

310/LOC

An Archaeological Survey of a proposed Woodland Grant Scheme at

Allt Saigh, Balmacaan

Wordsworth Archaeological Services
4 Balbeg, Balnain, Glenurquhart
Inverness-shire IV3 6XQ
(tel. 01456 476288)

15th December 1997

Introduction

The authors were requested by **Tilhill Forestry Ltd** to carry out a rapid walk-over archaeological survey of the proposed WGS area shown on Fig 1. The purpose of this survey was to identify areas of archaeological interest and to suggest appropriate measures to protect the identified remains.

2 sites of probable post-medieval date had previously been identified by Highland Council Archaeology Service [HNH 41 NW 0023 & HNH 02 SW 0003] as lying within the proposed plantation.

Method

An initial deskbound survey was carried out on available maps held by Highland Council Archive Service. This was followed by a site visit carried out on the 26th November 1997 by both Jill Kendrick and Jonathan Wordsworth. It was carried out in dry relatively mild conditions allowing the majority of the area to be examined. It is not considered that any major sites were missed. However the bracken cover at the SE end of the area made some of the identifications uncertain.

Following the site visit, aerial photographs of the site held by **Tilhill Forestry Ltd** were examined. Unfortunately these were at too small a scale (1:24,000) to be of value in defining archaeological features.

Situation

The proposed plantation is sited on open ground above 300 metres OD. Apart from a scattering of trees along the sides of the more precipitous burns, the land is largely covered in deer grass and heather moorland. A few areas of bracken-clad grassland, especially located at the S and E of the area are thought to be the remains of former woodland. No tree stumps or roots were visible to confirm this hypothesis.

Archaeological description

The area of the proposed woodland lies in an area shown as unwooded in Roy's Military Survey of c1750. The earlier OS map editions surveyed in 1871 and 1901 also showed this area as unwooded. The site of the unroofed building recorded on the 1st edition OS map [NH 41 NW 0023 - NH 445 198] was not found and it probably lay to the S outside the survey area, unless it was the ?building recorded as *Site 6*. It was probably a shepherd's bothy or store as a sheepfold (not recorded in the SMR) lay immediately to the S of this on both the 1st & 2nd edition OS maps. The site recorded as NH 02 SW 0003 [?NH 42 SW 0003 - ?NH430 203] could also not be found and no trace of a building is visible on either the 1st or 2nd edition OS maps at this point.

A substantial settlement was found at NH 437 193 and it is possible this may be the site recorded as NH 02 SW 0003, though this would be on map sheet NH 41 NW

Though prehistoric settlements have been found to the N in Glenurquhart and Abriachan at this altitude, no certain prehistoric remains were found. The platform at *Site 4* could be interpreted as the remains of a small roundhouse but there is no associated field system and no reason for the walls of this feature to be robbed out.

The turf bank observed at the E of the area [*Site 3*] was a major land division and as is suggested below, this may have been connected with the fort at Levishie. There is a reference to a deer forest at '*Invernorysn*' in 1381 x 1384 AD (*a grant by the crown to Alex, Earl of Buchan* in Gilbert JM 1979 *Hunting & Hunting Reserves in Scotland, Edin*). and the fort at Levishie may have been a hunting lodge connected with this deer forest. Certainly this makes sense of the banks observed above Levishie and indeed of the bank observed at Allt Saigh. As a land division it does not make sense, as Urquhart & Glenmoriston were traditionally part of the same estate and it is not the form of boundary usually used for sheep farming in the 19th century. The grazings to the N of the bank are poor and it makes more sense as a boundary to control deer being driven towards an enclosure at Levishie. The traditional form of deer hunting, the *tinchel*, involved deer being driven to the hunters and a turf boundary with a paling fence could have prevented the deer escaping into the wooded ground along the Allt Saigh down to Loch Ness. This theory would need to be confirmed by a detailed study of the ground outside the survey area.

The size of the buildings and the possible evidence for cultivation at Allt Saigh [*Site 1*] suggest this was a permanent settlement. The function of the different buildings could not be inferred and it was unclear whether this was a group of dwellings forming a joint stock farm or all parts of a single unit. The latter seemed the most likely explanation. The use of drystone rather than turf walling means the buildings are likely to date to the 18th century. However this means the turf dyke running N to the Allt nan Gobhar may also be later than the suggested medieval date for the turf bank recorded as *Site 3*. Either the turf wall was re-used as a field boundary by the people at *Site 1* or it was in fact constructed by them. The settlement was probably abandoned early in the 19th century when sheep were introduced to the area, though possibly this farm was abandoned because of its location.

The sites recorded as *Sites 5 & 6* are probably the remains of other shielings though the building at *Site 6* was substantial enough to have been permanently occupied. If it is the building recorded on the OS 1st edition map, it is surprising so little of the building now remains. This may only be reflection of the bracken growth which made identification of features in this area particularly difficult.

The shieling site at Carn na Caorach [*Site 2*] survives as a well-preserved complex of structures and enclosure which has appeared to suffer little deliberate damage. It is therefore important as an intact shieling settlement, probably abandoned in the late 18th century. If there was a deer forest established here by the 15th century, it is unlikely this shieling would have been established until the deer forest went out of use in the 16th or 17th century. It is therefore likely to have had a fairly short life and is partly suggested by the lack of improved grazing in the area other than around the buildings and the enclosure.

Sheep farming was abandoned in 1857 because nobody would take on the sheep runs and it was converted into a deer forest (*Grimble E 1901 Deer-stalking and the Deer Forests of Scotland, London*).

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the **Forest Authority Guidelines Forests & Archaeology**.

1. *All contractors and sub contractors should be made aware of the location of the archaeological sites recorded. They should be advised to follow routes and practices that avoid causing damage to these features.*
2. *For preference the whole of Site 1. should be preserved unplanted and this should include the drystone walled enclosures. If this is not practical, then the buildings should be kept clear of trees with a minimum 20m clearance. The area of improved grassland should be defined by differential planting of trees within these areas and the boundaries of the enclosures should be kept clear of trees for a minimum of 10m.*
3. *Site 2 should be left unplanted as an open area and this protected area should extend 20m from the edge of the known areas.*
4. *The turf bank, Site 3, should remain unplanted with a minimum area 10m from the edge of the bank left unplanted. This protection should include the dyke extending down the W bank of the Allt nan Gobhar.*
5. *Sites 4,5 & 6 should be left clear of trees with a 20m zone of unplanted trees.*
6. *No protection is required at Site 7.*
7. *Management procedures should be established to prevent natural regeneration within the protected areas.*

Jill Kendrick & Jonathan Wordsworth

15th December 1997

An Archaeological Survey of a Proposed WGS at Allt Saigh, Balmacaan

Gazeteer of Sites

Site No. **1**
NGR NH 437 193 (centred)
Description *A substantial settlement is sited to the W of Allt nan Gobhar on a sloping terrace above the Allt Saigh. The remains consist of 3 drystone-walled structures within a complex of drystone field walls. The most prominent measured 11m by 3m whereas the other 2 were 8m by 3m. The footings of a 4th building also measuring 8m by 3m lies to the SE close to the modern forestry fence. All the buildings are orientated either E/W or NE/SW. Though there is no evidence for rig cultivation, the series of stone dykes suggest this area was formerly cultivated rather than just used for paturing animals. At the N a sinuous dyke made largely of drystone walling but incorporating portions of turf walling runs parallel to the Allt nan Gobhar before running E to link with the dyke, Site 3.*

Site No. **2**
NGR NH 4275 2045 (centred)
Description *The remains of a well-defined shieling settlement lie to the E of Carn na Caorach at the junction of 2 small burns. 4 separate structures were identified measuring possibly 8m by 3m, 6m by 3m, 5m by 3m & 4m by 3m, though the edges of the buildings were difficult to define. The sites of the buildings showed as vivid patches of green moss. and appear to have been turf walled on stone footings. All the buildings were rectangular or possibly oval with rounded corners. At least 2 'dairy' stores were located by the burn and a third store lay near the buildings. To the W of the burn a natural hollow had been used as an animal pen 18m long by constructing 5.5m dyke at the S.*

Site No. **3**
NGR NH 4374 1960 - NH 4493 2019
Description *The remains of a substantial turf dyke can be seen running between the points recorded. It has decayed to a spread 2m wide by up to 0.4m high though it is generally no more than 0.3m high. It did not appear to continue E of Allt Ruighe Bhacain. To the W of the Allt nan Gobhar it continued S on the line shown as a more stoney dyke, though it was turf capped in places. It did not apparently go S of the Allt Saigh though this was not examined in detail. Similar turf banks have been noted to the N of the fort at Levishie at NH 409 186. The age of the dyke is unknown, though the amount of collapse suggests it is of some age. To function as a boundary it may have required a form of timber paling, though no trace of this now survives.*

Site No. **4**
NGR NH 4405 1953
Description *A platform 8m in diameter with stone revetting on its southern edge may be the remains of a prehistoric roundhouse or a later structure. This feature is poorly defined.*

Site No. **5**
NGR NH 4422 1963
Description *On a flat grassy flush c100m NW of the fence is a rectangular stone*

An Archaeological Survey of a Proposed WGS at Allt Saigh, Balmacaan

structure 4m by 5.5m. This would appear to be the remains of a shieling bothy, though the width of the building suggests this may have been used for some other purpose.

Site No. 6

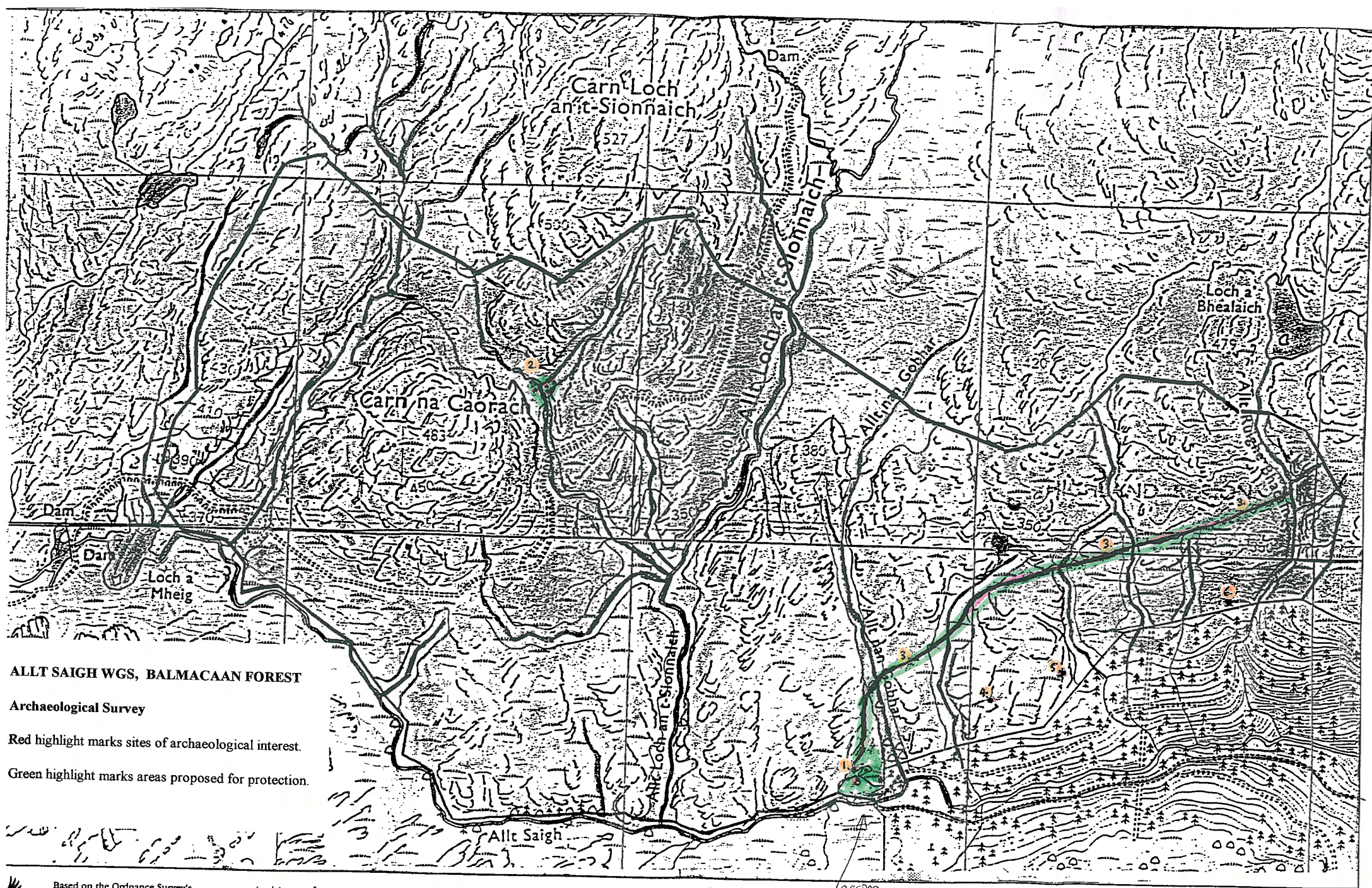
NGR NH 4476 1983

Description 15m N of the fence and 65m W of the Allt Ruighe Bhacain is a rectangular feature aligned approximately N/S measuring 8m by 4m. The edges of this structure were not clearly defined.

Site No. 7

NGR NH 4250 1945

Description An area of large flat stones pitched at 30-40 degrees had been considered by Mr Macleod, the owner of Balmacaan Estate, to be the remains of a possible structure. Though apparently forming a building, there was no evidence for walling to be seen. The bedding plane of the rocks above suggests these were frost-shattered slabs that have slid down the hillside. The lack of enriched grassland was another indicator that this was a natural feature.



ALLT SAIGH WGS, BALMACAAN FOREST

Archaeological Survey

Red highlight marks sites of archaeological interest.

Green highlight marks areas proposed for protection.



Based on the Ordnance Survey's (scale) map of (year) with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright. Licence No. AL813796. Tilhill Economic Forestry, 43 Clachnaharry Road, Inverness, IV3 6RA (date)

Scale:

Grid Ref:

Tilhill Economic
FORESTRY