a saint was simply one manifestation in a local context of the universal salvation offered by God in Christ: any power the saint had to help or heal was from God.

The Torbhlairen Bell and Shrine are part of the National Museums of Scotland collections, having been taken there after their discovery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They have been kindly loaned to Kilmartin House Museum as part of our Homecoming exhibition, 'Carved Stones and Ancient Bones: The Early Christian Church in Argyll', for which this leaflet has also been produced.

#### Notes

1. M. Campbell & M.L.S. Sandeman, *Mid Argyll: a field survey*, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 95 (1962) 1-125, at 82.
2. Archibald MacDonald, 'A fragment of an Irish MS History of the MacDonalds of Antrim', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 37 (1934-36) 262-84.
3. G. Márkus, *Adomnán's Law of the Innocents*, Kilmartin 2008, 13-14.
4. M. Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry*, Oxford 1988, 266.
5. J. Anderson, *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, Edinburgh 1881, 208.
6. C. Bourke, 'Insignia Columbae', in *Studies in the Cult of St Columba*, ed. C. Bourke, Dublin 1997, 162-83.
7. K.A. Steer and J. Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands*, Edinburgh 1977, 142-3.
8. W. Gillies, 'Some thoughts on the Toschederach', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 17 (1996) 128-42.

## EUROPEAN BEAVER FIELD TRIAL: KNAPDALE

by Jenny Holden

It was 7pm and the June sun still shone confidently; reluctant to give up its reign. Below me, at the foot of the hill, the chocolate box cottages, manicured lawns and humbug painted locks of Crinan Canal stretched into the distance. I looked beyond, out across the golden expanse of Moine Mhor NNR that borders the Scottish Beaver Trial Study Area in Knapdale Forest. A pair of raven chattered companionably as they flew purposefully by.



*European Beaver - Courtesy wikimedia*

As my 4x4 climbed the gravelly forest track which led to the loch side, the little buzz of excitement, that had become an almost permanent presence, woke once more, shrugging off any feelings of fatigue. This was the start of my working day, or night to be more accurate.

It was just a few days since the first reintroduction of a mammal to the British Isles had taken place. Three families of beavers were now swimming free in the forest lochs, beginning a five year trial to assess the likely impact of these animals if they were to be returned to our countryside on a permanent basis.

The Beaver is a large rodent, with adults measuring over a metre in length and weighing around 20 kilos. They live in tight knit family groups usually with an adult pair and 2-3 young, although if the habitat is particularly good, juveniles from previous litters may be tolerated and allowed to remain in their parents' territory for longer. As with all wild animals, beavers are not hot on reading text books. In Norway I came across a 12 year old "widowed" male living with his 9 year old son!

These aquatic mammals are mostly nocturnal, but during summer months are active in late daylight. They are active throughout the year and do not hibernate but will cache food rather like a squirrel and become far less active during the winter months.

They spend all of their time either in or very close to freshwater, rarely travelling more than 50m or so from the water's edge.

Plant material forms the entirety of the beaver's diet; they certainly do not eat fish. They fell broadleaved trees close to the waters edge in order to feed on bark, leaves and twigs and may use the timber to build lodges and dams. This activity has a coppicing effect and the trees then re-grow new shoots. The beaver prefers willow, aspen, rowan and birch and does not like coniferous trees.

Beavers dig waterside burrows or build lodges which have a submerged entrance, and are built up with branches and mud. They prefer to live on the banks of existing lochs or slow flowing rivers, but will build dams on burns to create their own ponds if necessary. They do not tend to like faster flowing rivers or canal systems.

The return of the beaver is a momentous event in UK conservation. It is something that has been fought for by a dedicated band of ecologists for many years; and hotly contested by others.

In May 2008, after more than 10 years of heated debate and procrastination by hundreds of folk and many, many organisations, the current Scottish Government took the bold step of allowing a trial reintroduction of the beaver to our shores. The trial is managed by the partnership of SWT and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) who have formed the Scottish Beaver Trial.

Knapdale Forest was chosen for several reasons:

Forestry Commission Scotland is the host partner of the Scottish Beaver Trial and believes, in line with the opinions of



*Jenny Holden - Beaver Trial Field Officer*

the other Trial partners and consulted experts, that Knapdale Forest is an ideal location to carry out the project as it covers a range of important habitats and biodiversity. The trial area is also in the heart of a forest which produces timber and provides recreational facilities for people, making it a suitable place to explore how beavers co-exist with forestry operations and the environment.

The area is quite geographically distinct, being almost surrounded by sea which will help to limit the directions in which the beavers could disperse; catchments are short and simple, again placing some limits on the way in which the beavers move around their environment.



Public support in the area is good. From the responses to the consultation document in October 2007, received from Mid-Argyll, 72% were in favour of beavers returning to Scotland and 73% were in favour of beavers returning to Knapdale Forest. Out of the 466 responses, over 80% were defined as resident in Mid-Argyll (with postcodes PA29, PA30 and PA31).

The Knapdale segment (those living in Tayvallich, Achnamara, Crinan, Bellanoch and Cairnbaan) contained the strongest opposition (31 negative responses) proportionally. This included 20% of landowners recorded as being adjacent to the proposed trial site. Seven (9%) national/local organisations out of 80 contacted raised “key concerns” and objections.

The majority of comments from those in favour of the trial related to benefits to biodiversity and wildlife tourism and a desire to see the reinstatement of the beaver in Scotland.

Comments from those against the trial covered a wide range of concerns and perceptions including environmental and socio-economic impact, public health, containment, length of trial, historical evidence of previous range, consultation process, insurance and compensation, the presence of non-native introductions of species such as mink and the best use of resources.

On a personal level, having now lived and breathed this project for around 8 months I can report that I can still count the number of objectors who have been in contact with me on my fingers; and the pro-beaver public? I lost count of them in



*Beaver Trial Monitoring Team*

my first week and find myself day after day being bombarded by questions from enthusiastic well wishers from the local area and further afield, whether I am trying to enjoy a pint in the local bar, watch a sheepdog trial or simply get round the supermarket!

Behind the scenes, a hard working team of ecologists, fundraisers, habitat managers, PR specialists, policy advisors, educators and animal husbandry experts are in place to ensure that this Trial is run in as scientific and effective way possible. It is also however, a learning experience for everyone involved and advisors from overseas, where beavers are already resident, will be on hand every step of the way.

In amongst this hive of activity is me, in my new role as Beaver Trial Field Officer. My job's official strap line is "to implement the local operational delivery of the Scottish

Beaver Trial,” which in real terms means that I’m the person on the ground getting wet, bitten by midges – and potentially by the beavers themselves – and answering a barrage of questions wherever I go.

Just months ago I had no intention of leaving Cumbria: my fiancé, Chris, and I were happily settled in a picturesque Lakeland village with our two dogs and small flock of Shetland Sheep. I had a job that I enjoyed with Cumbria Wildlife Trust and spent very happy weekends going to sheepdog trials, hanging merrily from rock faces, walking miles and miles over the Lake District Fells or simply nestled with a pint of ale in our local pub.

The trouble is that, once in a while, a job comes up that you simply can’t turn your back on and, even more rarely, you’re given the amazing opportunity to fulfil a dream.

I spotted two familiar figures ahead of me on the view point above Loch Creag Mhor. Chris, whose life had also inevitably been taken over by large hairy rodents, and our new found friend and volunteer, Charlie Self, were staring avidly through their binoculars at the water’s edge.

“They’re already out,” Chris told me in hushed tones, “Mary-Lou and Gunn-Rita are just among the reeds at the edge and Andreas Bjorn is feeding under that overhanging rowan.”

The families of beavers had been imported from Norway six months earlier after being captured in the wild by experts Frank Rossell and Bjornar Hovde. The family in Creag Mhor had formerly been one of Frank’s study groups and had

arrived already named. Being able to distinguish between individuals at a study site is vital and names are easier to remember than numbers or other codes. It is normal practice in scientific studies for the researchers to name their subjects. Here, Andreas Bjorn was the adult male, Gunn-Rita, the adult female, and Mary-Lou their one year old kit.

We took the canoe from the top of the truck and slid it gently into the water. Soon we were gliding across the glassy surface of the clear water with only the gentle whispering noise of the newly emerging reeds on the prow to break the quiet.

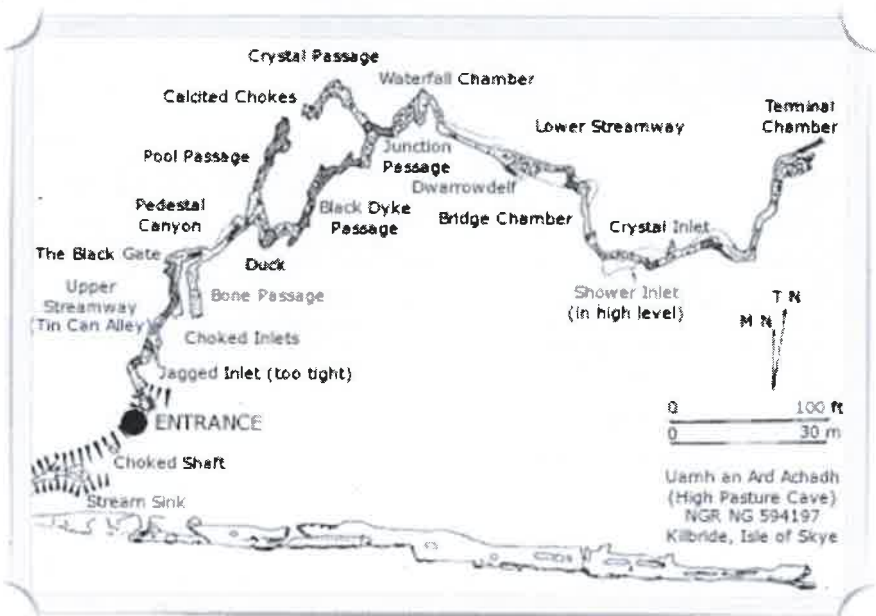
The beavers seemed unconcerned by our presence and barely lifted a nose as we settled in the centre of the loch to watch. Andreas Bjorn had not left his position under the rowan tree and seemed to have quite a passion for the flowers. Stretching up to reach another bunch, both the beaver's surprising size and dexterity could be observed. His chisel-like incisors scissored easily through the twigs and, holding his prize in his paws, he munched contentedly. *(to be continued Kist 79)*

**Investigating the Iron Age 'Underworld': Excavations at  
High Pasture Cave, Isle of Skye  
by Steven Birch**

The High Pasture Cave & Environs Project is a community-based project co-directed by Martin Wildgoose and Steven Birch, who are both freelance archaeologists based on the island of Skye. The Project draws on a wide range of volunteer support – from the local communities of Skye & Lochalsh,

university departments in the United Kingdom, freelance archaeologists and from overseas students.

The focus of the project work is centred on High Pasture Cave, a natural limestone cave that contains a diverse assemblage of archaeological deposits of prehistoric age. However, although the cave appears to have been the focus of the site during prehistory, fieldwork carried out between 2004 and 2007 has uncovered a wide range of features on the surface above, indicating the use of the site from the Mesolithic through to the Post-Medieval period – around 6000 years of activity. These features include pits and post-holes, and a number of cellular stone-built structures and revetment walls associated with a large burnt mound. Indeed, evidence



*High Pasture Cave location map*

*Martin Wildgoose surveys trench 1, bone passage*



recovered from the excavations so far suggests that fire played a major role in activities carried out at the site including its use in cooking and feasting, in the possible cremation of animals, and in industrial processes such as metalworking.

Access to the cave from the surface was initially through a natural entrance, comprising a walkway over abandoned river-washed gravels and boulders. Through time the entrance was modified; at first this included a series of small steps and a paved surface, which guided a person entering the cave along a dry and abandoned passage and down a steep ramp to a junction with the underground stream. Around the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, a more elaborate entrance was constructed comprising a steep stone-built stairwell, over which was built a corbelled roof.

Although much work remains to be completed at the site, the archaeological investigations and post-excavation analysis of materials recovered so far is providing evidence to suggest that

*Looking towards Fiskavaig rock shelter site*



the cave and the associated features formed an important part of the wider prehistoric landscape in Skye between the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age periods. Archaeological material recovered from the cave includes a series of structured deposits, including a wide range of votive offerings, and while much of this material would have been available locally, some of the finds point to wider cultural contacts. The assemblage

of materials recovered from the site has produced several significant and important finds and the site in general has the potential to augment substantially our understanding of the later prehistoric period in the Atlantic Iron Age of Scotland.



*High Pasture Cave Entrance*

It is most probable that the High Pasture Cave site was utilised on a periodic basis and the function of the site, and in particular the use of the cave, changed through time. A study of the range of small finds recovered to date and their distribution on site, along with the variation in the deposition of faunal remains, butchery techniques and quality of preservation, provides clear evidence of changing patterns of use.

The earlier phases identified within the cave, dating to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, provide evidence for the structured deposition of small finds, especially within the liminal zone where the



paved walkway entered the natural cave entrance. In this area we have recovered caches of bone points and pins, spindle whorls, whetstones and a large saddle quern stone. This deposition continued along the walkway in the cave where a cache of seven tuning pegs from a musical instrument were placed in a gap between the paving stones, while nearby we recovered a socketed iron axe and an adze of similar form.

Later phases of use including that identified above the upper paved granite floor in the cave, which has been radiocarbon dated to between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, indicates the continued deposition of material comprising domestic-type midden. Included with this mix of materials are elements from the burnt mound that was accumulating at the surface throughout the use of the cave, including deposits of fire-cracked stone, charcoal and heavily burnt bone. However, by this phase of use the distribution of small finds is more even and widespread throughout the archaeological deposits, with less emphasis placed on zonation within the cave.

The range of small finds from the upper contexts in the cave, although displaying slight variations in composition to those in the lower contexts, on the whole comprise similar types of material including spindle whorls, bone pins, items manufactured from antler, a range of iron objects, and stone tools including grinders, hammers, palettes, whetstones and quern stones. However, within these deposits we also recovered glass beads and residues relating to metalworking including hearth slabs, slag deposits, hammer-scale, and crucible and tuyere fragments; the latter indicating the processing of copper-alloy. And, although it now appears likely that the metalworking was taking place on site, or at

least somewhere close to High Pasture Cave, we have not yet found any in-situ evidence for these activities.

These finds, which are generally distributed around the cave and stairwell entrance, and along the section of cave known as Bone Passage, are augmented by a rich and varied faunal assemblage, the remains of fish and shellfish, and burnt plant remains; most likely relating to feasting at the site, or deposited as votive offerings in activities centred on the cave. In particular, it is the unusual composition of the bone assemblage recovered from the cave, including a predominance of domesticated pig and evidence for unusual butchery practices that sets it apart from the other animal remains recovered from the site, and to animal bone assemblages generally recovered from Iron Age sites in Scotland.

During these periods of deposition, we have archaeological evidence supported by a range of radiocarbon dates to suggest that the burnt mound was accumulating in a horseshoe-shape around the cave entrance. This feature, along with the associated revetment walls and small cellular structures, form a major component of the site. Small finds are however, less numerous in these deposits, although we have recovered metalworking residues, waste from the manufacture of shale objects, stone tools, ceramics and lithics. The resulting small finds distribution map for the site indicates a strong bias in favour of the cave entrance and bone passage.

Although the use of the High Pasture Cave site was most likely periodic, radiocarbon dates taken from a wide range of materials indicates the intense use of the site between 850BC and 100BC. The site appears to have been formally 'closed'

around 100BC. This included the partial backfilling of Bone Passage with organic midden, deposits of fire-cracked stone and granite boulders, and the complete backfilling of the stairwell with similar materials. At some time during the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the final closing act was performed when human and animal remains were placed in the top of the backfilled stairwell.

These included the extended inhumation of an adult woman aged between 30 and 40 years; the combined remains of a perinate aged between 7 and 9 months and a foetus aged between 3 and 6 months; and the remains of a foetal pig. Preliminary analysis of the human and animal remains suggests that excarnation may have been used before deposition of the remains in their final resting place at the top of the blocked stairwell; while isotope analysis of the human remains indicates that the perinate and foetus were most likely directly related to the adult woman. After the deposition of the human and animal remains in the stairwell, the area around the cave entrance and the surface of the burnt mound was landscaped using granite and limestone boulders. This final act may have been an attempt to hide or disguise the site from view, erasing the cave and its stairwell entrance from the Iron Age landscape of Skye.

This year we have started a major survey of prehistoric features through Strath Suardal that may be contemporary with High Pasture Cave, which will enable us to locate the site within its wider landscape setting. We have already identified prehistoric roundhouses and their associated field walls and clearance cairns; individual farmsteads and small-scale settlements that may have been occupied during the

time that the activities were taking place at High Pasture's. Two other natural caves have also been found during the survey work that contain similar deposits to High Pasture Cave, although in much smaller quantities, including worked antler, stone tools and the remains of domesticated pig. Further archaeological fieldwork including survey and small-scale excavation are planned at these sites to evaluate function and potential relationships to our work at High Pasture's.

From the fieldwork and post-excavation analysis conducted so far at High Pasture Cave it is clear that this is no 'normal' domestic settlement. The geophysical surveys and excavations have revealed no evidence for dwellings, while the site is set apart from the pattern of settlement that we have so far identified through landscape survey in Strath Suardal. The cave appears to have been the main focus at the site; a place where a surface stream plunges underground into a network of natural passages. As shelters, depots, landmarks and tombs, caves have been focal points for human ritual and subsistence activities. As such, archaeological evidence from caves allows a glimpse of past societies cultural understanding of natural places in the landscape, while the use of caves throughout human history transcends chronological divisions, suggesting that they were re-used, re-invented and re-contextualised over millennia.

Therefore, how do we start to interpret the High Pasture Cave site, including the associated deposits of midden, residues relating to craft industries and the deposition of a significant range of artefacts, primarily from the domestic domain? As archaeologists it is obviously difficult for us to differentiate between economic and symbolic activities, especially at a site

where the mode of deposition and the range of materials involved changes through time. Items found in specialised contexts are often types that are directly associated with the domestic domain, within the settlements themselves. Thus, the crucial distinction to make is not between different kinds of object or between the roles that they had played in daily life, but rather, it concerns the manner in which they were deployed when their use came to an end. Maybe it is the form of deposition we are identifying at High Pasture Cave that sets these items apart from those employed in domestic life, providing them with a new emphasis.

It has been suggested (Bradley, 2005) that these special activities needed to happen in special places, potentially in locations cut off from normal domestic activities or whose significance was marked by the presence of some special form of monument. The cave at High Pasture's could be classed as a special type of monument in its own right – a passage leading into the earth containing flowing water. We know from the Late Bronze Age in particular that water sources such as springs, lakes, rivers and bogs, were revered as special localities in the landscape. Votive offerings were, and still are, tossed into these natural places, which are believed to possess healing powers and were also believed to be entrances to the Otherworld. Bone Passage provided a ready-made chamber, allowing continuous access and repeated use and through use, including a modification of the entrance, the site was monumentalised.

The use of underground passages and chambers is well known in the Iron Age landscapes of Atlantic Scotland, most of which have been constructed by man. However, the function

of many of these structures including the souterrains and so-called 'wells', the latter of which are often associated with broch settlements in Orkney, remain a mystery. At Mine Howe in Orkney, the construction of stone-built chambers and inter-connecting stairwells created an underground space, or artificial cave. Excavations at the site have revealed evidence for feasting, metalworking and the deposition of the dead; at a location in the landscape set apart from the normal domestic realm.

With the discovery of sites such as Mine Howe and High Pasture Cave, it appears that we are dealing with an entirely new group of sites within the wider Atlantic Iron Age landscape. Is it possible that these sites are a form of shrine, a place where people gathered together on special dates in the Celtic calendar to hold feasts and make offerings to their Gods? Iron Age shrines have been identified in southern England; sites such as Hayling Island and Thetford that were used from the Iron Age into the Early Roman period. Therefore, with the excavations at High Pasture's, we have the opportunity to take these initial interpretations forward and shed light on a little understood aspect of Iron Age life in Scotland.

We hope to conclude our fieldwork at the High Pasture Cave site in 2009, with post-excavation analysis taking us through to publication in 2012. Our funding partners in the project are Historic Scotland, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, Highland 2007 Fund, Highland Council and Skye & Lochalsh Leader+. We would also like to acknowledge the university departments and freelance specialists who have assisted with the extensive programme of post-excavation analysis, and the

volunteers without whose help we could not have undertaken the work in the field.

*For further details regarding the High Pasture Cave & Environs Project visit the website at [www.high-pasture-cave.org](http://www.high-pasture-cave.org).*

*References - Bradley, R. 2005 *Ritual and Domestic Life in Prehistoric Europe*, Routledge.*

### **Summer 'Island' visit - Skye 2009 by Rebecca Pine**

This was the destination for the annual summer 'Island' visit by the Society. From various starting points we all passed through Glenelg on our way to Skye, mainly to view the sombre shell of the Bernera Barracks and to spend more time with the outstanding Glenelg Brochs, but also to enter the island by the traditional manner – by boat! The little Glenelg ferry was something of a taste of the olde worlde into which we were stepping; the hair-raising route on the island side of the ferry still being a heart-stopping experience.

Dunvegan was to be the hub for our week's activities. Accommodated in cottages in the Castle grounds our comfort was assured and we were given free access to the Castle itself to wonder at its many treasures. From Dunvegan we set out to view as much as possible of the natural beauty of the scenery of the island, its flora and fauna, and sites of geological and historical significance. We also took several, longer and shorter, boat trips which at their conclusion brought us back of course 'over the sea to Skye'.

The first such trip took us from Elgol, at the far end of the island, into the heart of the Cuillins at Loch Coruisk, where the "keen walkers" did a circuit of the loch and the rest covered enough of the ground to observe the magnificence of the mountains, presented to us in the most perfect conditions imaginable. It would seem a pleasure to be "lost" in their beauty: it would seem improbable to get lost driving out of Elgol, but it happened!

While some took their own routes around the island, on the following day eight of our party took another boat journey up through the Minch to the Shiant Islands, once owned by Compton Mackenzie. These are a remarkable group of three main islands, two of which are joined north/south by a rocky causeway. The eastward sides of these islands have some of the most spectacular basalt cliffs providing nesting for thousands of sea-birds, and as our boat bobbed below them we were joined in the air and on the water by hosts of curious puffins. We felt we could almost reach up and pluck them from the sky. Again in glorious sunshine we were then landed on the pebble beach on the west side of the South Island to investigate the one bothy/cottage and the remains of a once fragile existence thereabouts.

Another "free" day followed on which several of us chose to investigate the island of Raasay which is like a detached slice of pie nestling in the north-east of Skye, and only a short ferry ride away. Birthplace of Sorley MacLean the great Gaelic poet; his tribute to one of the first "Clearance" communities, Hallaig, graces the cairn overlooking the area of this infamous act. We traced the route along a hillside path full of little



orange butterflies, and with spectacular views across to the mainland and back down to the Cuillins.

The following day our whole party set out on a tour of the Trotternish peninsular, sadly without Creena, who had fallen down and fractured her elbow. Looked after by Rona and Marjorie until examined by the local doctor and then taken to the hospital in Broadford, and later transferred to Glasgow, we all wish her the best possible of recoveries. This day's itinerary took us to Iron Age caves, Museums, Castles and Rock formations - most notably the Quiraing, which had superb views from vertiginous pathways.

Our last day took us furthest back in time to the ongoing High Pasture Cave Project on the slopes overlooking the head of Loch Eishort (see previous article). Here an exploration of the site dating back perhaps 6 - 7,000 years is nearing completion. We were lucky to have an expert guided tour of the site and an interesting explanation of its usage - continued and occasional - during the intervening millennia. We look forward to the book due to be published in the next couple of years, and perhaps a visit to an NHASMA meeting in the near future?

Our final evening was made more pleasurable by the showing on her laptop of Moira and John's photographs of our holiday, and at our final dinner I gave the party my customary light-hearted résumé of the week's activities : -

'Over to Skye'  
by Rebecca Pine

Speed bonnie boat like a bird on the wing, over the sea to Skye:

And so we all did the traditional thing, over the sea to Skye.

Narrow the road, precious the load, let it be said and done

Though there's a bridge over the ridge ferries are much more fun;

So, speed bonnie boat like a duck in distress, over the short Kyle rhea;

Carry NH and carry AS and carry of course MA.

Speed bonnie car like a formula one, round the chicanes on Skye.

Front of the grid are Douglas and John, nobody else gets by -  
Except on the tracks with the twisty switchbacks, as long as the road was clear,

It has to be said the leader was Fred, and nobody else got near!  
"Your speed" said the boss "I couldn't attain, no matter how hard I try!"

So, convoy we went like a little old train, over the roads in Skye.

Speed the next boat like a swan on a pond, under the Cuillin heights:

Elgol behind, Loch Coruisk beyond, day full of wondrous sights.

Two corkscrews of wakes, the 'Bella Jane' takes aim for the Coruisk bowl;

The glacial ground and the Cuillin surround are theatre, heart and soul.

So, gently sweet boat while the mountains recede, back into  
Elgol's care.

Only one road everybody's agreed, so no one can get lost  
there!

Speed the third boat like a dolphin at play, over the Minch to  
Shiants.

Though there were bound to be bumps on the way, eight of us  
took the chance.

At seventeen knots three guillemots overtook on the starboard  
side,

But there by the shore were puffins galore, riding the high  
cliff tide.

Our bonnie wee boat put us down on the shore, and sun  
followed bright and high,

Then carried us back like the bluebird of yore, over the sea to  
Skye.

Speed Caley Mac like a black and white box, over the Raasay  
strait.

Castles and Cairns and Ruins and Rocks, pleasures that lie in  
wait.

Hallaig and back on a narrowing track, the Clearances Cairn  
we found

While bands of 'Small Heath' butterflies, zig-zagged about the  
ground.

But Hallaig's no more, a final encore: to Sorley a last goodbye,  
And speed Caley Mac to carry us back, over the sea to Skye.

Trudge bonnie feet like Sherpas and slaves, round all the sights  
of Skye:

Up the Quiraing and down in the caves, may vertigo pass you by!

Castles and Lochs, Barracks and Brochs, Museums of Life and Toys:

Time has its ends. But remember dear friends this week full of special joys:

The many hot days and various ways, we've travelled the paths hereby;

On foot or by boat, a-wheel or afloat, over the sea – on Skye!

**Bird List - Skye June 2009**  
**By Valerie Barker and Morag Rae**

Northern fulmar, Gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Mute swan, Grey heron, Common shelduck, Greylag goose, Mallard, Eider, Red breasted merganser, White-tailed eagle, Hen harrier, Sparrow hawk, Common buzzard, Golden eagle, Pheasant, Oyster catcher, Lapwing, Common sandpiper, Curlew, Great skua, Herring gull, Great black-backed gull, Lesser black-backed gull, Common gull, Arctic tern, Common guillemot, Black guillemot, Atlantic puffin, Razorbill, Wood pigeon, Collared dove, Cuckoo, Sky lark, Sand martin, Reed bunting, Swallow, House martin, Rock pipit, Meadow pipit, White wagtail, Northern wheatear, Blackbird, Robin, Song thrush, Willow warbler, Whitethroat, Coal tit, Blue tit, Tree creeper, Jackdaw, Rook, Hooded crow, Raven, Starling, House sparrow, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Linnet, Greenfinch, wren.

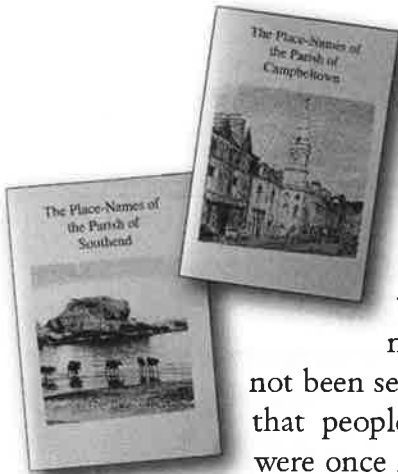
## BOOK REVIEW

### The place-names of the Parishes of Campeltown and Southend (separate booklets), 2009,

Kintyre Antiquarian and Natural History Society, Campbeltown.

Copies available from Angus Martin, 13 Saddell St.

Campbeltown PA28 6DN.



One only has to glance at an Ordnance Survey map of Kintyre to note a rich variety of place-names, including names that have not been settled for a long time. This indicates that people's dwellings and mental horizons were once not confined to the current (mainly coastal) tarmac roads. Remoter, less prominent land and seamarks, particularly in the hills and along the coast, carry names which have been obviously Anglicised. They often carry histories which connect with individuals.

Angus Martin, with his passion for both genealogy and landscape, knows full well the significance of place names and has been behind the publication of these two booklets. The Southend one was first published in 1938, the Campeltown one in 1943 and both were compiled by Duncan Colville. Angus has revised and supplemented these lists so that a new generation can unpick the meanings of hundreds of place-names, tracing them back to the original Gaelic, Norse or Scots, and linking them to individuals (Charley's Well for example) or groups such as Travellers (Tinkers Pool).

All maps should have similar accompanying booklets. Places are places because they carry a rich history of being lived in, walked over, hunted, fished, farmed, shepherded, planted and harvested by generation after generation.

**Letter to the Editor:**

**Kintyre families**

*Dear Sir*

*I am at present compiling a 60-page booklet intended to be a genealogical and historical guide to Kintyre families through the centuries and to provide sources of published information on these families. The compilation cannot aspire to comprehensiveness, but entries will be concise and it is hoped that no important families will be omitted. The work will look at surnames, their meanings and how they evolved into their present forms, and will try to establish, wherever possible, the origins of families. Famous (and infamous) family members will also be noted.*

*If any reader wishes to contribute to this project, with family history of any description, please contact me at 13 Saddell St. Campbeltown, Argyll PA28 6DN. All contributions will be fully acknowledged.*

*Angus Martin*

# THE KIST    ISSN 0307-529

The magazine of the Natural History and  
Antiquarian Society of Mid Argyll

Issue No. Seventy Eight Autumn 2009

Editor: Edward Tyler  
Sub/Picture Editor: Phillip Fox-Denham  
President: Dave Batty

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The Society's year runs from 1st September until 31st August.  
Charity No. SC000894