
21 CONCLUSIONS

The presence of Neolithic charcoal, pottery and lithics from the site, and the Iron Age evidence for burning in the excavated area provide an interesting, though unprovable suggestion of continuity of use of the site. However, the truncation and redeposition of Neolithic deposits, coupled with the absence of Bronze Age evidence, suggests that there were two very distinct periods of use.

What conclusions may be drawn? The relatively small area, both of the excavation and of surface of the stack limit the conclusions that can be derived from the excavation. Though there is a wide variety and large number of Neolithic finds from the excavation, they do not appear to represent a conventional domestic assemblage in that lithics were not manufactured on site (no debitage was found on the site, see [Appendix 4](#)).

A variety of wood types were burnt at this time, including what was probably exotic driftwood (spruce/larch) as well as native woods, particularly willow. This probably reflects the availability of fuel in the area, though there is a possibility that the high concentration of willow could have resulted from the burning of wicker. It is also interesting to note that every available type of wood seems to have been used. This burning is also reflected in the presence of burnt bone, and heat-affected lithics. The bone is undated, but the lithic assemblage contained no diagnostic Iron Age material, and is probably all Neolithic (C S Barrowman, pers comm). It is possible that previously burnt material was imported onto the site during the Neolithic period; however, this seems unlikely and the lack of secondary wear on the artefacts supports the presumption that the burning took place on the top of the stack.

One grain of emmer wheat may be Neolithic, coming from posthole Context 015/023, but all the other grain that was dated derived from the Iron Age use of the site. The occurrence of a broken saddle quern may have related to the presence of this grain. However, large-scale grain processing seems very unlikely, given the relatively small amounts of charred grain found and the topography of the site.

Two prestigious and rare finds, a beautiful, but broken, leaf or lozenge-shaped arrowhead of imported flint from Context 006 (SF100), and a large oval stone with one smoothly polished side, a surface find from the site survey (SF3:2004) are probably Neolithic in deposition. The leaf-shaped arrowhead (SF100) has a parallel in an artefact from nearby in Ness ([Barrowman, C S 2007](#)), and is diagnostically Neolithic in manufacturing date ([Appendix 4, Section 7](#)). The stone has no

known parallels in the islands, and its function is unclear.

The Neolithic produce and raw materials found at Dunasbroc could be argued to represent many if not most aspects of life in that age, and it is suggested that their collective burning there was a kind of votive deposit or offering. The exact meaning of this is not known, but it seems probable that the site's geographical location was significant.

It can be deduced from the stratigraphic analysis that there was at least one, and were possibly two, very hot fires on the same area during a very short period of the Iron Age. The scant Iron Age finds included a few sherds of diagnostic pottery, and the charred barley grains that provided the Iron Age radiocarbon dates. The undated bone fragments, both burnt and unburnt, must be assumed on stratigraphic grounds to belong to this period as well. Interestingly, there is no dated charcoal from the Iron Age use of the site. This may reflect the small sample size provided by the excavation, or a greater concern with grain by that time. Heather was found in many contexts, as were plants thought to derive from turf, possibly imported as peat fuel, such as grass/sedge stems, underground rhizomes, chickweed/mouse ear and dock. The 'weed' type plants are not found in context with the cereals, indicating that the 'cereals were fully cleaned before being brought to the stack' ([Appendix 6](#)).

Although we cannot be sure, the nature of the activities taking place seems to imply that this subsequent re-use in the Iron Age may have had some reference to the original use of the site. In this respect it may be relevant to note the numerous instances of Iron Age activity documented at Neolithic chambered tombs in the Western Isles, such as the pottery found at (amongst others) Clettraval ([Lindsay Scott 1947–8](#)), Unival ([Lindsay Scott 1934–5](#)) and probably Barpa Langass, North Uist ([Henshall 1972](#), 503), and in Orkney, the clearing aside of Neolithic deposits and deposition of Iron Age such as Calf of Eday ([Calder 1936–7](#)), Knowe of Rowiegar ([RCAHMS 1946](#)), Howe ([Ballin Smith 1994](#)) and Huntersquoy lower chamber ([Henshall 1963](#), 205) as discussed by Hingley ([1996](#)).

The excavation at Dunasbroc has provided a tantalising glimpse into a ritual site, re-used over time with, as yet, no excavated parallels elsewhere in Britain. This relatively small site has raised more questions than it has answered, but has also confirmed the thesis that coastal stack and promontory sites have a much longer and more diverse history than has previously been thought. Clearly no assumptions can be made about the dates or

functions of such sites, and further research will be necessary to understand them. The vulnerability to erosion that has provided this new evidence also

means that further research and fieldwork are a matter of great urgency, as the resource diminishes year on year.