

'10 Years' celebrations end with surprising find

September and October 2003 saw two major events, both enjoyed by many of the Trust's partners and supporters, with the second resulting in a very unexpected discovery.

At the end of September we held a very well-attended conference in association with the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland – one of the founding bodies of the NTS. Almost 200 people joined us in the Royal Museum's lecture theatre, and were treated to many fascinating glimpses of some of the exciting and ground-breaking work that has been carried out for the Trust over the past 10 years.

Three of the Trust's archaeologists shared with us their own 'Eureka Moments', and these proved to be highlights in an already very enjoyable programme. The most striking of these revelations was probably Derek Alexander's fly-through graphics of Culzean Castle and the caves beneath: an up-to-the-minute use of a technology which may well change the way we record places in the next few years.

Mar Lodge meeting

A couple of weeks later, in mid-October, the Trust hosted what may be the last ever annual get-together of National Trust and NTS archaeologists. The week-long event took us out into the Cairngorms and over to Drum and Crathes estates, but also included very stimulating discussions on the future of Derry Lodge,



Conference participants considering the future options for Derry Lodge

understanding historic landscapes, and techniques of historic building recording.

The unseasonably good weather combined with the amazing hospitality of local Trust staff to make this a truly memorable event, but it will also be remembered as the time the first evidence was found of early man on the estate: numerous pieces of prehistoric worked stone were found eroding from the burn at Chest of Dee.

The presence of flint and quartz artefacts is clear evidence of activity some 7,000 or more years ago, whereas previously the oldest physical traces of human occupation were no more than 400 years old. Now all we have to do is fill in the gap!

A personal "thank you"

On a personal note, I would like to say

that it is, and has been from my first day, a great privilege to work for the National Trust for Scotland.

Working for the NTS brings with it the satisfaction of knowing that what we do helps to protect a heritage that is enormously important to people from all over the world. The job has also taken me to some of the most wonderful places in Scotland, working with many kind, generous and dedicated people along the way.

For all those who were not able to join in the celebrations of the last decade of NTS archaeology, I would like to take this opportunity to say "thank you" for your past and continuing support.

Robin Turner
Head of Archaeology

Crafts of the past

An 'Ancient Skills Day' at Culzean Country Park allowed visitors to experience technological and craft skills that would have been used in the past.

Mary and Patrick Cave-Brown, from the Council for Scottish Archaeology, demonstrated a range of techniques including boring through wood using a flint drill bit and, ever-popular, fire-making.

Christine Macleod from the Weaver's Cottage was also on hand to show visitors how to spin wool using a distaff,

as well as demonstrating different methods for dyeing fibres. Other popular activities included potting, making rush lights, grinding barley using saddle and rotary querns, and making nettle rope.

The beautiful sunny day and wide range of activities attracted a large audience of around 500. We hope that next year even more ancient skills will be available to try.

Derek Alexander
NTS Archaeologist West

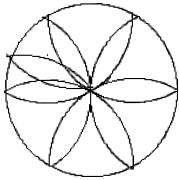


"And they said 'Ancient Skills' would be boring ...!" Drilling a hole with a wood and flint bit

Ritual marks found at Pitmedden and Craigievar

During a routine inspection of historic furniture at the Pitmedden Museum of Farming Life, it was exciting to find a series of small circles – about the size of a 10p coin – carved into the back of a tired and worn 18th-century chair. The circles are by no means part of the chair's overall decorative scheme and, after further investigations, we can now identify them as ritual marks in the form of circular 'daisy wheels'.

There are three precisely scribed circles. One contains seven elongated petal shapes whilst the other two have no internal pattern – indicating they may have been left deliberately unfinished. Six petals are more commonly used to represent the eternity of the Holy Trinity and Creation.



Heptafoil 'daisy wheel' mark. Present on the Pitmedden chair

From at least the early medieval period when Christian superstition and religion played a much stronger role in European society, our ancestors, masons and carpenters (or 'wrights') used these symbols as talismans of the sun and the Virgin Mary in an attempt to ward off evil spirits prone to inhabit dark places within the home or farmstead. Demons were thought to gain entry through windows, doors and chimneys, and because of this association marks were applied to architectural features within the interior as well as to the exterior entry points of a building.

The Pitmedden discovery is unusual in that the marks appear on a portable object, and to date we have not found any other object in the Region with similar markings.



Double inverted Vs, as at Craigievar, symbolising the Virgin Mary

A fascinating example of ritual marks set within their usual architectural context can be seen at Craigievar. On entering the castle, immediately to the right is a beautiful studded oak door – an original survivor from its earliest building history. Here one can see a sophisticated series of apotropaic symbols (which avert evil and bad luck) probably carved by the masons or carpenters working in the castle over a period of decades.

It is impossible to give an accurate date, but generally the use of these marks reached a peak throughout Britain in the 17th century with a further flourishing in the 18th century.

Lorraine Hesketh-Campbell
NTS Conservator, North-East



VVP, as at Craigievar, representing the Virgin and 'Pace' [peace]

Cleit monitoring expedition to the island of Boreray, St Kilda

A rare opportunity arose this August to undertake monitoring work on Boreray – the first chance for some 20 years. St Kilda researcher Mary Harman undertook the first comprehensive record of the structures on the island in the early 1980s, and she was able to accompany me on this visit, ensuring that structures

were speedily relocated and that questions could be discussed on site.

Mary had originally marked each cleit on the 6-inch map by eye. This time we used a hand-held GPS to locate each structure a bit more accurately. Her earlier photos of the cleits were replicated, so that an assessment of any

change could be made, although we didn't have time to visit every single structure.

We did however make time to explore the three bothies on the island, which were used from at least the 19th century by the St Kildans as shelters during their week-long annual stay. We were surprised to discover the base of a cruise lamp lying on the ground in one of the bothies – an evocative find from times past. Taking time at the bothies we also came to realise that one of these semi-subterranean structures appeared to have been constructed within an earlier, larger structure, possibly circular in plan. Could it be that this is the prehistoric structure – 'the Stallers House' – mentioned by early writers as being dug into the slopes of Boreray?

Jill Harden
NTS Highlands & Islands Archaeologist



A Boreray cleit with Stac Li in the background

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