

UAMH AN ARD ACHADH (HIGH PASTURE CAVE) and ENVIRONS PROJECT:

DATA STRUCTURE REPORT: LANDSCAPE SURVEY 2006 – 2010



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Archaeological and Ancient Landscape Survey

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

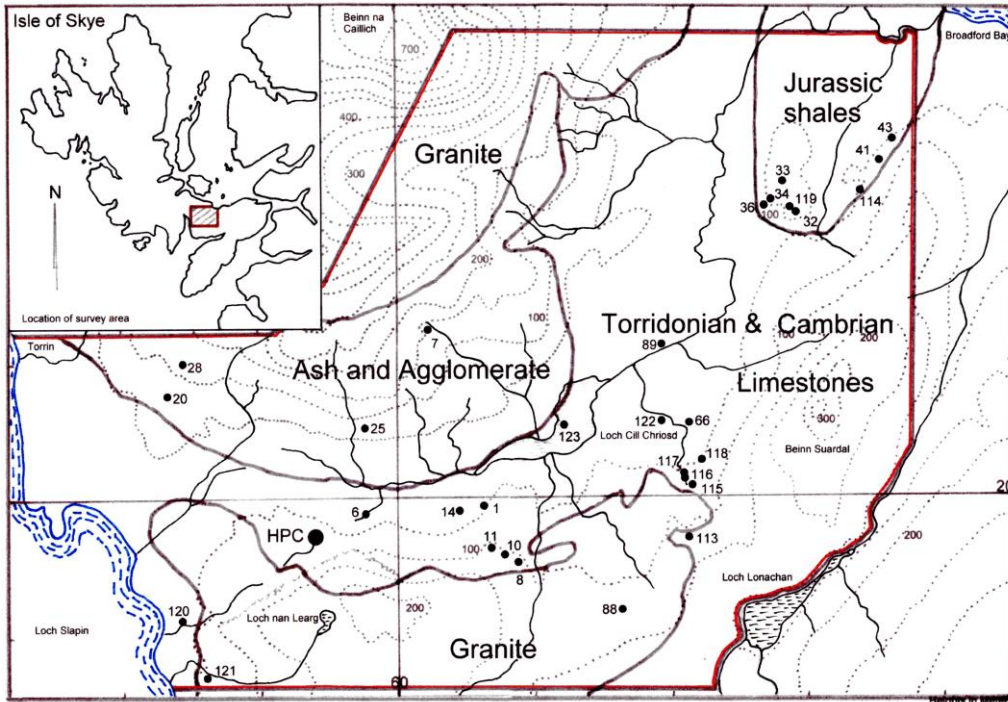
The study of prehistoric structures on Skye has formerly been heavily influenced by the visibility of monuments in the landscape, with a heavy bias towards the more obvious monuments such as Brochs, Duns and Cairns. Since the founding of the Skye and Lochalsh Museums Service (Dualchas) in the late 1980's landscape survey has increased noticeably adding many new sites to the archaeological record. In addition to landscape survey Dualchas, in tandem with Manchester University, has carried out a number of as yet unpublished excavations in the south of Skye. In particular, work at Coille a Ghasgain in Sleat uncovered a stone built circular structure dated to the 4th century BC (Armit, 1996) and excavations at Gillean, also in Sleat, revealed two circular structures which, from pottery evidence, appeared to span the Bronze to Iron Age transition (C. Burney pers com). It was therefore evident that an understanding of the occupation and evolution of the prehistoric landscape on Skye, which elsewhere in Scotland has seen significant study (Fairhurst and Taylor 1971, McCullagh and Tipping 1998, Halliday 1999 & 2007), was in its infancy. The High Pasture Cave Landscape Survey grew out of the recognition of this black hole in the understanding of the recorded data.

1.2 Aims

From the outset it was realised that the excavation and analysis of the High Pasture Cave deposits would have to include a parallel study of the evidence for contemporary occupation in order to better understand the relationship of this complex site with the surrounding inhabited landscape of Strath Suardal. This 'understanding' was to be achieved through a desk-based search of local and national archives, a level 1 walkover survey (dot on map) of the strath and a campaign of test pitting of all recovered sites thought to be contemporary with the activities at High Pasture Cave. The desk-based search was carried out over the winter of 2006/7, the walkover survey during the summer excavating seasons of 2007–9 and the test pitting campaign during 2010 – the final excavating season at the High Pasture site.

The primary aim of the landscape survey was therefore to recover an overall understanding of the prehistoric occupation and land use of Strath Suardal and how, if at all, the inhabitants of the strath could be seen to interact with the undeniably ritual site at High Pasture Cave. This understanding was based on an initial assumption that all prehistoric structures, whatever their function, were likely to be circular or sub-circular in plan – a not altogether sound assumption as excavations carried out in the summer of 1990 at Tungadale in the north of Skye uncovered a currently unique structure, of rectangular plan, occupied during the Middle Iron Age (Armit, 1996). With this flawed hypothesis in mind it was hoped that the landscape assessment, once completed, would allow a tentative reconstruction of the relationship between the High Pasture site and the occupied landscape, and how, if at all, the inhabitants of the strath interacted with the site. It was also hoped that the landscape survey would

provide an insight into prehistoric land use generally in this part of the island of Skye, and that this would eventually enable the High Pasture Cave site to be placed within a wider prehistoric landscape.

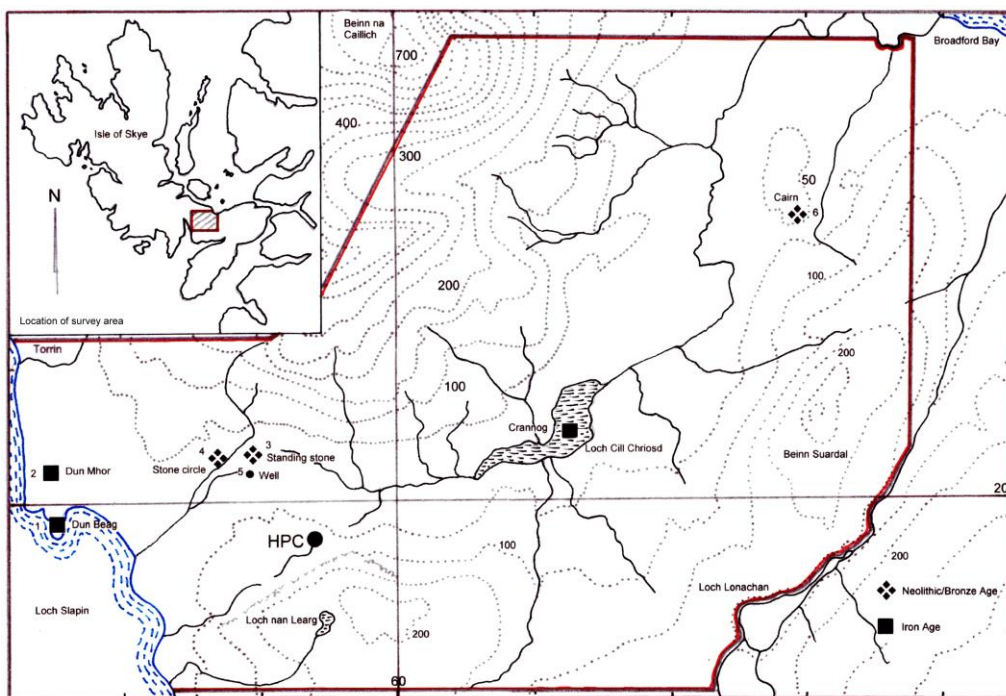


illus. 1: Area of survey (outlined red) and sites test pitted over the geology of Strath Suardal (After Benn & Ballantyne 2000)

1.3 Strath Suardal - Geology

Strath Suardal lies immediately to the south of the Black and Red Cuillin – a range of mountains and hills which effectively divide the north of Skye from the south. Strath Suardal runs north east to south west from Broadford on the east coast to Torrin and Loch Slapin on the west. The geology of the glen, with red granites and related volcanic rocks forming the uplands of both the north west and south east sides of the strath, and Torridonian and Cambrian limestone’s the central corridor, could not provide a more contrasting ground cover. These distinct geologies break down into differing basic soils: the granite, and related rocks, being none porous prevent water percolation resulting in shallow acid soils in the main overlying glacial tills (podsoils) - encouraging establishment of peat cover and growth of heather and coarse grasses with little nutritional value. The limestone’s however are essentially porous and well drained and break down into fertile alkaline soils supporting rich grassland and native woodland. The limestone soils therefore provide the ideal medium for cultivation and the growth of arable crops such as cereals and brassicas. An intruding tongue of Jurassic shale’s at the eastern end of the strath supports a similar ground cover to the granite but is more easily eroded producing a rolling landscape with peat based soils.

The strath is well watered with numerous surface burns running of the upland granite slopes into Loch Cill Chriosd, the overflow from which forms the Broadford River. The burns running over the limestone however quickly find their way underground, via both pre and post glacial sinkholes, forming extensive subterranean passageways, before surfacing as springs on the glen floor, (Ben, D & Ballantyne C. 2000) and only run as surface burns at times of heavy rains and flood. The High Pasture Cave system is one such underground waterway. Both sides of the glen enjoy a sunny aspect with the north side favored in the mornings and the south in the afternoons. Karstic clays, a product of the breakdown of the limestone, can be found throughout the glen and are often of sufficient quality to be used as potting clays and in the construction of ovens and smelting hearths.



illus. 2: Area of landscape survey (outlined red) with location of High Pasture Cave and sites recorded by the Royal Commission in 1922.

1.4 Archaeology

Prior to the archaeological surveys of recent years Strath had seen little in the way of in depth study. The geologist Sir Archibald Geikie witnessed and recorded the clearance of the strath and surrounding area in the middle years of the 19th century and his dramatic, often eloquent, description of these events brings them sharply to life (Geikie 1904). Just a few years later the Royal Commissions survey of the archaeology of Skye describes the more obvious monuments in the strath (shown on Illustration 2 and listed below, (RCAHMS 1928). It was not until 1987 when the Highland Council formed Dualchas, Skye's museums service, that the survey and recording of archaeological monuments on the island was revisited. Strath Suardal

was first systematically surveyed in 1990 (Miket et al 1990) in the early years of the Dualchas survey programme.

Monuments recorded during the 1922 Royal Commission survey

Name	Type	RCAHMS Ref.	OS Grid Ref.
1. Dun Beag:	Enclosure	NG51NE 01	NG 5751 1984
A small, now ruinous, stone-built fort on a prominent headland jutting out into Loch Slapin at the south west end of the strath.			
2. Dun Mor:	Enclosure	NG52SE 04	NG 5740 2015
A large enclosure lying amongst trees on the summit of a small knoll some 350 meters to the north of Dun Beag. Variouslly identified as a fort and/or a cattle enclosure.			
3. Clach na H-Annait	Standing stone	NG52SE 02	NG 5894 2030
A square section standing stone standing in a field to the east of Kilbride House at the south west end of the strath. Not its original position (pers. com. Norman Stoddart - farmer)			
4. Kilbride House	Stone circle	NG52SE01	NG 5868 2030
The site of a stone circle some 250 meters to the west of Kilbride House – now lost.			
5. Tobar Na H-Annait	Well	NG52SE 05	NG 5893 2023
An early Christian Holy Well. Situated just in front of a white barn, in a field to the south east of Kilbride House.			
6. Suardal	Chambered Cairn	NG62SW04	NG 6272 2203
The remains of a probable Hebridean type chambered cairn on a rocky knoll close to the north side of the B8083 at the north east end of the glen.			

2. Landscape Survey - Methodology

The landscape assessment consisted of three elements: a search of related archival evidence, a walkover of the Strath Suardal landscape and a test pitting campaign.

2.1 Desk-based research (See also 3.1)

The desk-based search, carried out over the winter of 2006/7, consulted local and national archives.

2.2 Walkover Survey (See also 3.2)

Previous archaeological surveys conducted within the strath have recorded the more obvious archaeological sites spanning the prehistoric to post medieval periods (see Illus.1 above and 3.1 below). They have not however fully recorded the landscape or the evidence for related land use, (RCAHMS, 1928 and 1961. Miket et al. 1990).

The walkover survey, completed over 3 consecutive excavating seasons (May to September 2007/8/9) was carried out by members of the HPC excavation team. The landscape was walked at 25 meter intervals and all features of none natural origin

were given a LS (Landscape Survey) number and recorded on prepared recording sheets, (previously recorded sites were reassessed). All recorded sites were also photographed when possible and their position logged using a hand held Garmin 60 GPS unit. Landscape boundaries were also recorded using compass bearings and the GPS unit with readings taken at every change in direction. The results of the walkover survey informed the follow up test pitting campaign.

2.3 The Test Pitting Campaign (See also 3.3)

During the test pitting campaign each site thought to be of prehistoric date was first recorded by offset survey at a scale of 1:100. Two test pits were then excavated – a 1 meter square (Test Pit 1) close to the centre of the structure in an attempt to recover a stratigraphic sequence of occupation horizons, identify a hearth area and hopefully recover datable materials (charcoals or bone) related to occupation for C14 analysis. The second, (Test Pit 2) sectioned the best preserved sector of enclosure wall in order to characterise the wall construction, record occupation horizons abutting or running under the wall and check for evidence of rebuilds. In 4 instances, (Sites LS10, LS20, LS43 and LS115), due to the small size of the site, only one test pit was excavated, running from the outside to the centre of the structure. In a further 4 instances a third test pit was excavated to test related features, (Sites LS06 (an attached enclosure), LS66 (the relationship of the overlying rectangular structure to the circular structure), LS88 (an intriguing circular depression) and LS121 (an associated boundary wall)). The main drawback with this approach is that sites not currently recognised as pre-historic would slip through the net.

Table 3 (below) provides an overview of the sites test pitted.

3. Landscape Survey - Results

3.1 Searches of Local and National Archives

The desk-based searches of local and national archives recovered 145 previously recorded sites within the assessment area, 9 of which were recorded as possible prehistoric 'Hut circles' (Marked below with a HPC LS number). The remainder were mostly post medieval townships, farmsteads and shielings, plus a small number of prehistoric duns and burial cairns and later 19th and early 20th century industrial sites. All of these sites were revisited during the walkover survey and, where necessary, grid references and descriptions were corrected or amended.

A list of all previously recorded sites is included in Table 1 below:

Uamh an Ard Achadh (High Pasture Cave) and Environs Project:			
Landscape Survey: Table 1		Previously Recorded Archaeological Sites.	
OS Grid Square And Site Ref.			
NG51NE	Name.	Type of Site.	OS Grid Ref.
HPC LS No.		● Circular structure	

01	Dun Beag	Fortified Enclosure (Dun)	NG 5751 1984
18	Kilbride	Building and Enclosure	NG 5913 1988
19	Camas Malag	Building and Enclosure	NG 5836 1904
21	Camas Malag	Boat Naust	NG 5836 1899
34	Kilbride	Farmstead	NG 5904 1993
83	High Pasture Cave	Cave. Burnt Mound.	NG 5943 1971
NG52SE			
HPC LS No.	Name	Type of Site	OS Grid ref.
01	Kilbride	?Stone Circle	NG 5868 2030
02	Clach na H-Annait	Standing Stone	NG 5894 2030
03	Kilbride	Find spot : Font and Bell	NG 5896 2029
04	Dun Mor	Fortified Enclosure (Dun)	NG 5740 2015
05	Tobar na H-Annait	Holy Well	NG 5893 2023
06	Kilbride	Township (Cleared 1824)	NG 5930 2000
08	Kilbride House	Find spot : Cinerary Urn	NG 5880 2030
10	Torrin	Enclosure Dykes	NG 5772 2133
11	Torrin	Enclosure Dyke & Lazy-beds	NG 5777 2148
12	Strath Beag	Sheiling Hut	NG 5775 2176
13	Strath Beag	Enclosure	NG 5785 2174
17	Beinn Dearg Beag	Cairn	NG 5891 2121
18		Sheiling Hut and Clearance Cairn	NG 5835 2110
19	Kilbride	Sheiling Hut	NG 5934 2050
20	Kilbride	Platform	NG 5964 2022
21	Kilbride	Stone Setting	NG 5995 2029
70	Cnoc Slapin	Farmstead & Rig Cultivation	NG 5759 2123
71	Cnoc Slapin	Stone-built Pen (Small)	NG 5754 2150
72	Allt Aisridh	Enclosure and Well	NG 5738 2161
73	Allt Aisridh	Dyke. (blocks earlier track)	NG 5732 2167
75	Strath Beag	Sheiling Hut	NG 5773 2175
76	Torrin	?WW2 Practice Trench.	NG 5816 2102
77	Beinn Dearg Beag	Sheiling Huts (2)	NG 5823 2178
78	Beinn Dearg Beag	Sheiling Hut and Boulder Wall	NG 5844 2182
79	Allt Slapin	Boulder Wall	NG 5843 2169
80	Beinn Dearg Beag	Sheiling Hut	NG 5862 2134
81	Beinn Dearg Beag	Boulder Wall	NG 5890 2136
82	Allt Nan Suidheachan	Sheiling Hut	NG 5970 2060
83	Allt Nan Suidheachan	Boulder Wall	NG 5970 2050
84	Cnoc Nam Fitheach	Boundary Dyke	NG 5900 2074
85	Torrin	Farmstead	NG 5830 2060
86	Cnoc Slapin	Stone Built Pen (Small)	NG 5742 2132
88	Torrin	Ruined Houses (3), Boat Nausts (12)	NG 5730 2051
89	Torrin	Quarry	NG 5725 2068
90	Torrin	Boat Nausts (15)	NG 5725 2092
100	Kilbride	Farmstead	NG 5881 2027
NG61NW			
HPC LS No.	Name.	Type of Site.	OS Grid Ref.
04	Strath Suardale	Township	NG 6110 1990
05	Strath Suardale	Quarry	NG 6110 1960
07	Kilchrist	Quarry	NG 6185 1979
07.01	Kilchrist	Quarry, Explosives Magazine	NG 6209 1972
09	115 BenSuardal	● Enclosure, Circular structure,	NG 6237 1994
10	Ben Suardal	Building, Sheiling Hut	NG 6239 1986
11	Ben Suardal	Sheiling Hut	NG 6254 1964

38	Coille Gaireallach	Structure	NG 6012 1999
42	Allt An Inbhire	Sheiling Huts (8)	NG 6100 1880
43	88 Loch Lonachan	● Circular structure	NG 6160 1910
NG62SW			
HPC LS No.	Name	Type of site	OS Grid ref.
01	Broadford	Chambered Cairn	NG 6416 2378
02	Beinn Na Cailich	Cairn ?Chambered	NG 6290 2370
03	Cille Chroisd	Church	NG 6172 2072
03.1	Cille Chroisd	Burial Ground	NG 6172 2072
04	Suardal	Chambered Cairn	NG 6272 2203
05	32, 119 An Sithean	● Circular structures (2)	NG 6291 2204
06	Strath Suardal	Township (Deserted)	NG 6200 2170
06.1	Strath Suardal	Building	NG 6197 2206
06.2	Strath Suardal	Building	NG 6193 2200
06.3	Strath Suardal	Building and Enclosure	NG 6200 2191
06.4	Strath Suardal	Building and Enclosure	NG 6213 2159
06.5	Strath Suardal	Building	NG 6205 2164
06.6	Strath Suardal	Building and Enclosure	NG 6205 2170
06.7	Strath Suardal	Building and Enclosure	NG 6200 2160
09	Strath	Find Spot : Socketed Axe	NG 6000 2000
12	Coire-Chat-Achan	House & Farmstead	NG 6208 2263
13	Goir A'Bhlair	Site of Battle (Traditional)	NG 6240 2340
16	Broadford	Cairn (lost)	NG 6400 2300
18	Kilchrist	Boundary Dyke	NG 6160 2010
18.1	Kilchrist	Structure	NG 6150 2008
18.2	Kilchrist	Kiln and Structure	NG 6150 2008
18.3	Kilchrist	Well	NG 6175 2000
18.4	Kilchrist	Ruinous Manse	NG 6160 2002
22	Strath Glebe	Cist	NG 6170 2040
27	Coire-Chat Achan	Enclosure and Structure	NG 6204 2342
28	Beinn Na Callich	Farmstead	NG 6190 2335
29	Buaile Nan Aodan	Structure and Stone Setting	NG 6145 2255
30	Coire-Chat-Achan	Enclosure and Structure	NG 6180 2277
31	Coire-Chat-Achan	Enclosure and Structure	NG 6175 2274
32	Coire Beithe	Sheiling Hut	NG 6101 2194
33	Coire Beithe	Enclosure and Sheiling Hut	NG 6109 2191
34	Allt Beinn Deirge	Sheiling Hut	NG 6111 2191
40	Allt Beinn Deirge	Structure, Enclosure, Lazybeds	NG 6110 2200
41	Allt A'Choire	Farmstead	NG 6195 2333
42	Allt A'Choire	Building, Rig Cultivation	NG 6195 2303
45	Buaile Nan Aodan	Structure	NG 6169 2285
46	Allt Buaile Nan Aodan	Enclosure and Structure	NG 6162 2282
47	Buaile Nan Aodan	Structure, Rig cultivation,	NG 6151 2275
48	Allt Buaile Nan Aodan	Sheiling Hut	NG 6145 2250
49	Coire-Chat-Achan	Clearance Cairn	NG 6203 2253
50	Allt Beinn Deirge	Clearance Cairn	NG 6197 2253
51	Strath Suardal	Clearance Cairn	NG 6205 2231
NG62SW			
HPC LS No.	Name.	Type of Site.	OS Grid Ref.
52	Strath Suardal	Clearance Cairn	NG 6206 2216
54	Allt Beinn Deirge	Sheiling Hut	NG 6109 2191
55	Kilchrist	Quarry Works	NG 6200 2000

55.1	Kilchrist	Quarry machinery, plinth etc.	NG 6207 2011
55.2	Kilchrist	Quarry Works	NG 6198 2072
55.3	Kilchrist	Quarry : Header Dam	NG 6203 2028
56	Allt Beinn Deirge	Sheiling Hut	NG 6176 2230
57	Coire Gaireallach	Stone Setting	
58	Strath Suardal	Enclosure, Stone Setting	NG 6218 2167
59	122 Kilchrist Glebe	● ?Stone Circle	NG 6197 2027
60	Kilchrist Glebe	Building	NG 6198 2039
61	Kilchrist	Rig Cultivation	NG 6110 1990
62	Kilchrist	Building	NG 6188 2078
NG62SW			
HPC LS No.	Name.	Type of Site.	OS Grid Ref.
63	An Sithean	Stone Setting	NG 6253 2252
64	Allt Beinn Deirge	Building, Rig Cultivation	NG 6141 2195
65	Broadford	Tramway winder house	NG 6377 2299
66	Bealach A' Ghlinne	Sheiling Huts (2)	NG 6366 2260
67	Bealach A' Ghlinne	Enclosure	NG 6363 2265
68	Bealach A' Ghlinne	Building and enclosure	NG 6364 2263
71	Bealach A' Ghlinne	Circular structure	NG 6330 2223
72	Bealach A' Ghlinne	Sheiling Hut	NG 6328 2226
73	Bealach A' Ghlinne	Sheiling Hut	NG 6329 2211
74	114 Bealach A' Ghlinne	● Structure (?Circular structure)	NG 6330 2206
75	Bealach A' Ghlinne	Enclosures. ?Sheiling Huts	NG 6311 2191
76	Bealach A' Ghlinne	Rock Shelter	NG 6299 2200
77	Beinn Suardal	Enclosure	NG 6276 2098
78	Beinn Suardal	Structure	NG 6268 2089
79	Beinn Suardal	Enclosure and Structure	NG 6247 2055
80	Beinn Suardal	Enclosures	NG 6235 2061
81	Beinn Suardal	Building	NG 6239 2067
82	Beinn Suardal	Enclosure	NG 6225 2004
83	118 Beinn Suardal	● Circular structure	NG 6227 2022
84	Beinn Suardal	Platform	NG 6220 2033
85	Beinn Suardal	Enclosure	NG 6225 2043
86	Beinn Suardal	Clearance Cairn	NG 6217 2047
87	116, 117 Beinn Suardal	● Circular structures (2)	NG 6226 2006
88	Allt Glen Suardal	Sheiling Hut	NG 6371 2047
89	Allt Glen Suardal	Building	NG 6372 2063
90	Allt Glen Suardal	Structure and Sheilings	NG 6393 2074
94	Kilchrist Glebe	Enclosure and Rig Cultivation	NG 6170 2050
95	Kilchrist	Building and Enclosure	NG 6220 2075
100	Allt Coire Forsaidh	Structure. ? Circular structure	NG 6030 2121
101	Allt Coire Forsaidh	Boundary Dyke	NG 6062 2080
102	Allt Coire Forsaidh	Structure	NG 6050 2081
103	Allt Coire Forsaidh	Boundary Dyke	NG 6044 2086
104	Allt Cnoc Nan Uan	Pen	NG 6008 2089
107	Suardal	Farmstead	NG 6180 2060
108	Allt beinn Deirge	Enclosure 1 st Ed. OS map	NG 6110 2190
109	Strath Suardal	Field System. 1 st Ed. OS map	NG 6130 2150
110	Strath Suardal	Building. 1 st Ed. OS map	NG 6273 2200

Table 1: List of archaeological sites recorded prior to the HPC Landscape Survey.

3.2 The Walkover survey

The walkover survey recovered a further 71 sites of which 21 were potentially structures contemporary with activities at the High Pasture site (see Table 2 below). The remainder were, once again chiefly post medieval and industrial in nature. In addition some 6000 meters of boulder boundary – all potentially related to, and contemporary with, prehistoric land use within the confines of Strath Suardal were recorded for the first time (HPC DSR 2014).

Uamh an Ard Achad (High Pasture cave): Landscape Survey			
Table 2 New Sites Recorded During Survey			● Possible prehistoric structure
HPC Survey No	Name	Type of Site	OS Grid Ref.
LS01	Coille Gaireallach	Circular structure ●	NG 6066 1991
LS02	Coille Gaireallach	Stone structure	NG 6092 1996
LS04	Coille Gaireallach	Stone structure	NG 6002 1990
LS05	Coille Gaireallach	Farmstead	NG 5991 1982
LS06	Coille Gaireallach	Circular structure ●	NG 5977 1988
LS08	Coille Gaireallach	Oval Structure ●	NG 6079 1961
LS09	Coille Gaireallach	Farmstead	NG 6106 1998
LS10	Coille Gaireallach	Circular structure ●	NG 6078 1968
LS11	Coille Gaireallach	Circular structure ●	NG 6075 1966
LS12	Coille Gaireallach	Stone built pen	NG 6085 1975
LS13	Coille Gaireallach	Single cell shieling	NG 6078 1975
LS14	Coille Gaireallach	Circular structure	NG 6044 1985
LS15	Coille Gaireallach	Single cell shieling	NG 5886 2055
LS16	Cnoc nam Fitheach	Single cell shieling	NG 5878 2065
LS17	Torrin	Twinning pen	NG 5860 2083
LS18	Torrin	Twinning pen	NG 5861 2082
LS19	Torrin	Stone built pen	NG 5852 2088
LS20	Torrin	Circular structure ●	NG 5837 2079
LS21	Kilbride	4 x turf enclosures	NG 5932 2043
LS22	Kilbride	Two cell shieling	NG 5908 2072
LS23	Kilbride	Single cell shieling	NG 5938 2061
LS25	Allt nan Suidheachan	Circular platform ●	NG 5957 2049
LS28	Vampire Pot	Circular structure ●	NG 5851 2104
LS33	An Sithean	Circular structure ●	NG 6278 2215
LS34	An Sithean	Circular structure ●	NG 6270 2215
LS35	An Sithean	Burnt mound (destroyed)	NG 6264 2199
LS36	An Sithean	Circular platform ●	NG 6261 2205
LS38	An Sithean	Stone built structure	NG 6333 2224
LS41	Bealach a Ghlinne	Circular structure ●	NG 6350 2240
LS43	Broadford	Circular structure ●	NG 6360 2261
LS45	Ben Suardal	2 x single cell shielings	NG 6289 2087
LS47	Strath Glebe	Structure (foundations)	NG 6185 2002
LS49	Kilchrist	Rock shelter	NG 6199 1982
LS51	Kilchrist	Two cell shieling	NG 6201 1942
LS52	Kilchrist	Two cell shieling	NG 6199 1944
LS53	Kilchrist	Two cell shieling	NG 6187 1941
LS54	Kilchrist	Two cell shieling	NG 6189 1928
LS55	Kilchrist	Farmstead	NG 6156 1986
LS56	Kilchrist	Farmstead	NG 6151 1989

HPC Survey No	Name	Type of Site	OS Grid Ref.
LS57	Kilchrist	Single cell shieling	NG 6161 1966
LS58	Kilchrist	3 cell shieling	NG 6148 1939
LS59	Kilchrist	Stone house and pen	NG 6152 1945
LS62	Strath Glebe	Structure and pen	NG 6207 2062
LS63	Strath Glebe	Possible structures	NG 6210 2054
LS64	Strath Glebe	Circular structure ●	NG 6215 2062
LS65	Strath Glebe	Enclosure	NG 6206 2039
LS66	Strath Glebe	Circular structure. ●	NG 6206 2035
LS67	Ben Suardal	Clearance cairn	NG 6220 2056
LS68	Ben Suardal	Clearance cairn	NG 6212 2072
LS69	Ben Suardal	Carved boulder	NG 6220 2045
LS70	Ben Suardal	2 x single cell shielings	NG 6235 2054
LS73	Ben Suardal	2 x Clearance cairns	NG 6217 2071
LS74	Ben Suardal	3 x Clearance cairns	NG 6218 2073
LS75	Ben Suardal	Clearance cairn	NG 6227 2090
LS76	Ben Suardal	2 x Clearance cairns	NG 6237 2091
LS77	Strath Suardal	5 x single cell shielings	NG 6184 2140
LS81	Strath Suardal	Half circular structure ●	NG 6213 2135
LS87	Strath Suardal	Stone structure	NG 6222 2145
LS89	Strath Suardal	Circular structure ●	NG 6220 2138
LS93	Strath Suardal	Stone-built pen	NG 6224 2198
LS95	Strath Suardal	Clearance cairn	NG 6208 2198
LS96	Coire-Chat-Achan	Stone structure	NG 6201 2268
LS107	Buaile Nan Aodan	Single cell shieling	NG 6192 2344
LS108	Beinn na Callaich	3 cell shieling	NG 6139 2249
LS109	Buaile Nan Aodan	Single cell shieling	NG 6147 2263
LS110	Allt Buaile Nan Aodan	Single cell shieling	NG 6160 2287
LS112	Buaile Nan Aodan	Single cell shieling	NG 6148 2238
LS113	Kilchrist	Circular structure ●	NG 6212 1967
LS120	Camas Malag	Circular platform ●	NG 5847 1916
LS121	Allt na Garbhlain	Circular platform ●	NG 5854 1872
LS123	Loch Kilchrist	Crannog ●	NG 6132 2052

Table 2: List of ‘new to record’ sites found during the walkover survey

3. The Test Pitting Campaign

A total of 216 sites were recovered during the research and walkover survey. Thirty two of these were potentially structures of prehistoric date and therefore possibly related directly to the High Pasture site or to the period of intense activity at High Pasture - circa 700BC to mid Late Iron Age circa 200AD. Of these 3 were not test pitted – Sites LS122 (crannog) and LS123 (stone circle) because of access difficulties. Site LS119, first recorded in the 1960’s, could not be relocated. The remaining 29 sites were all examined over the summer and early autumn of 2010 with a small follow-up excavation at LS06 in 2011.

An overview of the results is set out in Table 3 below. A more detailed, site by site, description follows Table 3.

Uamh and Ard Achadh (High Pasture Cave) and Environs Project: Landscape Survey 2006 – 2010

Table 3

Potential Circular structures – Test Pit Campaign (Site numbers are prefixed by LS = Landscape Survey)

(2) = number of

HPC Survey No.	OS Record No.	GPS Grid Ref.	Height OD & Aspect	Size (overall diameter meters)	Wall type and Wall width	Entrance faces to:	Test pits	Finds/Evidence of Occupation	Context C.14 Date @ 95% prob. Period
LS 01		NG 60661991	50m Open to NW	14m	Slab Orthostat soil fill 2 meters	Not visible	2	No evidence for occupation.	
LS 06		NG 5977 1988	30m Open to NW	14m	Boulder Orthostat with rubble fill 1.60 meters	SE	3	Hearth slabs, charcoals, Pit hearth, Burnt mound, Flint chunk Burnt bone. Pottery sherd	(Under F1.2 slab hearth) 370 – 170BC Middle Iron Age Under enclosure wall AD664 – 778 Early Medieval
LS 07	NG 62SW 100	NG 6030 2121	120m Open to SE	6m	Built of boulders and small stones. 1.10 meters	SE	2	Bottle glass, charcoals, pot-boilers,	No C14 date Shieling 18/19th C.
LS 08		NG 6080 1960	110m Open to NE	11 x 7.5m	Built of boulders and small stones 1.10 meters	SE	2	Cobbled floor, Charcoals, Pit containing iron slag and furnace bases (4).	(Initial cobbled floor) AD760 - 890 Early Medieval
LS 10		NG 6075 1967	105m Open to NE	7m	Turf ring bank 1 meter	SE	1	Pit hearth, Charcoals, Burnt bone, Lithics (4) Pottery sherds (4)	(Occupation floor) 410 - 350BC Middle Iron Age
LS 11		NG 6075 1966	110m Open to NE	11m	Stone built 1.50 meters	SE	2	Hearth slabs, Iron slag, Lithics (9). Charcoals. Pot-boilers, pottery sherd.	(Occupation horizon) AD80 – 240 Late Iron Age
LS 14		NG 6044 1985	50m Open to NW	11m	Boulder Orthostat. Inner face missing	Not visible	2	Charcoals. Ochre pebble	Hearth ash 1497 – 1384BC Early Bronze Age OGS under enclosure wall AD379 – 429 Late Iron Age
LS 20		NG 5837 2080	90m Open to SW	6m	?Boulder Orthostat	Not visible	1		Structured clearance cairn. ? 19th C.
LS 25		NG 5957 2049	100m Open to S		Positive, boulder revetted platform	Not visible	2	Pottery sherds (25), lithics (1) charcoals, Pot-boilers, Slab hearth Post hole	(Occupation horizon) 1000 - 840BC Late Bronze Age
LS 28		NG 5851 2104	120m Open to SW	14m	Boulder & stone built on negative platform 1.40 meters	W	2	Fragmented pebbles No evidence for occupation	
LS 32	NG62SW 05	NG 6288 2204	50m Open to SW	8m	Boulder revetted platform in hollow	SE	2	Charcoals. Possible pit hearth with white ash.	No C14 date
LS 33		NG 6278 2215	50m Open to SW	12m	Boulder orthostat on negative platform 1.50 meters	Not visible	2	Flint flakes (2). Charcoals. Fragments of pot-boiler, Compacted ash floor	Occupation floor 1127 – 973BC Late Bronze Age
LS 34		NG 6270 2215	45m Open to SW	12m	Boulder orthostat on negative platform 1 meter	S	2	Fragment of polished stone axe. 2 shallow depressions with ash and charcoal fill	(Ash filled pit in occupation floor) 1010 - 840BC Late Bronze Age
LS 36		NG 6261 2205	35m Open to SW	12m	Revetted positive platform	Not visible	2	Lithics (3), Small pebble rubber. Charcoals.	
LS 41		NG 6350 2240	60m Open to SW	11.50m	Rubble bank retained by occasional boulders 1.50 meters	SE	2	Charcoals, Fire cracked stones and pebbles, lump of ochre.	OGS under hut wall 361 – 172BC Middle Iron Age Floor surface 231 – 91BC Middle Iron Age
LS 43		NG 6360 2261	50m Closed aspect	6m	Earth bank	NE	2	Shards of green bottle glass (2)	No C14 date Shieling? 18th/19th Century
LS 64		NG 6215 2062	25m Open all around	12.70m	Revetted rubble bank 1.50 meters	S	2	Hearth slabs, Charcoals, Pottery sherd, Pot-boilers, Burnt Hazelnut shells,	No C14 date
LS 66		NG 6206 2035	50m Open to NE	14m	Boulder orthostat faced bank 2 meters	SE	3	Possible hearth. Pottery sherd. Charcoals. Frag. of ?quern	Occupation horizon AD1161 – 1262 Medieval
LS 81		NG 6213 2136	n/a	10m	Rock outcrop with field clearance.	N/A	2	Single lithic. No evidence for occupation.	Natural feature
LS 88	NG61NW 43	NG 6162 1915	130m Closed aspect	8.5m	Boulder orthostat faced bank 1 meter	S	3	Hearth slabs. Charcoals, Pottery sherd, Burnt Hazelnut shells Burnt bone, Lithics (4)	(Occupation horizon) AD1205 – 1280 Late Medieval
LS 89		NG 6220 2138	20m Open all around	12m	Rubble bank 2 meters	SE	2	Hearth slabs, charcoals, Burnt stone, Pot boilers. Fragment of saddle quern.	No C14 date
LS 113		NG 6212 1967	120m Open to N	12m	Boulder orthostat with rubble fill. 2.20 meters	?SW	2	Charcoals, Pot-boilers	Pit Fill (Occupation) 360 – 271BC Middle Iron Age
LS 114	NG62SW 74	NG 6330 2206	50m Open to NW	7m	Boulder orthostat with rubble fill 1.50 meters	NW	2	Shore gravel floor, 19 th C. pottery sherds (2)	No C14 date Shieling? 19th Century

HPC Survey No.	OS Record No.	GPS Grid Ref.	Height OD & Aspect	Size (overall diameter meters)	Wall type and Wall width	Entrance faces to:	Test pits	Finds/Evidence of Occupation	Context C.14 Date @ 95% prob. Period
LS 115	NG61NW 09	NG 6227 1997	100m Open to NW	14m	Rubble bank No apparent facing. 3 meters.	NW	2	Hearth slabs. Charcoals, Pottery sherd, Lithics (2), fragments of pot-boilers	(Pit Hearth, Occupation) 50BC – 90AD Late Iron Age
LS 116	NG62SW 87	NG 6225 2023	90m Open to NW	12m	Boulder orthostat faced bank 2.10 meters	Not visible	2	Hearth slabs. Charcoals,	(Occupation horizon) AD1170 - 1275 Late Medieval
LS 117	NG62SW 87	NG 6225 2023	90m Open to NW	10m	Stone built 2 meters	Not visible	2	Hearth slabs, Charcoals, pottery sherd Pot-boilers	No C14 date
LS 118	NG62SW 83	NG 6227 2022	90m Open to NW	9.50m	Stone revetted turf bank on built platform. 1.50 meters	SE	2	Pottery sherds (2 rim)	No C14 date
LS 119	NG62SW 05	NG 6291 2204	50m Open to SW	12m	Stone faced rubble bank.		0		Not located/ no longer extant
LS 120		NG 5847 1916	25m Open to SW	10m	Positive, boulder revetted, platform.	Not visible	2	Pottery sherd Charcoals	(OGS beneath platform revetment) 653 – 542BC Early Iron Age
LS 121		NG 5854 1872	70m Open to SW	11.50m by 13m	Irregular, boulder revetted positive platform.	Not visible	3	Pottery sherds (62). Very fine, hard, black burnished ware, charcoals, end scrapper. Fragments of pot-boiler. Piece of pumice. Quern rubber.	(Occupation horizon) 1410 – 1210BC Early Bronze Age
LS 122	NG62SW 59	NG 6197 2027	50m Open all around	11m by 13m	Rubble bank incorporating upright and fallen stones	Not visible		Stone circle	Not tested
LS123		NG 6132 2052	20m Closed	16m (above water)	Artificial island?	N/A		Possible Crannog	Not tested

Table 3: Overview of the Test Pitting results.

3.4 The Test Pitting – Results by Site (see Table 3 for an overview of the results)

LS01 (illus. 6) Unfinished/Robbed circular structure of unknown date.

A robbed or unfinished 14 meter diameter circular structure lying on a natural terrace amongst birch woodland at circa 50 meters OD. The western side of the circle which lies adjacent to a boulder boundary wall is much disturbed by rabbit burrows and lacks its slab walling. There are short lengths of radiating linear boundary attached to the SE and NW quadrants.

Test Pit 1 in the centre of the circle produced no evidence at all for either a hearth or occupation horizons. The surface of the exposed clay subsoil was heavily trampled (poached) possibly by corralled cattle.

Test Pit 2 demonstrated that the wall was some 2 meters wide and consisted of limestone slab facings with a soil fill. There was again no trace of occupation horizons within the structure. There were no finds and no samples were recovered for C14 dating.

LS06 (illus 3 & 4) LBA – MIA ceremonial site. EM enclosure

A well preserved and complex group of structures lying beside a stream some 250 meters down slope and to the North East of High Pasture Cave at circa 30 meters OD. The remains consist of a circular enclosure 14 meters in overall diameter over a

wall 1.60 meters thick. A 2.50 meter wide entrance faces to the south east. A second elongated enclosure is attached to the east side of the above. The stream which runs through the High Pasture Cave system returns to the surface just to the south west of the site and bounds the structure on its west and north sides. A small spring erupts from the limestone just to the east of the site. Short lengths of linear boulder boundary survive on the hillside to the east and south sides of the site.

Excavation of TP1, in the centre of the site, uncovered the edge of a central slab hearth which overlay an earlier pit hearth. The wall, (TP2) consisted of orthostat boulder facings with a rubble and earth fill. There were no occupation horizons abutting the inside face of the wall. A small post hole was found to underlie and to therefore predate the wall. Charcoal samples collected for dating produced a Middle Iron Age date for the central slab hearth and an early medieval date for an old ground surface sealed below the wall.

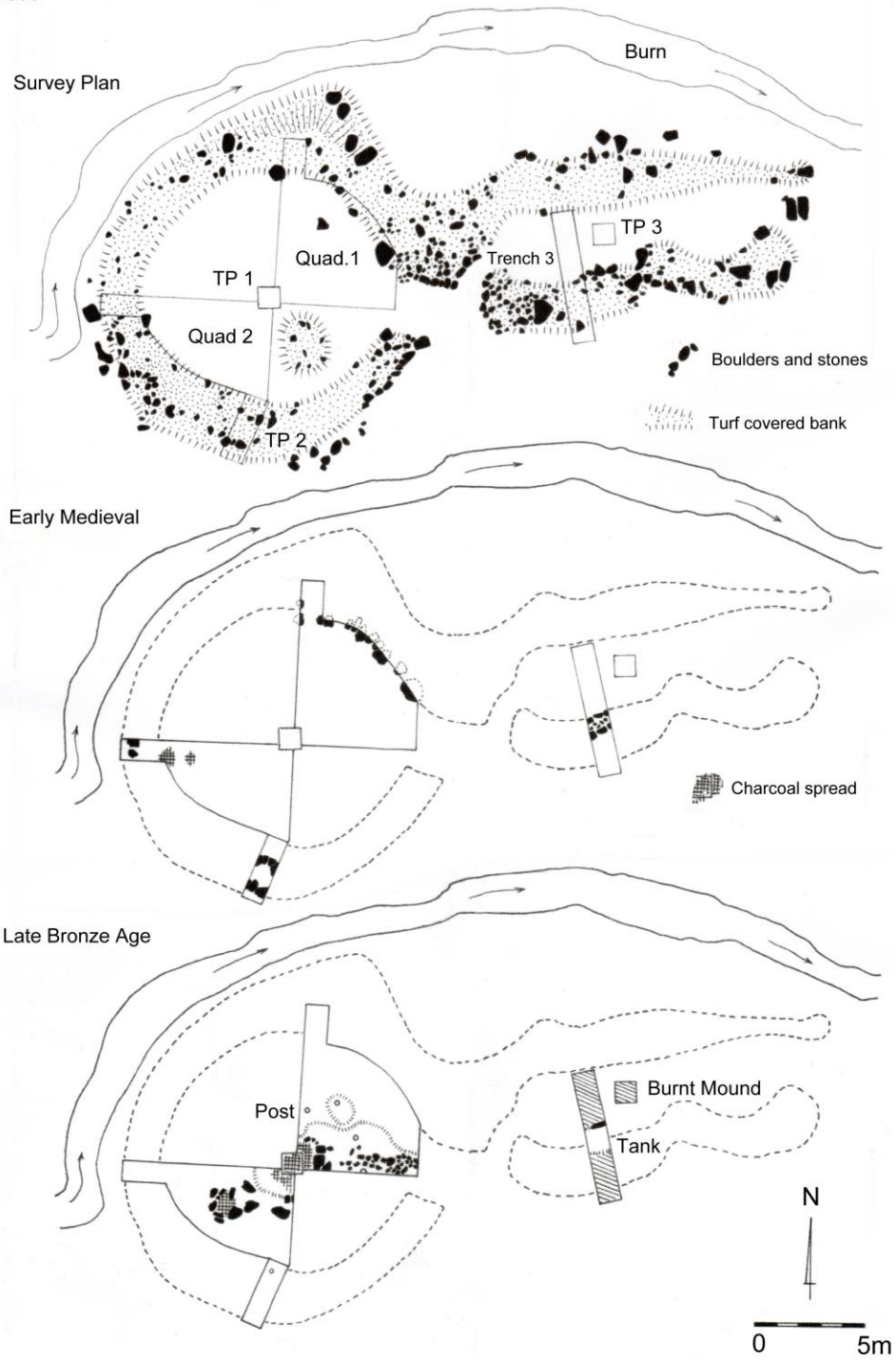
A third test pit (TP3) placed in the centre of the attached enclosure revealed a mass of burnt and shattered pebbles (burnt mound). A single sherd of Late Bronze Age decorated pottery, a fragment of a steatite *tuyere and a quantity of iron slag were recovered from the burnt mound material – the last two indicators of metal smelting. A later extension of this test pit to the south demonstrated that the burnt mound had been levelled sealing a collapsed sandstone slab tank which had been constructed within a cut into the local natural (Karstic clay) and that the enclosure wall overlay the burnt mound spread and was therefore later in date.

**Tuyere:* A formed, in this case carved, funnel set in the base of a smelting furnace to allow compressed air, via bellows, to be injected to raise the operating temperature.

Excavation (illus 3)

Site LS06 was later selected for more extensive study and two apposing quadrants (North & South) were excavated in 2011. Excavation demonstrated that the site had seen extensive use at the end of the Bronze Age when the central pit hearth and an arc of post within the northern quadrant were constructed. A single post found in test pit 2, which was sealed below an Old Ground Surface of Early Medieval date, also belonged to this period. The pottery recovered from the burnt mound suggests that the adjacent stone tank and burnt mound also date to this time. At a later date, during the Middle Iron Age a slab hearth was laid over the remains of the pit hearth and an activity horizon containing 74 abraded Middle Iron Age pottery sherds then accumulated sealing the earlier post holes in the northern quadrant. Much later, during the Early Medieval period, the burnt mound was levelled and the two stone built enclosures were constructed over the spread burnt mound material. There was no evidence that either of the earlier phases was roofed and the lack of consistent occupation horizons suggests that that the site served some other purpose – perhaps initially, as the burnt mound and tank might suggest, as a forerunner to the High Pasture Cave site and then perhaps as a secondary ritual centre in the middle Iron Age. The site was reoccupied in the 7th – 8th centuries AD when the burnt mound was levelled and the overlying enclosures were constructed.

High Pasture Cave: Landscape Assessment
Site LS06



Illus. 3: Site LS06 survey and excavation plans.

LS07 (illus. 8) 18th/19th century shieling

A ruinous circular structure, which measures 6 meters in diameter over walls 1.10 meters thick, with a possible door opening facing to the south east. The site lies amongst a group of 6 similar but smaller structures on the west bank of a burn close to a large waterfall.

Excavation revealed a poorly built structure with a compacted earth floor. Shards of green bottle glass and charcoal fragments were pressed into the surface of the floor.

LS08 (illus. 8) Early Medieval Smithy C14 date AD760 - 890

An interesting round ended structure which measures 11 meters by 7.5 meters over walls 1.10 meters thick. Although this site is not circular it superficially resembled the Iron Age structure excavated in 1987 at Tungadale in north Skye (Armit 1996, Miket in prep) with an end door opening and greater overall width than the norm for sub-rectangular and rectangular structures of later dates.

Excavation of Test Pit 1 revealed a compacted layer of large charcoal pieces and iron slag lying on a cobbled surface associated with a pit containing a mass of iron slag and 4 plano-convex hearth bases – all evidence of iron smelting/smithing. Test Pit 2 showed that the wall consisted of boulder faces with a rubble and earth core. The cobbled surface and charcoal spread butted up to the inside face of the wall perhaps indicating that the cobbled floor was present over the entire interior of the structure.

LS10 (illus 8) Middle Iron Age House/Bothy C14 date 410 – 350BC

Lying just 100 meters to the North West of LS08 at 105 metres OD is a circular turf ring-bank which measures 7 meters in diameter over a bank circa 1.2 meter wide at the base. Only one test pit was excavated covering both turf bank and the centre of the structure revealing a central pit-hearth containing charcoal pieces and a compressed white ash. A compacted earth floor containing lithics and pottery sherds surrounded the hearth. The bank was shown to be a compacted mound of the local subsoil faced with turf.

LS11 (illus. 8) Late Iron Age House C14 date AD80 - 240

Lying just 50 meters to the west of LS10 is a circular, stone walled structure which measures 11 metres in diameter over walls 1.50 meters thick. A door opening faces to the south east. A well built structure set on a negative platform.

Excavation of Test Pit 1 revealed a slab hearth set in a shallow pit surrounded by iron slag, lithics, charcoal pieces, pot boiler fragments and pottery sherds. Test Pit 2 demonstrated that the wall was faced on both sides with coursed horizontal stonework between occasional boulder orthostat facings. The core of the wall was filled with small stones and earth. There was no evidence for a rebuild. A clean, compacted earth floor butted up to the internal face of the wall.

LS14 (illus. 6) Early Bronze Age House C14 date 1497 – 1384BC

The remains of an 11 meter diameter circle of boulders lying on a natural terrace amongst native woodland (Birch and Hazel). The structure is heavily robbed and survives as a single (outer) ring of large facing stones. The inner face of the wall is represented by occasional in-situ slabs. Trench 1 revealed the western half of a kerbed hearth. The site was, at some point, incorporated into a linear boulder boundary. The relationship of the boundary wall to the remains of the circular structure indicated that the enclosure wall was later with only the arc of enclosure walling lying on the line of the boundary being retained. The rest of the circular structures walling was probably robbed during boundary construction. No obvious entrance survived.

LS20 (illus. 6) 18th/19th century clearance cairn.

A 6 meter diameter kerb of random sized boulders retaining a mound of smaller stones collected during land clearance. The site lies at the head of a small area of lazy-bed cultivation. There was no visible entrance and no evidence for occupation within the kerb.

LS25 (illus. 9) Late Bronze Age House C14 date 1000 – 840BC

A large, boulder revetted platform lying on an open south facing hillside above a tributary of the Broadford River. The site is now somewhat obscured by a group of 18th/19th century shielings. Excavation revealed 3 phases of occupation the earliest of which appeared to pre-date the construction of the platform. Phase 1 was represented by a greasy black occupation horizon containing a finely made black burnished pottery sherd similar to those found at LS 121 and dated there to the Early Bronze Age. Phase 2 consists of the construction of the platform with an associated occupation horizon which has been C14 dated to the Late Bronze Age. Phase 3 occupation consists of the overlying shieling group.

LS28 (illus. 8) Massive circular structure. (milking pen)

A massively built circular structure set on a positive platform and surrounded by numerous small cell like structures and boulder boundaries. The central structure consists of a circular boulder setting measuring 14 meters in overall diameter with an in-turned entrance which faces to the north west. Excavation revealed no evidence of occupation whatsoever. Possibly an animal enclosure related to the surrounding shielings.

LS32 (illus. 9) Disturbed circular structure

A disturbed, boulder revetted, circular platform measuring 8 meters in overall diameter. The site lies in a wet hollow with an open south west aspect. Excavation

recovered the remains of a shallow pit filled with a white ash and charcoal flecks at the centre of the platform. No structural evidence was recovered.

LS33 (illus. 6) Late Bronze Age House C14 date 1127 – 973BC

A discontinuous 12 meter diameter circle of large boulders set on a negative platform on an open, south west facing, hillside. The site now retains water and is very wet. Excavation revealed an occupation horizon consisting of compacted ash and occasional pot-boiler fragments.

Two lithics were recovered from the ash floor. The wall has been robbed of all but the larger boulders.

LS34 (Illus. 6) Late Bronze Age House C14 date 1010 – 840BC

A large negative platform, containing a discontinuous 12 meter diameter circle of large boulders, similar to Site LS33 above. Excavation again revealed an occupation horizon consisting of compacted ash and occasional pot-boiler fragments. A fragment of polished stone axe was recovered from beneath the outer wall. The site now retains water and is very wet.

LS36 (illus. 9) A revetted circular platform. (A small cultivation platform.)

A roughly circular revetted platform, 12 meters in diameter, lying in a shallow depression with open views to the south west. Excavation produced no evidence for occupation although several lithics were recovered from the single context, loam covered, platform.

LS41 (illus 7) Middle Iron Age Ring bank C14 date 361 – 271BC

A well preserved, 11.50 meter diameter, circular rubble bank with an obvious south east facing entrance. This site, unusually, lies on the summit of a prominent hillock. Excavation demonstrated that the site had been constructed over an earlier occupation horizon (not C14 dated) the remains of which were sealed beneath the rubble bank. Finds associated with both occupations included fragments of pot-boiler, beach pebbles (?unused pot-boilers) and a lump of ochre.

LS43 (illus. 8) 18th/19th century shieling

A roughly circular, 6 meter diameter earth ring-bank associated with two small turf walled pens. Shards of green bottle glass were recovered from the compacted earth floor within the ring-bank. The entrance faces to the north east.

LS64 (illus. 7) Possible Iron Age House

A circular 12.70 meter diameter rubble bank revetted by boulder orthostats. The entrance through the 1.50 meter thick wall faces to the south. The site lies amongst open improved pasture on the floor of the strath. A central slab hearth was

surrounded by degraded charcoals. Finds from the occupation horizon include fragments of pot-boiler, hazelnut shells and a sherd of possible Iron Age pottery.

LS66 (illus. 7) Possible Medieval house C14 date AD1161-1262

A disturbed 14 meter diameter circular structure now lying beneath the ruins of a post medieval house. The visible remains consist of a fragmentary boulder faced wall circa 2 meters thick. Excavation revealed an occupation horizon sealed beneath the later structure which contained a slab hearth, charcoal lumps, a single pottery sherd and a fragment of a saddle quern. A possible entrance faced to the south east.

LS81 Natural feature

A half circular, turf covered, bank thought to be the remains of a structure - actually a rocky outcrop with no artificial stonework at all. A single lithic (flake) was recovered from Trench 2.

LS88 (illus. 7) Medieval House C14 date AD1205 -1280

A roughly circular stone walled enclosure measuring 8.50 meters in overall diameter. A narrow entrance faced to the south. Excavation of test pit 1 revealed an occupation horizon which surrounded a central slab hearth. Finds recovered included charcoals, a single pottery sherd, 4 lithics, burnt bone fragments and burnt hazelnut shells. Test Pit 2 showed that the wall consisted of a pile of randomly laid boulders and stones. A third test pit over a hollow just to the north west of the site revealed a small, charcoal filled, fire pit cut into the local karstic clays, which had become baked and heat reddened with use.

LS89 (illus. 7) Circular rubble bank

A well preserved and now turf covered rubble ring bank measuring 12 meters in diameter over a bank 2 meters wide at the base. The site lies on the floor of the strath on heather covered, limestone derived soils. Excavation revealed a patchy occupation horizon, surrounding a central slab hearth, which contained burnt stone, fragments of pot boiler and a fragment of saddle quern. Some small charcoals were recovered but these were found inadequate for C.14 analysis.

LS113 (illus. 6) Circular rubble bank C14 date 360 – 271BC

A well preserved ring-bank lying amongst limestone outcrops, which measures 12 meters in diameter over a bank 2.20 meters wide at the base. Excavation in the centre of the site revealed a shallow pit containing a mix of charcoal pieces and pot boiler fragments associated with a compacted earth surface. Excavation across the rubble bank showed that the wall had been faced with horizontally laid stonework on the inside only, the remainder of the wall being a pile of random boulders and earth.

LS114 (illus. 6) 19th century bothy/shieling

Situated at the head of the strath and cut by the marble line railway (Constructed circa 1905) is a circular enclosure which measures 7 meters in diameter over a wall circa 1.50 meters wide constructed of two parallel, touching, lines of boulders. The floor of the structure was made-up of local shore gravel containing fragments of blue and white glazed pottery dating to the late 19th early 20th century. It is possible that this is a re-laid floor in an older structure; however no evidence was recovered to support this.

LS115 (illus. 7) Late Iron Age ring bank C14 date 50BC – AD90

A 14 meter diameter ring bank comprising boulders and large stones set in an earth matrix. At the centre of the interior was a shallow pit hearth with a slab base containing white ash and charcoal pieces. Finds included charcoals, pottery sherds, lithics and pot-boiler fragments all pressed into the associated floor surface. This site was heavily disturbed by bracken roots.

LS116 (illus. 6) Late Medieval ?House C14 date AD1170 - 1275

A circular, stone built, structure which measures 12 meters in diameter over walls 2.10 meters thick. Currently, a spring which erupts just behind the structure runs into the interior where it sinks down a small artificial looking drain. Excavation at the centre of the circle revealed a slab setting under a spread of charcoal ash. The wall, where excavated, had a low stone bench built against its interior face.

LS117 (illus. 8)

The remains of a stone built, 10 meter diameter structure with a wall 2 meters thick. A setting of flat slabs which lay in the centre of a compacted earth floor was surrounded by a scatter of charcoal flecks, pottery sherds and fragmentary pot-boilers.

LS118 (illus. 8) Possible Early Medieval Structure (based on the pottery)

A circular, stone faced, turf ring-bank which measures 10 meters in overall diameter over a wall 2 meters wide. The site sits on a positive platform on the steep, north west facing slope of Beinn Suardal at circa 90 meters OD. The only finds were two rim sherds, possibly of 6th/7th century date, which lay amongst the stone-filled interior. There was no evidence for a hearth or occupation of the structure.

LS 119 Not Relocated

A 12 meter diameter ring bank first recorded in the 1960's. Supposedly, according to its previously recorded OS grid reference, sited between Sites LS32 and LS33. (Possibly LS33 (see above) which is a similar size but at a different OS grid location).

LS120 (illus. 9) Early Iron Age structure

C14 date 653 – 542BC

A boulder revetted platform situated on the sloping hillside overlooking Camas Malag bay. The site is currently partially obscured by a group of 18th/19th century shielings. Excavation revealed a patchy occupation horizon below an old ground surface sealed below the turf bank of a shieling. The only find was a single sherd of black burnished pottery similar to those recovered from LS121 and there dated stylistically to the Early Bronze Age (see below).

LS121 (illus. 9) Early Bronze Age Farm

C14 date 1410 – 1210BC

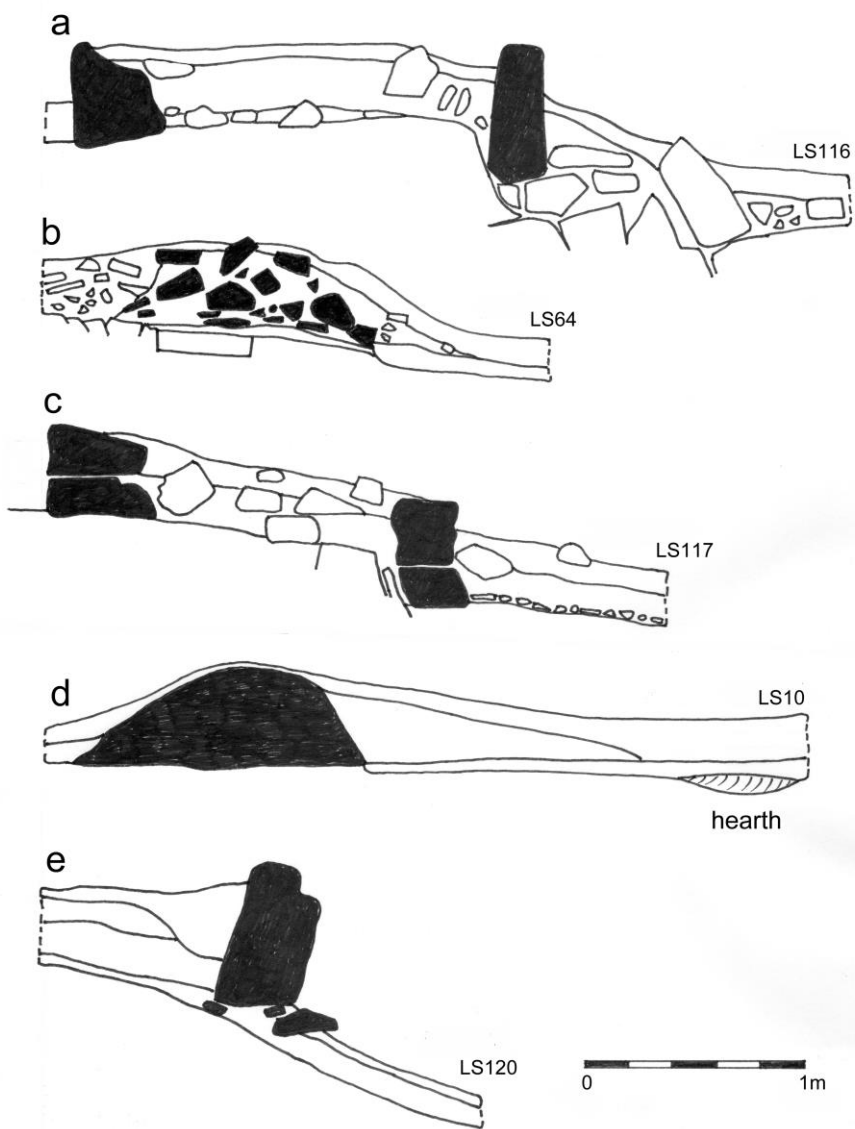
A boulder revetted platform of irregular shape with associated linear boulder boundaries forming small enclosures. Finds from both test pits include 62 sherds of fine, plain, black burnished pottery from several vessels, an end scrapper, a piece of worked pumice, a fragment of quern rubber and numerous pot-boiler fragments. Although there was no discernable occupation horizon a spread of charcoal fragments was encountered in both test pits. A third test pit which was placed across a well preserved length of boulder boundary demonstrated that the boulders had been placed after the turf had been stripped from the line of the wall.

3.5 Structural evidence

Walls (See Illus. 4 below)

Four structurally different wall types were noted during the excavation of the wall sections (TP2). A result similar to that obtained at An Sithean, Islay (Barber & Brown 1984) while excavations at Cul a Bhaile, Jura (Stevenson 1985) and at Toremore, Arran (Barber 1997) and Suisgill (Barclay 1985) also provide parallel structural information. In Strath Suardal slab and boulder faced walls (Type 'a.') with an earth and rubble core were the most numerous with 10 examples recorded. Rubble banks, (Type 'b' but perhaps Type 'a' robbed of its facing stones) – occurred on 7 occasions. Walls built of coursed stonework (Type 'c') provided 5 examples while earth banks (Type 'd') provided 2 examples. A fifth type of structure was also recorded where a positive/negative platform was supported at the front by a massive boulder revetment (Type 'e') provided 5 examples. The latter have often, in the past, been interpreted as charcoal burners platforms but have been proven by recent work on platform sites in Peebleshire (Jobey 1981), and in Argyle, Bute and Inverness (Rennie 1997) to include platforms for circular structure amongst these numbers.

This diversity of construction types was also mirrored, to some extent, during a comparable investigation in Wester Ross (Wedigs Project, Welti, A. & Wildgoose, M. 2015.) where 3 out of the possible 11 structures recognised were constructed with boulder faced walls, 3 were built with coursed walling, 1 with a turf wall, and 3 with a revetted front face to extended platforms cut into the hill slope.



Wall types.

Relevant
LS Site No's

01, 06, 14,
20, 33, 34,
88, 113,
114, 116.

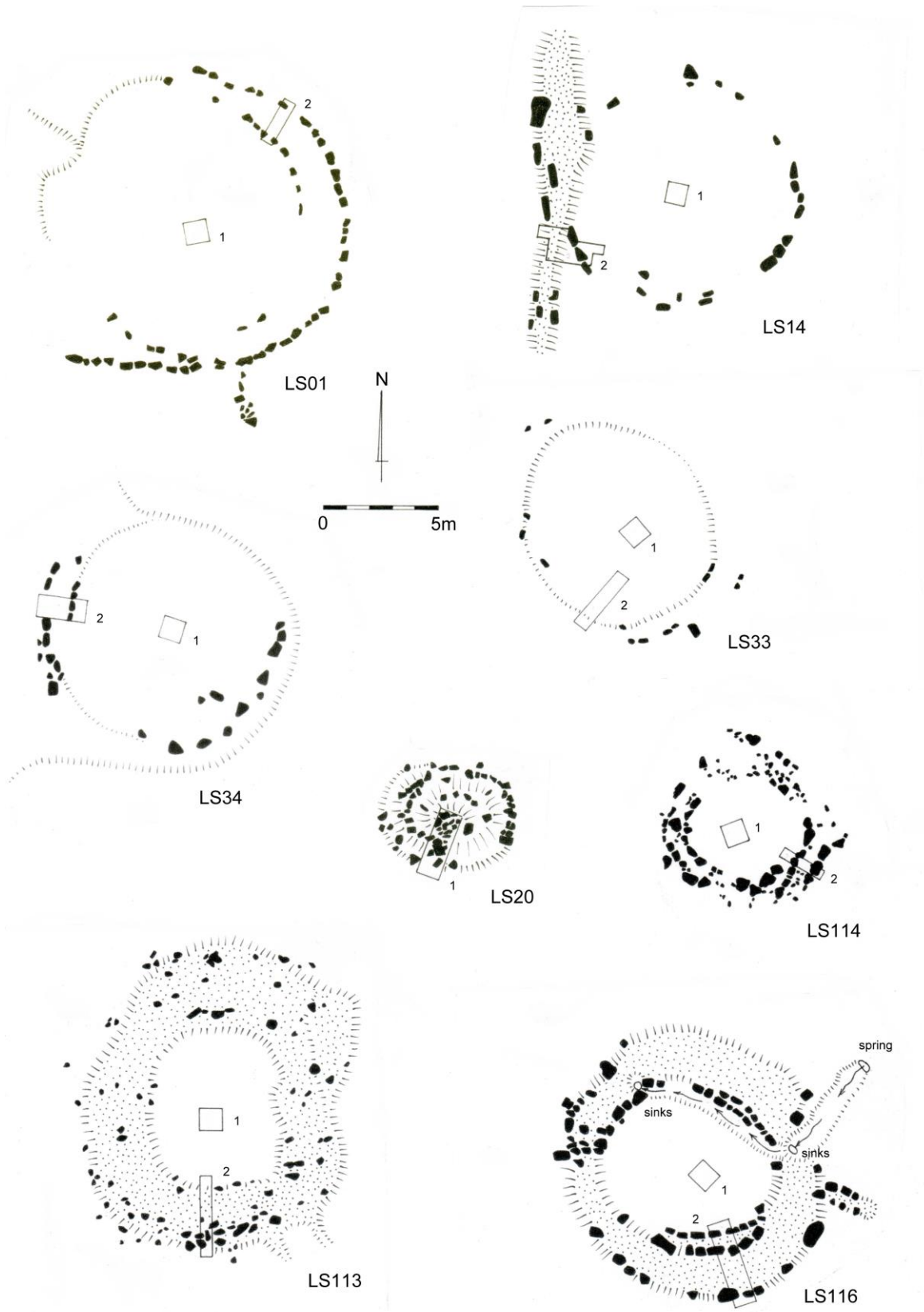
41, 118, 64,
66, 89, 115,
122.

07, 08, 11,
28, 117.

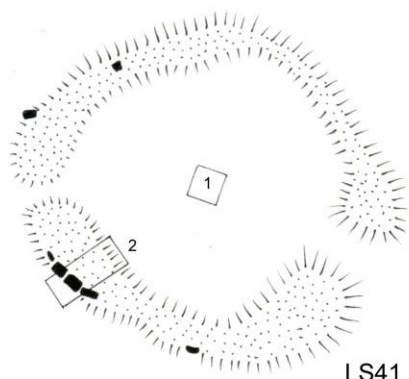
10, 43.

25, 32, 36,
120, 121.

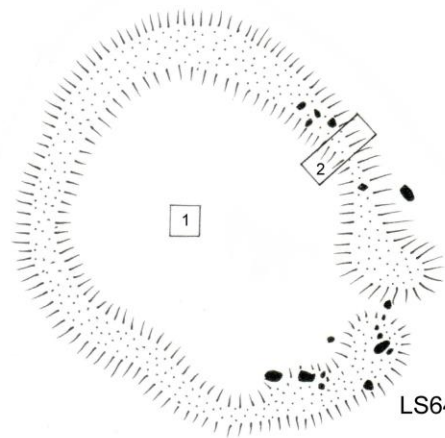
illus 4: Wall typology. a – Boulder/slab faced. b – Rubble bank. c – Coursed stone. d – Earth bank. e – Revetted platform.



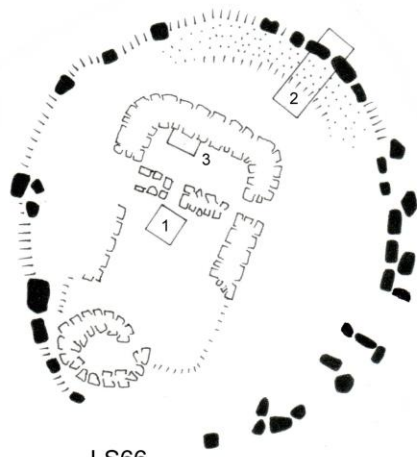
illus. 5: Circular structures: Plan and Test Pit Locations.



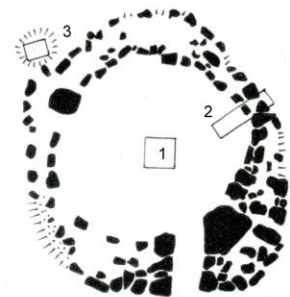
LS41



LS64



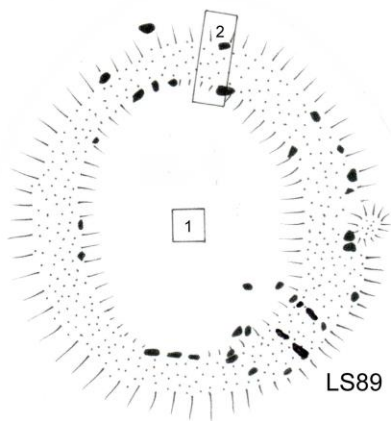
LS66



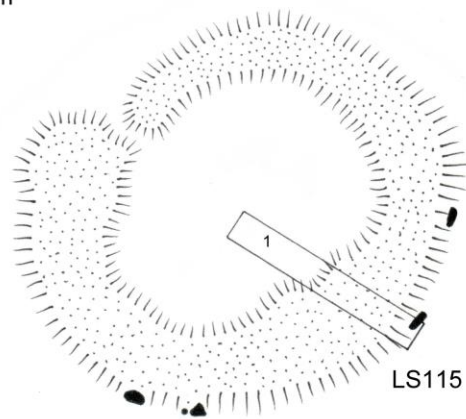
LS88

N

0 5m

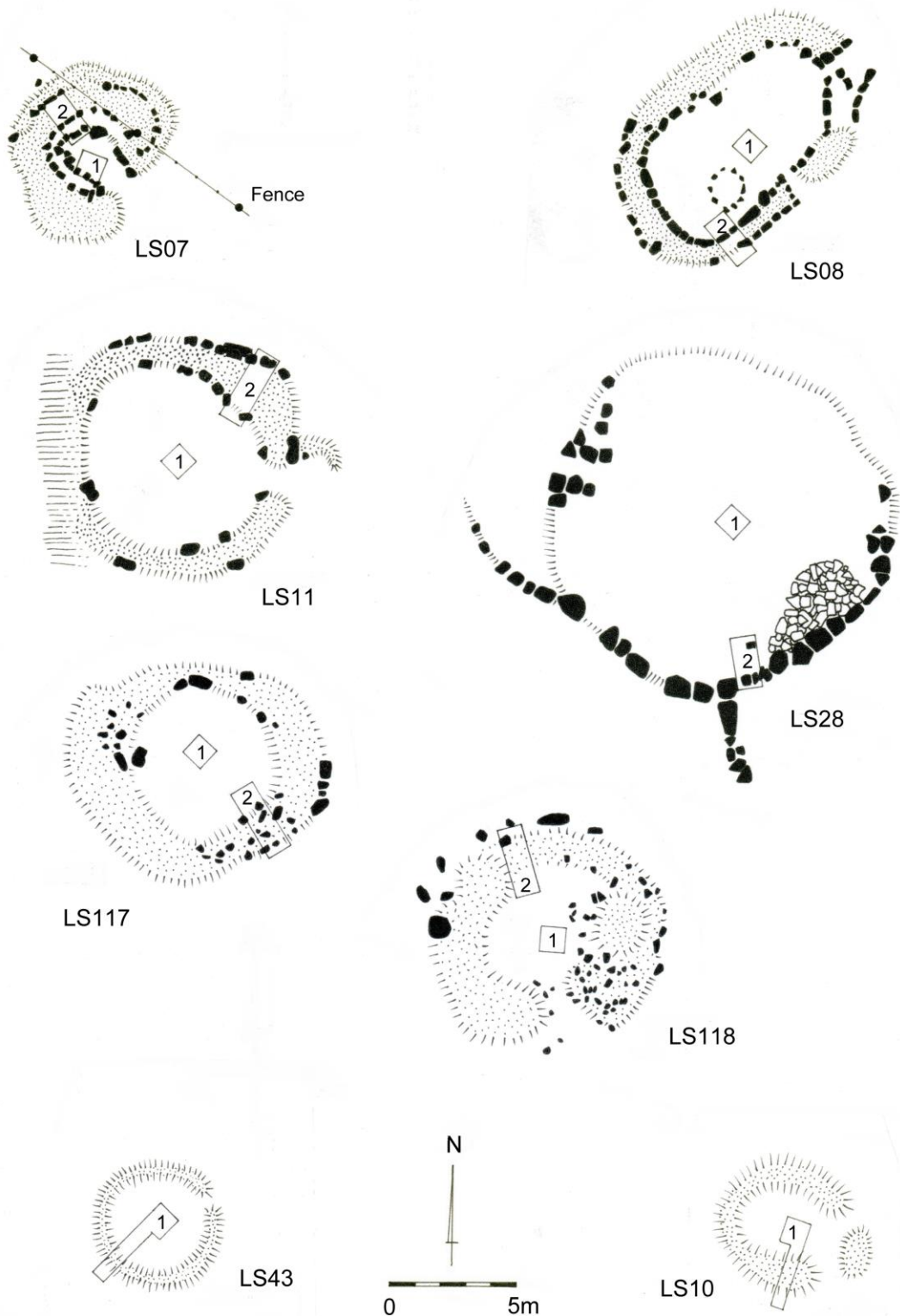


LS89

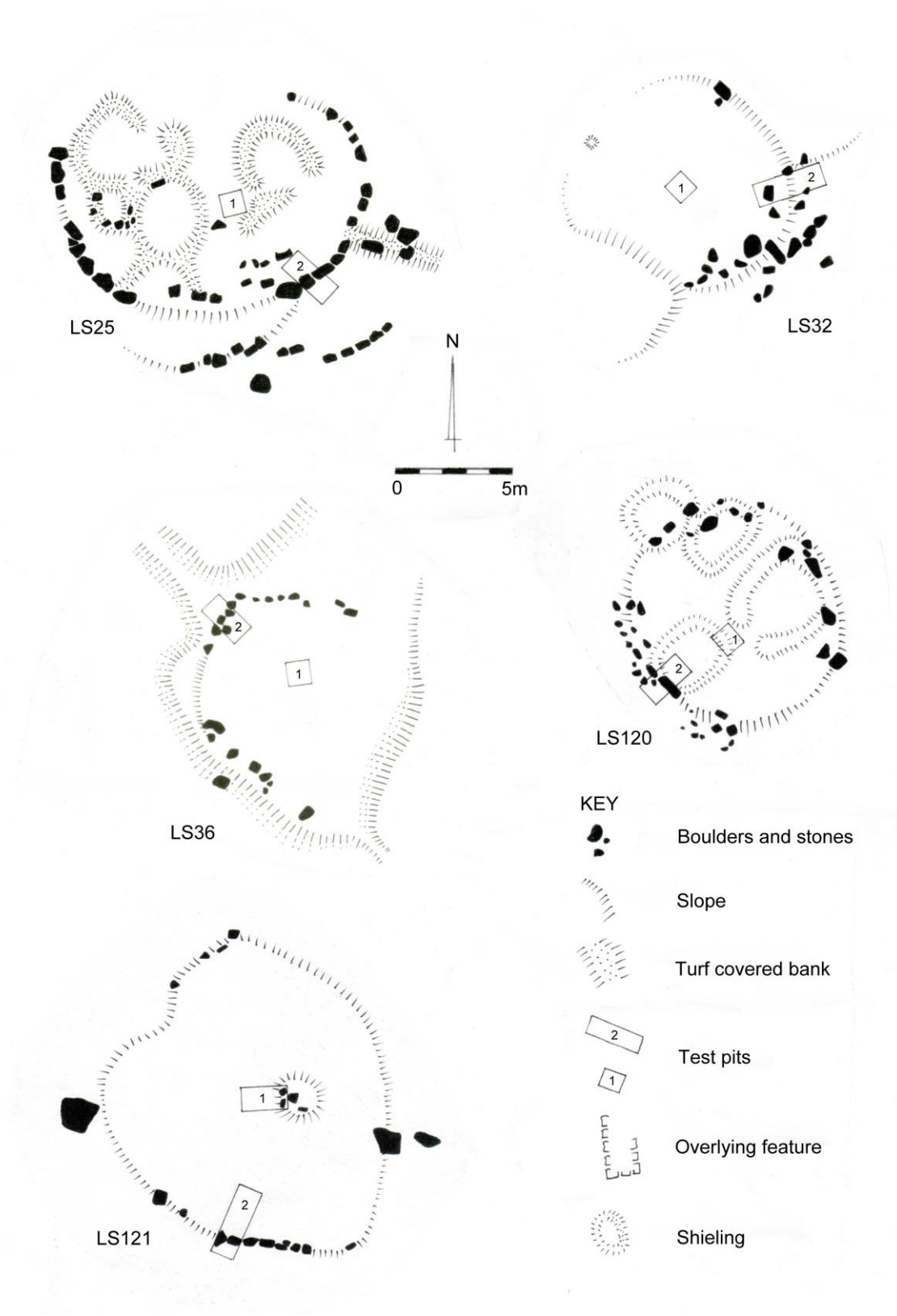


LS115

Illus 6: Circular structures: Plans and Test Pit locations.



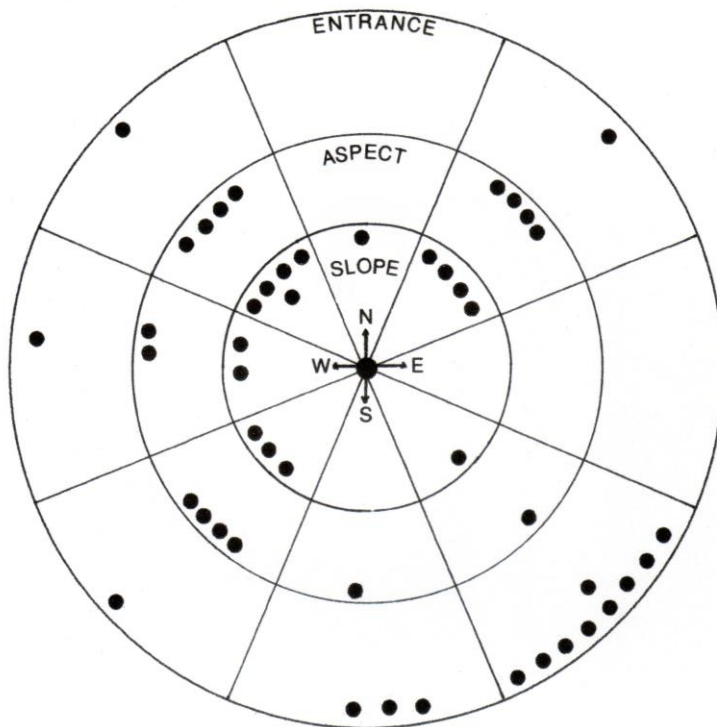
Illus. 7: Circular structures: Plans and Test Pit locations.



illus. 8: Boulder revetted platforms: Plans and Test Pit locations.

3.6 Entrances and internal structure

Entrances, where visible, were of two types - the extended entrance – Site LS88 for example - where the wall thickens to form a passage (6 examples) and the standard entrance or gap in the wall (10 examples). In all instances where occupation could be verified (apart from LS115 where the entrance faced to the NW) the entrance faced to, or close to, the south east – even if this meant the entrance faced into the hillslope (see illus 10 below). Where entrances faced other than to the south east (again apart from LS115) the structures produced no evidence for activity or occupation (LS01, LS20, LS28, LS43 and LS114).



illus. 9: The 16 Circular structures with visible entrances: Compass chart showing direction of entrance in relation to aspect and slope.

Interpretation of illustration 4

The above chart demonstrates that the choice of direction for the entrance to these structures was not generally dictated by the view or the lie of the land and that some other factor was considered more important. One influencing factor may be the direction of the rising sun.

3.7 Internal features

Evidence of four types of internal feature was recovered – cobbled floors, hearths (pit and stone slab), postholes and rubbish pits.

a). Cobbled areas

Only three of the tested structures produced evidence of cobbling. Test pit 2, site LS117 produced a cobbled surface consisting of small angular stones, with a worn upper surface, abutting the inside face of wall (see illus 5 c. above). Test pits 1 and 2 at site LS08 produced evidence suggesting that the entire floor area was cobbled. Test pit 2 at site 66 produced a cobbled surface abutting the inner face of the enclosure wall which sealed an earlier, well preserved, post hole.

b). Hearths

Apart from Site LS06 (see below) only one hearth was encountered per site indicating that occupation was either short lived or that during extended occupation the floors and hearths were regularly cleared of accumulated ash. This is in direct contrast to the floors in the rectangular Iron Age house at Tungadal, Isle of Skye where ash was allowed to build up, with hearth stacked on hearth, until the occupants were sitting on over 1 meter of fire-ash and living in the roof of the structure (Miket, R. in prep.)

Stone slab hearths were encountered on 11 occasions and, apart from Site LS06 where the slab hearth sealed an earlier pit hearth, these were laid directly on the natural and were surrounded by a compacted ash covered surface. Pit hearths were encountered on only 5 occasions (LS06, LS11, LS10, LS32 and LS115 - all were dug into the natural with 2 examples (LS11 & LS115) having a slab of stone set in the base of the pit. In contrast to the slab hearths which appear to have been swept clean the pit hearths were filled with fire ash, although in all instances associated occupation horizons appear to have been removed.

c). Postholes

Only four sites produced post holes – LS11 a single post hole abutting the inner face of the hut wall – perhaps an upright for a radial partition, Site LS66 circa 500mm in from the internal wall face, with the post perhaps acting as a carrier for a ring beam supporting the roof and/or a radial partition. Site LS25 associated with the early phase of occupation, and LS06 where holes for 4 large posts were arranged in an arc in the northern quadrant excavated - there were no corresponding post holes in the southern quadrant - and a single post hole was sealed beneath the later phase enclosure wall. This is not an unexpected result during keyhole excavation as test pits might fall between post holes or not extend far enough across the interior to encounter post holes.

d). Pits

Apart from the pit hearths mention above only one other pit was encountered – a large depression in the floor of site LS08 filled with charcoal fragments, iron slag and 4 Plano-convex hearth bases. These are all indicators of metal working and considering the entire interior of this site appears to have been cobbled probably indicate that this structure was a workshop.

3.8 Finds

The vast majority of the finds relate to the domestic activities of water heating and cooking. Every occupied site produced heat-fragmented pot boilers - mostly based on local water worn pebbles with Quartzite's and Torridonian Sandstone the preferred geologies. The only local source for water worn pebbles of the recovered geologies is Camas Malag beach at the south east end of the strath and it is likely that all the pebbles were sourced there.

Corn grinding is attested by only two fragments of saddle quern recovered from sites LS66 and LS89. This lack of quern fragments is interesting as the High Pasture site, although not an occupation site produced a large number of quern fragments.

Ceramics are represented by 103 sherds, the majority of which came from LS25 and LS121 – the remainder occurring in ones and twos on almost all the remaining occupied sites.

Site LS121, a revetted platform, produced 62 sherds of a fine, well made, black burnished ware with at least 3 vessels represented. This site also produced an end scrapper, a quern rubber, a piece of worked pumice and numerous pot boilers. Unfortunately no structural evidence was recovered perhaps indicating that a wooden structure once stood on the platform. Sites LS120 and LS25, also revetted platforms, both produced single sherds of the same black pottery, currently thought to be of Early Bronze Age date. (awaiting the pottery report)

A flake from a polished stone axe was recovered from beneath the wall at LS34 and lithic debitage was recovered from the floors of sites LS06, LS10, LS11, LS25, LS33, LS36, LS81, LS88 and LS115 indicating that the production and/or use of lithic tools was widespread and may have continued into the Medieval period.

Evidence for iron working was rare: Small amounts of iron slag were found at site LS11. Iron slag's and 4 Plano convex hearth bases were recovered from a pit at LS08 – an early medieval site. A fragmentary soapstone tuyere and iron slag's were recovered from the Late Bronze Age/ Early Iron Age burnt mound associated with the early phase of LS06.

Post medieval finds were rare. Sites LS07 and LS43, both thought to be 18/19th century shielings, produced shards of green bottle glass and LS114 produced 2 sherds of 19th century glazed pottery from its shore gravel floor.

4. Discussion

4.1 Occupation horizons

Although the test pitting of the 29 sites on Skye has produced much evidence for the structure and dating of the Strath Suardal circular sites it is not clear if these dwellings were permanently or seasonally occupied. In all cases where floor surfaces survived there was little or no build up of floor deposits although, in a number of cases, (LS06, LS25 and LS41), a sequence of structural rebuilds with associated floor surfaces could be demonstrated. This result set contrasts, to some extent, to recent work carried out by the Loch Broom Field Club (Wee Digs Project) where four out of eleven structures tested in a similar manor proved to have had an extended occupation sequences. (Welti, A. and Wildgoose, M. 2015 Loch Broom Field Club)

4.2 Relationship with High Pasture cave

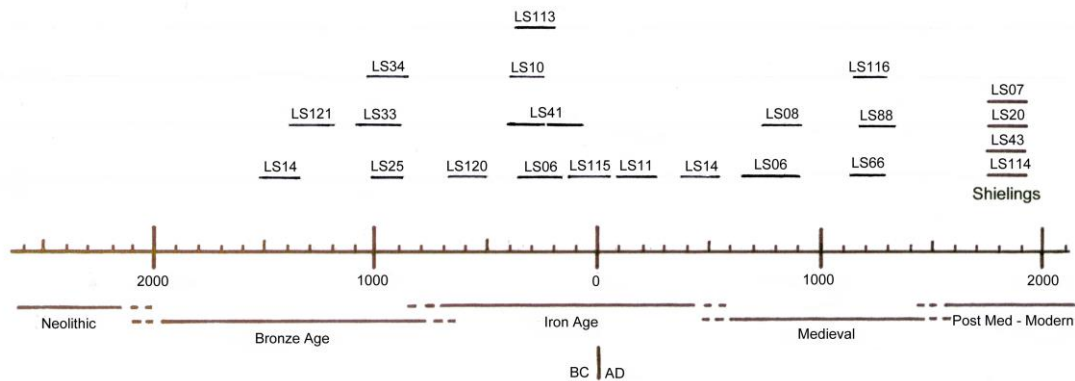
Although no direct relationship, other than date of occupation, could be demonstrated between High Pasture Cave and the contemporary circular occupation sites within the strath the test pitting of these sites raised the possibility of a ritual link. During the excavation of the High Pasture Site it was noted that the deposits, both inside and outside the cave, consisted of what appeared to be dumps of domestic rubbish – dark soils containing charcoals, small fragments of burnt bone, charred grains and abraded fragments of pottery. The apparent deposition of occupation material at the High Pasture ritual site raises the possibility that the debris of everyday domestic life possessed ritual significance. The lack of occupation horizons within the tested circular structures therefore might indicate that floor deposits were collected at occupation sites and deposited, wholly or partly, at the High Pasture Cave site and that High Pasture therefore functioned as a ritual/religious focus for the inhabitants of Strath Suardal. A practice which may also have contributed to the ritual deposits at Mine Howe in Orkney, also a subterranean site, where the mound and surrounding ditch fill consisted of substantial deposits of midden material interleaved with rubble. (Card, N. & Downes, J. in prep)

The numerous small domestic items found at the High Pasture site would seem to support this theory with the core deposits, both within and outwith the cave, containing many small items, (bone pins, needles, spindle whorls and pot boilers) both whole and broken, connected with the performance of everyday life. In addition numerous fragments of corn grinding querns were also recovered with both saddle and rotary examples represented. Three scenarios can be envisaged when this deposition could have taken place: **a**). on a daily basis (unlikely). **b**). on an annual basis as part of a 'return of spring' ritual clean of the house. **c**). at the abandonment and/or ritual closure of a site – perhaps associated with movement to a new location or the death of the occupants – conceivably a particularly powerful time in the life cycle of a settlement. The C.14 dating of the excavated structures (see illus. 11 below) would appear to support short term occupation of a site followed by relocation to a new area.

4.3 C14 dating

Of the 29 sites excavated only 16 produced charcoal samples of sufficient size to enable C.14 dating to be attempted. Of the remaining 13 sites - 5 with evidence of occupation produced no datable material, 3 produced no evidence for occupation, 3 were 18/19th century shieling huts, 1 was not located and 1 was a natural feature. The results obtained from the C14 analysis suggest that occupation of the sites within the strath has been intermittent since the Early Bronze Age. It must however be remembered that the majority of the samples, apart from Site LS06, were collected from the hearth fire at each site and could therefore represent, if 4.2 above is considered, the end of the sites occupation. The samples gathered from Site LS06 were taken from the secondary slab hearth (Middle Iron Age) and context 2.8 sealed below the circular enclosure wall (Early medieval). The earlier pit hearth at LS06 was dated purely by its association with late Bronze Age pottery. The spread of C14 dates from LS06 suggests an extended period of use for this site which sets it apart from all other tested sites. The late date (664-778AD) at LS06 indicates an early medieval reuse of the site associated with the building of the stone enclosures.

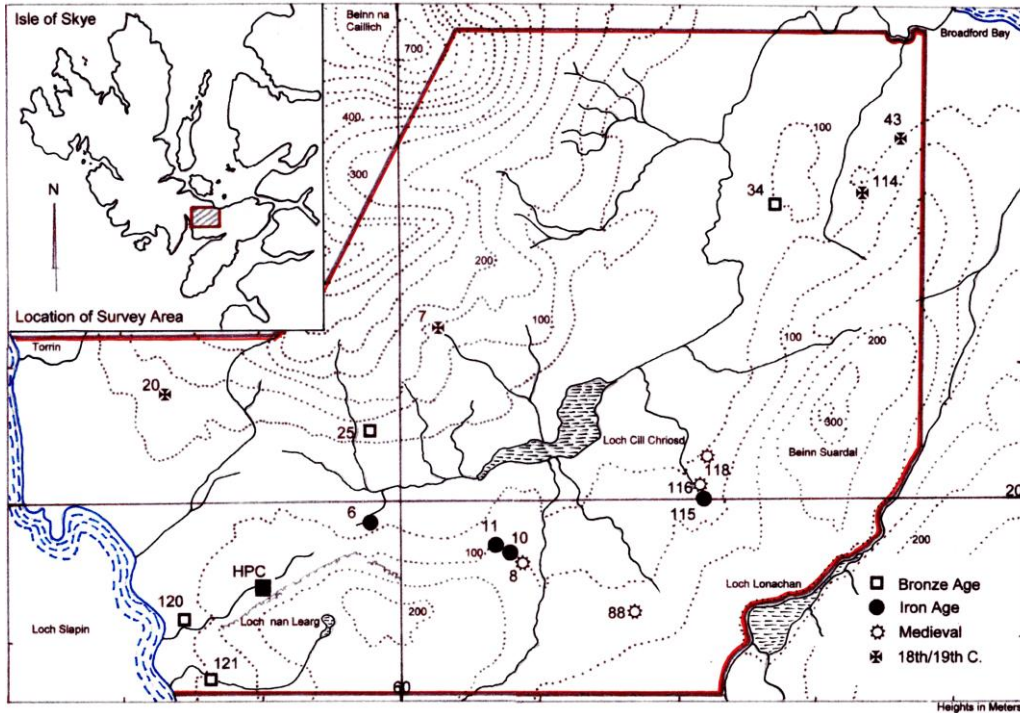
Leaving aside the 5 occupied but currently undated sites the C14 results, would seem to indicate that up until the late medieval centuries only 3 or at times 4 structures were occupied in the Strath at any one time. An apparent peak of activity in the strath around the 4th to 2nd centuries BC coinciding with the rise of ritual activity recognised in the excavations at the High Pasture site. The trough in activity from the 2nd century AD onwards neatly mirroring the closure and abandonment of the site until activity again picks up in the closing centuries of the first millennium AD. (See illustration 11 below).



illus 10: Timeline demonstrating the time relationship of the dated sites.

The charcoal samples also throw some light on the tree cover in the strath with almost all the samples tested so far being from Common Hazel (*Corylus Avellana*) with only one example of the currently more common Birch (*Betula*) suggesting that Hazel was perhaps the dominant species and/or the preferred firewood. Burnt

Hazelnuts were found amongst charcoal samples from sites LS64 and LS88 indicating that these were collected either accidentally amongst fire wood or as a food source - the former perhaps indicating occupation in the autumn/winter months the latter a partial reliance on natural food sources.

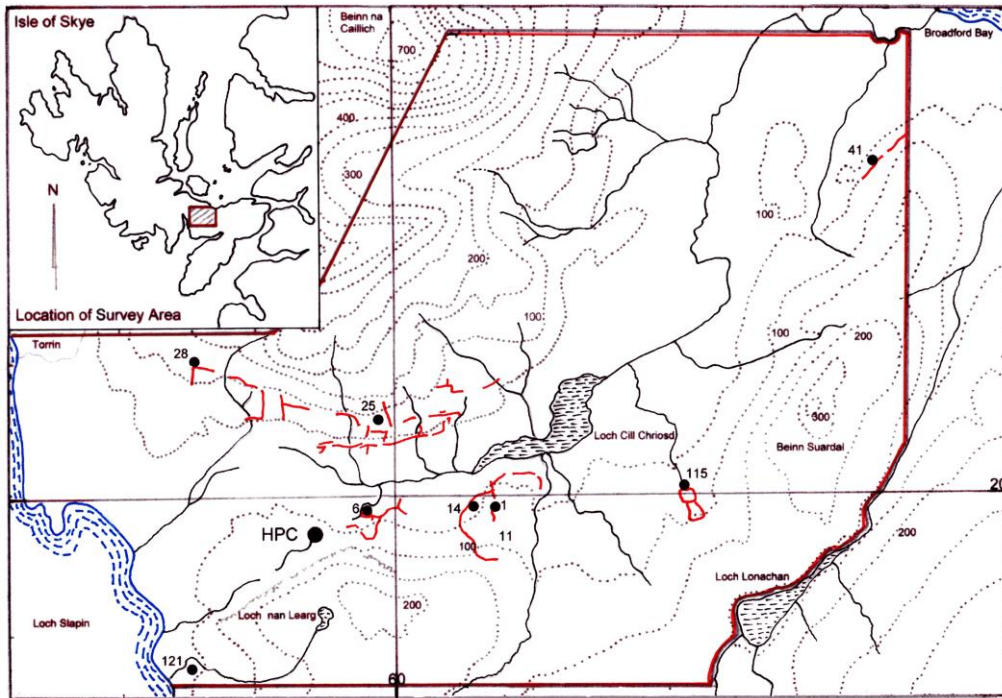


illus 11: Distribution of dated circular structures located within Strath Suardal.

4.4 Associated Landscape (See Illus. 2 above and 13 below)

In view of the contrasting geologies and associated soils within the strath it is not surprising that the majority of the occupied structures cluster on the better soils associated with the limestone geology (see illus. 1). Of the 6 structures which are clearly on the poorer granite soils four are of 18th/19th century date (LS07, LS20, LS43 and LS114), and one is of possible bronze age date (LS 25). The seventh site (LS28) is possibly either an animal enclosure associated with LS25 or a milking shieling of 18th/19th century date similar to the one excavated at the head of Loch Slapin in 1991 (Miket and Wildgoose 1991 unpublished). Around and clearly associated with these circular structures are the fragmentary remains of organized farming landscapes. These remains consist of land divisions, enclosures and track ways. The land divisions and enclosure boundaries are visible today as linear settings of large boulders and, in some instances, can be traced for hundreds of meters - often disappearing below the peat overburden and then re-appearing on rocky outcrops further on. Both rectangular and sub-circular enclosures have been identified during the survey and both appear to be contemporary with the prehistoric occupation sites rather than the later post medieval occupation of the glen which occupies the lower, central corridor, of the strath. These farming landscapes occur on the upper slopes of both the limestone (better) and granite (poorer) soils with little obvious difference

between the visible farming regimes. It must however be considered likely that controlled grazing was practiced on the granite based poorer soils and that the better limestone soils were used for the growing of crops such as cereals and brassicas. The survival of Bronze Age ard marks below the accumulation of burnt mound material at the High Pasture site (Birch in prep) to some extent supports this argument. The large deposit of barley recovered from the ritual deposits both outside and within High Pasture Cave also suggests that a successful farming regime, based on the limestone geologies, existed within the strath.



illus. 12: Recorded linear boulder boundaries with associated sites.

Site (LS25) the only proven prehistoric occupation site on the granite based soils appears to have been occupied in the Bronze Age, at a time when peat cover was at a minimum (Brown. 2008). Deteriorating climatic conditions and acidification of soils leading to extending peat cover would have eventually made occupation of this site unsustainable, leading to eventual abandonment. The extensive field system which surrounds site LS25 might therefore be seen as a fossilized example of enclosure patterns now largely lost on the more intensively farmed lower limestone slopes of the central corridor of the strath. Interestingly a tongue of Jurassic Shale at the eastern end of the strath, today wet and heather covered, attracted a cluster of early prehistoric sites which include a chambered cairn (Highland Historic Environment Record MHG 5318), circular structures (LS33, 34 36 and 43) and a possible burnt mound (LS35), but no visible evidence for enclosure. This cluster of sites occupies a rise commanding an open view westward over the entire strath and under differing climatic conditions would have been an advantageous site to occupy.

4.5 Pottery assemblage. Ann MacSween **To be added**

5. Bracken – an ever present problem

Of the 29 sites investigated 21 were heavily infested with bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and its associated sub-surface rhizomes. These rhizomes, when unrestricted by solid features, had spread throughout all contexts to a depth of circa 800mm. In some cases a compacted earth floor or a solid cobble floor impeded their spread, with a rhizome matt forming on the surface of these features. In all cases where bracken rhizomes had spread into or passed through occupation horizons the finer detail of occupation sequences had been erased leaving only a single homogeneous context. It is likely however that, in general, small finds and datable materials had not moved far within contexts and that, except at context boundaries, careful excavation allowed valid evidence to be recovered. To this end bracken rhizomes were cut off when exposed and not pulled as was the temptation.

It would appear that it is already too late to save the finer detail of the occupation sequences of the majority of sites heavily infested with bracken. The test pitting campaign has however shown that it is still possible to recover secure samples for C14 dating, plus evidence of sequential occupation, and that it will always be possible to recover detailed plans of the more substantial features such as walls, hearths, floors and post holes.

Perhaps the small number of sites which survive bracken free should be treated as a finite resource, and some attempt made to ensure that they remain bracken free in order to preserve the finer detail of occupation horizons.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Strath Suardal;

OS maps of the west coast of Scotland are peppered with sites designated as 'Hut Circles', while current literature tends to use the term 'Atlantic Roundhouse'. Unfortunately these terms carry the implication that a site has been lived in, that it is a house. The work carried out on the Strath Suardal landscape has shown that a number of these sites (roughly 10%) show no evidence of occupation at all and therefore that they may have performed some other function related to ritual life, land use or animal husbandry. The evidence recovered during the test pitting campaign, regarding both date and function now shows that the terms 'Hut circle/round house' (inferring an occupation site) cannot be automatically assigned in the classification of these structures and that a more appropriate term, such as 'circular structure' should be used until excavation can clarify individual site classifications.

6.2 Possible Ritual Deposition of Occupation Materials

Test pitting has also demonstrated that once floor surfaces had been established they may have been regularly swept clean or perhaps ritually cleaned (allowing little build-up of occupation horizons) with the domestic debris being deposited either outwith the occupied area, on the fields perhaps, or elsewhere as part of a recurring ritual practice - perhaps in this instance at the High Pasture Cave site. Alternatively occupation may have been short lived, occasional or seasonal in nature (see Halliday S.P 1999 & 2007 for Bronze Age parallels), although to-date no alternative occupation sites, other than the two duns) have been located in the vicinity.

6.3 Date Range and Management of the Landscape

The test pitting campaign has provided much new evidence regarding the date range of circular sites and number of sites occupied at any one time, with the earliest site dating to the Early Bronze Age (LS 121) and the latest dateable by the pottery in the floor makeup to the mid 19th century (LS 114). This date range extends the beginnings of management of the landscape in south Skye back into the Early Bronze Age and demonstrates the conservative nature of local architectural styles. Excavations at the High Pasture Cave site have produced corroborating evidence for possible early cultivation of Bronze Age date, with areas of cross ploughing (ard marks) containing beaker sherds being recovered from beneath the burnt mound spreads associated with this ritual site. (Birch and Wildgoose forthcoming).

6.4 Site LS06

The test pitting and subsequent partial excavation of site LS06 has shown that at the end of the Bronze Age this site had a suite of features and activities – central hearth, burnt mound, metal smelting, running water, water tank etc. - which would later form the core features of the Iron Age ritual landscape at the High Pasture Cave site. The possibility therefore exists that site LS06 was a precursor and perhaps model for the ritual enclosure and practices found at the High Pasture site.

6.5 Summary

6.5.1

The evidence for occupation and abandonment recovered from the landscape assessment in Strath Suardal currently points to a small number of occupied farm sites, perhaps no more than 3 or 4 at any one time, spread throughout the strath which, through time and changing climatic conditions, were relocated as peat cover extended and worked soils became less productive. In recent work at Acheny Glen paleo-environmental evidence indicated continuity of land use, however very few of the excavated hut circles showed evidence of long term occupation. It is now suggested that occupations were probably short-lived, followed by long periods of disuse (Haliday, S P 2007). At Acheny Glen, Strath Suardal and more recently in the results from the Wedigs Project in Wester Ross (Welti A & Wildgoose M) long sequences of occupation of the landscape can be shown to be a series of

occupations and abandonment's with land probably worked until returns diminished, followed by abandonment in favour of new or rested land. Continuity of occupation can therefore be shown to lie in the use of the landscape not in individual farmsteads within the landscape.

6.5.2

The work in Strath Suardal has also raised the possibility that, for more than a millennium during the Bronze and Iron Ages, the lives of the inhabitants of the strath were linked via ritual practices, initially with the activities at site LS06, and latterly with the High Pasture Cave ritual centre.

6.6 A new perspective

The landscape assessment – archive search, walkover survey and test pitting – a relatively cost effective and rapid method of acquiring maximum information, has provided a new perspective on the archaeology of the High Pasture Cave environment. It has also, unfortunately, highlighted the fact that bracken is a major current and future threat to the archaeology of Scotland.

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