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 The National Trust for Scotland

Excavations at the Glenfinnan Monument

September 1998

Damian Hind 1999

National Trust for Scotland Archaeology Report No. 19

Table of contents

Executive summary and acknowledgements-----	3
Location -----	4
1.0 Purpose and nature of work-----	5
1.1 Historical background -----	6
2.0 Results of work: summary -----	8
2.1 Details of excavation -----	8
3.0 Interpretation -----	14
General discussion -----	15
Appendix 1: Details of colour slide photographs-----	16
Appendix 2: List of contexts-----	18
Appendix 3: Site matrix diagrams-----	21
Appendix 4: List and description of finds-----	22

Excavations undertaken at the Glenfinnan Monument, August 31st – September 4th and October 27th 1998.

Damian Hind

Executive summary

Excavations were carried out at the Glenfinnan Monument, Highland (Fig. 1). The work centred on a roughly concentric drystone wall, approximately 40m radial to the monument, and aimed to establish more about its nature and relationship to the monument. Trenches were also dug adjacent the monument, to uncover the remains of a two storey shooting box, dating from the first phases of the monument's construction, to establish its dimensions and record any construction details.

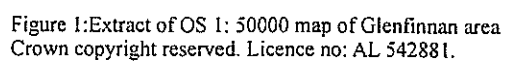
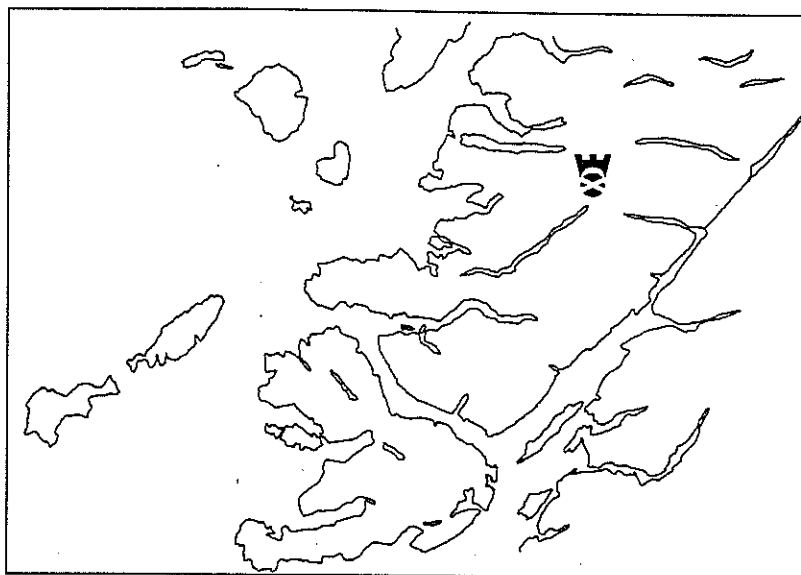
The drystone wall only survives to one course high, and was not found to continue completely around the monument. It has been partially dismantled, with its remains being spread to either side of the wall. The lack of overall rubble suggests that the stone was reused, possibly for materials for the current wall.

The foundations to the shooting box were located, and appeared to be made of a plank raft dug into the sandy soil. Only its width was established.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the NTS London Members' Centre for the donation that made it possible to carry out this project. Also, to the staff of the NTS Glenfinnan Visitors Centre, particularly the Property Manager, Lillias Grant, for her assistance and enthusiasm for the project.

The Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments for Scotland provided invaluable help in the form of drawings and data from their recent survey of the Monument, and in particular Neil Cameron.



1.0 Purpose and nature of work.

A picture of the monument dating to 1820 shows it in its original form. The tower is depicted prior to the erection of the statue, and a two storey, rectangular building abutting it on the north-eastern side (Fig. 2, below). Surrounding the monument are the remains of a buried circular wall. With the aid of a grant from the NTS London Members' Centre, an investigation into the nature of the wall and now demolished building was undertaken.

The concentric wall, approximately 40m radial to Glenfinnan Monument has been under scrutiny for some time, and has recently been surveyed as part of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) continuing Listed Buildings Recording Programme. It has been traced roughly halfway around the monument (Fig.3). The primary aim of the work described below was to trace the line of the wall further around the monument and to determine any constructional details.

An investigation of the area immediately in front of the entrance to the monument aimed to research the alignment and size of the rectangular building, since no information currently exists showing details of the building specifics.

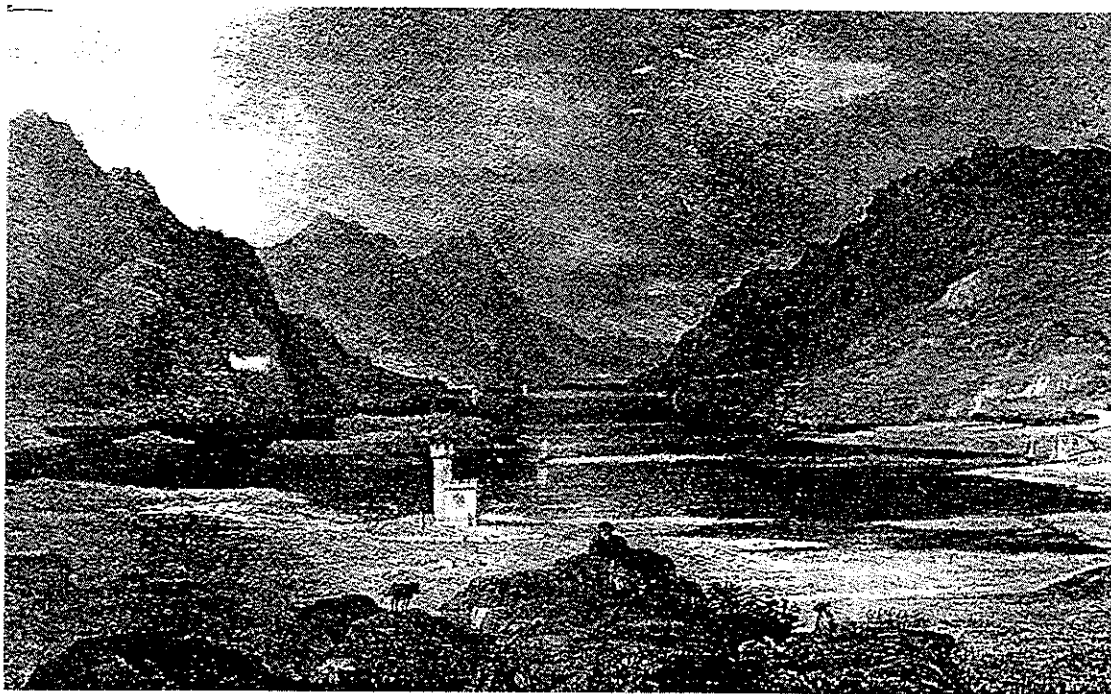


Figure 2: Illustration of the Glenfinnan Monument, shown with low, encircling wall and adjoining two-storey building. Taken from *Views of Romantic Lochaber*, c.1825

1.1 *Historical background*

Alexander MacDonald of Glenaladale had the monument built in 1815, in memory of the 1745 Jacobite rising. Research by the RCAHMS has shown that the monument was designed by the architect James Gillespie-Graham¹. Originally a 'shooting box' was attached to the monument², this being dismantled in 1834 by Angus MacDonald of Glenaladale. At the same time Greenshield's statue of the Highlander was erected on top of the tower.

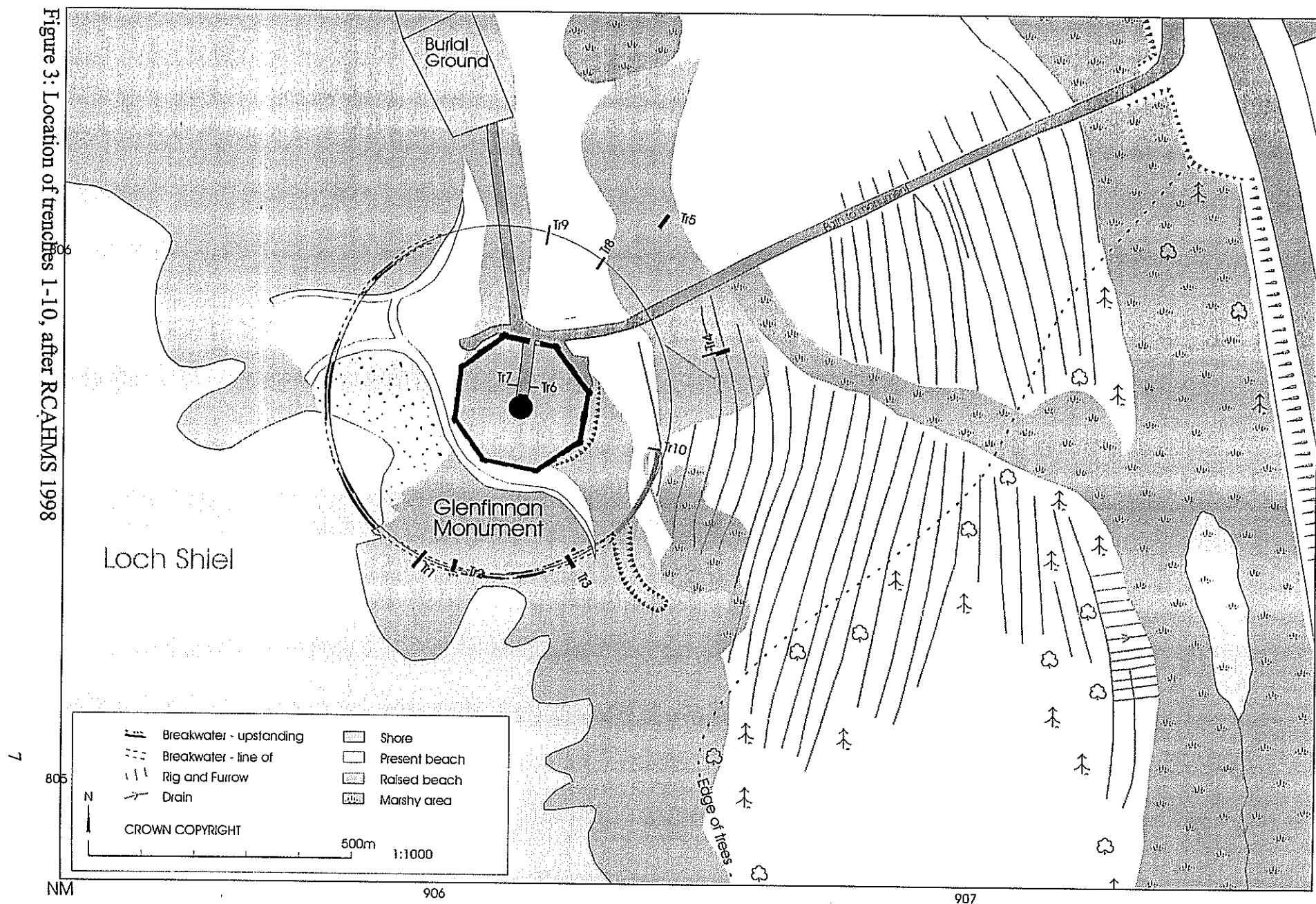
No known documentation exists for the drystone wall, although the 1820 illustration shows the tower with an adjacent building and low wall (fig 2). The building appears to be over half the height of the tower, crenellated and to have a large window on the north-eastern side. Artistic licence notwithstanding, this picture shows a two storey structure built onto the monument, surrounded by a circular wall.

Evidence of a lintel and a double-depth step in the tower at first storey height suggest that the tower was probably used as the staircase for the adjoining building.

¹ N. Cameron, pers. comm.

² *The Buildings of Scotland: the Highlands and Islands*, Gifford. 1992, 246. London.

Figure 3: Location of trenches 1-10, after RCAHMS 1998



2.0 Results of work: summary

Seven trenches were dug during the first visit to the monument (Fig. 3), five of which traced the line of the concentric wall. Three uncovered evidence of the wall, which was of drystone construction, and survived to one course in height. Signs of demolition were visible, as rubble from the walls was spread thinly to either side of the remains. Trench 4 did not uncover evidence for the wall, although what first appeared to be an earthwork was later determined to be natural, possibly a raised shore or bank made of pea gravel and water-worn stone. Trench 5 failed to uncover any evidence of construction at all, despite being excavated to 500mm and the base of peat.

Trenches 6 and 7 were excavated beside the monument and uncovered evidence of possible foundations to the adjoining building. Trench 6 showed traces of a wooden base to foundations, whilst trench 7 uncovered angular stones pushed into the sand subsoil.

Post excavation analysis showed that trenches 4 and 5 were located too far from the monument to uncover the wall, and a decision was made to make a second visit when three more trenches were dug. Trenches 8 and 9 were located on the suggested line of the wall, whilst 10 was located through direct observation. Trenches 8 and 9 failed to uncover any evidence of the wall under investigation. This may be because the trenches were located on an area of raised beach, estimated to be 0.7-1.0m higher than the level of the surviving wall.

2.1 Details of excavation

Excavation was carried out between August 31st and September 4th 1998 by Damian Hind, NTS Archaeological Assistant, with the assistance of volunteer Tom Janes, and again, on October 27th. All work was carried out by hand. To aid location of the wall the ground was probed using a rod, allowed the position of the wall to be defined for trenches 1-3. Trenches 1-3 were excavated through a raised sandy beach deposit, whilst Trenches 4 and 5 were excavated in the peat lying further from the loch edge.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was 4m long by 0.6m wide, and contained four contexts to a maximum depth of 480mm. Topsoil was represented by layer 1.1: a dark black brown, fairly compact humic sandy silt between 260 and 480mm in thickness, with successive very thin bands of light grey coarse sand and humic sandy silt, becoming generally more sandy towards the bottom. To the eastern (inner) end of the trench this overlay a spread of medium sized stones (1.2), which appeared to be mixed with similar material to 1.1 and which extended 0.3m from the eastern end of the trench. This was a spread resulting from the demolition of the wall, which was defined here as 1.3. In trench 1 the wall was 0.9m in thickness, of drystone construction and mixed (presumably by later covering material) with a very dark brown sandy silt. To the west of the trench (outside the wall) was a compacted, black humic silt layer which also overlay the wall. Investigation immediately below the wall showed that it was placed onto what appeared to be natural sand, with no discernible bedding or foundation material.

Trench 2

Trench 2 was 2.3m long, and 0.75m in width, containing five contexts, to a maximum depth of 450mm. The topsoil (2.1) is a dark brown humic sand with very thin bands of light brown micaceous sand and very occasional stone fragments, 150-200mm in depth. This was underlain to the eastern end of the trench by 2.2, interpreted as the demolition debris of the wall. This consisted of angular pieces of medium-sized stone (100-150mm maximum dimension) in coarse light brown-grey sand, which covered the trench 1.2m to the inner side

of the wall (2.4). This layer is mirrored on the outer (western) side of the wall by layer 2.3, although the matrix (a very light brown-grey sand) is different, and probably suggests a different period of inundation: one that reached the wall, but did not actually breach it. The wall itself (2.4) was 0.9m wide, one course of which survives. It was constructed of dry, angular stones approximately 350-400mm in all dimensions, packed between with smaller stones. The stones appeared to have been aligned in such a way as to form a rough face, and seem to have been laid directly into a compacted light yellow-brown sand layer (2.5), which ran completely throughout the base of the trench.

Trench 3

The topsoil of trench 3 (3.1) was a layer of moderately loose dark grey-brown coarse silty humus with occasional small to medium angular stones (200mm maximum dimension) with slight bands of light brown sand, between 120 and 220mm in thickness. This overlay layers 3.2 and 3.3, which were primarily similar, but lay to either side of the wall remains (3.4).

Layer 3.2 is 210mm in depth and comprised a loose dark brown-black humic sand with frequent angular stone (250mm maximum dimension), extending more than 0.7m to the inner side of the wall, to the edge of the trench. The layer outside the wall (south-east) extends more than 1.25m from the wall, to the edge of the trench, and was a loose, dark brown-black humic sand with frequent angular stone (250mm maximum dimension). Both these contexts overlay the remains of the wall, which at this point was made up of large angular stone pieces, 350-400mm on some sides, packed with smaller pieces of stone (average edge size 100mm) and mixed with dark grey-brown humic sand with high incidence of soft roots. Underlying 3.4 was a light yellow-brown loose sand with patches of more red-brown sand, which was regarded as natural ground level, and was left unexcavated.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was 5.25m in overall length, having been extended west, towards the monument by 2.45m at 0.3m width, the eastern portion being 0.7m wide. The topsoil (4.1) of trench 4 was between 0.19m and 0.45m in depth, and ran throughout the length of the trench. Layer 4.1 consisted of black-brown compacted peat that gradually merged into layer 4.2, a dark red-orange fine sand with frequent smooth pebbles and occasional larger stones 150mm at its maximum thickness. It was found extending 1.54m from the eastern end of the trench, and ran up to 4.3 at its eastern end. Layer 4.3 was a series of distinctly banded pea gravel and stone layers in a matrix of dark red-brown iron-panned silt. A small sondage was removed at each end of the wider, eastern portion of trench 4, and this proved that the banding was natural in origin. No direct evidence was found of the existence of the wall in the area of trench 4, and post excavation analysis suggests the trench to have been most probably located in the wrong place.

Trench 5

This trench was excavated in the low-lying peat area 39.8m NE of the monument. The trench extended 3m in length, and was 0.5m in width. As the first removal of material (to 0.28m) was without any change it was decided to half-section the trench. Two layers of peaty material were recorded: 5.1; a dark black-brown very moist vegetable matter layer, extending to 280mm in depth, which overlay a dark red-brown silty peat with possible iron panning (5.2), 220mm thick. This in turn covered a gravel subsoil with heavy iron panning, discovered at 500mm depth (left unnumbered).

Again, post excavation analysis has shown the trench to be most likely located in the wrong place to have recovered evidence for the wall.

Trench 6

This was excavated immediately south-east of the footpath leading from the monument to the stockade gate with its long axis in line with that of trench 7 (see fig). The aim for both trenches was to pick up constructional details of the building commonly known as the "Shooting Box".

The trench was 1.65m by 0.28m, orientated ESE-WNW. Excavation of the trench uncovered six events, the uppermost and latest being a mid-grey brown sandy topsoil 70mm thick (6.1). This was partially underlain by a thin lens of very dark grey sand (6.2), 30mm wide at the western end, which faded out 0.44m into the trench. This lay partly above layer 6.3, a very dark brown silty sand with occasional to moderate water-worn pebbles, 60mm in thickness. Below this was 6.4: a layer of coarse dark red-brown sand with moderate gravel and stones, 150mm in thickness, cut by 6.6. This cut was rectangular in profile, with vertical sides, 440mm in depth, 400mm in width. The base of the cut was flat, aligned north-west – south-east and originated at the north-western end of the trench. It was filled with a dark red brown sand with moderate gravel and small stone fragments. At the interface between 6.5 and 6.6 there was an intermittent layer of organic matter, 10mm in thickness, that appeared to be decomposed wood.

Trench 7

This was excavated immediately north-west of the footpath leading from the monument to the stockade gate. To the south eastern edge of the trench a lens protruded 0.35m into the trench (7.1), and sloped down to a maximum depth of 150mm at the edge of the trench. This was made up of heavily compacted grey brown sandy gravel, and overlay 7.2: a coarse black-brown sand with moderate pebbles, 130mm thick with occasionally lighter sand lenses. This was the topsoil of the garden.

Underlying 7.2 was a layer of mottled red-brown coarse sand with frequent small pebbles and occasional to moderately sized pebbles. Below this a layer (or truncated fill) of mid-brown loose sand mixed with very substantial angular rocks (7.6) had been cut by 7.4: a cut with vertical sides, 300mm in width, which was excavated to 150mm deep: at which point it proved to be the cut for an electricity cable. This was filled by 7.5: a loose dark brown sand.

The substantial nature of the stones filling 7.6 suggests it could be either a foundation fill or demolition debris.

Trench 8

This trench was excavated approximately between trench 5 and the monument, and located according to plotting carried out during post-excavation work. It was positioned in such a way as to straddle the extrapolated line of the wall, at 2.6m long, and was excavated to 0.70m deep. A dark brown peat layer was removed (8.1), which overlay dark red-brown silt (8.2), which remained uninterrupted to the base of excavation. No trace of the wall was recovered.

Trench 9

This trench was placed in line with the monument and the gate, and was again located prior to the site being revisited by means of post excavation analysis of the original RCAHMS survey drawings. It was excavated to 0.5m maximum depth, and was 3.80m in length.

Unfortunately the trench was particularly heavily waterlogged, which hindered full identification and measurement of the layers. However, the layers were similar to those found in trenches 5 and 8; a dark brown layer of peaty organic matter overlying a more dark red-brown silty peat.

Trench 10

A trench was removed to ascertain the nature of a section of earthwork, which appeared to lie along the line of the wall. Removal proved this to be a section of the wall. The wall (10.2) was overlain by a near black humic sand (10.1), containing occasional large stones, interpreted as being a collapsed part of the wall. The wall lay 24.1m from the Monument, slightly nearer than predicted by approximately 1.3m, and was 1.0m wide.

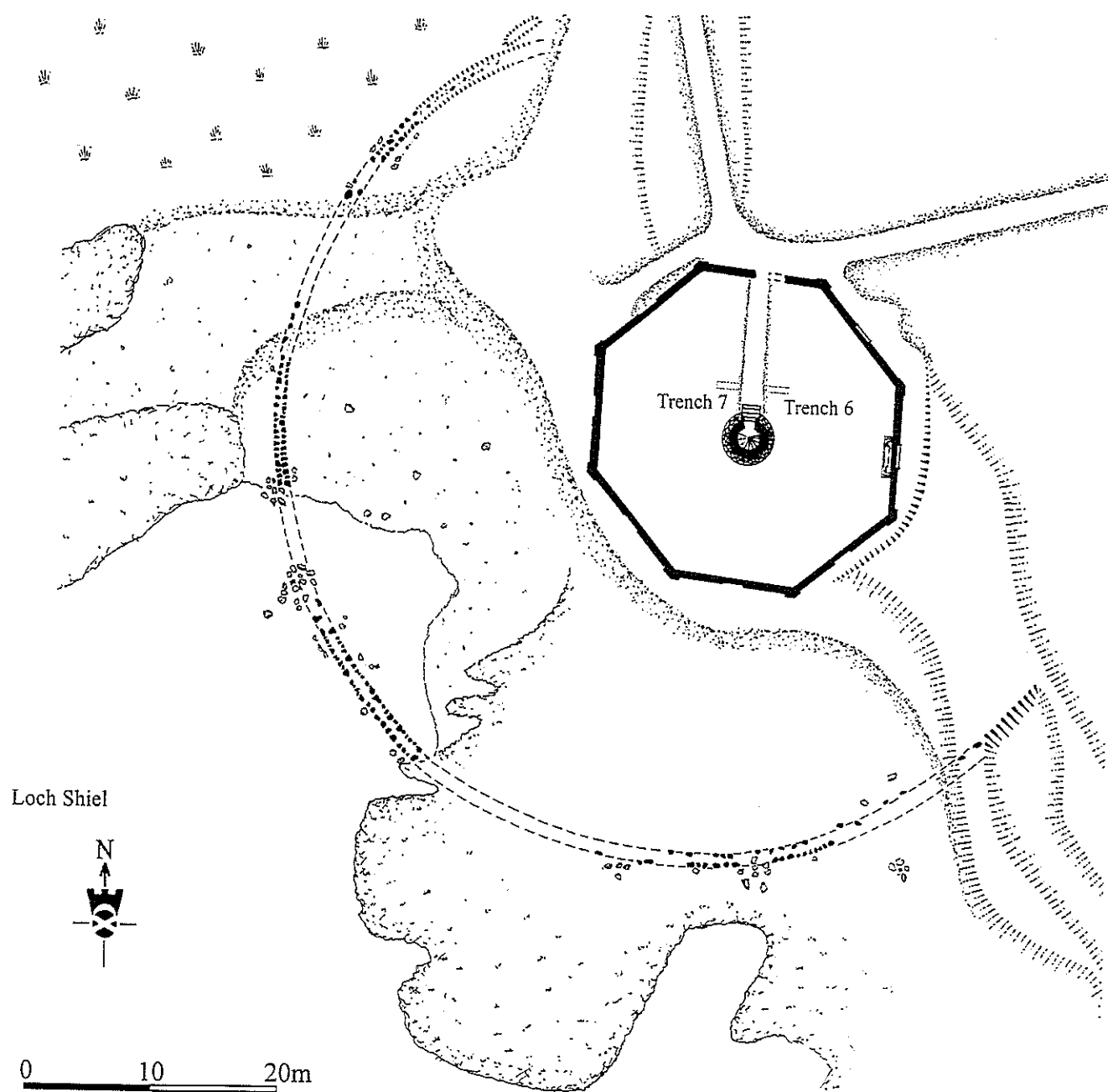


Figure 4: Location of trenches 6 and 7, within the Monument walls

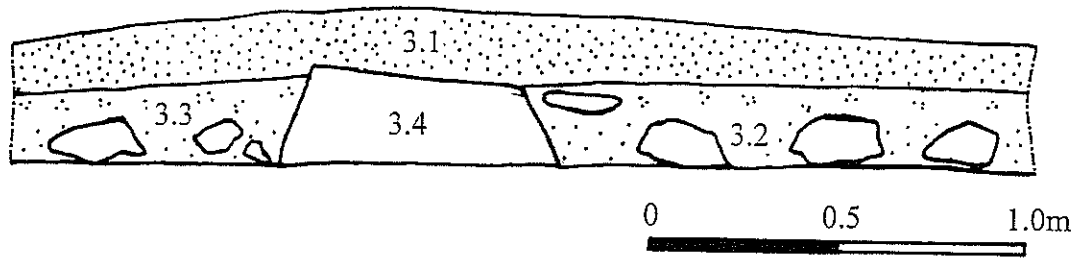


Figure 5: East facing section of trench 3

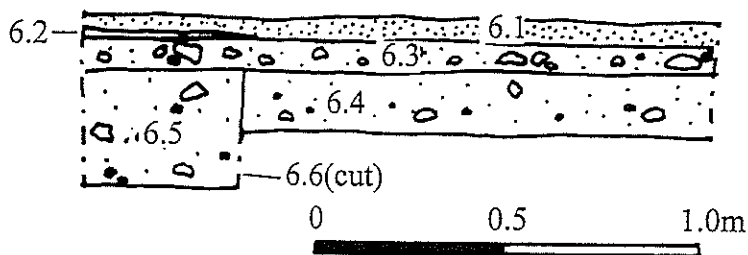


Figure 6: South facing section of trench 6

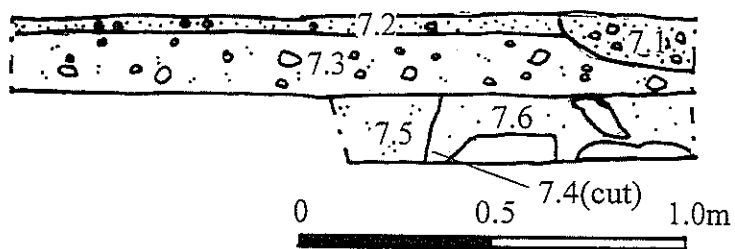


Figure 7: South facing section of trench 7

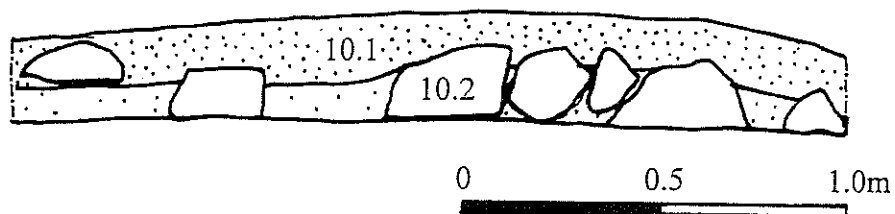


Figure 8: South-west facing section of trench 10

Trench 10

This trench showed that the wall does extend at least in a half circle around the Monument, and can be said with some certainty to run uninterrupted to the point where the storm beach is located.

General discussion

The siting of an enclosure at the head of Loch Shiel might suggest economic motives for its construction, rather than more romantic associations to the Jacobite Rising. Its shape - a circular enclosure - would be indicative of a cattle *fank*, of a type common in this area: these lacked corners into which cattle could be trapped if they became distressed. Its size (approximately 60m in diameter) would be sufficient. It is also well situated, having easy access to all cardinal points of the compass, either via water or foot. Although no known drove road exists in the area, the lochside location may have made Glenfinnan a collecting point for local cattle, to be driven on to north or east to known drovers' routes.

The overall lack of building rubble from the wall is also a mystery, in that a substantial wall would generate a great deal of demolition debris. It would be plausible to assume that since there is a general lack of demolition debris, it was removed, possibly for the construction of the octagonal wall: this was known to have surrounded the monument in 1873, at the time of the Ordnance Survey First Edition Map of the area. Certainly by this time the circular wall had ceased to exist.

As the monument itself is not directly in the centre of the concentric enclosure remains it seems likely that the two were not built at the same time. Moreover, if a concentric wall was constructed with respect to a circular tower, it would be likely for the wall to accurately trace a concentric line. This is not the case with the Glenfinnan Monument, as it lies approximately 5m off-centre within the remains of the wall. This suggests that the monument was built after the enclosure. The finds however, do not suggest the wall to be of any great antiquity, and the amount of recovered items is scant at best. Hence dating the wall accurately is not possible.

Recent survey work by RCAHMS shows that the concentric wall itself is not entirely circular: this is confirmed by excavations (Fig. 3). As the wall has not been found to the north and east of the monument, two possibilities emerge: firstly, as a significant change in ground level has been observed, the wall is located below the depth of final excavations in trenches 8 and 9. The second possibility is that the wall is nearer to or further from the monument than trenches 8 and 9: as trench 4 proved, it is particularly easy to mislocate trenches. Hence further excavation would be merited in this area, in an attempt to excavate to a depth consistent to the level of the surviving remnants of walling and to more satisfactorily trace the line of the wall.

Appendix 1: Details of colour slide photographs

Film numbers refer to the NTS SMR numbering system. Colour slides remain in the NTS SMR collection.

Film number 149: August - September 1998.

17-18	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 1, view west
19	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	View of monument, to west
20-21	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 2, view north-east
22-23	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 2, detail of wall
24	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 2, view north

Film number 150: September 1998.

1-2	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 2, view north
3-4	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	General view of Loch Shiel
5-7	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 1, view to north of section
8-10	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 1, view west showing contexts 1.2 & 1.3
11-12	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 3, view south
13-14	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 3, view east
15-17	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 1, western edge of wall 1.3
18-19	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 3, view east
20-21	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 3, view north
22-23	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 3, view south
24-25	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 5, view east
26-27	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 5, view north
28-30	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 7, view north east
31-33	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 4, view east
34-37	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 6, view north

Film number 155: September-December 1998.

1	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 10, view east
2-3	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 10? Slide darkened
4-5	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 10, view east
6-7	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 10, view west
8-9	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 9, view south
10-13	GLEN#	Glenfinnan	Trench 8, view south-west

Appendix 2: List of Contexts

The trench numbers are incorporated into the context descriptions, in order to provide more immediate cross-referencing.

Trench 1

1.1 Successive layers of dark black-brown fairly compact humic sandy silt and occasional small stones, mixed with lenses of light grey coarse sand. Appears to peter into more coarse sand with increased depth. Between 260 to 480mm in depth, covering the length of the trench. Above 1.2.

1.2 Loose small stones within a matrix of dark brown-black humic sand. Covers eastern 0.70m of trench, 0.3m in width. Below 1.1, above 1.3, same as 1.4.

1.3 One course of loosely packed large angular stone. 0.9m in width, running width of trench, bonded with dark brown-black humic sandy silt and occasional patches of more red-brown, possibly organic, patches of silty material. Lies below 1.2 and 1.4.

1.4 Layer of black, compacted humic sandy silt on western edge of wall, incorporating very occasional large stones (0.3m minimum dimension).

Trench 2

2.1 Moist and compacted dark grey-brown humic sand topsoil with occasional lenses of more coarse grey to very light brown micaceous sand. It contains occasional stone inclusions, and is 150-200mm in depth.

2.2 Loose very light greyish brown sand with moderate to frequent angular stone inclusions, 100-150mm in maximum dimension. Lies to inner side of the wall (2.4) and covers whole area of trench to that side. Lies below 2.1, above 2.4 and is same as 2.3.

2.3 Loose very light greyish brown sand with moderate to frequent angular stone inclusions, 100-150mm in maximum dimension. Lies to outer side of the wall (2.4) and covers whole area of trench to that side. Left partially unexcavated. Lies below 2.1, above 2.4 and is same as 2.2.

2.4 A 0.9m wide drystone wall construction with large (350-400mm in all dimensions) angular stone pieces packed with smaller angular stone pieces. Appears to have rough faces, and is one course in height. It has undergone heavy root action and is within a matrix of dark grey-brown sand. Below 2.2 and 2.3, above 2.5.

2.5 Light yellow-brown sand, moderately compacted, underlying 2.4 and visible throughout trench 2. Probably naturally deposited.

Trench 3

3.1 Coarse moderately loose dark grey-brown silty humus with occasional angular stones (200mm maximum dimension) between 120 and 240mm in depth. Contains occasional bands of light brown sand. Above 3.2 and 3.3.

3.2 Loose dark brown-black humic sand with frequent angular stone (250mm maximum dimension), more than 0.70m in length, continuing north of trench. Same as 3.3, below 3.1, above 3.4.

3.3 Loose, dark brown-black humic sand with frequent angular stone (250mm maximum dimension), more than 1.25m in length, extending to south of trench. Same as 3.2, below 3.1, above 3.4.

3.4 Large angular stone pieces, 350-400mm on some sides, packed with smaller pieces of stone (average edge size 100mm) and mixed with dark grey-brown humic sand with high incidence of soft roots. Below 3.2 and 3.3, above 3.5.

3.5 Light yellow-brown loose sand with patches of more reddy-brown sand. Lies below all contexts, and was left unexcavated. Interpreted as natural.

Trench 4

4.1 Compact black-brown peat, between 170 and 370mm in thickness, above 4.2.

4.2 Red-brown sandy peat, showing some signs of mineral panning to western edge.

4.3 Compacted mix of rounded pebbles and pea gravels within matrix of mid red-brown silt, with defined western edge. Below 4.2. Interpreted as being a natural deposit, excavation ceasing at this level.

Trench 5

5.1 Very moist dark black-brown peaty humus, 280mm thick. Lies throughout trench 5, being 3m in length. Lies above 5.2.

5.2 Compact dark red-brown silty peat, 220mm in thickness, lying below 5.1.

Trench 6

6.1 Very dark grey sand lens, 30mm wide at western end of trench, fading out 0.44m into trench. Above 6.2.

6.2 Mid grey-brown sand (topsoil), 70mm thick, lying above 6.3, and below 6.1

6.3 Very dark brown silty sand with occasional to moderate water-worn pebbles, 60mm in thickness. Above 6.4, below 6.2.

6.4 Coarse dark red-brown sand with moderate gravel and stones. 150mm in thickness, cut by 6.6 and below 6.3.

6.5 Dark red-brown sand with a very thin skim of rotted wood at base of context. Below 6.4, and is the fill to 6.6.

6.6 Rectangular cut, 200mm deep, 400mm in width, longer than the width of the trench, filled by 6.5, cutting 6.4.

Trench 7

7.1 Heavily compacted grey brown sandy gravel mix, extending 0.35m into trench from eastern/ path end, 160mm in thickness, above 7.2. Part of path currently in use.

7.2 Coarse black-brown sand with moderate pebbles, 130mm thick with occasionally lighter sand lenses. Above 7.3

7.3 Mottled red-brown coarse sand with frequent small pebbles and occasional to moderate larger stones (circa 80mm maximum dimensions). Below 7.2, above 7.4.

7.4 Fill of loose dark brown sand, 0.30m wide, 150mm deep, containing electrical cable. Fill to 7.5, below 7.3.

7.5 Cut, vertical sided, excavated to 150mm deep to show cable present in 7.4. 0.30m in width, cut into 7.6. Above 7.6, filled by 7.4.

7.6 Mid-brown loose sand mixed with very substantial angular rocks, 400mm+ maximum dimensions, lying below 7.5.

Trench 8

8.1 Very moist dark black-brown peaty humus, c.300mm thick, lying above 8.2.

8.2 Compact dark red-brown silty peat, c.200mm in thickness, lying below 8.1.

Trench 9

9.1 Very moist dark black-brown peaty humus, c.260mm thick, lying above 9.2.

9.2 Compact dark red-brown silty peat, lying below 9.2. Thickness not determined due to excessive waterlogging.

Trench 10

10.1 Near black humic sand, containing occasional large stones, c.150mm deep, covering 10.2.

10.2 Wall, consisting of large blocks of unmortared stone, surviving to one course in height, c.0.9m overlain by 10.1.

Appendix 3: Site matrix diagrams

