

ACHARN

J N G RITCHIE & I THORNER

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Further Flintwork from Acharn, Morvern

by Sinead McCartan

Mr Thornber had discovered further flints at the same spot on the north bank of the Abhainn a' Ghlinne Gai where he had previously found mesolithic material; this had been discussed by the late Denise Rich Gray (in Ritchie and Thornber 1975, 27-30). A brief examination of earlier material suggests that both assemblages may be considered to be of broadly contemporary date.

The present assemblage consists of 88 pieces; a detailed breakdown is to be found in the catalogue. The raw material exploited is primarily chalcedony, mainly flint. Surviving cortex suggests that a pebble source, probably local gravels (Wickham-Jones and Collins 1978) was exploited. The high incidence of hinge and step fractures indicates some flaws in the material. However, the flint is mostly of good quality and the only core present is very fine. No preference seems to have been given for the exploitation of any particular colour of flint. The inclusion of four quartz flakes show that some quartz, also local, was used to supplement flint. The exploitation of pebble flint poses many limitations to the knapper, and this is much in evidence. The small nature of the material - the longest flake is 32mm long and the longest blade 36mm long - indicates the exploitation of relatively small pebbles. There is evidence for the bipolar technique of knapping. The mechanics of this technique are described elsewhere (Wickham-Jones 1983, 164). Undoubtedly, it is a technique which is suitable for, and makes economical use of, pebble flint. This can be seen in the Acharn core, where its form has been changed from single platform to bipolar, so that it could be knapped right to its limits (illus 2, no. 1). In addition, the

preponderance of diffuse bulbs and small platforms is suggestive of direct percussion with a soft hammer; a heavy, hard hammerstone would have been unsuitable, given the size of the raw material. Of the few pieces which have retained their platforms, both bipolar and simple artificial platforms are present, attesting the use of both platform and bipolar cores. Many pieces show evidence of platform trimming which suggests that care was taken in the preparation of cores. The presence of a core trimming and a core rejuvenation flake support this assertion, and in conjunction with the waste material they are suggestive of 'on site' knapping. The majority of the pieces are corticated and patinated. This is due to the post-depositional processes and is unlikely to have any cultural significance. The presence of eighteen burnt pieces and the high number of broken pieces (39) is difficult to reconcile with post-depositional processes alone, and the activities of man must also be considered. Surface collections are notoriously difficult to interpret. However, the microlith (illus 2, no. 2), together with the core and blades, support the mesolithic date previously ascribed to the site (Rich Gray in Ritchie and Thornber 1975, 27).

## CATALOGUE

### Notes to the catalogue

1. Unless otherwise stated all pieces are of flint.
2. Formal, i.e., retouched tools are marked by an asterix. They are assigned a conventional typological term at the end of the entry. These terms are not intended to indicate function.
3. During examination, all pieces are held with dorsal face uppermost and the proximal end towards the observer.

4. All dimensions are given in millimetres in the order; length: width: thickness. Length is measured along a line at  $90^{\circ}$  to the platform of the piece; width is in the same plane and at  $90^{\circ}$  to the length along a line across the widest part of the flake; thickness is measured from the ventral surface to the highest point of the dorsal surface along a line perpendicular to both length and width.
5. In the measurement of angles the following abbreviations have been used: L, left edge angle; R, right edge angle; P, proximal edge angle; D, distal edge angle.
6. Colour has been noted to illustrate variation.
7. Cortication refers to the matt discoloration of the piece: patination refers to the lustrous sheen that may subsequently develop (Shepherd 1972, 114-18).
8. A chunk has no ventral surface or platform.
9. A blade is where the length: width ratio is at least 2:1; an irregular blade has the same length: width ratio but the sides are not parallel.
10. Macroscopic edge damage has been noted where apparent. This generally consists of the removal of small flakes and may be due to use, although this cannot be verified without the use of a high-powered microscope.

#### Inner Chunks

1. Seven; light-dark grey; three burnt.

#### Secondary Chunks

2. Ten; cream-dark grey; five burnt; five corticated.
3. One; pink-white-grey; burnt and crazed; lightly corticated; lightly patinated.

### Cores

4. One; single platform with opposed bipolar platform; pink-white; lightly corticated; 39: 36: 22 (illus 2, no. 1).

### Secondary Flakes

5. One; pink-white; burnt and crazed; corticated; 22: 18: 8.
6. One; grey-white; corticated; edge damage on right lateral; 19: 28: 12.
7. One; pale grey; lightly corticated; patinated 32: 27: 7.
8. One; pale yellow; corticated; lightly patinated; 17:18:3.
9. One; grey-white burnt and crazed; lightly corticated; step termination.
10. Two; pale grey; lightly corticated; lightly patinated; step termination.
11. One; pale grey-cream; corticated and calcined; lightly patinated; hinge termination; 16:10:4.
12. One; cream; corticated; hinge termination; 12:14:3.
13. One; white; burnt; corticated; lightly patinated; simple artificial platform; broken; proximal surviving.
14. One; pale grey-cream; corticated; simple artificial platform; proximal surviving.
15. One; grey-white; platform broken; broken; proximal surviving.
16. One; grey; corticated; broken; proximal surviving.
17. One; grey; lightly patinated; broken; small fragment missing at distal.

### Inner Flakes

18. Quartz; four; all broken.

19. One; core trimming flake; pale grey; corticated; lightly patinated; 10:14:4.
20. One; core rejuvenation flake; grey-cream; corticated; 26:20:6.
21. Three; white-grey-red; burnt and crazed; broken; two segments and one distal end.
22. One; grey-white; burnt and crazed; corticated; lightly patinated; 16:11:5.
23. One; grey-white; burnt; lightly corticated; lightly patinated; broken; proximal surviving.
24. One; grey; burnt and pitted; lightly corticated; lightly patinated; broken; proximal surviving.
25. One; grey-white; edge damage at distal; 18:10:3.
26. One; pale grey; lightly corticated; lightly patinated; 11:8:1.
27. Four; grey-white; three corticated; all patinated; all step terminations.
28. One; grey-cream; lightly corticated; edge damage on left lateral; hinge termination; 20; 15; 5.
29. One; grey-cream; lightly corticated; lightly patinated; hinge termination; 6: 10: 1.
30. One; white-pink; corticated; patinated; hinge termination; 21: 17: 3.
31. One; cream; corticated; lightly patinated; hinge termination; 16: 9: 2.
32. One; purple-pink; lightly patinated; hinge termination; 12: 10: 2.
33. One; grey; lightly corticated; patinated; hinge termination; 15: 4: 2.
34. One; grey-cream; corticated; hinge termination; 11: 14: 2.
35. Two; pale grey-cream; corticated; patinated; one bipolar and one broken platform; broken; left laterals surviving.
36. Five; grey-cream; three corticated; broken; segments surviving.

37. Two; grey-white; corticated; one patinated; bipolar platforms; broken; small fragment missing at distal ends.
38. One; pale grey; corticated; platform broken; edge damage on left lateral; broken; small fragment missing at distal.
39. Two; cream; corticated; one lightly patinated; broken; distals surviving; hinge terminations.
40. Two; pale grey; corticated; patinated; broken; distals surviving; one hinge termination.
41. One; pale grey; corticated; lightly patinated; edge damage on right and left lateral; broken; distal surviving.
42. One; cream; corticated; platform broken; broken; proximal and right lateral surviving.
43. One; pale grey; corticated; bipolar platform; broken; proximal surviving.
44. One; cream; corticated; simple artificial platform; broken; proximal surviving.
45. One; cream; corticated; platform broken; proximal surviving.
46. One; grey-white; corticated; simple artificial platform; broken; proximal surviving.
47. One; pale grey; corticated; bipolar platform; broken; proximal surviving.
48. One; red-tan; patinated; platform broken; broken; proximal surviving.

#### Secondary Blades

49. One; pale grey; corticated; cortex at distal end; 20: 6: 2.
50. One; pale yellow; corticated; lightly patinated; broken; fragment missing at distal end.

Inner Blades

51. One; irregular; pale grey; corticated; 28: 12: 3.
52. One; irregular; pale grey; heated; corticated; lightly patinated; pointed distal end: edge damage at distal; 24: 9: 4.
53. One; irregular; cream; corticated; broken; small fragment missing at distal; 24 12: 2.
54. One; regular; cream-grey; corticated; 36: 13: 4.
55. One; regular; grey; patinated; step termination.

Formal Tools

- \*56. Blade; cream; corticated; edge damage on right lateral; broken; segment surviving; retouch on right lateral; R 71; microlith.



Cremated Remains from Cairn 3, Acharn, Morvern

by Mary Harman and Dorothy A Lunt

The Cremation

by Mary Harman

Most of the fragments are small (less than 25mm long), the largest piece being 91mm in length. All the pieces are white, some with a faint tinge of grey, showing that the cremation was efficient. There are many fragments of skull, mostly pieces of vault, but also parts of left and right petrous temporals, the right malar, right temporal and central piece of the occipital, which is not noticeably masculine. A piece of mandibular alveolus shows that the first six teeth on the right side were present at death. There are a number of tooth root fragments, mostly molar, and major parts of several teeth: a lower incisor, canine or premolar, and three molars. Other recognisable fragments include parts of a few vertebrae, ribs, scapula, pelvis and phalanges, part of the calcaneum, or possibly proximal end of the femur, with the epiphysis not fused, and the distal epiphysis of the fibula, not fused. There are also a few fragments of diaphysis showing that epiphyseal fusion had not taken place. There is no evidence for the presence of more than one individual in this deposit; the remains, therefore, are those of a young person aged about 20 years. All parts of the body are represented, but this not the whole of one body; while the cremation process was efficient, either the gathering or the deposition of the ashes involved only a token deposit.

## Cremated Teeth

by Dorothy A Lunt

Parts of four incinerated teeth were examined at high power under a binocular microscope. (1) Part of the crown of a tooth, probably a molar. I think, but am not absolutely certain, that we are dealing with the dentine, all the enamel having been removed during cremation. There is one clear attrition facet on a cusp tip, but it is a very small facet and has not yet acquired the saucer shape of larger dentine facets. (2) Part of the crown of a tooth, probably a molar. Again, I believe this consists of dentine only. There is a good deal of surface damage and I cannot see any unequivocal attrition facets. (3) Part of the crown and root of a tooth, possibly an upper third molar. Probably dentine alone is present in the crown, which is quite badly damaged and yields no further information. (4) The greater part of a lower molar, probably the lower right third permanent molar. On analogy with the other specimens, I should expect dentine alone to be present in the crown, but the occlusal surface shows rounded cusps rather than the sharp points to be expected if all enamel has been lost. These rounded cusps have a smudged appearance and the occlusal surface does not show distinct morphological features. Perhaps part, but not all, of the enamel has been lost during cremation. If this is so, then it would be impossible to say whether there had been attrition facets in the enamel. There is no evidence of attrition facets on the specimen as it stands, which suggests that dentine had not yet been exposed. The root apices have been broken post mortem, but the appearance of the root canals suggests that the roots had been completely formed, and if tooth identification is correct, that the individual was at least 20 years old at death.