

**Report on the Location and Marking of Archaeological Sites
prior to Forestry Felling at Kinbrace Farm, Kildonan,
Sutherland**

FCCO/SUT/AF

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for

**Scottish Woodlands Ltd
and
Historic Scotland**

Report on the Location and Marking of Archaeological Sites prior to Forestry Felling at Kinbrace Farm, Kildonan, Sutherland

Introduction

The author was asked by Scottish Woodlands Ltd to locate a number of recorded archaeological sites, many of them Scheduled Ancient Monuments, within an area of mature forestry plantation at Kinbrace Farm and Kinbrace Hill, Kildonan parish, Sutherland. The object of locating the sites was to mark adjacent trees for hand felling and to mark routes to each site to enable access for this hand felling, the aim being to make the sites visible and accessible prior to mechanized felling of the remaining areas of forest. This would ensure that felling operations would not encroach on the Scheduled Areas, and that other archaeological sites which had been planted over would not be further damaged.

Method

Information on the Scheduled Ancient Monuments was provided by Historic Scotland, while the Highland Council's Sites and Monuments Record provided information on other archaeological sites recorded in the area of proposed felling. Aerial photographs, taken before the original planting, were examined for evidence of further, unrecorded sites. Following this, the sites were visited on 1.10.01. The condition of each site was noted briefly, particularly if this appeared to have altered considerably since the last visit (Most of the sites were visited by the RCAHMS in July 1991).

An orange coloured spray was used to mark each tree which it was felt should be felled by hand, the extent of this hand- felling being dictated by the condition of the site and the surrounding forestry. A second, blue, spray was used to mark an access route, either from the road or nearest trackway or firebreak, or from the nearest easily-located archaeological site.

Sixteen sites were noted, of which eleven are Scheduled, two others are recorded on the Highland Council SMR and three were located in the course of this visit. An account is given below of each site.

The Archaeological Sites

1. Hut Circle at NC 8681 2963

Scheduling no. 1873, SMR no. NC82NE0036 A.

This hut circle is set in a clearing adjacent to the road, and is therefore already visible and accessible (**Photos 1 and 2**). Trees were marked for hand felling to ensure a distance of at least 10m from the edge of the feature. A number of exposed stones were noted within the trees to the SE of the site (**Photo no. 3**) which may represent a lynchet or field boundary. Trees were marked to extend the clearing to include this feature.

2. Hut Circle at NC 8688 2969

Scheduling no. 3387, SMR no. NC82NE0036

This hut circle is located in a small overgrown clearing, with one mature tree growing within the hut circle itself (**Photo no. 4**). Trees were marked for hand felling to ensure a cleared distance of 10m from the edge of the feature and to attempt to ensure that future windblown trees would not fall on the circle. An access route to the hut circle was marked in blue from the NE of the clearing of Site 1.

3. Area of probable features associated with SMR no. NC82NE0036 at NC 8678 2953

A rapid search was made of the area surrounding sites 1 and 2, where 'irregularly shaped fields...enclosed by courses of stones, earth and stone banks, or low, spread turf banks' were originally noted. The survival of any of these features after afforestation was unlikely to be good enough to merit careful felling, and although in several places small stony banks were noted, mostly cut through by ploughing, it was not felt that these were individually worth clearing. However, at NC 8678 2953 a group of probable field walls and clearance cairns are in a better state of preservation, although ploughed and planted. This area was marked for hand felling, and an access route marked in blue to the road, a fence post being marked to indicate the beginning of this route.

4. Mound, cairn or clearance pile at NC 8676 2934

This small, grass-covered mound is clearly visible in a small clearing just at the edge of the forest (**Photo no. 5**). Its size suggests that it is a clearance pile. The trees were marked to extend the clearing to approximately 5m. from the edge of the feature, and the fence was marked in blue to indicate its location.

5. Chambered Cairn at NC 8688 2935

SMR no. NC82NE0002

This large, round chambered cairn of bare stones is set in a clearing just visible from the road and the adjacent ride (**Photo no. 6**). The original report on this site described the cairn as being set on a raised platform extending some 6.5m from the base of the visible cairn, but this platform is now obscured by grasses. Trees

were marked for felling to extend the clearing to ensure a distance of 10m from the visible edge of the feature and to attempt to prevent future windblow from damaging the cairn.

6. Hut Circle at NC 8701 2917

Scheduling no. 3325, SMR no. NC82NE0045

This feature was not located, nor is there any record of it having been visited since afforestation. This area of forest is generally accessible, although there are patches of windblow, and it is assumed that this feature was mutilated by ploughing.

7. Two Hut Circles or Enclosures at NC 8704 2907 and NC 8706 2906

This feature was not located. It is recorded as having been visited in 1977, when it was described as mutilated by recent forestry ploughing and planting. The forest here is fairly accessible although there are patches of windblow, and it is assumed that these two hut circles have not survived.

8. Probable Clearance Pile at NC 8701 2913

This mound was located while searching for Site 7, and is assumed to be representative of associated field clearance heaps. It is visible as a moss-covered stony mound, through which the plough has passed (**Photo no. 7**) Trees were marked for hand felling to an approximate diameter of 10m, and an access route was marked in blue to the road, a fencepost being marked to indicate its start.

9. Two Chambered Cairns at NC 8717 2915

Scheduling no. 1797, SMR no. NC82NE0003

Two large cairns of bare stone set in one large clearing adjacent to a forest track, easily visible and accessible. (**Photos 8 and 9**) Trees were marked to extend the clearing to a radius of 20m, and more in the SW where windblow is causing trees to fall onto the SW cairn. No access route was considered necessary.

10. Chambered Cairn at NC 8724 2930

Scheduling no. 3324, SMR no. NC82NE0043

This cairn was not located, in an area of particularly bad windblow (**Photo no.10**) There does not appear to have been a clearing left around the site. The cairn has not been visited since afforestation, and a previous attempt in 1991 could not locate it.

11. Cairn at NC 8741 2916

Scheduling no. 3323, SMR no. NC82NE0010

This cairn is located on a rise in a clearing and appears to be in a good state of preservation (**Photo no. 11**) Trees were marked for hand felling to extend the clearing to ensure at least 10m from the edge of the visible cairn.(Note: these trees are marked in blue as the orange spray ran out) However, the nature of the surrounding forest made it almost impossible to mark out an access route, through a combination of windblow and waterlogging. The marked route leads roughly

west from the N-S ride to the east of the site, but this ride itself is almost completely blocked by windblown trees. It is probable that work of hand felling at this site will have to wait until commercial felling operations have cleared the ride.

12. Structure at NC 8742 2904

SMR no. NC82NE0009

This feature was recorded as a mutilated U-shaped enclosure, possibly originally a cairn, about 19m in diameter, with numerous field clearance mounds in the area. It has been planted over, and the conclusion of the last visit to the site in 1977 was that it was too amorphous to be interpreted. At least two stony, moss-covered mounds were noted at this location (**Photo no. 12**), possibly two points on the enclosure, and more stone piles were visible to the north of these two. An area including the two main mounds was marked for hand felling (note: blue spray was used to mark trees for felling as the orange spray had run out) and an access route was marked in blue, beginning beside the small sluice which forms part of the farm water supply.

13. Cairn at NC 8740 2888

Scheduling no. 3322, SMR no. NC82NE0020

This cairn is visible as a grass-covered mound in a clearing close to the forestry track, with a number of dead windblown trees lying on the cairn. (**Photo no. 13**) Trees were marked for hand felling to extend the clearing back at least 10m from the edge of the mound, and an access route was marked in blue from the track, starting just west of the stream

14. Hut Circle at NC 8710 2880

Scheduling no. 3320, SMR no. NC82NE0023

This hut circle is set in a small clearing just within the forest (**Photo no. 14**) The hut circle has a diameter of 8.5m N-S by 6.5m E-W Trees were marked for hand felling to extend the clearing to a diameter of 20m, and an access route marked in blue to the road, a fence post being marked in blue to indicate the start of the route.

15. Hut Circle at NC 8755 2886

Scheduling no. 3321, SMR no. NC82NE0021 A.

This feature was not located, within an area of severe windblow (**Photo no.15**) Where accessible, the exposed rootballs of the trees and scars left on the ground were examined for evidence for the hut circle. Some stones were exposed which might have formed the walls, but the evidence was too poor for a definite identification to be made. A visit to the site in 1976 described this feature as being severely mutilated by ploughing and planting, and it was not located during a visit in 1991.

16. Hut Circle at NC 8764 2873

Scheduling no. 3321, SMR no. NC82NE0021 B.

This hut circle is set in a clearing just inside the forest east of the farm, and is indistinct under a thick growth of grasses. **(Photo no. 16)** A few windblown trees have fallen on the site. Trees were marked for hand-felling to extend the clearing back at least 10m from the edge of the feature, and an access route marked in blue from the forestry fence to the SW.

Other Sites within the Kinbrace Forestry Area

It had been intended to do a rapid survey within the forestry to ascertain the extent of survival of other minor, associated archaeological features such as clearance piles and field boundaries, and to investigate possible archaeological features as noted from examination of pre-forestry aerial photographs. However, the inaccessibility of the forest and the degree of mutilation of known sites from ploughing and planting, led to the abandonment of this plan.

Recommendations

During this visit, the high number of trees affected by windblow was noted, and it would appear highly likely that the removal of the outer, supporting trees around a clearing would encourage the trees behind to blow over, potentially damaging the archaeological sites within the clearings. It would seem undesirable for a long interval to occur between the hand felling and the clear felling. However, the timetable for the next stages is at the discretion of the forester.

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7.11.01

The Photographs

1. **Site 1. Hut Circle A**, view from SE showing area of souterrain
2. **Site 1. Hut Circle A**, view from SE showing entrance
3. **Site 1. Hut Circle A**, area of exposed stones to SE of the clearing.
4. **Site 2. Hut Circle B**. View from the ENE
5. **Site 4. Mound or Cairn**, view from the SW
6. **Site 5. Chambered Cairn**, view from the S.
7. **Site 8. Probable Clearance pile**, view from the NW
8. **Site 9. Two Chambered Cairns** view of NE cairn from the SW
9. **Site 9. Two Chambered Cairns**, view of SW cairn from the E
10. **Site 10. Cairn**. View of approximate location of cairn
11. **Site 11. Cairn** View of cairn from the W.
12. **Site 12. Possible cairn or enclosure**, view of western stony pile from the E.
13. **Site 13. Cairn**, view from the NE
14. **Site 14. Hut Circle** view from the S.
15. **Site 15. Hut Circle A** view of approximate location of hut circle
16. **Site 16. Hut Circle B** view from the SE

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