
14 CONCLUSION, *by Alan Saville and Karen Hardy*

The location of An Corran would have been an excellent place for people who were dependent upon natural resources. The rockshelter was somewhat protected from wind and rain, even in mid-winter, and it lay adjacent to a headland yet slightly to the east of it, and was therefore protected from the extremes of westerly weather by the cliff above. Directly below was a small sandy beach with extensive areas of rocky foreshore to both sides. Opposite, less than 100m out to sea, lay Staffin Island, the presence of which served to provide protection from the open sea and is associated with a small channel which would have been ideal for collecting crustaceans and in-shore fishing. Staffin Island, which also has traces of Mesolithic activity (K Hardy, pers comm), is home to seal colonies, and otters are frequently seen swimming in the channel between the island and the mainland. The rocky foreshore houses millions of shells and contains thousands of rock pools which could have been exploited as fish traps. Above, on the cliffs, birds still nest and the abundance of bird bones in the assemblage suggests their exploitation for food.

Less than 100m from the site lay a large outcrop of baked mudstone, and the beach further to the west has chalcedony pebbles eroding out from the Trotternish escarpment and being brought down to the beach by the nearby Stenscholl River. These two sources provided most of the required lithic raw material, though some bloodstone was also imported. A small way up the river, large areas of marshland would have provided many useful resources such as reeds, while fish traps can still now be seen at the mouth of the river which lies only half a mile from An Corran. Above the cliff is a wide area of relatively flat, open land and about two miles to the west the Trotternish escarpment towers over everything. These inland areas would have been home to red deer and other terrestrial animals, all in easy reach of An Corran. Small pockets of trees still survive and the bone and charcoal assemblages suggest that the area nearby contained more trees than it does today.

The deposits at An Corran show evidence of having been repeatedly disturbed, most likely throughout antiquity (cf [Scott 1934b](#)). As a result there is much

temporal mixing, which makes any interpretation of specific activity at the site difficult. The lithic artefacts suggest occupation during various times in the Mesolithic and without benefit of radiocarbon dating it might have been concluded that most of the other evidence for human presence at An Corran from prior to the horizon with the copper-alloy pin (i.e. the bone tools, the human bones and the midden material) was also of Mesolithic date. However, the radiocarbon analyses make it clear that intermittent activity took place on the rockshelter throughout prehistory, from the Mesolithic to the Iron Age. Radiocarbon dating at An Corran has also been instrumental in decoupling the previously assumed association between bevel-ended bone and antler tools and the Mesolithic – this is a very long-lived tool type on the Scottish west coast (cf [Saville 2004a](#)). Reasons for use of the rockshelter obviously varied through time, as reflected most particularly by the human remains interpreted as the residue from burials.

In the final analysis, the significance of the snapshot provided by the chance opportunity to investigate the An Corran rockshelter is to point up once again the enormous potential that such sites have for studying Mesolithic economy and technology, and particularly in this case for examining the little understood Early Mesolithic phase of Scottish prehistory. Fortunately at An Corran, as a result of the exploratory work reported here, a substantial part of the ledge deposits survive, are protected, and could in the future be investigated further. At the several cave and rockshelter sites in the vicinity of Oban ([Anderson 1895 & 1898](#); [Coles 1983](#); [Connock 1985](#); [Connock et al 1992](#)), the archaeological response has, for various historical reasons, been largely too little too late ([Pollard 1990](#)). An Corran now provides a classic example of this kind of heritage asset, and the publication of this report should serve as a reminder to those responsible for curating and monitoring the archaeological resource that any cave or rockshelter with intact deposits warrants high priority, and that it is imperative that – if and when another site of this type becomes threatened by development or other factors – the appropriate level of archaeological response is applied.