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## 7 Conclusions from the Blackhouse Burn Environs Project by *O Lelong*

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The results of the Blackhouse Burn Environs Project, in tandem with other recent work including the excavations on Biggar Common (Johnston 1997) and that of the Upper Clyde Valley Landscape Project (Hanson & Sharpe in prep; Sharpe forthcoming), have shown the enormous potential of the valley's landscape for yielding evidence of its early prehistoric occupation. The evidence so far indicates that that activity may have taken place continuously or intermittently over several phases, spanning millennia, at the same sites. The fieldwork has demonstrated the great value of lithic scatters in the area as indicators of the presence of sub-surface, multi-phased archaeological remains.

A number of sites now have produced evidence for later Mesolithic and early or late Neolithic activity on the same spot, at various scales. These include the Blackhouse Burn monuments, with late Mesolithic vegetation clearance and perhaps hunting preceding the late Neolithic monument construction; Biggar Common, with a late Mesolithic structure on the same site as early Neolithic bonfires and an earthen mound, and later Neolithic to Bronze Age mortuary activity; and Carmichael, with a late Mesolithic knapping floor and possibly associated hearth, evidence of late Neolithic to early Bronze Age tool production and use, and possibly ceremonial activity in evidence through the pottery and putative ring-ditch.

Some such instances of the multi-phased use of the same site may be purely coincidental; however, it is unlikely that all were. If some were deliberate, then certain places in the Upper Clyde Valley must have held their significance over thousands of years. Murray has argued that earlier Neolithic ceremonial activity and the construction of monuments on sites that were significant in the Mesolithic (as seems to

have happened on Biggar Common) may have expressed a cultural and cognitive transformation (Murray 2000). This transformed mindset, she argues, would have been a deliberate and necessary precedent to the fundamental economic shift toward domestication. It has been suggested that the construction of the late Neolithic enclosure at Blackhouse Burn – an architectural intervention on an enormous scale – was only possible after people had begun to re-order the natural world as a matter of course, through domestication, and that its construction formally expressed a long-standing relationship with the place (even if the nature of its significance had changed over time) (Lelong & Pollard 1998a, 47–50).

The late Neolithic saw the construction of a number of large ceremonial enclosures like the Blackhouse Burn enclosures in agriculturally productive areas like the Upper Clyde Valley and elsewhere in south-east Scotland – for instance, at Meldon Bridge, Peebleshire (Speak & Burgess 1999). Their construction may have been linked, as Telford has suggested, to the emergence of social hierarchies (Telford 2002, 306–310), itself motivated by the desire to increase arable yields through the centralized organization of labour.

Enclosures such as those at Blackhouse Burn may have been built as regional gathering places for groups across the area, in the way that smaller henges perhaps were used on a more local scale. Future fieldwork, particularly field walking and trial excavation of lithic scatters, should steadily increase our understanding of the locations and nature of contemporary settlement and of the people who built, gathered in and buried their dead at the ceremonial monuments.