

NC80SW0035

7101 SUT

7
1
0

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SURVEY
OF
THE AREA TO BE AFFORESTED
BY
SUTHERLAND ESTATES
IN
DUNROBIN GLEN

Undertaken by Jill Harden
May 1990
for Sutherland Estates

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
The survey	3
Glossary of terms	4
The results	5
Conclusions	10
Recommendations	11

APPENDICES OF MAP & PHOTOGRAPHS

DUNROBIN GLEN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Introduction

Sutherland Estate's proposal to afforest the upper part of the Dunrobin Glen will take in c460ha of heather moorland.

The area stretches from the 140m contour to a maximum of 325m OD, with all aspects of slope included. It incorporates Beinn Cas a Bhiach in the north and Glen Rock in the south. The strath of the Allt nan Sgeith runs NW-SE through the centre of the area, whilst its headwaters cut the slopes at right angles to the main burn.

Three areas of archaeological interest had been noted on the plans provided by the Estate:

a prehistoric settlement and field system at NC 79550453;
two so-called 'peat huts' at NC 79410469 and NC 80020431.

It had been realised that the potential for prehistoric and historic settlement in the Glen was far greater than that recorded in the National Monuments Record and noted on the afforestation plans. A detailed archaeological survey was therefore requested, to determine the extent of visible sites on the ground. The results of the survey are to be incorporated into the afforestation proposals as unplanted areas.

The survey

The wide, U-shaped glen is covered in heather, of varied depth and thickness due to the mosaic pattern of controlled burning undertaken in the past. This is broken up by small patches of grass and bracken around the burns. Peat cuttings at the top, W, end of the glen were being worked on the days of the survey.

The survey followed the lie of the land, splitting the area into three notional parts:

1. The area N of the Allt nan Sgeith, but below the road
2. The area S of the Allt nan Sgeith, around Glen Rock but mainly below 200m due to the steepness of the slope
3. The W part of the area below Coire Cnoc na Gamhna and Cnoc na Gamhna and the 250m contour.

Hill slopes above the 250m contour were not investigated. Where they were N-facing it was felt that it was extremely unlikely that there would be any trace of land-use. Where they were S-facing the slopes were so steep as to make settlement practically impossible.

Glossary of terms

The following types of structures could be expected in this landscape:

Prehistoric settlements:

Consisting of hut circles (round houses), field dykes and piles of stones resulting from clearing patches for cultivation (clearance cairns), burnt mounds, and any other evidence for prehistoric land-use. They probably date to between c1,500BC and 500AD.

Prehistoric burial mounds or cairns:

Large stone cairns which are usually circular or rectangular in plan. Often, all that remains of them today are the huge slabs and/or boulders which formed the entrance passage and internal burial chamber. These date to between 3,500BC and 2,000BC.

Gravel mounds may have been used in prehistoric times for burials. Pits would have been dug into a mound to bury the dead, either as an inhumation in a stone-lined box (cist) or as cremations in leather bags or large funerary urns. These date to between 2,200BC and 1,000BC.

Medieval/post-medieval settlements:

These are characterised by the remains of long thin rectangular buildings, or sub-rectangular structures often with rounded ends. They are often associated with kilns and traces of cultivation such as cord-rigs, lazy-beds or fields. Little academic work has been done on rural settlements of this period (c1000AD-19th century)

Abandoned post-medieval settlements:

Stone-built rectangular structures and associated field systems, usually standing several courses above the ground, are presumed to date to the 19th century.

Shielings:

Small structures, situated away from main areas of settlement, are usually interpreted as shielings or shelters used only during the summer whilst away on the high hill grazings.

The results

The following features were recorded:

A Abandoned post-medieval settlement 1: [centred at NC 79150485]
(HRC No.NC70SE48)

This group of unroofed buildings and field walls is well preserved. The southern extreme of this settlement, consisting of field dykes and evidence of lazy-bed cultivation, lies within the proposed afforestation boundary.

B Prehistoric settlement 1: [NC 79410469] (HRC No.NC70SE39)

Described in the sites and monuments record held by Highland Regional Council as an isolated peat-silted hut circle, 10.5m N-S and 8m W-E, within a tumbled wall, 0.4m maximum height and spread approximately 2m. The entrance to the structure is in the S quarter. A few lynchets and stone clearance heaps were evident around it.

C Prehistoric settlement 2: [NC 796045] (HRC No.NC70SE40)

Described in the sites and monuments record held by Highland Regional Council as three substantial, heather-covered, hut circles situated towards the bottom of a S-facing slope. They vary in size, from 13m by 11.5m to 12.5m by 10.5m within tumbled walls spread 2.5m-3.5m and up to 0.6m high. The entrances to the structures tend to be in the S or SSE arc, on the longer axis. No definite area of cultivation could be seen, but about 200m to the NE, uphill from the three hut circles, is an area of clearance heaps.

D Prehistoric settlement 3: [NC 80020431] (HRC No.NC80SW22),

Described in the sites and monuments record held by Highland Regional Council as an isolated heather-covered hut circle, 9m in diameter, within a tumbled wall, 0.3m maximum height and spread approximately 2m. The entrance to the structure is in the S arc. There is some evidence of cleared ground to the S and E, with a couple of field clearance heaps.

**E Prehistoric settlement 4: [NC 80120430]
previously unrecorded**

Approximately 150m due E of the above site is a small flat-topped grass and low heather covered spur of ground about the 170m contour. It is sub-circular in shape, c10m by 12m, and is thought to be the platform of a prehistoric hut circle. No enclosing wall has survived. A low, heather-covered dyke runs away in a zig-zag easterly direction from it. The surrounding slope is covered in thick, deep heather, masking any associated field clearance heaps, dykes or lynchets that might be present.

**F Prehistoric settlement 5: [approx NC 80620396]
previously unrecorded**

This hut circle is situated down slope from the ride in the existing plantation, on a prominent heather clad knoll, c15m above the grassy flood-plain of the Allt nan Sgeith. It is c8m in diameter within walls spread c1.5m and standing c0.3m high. The entrance is not particularly obvious. There is a small area of clearance cairns to the NE in deep heather.

**G Prehistoric settlement 6: [approx NC 81050365]
previously unrecorded**

Set on a slight shelf of the S facing hill-slope are the upstanding remains of an impressive hut circle. The area in front of the main entrance, to the S, is grass covered, but most of the monument is clad in deep heather.

Large boulders mark the sides of the main entrance, c1m wide, which gives access to an area c12m diameter within the walls. At the 'front' of the structure the wall is at least 0.5m high, whilst at the 'back' it is c1.5m high, and is spread between 1.5m and 2.5m.

There is a second break in the wall, in the SE, which could possibly mark the entrance to a souterrain under the grassy area.

No associated fields were recovered on the thick heather-clad slopes, although the areas to the SW and SE looked promising.

**H Prehistoric settlement 7: [approx NC 80900340]
previously unrecorded**

Approximately 100m WSW of the confluence of the Allt nan Sgeith and the Glen Rock Burn, on a slight platform set onto the NE facing slope above the flood plain, are the remains of a hut circle. It is c7m in diameter between walls c0.2m high and spread c1m, with no immediately obvious entrance. The area to the NW and NE has been in cultivation in historic times so that any earlier field systems have presumably been destroyed.

J Shielling 1: [approx NC 80720339] previously unrecorded

A small circular setting of boulders, c4m in diameter, was located on the steep, NE facing, hill-side in the lee of the consumption dyke. Its size has led to its interpretation as a shielling.

**K Prehistoric settlement 8 & Shielling 2:
[approx NC 80730342] previously unrecorded**

Just below the steep slopes and crags at the ESE end of Glen Rock, and below the consumption dyke, is a slight mounded spur of ground. On this are the remains of a hut circle, c8m in diameter between walls c0.3m high and spread to c1m, with an entrance to the SE.

Against the W side of the mound, set down from the hut circle, is a ring of boulders, c6m in diameter. This could be the remains of a shielling, as it is similar in form to that noted above.

**L Prehistoric burial mound?: [approx NC 08250393]
previously unrecorded**

A prominent mound on the flood plain of the Allt nan Sgeith, just downstream from its confluence with the Allt Horn, could have been used at some time in the prehistoric period for burials. There are no features to confirm or refute this interpretation, but its location within the landscape could be significant.

M Abandoned medieval/post-medieval settlement 1:
[centred NC 80020400] previously unrecorded

On a grass covered area, between and just above the confluence of the Allt Horn and Allt nan Sgeith, is a complex consisting of a long house with subsidiary structures, enclosure wall with internal dykes and a fine stone-built kiln.

The long house, aligned WSW-ENE, had been constructed on a pronounced slope down towards the Allt Horn. It is at least 18m long, with a semi-circular addition at the E end c3m radius. The width of the building is c2-3m, being slightly narrower at the uphill, W end. The walls are a single boulder wide and high, with a definite entrance in the S wall near the W end.

Subsidiary structures, continuing the axis of the long house and at right angles to it, have also been recorded.

Some 12m SSE of the W end of the long house, down towards the Allt nan Sgeith, are the remains of a kiln, c1.2m in diameter and 0.85m deep, with a flue area to the SSE.

N Prehistoric settlement 9: [approx NC 79510387]
previously unrecorded

Above the E bank of the Allt Eas nan Lair, just before a significant change in angle of this NE facing, deep heather-clad slope, are the remains of a hut circle. It is c10m in diameter between walls c0.25m high, spread to 1.5-2m. The entrance is to the E.

To the SE a large, flat area of ground, covered in deep, thick heather provided no obvious traces of contemporary cultivation although apparently ideally situated for such use.

P Abandoned medieval/post-medieval settlements 2:
[centred NC 79070400] previously unrecorded

Just N of the confluence of a minor burn with the Allt Cnoc na Gamhna, is a grass covered area with a complex of structures. It consists of the remains of two long houses and associated field dykes, a kiln with an attached store(?), a rectangular structure and associated lazy-beds.

One of the long houses is aligned approximately N-S, is c14m long and 2.5-3m wide, between walls only a single boulder wide and high. In the W wall, towards the N end, is a broken rotary quern stone c0.25m radius, with central hole c0.1m in diameter. A field dyke runs W from the SW corner.

About 7m to the S is another long house, aligned W-E, at least 18m long and 2.5-3m wide, between walls only a single boulder high and wide. An entrance is situated in the S wall c8m from the SW corner of the building. This long house is subdivided into four rooms.

To the E, down slope from the second long house, are the remains of a kiln and (?)store and rectangular structure, both of which could be more recent than the long houses. The kiln is c2m in diameter and c1m deep, with a rectangular structure built against the E side c4m long and 2.5m wide, across walls c0.6m wide and at least two courses high. About 10m further E is a rectangular structure c6m long and 3m wide between walls c0.6m wide and at least two courses high.

Q Abandoned post-medieval settlement 2:
[centred NC 79000392] previously unrecorded

Above the S bank of the Allt Cnoc na Gamhna is a wide grassy area with four enclosures of various sizes.

At the W extreme are the remains of a structure roughly aligned N-S. It is at least 14m long and 3m wide, between walls c1m wide and standing at least 3 courses high. The side walls are not straight, with a marked inward kink at the cross-wall c9m from the S end.

About 6m E is a sub-rectangular structure c10-11m long and 3m wide, between walls c1m wide and standing 2 or 3 courses high.

A low wall runs ENE from the NE corner of this structure in an irregular path towards the largest enclosure some 30m away. There is a break in this wall just before its junction with the SW corner of the enclosure.

The irregular shape of this enclosure reflects the path of the burn and the flat grassy patch immediately S of it. It defines an area c52m long and at most 16m wide with a wall still standing some 2 or 3 courses high and c0.8m wide.

About 8m to the S, in the heather, is another irregularly shaped enclosure, but it is only c7m long and c5m wide, within walls c0.8m wide and 3 courses high.

**R Prehistoric settlement 10: [approx NC 78860413]
previously unrecorded**

Two hut circles are situated on the E facing break of slope below the crags of Cnoc na Gamhna in thick heather and surrounded by rushes and tiny patches of grass. The area to the E is flat and wide but there are no immediately obvious traces of associated cultivation.

The N hut circle is c12m in diameter across walls spread to c1.5-2m and standing 0.3m high on the W arc and 1m high on the E. The entrance is to the SE.

About 30m to the SW is another, smaller hut circle. It is c10m in diameter across walls spread c1.5m and 0.3m high. There is no obvious entrance.

Conclusions

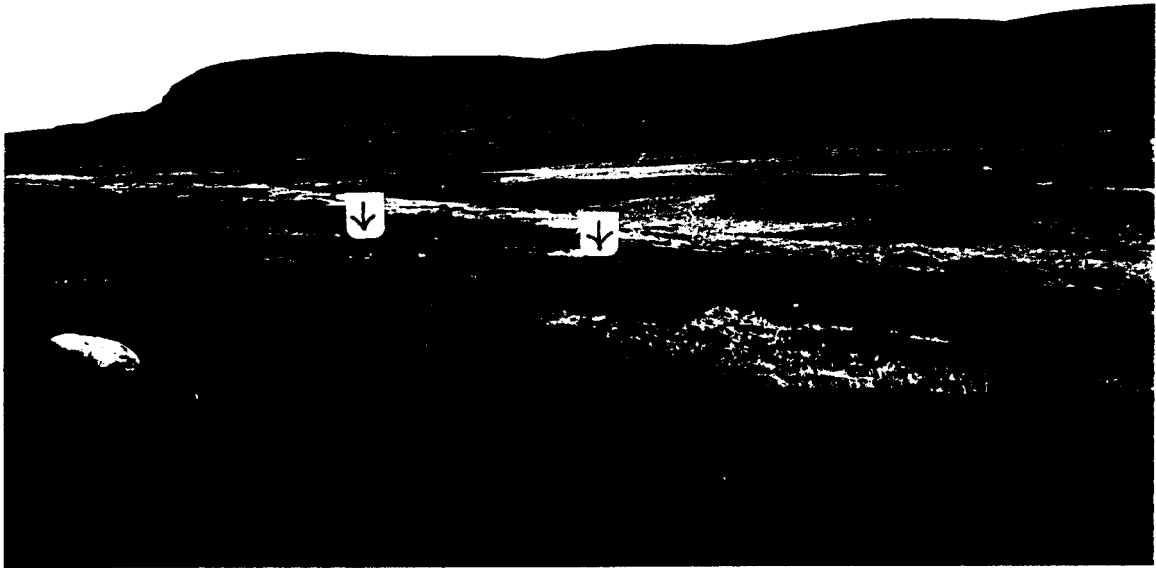
As expected, this area is quite rich in prehistoric and historic settlement. The archaeological survey undertaken for Sutherland Estates has identified:

- a possible prehistoric burial mound;
- ten areas of prehistoric settlement;
- two areas of medieval/post-medieval settlement;
- two areas of abandoned post-medieval settlement;
- and a couple of possible shielings.

It is impossible to say whether the farmsteads of any particular period were in use at the same time, or if they represent an ebbing and flowing of settlement over the years. Nevertheless, Dunrobin Glen contains a concentration of settlement features, as well as evidence for associated land use, which are well worth preserving and managing as part of the forestry proposals.

Recommendations

1. The areas of archaeological and historical value, marked approximately on the plan attached, should be omitted from any forestry planting proposals.
2. In advance of any forestry work - i.e. fencing, preparing access routes, ploughing, etc. - the areas should be marked on the ground by an archaeologist to protect them from accidental damage or destruction.
3. The areas should be permanently marked in some way, to protect them from machine damage in the future:
e.g. in the development of rides and access routes,
use as turning areas for large machinery, etc.
4. If self-seeded trees begin to show in these areas:
 - i. they should be pulled out if less than two years old,
 - ii. if they are more established they should be cut at the base without disturbing the roots.
5. The area has several lengths of old boundary walls cutting across it and these could be incorporated in any rides that are planned. Thus the old land divisions could be reflected in the new forest pattern.



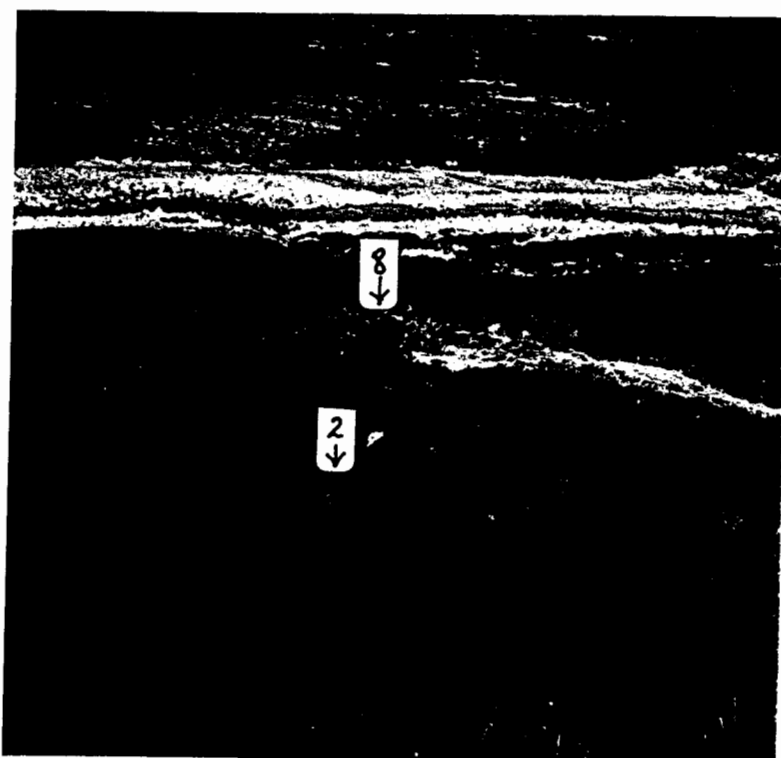
C: PREHISTORIC SETTLEMENT 2



F: PREHISTORIC SETTLEMENT 5



G: PREHISTORIC SETTLEMENT 6



K: PREHISTORIC SETTLEMENT 8 & SHIELING 2



M: REMAINS OF LONG HOUSE



M: KILN AT ABANDONED SETTLEMENT 1

