8. THE METAL

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A total of 14 ferrous metal artefacts were recovered at Craggan. The finds included a wide range of objects, including a possible tip from an iron knife blade, nails and nail fragments of various sizes and forms, sheet metal fragments, and an incomplete but substantially intact pair of modern pliers. The finds survive in a heavily corroded and fragmented state, and X-rays were used to aid identification. Despite this, several of the smaller fragmentary pieces are not classifiable nor considered to be closely datable.

Ferrous metal find (SF 05) from ring ditch [3001], part of Structure C, is probably an incomplete nail, though it could also be a hinge pin or similar object. The head is flat and circular and has a broken circular-sectioned shank that is straight and non-tapering. The fragment does show similarities to Manning's Type 6 nail (Manning 1985: 133), having a flat circular head and circular cross-sectioned shank. Iron sheet metal, potentially from a vessel or container, also came from ring ditch [3001]. A bent rounded tip of an iron knife blade with a 'v'-shaped cross-section came from pit [3019], also part of Structure C. This possible iron knife blade was bent either during use or manufacture.

A probable nail shank and associated spalls, from pit [003], (Pit Group 1), has been slightly distorted potentially indicating that it had been removed from its fixture prior to deposition.

An incomplete heavily distorted iron nail was retrieved from refuse pit [39037] in association with Structure B. Like the example just described, the distorted condition of the nail implies it was deliberately removed from its timber fixture prior to its discard.

Several other fractured fragments of iron retrieved during sample processing remain unidentified due to their small and fragmentary condition. These include amorphous fragments of iron from pit [053]. From the topsoil a modern pair of pliers were recovered (SF 24). These will not be discussed further in this report.

The nails and nail fragments found at Craggan display evidence of distortion following removal from their timber fixtures. The nails are all hand-forged examples as indicated by the square-sectioned shanks but all are incomplete with missing or damaged heads making identification to specific nail types impossible. Based on the remaining length of the shank and the average diameter of the shanks, these appear to derive from small general purpose carpentry nails. As noted by Hunter (1999: 366), nails are surprisingly rare finds on Iron Age sites, a fact that cannot be simply dismissed as a result of poor soil conditions or other preservation factors. Chronology of the activity definitely plays a part as nails only appear to become more common in the later part of the Iron Age, from the 1st century AD onwards (ibid: 367). Routine recycling of metals also contribute to the picture as broken or exhausted iron objects could be re-forged, removing them from the archaeological record unless in special or unusual circumstances. A further hypothesis offered by Hunter (1999) is that nails were not routinely used in association with the construction of buildings until the Late Iron Age period and those encountered on Iron Age sites may well derive from internal fittings and fixtures and not from the structures themselves. This would suggest that Iron Age structures did not utilise nails for the construction of the roof. The limited quantity of nail fragments and their sparse distribution across the site would certainly corroborate this earlier interpretation.