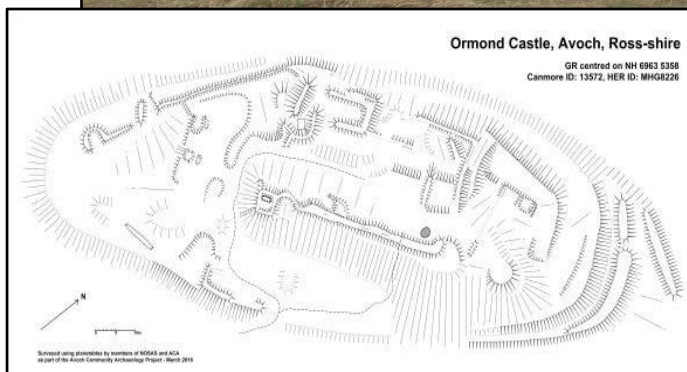


Report of a Survey of Ormond Castle, Avoch, Ross-shire carried out by members of the North of Scotland Archaeological Society and Avoch Community Archaeology group
Mar 20th to 21st 2016



With the kind permission of Broadlands Estates Rosehaugh

Background

The North of Scotland Archaeological Society (NOSAS) and Avoch Community Archaeology (ACA) group joined forces in March 2016 to survey and photograph Ormond Castle, GR NH 6963 5358 (HER ID: MHG8226, Canmore ID 13572). The castle overlooks the village of Avoch on the Black Isle and commands good views across the Moray Firth to the south and the former ferry crossing between Chanonry and Ardersier in the east.

To date Ormond castle has not received the attention it deserves. It is traditionally associated with William the Lion (1143 – 1214). He built two castles on the Black Isle in 1179, one at Redcastle and a second which is thought to be this one. Andrew de Moray was owner of the castle in the 13th century and principal commander of Scottish forces in the north during the Wars of Independence in the late 13th Century, but was mortally wounded fighting alongside William Wallace at the Battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297. In 1455, after being in the hands of the de Moray family and the earls of Ross, the castle passed to royal control and in 1481 James III granted it to his son, the Marquis of Ormond, from whom the present name derives. The castle was destroyed by Cromwell's forces in 1650 and the stones were transported over the firth to build the Citadel in Inverness.

Only the foundations of the walls remain today. The HES scheduling document for the site states that "the monument is of national importance because it is a fine field monument of a type rare in Scotland; it is said to have been one of the royal castles built c.1179 and the clearly defined remains have the potential to increase understanding of 12th century fortification techniques and military history." Also of interest are the ditches and banks around the northeast side of the site, reminiscent of those found on some Iron Age forts and suggesting the possibility of the site having had earlier occupation.

In 1883 the castle was investigated by Angus Beaton, but the excavations carried out remain unpublished and the plan produced was inadequate. A further sketch was drawn in the 1960s, but it too is not very detailed and does not give an indication of the complexity of the site. Our task to carry out a measured survey using planetables was ambitious; not only was the site complex, but it was also big (150m x 65m), covered in thick vegetation and had considerable height discrepancy.

Aims and Objectives

1. The primary aim was to produce a measured survey of the site using the planetable method. But the first task was to clear the site of vegetation so that the features could be seen; the local ACA folk were to make a good job of "strimming" the site of its undergrowth in the couple of weeks beforehand.
2. A profile of the site was to be produced using tapes; the resultant measurements would then be processed in order to take account of the height discrepancy.
3. The site was to be photographed:
 - a) Aerial photographs of the overall site using a quadcopter
 - b) Ordinary photographs of individual features, taking advantage of the low vegetation. The strimming had also revealed some new features particularly in the two outer baileys; these had not previously been recognised

Method

On a calm but cold Sunday in March 20 people, from both NOSAS and ACA, gathered at the site. Many had no experience of using a planetable but, after some training, they quickly got into the way of it and the task was completed in 2 days using 5 planetables. Nine PT stations were needed to cover the site. Inevitably the height variations over the site meant that measurements were distorted and the PT positions were not quite correct in their relationship to each other, but this was overcome at the drawing-up stage by using the APs. The PT positions were precisely marked on the ground using spray paint and the photogrammetrically rectified aerial photographs were used to adjust their positions on the plan. The flyover also produced some impressive 3D images of the castle and its features which gave a greatly enhanced overall

picture of the fortification. These images also revealed a few more features which we were able to fill in “by eye” on the two return visits which were needed to verify and adjust the drawing.



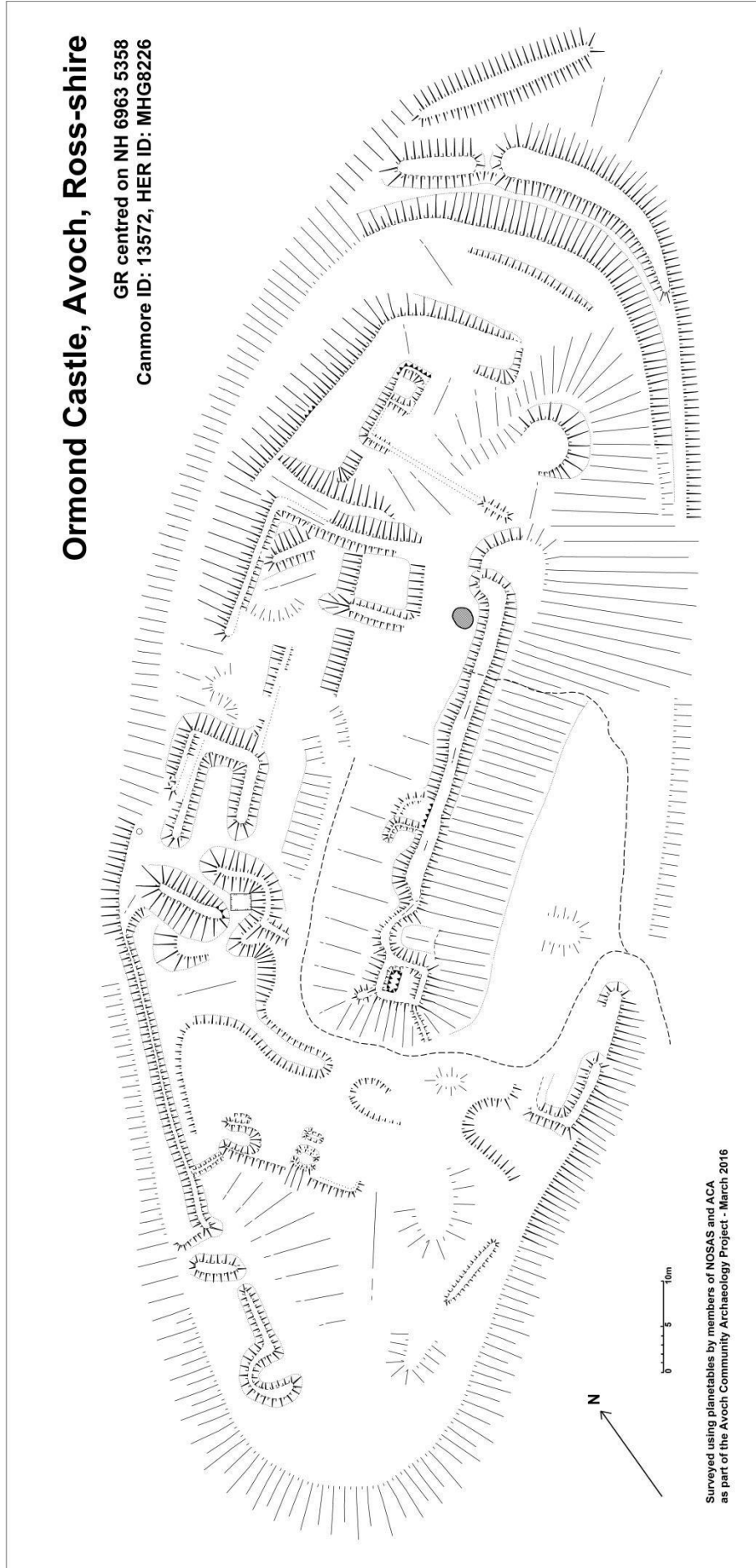
Preparing to survey the summit wall, looking NE



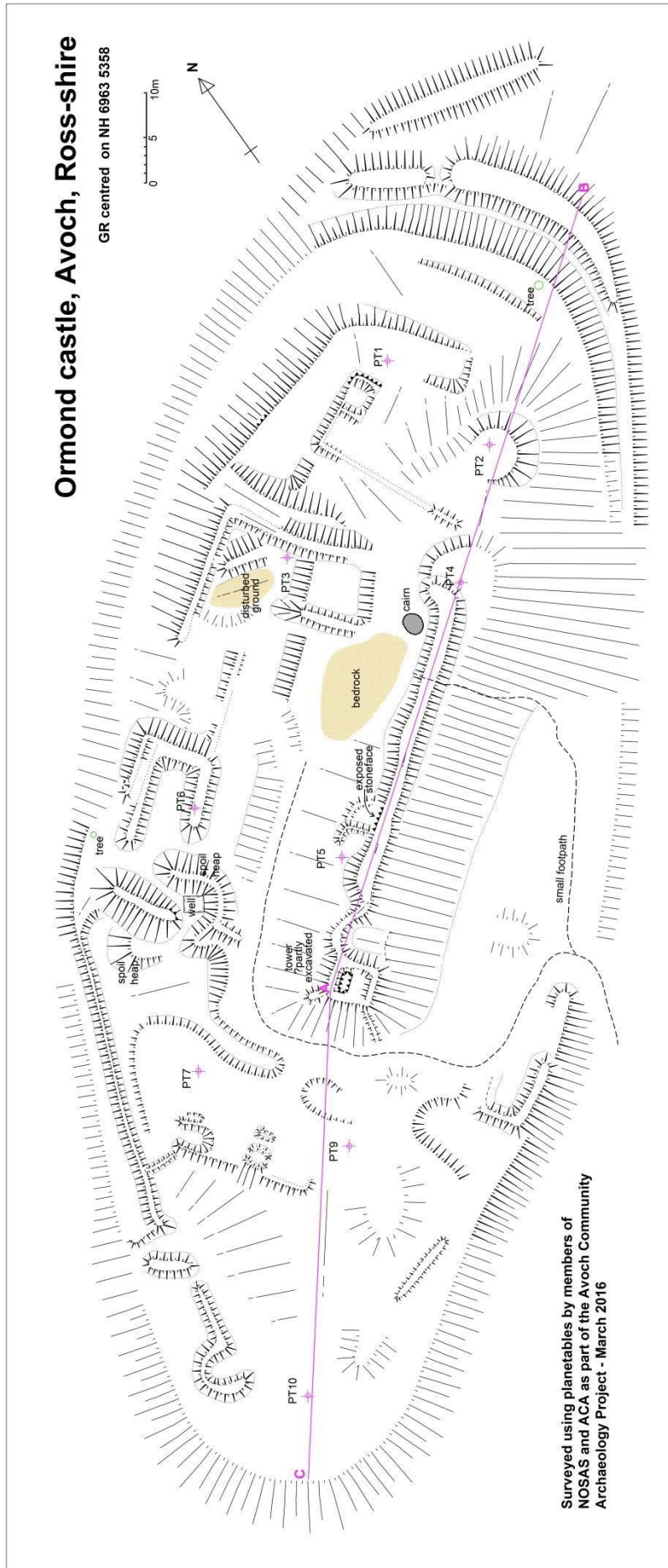
Planetabling in full swing, looking W

Results

1. Final plan



2. The plan with the profile and the planetable positions

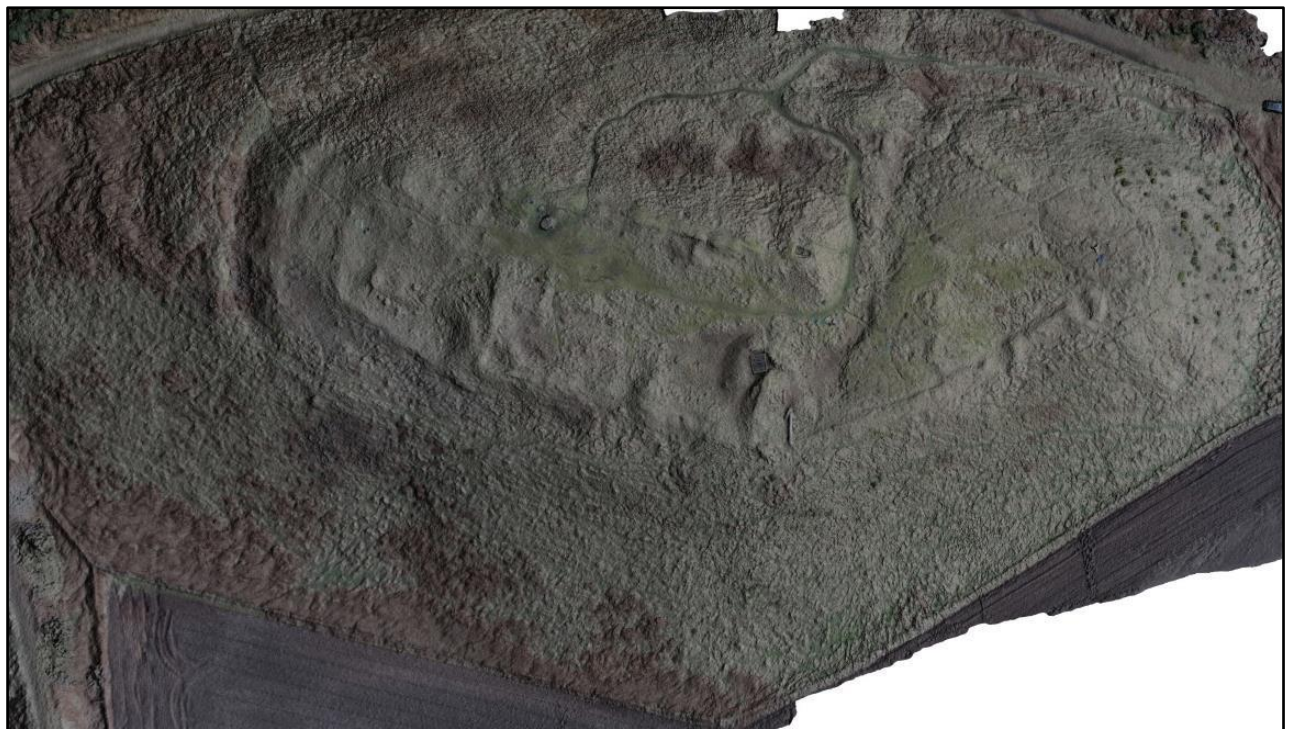


3. Photographs

a) Processed Aerial Photographs



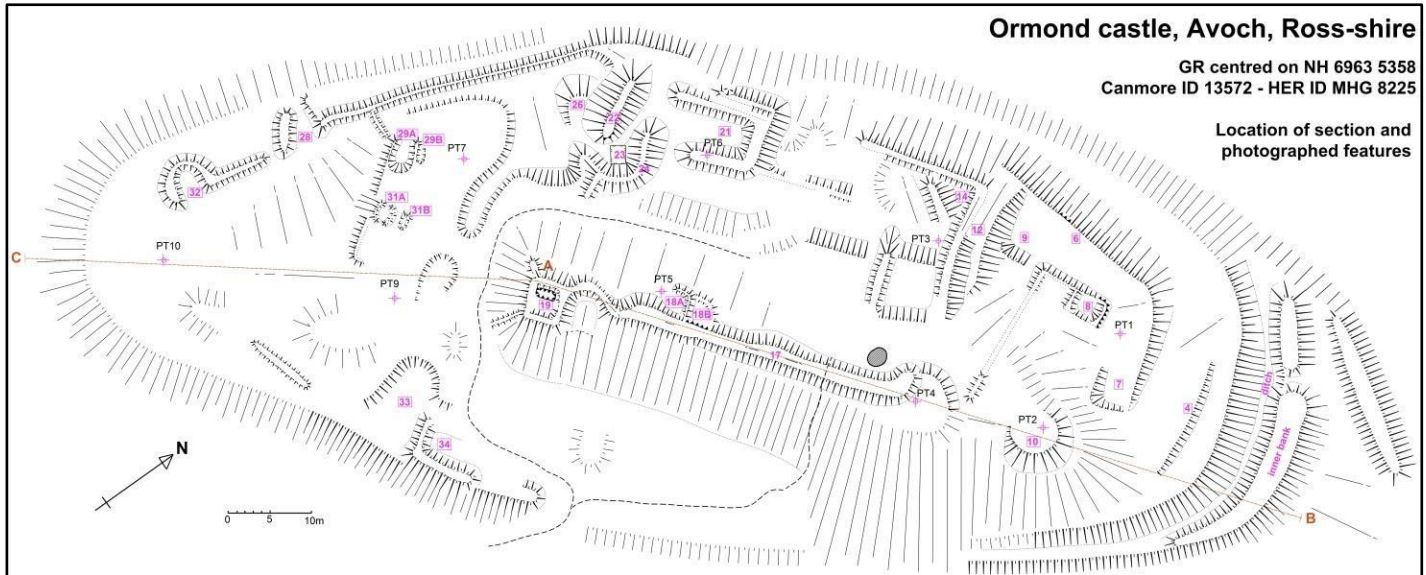
Ormond Castle viewed from the west



Ormond Castle from directly above

b) Photographs of Individual Features

The strimming of the vegetation enabled a clearer view of the features and the opportunity to photograph them was not to be missed. Each feature was given a number in order to identify it. Unfortunately the weather was damp and generally the photos are poor. Only a selected number are included here, a complete list appears as appendix 1.



Feature 4.
 Platform looking SE,
 the inner ditch and bank
 at the NE end of the site
 are seen on the left



Feature 6
 Outer wall looking W



Feature 24
Midden looking NW, the
well (26) is also seen
surrounded by a wooden
fence with wall (22)
beyond



Feature 19
North part of tower, partly
excavated, looking N



Feature 27
Outer wall at west end of
site with tower (32) in the
foreground



Appendix 1.

Ormond Castle photographs - 20th March 2016								
	Feature no.	Description	Part		Comments	Looking	Photo ref	
1		Inner ditch and bank	E part			NNW	5188	
2		Inner ditch and bank	SE part			S	5189	
3		Inner ditch and bank	NE part			NW	5190	
4		Inner ditch and bank	E part			E	5193	
5		Outer ditch and bank	E part			E	5191	
6	4	escarpment/platform				SE	5194	
7	7	platform				NW	5196	
8	7	platform				SE	5197	
9	8	building	E end			NW	5199	
10	8	building				N	5201	
11	8	building				N	5202	
12	9	recessed platform				NW	5203	
13	6	wall				NW	5204	
14	6	wall				W	5205	
15	6	wall			detail of stoneface	W	5208	
16	6	wall	W end		showing relationship to corner 1	NE	5212	
17	10	platform/?tower				N	5209	
18	14	wall corner/depression				NW	5210	
19	14	wall corner/depression				E	5211	
20	21	wall/building	E end		also 22 and 24	W	5214	
21	21	wall/building	E end			W	5215	
22	21	building	NW corner in foreground				E	5216
23	23	well			24 on left, 22 on right	S	5217	
24	23	well	W side		26 midden in foreground	SE	5224	
25	22	wall	SE corner		detail stonework	NW	5218	
26	22	wall	SE corner		detail stonework		5237	

27	22	wall		SE corner		detail stonework		5238
28	24	midden					NW	5220
29	24	midden				material detail		5219
30	26	midden				also 22 wall and 23 well	E	5225
31	17	wall		mid-part		detail of stoneface	S	5221
32	18A	tower					NE	5234
33	18A	tower					NE	5235
34	18B	small enclosure					W	5236
35	19	tower		N part		detail of stoneface	N	5222
36	19	tower				?excavated recess	SE	5223
37	27	wall					SW	5240
38	27	wall				32 in foreground	N	5242
39	32	?tower					NW	5241
40	29A	small enclosure					NW	5245
41	29A	small enclosure				29B on right	NW	5231
42	29A	small enclosure				29B on right	NW	5239
43	31A	small enclosure					NW	5243
44	31A	small enclosure				31B in foreground	SW	5244
45	33	possible ditch					W	5227
46	33	possible dirch				34 in forground	W	5226