

36/LOC

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SURVEY  
OF CERTAIN  
AREAS TO BE AFFORESTED  
FOR  
KNOYDART ESTATE  
ON  
THE KNOYDART PENINSULA  
OS Sheet 33  
LOCHABER

Undertaken by  
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July 1991  
For Historic Scotland

## KNOYDART

### Introduction

By late spring 1991 ten areas on the peninsula had been earmarked for planting by Fountain Forestry. Following a site visit by Highland Region's Archaeologist, four of these areas were identified as requiring rapid archaeological assessments in advance of afforestation. The other six areas were omitted from such work because, although large in extent, they are either on N-facing on steep slopes or situated on land unlikely to support human occupation.

The four areas surveyed will be dealt with separately in the following report.

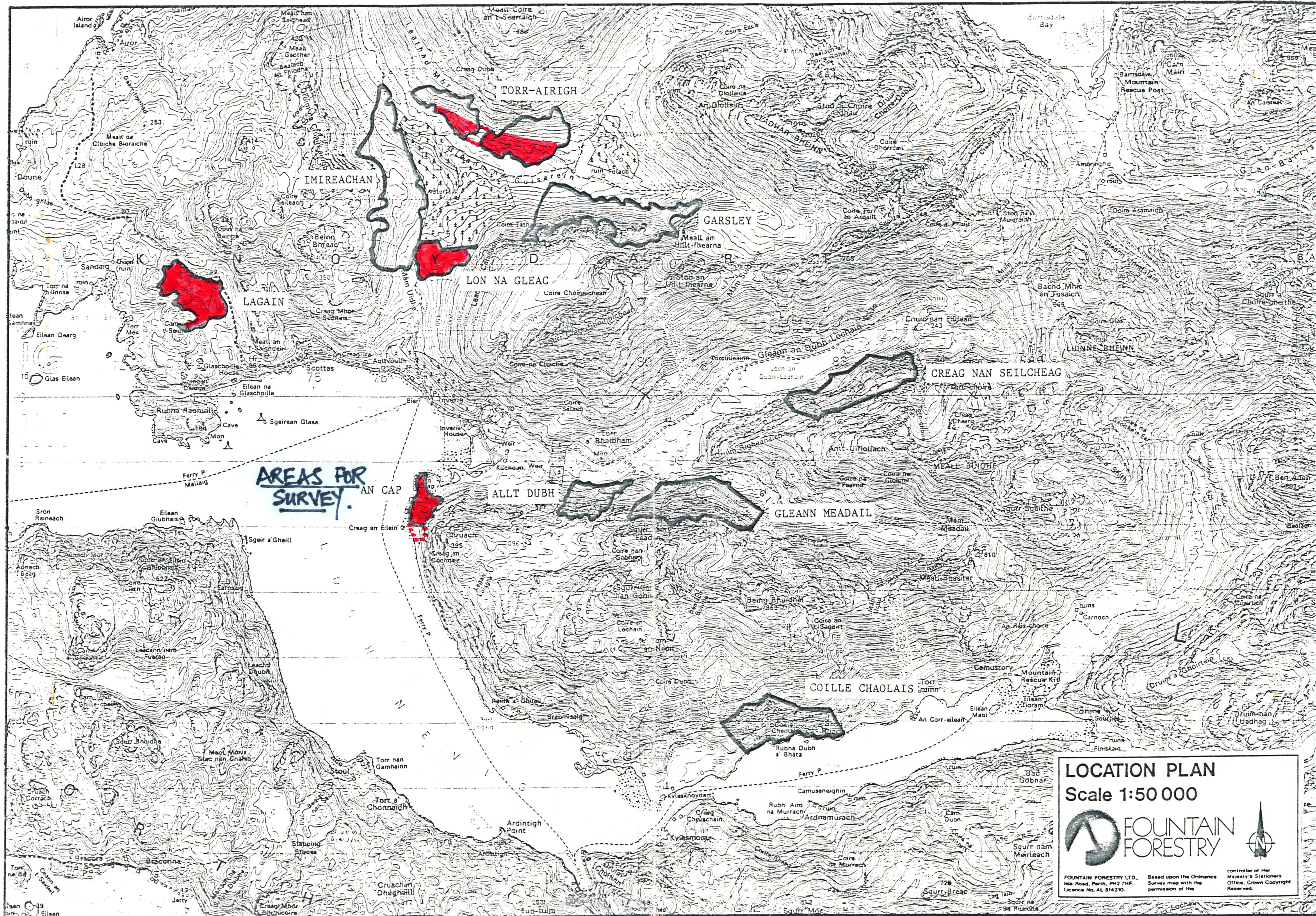
### The survey

An assessment of the land was made in early July. All of the ground is currently used as grazings for sheep and red deer, with evidence of ancient peat cuttings and pre-20th century agricultural use across much of the landscape. Details relating to the ground cover are given for each area, but it must be noted that in certain instances the survey was being undertaken too late in the year. The bracken cover was already in excess of 1m high and accurate, detailed results from particular survey areas proved impossible. This problem was exacerbated by appalling weather, particularly during the two days when survey was attempted at Torr-Airigh.

### **Method:**

The areas of the proposed plantings were traversed at approximately 100m intervals, systematically walking over the ground and recording the features observed. Details of buildings and enclosure walls, previously surveyed by the OS and marked on the 1:10,000 map, were checked using tapes. The remains from the agricultural use of the area, the clearance cairns, lazy beds and fields enclosed by dykes, were sketch plotted by pacing.





**AREAS FOR SURVEY.**

**LOCATION PLAN**  
Scale 1:50 000



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## AN CAP: NM 7698

### The survey area:

This area, c25 hectares in extent, is bounded to the W and N by the shore of Loch Nevis. A slight rise, An Cap, is situated in its N part, whilst the S half consists of W and N facing slopes, generally below the 70m contour. These two distinct areas are defined by a deer fence, which crosses the ground from W-E. The N part is generally grass covered with orchids and other moorland flora, the S part is much rougher, with low heather, St John's Wort, grasses and patches of bracken.

### N half of An Cap - Results:

No settlement constructions were identified in this area, but evidence of the agricultural use of An Cap was recorded.

A series of drains had been cut (during this century?) down the S slope of the rise, presumably attempting to maintain the grass sward. Vague traces of earlier, parallel drainage patterns (lazy beds?) could be seen running down the W slope of An Cap. This area appeared to be defined on its E side by a low earthen bank c0.8m wide and 0.2m high.

An extremely dense patch of bracken obscured any features which may exist in the SW of this area.

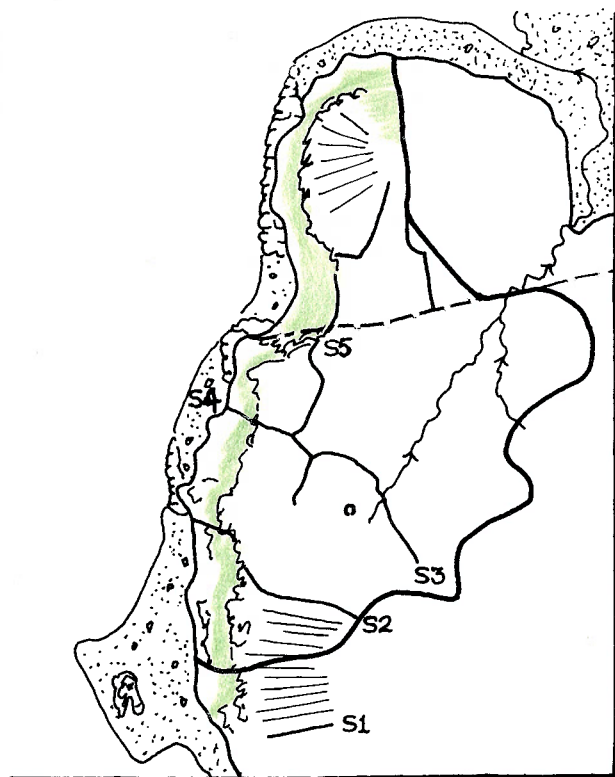
### S half of An Cap - Results:

No settlement constructions were identified.

The N facing slope of this area was criss-crossed by (20th century?) drains, whilst the NW and W facing slopes had been divided up by a series of (earlier?) earthen dykes, already recorded by the OS. In suitable lighting conditions the varied agricultural use of these fields could be seen. Lazy beds (?) c2m wide were noted in the NW field, whilst much narrower cord rig (?) patterns were observed in the S-most field.

A tiny drystone structure was recorded at about 50m on a slight break in the N facing slope. This was horse-shoe shaped, with the break in the wall to the S. It measured c3m across the wall which only stood one or two boulders high and c0.4m thick. It is interpreted as a grouse butt or some sort of cleet.

Certain small areas were obscured by dense bracken. Those patches on the higher ground are unlikely to mask significant archaeological features. Those near the shore were searched for drystone structures, to no avail.



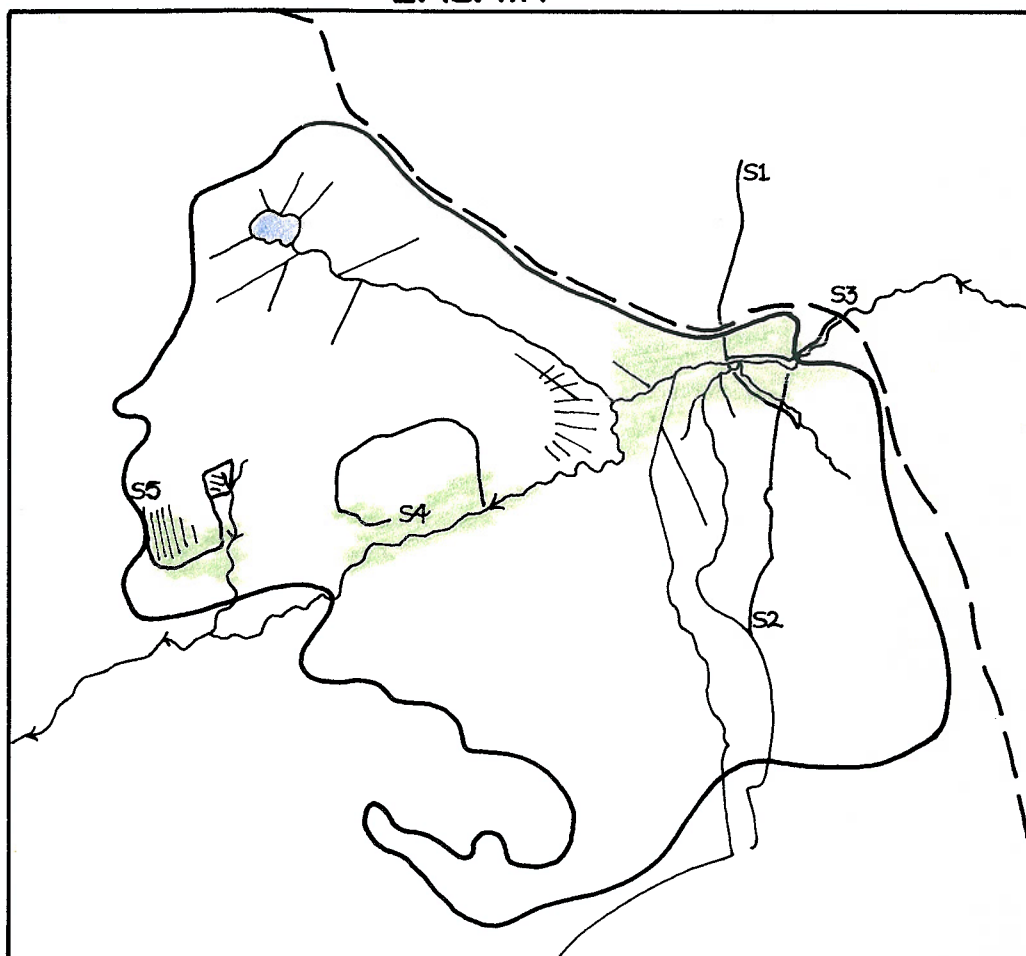
AN CAP

bracken

scale 1:10,000



LAGAIN



## LAGAIN: NG 7301

### The survey area:

This area, c65 hectares in extent, lies W of the road to Airor, between c70m and 130m OD. Its N and S boundaries lie along the watershed of the Allt an Lagain, whilst its W edge skirts the extensive deserted settlement and fields of the area known as Reidh an Daraich.

The landscape is conveniently divided in two by the burn, although the vegetation is similar on both sides of the Lagain. Grasses predominate, along with bog myrtle, orchids and St John's Wort, but the E length of the burn is bordered by thick patches of bracken.

### N half of Lagain - Results:

No settlement constructions were identified in this area, but evidence of agricultural use was recorded, as well as extensive areas of peat cuttings in the wet lands to the N.

A series of drains had been cut (during this century?) towards the lochan and burn in the N of this area and peat cuttings were located here and on the higher flat ground to the S. The S facing slopes immediately N of the Allt an Lagain bore some traces of field boundaries, built of earth and drystone, generally c0.7m wide and 0.3m high, with associated remains of lazy beds(?). Some of these had already been recorded by the OS.

### S half of Lagain - Results:

No settlement constructions were identified, nor was there any evidence of agricultural use. The vast majority of this area is a peat bog.

The area around the N-ward flowing burn in the centre of this tract of land was crossed by (20th century?) drains, some of which run for a considerable distance to the S. An earthen dyke, recorded by the OS, runs from one of these drains, generally following the contour to the N before dropping towards the burn. Whilst it was initially interpreted as a head dyke, it seems more likely that it was constructed as a leet or head drain, designed to catch the run-off from the slopes to the E and feed it to the ruined mill by the road bridge across the Lagain burn.

### Comment:

Whilst it is recognised that the surveyors are not foresters, it does seem incredible that it should be suggested that much of this landscape could support broadleaves of any age.

## LON NA GLEAC: NG 7602

### The survey area:

This area, c35 hectares in extent, is situated on the E side of the bealach between Inverie and Glen Guiserein, between the 125m and 170m contours. The vast majority of this area is a comparatively flat peat bog. Only at the very E edge does the ground rise sufficiently for it to be freely drained. Typical peat bog flora cover the area, with bog myrtle, St John's Wort, orchids and bell heather, whilst deer grass predominates. Only at the E edge does the peat bog give way to boulder strewn slopes and softer grasses.

### Results:

No settlement constructions or remains of agricultural use of this area were identified.

A series of deep open drains had been cut (during this century?) across the flat ground into the Allt Doir a'Chaoruinn, presumably in an attempt to improve the drainage across the bog.

### Comment:

Whilst it is recognised that the surveyors are not foresters, it does seem incredible that it should be suggested that this landscape could support broadleaves of any age.

## **TORR-AIRIGH: NG 7803**

### **The survey area:**

This well drained area, c110 hectares in extent, lies on the N side of Glen Guiserein, between c80m and 180m OD. In places the S facing slope is quite steep and so practically all the evidence of settlement and agriculture lies below the 120m contour.

The two main deserted settlements are situated about the break of slope between the floodplain and the hill-side. Both lie largely outwith the area proposed for afforestation.

The E half of the area is grass covered, ensuring viable survey conditions. Apart from the structures already recorded by the OS, few additional features were noted.

The W half of the area was extremely difficult to survey because of the extent of the bracken cover. Whilst new features were recorded, the survey should not be regarded as definitive. If planting is to proceed in this area, then ideally another visit should be paid to the area during April-May, once this year's bracken cover has died down and before next year's growth begins.

### **E half of Torr Airigh - Results:**

#### **1. NG 78460390: long stone cairn**

A low long drystone cairn is situated just above the W bank of a burn at NG 78460390. It has rounded ends, measures c3.5m long and c1.4m wide, and 0.3m high. It is orientated NNE-SSW.

#### **2. NG 78040370: enclosed knoll**

A significant grassy knoll on the edge of the floodplain is surrounded by an earthen (and in places a drystone) dyke. The dyke is c1m wide and 0.4m high, enclosing a D-shaped area almost a hectare in extent. No associated features were recorded.



3. centred around NG 778039: deserted farmstead and fields  
The OS have recorded an enclosed field system on this S-facing slope, but did not survey the structures to the W of the burn, immediately W of the main enclosure wall.

The main drystone and earthen wall encloses an area of c2 hectares. It is subdivided into 4 areas by other dykes, though the size of two of the fields is very small. From the S side of the glen, it had been observed that the large field to the W had the remains of lazy beds (?) running down the hill slope. The field to the E was apparently completely flat, although in its NE corner is a tiny square drystone structure, c3m across its walls which are c0.3m thick and 0.4m high.

About 30m W of this enclosure, and across the burn, is a drystone rectangular structure, aligned W-E. It is c6m long and c2.5m wide across its walls which stand c0.6m high and c0.3m thick. Upstream c40m, on the W side of the burn, is another small square drystone structure, c3m across its walls which are c0.3m thick and 0.3m high.

To the W of these structures is an undefined area of lazybeds(?), which had been observed from the other side of the glen, but was not immediately visible on traversing the area.

4. centred around NG 77460392: Sidhean Torr-airigh -  
the fairy knoll, deserted settlement and field system  
This lies largely outwith the planned area of afforestation.

A small deserted settlement is situated immediately to the E of the natural long mound, aligned N-S, known as Sidhean Torr-airigh. It has been recorded by the OS, and so a sketch plan of the structures with the associated enclosures is attached.

However, to the N of the settlement, (and within the area proposed for afforestation), is a system of earthen and drystone dykes, enclosing sloping areas of ground each at least one hectare in extent. Most of these dykes have been plotted by the OS, being c0.6m wide and 0.4m high.



## **W half of Torr Airigh - Results:**

**5. centred around NG 77340417: deserted farmstead and fields**  
The OS have recorded a deserted farmstead and associated fields to the E of the burn. However, there appear to be two phases of habitation in this area and the field system extends W-wards, towards the well, Tobar Deudadh.

The rectangular drystone structure recorded by the OS is situated in the centre of an enclosure, which is today surprisingly boggy and supports very poor quality vegetation. The field walls define a regular, rectangular area (c38mNW-SE by at least 45m), unlike all the others surveyed. The building is c8.5m by c4.8m across its walls which are c0.4m thick and c1m high. Within the NW and NE corners of the building a couple of crude, circular structures have been constructed.

Adjoining the W side of the enclosure is another, more irregular dyke which defines another field. This abuts the E side of the burn, and in its NW corner is a subrectangular drystone structure with rounded ends. This is c7m long by c3.5m wide across its walls which are 0.5m wide and 0.4m high, with a central entrance in its SW wall.

The field dykes can be traced across the hill slope to the W, for a distance of c75m, but in no case was the head dyke recorded. Down the slope, below the well and the associated fields, is a large sub-rectangular/subcircular enclosure defined by an earth and stone dyke. Although the dyke is c0.3m high and 0.6m wide it had not been recorded by the OS. It defines an area c2 hectares in size.

## **6. centred around NG 769042: large deserted settlement and field system**

This lies outwith the planned area of afforestation.

A large deserted settlement is situated on the lower slopes in this area, between the river (to the W) and two burns (to the N and S). It has been recorded by the OS and, as it lies a significant distance from the area proposed for afforestation, it was not surveyed in any detail



**7. centred around NG 769044: field system and small structures**

However, to the N of the settlement, (and within the area proposed for afforestation), is a system of earthen and drystone dykes, enclosing sloping areas of ground each at least one hectare in extent.

These dykes have not been plotted by the OS, but were in such dense areas of bracken that it proved impossible to complete anything other than a sketch survey. The upper reaches of these dykes were generally built of stone, in some cases using very large boulders. Other stretches appeared to have been constructed of turves, and are c0.6m wide and 0.4m high.

In an attempt to mitigate the survey problems a series of photographs were taken of this area from the other side of the glen. However, the driving rain and wind added to the difficulties and the results are far from satisfactory.





# TORR-AIRIGH

scale 1:10,000

bracken





## Recommendations

**AN CAP: NM 7698** In the area to the S of the deer fence, it could be suggested that the old field boundaries are respected in the design of any ploughing patterns which are deemed necessary for the planting of broadleaves.

**LON NA GLEAC: NG 7602** There are no apparent archaeological constraints in this area.

**LAGAIN: NG 7301** There are no apparent archaeological constraints on the S side of the Lagain, except that the route of the head drain or leet should be protected, to ensure that the mill can be interpreted adequately. There are disparate agricultural features immediately N of the Lagain, which presumably relate to the extensive deserted settlement to the W. However, no specific recommendation is offered concerning their future.

**TORR-AIRIGH: NG 7803** There are certain archaeological constraints which should be considered in this area.

1. **NG 78460390: long stone cairn.** This feature is so close to the burn that it will presumably lie outwith the planting area, anyway.
2. **NG 78040370: enclosed knoll.** This is an isolated feature at the S edge of the planting area. No specific recommendation is offered.
3. **centred around NG 778039: deserted farmstead and fields**  
The structures immediately W of the burn will presumably lie outside the planting area. Although the field system is earmarked for planting with Scots Pine and broadleaves, no specific recommendation is offered.
4. **centred around NG 77460392: Sidhean Torr-airigh - the fairy knoll, deserted settlement and field system**  
Part of the field system immediately N of the deserted settlement could be left unplanted, to maintain the integrity of this farming community.
5. **centred around NG 77340417: deserted farmstead and fields**  
Part of this area, on either side of the burn could be left unplanted.

Recommendations cont.

6. centred around NG 769042: large deserted settlement and field system. It should be ensured that this does lie outwith the planting area.

7. centred around NG 769044: field system and small structures. Although extensive, it is not clear how these fields relate to the deserted settlement to the S. Perhaps the planting regime should be altered, so that readily identifiable blocks of Scots Pine or broadleaves are planted within the enclosures, thus defining them and ensuring their preservation, to a certain extent.

Jill Harden  
July 1991