

NOTES

I. A COLLECTION OF STONE ARTIFACTS FROM REDPOINT, LOCH TORRIDON, ROSS-SHIRE

THE remains of a prehistoric stone industry lie scattered in two broad hollows or bottoms in the sand-dunes on the north side of Redpoint (NG 726685-6), where the northern shore of Loch Torridon merges into the sea-coast. Following up finds gathered by Dr J. S. Richardson, F.S.A.SCOT., and the late Major-General D. T. Richardson C.B., M.C., and subsequently by Mr I. McIntyre, F.S.A.SCOT., all given to the Museum, the writer visited the site in 1954 and the two following years.

There are three bottoms, here denoted A, B and C. Both 'B' and 'C' are settled and established at approximately the same height of, say, 20 to 25 feet above high-water mark, to which something like 8 feet has to be added to give height above O.D. Possibly one should add rather more than 8 feet, for the H.W.M. noticed was an extreme one. In these two bottoms there is a deposit of gravel and stones, with lichens and other growth, whereas at 'A' there is less indication of established conditions, though many stones occur on the surface of the sand. Marram grass is the only vegetation in 'A', where the level is about 5 feet lower than in 'B' and 'C'. In all three bottoms there were accumulations of natural iron-pan, on which Mr Allard Johnson B.SC., A.R.I.C., has kindly commented as follows:

'Thank you for the two specimens of iron pan. In my experience and according to the literature these are formed at various depths in the soil profile and are not necessarily – in fact not usually – associated with wet or boggy conditions at the surface. However some iron pans are formed where the water draining downwards meets the water table, and the thin concentrated specimen that we have here may be of this kind. The examples of ponds with sandy bottoms (and incidentally ducks or geese on them) that occur to me are near sea level, namely at Glenluce and in South Uist.'

There appeared to be only two chipping-floors, one in bottom 'A' and the other in 'C'. In the former, the very great majority of pieces were got on or within 3 or 4 in. of the surface. A few pieces were found, spread about the surface of the sand, but the great bulk was concentrated within a very small area. At 'A' there were many fire-damaged stones and some small traces of charcoal. In 'C' the concentration was less sharply marked, but all pieces were got on the surface.

At 'A' quartz was present in very much the greatest proportion, while at 'C' there was rather more of indurated mudstone, with bloodstone not common, but less rare than flint. I prefer not to try to establish percentages of materials, because many fragments of the commoner materials were discarded on the site, while every scrap of bloodstone, mudstone and flint was carefully kept. The mudstone found at 'A' was in very small pieces, while at 'C' it was in larger sizes.

Flint was definitely rare – a score of pieces mostly very small. Bloodstone, present in varying colours of green, is best known from the Island of Rhum, but J. H. Dixon¹ notes it as one of the less common minerals found in the parish of Gairloch; artifacts of it have also been recorded from Rudh' an Dunain, Skye.²

Indurated silty mudstone is the technical name of a dark material which weathers to a finely granular surface, greenish- or brownish-grey in colour. I am much indebted to Dr Sabine of the Geological Survey for this information. Although it has such an uninteresting name, this very hard, black material with tolerable tractability (and a glossy

¹ *Gairloch* (1886), 290.

² *P.S.A.S.*, LXVII (1933-4), 222.

fracture-face) seems to have a widespread use as a substitute for flint. I understand it occurs in association with dolerite intrusions, which I believe are not uncommon. Some pieces from Rudh' an Dunain appear to be of the same material. Specimens from Ayrshire are also identified by Dr Sabine as of the same rock.

Most of the artifacts in the present collection that can be claimed as implements are simply utilised flakes or cores without further working. Without knowing what materials the tools were made to deal with, one cannot look upon the comparative brittleness of quartz and quartzite as categorically ruling them out from use for purposes for which they were relatively unsuitable, despite much wastage and frequent calls for re-sharpening or re-facing. Many of the quartz pieces show signs at both ends of repeated blows or reaction; I can think of nothing but use as some sort of percussion tool that would produce this effect. Use of yielding material as hammer is not ruled out.

The few implements that have been deliberately retouched do not suffice to establish the date or relationships of the industry, but the general circumstances are comparable to the late Dr W. A. Munro's finds at Ardnamurchan and Morar.¹ Attention may be drawn to a sort of 'angle-graver' on a short quartz blade, one side of the tip being fairly steeply retouched in a hollow arc. What might be a long narrow microlithic crescent, also quartz, is unfortunately not 'backed' with characteristic retouch, though the back does bear some flake scars. One or two quartzes are small steep scrapers, and there is one 'thumb-nail' scraper of bloodstone.

The earlier finds included some with a microlithic aspect. Mr McIntyre gave a 1¼-inch point of mudstone with steep inverse retouch along each edge, fine towards the tip and coarse towards the butt as if for hafting; some of the mudstone and bloodstone flakes are small and narrow, and a small flint core has had very small flakes removed from it. On the other hand there is part of a narrow flint flake with minutely serrated edge, and among Dr Richardson's finds there is a fine 'birch-leaf' arrowhead of flint and what appears to be a small diamond-shaped arrowhead of quartz, all appropriate to the neolithic period. Surface finds of course tend to be mixed, but a blending of cultures is possible, as in the other sites described by Lacaille as 'the hybrid industries of the Western Seaboard'.²

A further typescript account of this latest collection has been placed in the Society's library. It includes notes on some of the specimens, for which I am much indebted to Mr A. D. Lacaille, HON. F.S.A. SCOT. For information about the site and for other assistance I have to thank Mr P. R. Ritchie, Mr R. B. K. Stevenson, and Mr W. G. Bannerman, District Road Surveyor, Gairloch. To Mr Stevenson I am further deeply indebted for his additional help both in correlating my finds with those of others, and in other ways.

A. F. GRAY

¹ *Archaeologia*, xciv (1951), 103 ff.

² *Stone Age in Scotland* (1954), 288-304.