

An Archaeological Survey of Millburn Plantation, Ru Arisaig Forest



Looking East along line of New Road above Site 8

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Introduction

To gain access to conifers in Millburn Plantation, Ru Arisaig Forest, Scottish Woodlands Ltd needed to construct an access route past abandoned structures at NM 6465 8480. Highland Council Archaeology Service requested that the route should be examined by an approved archaeologist to record the nature of the surviving remains and to minimise the impact of the forestry operations on these archaeological remains. The author was appointed by Scottish Woodlands to carry out this work.

Method

A brief desk-bound survey was carried out examining existing records in the Archaeology Service's Sites & Monuments Record and earlier Ordnance Survey maps of the area (including Roy's Military Survey of c1750) held by Highland Council's Archive Service. A brief look was also made of available sources in Inverness Library's Reference Section.

A site survey was carried out on the 30th October in dry conditions. Attention was particularly concentrated in the area of the new access road which had already been constructed by the time of this visit. Measurements were taken of extant buildings and a photographic record was made for Highland Council's Sites & Monuments Record. Attempts were made to seek for archaeological sites within the Millburn Plantation, though these were hampered by the dense sitka spruce cover. The lines of the internal tracks had already been felled obscuring the ground beneath them. Archaeological sites within the plantation were defined by hazard tape so that these areas could be respected by the woodcutters. Sites so protected included sites 10-13. Full descriptions of all sites noted during this survey are listed in the gazeteer.

Archaeological & Historical Background

No prehistoric remains have been recorded in the vicinity of this plantation. A hunter/gatherer settlement has been examined near Loch Morar and a bronze age cist was discovered during road widening at Glen Borroadale. These suggest there has been at least sporadic human activity in this area since prehistoric times.

Apart from extensive arable settlement in the area of Rhumach., no settlement or arable cultivation was shown here on Roy's Military Survey of c1750. Patches of woodland were shown in the approximate area of the present plantation. Loch a'Mhuilinn was not shown.

The Deer Forest Commission of 1892 [*Royal Commission (Highlands & Islands 1892) Minutes of Evidence 2, Edinburgh 1895*] examined several testimonies which help to establish the sequence of occupation here. The settlement here was probably part of Rhumach which was cleared of 20 tenants c1843 [*James MacDonald Evidence p1224*] and the mill was now [1892] occupied by the gamekeeper. According to Aeneas MacDonnell of Camusdarroch these sub-

tenants were cleared because they were not paying commercial rents, only paying nominal rent for their grazing and none for their houses, giving labour instead. It is not certain if this clearance led to an initial introduction of sheep farming, but by 1853 the whole Rhu peninsula was established as a deer forest [*Evidence of Mr Nicholson p1232*]. Of the forest of 3,500 acres only 62 acres in Rudha were cultivated consisting of Rudha Farm at the promontory and fenced arable land at Rhumach. From these testimonies it is clear that the remains in this area belong to a traditional farming settlement cleared in the 1840s prior to the establishment of the Rhu Deer Forest.

The Millburn Plantation was clearly established by the time of the first Ordnance Survey of 1875 and indeed by the time of the revision of 1899 (*shown as Fig 2.*), the forest boundaries were partly decayed. It is clear that the plantation was established as part of the Deer Forest, for sheltering the deer. The positioning of the gamekeeper at Millburn Cottage, confirmed by kennels recorded on the 1875 OS map, was obviously connected with this forest.

Since 1899 the boundaries of the plantation have been extended to include the area around Lochan an Deabh. Estate records can probably date these events and also the previous planting and harvesting cycle.

Survey results

Because the road had already been constructed by the time the writer was asked to visit, it was not possible to establish what archaeological remains lay on the route of the road. It had clearly been sited to avoid the standing buildings recorded on the OS map and no obvious damage to the structures has occurred. A sketch plan (not to scale) is included as Fig 3. The settlement was sited on a natural terrace, which at 10 metres OD was almost certainly a raised beach formed in late glacial times some 10,000 years ago. Between this terrace and the new road occasional stone clearance heaps, Site 1., were seen. These may have been derived from field clearance on the terrace above or from cultivation, possibly of rig that stretched downwards to the sea. Since the road cut was some 7 metres wide and the spread of excavated material was up to 8 metres wide it was not possible to observe any features to the north of this terrace. As Fig 1. shows there was extensive cultivation formerly in this area.

Similar clearance heaps were observed within a walled enclosure within the plantation at Site 12. One of these cairns was substantial enough to have a different origin, such as being formed as a burial cairn. There were also clearance cairns at Site 15 to the southeast of Locha'Mhuilinn, possibly marking fields cultivated before the loch was created.

The settlement recorded as Sites 1-8, and sketched as Fig 3., may have originated in the prehistoric period if Site 2 is interpreted as a former roundhouse. It must date to the 17th century or earlier. The extent of rig cultivation and abandoned settlement shown here, at Torr Bheithe and to the west of Millburn Cottage towards Rhumach, show a considerable population used to live in this area. The glacial terraces and generally favoured situation of the field systems would have enabled a productive system of agriculture to be followed.

The surviving structures at Sites 1-8, all appear to be late 18th/early 19th century in date and this would be consistent with the lack of settlement shown here on the Roy map of c1750. However some of the Torr a'Bheithe structures to the south of the main survey area (mistakenly labelled by the OS as Old Shielings) appear earlier in form, being of turf and stone construction and it may be that the Roy survey has omitted some earlier settlements in this area.

Conclusions

It was unfortunate that the survey could not be carried out before the road was constructed and felling commenced in the existing plantation. However it is thought unlikely that any significant archaeological remains have been destroyed or obscured by the current work. Also if the survey had been carried out earlier in the summer the archaeological sites would have been largely obscured by the dense bracken growth evident in this area.

The sites within the plantation have been severely damaged by tree growth. Where it is feasible to protect these sites during felling, the working practice should be designed so that they can be protected from tree fall and access tracks. If possible the enclosure defined at Site 12 should be retained as an open area in the new plantation so that it can once more be a feature in this woodland landscape. The buildings at Site 10 should be retained and protected within any proposed management plan.

Jonathan Wordsworth
10th November 1997

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Bob Steward of Highland Council Archive Service for permission to copy parts of OS map Sheets Inverness-shire 120 & 134, published in 1900.


Bogha Ruadh



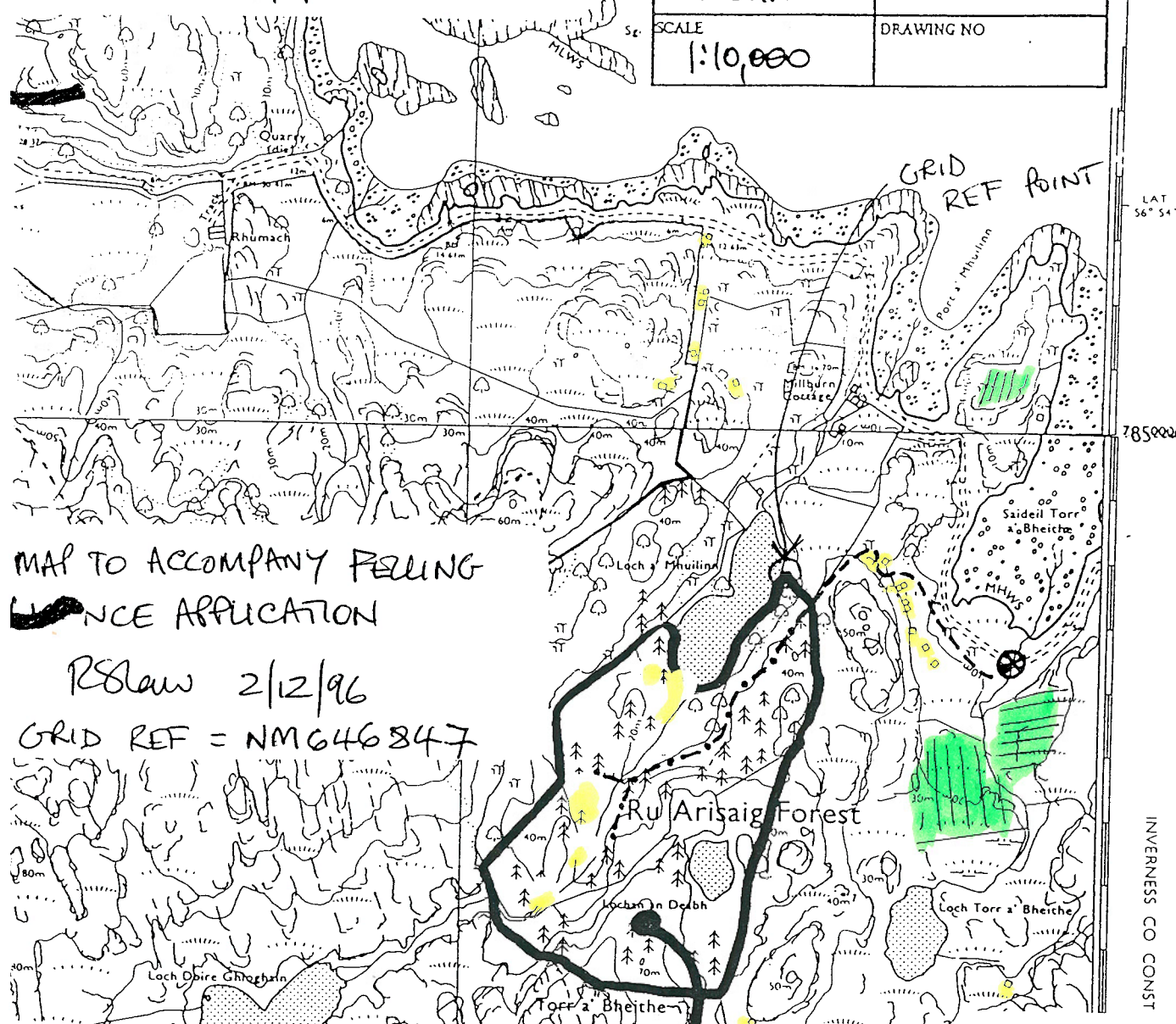
⊗ Construct stacking point and hammer head for 8 wheelers

External forwarder track to be carefully sited to suit landform and avoid archaeology

Indicative internal track with laybys for skyline winch and piped culverts.

 Scottish Woodlands Ltd Mayfield, High Street, Dingwall, IV15 9ST Telephone 01349 864999 Fax: 01349 864133	
PROJECT ARISAIG ESTATE	
DRAWING MILLBURN PLANTATION ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS	
DRAWN R SHAW	APPROVED
SCALE 1:10,000	DRAWING NO

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NM 89 NM

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Fig 1 Location of Survey

Reproduced from the ~~1:10,000~~ Ordnance Survey
 1:10,000 map with the permission of the
 Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
 © Crown Copyright. Scottish Woodlands Ltd,
 Research Park, Riccarton, Edinburgh.
 Licence number AL550035.

Yellow highlight marks known
 archaeological sites
 Green highlight marks areas of
 former rig cultivation

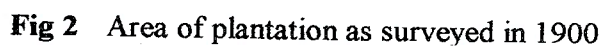
Fell po

Conifer

Retain hardwoods

7/11/96 R Shaw

1/12/95/1/12/96



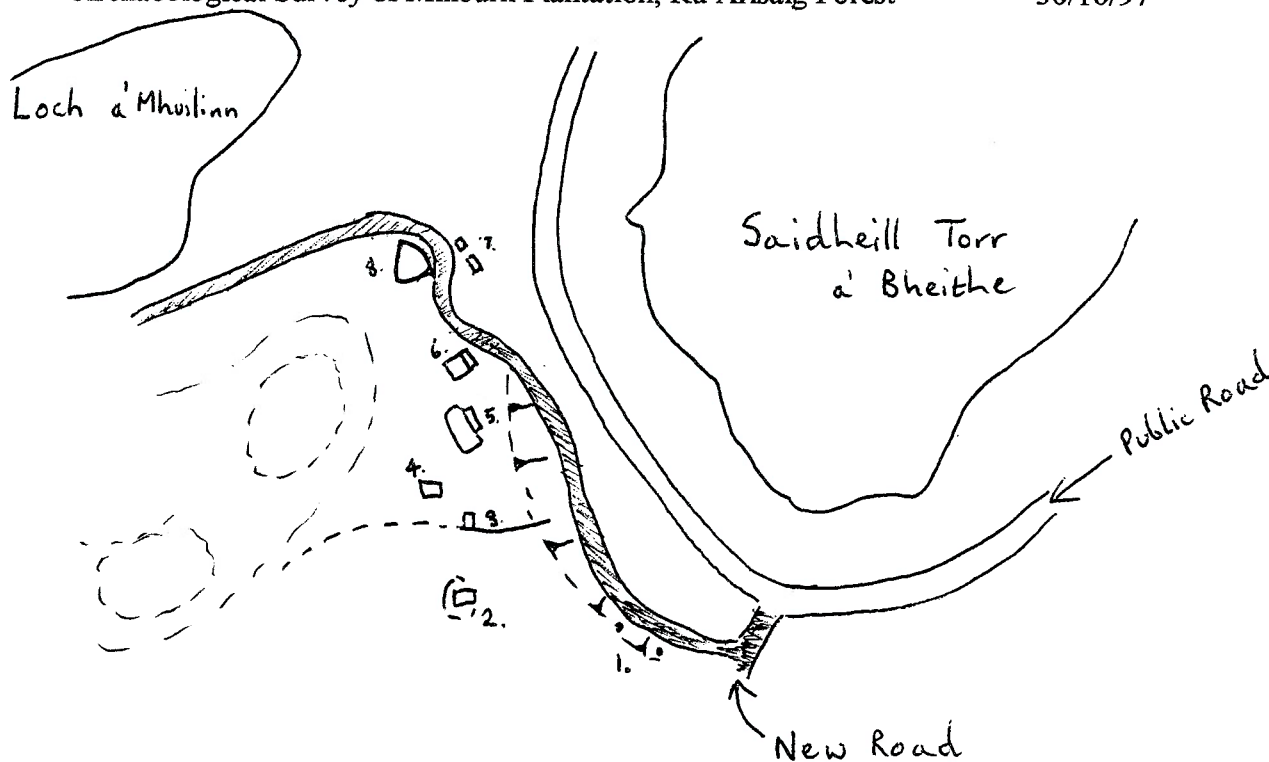


Fig 3 Location of new road to settlement remains at Sites 1-8. Sketch plan not to scale.

Gazeteer of Sites

1. NM 6478 8465 A series of clearance cairns 2-3m in diameter by 0.5m high lie on the slope of the raised beach in improved ground. They were only noted at the E end of this slope. It was not clear if they were dumped from the field to the S or were part of a field system now cut by the new road.
2. NM 6474 8464 A rectangular drystone enclosure 7m by 12m and aligned NE/SW lies within a circular walled enclosure 14m in diameter. The walls of this circular enclosure are of earth & stone and c1m wide. While it could be a prehistoric roundhouse, it is probably too large for this. It is likely to be a stock enclosure dating to the 17th century or earlier.
3. NM 6476 - ?NM 6476 8463 (& beyond?) A turf & stone dyke runs approximately on the line shown on Fig 3. It survives as a series of upright large stones. A drystone structure 5m by 3m externally and aligned NW/SE, lies on the N side of this dyke.
4. NM 6470 8469 A rectangular drystone structure, 9m by 5m externally, is sited here. The walls, though partially collapsed still survive up to 1m high. It is aligned NNW/SSE.

5. NM 6470 8473 *A well-preserved rectangular drystone structure, aligned NNW/SSE and with rounded corners survives here within an adjoining drystone enclosure 17m by 10m. It measures 8m by 3m internally with walls 0.7m thick and up to 1.5m high. A possible cruck slot lies in the W wall at the end of a division wall adjoining the entrance on the E side. The earlier OS maps suggest there may have been another building within this enclosure to the W. It was not evident during this survey.*
6. NM6469 8476 *Lying 3m to the W of the new road is another rectangular drystone structure with rounded walls c0.7m thick. It measures 10m by 3m internally and is also aligned NNW/SSE. An enclosure 12m long extends to the S. No cruck slots or gables were evident. The walls survive up to 1m high.*
7. NM 6464 8479 *To the E of the road are two drystone structures. The larger, lying to the E, measures 2.5m by 5m internally within walls 0.7m thick. The walls survive up to 1.2m high. The building is aligned E/W with an entrance on the S. The smaller building, probably a store or shed, measures 3m by 2m with walls 0.6m thick and up to 1m high. It is aligned NW/SE with its entrance to the SE.*
8. NM 6463 8481 *On the W side of the new road, opposite Site 7, are the remains of a drystone enclosure built against a rock face and measuring some 19m by 16m. The walls survive only up to 0.5m high.*
9. NM 644 840(centred) *The OS map shows a series of structures to the E of Torr a'Bheithe which are described as 'Old Shielings'. These are not shielings but permanent structures both of drystone and possibly of turf & stone construction. They were not examined in detail.*
10. NM 6430 8465 *2 drystone structure shown on the earlier OS maps still survive in the present plantation to the SW of Loch a'Mhuilinn.
The building to the E measures 8m by 4m internally with drystone walls surviving up to 1m high. It is aligned NNW/SSE. An ash tree grows in the space of the N wall.
The building to the W measures 10m by 4m internally with drystone walls surviving up to 2m high. The building has been altered in the recent past to make a structure 3m by 4m (long axis N/S) with an entrance on the W. The roof has been raised on a scantling structure 1-1.5m above the existing drystone walls. The presence of rusted oil drums suggests this was used as a vehicle store.*
11. NM 6420 8438(?) *An oval structure of drystone construction 5m by 3m lies 7m W of the forest path and 30m S of the S boundary of Site 12.
It has been planted with trees making its function and original shape unclear.*
12. NM 6420 8445(centred) *Extending from a prominent rock face are the remains of 2 earth & stone dykes forming respectively the N & S walls of an enclosure. Their full extent is not known and they may have continued E as purely turf walls.
Within this enclosure are a series of stone heaps, probably clearance cairns. A substantial heap 5m long by 1m wide may be a more significant monument such as a burial cairn.*
13. NM 6432 8466(centred) *A fragment of turf & stone dyke lying to the E of Site 10 runs roughly S for more than 100m before disappearing within the plantation.*

14. NM 6414 8426 *A small fragment of turf & stone dyke lies to the N of the Allt a'Mhuilinn near the S edge of the plantation.*
15. NM 6442 8462 *A small group of probable clearance cairns were seen to the SE of Loch a'Mhuilinn largely obscured by recent tree fell.*
16. NM 6406 8424 - NM 6452 8451 *A substantial turf & stone dyke lying mostly to the E of the Allt a'Mhuilinn is thought to be the remains of the enclosure erected around the plantation first shown in 1873. On the evidence of the boundary at the N of the loch this was capped by a post & wire fence. This At the N the boundary dyke is only of drystone construction at its base.*