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## 3 The Excavation *by Gavin MacGregor*

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### 3.1 Aims, Objectives and Methods

The excavation aimed to establish whether or not further human remains were present at the site, to establish how the human remains were deposited at the site, the position and location of the urn and whether there were any intimately-related features in the vicinity of the urn. It also aimed to recover all human material associated with the disturbed urn and fragments of the urn from the floor of the shelter and from the scree slope. The interior of the boulder shelter was cleaned and planned. The deposits around the urn were then half-sectioned in order to characterise their nature and extent. The urn (*Illus 5*) was fully exposed in order to lift it. However, the eroded and friable nature of the urn prevented lifting of the contents intact for laboratory excavation. Consequently, its contents were excavated *in-situ* utilising 20 mm spits and quadrants to record bone location. All deposits within the urn were bagged with the cremated bone according to this sampling strategy. All further material from the site, including the original spoil, was dry sieved in order to maximise recovery of human remains and artefacts.

### 3.2 Excavation Results

The site comprised two massive boulders resting on smaller rocks and boulders within or on a scree slope (*Illus 3*). The interior of the boulder shelter currently has a maximum height of 0.5 m and measures *c* 2.5 m by 2.5 m. The interior was filled with rocks and cave earth (context 007). The area of disturbance relating to the original discovery by the bird-watcher was at the western end of the shelter and was sub-circular, *c* 1 m in diameter, extending a further 0.3 m below the floor level. Rocks could be seen to pitch downwards into the interior of the boulder shelter but had no structural coherence or integrity. The mouth of the boulder shelter had been at least partially blocked by crude stone walling (*Illus 4*, bottom right of picture).

Cleaning of the surface around the urn produced a quantity of burnt bone and a few sherds of pottery. Excavation of the urn revealed that it had been placed into an irregular pit (005), measuring *c* 0.5 m in diameter, cut through the deposits of the boulder shelter floor (001/002) (*Illus 3*). The scree within the floor deposit pitched downwards from west to east. It was clear that pit 005 had been formed by pulling out slabs from the scree deposit. The urn had been placed



*Illus 4* Glennan boulder-shelter: working in the interior



*Illus 5 Glennan boulder-shelter: the urn in-situ*

inverted, containing the cremation deposit (004) within the pit, which was then backfilled (006). Only the upper 0.15 m of the urn, which relates to the Enlarged Food Vessel tradition (see [Section 4.2](#)

below), survived *in-situ* ([Illus 5](#)). Sieving of the exterior spoil produced a quantity of burnt bone, a few sherds of pottery and a retouched flint flake ([Illus 7](#); see [Section 6](#)).