

**Loch Hope, Eriboll Estate, Durness, Sutherland  
Native Woodland Planting Scheme  
Compartments 2 and 3  
Archaeological Evaluation**



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**For**

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# **Loch Hope, Durness, Sutherland: Native Woodland Planting Scheme**

## **Compartments 2 and 3**

### **Archaeological Evaluation**

#### **1.0 Background**

This evaluation covers an area of proposed new native woodland planting and natural regeneration on the west side of Loch Hope on the Eriboll Estate in NW Sutherland. Although an archaeological survey in advance of a WGS was carried out approximately 10 years ago, the detail given in the Environmental Impact Assessment is imprecise and lacks a gazetteer. It does indicate the presence of archaeological features within the area of proposed planting. This present evaluation provides a more detailed archaeological and historical background and a gazetteer of visible archaeological features and areas of potential archaeological interest.

The *Forests and Archaeology Guidelines*, produced by the Forestry Authority, recommend that:

- No new planting should occur on archaeological sites. Normally an unplanted area should extend for at least 20m beyond the outermost recognised feature of the site
- Where groups of archaeological features are close together they should be incorporated into a larger area of open space
- Fence lines should not cross the archaeological site
- Archaeological sites should not be used as a source for stone or other materials

In addition, it is generally accepted that the best management practice for archaeological features is light grazing, to prevent the features from being obscured or damaged by vegetation growth within fenced areas even if the site is left clear of tree planting. Where the site is close to the perimeter fence, the fence line should be altered to exclude the site.

In the case of this scheme, the fence for the previous WGS is still in place and will form the boundary of the new scheme for the most part. This fence will be extended along the shore of Loch Hope and there is potential here for the revision of the route of the fence to avoid damage to the archaeological record

#### **2.0 Methodology**

This evaluation consists of a desk-based evaluation, followed by a rapid walk-over survey, carried out on 13.5.11 in dry and clear weather conditions.

#### **3.0 Archaeological Background.**

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed buildings or gardens and designed landscapes within, or in the vicinity, of the present scheme.

There are no archaeological sites directly within Compartments 2 and 3 listed on the Highland Historic Environment record (HER), but four recorded sites, adjacent to the boundary of the schemes, give evidence for human activity in the area:

- **MHG12935: Arnaboll, cairn**

NC 4686 5801

Description: originally recorded as a broch, this is now considered to be a truncated round cairn, dating possibly to the Neolithic period. Another chambered cairn is located 1km to the north. These, together with other cairns and hut circles on the east side of Loch Hope, are evidence for prehistoric settlement and ritual around the loch.

- **MHG10383: Cladh Arnaboll, burial ground**

NC 4671 5797

Description: a post-mediaeval burial ground enclosed within a drystone dyke. This may be indicative of a pre-reformation chapel site or may be purely a burial ground reflecting the distance from, and impracticality of transporting bodies to, the parish church of Durness at Balnakiel.

- **MHG17915: Salachaidh, enclosures**

NC 4600 5700

Description: two irregularly shaped enclosures, as recorded on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map of 1878. These are most likely to be achadhan, or hill fields, common on the west coast, associated with post-mediaeval settlement and utilising small patches of better favoured ground some distance from the in-bye lands of the township. In the case of Salachaidh the nearby township is Arnaboll.

- **MHG43250, MHG 11925, shieling settlement, possible hut circles, enclosure**

NC 4516 5371

Description: originally recorded as two possible hut circles and an oval enclosure, but re-defined as a complex of 3-4 adjoining shielings and an oval platform which may be a hut circle but is too obscured by peat. No trace of a field system

The archaeological section of the EIA for the previous WGS stated that there were ‘a number of interesting archaeological sites...situated within the study area, most of which are displayed on Roy’s map of the 1780s (sic) and on recent OS maps of the region. Other sites of substantial archaeological interest are located at Arnaboll, outwith the afforestation scheme area’ The report mentioned specifically two large peat and stone enclosures at Sallachaidh, of unknown period (immediately west of compartment 2) and three c18th-19<sup>th</sup> century walled enclosures at Badvoer, within compartment 1, and listed the areas of archaeological potential as being:

- a. Between the Allt Loch na Creige Riabhach and the Allt an Locha Crochaich.
- b. In the vicinity of the Allt Bad a Mheoir. (Badvoir in compartment 1)
- c. Between the Allt Bhreag and a point north of the Allt a Gharbh-chnuic, in compartment 2
- d. In the vicinity of the Allt nan Gobhar (open ground between compartments 2 and 3)

The EIA recommended that these four areas be left as open ground. However, as the EIA's conclusions were based on a desk-based assessment, the present evaluation, including a rapid walk-over survey, was commissioned to ensure that all features of archaeological, historical or cultural interest have been identified.

#### **4.0 Historical Background**

Early maps and documentation, including the Durness list of depopulated townships, indicate that there were only two areas of permanent settlement on the west side of Loch Hope in the Early Modern period: Arnaboll to the north, and Badvoir to the south. The former lies to the north of the proposed planting scheme. The post-mediaeval township of Arnaboll, or Arnable, features in the 1809 Militia list, with three men eligible to enlist, suggesting three households at this date. Four heads of household are listed on the 1819 Bighouse Estate rent Roll

Roy's Military Survey of the 1750s depicts the post-Mediaeval townships of Ardiboll and badvour, both with cornlands, but nothing in between.

The removal of small tenants from the Reay estate to make way for sheep began in the 1790s. Many of the existing tacksmen took the initiative in introducing sheep, including the Clarkes of Eriboll. It is likely therefore that the township of Arnaboll was cleared of its subtenants at a date between 1809 and 1819. From then on, Arnaboll was home to a shepherd, as recorded on all census returns between 1841 and 1901

The 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map, surveyed in the 1870s, shows the two enclosures at Salachaidh. These appear to be enclosed areas of cultivation, most likely to have been associated with the post-Mediaeval settlement at Arnaboll, making use of small areas of fertile and well-drained ground. These would have fallen out of use with the removal of the original population. These are the only built features in the vicinity of the planting compartments, with the exception of the road from Cashel Dubh to Eriboll, which crosses the SW corner of compartment 2. This road probably follows an earlier drove route, as Donald McKay, tacksman of Eriboll, was a major cattle drover in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the cattle being taken to a gathering point at Mudale at the head of Strathnaver. The built road is likely to have been constructed after the acquisition of the Reay estates by the Sutherland family, possibly as part of the Marquis of Stafford's programme of road building in the 1830s. This road was still in use for road traffic well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Modern mapping records 'Old Shielings' on the north side of the Allt Bhreag, in the SE corner of compartment 2. These are the recorded shielings site (see above, section 3.0)

#### **5.0 Site Description**

The two planting compartments are bounded to the east by Loch Hope. From the loch shore the ground rises steadily, steeply cut by the numerous streams flowing west into the loch. The exception is the Allt nan Gobhar which, with its minor tributaries, flows south, across a broader open landscape bounded by ridges of gneiss. The landscape is almost entirely treeless

apart from along the sides of the deep-cut watercourses; within the predominantly heather cover are patches of grass and bracken indicating better drained ground.

## **6.0 Gazetteer of Sites**

The following archaeological features were noted during the walk-over survey:

**1. Salachaidh, enclosures, centred on NC 459 569 and NC 462 572**

HER ref. **MHG17915**

**Significance: local**

These two features are located on gentle west-facing slopes. The boundary dyke is of low turf and rubble construction, and the interior areas stand out as green, grassy patches. There appear to be no associated structures. Both enclosures are located outside the boundary of the proposed planting area, but very close to the fence line.

**2. Shielling hut (possible ) at NC 46439 56932**

**Significance: local**

Indistinct rubble and turf footings of a possible oval structure, aligned NW-SE and approximately 3m in length. At the NW end is a relatively large mature tree, unusual in the landscape and possibly significant in association with the structure. The surrounding area, including the steep sheltering bank to the west, is colonised by bracken.

**3. Allt an Lochain Duibhaidh, wall, pier at NG 45222 53915**

**Significance: local**

A double row of set stone footings extends across the shingle into the water of the loch, just south of the small un-named stream north of the Allt an lochain Duibhaidh. This is best preserved at the east, loch, end, and a scatter of rubble at the west end suggests disturbance or demolition. These would appear to be typical footings of a drystone dyke, with a width of 1m. If this is the case, most of the stone has been deliberately removed. There is no indication that the feature continued west above the shingle. The function is uncertain. It may be the remains of a pier for landing boats, or a fishing stance, but is better constructed than other rubble banks extending into the water noted elsewhere around Loch Hope. Together with site 4, below, it may have been one side of a contained landing and loading area for livestock.

**4. Allt Bhreaig, wall, pier at NG 45242 53697**

**Significance: Regional**

Similar to site 3, a double row of set stones runs E-W across the shingle, and crosses the outflow of the stream but does not extend out into the loch or continue west above the shingle. Although obviously of similar function to site 3, this is unclear

**5. Allt an Lochain Duibhaidh, Bank, dyke from NG 45188 53963 to NG 45089 53874**

**Significance: local**

A low and indistinct turf and rubble dyke runs between the Allt an Lochain Duibhaidh and the small, un-named stream to the north, crossing areas of thick heather cover and one central area of more open grass-bracken.

6. **Allt an Lochain Duibhaidh, Retaining wall at NG 45089 53845**

**Significance: local**

A short section of rubble retaining wall on the north bank of the stream. This section is 1.5m in length, 500mm high and is aligned NNW-SSE. Its function is unclear, but it may be associated with animal containment along the banks of the stream

7. **Allt an Lochain Duibhaidh, Rubble bank at NG 45122 53845**

**Significance: local**

A broad, spread rubble bank aligned approximately N-S and blocking access to the low terrace adjacent to the stream. There appear to be the remains of a double-skin wall, over which random rubble has been piled. A small sub-circular stone setting or cell is attached to the west side.

8. **Allt an Lochain Duibhaidh, stone pile at NG 45075 53737**

Located in an area of grass and bracken and adjacent to a small watercourse, an amorphously shaped pile of stones of medium size. This is interpreted as field clearance, more likely to be to improve grazing than to prepare ground for cultivation.

9. **Allt Bhreag, shieling settlement, possible hut circles, enclosure at NC 4516 5371 MHG43250, MHG 11925**

These previously recorded features could not be evaluated as increased vegetation cover has obscured them. They are all located on the north bank of the Allt Bhreag, as shown on modern mapping, but are only visible as indistinct platforms

## **7.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

With the exception of sites 1 and 2, all the features noted during this evaluation form a cluster around the streams flowing into Loch Hope north of the prominent Creag Bhreag. All nine features can be presumed to be approximately contemporary, ie all dating to the Early Modern period pre-dating the introduction of sheep farming at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They represent the minimal impact of human activity in an area of low fertility, little shelter and few natural resources between the two slightly better favoured areas of the townships Arnaboll and Badvour. The two enclosures at Salachaidh appear to be typical examples of *achadh*, or hill field, common in parts of the NW Highlands, and are within easy walking distance of Arnaboll township. The other sites, clustered in the shelter of Creag Bhreag, appear more likely to be features of livestock management. The existence of hut circles at Allt Bhreag could not be confirmed, but it is possible that the use of this site could extend back into the prehistoric period.

The distribution of archaeological features in compartments 2 and 3 conforms to the predictions of the original EIA statement, although no features were located in the vicinity of the Allt nan Gobhar. The isolated site, no. 2, could not have been predicted by a desk-based exercise.

The following individual recommendations are given for the protection of the archaeological record:

**Site 1, Salachaidh.** The two enclosures are clearly visible features west of compartment 3, which should be unaffected by the scheme. However, they are very close to the fence line. Any alteration or replacement of the fence should take the features into consideration. No stones should be removed from the dykes for any purpose.

**Site 2, possible shieling structure.** This isolated feature should be protected from planting within an exclusion zone extending 20m from the visible feature

**Sites 3-9** form a group which will be divided by the proposed fence line. This should be avoided if possible. As some of the features are on the loch shore, it will be impossible to alter the fence line to include all the features within the enclosed area. It would be preferable to exclude all the features by shifting the fence line to west of the Allt Bhreag shielings (site 9). This would have the advantage of protecting any associated features obscured by vegetation and thus not identified during this evaluation.

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**20.6.10**

## Appendix 1. Data Sources and Bibliography

The following data sources were consulted during this evaluation:

- Highland Historic Environment Record (HER) held by the Archaeology Unit within the Dept of Planning and Development at Highland Council
- Early maps held by the Map Library within the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh
- Satellite images from Google

The following sources gave background information to the evaluation:

- Baldwin, JR ed. 2000 *The Province of Strathnaver*
- Richards E, 2000 *The Highland Clearances*

## Appendix 2. Photographic Archive (digital)

Photo no.	Site no.	Description	Viewpoint
1	2	Possible footings of small oval shieling hut. Ranging pole marks one end and the structure extends back towards the tree	From SE
2	2	Possible shieling hut, footings marked by area of bracken to right of ranging pole	From NE
3	3	Double row of stones set on shingle shore appear to be footings of drystone wall, now removed. Behind set rows is scatter of displaced rubble	From E
4	3	Detail of double row of set stones	From E
5	3	Feature as seen from top of shingle beach, beyond which the wall or pier does not appear to continue	From W
6	4	Second double row of set stones crossing the outflow of the Allt Bhreaig, but not continuing into the vegetation at the top of the beach	From W
7	5	Turf and rubble dyke crosses area of open grass-bracken. Ranging pole marks the line of the dyke, which runs from centre foreground	From N
8	5	Turf and rubble dyke crosses area of thick heather, running from centre foreground towards right of tree which marks the small un-named stream	From S
9	6	Short section of rubble retaining wall on the north bank of the Allt an Lochain Duibhaidh	From S
10	7	Rubble bank with, to right of ranging pole, small circular setting of stones	From NW
11	7	Rubble bank crossing low terrace adjacent to Allt an Lochain Duibhaidh, runs from centre foreground	From S
12	8	Stone pile, field clearance	From W



## Photographs



1



2



3



4



5



6



**Photographs (continued)**



7



8



9



10



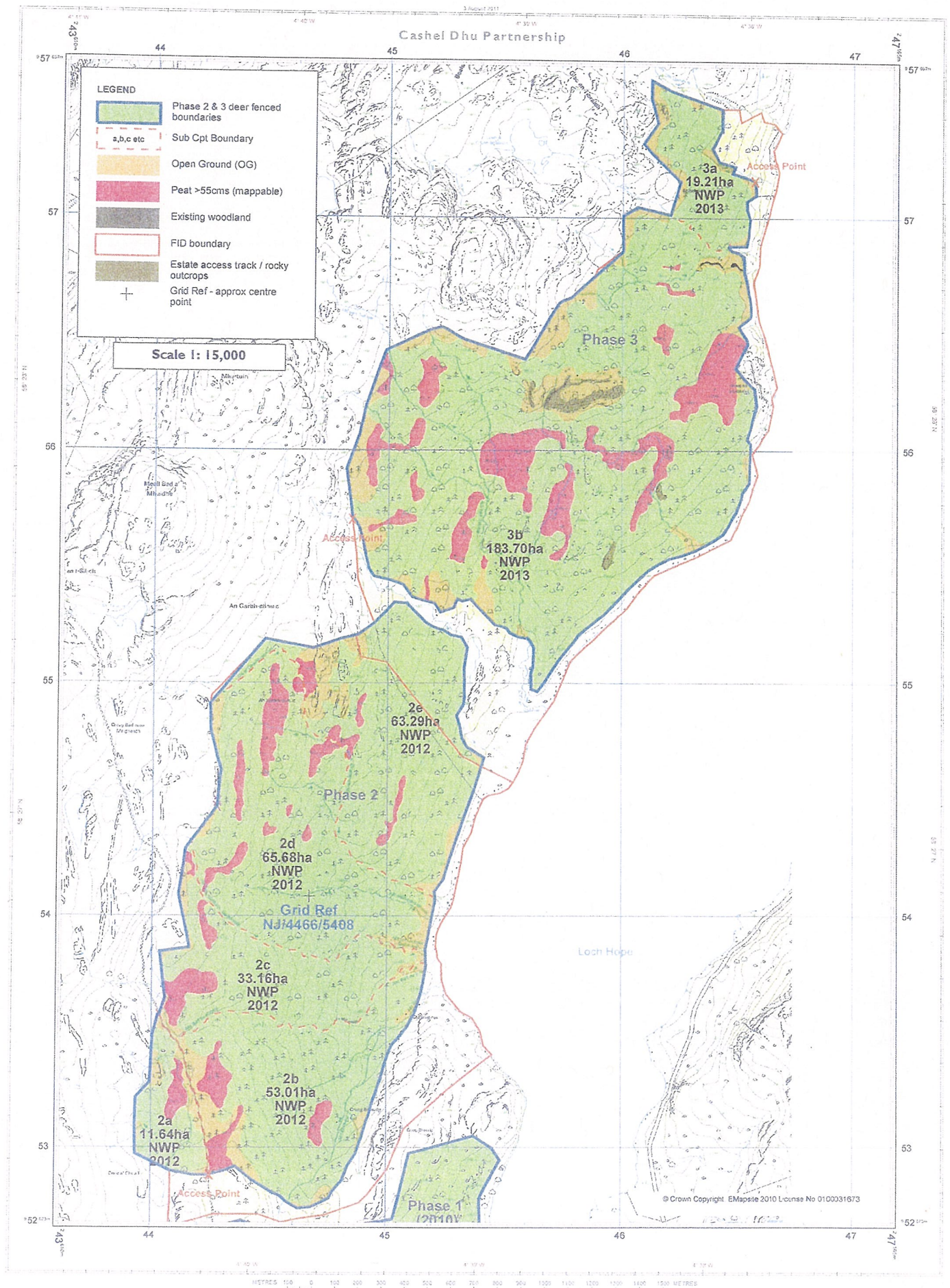
11



12



# LOCH HOPE WOODLANDS PHASES 2 & 3 : RDC-RP Case No 4569560 Planting Models





**Map 4 Loch Hope Woodlands, Phases 2 & 3 : Areas of Archaeological Interest**

