

5. CREMATED HUMAN SKELETAL REMAINS

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Cremation pit [059] was located near Structure G. The cremation was excavated in the field in seven spits, each measuring 0.02m thick. Cremated bone was recovered from fill (060) through wet sieving in the laboratory. Fragmentation was relatively high, with the largest fragment (from spit 5) measuring 59.09mm in length. The largest percentage of fragments (291.04g, 49%) were recovered from the 5–10mm sieve, followed by the >10mm sieve with 147.06g (24.8%), the 2–5mm sieve with 141.19g (23.8%) and lastly, 13.54g (2%) was recovered from the <2mm sieve. Of the 592.83g of cremated bone, 226.16g (38.1%) could be identified to element. This included 42.35g of skull, where most of the fragments were identified as belonging to the cranial vault, with one fragment specifically belonging to the occipital bone. Several tooth root fragments were also recovered from spits 3, 4, and 5. A total of 4.1g of fragments was identified as belonging to the vertebral column (including the dens from cervical vertebra 2), 3.78g were identified as rib fragments (all body fragments), 5.21g upper limb fragments, and 1.8g were identified as belonging to the pelvic girdle. This included a small fragment from the right pubic bone, which included the lower half of the symphyseal face and part of the inferior pubic ramus. A total of 7.58g was identified as belonging to the lower limbs, 159.99g were unidentified long

bones, and 1.35g were hand/foot bones, including both hand and foot phalanges.

The cremated remains from Craggan were possible to identify as belonging to at least one individual. Based on the thickness of cranial vault fragments and complete tooth roots, it is estimated that the individual was an adult. The presence of a fragment from the right pubic symphysis (from spit 6) provides tentative evidence for an age-at-death estimate and biological sex determination. Based on the subpubic concavity, the individual is a probable male. Caution must be taken, however, as determining biological sex should be carried out using multiple sexually dimorphic traits, along with metric analysis. While the cremation process resulted in taphonomic damage to the symphyseal face, slight ridging was still visible, suggesting the individual was under the age of 50.

The cremated remains belonged to at least one adult, a possible male individual. The cremation process can limit the amount of biological data obtained compared with inhumations (such as age, sex, stature, pathology, and trauma), but the cultural information associated with the processing of the dead that cremations can provide is just as valuable. Cremation in prehistory was a complex process involving extensive time, preparation, and resources (Lynch & O'Donnell 2007). While the assemblage is restricted to a single deposit, it is part of a small corpus of Neolithic cremation burials in Scotland and has limited but important potential to further understanding of cremation in the Neolithic period.