

## 2. INTRODUCTION

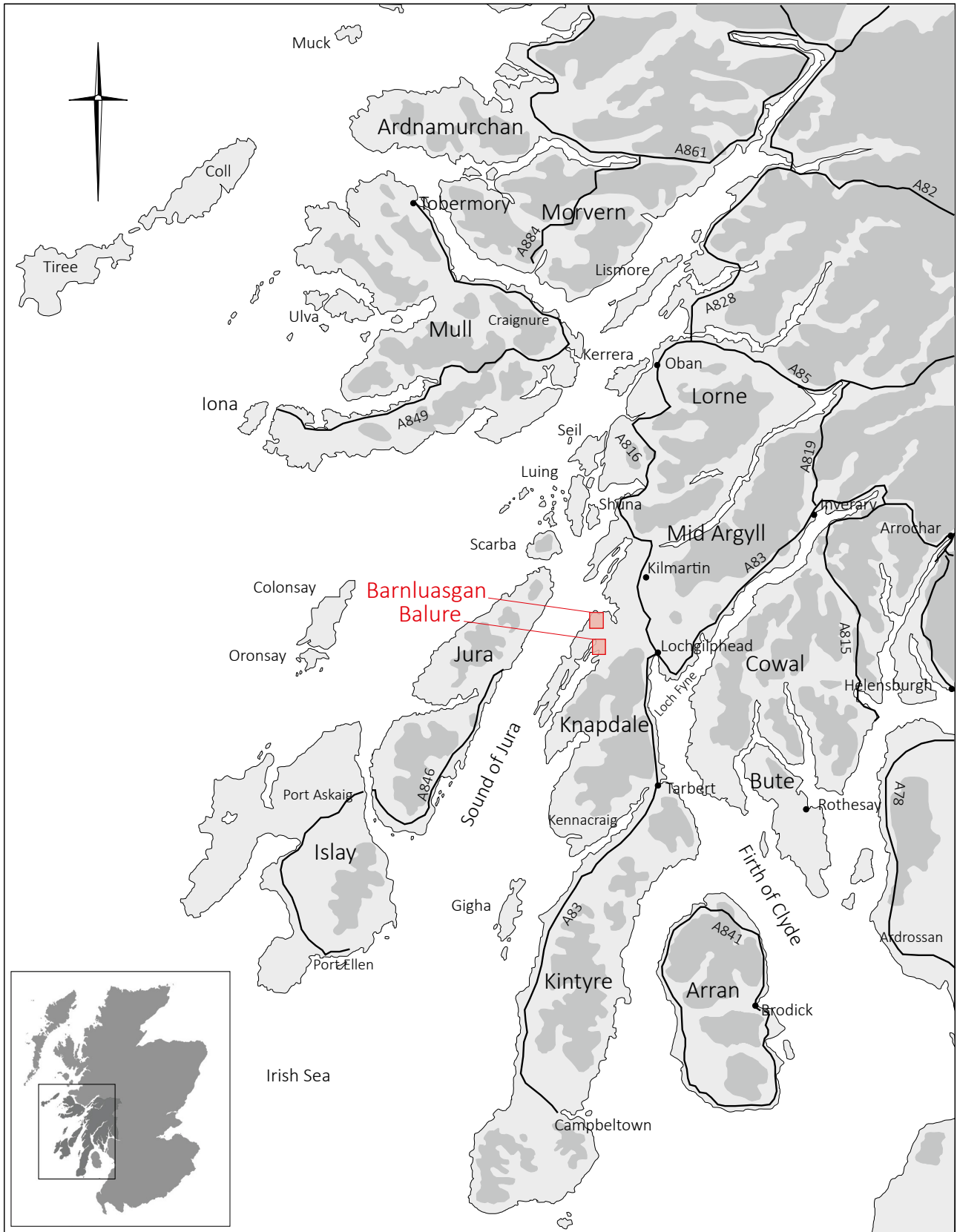
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Many drystone enclosure structures in the west of Scotland, particularly in Argyll, are known as duns, a Gaelic vernacular term that can be used to classify any fortified place, or even a naturally defensive place. Duns are the commonest Iron Age site type in western Scotland, with a particular concentration of sites on hilltops and crags in Argyll. The term 'dun' was adopted by the former Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS), who used it to distinguish smaller (up to 375m<sup>2</sup>) thick-walled stone enclosures from larger stone enclosures they termed 'forts'. This classification is now perhaps unsatisfactory, as duns and forts in Argyll (along with some sites termed by RCAHMS as 'enclosures' and 'brochs') form a heterogeneous group, in terms of size, date, structural morphology and landscape locations. However, in this discussion to avoid confusion, past-type site designations for the two sites discussed here will be used, although the need for reclassification, particularly of the site at Barnluasgan, will be addressed in the final section.

The function, date and social significance of these structures have been much discussed, particularly in relation to what has more recently been termed the 'Atlantic roundhouse', although this debate has tended to focus on the broch (and to a lesser degree the wheelhouse) conducted, with a few exceptions, within a framework focused on the Western and Northern Isles (Nieke 1990; Armit 1991, 2004;

Hingley 1992; Parker Pearson et al 1996, 1999; Harding 1997, 2004a; Gilmour 2000; Henderson 2000, 2007; MacKie 2000, 2007b, 2008, 2010). Similarly the chronology and typology of enclosed Iron Age sites in Argyll has been open to debate, particularly that between Nieke/Alcock and Harding (Nieke 1990; Alcock 2003; Harding 1997, 2004a). Henderson & Gilmour have most recently summarised the debate and argued that most of the excavated dun sites date to the second half of the 1st millennium BC and while many dun sites have produced artefacts of later date, they also have evidence of earlier but poorly dated occupation or constructional phases, such as at Druim an Duin and Ardifuir, and few of the excavated sites have reliable 1st millennium AD dates for their construction (Henderson & Gilmour 2011). One of the major factors that influence the fluctuation in this debate is the paucity of diagnostic or securely dated finds from sites excavated to modern standards. The present paper reports on the excavation of two dun sites, Barnluasgan and Balure, which provide data on this debate, including new radiocarbon dates, and discusses the sites within the context of other Iron Age sites in the area. The sites lie about 5km apart in North Knapdale, south of the Crinan Canal, in the area around the head of Loch Sween (Illus 1).

Note: artefacts in this report are described by their catalogue number, eg <100>; small find (SF) and context number (C) correspondences can be found in the catalogue entries. All the illustrations (except Illus 112) are by Roddy Regan, © Kilmartin Museum.



Illus 1 Site locations within Argyll. (Image by Roddy Regan, © Kilmartin Museum)