



## Keeping up with the Joneses at Castle Fraser The last word in 17<sup>th</sup>-century home improvement

It is amazing how much a small detail revealed behind a wall lining or under a floorboard can enhance our understanding of the way a building looked at different times in its past. And if we combine this with having another closer look at areas which, although accessible, we never spend much time in – like the lofts – we find the building has some remarkable stories to tell us about its inevitably complicated history.

Much ink has been spilt over the years in trying to work out the intricate details of more than five centuries of development of the central tower house of Castle Fraser. But hardly anyone has bothered to consider the long, low wings which Lord Andrew Fraser had built in

the 1620s-30s to improve the comfort of his accommodation: beautiful buildings which create a stately, formal courtyard in front of the castle. A rewiring project over last winter provided the perfect opportunity to address this large gap in our understanding, and some rather exciting possibilities are emerging already.

It has recently been suggested that part of this courtyard complex may have been designed to house a long gallery. This was a place in which to take exercise in inclement weather (a daily walk was considered absolutely necessary to keep healthy); to display portraits of family and important friends; and to present splendid entertainments. We

have now found evidence of the existence of a long gallery in the roof-space of one range: the whole of the first floor, which today contains a series of rooms and corridors, seems to have started life as one immensely long chamber (c 75 feet), with a high, vaulted ceiling, entered from the withdrawing room off the Great Hall. It would have been a truly impressive sight, with six tall windows on either side, overlooking the courtyard and the formal gardens, and a huge window at the far end. At the other end may have been a great fireplace, perhaps now masked by a delicate 18<sup>th</sup>-century fire surround, but originally probably much like the robust, late 16<sup>th</sup>-century fireplace we discovered last year at Fyvie Castle during conservation works on an 18<sup>th</sup>-century marble surround.

Many galleries were lined with decorative wooden panelling. This may well have been the case at Castle Fraser, since original wallplaster found preserved in the loft is undecorated, hinting that it may never have been intended to be seen, hidden instead behind fancy woodwork. The ceiling may also have been of highly decorated plaster or woodwork.

The classic expression of 17<sup>th</sup>-century magnificence was to possess a great hall, withdrawing room, bedchamber and gallery, all adjoining on the first floor. Our ongoing project at Castle Fraser seems to indicate that Andrew Fraser had exactly this in mind when he sat down to sketch out his home improvement plans.

*Shannon Fraser*  
NTS Archaeologist North-East



Completed around 1633-6, a first-floor gallery in this wing would have had a spectacular view of formal gardens occupying the lawn area in the foreground.

### Culzean caves get 'Extreme' exposure!

Culzean Castle caves featured in a new TV series 'Extreme Archaeology' which deals with sites that are difficult to access. The EXA Team undertook trial trenching, geophysical survey and laser scanning in August 2003 and the programme was broadcast in July 2004 to an audience of 1.9 million viewers!

The wonderful location with its strong historical associations combined with some excellent archaeological results to make a most interesting and enjoyable programme. The discovery of human bones from at least three individuals was a major surprise, especially as one radiocarbon dated to 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century AD.



# What Susan desperately sought: 7000 years of Cairngorms history

As reported in the last *Archaeology Bulletin*, the discovery by one of our English colleagues of a flint scatter on the banks of the Dee caused considerable excitement among the Scottish contingent at our joint NTS/National Trust archaeology conference at the Mar Lodge Estate. Angus Wainwright, the National Trust Archaeologist who made the discovery, is used to working in a landscape positively bursting with prehistoric stone artefacts, so



Mar Lodge flint. Photo by Raymond Besant, *Press and Journal*.

such a discovery seemed fun but not particularly unusual. But what he had stumbled upon was in fact the first evidence of prehistoric human activity in the Cairngorms – something which the former Mar Lodge Estate Archaeologist, Susan Bain, had always kept an eye out for during her three year stint on the Estate but which, infuriatingly, had simply refused to materialize.

Having returned to the site with Angus, we collected a sample of flint artefacts and some worked quartz – in the process becoming even more excited: the form of the tools began to suggest we might actually be looking at an extremely ancient site, used by fisher-hunter-

gatherers moving along the river valleys in seasonal cycles. Preliminary analysis of the artefacts now suggests that is what we appear to have. This is an incredibly important find, as, apart from the early prehistoric material found on the NTS property at Ben Lawers, this is the only substantial collection of worked stone of this period (at least 5000 BC) from Scotland's upland, inland zone. Most of the earliest sites of human activity in Scotland are in fact coastal, so this new site has the potential to cast light on a completely different aspect of the lives of these ancient people.

A number of the flint pieces are

burnt: standing on the banks of the Dee, it is easy to conjure up an image of a group of people working close about their camp-fire, some preparing food, others repairing their implements for hunting and collecting food-stuffs, and making new tools for use on the journey ahead. With further research, we may find that this was a place in the landscape revisited many times – a familiar stopping point on journeys repeated over seasons, years, maybe centuries.

The scatter of tools abandoned as past their best, and the debris

from working others – some of which fell into the camp-fire – may turn out to be the most substantial remnants of such long-ago evenings which survive for us to find. But alongside other, more ephemeral traces, these tiny fragments of stone – some only a few millimetres long – can help us catch the echoes of those conversations round the fire, just rising above the constant rush of the river.

*Shannon Fraser*  
NTS Archaeologist North-East

*Analysis of the lithic assemblage was funded through the generous assistance of Aberdeenshire Council.*

## Medieval defensive ditch discovered

The first definite traces of a medieval defensive ditch have been found at Brodick Castle. NTS Surveyor Gary Horsburgh was keen to investigate the foundations of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century courtyard wall at the rear of the castle as part of our Annual Maintenance Grant programme supported by Historic Scotland. Severe cracking in the walls on either side of the gateway was causing concern. These cracks suggested the wall foundations might have been built upon unconsolidated material – possibly an infilled medieval ditch.

Brodick Castle dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when it is likely to have been defended by high 'curtain walls', round towers and ditches. The early traveller Martin Martin recorded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the 'south and west sides are surrounded by a broad wet ditch'. Although only part of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century gatehouse survives, the rest of the surrounding area and the old courtyard wall was demolished and levelled in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when the renowned Scottish architect James Gillespie-Graham added his extension to the castle.

An exploratory trial trench was excavated using a mini-digger. Below the layers of road make-up and pipes were the clear traces of the inner edge of a ditch. The natural boulder clay shelved steeply, precisely in line with the cracks in the wall. The presence of pipes and the proximity of the walls prevented further excavation in this area, but a second trench was dug by machine 10m beyond the first.

Despite being dug to a depth of 1.6m, the trench still did not reach natural subsoil. The trench must have been close to the middle of the ditch and was full of demolition material from the old castle. The natural was located further to the west, indicating that the ditch must be at least 20m wide. Martin Martin was certainly right when he said it was 'broad'!

Future work could excavate part of the ditch, and attempt to locate the base, which may have been backfilled with materials and artefacts from the medieval occupation of the site.

*Derek Alexander*  
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The medieval castle ditch revealed.

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