

**EXCAVATION - TORRIN, ISLE OF SKYE NG 556 227**

In July and August, 1991, the Skye & Lochalsh Museums Service carried out a small excavation on a 'typical' shieling complex at the head of Loch Slapin. Local volunteers provided the trowel power.

Evidence for four phases of activity was recovered:-

1.

The earliest was indicated by three large pits, 2.0m. by 1.0m. and 300cm. deep, cut into the bedrock; two of these had a post at each end with a central hearth, the third a single post. A single isolated post-hole was also cut into the bedrock. Sealing these features was a layer of char and black ash 100 - 150 mm. thick. Numerous reddened and heat cracked pebbles were recovered from this deposit.

2.

At a later, and as yet indeterminate date, a small turf mound, 4.0m. in diameter, was raised. The turf for this mound was obtained by skinning the surface leaving an artificially levelled surface involving partial removal of the underlying, period 1, char and ash layer. A large charcoal deposit lying on the skinned period 1 surface and centrally under the turf mound would appear to be the primary deposit for this structure.

3.

Subsequently a large twin celled shieling was built partly inset into the turf mound. The larger cell, which had an eastward facing entrance, was 4.5m. in diameter with walls 1.0m. thick. The subsidiary, satellite, cell was "D" shaped, measured 2.0m. by 2.0m. and was linked to the larger cell by a narrow passage roofed with large stone lintels. At this point there was clear indication of two hearth levels. Throughout the life of the shieling this passage appears to have served also as a stoke-hole to the "D" shaped cell, perhaps indicating the smoking of produce, such as cheeses and perhaps even fish.

4.

Thereafter a large rectangular cell was inserted against the SW wall of the larger cell. This addition measured 3.5m. by 2.0m. and included a well laid cobbled floor. As first built this cell had a wide door opening facing SW, away from the larger cell. This entrance was soon blocked up, the blocking laid over the SW end of the cobbled floor restricting access to a low linteled creep from the larger cell. A rammed earth floor overlay the cobbles. Finally, the whole complex was abandoned. Soil and charcoal samples were recovered for analysis.

Thanks are extended to the John Muir Trust and Torrin Grazings Committee for permission to excavate, and to those local volunteers who assisted with the excavation. The site has been set out to display the shieling phase.

Martin Wildgoose  
September, 1991.

# TORRIN 91

PHASE 4a

