

## 5. A NOTE ON AN EXCAVATION AT DUNAN NA NIGHEAN, COLONSAY.

In the *Proceedings* of this Society for the years 1945-46,<sup>1</sup> the monument of Dunan na Nighean, in Colonsay, was first described and planned. From this plan, without excavation it was uncertain whether it should be classified as the remains of an Iron Age dun, or as a Passage-Grave of the early second millennium B.C. The well-preserved "chamber," measuring only 12 feet across, though suitable for a Passage-Grave, would be absurdly small for the inside diameter of a fort, and a narrow passage nearly 20 feet long leading to the "chamber" again suggested a tomb rather than a dun.

Only excavation could settle the point, and accordingly in the autumn of 1949 the writer and Miss N. K. Sandars undertook a small test excavation, with the kind permission of Lord Strathcona.

The whole "chamber" area was first cleared of undergrowth and small trees, and then uncovered. A few inches below the surface it was found to have been paved, and the walls were roughly built of collapsed stones. In fact, it was clear that this structure constituted a secondary hut, and that the walls of the earlier building should lie behind. There were no finds from this secondary hut, except some long stones, polished with wear, and some scraps of pottery, evidently brought up by roots from an earlier level.

Below the paved floor was a layer of ashes and black and burnt red soil in which were a number of sherds of pottery, undecorated dark brown ware not closely datable though probably of the last century B.C. or the early centuries A.D. Below this was the decayed rocky floor of the dun, which was searched for hearths or post-holes with negative results. Charcoal from this level has been identified as Birch. On the west side of the secondary hut the walls were demolished in a search for the original wall of the fort, and this was duly found, formed of roughly coursed blocks of stone, 18 inches behind the hut wall. The section (fig. 3) shows the relationship between the two phases of occupation, and was drawn along the first part of the line A-B on the plan (fig. 2).

This small excavation has now made it possible to assign Dunan na Nighean to two phases. The first was a small dun probably belonging to one family only, and dating approximately to the Broch period or a little later. The second phase was represented by a small paved hut with a long entrance passage, all built into the collapsed stones of the dun. This hut cannot be dated and may be comparatively modern.

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