

Corse Law, Carnwath, Lanarkshire: a lithic scatter

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ABSTRACT

The results of a large fieldwalking exercise are presented. The flaked lithics recovered suggest activity in this area from the Mesolithic period through to the Bronze Age. Spatial analysis also points to at least one possible discrete episode of lithic production.

INTRODUCTION

Over a period of 11 months during 1987-88 members of the Lanark and District Archaeological Society fieldwalked an area of some 300 acres which had been ploughed in advance of forestry planting. More than 2200 flaked lithics of Mesolithic to Bronze-Age date were recovered, as well as worked channel and post-medieval pottery. The author was invited to examine the artefacts and produce a report.

LOCATION (NGR NT 018505) (illus 1)

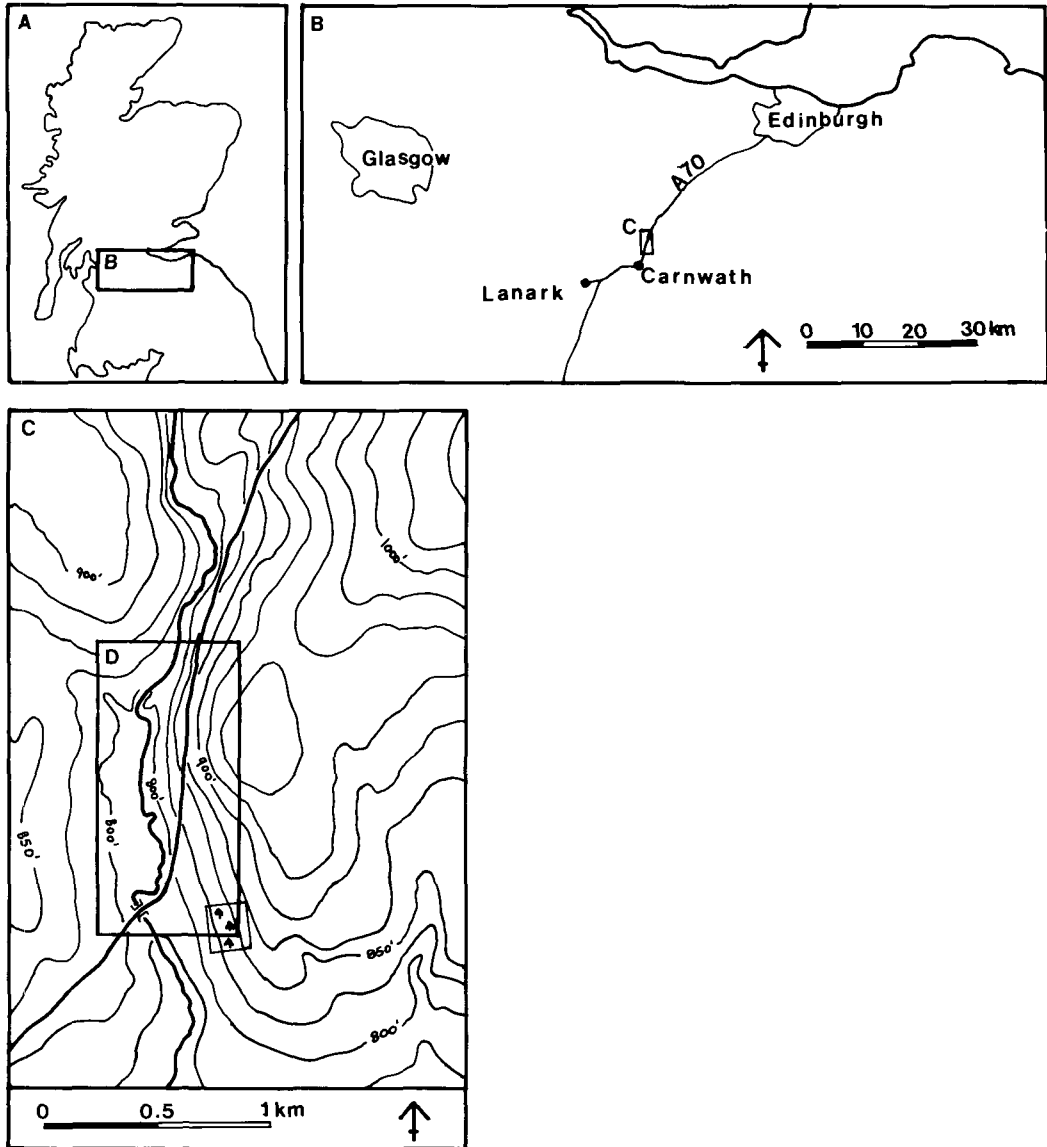
The fieldwalked area is located on either side of the A70 Carnwath to Edinburgh road. Although most of the forestry ploughing was investigated, the greater depth of peat cover upslope beyond the new forestry road and Hill Wood prevented the plough from disturbing the old ground surface, hence the finds from this area are rather sparse. The main scatter is thus bounded to the west by the River North Medwin, to the east by the forestry road, and the northern and southern boundaries limited by the extent of forestry ploughing.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Corse Law lies in an area containing a considerable number of upstanding prehistoric remains. In particular the district of Carnwath and the South Pentlands would appear to be the principal area of Neolithic activity in Lanarkshire (RCAMS 1978). Here, long cairns, henges and small cairns have been recorded, as well as finds of Cumbrian and Porcellanite axes. Barrows and several complexes of small cairns represent activity during the Bronze Age, and there is some evidence for settlement in the Iron Age. Within the fieldwalking area itself isolated cairns and a group of small cairns (probably dating to the Bronze Age) are present (RCAMS 1978), and it is possible that some of the finds are related to these.

No other lithic scatters have been found in the immediate area, but to the south-west there are five unexcavated Mesolithic sites located along a stretch of the River Clyde (Lacaille 1954).

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ILLUS 1 Location maps: for D see illus 4

METHOD

FIELDWALKING

The plough furrows, which lay at c 4 m intervals, were systematically fieldwalked. The ground was divided into a grid of individual furrow units, measuring 20 m from north to south by 4 m transversely, and these were used as the basis for collection. In this way a large area could be covered with ease. The grid, although perhaps too coarse for detailed spatial analysis, has proved satisfactory in defining the broad distribution of artefacts.

LITHICS

The analysis involved a sort based on materials and lithic types. This method was developed during work on a large assemblage from Kinloch, Rhum (Wickham-Jones, forthcoming) and provides a rapid way to assess the character of the finds. Little other detailed work was applied given that this is only a surface collection and, as such, may not be truly representative of the original remains.

THE LITHIC ASSEMBLAGE

RAW MATERIALS

A total of 2262 flaked lithics was recovered, composed of a variety of raw materials. Chert was dominant (75%), supplemented by flint (21%) and pitchstone (3%), whilst quartz and agate were present in small quantities (table 1). Rolled cortical surfaces on all material types suggest that pebble sources were exploited. Most of the materials would have been derived locally, although the chert was probably more widely available than flint (Wickham-Jones & Collins 1978). Pitchstone is an exotic stone, and it probably came from Arran, although source analysis would be necessary to prove this.

PRIMARY KNAPPING

Chert (table 1)

There are six flaked pebbles and 27 cores. The majority of the cores were produced using a prepared flat platform, and they include a mix of single, double, multi and opposed platforms. Three scalar cores indicate a different knapping technique whereby the core is held against an anvil and struck from above with a hammer. By this method, flakes are removed from both ends simultaneously. Most of the cores show evidence for the removal of both blades and flakes, but four are solely blade cores. Some 93% of the chert consists of flakes and knapping debris, and 7% of this has cortex present. Blades comprise 4%, many of which are broken. Lengths of the complete specimens range from 16 to 54 mm by 5 to 18 mm in width, with just over half under 10 mm wide.

Flint (table 1)

Two flint cores and one half of a flint pebble were recovered. One of the cores is amorphous, whilst the other has a double flat platform from which both blades and flakes have been removed. Seventy-eight per cent of the flint consists of flakes and debris, and 11% have

TABLE 1
Corse Law: Lithic assemblage by type and material

Type	Chert	Flint	Pitchstone	Quartz	Agate	Total
Inner flakes	1320	312	30	6	9	1677
Secondary flakes	63	35	—	1	4	103
Primary flakes	15	6	—	2	—	23
Inner chunks	148	9	4	—	—	161
Secondary chunks	24	3	—	—	—	27
Primary chunks	9	—	—	—	—	9
Cores and pebbles	33	3	4	—	1	41
Inner blades	59	41	28	—	—	128
Secondary blades	8	5	—	—	—	13
Retouched	23	56	1	—	—	80
Total	1702	470	67	9	14	2262

cortex present. Blades comprise 10%, many of which are broken. The complete specimens range from 12 to 68 mm in length by 6 to 27 mm in width, with over half less than 10 mm wide.

Pitchstone, agate and quartz (table 1)

Four cores of pitchstone and one of agate were found. Those of pitchstone are small in size and use prepared flat platforms. Two are single platform blade cores, whilst the others are less well formed. The agate core may have originally been a single platform core which was later reworked in a bipolar fashion.

Fifty-one per cent of the pitchstone consists of flakes and debris, none of which has cortex. Blades comprise 42% of the pitchstone. Unbroken lengths range up to 25 mm and widths range from 6 to 13 mm with the majority being 8 to 10 mm wide.

There are 13 flakes of agate, and all the quartz pieces are flakes.

SECONDARY KNAPPING (table 2, illus 2 & 3)

There are 80 retouched pieces. Seventy per cent are of flint, 29% chert, and there is one piece of pitchstone.

Scrapers

These are the dominant form, comprising 42% of the total, with two-thirds made of flint and the rest of chert. The majority of the unbroken scrapers have lengths more or less equal to the widths, thus forming a roughly round shape. In general those on chert tend to be thicker than those of flint.

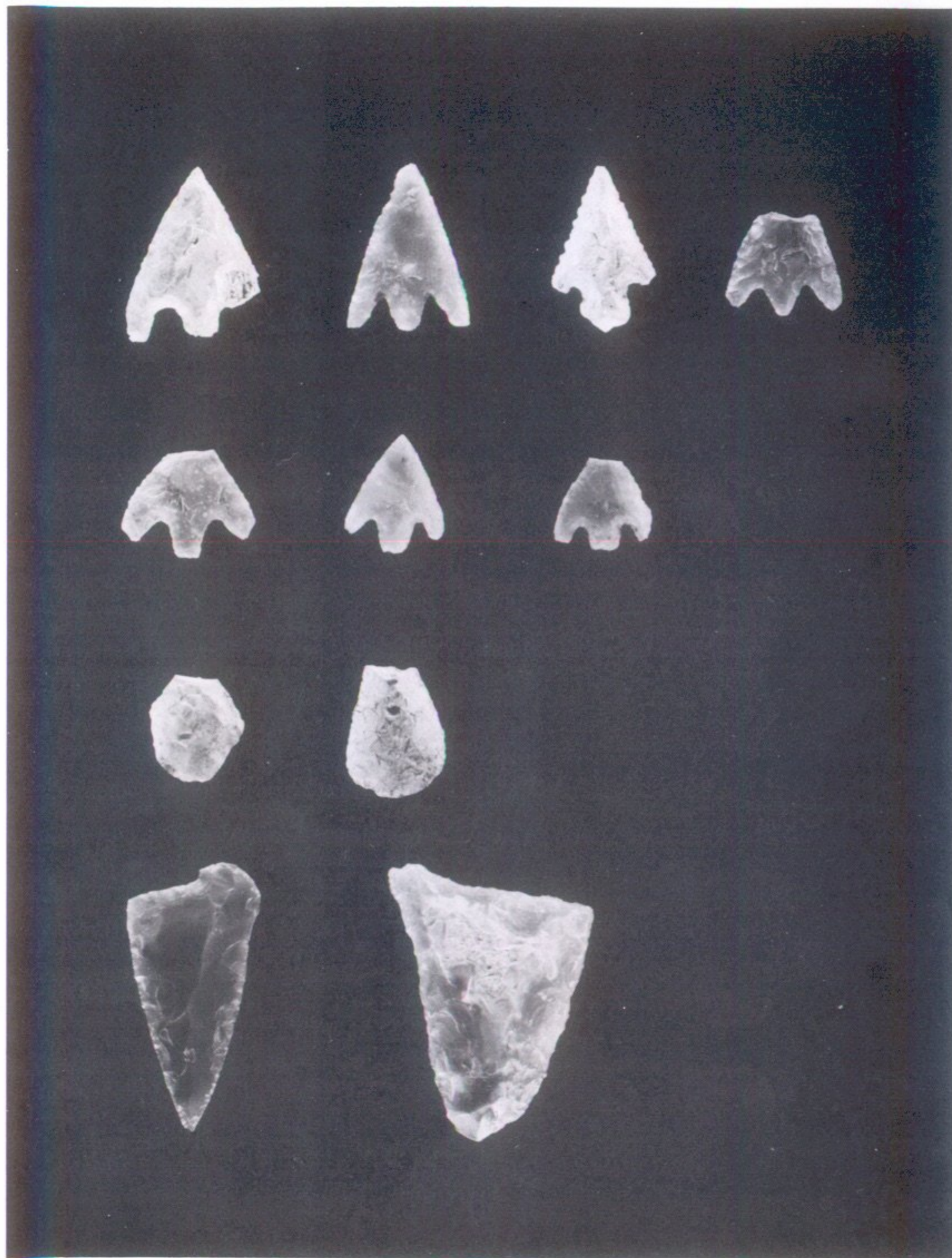
TABLE 2
Corse Law: retouched types by material

Retouch type	Chert	Flint	Pitchstone	Total
Scrapers:				
Entire edge retouched	—	6	—	6
Distal end retouched	—	6	—	6
Partial retouch	11	4	—	15
Broken	—	7	—	7
Edge retouch:				
Blades	1	7	—	8
Flakes	1	6	1	8
Microliths	10	5	—	15
Invasively flaked:				
Barbed-and-tanged	—	7	—	7
Leaf point	—	3	—	3
Oblique arrowhead	—	1	—	1
?Chisel arrowhead	—	1	—	1
Borers	—	3	—	3

Differences in amount of scraper edge are also apparent between the two material types. The chert pieces show a tendency for retouch to be located on one side and end or two sides and end (illus 2: 1–4), whilst for flint the dominant type is for a scraping edge either round the entire circumference of the piece or on the distal end alone (illus 2: 5–8). Three of the six distal end scrapers are laterally broken, but the breakage does not truncate the scraping edge. One of the chert scrapers is retouched on the ventral face down one side.



ILLUS 2 Corse Law: retouched artefacts. Reading left to right and top to bottom: 1-4, chert scrapers; 5-8, flint scrapers; 9-11, flint borers; 12, 13, retouched flint blades (scale roughly 4:5)



ILLUS 3 Corse Law: retouched artefacts. Reading left to right and top to bottom: 1-7 barbed and tanged arrowheads; 8, 9, leaf points; 10, oblique arrowhead; 11, ?chisel arrowhead. All of flint (scale roughly 4:5)

Edge retouch

These comprise 20% of the total. The majority are made on flint; there are two chert pieces and one of pitchstone. Half of these pieces are made on blades, and of these the most common form is for retouch down either side, in two cases this is quite abrupt (illus 2: 12, 13). All are truncated by lateral breakage. One other blade is retouched down one side only while another is obliquely worked at the proximal end. Edge retouch on the rest of the pieces is more varied. Of interest are three pieces (one of flint, one pitchstone and one chert) which exhibit working on the ventral face. One other fragment shows abrupt retouch on two converging edges to form a point.

Microliths

These form 19% of the total; two-thirds are made on chert and the rest of flint. The majority are fragments with abrupt microlithic retouch down one side, and there are three examples of complete backed blades. Of the rest, there are two scalene triangles, one possible crescent, two pieces retouched on either side to form a point, and one miscellaneous piece with partial retouch on both sides.

Borers

There are three borers, two of which are made on thick flakes and another made on a blade. On two of the pieces the retouch is along two long edges to form a point (illus 2: 9, 10) while on one the entire edge has been retouched steeply (illus 2: 11). The latter is of interest as it may have had a dual function of scraper and borer.

Invasive flaked pieces

There are seven barbed and tanged points, all made on flint (illus 3: 1–7). Two pieces are burnt; three have tips missing and two have broken barbs. There are two leaf points made on flint (illus 3: 8, 9); both have broken tips. One has been bifacially invasively flaked, and the other has been invasively flaked on one face while the opposite face has been worked around the edges. One other piece is apparently unfinished; it has an irregular outline and both proximal and distal tips are missing. One face has been invasively flaked whilst the opposite face has been worked around the edges.

Miscellaneous

There are two other retouched pieces. One is an oblique arrowhead made on flint (illus 3: 10). This has been bifacially retouched down the left edge and there is light retouch down the right edge on one face. The proximal end has been worked to form a tang.

The second piece is also of flint (illus 3: 11). It has been invasively flaked on the dorsal face with some cortex remaining in the centre. The ventral face has been invasively flaked at the proximal end. In outline form it bears some resemblance to a chisel arrowhead (the sides diverge to form a broad proximal end). However, in this case the chisel edge is formed on the proximal end, rather than on a side, and it has been retouched as opposed to leaving the original flake edge.

OTHER FINDS

WORKED CANNEL

There are four pieces of cannell. One is simply a thick flake and another a tabular fragment with no immediate signs of working. The other two pieces are a bracelet fragment and an incomplete roughout for a possible bracelet. They are described below.

Flake

50 mm long, 32 mm wide and 15 mm thick with pronounced bulb of percussion.

Tabular fragment

Maximum dimensions of 105 mm by 70 mm by 30 mm. No other signs of working.

Bracelet fragment

24 mm wide and 18 mm thick with a probable inner diameter of c 68 mm. The outer face is flat with bevelling c 2 mm wide on either edge. The sides are flat and are 15 mm deep. In section the inner face is triangular, formed by two slightly convex faces meeting at a right angle. Long multi-directional striations are evident over the whole of the piece indicating the surface finishing method.

Roughout

About a third of the piece has been destroyed by laminar breakage but the inner circumference remains intact. It is sub-circular in plan with a maximum width of 47 mm and maximum thickness of 35 mm. The inner diameter is 46 mm and is almost circular. The inner face is curved in cross section and partially smoothed. It meets one flattish side c 30 mm deep at a rather abrupt angle, while on the opposite side it continues on a shallow concave slope before meeting a flat surface c 20 mm deep. This concave area bears signs of pecking. The outer face has one area of pecking whilst the rest has been roughly smoothed to form irregular faceting. About a third of the perimeter is of a much shallower curve and forms an angle to the rest. Here the width of the piece is 29 mm minimum.

The piece has probably been worked by first pecking to form the rough shape and then by grinding. It is not known whether the finished artefact was intended to be a bracelet or whether its present inner diameter was the proposed size. The piece may have been abandoned unfinished due to breakage or working error.

Worked cannell or lignite has been found at three other sites in Lanarkshire. At Cairny a bracelet fragment was found during excavation of a small cairn dated to the Bronze Age (Maxwell 1976). A 'pulley ring' was found at Lupus, and at Calla Broch there were two pieces of cannell with hour-glass perforations (RCAMS 1978).

POTTERY

John Terry

There are 20 post-medieval pottery sherds and 14 fragments of clay tobacco pipe. The pottery sherds are all of a coarse wheel-thrown earthenware typical of the traditional output from small country potteries during the 16th to 17th centuries. A light grey-coloured fabric of a reduced firing accounted for 18 of the sherds. Of the two remaining sherds, one was of a red pinkish fabric, while the other exhibited an outer surface of pinkish red, which changed to a light grey colour as viewed across the sherd break. The colour change of the latter is purely as a result of firing conditions and/or positioning while inside the kiln.

A yellowish green-coloured patchy glaze of a common lead base has been applied to the inner surface of 11 of the sherds in the grey fabric group, and on the outer surfaces of a grey decorative rim sherd and the two reddish sherds.

The small, fragmentary, nature of these sherds, together with the predominance of plain body sherds (16) precludes any identification of standard vessel types. One rimsherd is straight-sided and of 10 cm diameter with external glaze. It is decorated with two parallel incised lines running around the outer surface of the rim.

The pottery would fit a 17th-century date best, where it is comparable to larger collections from the Glasgow area and Forth region (Haggarty, pers comm).

Most of the clay tobacco pipe is probably of a similar date, although some of the thicker walled stems may be of a slightly earlier, 16th-century, date. Two pipe bowls are present, one plain and the other decorated with a single line of tiny incised knife-point marks around and below the rim on the rear half of the bowl.

FUNCTION OF THE LITHIC ASSEMBLAGE

The flaked lithics probably represent a series of assemblages deposited over several millennia, but as the collection is unstratified, it is difficult to assess their complex functional relationships. Behavioural patterns of procurement, manufacture, use and discard can often be determined through detailed technological analysis. This may include examination of, for example, core preparation, flake and blade production, selection of flakes for formal tools, reuse and breakage. Although no such analysis was carried out on the Corse Law material, there are apparent differences in the selection and use of the various raw materials which, viewed at a broad level and with the spatial information, provides some interesting patterning.

RAW MATERIAL SELECTION

Certain differences in raw material selection and use can be shown through an examination of the artefacts produced. Chert, although being the dominant material, occurs mainly in the form of flakes and debris and comprises over 90% of all cores. The flint contains a smaller proportion of flakes, debris and cores. This would suggest that, while chert pebbles were probably being knapped in the immediate vicinity, there is less evidence for the primary knapping of flint. In comparison, the flint appears to have been deliberately selected for retouched pieces, particularly for non-microlithic types. Where chert is used, it is predominantly for scrapers (possibly of a different type to those on flint, see above) and microliths. Blade production also differs between flint and chert as those blades produced on chert are more frequent and tend, on average, to be slightly shorter and narrower than those on flint. Here, it is interesting to note the large proportion of pitchstone blades which were consistently smaller in size than the rest.

SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION

The broad distribution of artefacts can be seen in illus 4. Most of the pieces are concentrated in the southern half of the section between the river and the main road. This may be further sub-divided into two groups A and B.

Group A

Here, chert is the dominant raw material. There are three relatively large concentrations of knapping debris, although interestingly there are no cores in direct association. The majority of the microliths were found here and pitchstone is also well represented.

Group B

Although chert is present here there is a better representation of flint than in A. There may also be a small concentration of non-microlithic retouched pieces.

Apart from the above observations, there appear to be no other immediately obvious relationships between either the distributions of different artefact types or of raw materials.



ILLUS 4a, b Corse Law: lithic distribution: a, flint; b, chert

DISCUSSION

The differences, outlined above, in artefact production between flint and chert may be related to the knapping qualities of the original raw material. Chert is less homogeneous than flint and, as such, the flaking of this material may be less controllable. This can result in, for example, thicker flakes, more chunky debris and minimal secondary retouch. Better quality materials such as flint can be more carefully flaked and may also be selected for those pieces for which fine retouch is required, eg invasively flaked arrowheads.

The presence of a variety of raw materials may also indicate differing extractive strategies, some of which may be period-specific. At Elginhaugh, East Lothian, the chert used during the Mesolithic period was of a different colour, and therefore possibly from a different source from

that used in later periods (Clarke 1988). By contrast, it was noted that in Weardale, northern England, the chert, although being locally abundant did not appear to have been used until the post-Mesolithic periods (Young 1987). More locally, chert was flaked on five Mesolithic sites along the Clyde and on only one site (Eastfield) was this supplemented by flint (Lacaille 1954). At Cloburn Quarry, Lanarkshire, flaked chert was dominant in the post-cairn construction phases (Pollard 1988) indicating the common use of this material in later prehistoric periods.

At Corse Law the lack of stratigraphy means that resolution of period-specific strategies is almost impossible. Certainly there appears to be at least one episode of stone tool manufacture on site and this mainly of chert (illus 4). Here the association with microliths may suggest activity during the Mesolithic.

Later periods are indicated by the presence of specific retouched types, in particular the arrowheads. Flint has been selected for all these pieces, although whether they were produced locally and chosen in preference to chert or whether they were imported is not clear.

The pitchstone is an exotic stone brought into the area most probably from Arran. It is present on many Scottish sites in small quantities, and a common form is the small blade as at Corse Law (Thorpe & Thorpe 1984). Imported pitchstone has been found in Mesolithic through to Bronze-Age contexts and that found at Corse Law must remain undated.

Finally, the presence of the group of small cairns running diagonally across the centre of the area deserves attention. The main group was not planned on to a grid during the Royal Commission survey, although several cairns were located during the fieldwalking in 1987 (illus 4). Any association with the artefactual scatter must remain tenuous; however, it is possible that the main concentration of artefacts lies just to the south of the cairn group.

CONCLUSION

A fieldwalking project such as that carried out by the Lanark and District Archaeological Society at Corse Law is a rare event in Scottish archaeology. Not only was a large area covered but the site was visited over a long period of time and the use of careful gridding and collection methods ensured that the assemblage had some context.

Information retrieved in this manner is of relative value: the assemblage probably represents but a small part of that lying under the peat and the locational and temporal data can only be accurately determined by excavation. However, much work has been done recently on the quality of information to be retrieved from the plough zone. In the south of England, in particular, emphasis is being placed on fieldwalking as a valid tool for archaeology and related methodologies and interpretation are being refined (Haselgrove *et al* 1985). It must be remembered too that, in general, certain types of site can only be found through fieldwalking of disturbed ground, eg Mesolithic settlement and others with no upstanding structural remains.

The great enthusiasm of amateur archaeological societies and the practical aspects of their local knowledge and permanent presence in an area are invaluable to the recording of a region's archaeology. It is now up to the professional bodies to provide not only training and encouragement in such fieldwork but also a proper framework for the analysis of the information retrieved.

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