



## Digging deep in time – Crathes excavations go back 10,000 years

Over the past three years, an exciting prehistoric project has been unfolding in one of the parks on the Crathes Castle Estate, known as the Warren Field.

In the sultry summer of 1976, important cropmarks were revealed including a large rectangular timber structure, a line of pits some 60m long, and various other potentially archaeological features.

The Warren Field Project was established to get a better understanding of what lies beneath the ground surface, to help us manage the many public events in the field without damaging the archaeological remains and to cast more light on site types which are very rare. And every season, the project has thrown up surprises!

The building, which was about 24m long and 9m wide, proved to date to about 3800-3700 BC – the earliest neolithic. Identification of structural timbers shows that although oak was dominant, the builders were also using ash and willow or poplar in the main walls, and possibly hawthorn in one of the partitions. The evidence suggests that the building stood for some time before its deliberate destruction by fire.

Flint and pitchstone artefacts,



Excavating the neolithic timber building

extremely fine pottery, very rare fragments of decorated wooden bowls, and grains such as barley, bread or club wheat and emmer wheat were all recovered from the building. Their varied distribution patterns may suggest functional differences between the different areas of the structure – differences which may also have had symbolic and ritual significance.

### Ancient Pits

Twelve large pits (up to 2.5m in diameter) and five smaller features were identified during excavation of the nearby pit alignment. In general, a thick deposit of charcoal was placed within each freshly-dug pit, followed by a slow,

gradual infilling with soil as the spoil from digging eroded back in. Eventually, erosion stopped, with the pits remaining visible as dimples in the landscape. Later, people re-opened the pits, putting in material which again included large amounts of charcoal.

What was entirely unexpected – and extremely exciting – is the dating of these two phases of activity. Radiocarbon dates indicate that the pit alignment was created some 9,500-10,000 years ago, while the reworking of the site

occurred some 4000 years later. These are extremely important discoveries: on the one hand, this type of activity is almost unknown from such an early period in Britain, while on the other, this is an unparalleled example of the intentional re-use in the neolithic of an already ancient monument.

Archaeologists are already starting to rewrite the (pre)history books.

Shannon Fraser  
NTS Archaeologist North-East

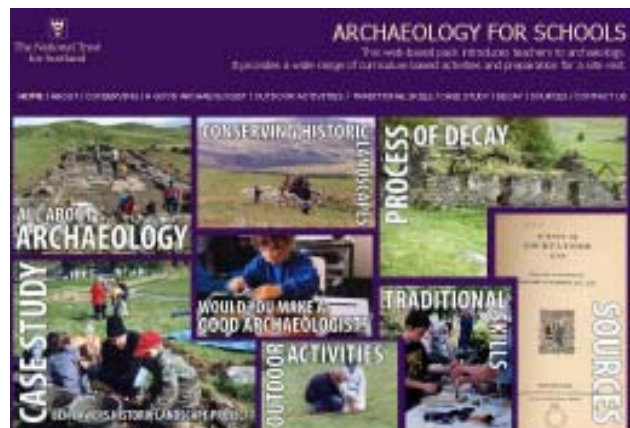
*The excavations at Warren Field have been directed by Murray Archaeological Services; the major funders are NTS, HS, and the Russell Trust.*

## Educational website takes archaeology to schools

If you are intending to work with school pupils, or other groups of young people, then visit the new HLF-funded microsite on the NTS education website.

*Archaeology for Schools* has been created by Debbie Jackson and Derek Alexander (NTS West Region Education Officer and Archaeologist respectively) after completing a schools programme as part of the Ben Lawers Historic Landscape Project. The microsite is aimed at teachers and club leaders, and provides both facts about archaeology and practical information on the workshops.

The emphasis throughout is on learning through fun, with lots of hands-on activities that link archaeology to the curriculum. The activities have been tested by primary and secondary school pupils in the Tayside area and also by some young people at NTS clubs or events. The rangers at Culzean, Ben Lomond and Ben Lawers have already used *Would You Make a Good Archaeologist?* successfully this year – so do take a look and see if there is anything there for you!



[www.ntseducation.org.uk/archaeologyforschools](http://www.ntseducation.org.uk/archaeologyforschools)

Each section can be printed easily as a pdf, but Debbie or Derek can also send out paper copies

## A Scotsman abroad: 18th-century Scottish studies at Williamsburg, USA

Earlier this year I was invited to give the opening plenary lecture at the 18th-century Scottish Studies Society Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia, USA. The talk was entitled "Enlightened Archaeology: archaeology of the age of the Enlightenment."

The lecture was a review of 18th-century archaeology in the NTS and included a wide range of sites based on information provided by all of the Trust archaeologists. It included evidence for Rob Roy at Ben Lomond, his attack on Old Auchentroig and involvement in the Battle of Glen Shiel in 1719. The recent archaeological work at Culloden was discussed as was the Weavers Cottage in Kilbarchan. The 18th-century links between Virginia and Greenbank House were highlighted. The large houses and designed landscapes of Culzean, Newhailes and Dunkeld and the Hermitage featured heavily. Evidence for 18th-century rural life was also discussed with reference to the results of the Ben Lawers Historic Landscape



Governor's Palace, Williamsburg

Project. Finally, mention was made of the Trust's involvement at Abbotsford and the Burns National Memorial Park.

### *Out and about*

While in Virginia, I visited the important colonial site of Jamestown, about to celebrate its 400th anniversary next year, and was given a sneak preview of the new archaeological exhibition – fantastic stuff! Many of the

historic sites in Virginia are similar to NTS properties in terms of research, conservation and presentation to the public. Colonial Williamsburg is a wonderful place with more living history guides than probably all of the NTS and NT put together! A visit to the American War of Independence siege site at Yorktown was also an eye-opener, although more reassuring in that the presentation of the site was not far off what we do at Culloden and Bannockburn. A trip to the historic houses of both Ash Lawn and Monticello, near Charlottesville, again highlighted the success of archaeology to help inform the interpretation of sites.

Overall the trip was a fantastic experience: plenty of archaeology, loads of food, sunshine, Blue Ridge Mountains, new friends and contacts. I'll be going back!

*Derek Alexander*  
NTS Archaeologist West

## Scotland's Rural Past gets Lottery boost

A grant of almost £600,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund has enabled the start of an ambitious project to get people more involved in their rural past.

The NTS has been a major partner in devising the Scotland's Rural Past Project, which will help local groups to understand, record and care for the evidence that people have left of daily life in the Scottish countryside over the past thousand years.

The project has taken several years to pull together, and as well as HLF and NTS, funds have been pledged from Historic Scotland, RCAHMS, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and the Russell Trust.

This has enabled a team of four full-time staff to be recruited, and to begin a 5-year programme of work. The staff, based in the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, will help existing local groups to learn new skills of recording and research, and will also stimulate the interests of new groups.

As well as recording deserted settlements and similar sites on NTS properties, we hope that the Trust can also use Thistle Camps as a means of giving intensive training to the most



Colin McLean (HLF), John Hume (RCAHMS) and Patricia Ferguson MSP (Culture Minister) at the launch of SRP at Wester Kittochside

enthusiastic of the participants in the project.

The project website is still being devised, but in the meantime anyone interested should visit [www.rcahms.gov.uk/news.asp](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk/news.asp), or contact [srp@rcahms.gov.uk](mailto:srp@rcahms.gov.uk) for up-to-date information.

**The *Archaeology Bulletin* is produced by Robin Turner, NTS Head of Archaeology. If you have any comments or contributions, please send them to:**

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