

3 POST-EXCAVATION ANALYSIS AND SPECIALIST REPORTS, by Karen Hardy, Alan Saville, Roger Miket and Torben Bjarke Ballin

The excavation was summarised in an interim report (Rees et al 1994) and some of the hand-excavated lithic and bone artefacts were brought to the National Museum's former Artefact Research Unit in Edinburgh. The predominant Mesolithic character of the lithic and bone artefacts from the lower levels at the rockshelter was confirmed by an exploratory radiocarbon date on one of the bone tools (OxA-4994: 7590±90 BP). Summaries of the excavation and the finds were prepared for publication to bring the site to wider attention (Saville & Miket 1994a; 1994b), to substantiate and clarify news of the excavation which had already appeared in the national (e.g. *The Sunday Times*, 20 February 1994) and local press (e.g. *The Oban Times*, 3 March 1994; *Teachd an Tir*, spring 1994), and to assist in the necessary fund-raising for post-excavation.

During the excavation, large numbers of finds were recovered from the site, mostly during trowelling, or as a result of dry-sieving some of the deposits through a 2mm mesh. In addition, to complement the recovery by hand excavation, substantial bulk sampling was undertaken. Selected blocks and spits of deposit from identifiable contexts (approximately 1.5 tonnes, or c 11.8 cwt, of soil) were transported in fertiliser bags to Edinburgh University's Archaeology Department in the hope of further processing under laboratory conditions. The decision to engage in this form of extensive sampling arose from the time constraints under which the excavation sondage was carried out, as described above.

The *ad hoc* circumstances of the excavation had precluded making any arrangements in advance for post-excavation or final publication. Roger Miket brought together a small, initially voluntary, working group of specialists from the Archaeology Departments of the University of Edinburgh and the National Museums of Scotland, which began the process of assessing the An Corran finds and estimating the likely costs of producing a report (see various assessment proposals in the project archive by S Boardman et al; P Milburn; and N Murray). Initial grants were obtained in 1996, principally from Historic Scotland and Highland Council, with the National Museum's Artefact Research Unit taking responsibility for the administration of the project. At the end of 1996 Dr Karen Hardy was appointed as part-time An Corran project manager and specialist, and various other specialist reports were commissioned. The initial objective, to produce a final report by the end of 1998, was almost achieved in first draft form, but, as in the case of the Kilellan, Islay, post-excavation project (Ritchie 2005, 5), the An Corran project was put into abeyance by the demise of the

Artefact Research Unit and the activity associated with the creation of the new Museum of Scotland (opened in 1998), and by the other commitments of the main protagonists.

However, references to An Corran in several publications kept the site in the frame as far as its relevance for the Scottish Mesolithic is concerned (e.g. Bonsall 1996; 1997; Mithen 2000; Saville 2003; 2004b; Hardy & Wickham-Jones 2007). Particular interest in aspects of the human and animal skeletal remains was shown by Dr Nicky Milner, who, together with Dr Oliver Craig, was responsible for obtaining further radiocarbon dates and stable isotope data (Milner & Craig 2009). Further funding from Historic Scotland became available in 2008–2010 to reignite the project and to allow Dr Torben Bjarke Ballin to collate the archive and bring together all the available material into a draft final report. Alan Saville, as the main stakeholder for the post-excavation project throughout its lengthy gestation, was responsible in 2010–2011 for preparing this final report for publication, but all the main authors have contributed to and signed off on the report as it now stands.

It remains unclear to the main authors of this report how much of the bulk-sampled material referred to above was eventually fully processed. It is the case that some sub-sampling and processing was done and that the residues from this were retained, but there is uncertainty over how much of the total this represents and how much possibly was mislaid. Strenuous efforts were made to clarify the position and to locate any overlooked bulk samples or sub-samples, but without resolving the matter, and it must be concluded that some of the bulk-sampled material may have been lost. However, 108 small bags of unwashed soil samples which had been intended for insect sampling or reference purposes were available. These were sieved and did produce numerous additional artefacts. There also remains a possibility that a few artefacts which came to light at various stages while the site was partially exposed in 1993–94 have not been traced.

Thus it is necessary to record the fact that the archaeological residues on which this report is based are more in the nature of a grab sample (and one to which limited stratigraphic control can be applied), rather than a controlled sample which can reliably be assessed for its representativeness. Despite this and other difficulties resulting from the emergency nature of the excavation, the An Corran site and its finds are regarded as of considerable significance for Scottish prehistory and well-deserving of the documentation provided here.

Below, the archaeological residues are presented and interpreted by a number of specialists. The finds include prehistoric artefacts, as well as faunal and botanical material relating to the An Corran site. In total 5184 lithic artefacts were retrieved, in addition to 114 bone tools, two antler tools, and one copper-alloy pin. The faunal and botanical material embraces 46 human bones and teeth, approximately 8000 vertebrate bones and bone fragments (totalling c 4.6kg), and approximately 11kg of shell (marine molluscs). Thirty-five flotation samples provided mainly charred hazelnut shells and charcoal, as well as fragments of land snails. Eighteen samples were radiocarbon dated; those samples were based on selected bone tools, as well as human and animal bone.

The specialist contributions were undertaken and completed at different stages during the protracted gestation of this report, and therefore do not necessarily align with all aspects of the final overview as presented here, for example when considering any

phasing or grouping of the contexts. This is particularly so since most contributions were completed before all of the radiocarbon dates were available and it has created some inconsistencies, which it is now impossible to resolve for the present report without major reworking of the data. However, all the material from the excavation is held at National Museums Scotland and is available for further study or reanalysis, as has already begun to happen (for PhD theses at the University of York being undertaken by Ben Elliott and Emily Hellewell).

In this report, all artefacts are referred to by their number (CAT no.) in the individual specialist catalogues, which form part of the site archive (to be deposited with the RCAHMS). In view of the particular importance of the extensive bone artefact assemblage and its relevance for site chronology its catalogue is included with this report ([Appendix Two](#)). The An Corran finds are registered at National Museums Scotland with the assemblage designation X.1994.15.