

## 2. A FRAGMENT OF COMB FROM DUN SCALPSIE, BUTE

ON the south-east shoulder of Tarmore Hill (279 ft.), Bute, is a small hill-fort which dominates the shore and arable lands around Scalpsie Bay. The rock on which the fort is situated was appropriately described as 'bold and precipitous' by J. K. Hewison in his book, *The Isle of Bute in the Olden Time* (Blackwood, Edinburgh, 1893), for it is over 100 ft. high and slopes steeply on three sides to low marshy ground some 70 ft. below. On the

west side, some 20 ft. below the fort, is a small raised beach containing a spring, the nearest available source of fresh water.

There is no record of any previous excavations on the site, but in the fields below the fort a tumulus was examined by the late Professor Bryce (see *P.S.A.S.*, xxxviii (1903-4)), 56, and found to contain a cist. No skeletal remains were recovered, but the finds – an urn, jet bead, bronze pin, and a flint knife or scraper – indicated that it probably dated from the Middle Bronze Age.

Dun Scalpsie, which appears to be one of a complex of small forts on the western coast of Bute, is as yet undated, but Mr R. W. Feachem, of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, is of the opinion that the masonry of the inner face, revealed during a trial excavation in July 1959, is of a classic Early Iron Age type. (See Pl. XIX.)

There appear to have been at least two periods of occupation, and in the primary occupation level a small fragment of bone comb was found in association with a stone spindle whorl with hourglass perforation, two whetstones, vesicular slag, animal bones and teeth.

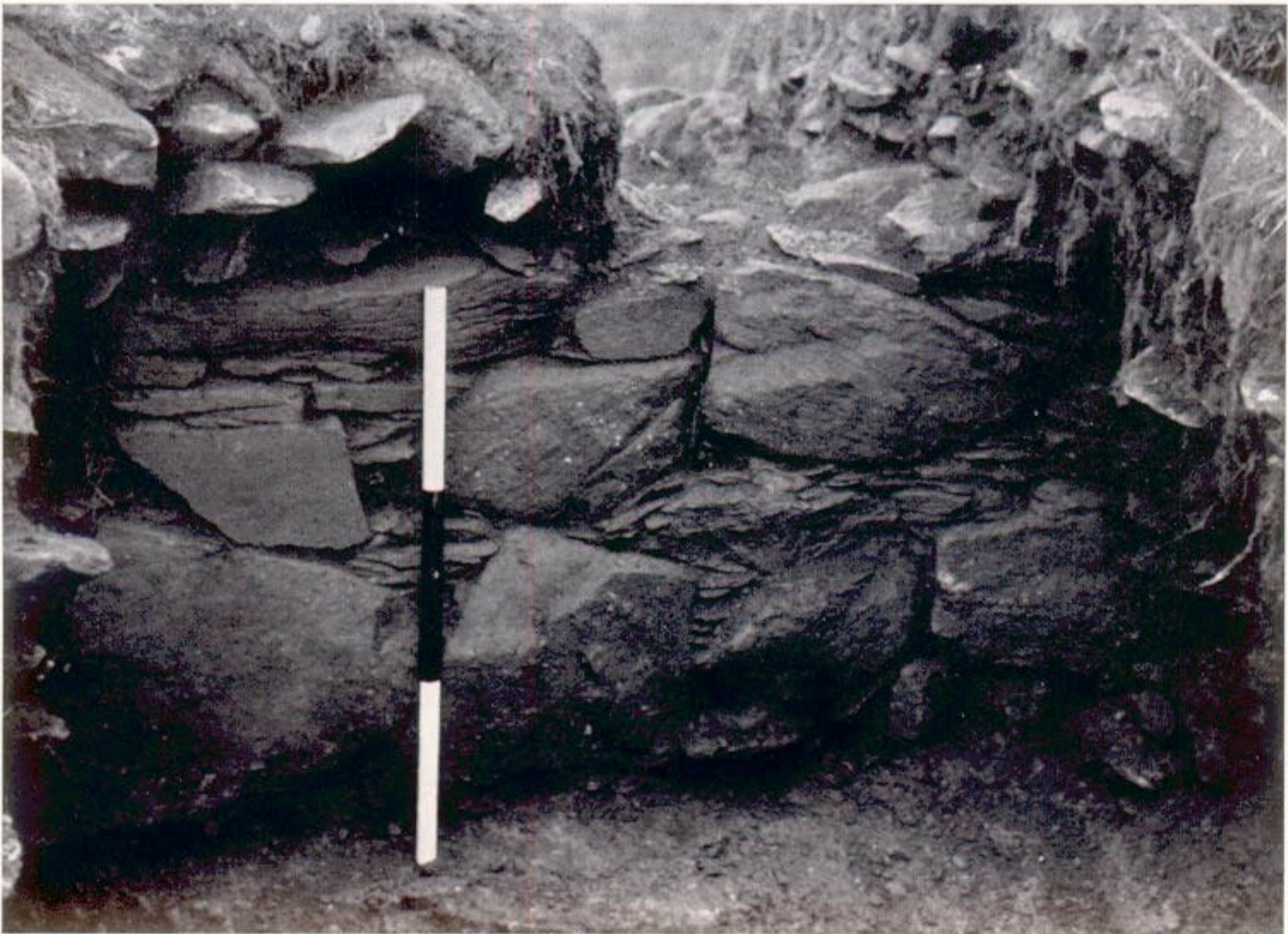
The comb fragment (Pl. XIX) was submitted to Mr Stevenson of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, who, although unable to suggest any satisfactory parallels, thought it resembled Early Iron Age combs in that it was one-piece rather than composite. The moulding and broad depression resembled a small one-piece comb from the undated Broch of Kettleburn, but, as will be seen from the illustration, there is a suggestion of a projection on top of the comb which led Mr Stevenson to suggest that it might possibly be a one-piece imitation of a composite thirteenth-fourteenth century Norse comb with stepped ends.

On the recommendation of Mr Wilson of the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities, the British Museum, the comb was submitted to Mr J. F. Head, F.S.A., of Great Missenden, Bucks., who, like Mr Stevenson, could offer no parallels. He thought the moulded border was reminiscent of the upper extension of the handle of the Iron Age weaving comb from Danebury hill-fort, Hants (B.M. *Later Prehistoric Antiquities of the British Isles*, fig. 21, 4, lower).

It is hoped that further excavations on the site next year will yield more positive evidence for dating these finds.

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