
3 Site Location, Geology, Topography and Soils (Illus 1)

The site is 2km south-west of Kilmartin village in Mid Argyll. It is located at the west side of the entrance to the Kilmartin Glen on a promontory at the south end of a fluvio-glacial terrace at 20m OD. The edges of the terrace form steep bluffs, particularly on the south and south-east. This higher ground provides extensive views across the floor of the glen and to the south across the Moine Mhor (Illus 2). Much of the ground immediately above the floor of the glen in the vicinity of the site is suitable for agriculture. To the north-west are gently rising slopes dotted with depopulated settlements. At around 200m west of the edge of the terrace, the slope rises steeply to rugged hills. When the site was occupied, it would have been central to what was one of the largest expanses of arable ground in the Kilmartin Glen (Lane & Campbell 2000, illus 7.18).

The rocks of Mid Argyll are a variety of sandstones, shales and limestones metamorphosed into quartzites, schists, phyllites and marbles belonging to the Dalriadian Assemblage but in the Loch Awe and Knapdale areas, intrusions of

basic igneous rock are prolific. Differential erosion of the sedimentary and igneous rocks, particularly accentuated by glaciation, has created long, narrow, steep-sided valleys following the north-east to south-west Caledonian trend. During the Quaternary the area was heavily glaciated, with ice sheets flowing south-west from Rannoch Moor. After the retreat of glaciers the land rose relative to the sea, leaving raised beaches.

The characteristic topography of the Kilmartin Glen is very much the result of melt-water flowing from the glaciers. Two kilometres north of Kilmartin village melt-water escaped through the Creagan-tairbh Pass into the glen. Debris dumped from this flow contributed to the fluvio-glacial terraces on either side of the glen and formed an alluvial plain over the former marine embayment of the Moine Mhor. The terraces appear to be flat but on closer inspection are undulating and cut by meandering paleo-channels and gullies, which can also be observed on aerial photographs. Above the terraces to the north-east and south-west of the glen, the



Illus 2 Site setting, view looking west across valley floor towards the gravel terrace

topography is characterized by steep-sided hills rising to an average height of some 200m.

Surface geology is varied, but the floor of the glen and lower terraces comprise mainly marine clays, overlaid by gravels with sands, silts, and stony topsoil. The soils are naturally acidic and some are very humic and peaty. On the hill slopes are thin clays, while the bottom of the slopes are

often characterized by deep deposits of fine silt from hill-wash. Other than these silty deposits, topsoils throughout the area are thin and generally podsollic in character with a leached layer and iron panning. Since quarrying, the ground surface at Bruach an Druimein has become wet and inundated with rushes and is now used as rough grazing for cattle.