

## NEWSLETTER 19 - OCTOBER 1997

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS AT DUN DAVIE NEAR DORNIE

A previously unrecorded series of artificial platforms was identified by Highland Council following the rockfall from Dun Mor (known locally as Dun Davie) on to the A87 in January 1997. Remedial works to stabilise the rock face were delayed to permit a detailed examination of the site and a team from the Centre for Field Archaeology, Edinburgh University was called in and given three objectives:

1. To record any features and objects of archaeological importance that would be damaged by the proposed machine access road required for remedial works.
2. To excavate an oval cairn located on one of the platforms.
3. To liaise with the contractors and advise on any variations to the proposed route.

15 trial trenches were excavated by hand in order to characterise the presence, nature, depth and extent of surviving archaeological features. The trenches were backfilled on completion of the fieldwork which also included detailed mapping of the features. Five enhanced platforms were revealed with the northernmost one being located on the very top of the knoll. The platforms had been created by constructing rough stone walls on the bedrock outcrops and filling behind them with rubble and soil to form level ground surfaces. A well-defined pathway, enhanced in two places by revetting (retaining) walls, zig-zags up the southern side of the site to the platforms. This pathway almost certainly started at the edge of Loch Duich originally. The first stretch of the path and probably some intermediate platforms would have been disturbed during the construction of the A87 trunk road during the 1960s.

The oval cairn of stones on one of the platforms measured approximately 2.5 metres by 1.5 metres and covered a pit measuring 1.15 metres by 0.60 metre and 0.35 metre deep. Although small this feature could have been used for burial purposes, the absence of skeletal remains possibly being explained by the acid nature of the soil.

Artefacts recovered from the site consisted of worked quartz, modern pottery, glass and iron objects and in general came from the dumped material behind the revetting walls. The dumped material was not well sealed and contained many roots and so cannot be used to date the construction with any confidence. If the dumped material is derived from the ridge then the presence of worked quartz suggests pre-historic and possibly pre-Iron Age occupation of the site, probably pre-dating the construction of the walls. However the possibility that the backfill material had been imported from elsewhere cannot be ruled out. Deposits of charcoal-rich soil were found in two trenches. It is hoped that these will be subjected to species identification with a view to submission for radiocarbon dating.

An Iron Age or Dark Age date is generally assumed for fortified ridge sites and in general such sites are associated with a dun. However Dun Davie, despite its name, does not have a dun and the revetting walls provide little in the way of fortification. The function of the site and hence its date remain unknown!

So a number of questions remain to be answered by post-excavation work e.g. the date of site construction, what purpose did it serve, why is there so much modern material and does the presence of worked quartz imply pre-historic occupation? I would add one further question. Why was it named Dun Davie? Who is or was this individual?

If anyone would care to read the official report a copy is in my possession and can be made available. *Contributed by Bill Ramsay.*

## **SUMMER 1997 - WILDLIFE REPORTS**

The warm sunny weather during July and August ensured another good summer for butterflies although there was no repeat of last year's immigration of Painted Ladies. Scotch Argus, Meadow Brown and Speckled Wood were particularly numerous and widespread. I located the two latter species in several "new" localities. My best sighting though was of a Grayling at An Dubh-aird on 27th July. It was my first positive record of this elusive species which retracts its forewings between its hindwings and tilts sideways making it very difficult to locate when it settles on the ground. The Grayling is primarily a coastal species and occurs mainly in western Britain.

It was not such a good summer for nocturnal moths, or at least far fewer were attracted to our windows than last year and Pat Mucklow noticed the same in Kyle. However a probable Convolvulus Hawk-moth was seen at Upper Ardelve and an Elephant Hawk-moth was found on Carr Brae, although unfortunately as a road casualty.

Black-throated Divers had another successful breeding season. Five pairs held territories and two of these reared a single chick whilst the Cluanie pair reared two young for the second year running.

Golden Eagles also appear to have done well with at least three juveniles seen in the area.

Stonechats have made a remarkable recovery from last year's low population if my own observations are anything to go by. 30 sightings between May and September contrast with a mere 5 sightings during the same period in 1996. Many of this year's sightings were of fledged broods of juvenile birds in widely scattered localities which augers well for the future.

Several people commented on unusual numbers of Bullfinches and Long-tailed Tits both of which turned up in some unlikely places.

11 Canada Geese off Glas Eilean on 24th August was only the 2nd record that I know of for Lochalsh. If it had not been such a bright day they would almost certainly have gone unnoticed, the dark necks and white cheek patches only just being discernible from Avernish Point.

Two Sandwich Terns in Kirkton Bay on 8th September were my 1st for the area.

*Newsletter compiled by Brian Neath (01599 555 341)*



