

The Caithness Fieldwalking Project 2004 – Preliminary report

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Aims

The 2004 season of fieldwalking in Caithness was aimed at continuing the work carried out as part of doctoral research over the past four years, surveying the landscape for traces of past human activity. This year, however, the project moved away from being University lead research and became a local community initiative. The main sponsors of the project were the local council and Murray Lamont from MacKays Hotel, Wick. The project was co-ordinated by CAT and directed by Dr Amelia Pannett.

In previous years the aims of the fieldwalking had been restricted to the recovery of prehistoric material, predominantly lithics. In 2004, however, it was decided to broaden the scope of the project and collect all material pertaining to the past occupation and use of the landscape. It was hoped that the material collected would provide a detailed picture of the human activities in the landscape from the earliest period of occupations, the Mesolithic c. 7000 years ago, to the 19th century AD.

While the recovery of material was the main priority of the project, it was also designed as a training exercise for anyone from the local community interested in learning how to undertake systematic survey. While the survey procedures used are relatively simple, it was important to reiterate the need for consistency in the methods used. The training of local people in the use of one, consistent, method for fieldwalking will enable surveys to be carried out throughout the year, as and when fields become available. It is hoped that a core team of fieldwalkers can be put together to carry the project forward.

Methodology

The methodology used in the 2004 survey was the same as that used throughout the fieldwalking project in Caithness. Fields were selected to cover a range of topographic zones, in order to minimise the biases imposed by the predominance of ploughed fields in lowland areas. The fields were divided into a series of 'runs' spaced 20m apart. Each 'run' was surveyed in a consistent manner, with walkers moving across the field in one direction, generally following the line of the plough furrows where possible. Each walker was given a bag and asked to survey an area of around 1m each side of the line of their 'run'. All anthropogenic material was collected, with material from each run bagged separately. Field notes were taken that detailed the weather and light conditions, the state of the field (ie, ploughed or harrowed, weathered or unweathered), the proximity of the field to known monuments or archaeological sites, and the presence of any concentrations of material. Any concentrations that were identified were subsequently intensively surveyed in order to collect all of the surface material in that area. The size and exact location of concentrations was noted on the field notes.

The field survey

Three areas were targeted for fieldwalking during the 2004 season: Thrumster, Castletown and Dunnet. Each area will be discussed separately in this report, with a field by field assessment of the material recovered.

Thrumster

Three fields were surveyed in the Thrumster area, all on the first day of the project. A group of around 20 local volunteers turned out to take part in the fieldwalking.

Field 1 (NGR ND 3417 4554)

The field was located on a gentle west facing slope adjacent to the A99, around 2km SW of Hempriggs chambered cairn and 0.5km to the east of Thrumster Little Broch. The field had been ploughed but not harrowed, and had been well-weathered. It was walked in bright and sunny conditions, with walkers moving SW-NE across the field.

Twelve 'runs' were surveyed, all but one of which produced material, predominantly modern pottery. The table below shows the distribution of material across the field.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Flint	Stone	Metalwork
1	3			
2	2			
3	6	1	1	
4	4			
5	7			
6	4		1	
7		2	1	
8				
9	2	1		1
10				
11				
12	8	1		

At the western end of the field a large concentration of material was identified in a discrete area approximately 30m by 20m. A large quantity of material was recovered, with considerably more left in situ due to the logistics of complete recovery.

Modern Pot	Stone	Clay Pipe	Glass	Metalwork
501	4	10	20	30

This would appear to represent the location of a 19th century house, with the material recovered probably deriving from the midden. The modern pottery collected included decorated fine wares, vessels for use in dairying and other coarse utilitarian vessels. A slate pencil was also collected, together with a number of complete glass vessels, including several that had apparently been used to hold poisons – on the advice of the CAT representatives these were not retained as they presented a potential hazard. Fragments of clay pipes of varying sizes were identified, including a small number that appear to be pre-19th century.

Of particular interest was the recovery of a small number of stone artefacts that may relate to activities in the later prehistoric period. These included a fragment of a small stone bowl, a stone pot lid and a spindle whorl. It is possible that this material derived from iron age activities in the local area, perhaps associated with the nearby Broch.

Field 2 (NGR ND 3445 4609)

The field was located 0.5km to the NE of field 1, on a gentle NW facing slope adjacent to the A99. The field had been ploughed but not harrowed and was well-weathered. It was walked in overcast conditions, with the walkers moving west-east across the field.

There were 19 runs in the field nine of which produced material, predominantly modern pottery, although flint, glass, clay pipe and metalwork were also recovered.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Flint	Glass	Clay Pipe	Metalwork
1	13		1		1
2	3		2	1	
3	3				
4	6				
5	3				
7	4				
8	6				
10	6	1			
11	3				

The modern pottery included both decorated fine wares and coarser utilitarian vessels, and the single flint piece was a small burnt chunk.

Field 4 (NGR 3472 4538)

The field was adjacent to the eastern end of field 2, and occupied the top of a level ridge, with the eastern side of the field sloping fairly steeply away. The field had been ploughed and well-weathered and was walked in overcast conditions. The field comprised two distinct soil types, with the higher western end predominantly peat and the lower slopes brown mineral soil. The peaty soil was almost completely devoid of material suggesting that this part of the landscape has only recently been taken into cultivation. A small assemblage of material was recovered, including modern pottery, flint and a single shell.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Flint	Shell
5	10		
6		1	
8		2	
9	1	3	
12		5	1

The modern pottery comprised sherds of both decorated fine wares and coarser utilitarian vessels. The flint piece from run 6 was a small regular flake that had been struck off a blade core.

Interpretation

The concentration of material in field 1 clearly relates to middening activities associated with a 19th century house site. Indeed, the house is marked on estate maps dating from the mid-19th century. The presence of material apparently dating to the later prehistoric period adds another dimension to the picture, and indicates perhaps that this part of the landscape had been the focus for settlement or agricultural activities for generations prior to the occupation of the house in the 19th century. It is interesting to note that fieldwalking in the field adjacent to the Thrumster Little Broch during the 2003 season revealed no evidence for prehistoric activity.

Elsewhere in the landscape the identification of low density spreads of modern pottery and other modern materials demonstrates the presence of midden spreading on cultivated fields. The relative lack of lithics in fields 1 and 2 indicates that activities associated with the manufacture or use of flint tools were not occurring in this part of the landscape. It is possible that these slopes were wooded, with communities choosing to undertake domestic activities on the lowlying land closer to the loch. In field 4 the recovery of a small number of lithic pieces, including one indicative of Mesolithic knapping, indicates the occurrence of small scale activities associated with the manufacture of tools. This may have been the location for a short lived episode of activity, perhaps associated with hunting.

Castletown

Fourteen fields were walked around Castletown over a period of 8 days. A regular team of five local volunteers turned out to undertake the survey.

Field 1 (NGR ND 1971 6798)

The field was located behind a housing development on the northern side of Castletown. Records from early maps showed the presence of a large shell mound in the field (P. Humphreys *pers comm*), although this has been ploughed out and is no longer visible. The field occupies a gentle north facing slope, and had been harrowed and well weathered. It was walked in sunny and bright conditions. Only 2/3rds of the field was surveyed as the farmer began to re-harrow the western end of the field in advance of sowing whilst it was being walked. Fourteen 'runs' were surveyed in total, with walkers moving across the field in a N-S direction.

Each of the runs produced material, including modern pottery, flint, clay pipes, metalwork and shells.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Flint	Clay Pipe	Metalwork	Shell
1	2	6			
2	19	4			
3		6			
4	1	3			
5		6			7
6		4			
7					4
8		4			
9		3			
10		5			
11		7		1	63
12					
13		2	1		
14		4			

Due to misunderstandings about the collection strategy only a small quantity of modern pottery was recovered. Nevertheless it is possible to determine from the available material that the spreading of midden material was occurring in this part of the landscape. The pottery that was collected included both decorated fine wares and coarser utilitarian vessels.

The lithic material recovered comprised predominantly debitage, although this has yet to be fully analysed. However, a small blade core and a quartzite knife were also identified.

The shells collected may represent the remnants of the shell mound, although the concentration in run 11 is not representative of a concentration of material in this particular area as shell material was not collected across the whole field. It is also possible that this material relates to the liming of the field using shell sand.

Field 2 (NGR ND 2046 6789)

The field is located around 1.5km to the east of field 1 and occupies a gentle north facing slope. The field had been harrowed and well-weathered and was walked in sunny and bright conditions. At the southern end of the field are the remains of a possible medieval house, while a Broch is located around 0.5km to the east in an adjacent field.

Eighteen 'runs' were surveyed, with walkers moving north-south across the field. Eleven 'runs' produced material, including flint, stone, modern pottery, medieval pottery, metalwork and clay pipe.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Medieval Pot	Flint	Stone	Metalwork
2	3	1	4		1
3			2	1	
4			4		
5			4		
6			1		
7			1		
9			1		
13			1		
15			4		
16			3		
18			1		

As with field 1 only a small quantity of modern pottery was collected, although the recovery of a sherd of medieval pottery is significant and may relate to the occupation of the house site within the field. The lithic pieces recovered were primarily debitage, although full analysis has yet to take place. However, a single barbed and tanged arrowhead was identified in run 15. This is a finely finished piece, manufactured on toffee coloured flint, and is complete.

The most significant artefact recovered in this field was the polished stone axe recovered from run 3. This was around 70mm in length and had been manufactured on a soft stone, possibly sandstone with a band of possible mudstone along one edge. The axe was slightly damaged on one corner of the cutting edge, which was a post depositional break and not related to the use of the tool. The remainder of the cutting edge was complete and it is unlikely that this ever functioned as a utilitarian tool.

Field 3 (NGR ND 2104 6705)

This field is located 1km to the east of field 2; it occupies a gentle west-facing slope and is adjacent to the field containing the Broch. The field had been harrowed and

well-weathered and was walked in dull and overcast conditions. Fourteen 'runs' were surveyed, with walkers moving east-west across the field. All but two 'runs' produced material, predominantly flint but with a small quantity of clay pipe.

Run No.	Flint	Clay Pipe
1	1	
2	2	1
3	12	
4	5	
6	6	
7	4	
9	3	
10	3	2
11	3	1
12	4	
14		1

The distribution of flint across the field is consistent with the low-density spreads of material identified elsewhere in Caithness as part of the wider fieldwalking project. It comprised entirely debitage, although has yet to be fully analysed.

Field 4 (NGR ND 2099 6700)

The field is located immediately to the south of field 3 and occupies a gentle west-facing slope. It had been harrowed and well-weathered and was walked in dull and overcast conditions. Sixteen 'runs' were surveyed, with walkers moving east-west across the field. Only eight 'runs' produced material, predominantly flint, but including modern pottery, glass and metalwork.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Flint	Glass	Metalwork
3		2		
5		4		
6		3		
7		3		
9		1		
12		1		
13	5	1	3	1
16		1		

The recovery of pottery and other 'modern' material from run 13 demonstrates the occurrence of midden spreading in this area, despite the lack of comparable material from other runs. The distribution of lithic material in this field is also consistent with the low-density scatters identified elsewhere. No tools were immediately apparent amongst the assemblage, although it has yet to be fully analysed.

Field 5 (NGR ND 2051 6697)

The field is located immediately to the west of field 4, and occupies a gentle west-facing slope. It had been ploughed and well-weathered and was walked in sunny and bright conditions. Sixteen runs were surveyed, with walkers moving east-west across

the field. Only seven runs produced material, including flint, clay pipe, glass and metalwork.

Run No.	Flint	Clay Pipe	Glass	Metalwork
1			1	
3	2		1	
4	1			
5	1			
9	1			
11		1		
12	1	1		1

Again, the presence of 'modern' material in the assemblage indicates the occurrence of midden spreading in this area, while the quantity of flint relates to the low-density spread of material across the wider landscape.

Field 6 (NGR ND 2038 6741)

The field is located to the west of field 6 and occupies a gentle north-facing slope. It had been ploughed and well-weathered and was walked in bright and sunny conditions. The field is located immediately to the south of field 2, and consequently is adjacent to the possible Medieval house site previously mentioned. Twelve 'runs' were surveyed with walkers moving south-north across the field. Only seven 'runs' produced material, including modern pottery, flint, glass, clay pipes and metalwork.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Flint	Glass	Clay Pipe	Metalwork
2	11		3		
3		2		1	
5		1			
9	8		1		1
10		2			
11		1			
12		2			

As in the previous fields in this area, midden spreading has clearly occurred despite the lack of modern pottery from the majority of 'runs'. The lithic assemblage comprises entirely debitage, although this has yet to be fully analysed, and relates to the low-density spread of material across the wider landscape.

Field 7

The field is located immediately to the west of field 6 and occupies a gentle north-facing slope. It had been ploughed and well-weathered and was walked in bright and sunny conditions. At the northern end of the field is the possible Medieval house site. Four 'runs' were surveyed, with walkers moving south-north across the field. Three of these produced material including modern pottery, flint, glass and metalwork.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Flint	Glass	Metalwork
1	20	1	2	2
2		3		
3		1		

Midden spreading has clearly occurred in this field, as the material from 'run' 1 demonstrates. The recovery of lithics again relates to the low-density spread of material across the landscape.

Field 8 (NGR ND 2197 6562)

The field is located 2.5km to the south east of field 7 and covers the summit of Coopers Hill with both north and south facing slopes either side of the crest of the hill. The slopes are fairly steep and the ploughed out remains of Coopers Hill chambered cairn still dominate the skyline in the centre of the field. The field had been ploughed and well weathered and was walked in dull and rainy conditions. Twelve 'runs' were surveyed, with walkers moving north-south across the field. Seven of the 'runs' produced material, predominantly flint but including modern pottery.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Flint
2		2
4		5
5		3
6		5
7		2
8	1	1
9		1

The field was notably devoid of modern pottery and other 'modern' materials, perhaps indicating that the spreading of midden material was not routinely practiced in this area. The flint assemblage is predominantly debitage, although it has yet to be fully analysed. It was concentrated towards the crest of the hill, in the vicinity of the chambered cairn, and perhaps relates to activities in the area prior to the construction of the monument, as was identified at Camster Long.

Field 9 (NGR ND 2066 6658)

The field is located to the south of field 4, on the opposite side of the B876. It occupies a gentle south-facing slope which runs down towards the site of a drained lochan. Indeed, the change in soil at the southern end of the field is quite distinct with brown mineral soil giving way to heavy grey clay, aptly demonstrating the extent of the original wetland area. The field had been ploughed and well weathered and was walked in dull and rainy conditions. Fourteen 'runs' were surveyed, with walkers moving north-south across the field. Nine 'runs' produced material, predominantly flint but including modern pottery.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Flint
3		1
4	1	1
5		2
8		1
9		2
11		4
12		2
13		5
14		4

The lithic material was confined to the northern end of the field, clearly reflecting the nature of the landscape prior to drainage, and appears to relate to the low-density spread of material across the wider landscape. The occurrence of pottery may again relate to the spreading of midden in the landscape, while the presence of sand, small natural flint pebbles and shells in the field clearly relates to the liming of the field using shell sand.

Field 10 (NGR ND 2080 6653)

The field is located immediately to the east of field 9 and occupies a gentle south-facing slope. As in field 9, the distinct soil change at the southern end of the field demonstrates the extent of the wetland area. The field had been ploughed and well-weathered and was walked in dull and rainy conditions. Eight 'runs' were surveyed, all of which produced material, predominantly flint but including modern pottery, stone, clay pipes and shell.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Flint	Stone	Clay Pipe	Shell
1		3			1
2		2		1	
3		1	6		1
4		2		1	
5		11		1	
6		14			
7		12			
8	1	16		1	

The presence of modern pottery, albeit a single piece, together with the occurrence of clay pipe indicates that this area had also been subjected to midden spreading. The recovery of small natural pebbles and shells probably relates to the liming of the field using shell sand – the pebbles collected can be distinguished from those brought to the area for knapping as they are too small to function as viable nodules for the production of cores. The spread of lithic material was, again, confined to the northern end of the field with a low ridge running east-west across the field evidently providing the main focus for the lithic activities. This has also been identified elsewhere in the county, particularly at Stemster where the lithics were concentrated along a low ridge above a drained lochan.

Field 11 (NGR ND 2084 6607)

The field is located immediately to the east of field 10, and occupies a gentle south-facing slope. The field is around half the length of the neighbouring two as the remnant of the lochan occupy the lowlying ground to the south. The field had been ploughed and well-weathered, and was walked in dull and rainy conditions. Fifteen 'runs' were surveyed, with walkers moving north-south across the field. All of the runs produced material including modern pottery, flint, clay pipes, glass and metalwork.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Flint	Glass	Clay Pipe	Metalwork
1	4	8	1		
2		25			
3	35	7	2		

4	6	19			
5	21	32			
6	15	21			
7	9	6	1	1	
8	4	6			
9	9	12	5		2
10	5	19			
11	3	17		1	
12	6	14			
13	8	11	1		
14	16	8	3	1	
15	9	14			

Following discussions about the collection strategy it was decided to collect all modern pottery for the remainder of the survey, and this alteration is clearly shown in the increase in pottery quantities. This field had evidently been included in the system of midden spreading identified in the neighbouring areas, with the glass, pipes and metalwork incorporated into the soil through this method also.

The quantity of lithics in this field is notably higher than elsewhere in the Castletown area (with the exception of fields 13 and 14, see below). The flint was, again, concentrated along a low ridge running east-west across the field, a continuation of the ridge in field 10. It is undoubtedly the proximity of this raised ground to the wetland area and lochan that caused it to become a focus of activity involving flint knapping. The material has yet to be fully analysed, but appears to be predominantly debitage. The exception being the small lozenge-shaped arrowhead recovered from run 3.

Field 12 (NGR ND 2313 6798)

The field is located around 2km north-east of the main concentration of fields in Castletown, close to Loch Heilen. It occupies lowlying level ground, with an area of boggy land towards the northern end of the field. The field had been ploughed and well-weathered and was walked in dull and rainy conditions. Ten 'runs' were surveyed with walkers moving east-west across the field. All of the 'runs' produced material, including modern pottery, medieval pottery, flint and glass.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Medieval Pot	Flint	Glass
1	7		3	1
2	10		3	2
3	13			
4		1	1	
5	9		1	
6	6			
7	6			1
8	1			
9	8		4	
10	6		2	

The presence of both modern and medieval pottery suggests that this part of the landscape has been subjected to midden spreading, and therefore agricultural activity, for a considerable period of time. The quantity of flint is low, relating to the general distribution across the wider landscape. The recovery of a leaf-shaped arrowhead from run 4 is significant given its proximity to the area of boggy ground and may hint at the use of this part of the landscape for hunting activities.

Field 13 (NGR ND 2137 6621)

The field is located around 1km east of field 11 and occupies a gentle west-facing slope. At the northern end of the field the topography becomes more undulating with small rises separated by shallow depressions. The field is around 1.5km west of Coopers Hill chambered cairn. It had been ploughed and well-weathered and was walked in bright and sunny conditions. Nineteen 'runs' were surveyed, the majority of which produced material including modern pottery, prehistoric pottery, flint and glass.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Prehistoric Pot	Flint	Glass
4	1		1	
5	4		1	
6			2	
7	2			1
8			2	
9	1		2	
10	1			
11	1		2	
12			1	
13			4	
14			11	
15		1	4	
16			7	
17			3	

The field was relatively devoid of 'modern' material, compared with the neighbouring fields suggesting perhaps that this had not been subject to the same system of midden spreading seen elsewhere in the landscape. The identification of a single piece of prehistoric pottery is unusual in the Caithness context and is the first piece to have been collected as part of the wider fieldwalking project. It is a small, abraded piece of coarse pottery with a reddish outer surface and a black inner surface. No decoration is immediately apparent on the outer surface.

The distribution of flint increased notably towards the northern end of the field where two clusters were identified in 'runs' 15 and 16.

Cluster No.	Flint	Grid ref of cluster
15c	140	ND 21622 65916
16c	34	ND 21642 65919

The clusters comprised predominantly blade dominated debitage, suggesting that they may relate to Mesolithic activity. The recovery of a blade core and a microlith from cluster 15c further indicates a Mesolithic date for the material. Cluster 15c was around

25m in diameter and occupied the edge of one of the undulations at the northern end of the field. Cluster 16c was located at the base of this undulation, around 14m to the north of 15c and may in fact represent the movement of material down the slope from the larger cluster.

Field 14 (NGR ND 2165 6596)

The field is located immediately to the west of field 13 and occupies a gentle west-facing slope. The field had been ploughed and well-weathered and was walked in bright and sunny conditions. Sixteen 'runs' were surveyed with walkers moving east-west across the field. The majority of 'runs' produced material, including modern pottery, flint and glass.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Flint	Glass
1	3		
2			
3	1	1	
4	3	2	
5	1		
6		1	
7	3		
8	3	6	
12		1	
13		5	1
14		1	
15	4	1	
16	3		

Again, the relatively lack of 'modern' material appears to relate to the agricultural activities in this part of the landscape, with midden spreading evidently not occurring to the same extent as elsewhere. The distribution of lithics relates to the general low-density spread of material across the wider landscape, although a cluster was noted in run 11.

Cluster No	Flint	Grid reference
11c	82	ND 21375 66213

The cluster comprised predominantly blade debitage, although it has yet to be fully analysed. It was around 13m in diameter, and occupied a slight rise close to one of the shallow depressions that characterise the northern end of the field. It is possible that this also relates to Mesolithic activity in the landscape.

Interpretation

The material recovered in the Castletown area points to the occurrence of a variety of activities across the landscape throughout the prehistoric and historic periods. Despite the problems surrounding the collection strategy for modern pottery, it is possible to distinguish tentatively between those fields in which midden spreading was carried out regularly during the 19th century and those where it was not. In addition the presence of shells and natural beach pebbles in a number of the fields provides clear indications of the occurrence of liming using shell sand. Both practices are well

documented, but it is only through the identification of such material within specific fields that it is possible to determine where they were carried out.

The distribution of lithic material across the landscape provides a fairly detailed picture of domestic activities during the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods. Without full analysis of the flint it is difficult to draw too many conclusions about the nature of the activities occurring in specific places, but it is possible to discern between 'sites' and the general 'background noise' created by a more ephemeral activities. The term 'site' is used to classify places such as clusters or concentrations of material that can be distinguished from the low-density spreads (background noise) that cover much of the landscape. A 'site' may relate to the occupation of a specific location for a period of time, an overnight camp site, or longer term settlement for example. Smaller clusters may relate to the short-term, perhaps repeated use of a particular place for the undertaking of specific activities, perhaps hunting. In contrast, the low-density spreads of material that cover much of the landscape may relate to more ephemeral activities – the rapid manufacture of a tool for immediate use, for example, or the loss or discard of material as people moved across the landscape. It is also possible that some of the lithic material, and perhaps even the sherd of pottery, was incorporated into the ploughsoil through midden spreading in the prehistoric period.

The recovery of isolated tools, such as the knife from field 1 and the arrowheads from fields 2, 11 and 12 also provides information about the occurrence of specific activities. The arrowheads are clearly related to hunting activities, and have been recovered as isolated finds in several areas of Caithness. In the context of the Castletown area it is possible to suggest that the boggy land in field 12 may have provided Neolithic populations with ideal hunting spots – close to water, it is likely that this area may have been wooded, providing cover for the hunters as they awaited the arrival of deer or other game. Similarly, the presence of a Neolithic arrowhead in field 11 may relate to hunting activities focussed on the nearby lochan. Here, however, the arrowhead was not found in isolation and could indicate that occupation in this area was more sustained, with people perhaps settling on the ridge for a few days or longer to hunt in the local landscape before moving on to another favoured location. The recovery of a Bronze Age Barbed and Tanged arrowhead in field 2 provides evidence to suggest that game continued to be a significant resource, with hunting occurring on the higher ground into the later phases of the prehistoric period.

The recovery of the polished stone axe from field 2 is exciting, as it provides an insight into another aspect of Neolithic life. This axe does not appear to have been manufactured as a functional tool, indeed the softness of the stone would have prevented it being used for chopping wood or other vegetation. The completeness of the cutting edge too indicates that this has never been used. It is possible to suggest, therefore, that this piece was manufactured for ceremonial or ritual use. Without detailed analysis of the piece it is impossible to determine an exact date for the axe, or discern whether it was manufactured using local stone or was imported.

The identification of two, possibly three scatter sites in fields 13 and 14 provides fairly detailed information about the use of this part of the landscape. The topography in this area indicates that it would have comprised a number of small lochans, or wetland areas surrounded by knolls or areas of raised ground. It is on these areas of higher ground that the lithics scatters were identified, indicating that people were

choosing to sit on ground raised above the watery land, perhaps making use of a natural vantage point in the landscape. The large quantity of blade debitage and the recovery of a microlith indicates that the scatters probably date to the Mesolithic period. It is possible, therefore to envisage the use of this part of the landscape as forming part of the routines of movement of the hunter-gatherer populations, with people visiting these places on a regular basis to hunt game, and perhaps fish. The tools necessary for the tasks were clearly manufactured on site. Perhaps people passed the time whilst waiting for animals to arrive engaged in the manufacture or repair of tools, the waste material from these activities forming the scatters apparent today. Full analysis of the lithic material will provide more detailed information about the specifics of the activities undertaken at each of these places.

Dunnet

Four fields were walked on a single day with a team of 4 local volunteers.

Field 1 (NGR ND 2131 7103)

The field is located on the northern side of Dunnet Bay, close to the shore. It occupies a gentle south-facing slope. It had been ploughed and well-weathered, and was walked in bright and sunny conditions. Seventeen 'runs' were surveyed, with walkers moving east-west across the field. All of the 'runs' produced material, predominantly modern pottery, although medieval pottery, flint, glass and clay pipe were also recovered.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Medieval Pot	Flint	Glass	Clay Pipe
1	11			1	2
2	7			2	
3	6		1		1
4	2		1		
5	5				
6	3		1		
7	12		1		
8	12			4	
9	2		1		
10	6	1	1		
11	2				
12	3		1		
13	2		1		
14	3				
15	8		1	2	
16			1		
17	5				1

The presence of modern pottery again indicates that this field has been subjected to midden spreading in the recent past, also demonstrated by the presence of glass and clay pipe. The recovery of a single sherd of medieval pottery (Norse grass tempered ware) may indicate that midden spreading, and consequently cultivation, has been carried out in this part of the landscape since the 1st Millennium AD. The quantity of lithics was surprisingly low, considering the location of the field in the landscape, and evidently relates to the low-density spread of material across the wider landscape.

Field 2 (NGR ND 2202 7123)

The field is located around 1km to the south-east of field 1, within the village of Dunnet. It occupies a gentle west-facing slope and was walked in bright and sunny conditions. The field had been ploughed and well-weathered. Eight 'runs' were surveyed, with walkers moving west-east across the field. All eight 'runs' produced material, predominantly modern pottery but including medieval pottery, flint, glass and clay pipes.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Medieval Pot	Flint	Glass	Clay Pipe
1	20			6	
2	3		2		
3	6				
4	26	1		5	
5	13				
6	16		1		1
7	3				
8	47		1	6	1

The presence of both modern and medieval pottery indicates, again, the occurrence of agricultural activities in this area over a considerable period of time. The quantity of flint material was also surprisingly low, but may also relate to the low-density spread of material across the landscape.

Field 3 (NGR ND 2266 7085)

The field is located around 1km to the east of field 2, slightly higher up the west-facing slope. It had been ploughed and well-weathered and was walked in bright and sunny conditions. Twelve 'runs' were surveyed in total, with walkers moving west-east across the field. All but one of the 'runs' produced material, predominantly modern pottery but including flint, glass, stone, clay pipe and metalwork.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Flint	Glass	Stone	Clay Pipe	Metalwork
1	7					
2	13		5			
4	6	2				
5	26		1			
6	5	1				
7	3					
8	2					
9	10					1
10	30		2		1	
11	6			11		
12	15					

The quantity of modern pottery, glass, clay pipe and metalwork indicates that the spreading of midden has occurred. The recovery of a decorated spindle whorl, dated to the later prehistoric or early historic period (?) may represent a chance loss or may indicate that the practice of midden spreading was undertaken during these early periods. The quantity of flint is extremely low, and may also represent chance losses rather than belonging to the low-density spread of material identified elsewhere.

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Field 3 (NGR ND 2245 7071)

The field is located immediately to the west of field 2, and occupies the lower slopes of the west-facing hill. It had been ploughed and well-weathered and was walked in bright and sunny conditions. Ten 'runs' were surveyed in this field, with the majority producing material, predominantly modern pottery, but including flint, stone, clay pipe and glass.

Run No.	Modern Pot	Flint	Stone	Clay Pipe	Glass
1	10	2		1	1
2	5		1		
3	4			1	
4	2				
6	8	1			7
7	5	1			
8	9				2
9	1				2
10	8			1	

The quantity of modern pottery is lower than in the neighbouring fields, but nevertheless indicates the occurrence of midden spreading for agricultural purposes, together with the glass and clay pipe. The quantity of flint is, again, surprisingly low and may relate to chance losses rather than forming part of the general 'background noise' that occurs elsewhere in the landscape.

Interpretation

The material from Dunnet provides an interesting picture of 19th century middening practices, demonstrating that the fields walked had been under cultivation for at least 100 years. The presence of earlier, medieval pottery and a spindle whorl may provide indications of a longer period of agricultural activities in the area, with the material perhaps also deriving from middens.

The low quantity of lithic material across the whole area is interesting, and indicates that this part of the county may not have been utilised to any great extent during the early prehistoric period.

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