

## I.

## FURTHER ANTIQUITIES AT SKIPNESS, ARGYLL.

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I had the honour of reading a paper to the Society<sup>1</sup> last year, in which I attempted to give as complete a catalogue as possible of the ancient monuments in a certain area of northern Kintyre. Since this paper went to the press several more colonies of huts have come to light in the area taken for survey; and, as completeness was the primary object of the inquiry, I have ventured to put together the following notes on these sites by way of an appendix to the former paper. I regret that these remains were missed in the original survey, but believe that all sites of any importance have now been located; though there are undoubtedly numbers of single huts, and possibly small groups also, lying here and there under thick cover or in inconspicuous places, which are unlikely ever to be found except by pure accident. Some excavation has also been done on a few of the sites.

This paper has accordingly been divided into two parts:—

(A) A list of sites omitted from the previous paper.

(B) An account of the excavations.

References will be found frequently to serial numbers of monuments; such numbers, when below 123, are those allotted in the previous paper. The general arrangement, method of using the map, etc., are the same as in the previous paper, where they are explained.

## (A) LIST OF ADDITIONAL SITES.

No. 134. This is a group of five huts and an enclosure. It lies on the right bank of Claonaig Water, 120 yards west of the junction of Allt nan Capull. The huts are of stone, the largest being a well-preserved rectilinear building with rounded corners, measuring 13 feet by 8 feet, and having a doorway in the middle of each long side. The enclosure measures 27 feet by 15 feet, and is of an irregular oval shape; it is on account of this irregularity that it is assumed to have been an enclosure rather than a roofed house.

*N.B.*—The sides of the valley below this point are largely covered with scrub-wood and dense undergrowth, which hide any inconspicuous remains completely. It is certain, however, that there are huts and numerous "platforms"<sup>2</sup> in these woods at different places.

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings*, vol. liii. pp. 76-117.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, vol. liii. pp. 109-112.

No. 133. *Cnocan Tigh Searmonaiche*.—Unmistakable remains of foundations can be made out on this hillock, the name of which suggests that it may have been used for some religious purpose—possibly after the Reformation and before the building of the present parish church at Claonaig in 1762.

No. 129. A small unmarked burn joins the Claonaig Water on its left bank at about spot-level 197. There are two large turf huts and a mound beside this burn.

No. 128. This is a large colony of huts, but they are all in extremely bad condition and some have dwindled to mere mounds. The site is on the left bank of Claonaig Water between spot-levels 261 and 222. The largest of the huts are at the upper end, and stand on flat ground in the loops of the burn.

No. 127. This group contains at least twelve huts of usual types. It lies on both banks of the short right tributary of Claonaig Water that joins it at spot-level 272. The lowest is just above the sharp angle shown on the map, and the group extends uphill from that point.

No. 126. This is a large colony of huts lying on both banks of the right tributary of the Claonaig Water which forms the parish boundary, from above spot-level 386 to about the head of the arrow which indicates the direction of the stream. They appear to be of the usual types, but when visited were too much overgrown with bracken to count or examine satisfactorily.

No. 123. A single hut beside an unmarked burn that runs roughly parallel to, and to the west of, a burn that is marked on the map some 350 yards to the west of the parish boundary at the point mentioned under No. 126 above.

No. 124. A small burn runs down past the face of a very conspicuous ridge of rock which crosses the head of the Claonaig Water valley at spot-level 362; a large oblong turf hut stands on its left bank beside a turf dyke—*i.e.* about 70 yards south of the spot-level.

No. 125. Four mounds bearing traces of small oblong huts stand on both banks of the head of Claonaig Water just above the sharp turn which it makes at spot-level 370.

No. 136. The nucleus of this colony lies on the left bank of the headwaters of the burn that feeds Loch Cruinn, and extends from spot-level 537 to the lower end of a steep rocky cleft. The huts, however, which are at least twenty-two in number, are considerably scattered; some lie as much as 100 yards from the burn both to east and west, while others are strung out to the west along the old Skipness-Clachan road, the traces of which can be made out at this point quite clearly. The huts are mostly round or oblong, with little stone appearing in their foundations; two of



the largest, which are close to the bank of the burn, have been undermined and more than half washed away.

There are two other colonies of similar huts lying some 200 and 250 yards respectively from the burn mentioned above in a WSW. direction; but as they lie just across the watershed—which is marked here by a conspicuous dyke of trap—they are outside the area which this survey was originally designed to include. They should be borne in mind nevertheless, as they are clearly associated with No. 136 and with the old road mentioned above.

No. 135. Two large rectilinear huts with rounded corners, lying on a spur which bears spot-level 595, 500 yards south-west of the upper end of Loch Cruinn.

No. 80. In my previous paper I gave this number as being a single hut. This is wrong, as traces of at least six can be found by the side of Loch Cruinn at this point. The old road mentioned under No. 136 above can also be traced here.

No. 137. At a point 500 yards due west of the south corner of Claonaig Inn a dotted line will be found running into the continuous line that represents a turf dyke: just inside this angle is a rectangular hollow in the ground, measuring 10 feet by 7 feet by 3 feet deep. One end and one side have been built with stone, and there is no doorway or threshold visible. It therefore seems more likely that this hollow was intended to be a tank or pit than a habitation; but there is no way of leading water into it.

No. 138. Faint traces of a very small oval hut can be made out just above the beach at a point due south of Rockfield. "Platforms" are certainly numerous in the woods lying to the south-west of this point; and there are also probably more huts than have been noted in vol. liii.

No. 132. This mound, which was almost certainly the site of a hut, lies in the course of a small burn which runs past the east side of the "Stone Circle" (No. 75), at a point 90 yards due south of the entry "5° 24'" in the margin of the map. The burn is marked as rising below this point.

No. 131. There are faint traces of possibly three huts on both banks of Allt nan Capull at the point, about 100 yards below the "A" of Allt, where the fence joins it.

No. 130. This is a small round hut lying due south of the "N" of Crow Glen (sheet 213 N.W.) and just outside the wall that bounds the wood. There may be others hereabouts, but the bracken was too thick for proper investigation.

*N.B.*—Nos. 129, 130, and 131 are all on the line of the old Skipness-Clachan road, mentioned under No. 136 above.

## (B) ACCOUNT OF EXCAVATIONS.

1. A general account has been given in the *Proceedings*, vol. liii. pp. 92 and 93, of a large colony of huts lying beside the upper portion of Allt Leam nam Meann; and I will refer the reader to this passage in order to avoid the repetitions that would be entailed by repeating here a full topographical and descriptive account of the site.

The particular hut chosen for excavation lies on the right bank of Allt Leam nam Meann, 25 yards above its junction with Allt Ruadh; it was chosen principally for the reason that the burn—which is evidently eroding its banks very quickly in this place—had already washed away at least two-thirds of the hut and the mound on which it stood, so as to leave a vertical section in which the stratification of the interior appeared with admirable clearness. On the landward side the mound slopes away to a small marshy hollow; between the eroded face and the burn lies a narrow terrace 2 feet 6 inches below the summit of the mound, consisting partly of harder layers that have resisted erosion and partly of materials fallen from the upper levels. It is important to understand the nature of this terrace, as the lowest inhabited stratum extends into it, and it will be mentioned later in connection with certain finds. The present level of the bottom of the stream is 3 feet below the terrace. The summit of the mound is flat, and the wall of the hut is indicated only by an inconspicuous swelling. Neither face of the wall can be traced, either above or below ground, with sufficient accuracy to determine the exact dimensions and shape of the hut. In the light of a general acquaintance with local types, however, it seems probable that the hut was oblong, with very rounded corners, and measured internally about 7 feet by 10 feet. But it is possible that an oval or even circular plan should be substituted; consequently no typological argument must be based on the association of this particular outline with the types of finds made. The wall was probably of stone, but whether it was mixed with any proportion of turf or not cannot now be determined.

The plan shows the general appearance of the mound and the line of the section through it; the stone-work indicated on the south-west edge of the mound appears to be part of an annexe, such as is often to be found outside these huts. The strata found are shown in fig. 2; it should be noted that this section is drawn so that its east and west ends correspond to the east and west sides of the sketch-plan, though on double the scale, and not as the actual face of the work would have appeared at any period of the excavation to an observer standing on the terrace.

(a) The lowest stratum (marked by vertical lines) is the undisturbed

glacial deposit of coarse gravel and clay, orange in colour, on which the whole structure was founded. There was a black pan  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch thick, of a bright metallic appearance, on the top of this stratum.

(b) The lowest occupation level marks, as will be seen, a definite pit sunk into the gravel, the depth in the middle being 3 feet from the summit of the mound. This stratum consists of sandy clay, generally discoloured to a bluish grey and containing charcoal; but it must be

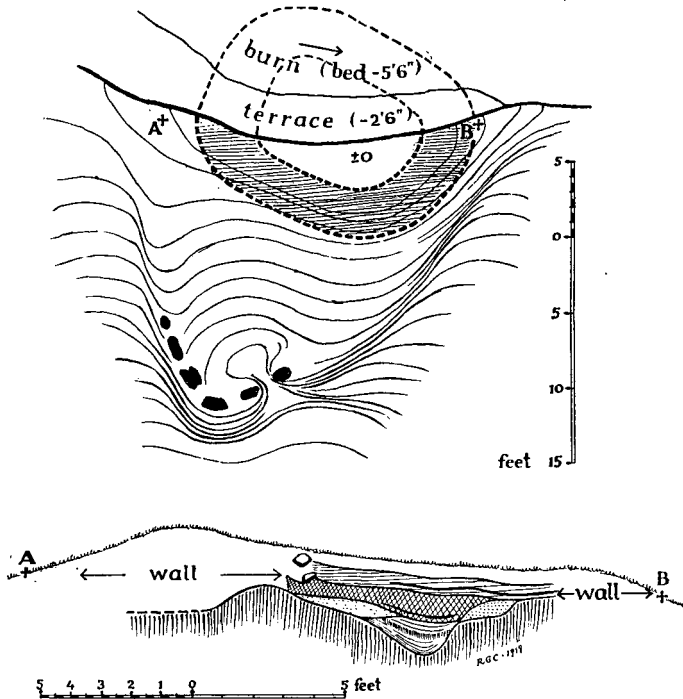


Fig. 2. Plan and section of Hut-Circle excavated at Allt Leam nam Meann.

distinguished into two layers, as a thick belt containing much charcoal begins at a height of 3 inches and runs all through it at this level, and follows the contours of the pit. Above this layer the discoloration is much more pronounced than it is below it. There is a thin layer of charcoal at the bottom of the pit, which has become incorporated into the pan that divides this layer from the orange gravel, and even underlies it in places. As has been said above, the continuation of this layer was found on the terrace, where it was covered with 2 inches of turf; it appeared to be dipping towards what must have been the original centre of the hut, but disappeared about 1 foot from the face—the terrace

outside this line appearing to consist of fallen material and no longer of uneroded beds. In this portion of the stratum that extended on to the terrace there was a continuous layer  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch thick of clubmoss, with some heather stems; the moss had been torn from its roots and laid level in the stratum. There was a thin pan below the layer of moss.

It was in this part of the terrace that the fragments of pottery were found, which will be described later. Unfortunately the connection between the turf and the clay stratum below it were so intimate that it is impossible to say with certainty whether the pottery belonged to this lowest level or had fallen on to the terrace from one of the higher strata and had then been overgrown by the grass. The former alternative seems to be more probable on the whole. It was noticed that the whole of this stratum smelled strongly of decaying vegetable matter.

(c) The next stratum (dotted) consisted of yellow sand. It indicates a flattening of the floor after the habitation described above; but had been cut through by the overlying stratum (d) and so only appeared on the sides of the section. It contained post-holes, and in these there was a certain amount of charcoal; otherwise there was little charcoal in this stratum.

(d) Above the sand was a very thick earthy deposit (cross-hatched on the section). This deposit was practically homogeneous, and showed no definite division into floors; though it was rather greyer and more clayey at the bottom, so that the transition to layer (b)—where the two are in contact—is indistinct. In this transition-layer there was a pan, and a particularly thick and solid pan sealed the top of the whole brown layer. This brown layer contained a quantity of charcoal, much of which was in large lumps, and all the other articles found; several of the grinding and hammer stones were lying packed together on the west side of the section, and the pipe-like pieces of iron were in the pan that lies in the transition-layer.

(e) The uppermost occupied stratum (marked with horizontal lines) consisted of a number of alternate layers of reddish sand and clay, and shaded off indistinguishably into the soil above, which was very thin. The fact that it was made up on top of some stones that had apparently fallen from the walls suggested that it represented a re-occupation after a considerable lapse of time. It was discoloured with charcoal, much of which seemed to consist of heather stems; and there were indications at several different levels within it of pans beginning to form. The more discoloured layers in this stratum were thin and separated from one another, but were very distinctly marked; the general appearance was one of short periods of habitation separated by intervals sufficiently long to allow the formation of some soil.

(f) The top stratum consisted of undisturbed humus 4 inches to 6 inches thick.

The total thickness of all the inhabited strata in the section was 2 feet 8 inches.

The finds were of three kinds: stone, pottery, and iron. The pottery consists of three small fragments of mediæval green-glazed ware, and two shapeless lumps of a greenish and very friable ware that are too small to identify further. The mediæval ware is wheel-made, dark olive green on the outer and red on the inner surface, and bears the typical green glaze still adhering to it in very small spots. There is unfortunately no portion of a foot or rim. The stone objects are all water-worn pebbles of various granites and sandstones, that are shown by the marks upon them to have been used for rubbing, hammering, or sharpening instruments of some not very hard metal. They are similar to the types usually found on prehistoric sites. The iron objects lie under the suspicion of being nothing more than freakish formations of the pans, and they are so completely oxidised that identification is almost impossible. One, however, looks very much like the remains of a nail, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches long; another, which is twisted and tubular, may also once have been a short bar, or some solid implement about 8 inches long.

*Conclusion.*—The only conclusions that can be drawn with safety from these results are (i.) that the site was inhabited at disconnected intervals for a long period; (ii.) that the date of some portion of this period falls within the time in which green-glazed pottery was in use. This statement, of course, permits an error in dating that might amount to 500 years or more, particularly as it is not known with certainty to which stratum the pottery belongs. But it constitutes an advance in knowledge nevertheless, as before the discovery of these fragments there had been nothing to guide one in the dating of these huts as between the local tradition, which makes them shielings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and their extremely primitive appearance, which would accord perfectly with a prehistoric date. It is interesting, further, to note the pit system of house-building continuing in use during the Middle Ages, and also the persistence of very primitive grinding and sharpening stones. Finally, the indications of interrupted habitation correspond to some extent with the tradition (alluded to above) of shielings inhabited during the summer months only; and in this connection it would be interesting to know whether this practice can be traced back to any considerable antiquity.

2. The excavation of another hut in the same colony was begun, but had to be given up before the whole site had been searched exhaustively. But it is worth while to note such results as were obtained.



This hut lies some 200 yards above the last, on the left bank of the burn. It is one of a group of three, and there is a ridge running between the other two which may have formed, with them, a small enclosure for animals. The walls of the hut chosen for excavation were of stone; but they had not been built with skill, as the interstices between the stones had been made up with earth. Their height, however, was 2 feet in most places, on the inner face (the hut being partly sunk into a mound); while those of the other two huts in the group were hardly more than swellings in the ground. The wall on one side stood immediately on the bank of the burn, and had been partly carried away. The doorway was of the usual type, narrow and flanked with upright slabs. At one point a hole was found running through the wall at a steep upward slope from the inside; it was about 4 inches across, and was full of loose red earth. As it bore no traces of fire it was probably not a flue, but simply the result of a loose stone slipping out of the wall.

The principal stratum of the floor was a pavement of small flags 1 foot below the surface. These flags covered the whole area of the floor and ran well up to the walls; they were set in grey clay similar to that found in the first excavation, and the spaces between them were made up with the same. This clay layer under the flags was not explored; the floor was only removed to the depth of the flags. The clay contained some moss, as at the other site, and a good deal of black granular matter which was not charcoal but some metallic substance resembling fragments of pan. Just inside the doorway there were substantial traces of wood; the largest lump amounted to a cubic inch or more, but the fragments were very soft and rotten. Above the flags and clay were 4 inches of alternating reddish and black deposits, with another thin layer of grey clay upon them; in this was a post-hole, made, as far as could be judged, by a stick some 2 inches in diameter, that had leaned towards the doorway.

Above the grey clay lay a brown stratum which was quite distinct in appearance from the black and reddish beds underneath. It contained the pan-like substance already referred to in much greater quantities, also a great deal of iron ore in lumps that ranged between the sizes of a potato and a pea. This ore had been roasted to a certain extent, but there was no slag, such as is found on a bloomery. At least one good lump of this ore was found on the flagged floor below, though it was only in the brown stratum that it was plentiful. All these strata ran out through the doorway without interruption.

No manufactured objects were found. The pottery, etc., from the last site and specimens of the ore from this one are in the keeping of the proprietor, P. J. Mackie, Esq., Glenreaddell, Whitehouse, Argyll.

*Conclusion.*—There is pretty clear evidence here of at least two main periods of habitation, between which the floor was remade, as is shown by the presence of the upper layer of grey clay. (This is exclusive of any strata below the flags.) It is also quite clear that in the second period, at least, the hut was used extensively for iron-smelting, and probably to a less extent in the first period as well. (It is natural to suppose that the substance which has been assumed to be broken iron-pan was the raw material of this process.) This discovery of iron-smelting makes an interesting comparison with the result of a previous excavation of a hut, which I have described in the *Proceedings*, vol. liii. p. 84.

3. This hut belongs to the group numbered 90 in my previous paper (vol. liii. p. 100); it was originally noted as a grave-mound, but this excavation proved it to be a hut while the former paper was in the press, and a hasty correction had to be inserted in the final proofs.

The hut is circular, of small size, and built of stone; the doorway can no longer be made out, nor the exact measurements determined. The deposits found on excavation were as follows:—

On the rock, which is near the surface on this exposed hillside, lay a stratum of pure red boulder-clay 6 inches deep. Above this was a floor-stratum consisting of slabs of mica-schist laid in gravelly clay—the whole being 5 inches thick. This floor-stratum contained charcoal plentifully. Immediately upon it lay a fire-spot, 1 inch thick and 18 inches in diameter, of nearly pure charcoal; the spot was blackest in the centre, and the edges shaded into the general colour of the floor. Above this floor came a layer of stones of various sizes, having their gaps and irregularities filled up with clay. This layer seemed to have been laid down in order to raise the level when the lower floor was fresh and open, as clean charcoal from the hearth was found sticking to the lower side of one of the stones which lay upon it. Above this layer came a second floor-stratum 4 inches thick, consisting of brown earth mixed with charcoal and small stones, and containing a fire-spot similar to the one in the lower stratum. It was noticed that both hearths were made up with stones and clay, the stones showing clear traces of fire. A post-hole that was found in the clay below the lower floor probably belonged to the second habitation, as the point of the post only penetrated about 3 inches into the clay, and this would not have been a sufficient depth for stability, if it had belonged to the lower floor. The inclination of the hole also showed that the post was intended to hang over that part of the hut in which the hearth of the upper floor lay. The top of the upper floor-stratum reached to within 6 inches of the surface-level, but a pile of large stones, resulting presumably from the ruin of the walls,

lay on the top of the site in such a way as to give me the erroneous impression that the whole thing was a grave-mound, as has been mentioned already.

No finds were made; the absence of bone fragments was particularly remarkable on a site where such clear traces of hearths existed.

I should like to say in conclusion that Mr R. G. Collingwood, of Pembroke College, Oxford, took the leading part in planning and carrying out these excavations.