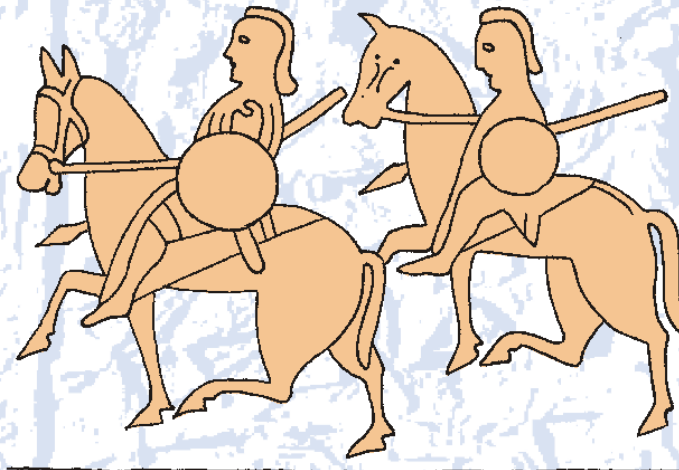
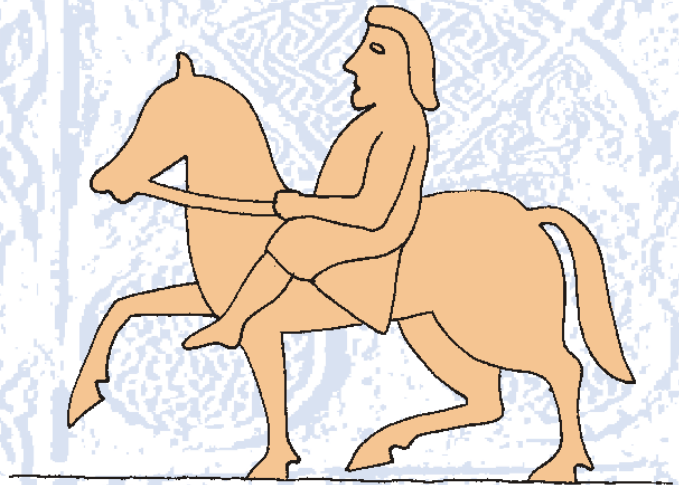



The Highland
PICTISH TRAIL



A guide to Pictish sculpture from
Inverness to Dunrobin



KEY

- Town or Village ●
- Pictish Stone Site (17)
- Recommended Pictish Trail Route —
- Alternative Route Links - - -
- A9 Trunk Road —
- Arabella Roundabout (17)

Pictish Trail Guide

"Mysterious and often beautiful, Pictish sculpture presents one of the great puzzles of Dark Age archaeology"
(Joanna Close-Brooks 1989)

The Route

Leaving Inverness, follow the A9 northwards over the Kessock Bridge to the Black Isle.

Follow signs for Groam House Museum, Rosemarkie.

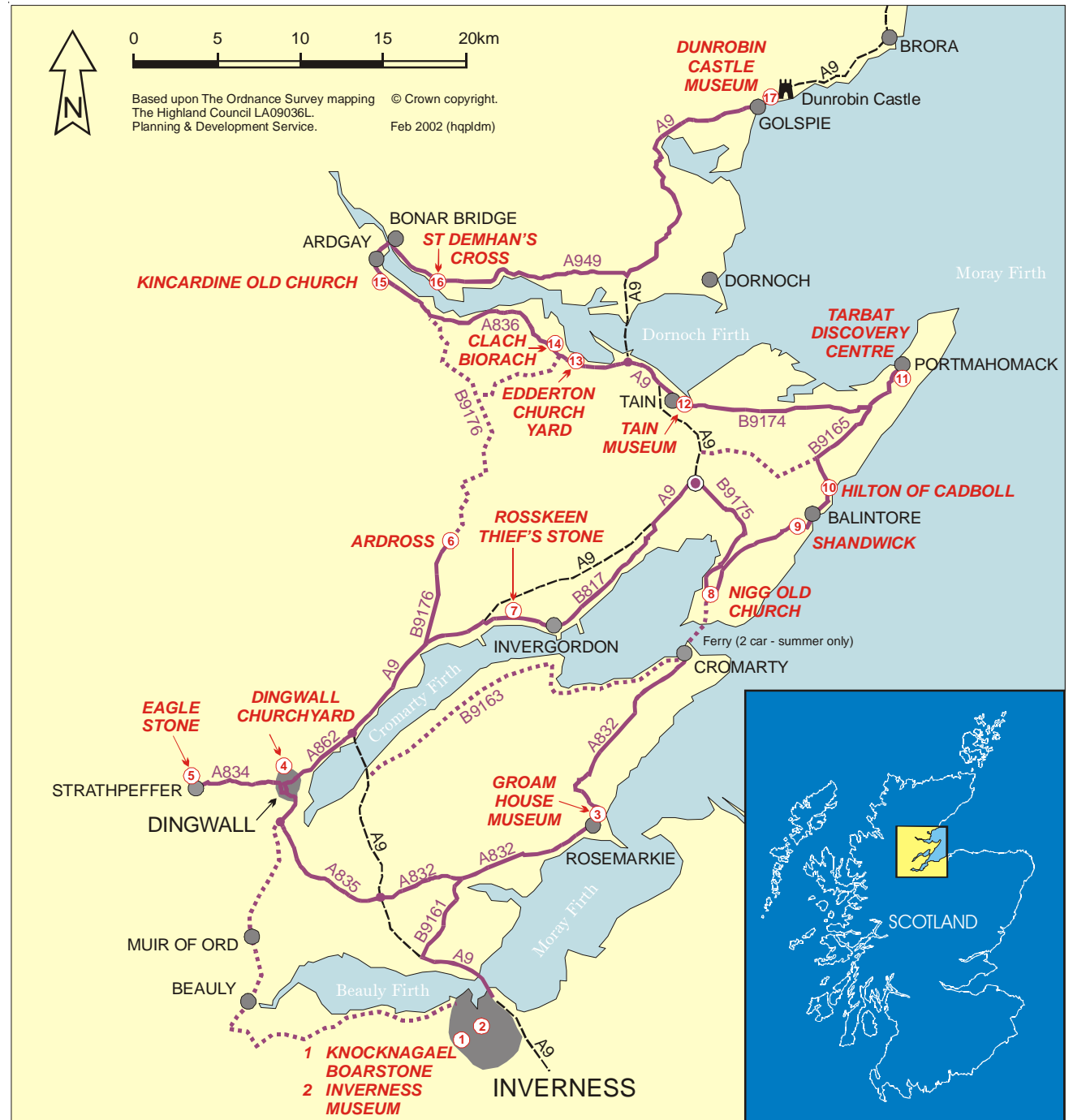
From here you can either continue across the Cromarty - Nigg car ferry (seasonal - to check timetable contact local tourist offices) or follow the coast road around the Black Isle to Dingwall and Strathpeffer.

Sites 8 - 13 are signposted from the A9 at the Arabella roundabout (17 on the map).

All the sites have free parking available nearby unless otherwise indicated. Please contact The Highland Council Public Transport section (Tel: 01463 702695) for details of public transport services in the area.



Pictish Trail →



Who were the Picts?

The Picts lived in north and east Scotland in the 3rd to 9th centuries AD. We know little of their history as very few written records survive, and none in the Pictish language. There are a few inscriptions however which suggest that they spoke a language closely related to both Welsh and Gaelic. The name first appears in Roman sources as *Picti*, meaning 'the decorated or painted people' - perhaps a reference to tattooing or war paint. However this may be the latinised form of an older name. In Gaelic the Picts are called *Cruithne* - the Welsh form of which has given us 'Briton' and 'Britain'. They intermarried with the Irish *Scotti* and jointly raided Roman Britain. There were also extensive contacts with Anglo-Saxon Northumbria. Both these interactions can be seen in the art of the later carved stones. From the 9th century, Picts and Scots were both ruled by a single king - although by then, Shetland, Orkney, Caithness, Sutherland, and the Hebrides were all under Norwegian control.

Symbols and Designs

The famous symbols are unique to the Picts. Their purpose and meaning are still unknown, but they appear over a long period on jewellery, and as graffiti, as well as on carved stones. They frequently appear in pairs, and have been interpreted as indicating particular kindreds, lineages or clans, or as a pictographic system of writing. However they may have mythological or religious meanings - there are many examples of early medieval carved stones from England, Ireland, the Isle of Man and Scandinavia where pagan and Christian themes are combined. Like these stones too, they probably commemorate individuals. In a few cases associated graves have been found. Below are examples of Pictish designs and symbols which can be seen on the Trail. Also look out for cup-marks, which appear on some of the stones. These are circular hollows created in patterns on the face of a stone, and are generally thought to be prehistoric in date.

Classification

The Pictish stones have been conventionally divided into three groups:

Class 1 : unworked stones or boulders, with symbols only incised on them, dating from the 6th, 7th and 8th centuries.

Class 2 : major works of art, dating from the 8th and 9th centuries. They are quarried and cut rectangular slabs, usually of sandstone, which are finely carved in relief with Pictish symbols mingled with Christian motifs. On one side there is often a large cross, with its surface and surrounding spaces filled with elaborate designs. The surface style of the decoration is generally similar to manuscript illumination and religious metalwork of the period.

Class 3 : this is a catch-all for any Pictish sculpture from the 8th or 9th century, where no symbol has been identified. It includes fine cross-slabs, recumbent gravemarkers, free-standing crosses and composite stone shrines.

Pictish symbols:



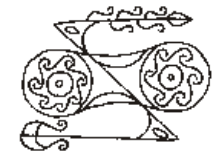
Crescent



Crescent & V-rod



Double disc



Double disc & Z-rod



Horseshoe



Mirror case



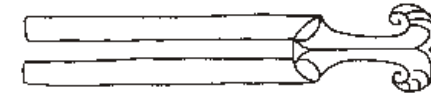
Mirror & comb



Pictish beast



Step

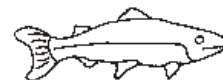


Tuning fork



Inverted L

Naturalistic symbols:



Fish



Boar

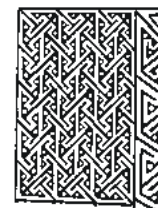


Eagle

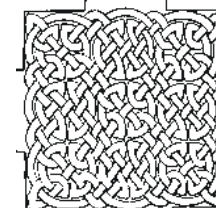


Wolf

Designs include:



Key-pattern (e.g. Rosemarkie)



Knotwork (e.g. Nigg)

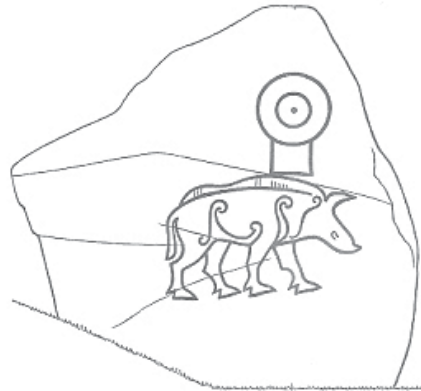



Spirals (e.g. Nigg)

Not all stones fit into this classification. At Creich, for example, there is a cross incised on a rough standing stone (no.16).

1. Inverness - the Knocknagael Boar Stone


This Class 1 stone previously stood at Knocknagael, on the south side of Inverness beside the road to Essich (NH 656 413). It is a large, rough slab with the incised figure of a boar, and above it a mirror case symbol. In 1991 it was moved for its protection to The Highland Council's HQ in Glenurquhart Road, where it can be seen through a large window.



 Visible through window all year, entry to building by appointment. Car parking usually available at rear of building. Contact: HC Archaeology Unit 01463 702250.

2. Inverness Museum (collection)

Eight Class 1 stones are on display, including the Ardross Wolf (see no.6 below) and a fragment from Little Ferry Links (Sutherland) that matches a piece in Dunrobin Castle Museum (see no.17). A catalogue is available for sale in the shop (see reading list). There are also examples of Pictish metalwork showing the symbols.

 In Castle Wynd. Open all year (free). Contact: 01463 237114.

3. Rosemarkie - Groam House Museum (collection)

Rosemarkie was the site of an early Christian centre in the 8th and 9th centuries AD. Today, you can examine the surviving fragments of Pictish sculpture gathered together in the museum display. The centrepiece of the permanent exhibition is a magnificent Class 2 cross-slab, covered with elaborate and intricate designs reminiscent of Pictish metalwork. These include two crosses as well as three crescent and V-rod symbols, one double-disc and Z-rod, a comb, mirror, and mirror-case. The museum also houses a comprehensive collection of photographs of the Pictish stones of Scotland.



 Open 1 May to 30 September 10am to 5pm (Mon-Sat) 2-4.30pm (Sun); 1 Oct to 30 April 2-4pm (Sat and Sun). Contact: 01381 620961. Disabled access to ground floor only.

4. Dingwall - the Churchyard Stone


This Class 1 stone was found in 1880, re-used as a lintel in the church. It was taken out and set up in the churchyard facing the entrance gate. On the front are a double disc and Z-rod, and two crescent and V-rods, and on the back three circles and a crescent and V-rod as well as six cup marks.

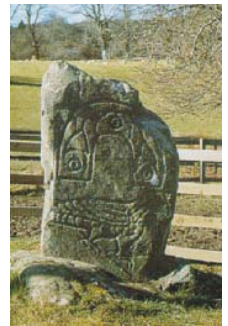
 Accessible all year.



5. Strathpeffer - the Eagle Stone


This Class 1 stone stands on a small, probably artificial mound. On one face is a decorated horseshoe symbol above an eagle. Its Gaelic name (*Clach an Tiompain*) means 'the Sounding Stone'.

 Accessible all year. Signposted from the road along a short footpath.



6. Ardross Stones

Two Class 1 sandstone fragments, bearing incised representations of a deer and wolf in Pictish style, were found 'built into an old wall at Stittenham' before 1891. Often known as the Ardross Wolf and Deer (or Horse), they are preserved in Inverness Museum (no.2). Copies have been carved and set up outside the new Ardross Hall.

 Accessible all year. Park in the car park and walk round the side of the building.



7. Rosskeen - the Thief's Stone

The *Clach a'Mheirlich* or 'Thief's Stone' (Class 1) stands in a field by the Alness to Invergordon road. On the front is an incised step symbol and on the left side what appear to be the traces of a crescent symbol with a pair of pincers below.



Park in the 'Public slipway' car park.

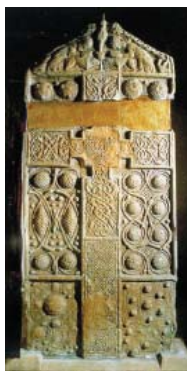


The stone is about 20m into the field across the road.

Visible all year, but **please view from roadside - do not climb over the fence.**

8. Nigg - the Nigg Stone

This magnificent Class 2 cross-slab now stands inside the church. The decoration has similarities with the 8th-century free-standing crosses on Iona, the St Andrews Sarcophagus (a Pictish royal shrine) and the illuminated gospel-book, of the same date, known as the Book of Kells. The great cross is set against a background of bosses made up of snakes, and the pediment above illustrates an episode in the life of St Paul the Hermit as told by St Jerome. On the reverse there is an eagle symbol, hunting scenes, and an illustration of the Biblical story of how David killed a lion in order to save a lamb in his flock. A detached fragment, including part of a Pictish beast symbol was found in 1998. It is currently in Tain Museum (No.12).



The church is open 1 April to 31 October, 10am-5pm.

Contact: Nigg Old Trust 01862 832214.

9. Shandwick - the Shandwick Stone

This impressive Class 2 cross-slab was a landmark for local boats. It is now protected by a glass shelter. Facing the sea, its great cross is covered with bosses and interlocking spirals. On the back are five panels of decoration. At the top is a double-disc symbol above a Pictish beast, while another shows a hunting scene, fighting swordsmen and a hunter with a cross-bow. The complex patterns of serpents biting their own bodies have parallels in 8th-century metalwork from Britain, Ireland, and continental Europe. Its Gaelic name (*Clach a' Charaidh*) means 'stone of the grave-plots'. A burial ground here was recorded in 1889 as last used during the cholera epidemic of 1832 and ploughed under about 1885.



Visible through glass all year, entry to shelter by appointment. Park in the lay by provided and cross the stile (no wheelchair access). Contact: Shandwick Stone Trust 01862 832525 or 07831 894450

10. Hilton of Cadboll

The Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab (Class 2) once stood outside St Mary's chapel at Cadboll, the remains of which can still be seen as grass covered mounds. In 1676 the face bearing the cross was defaced and an inscription cut to commemorate Alexander Duff and his three wives. In the 19th century the stone was removed to Invergordon castle, and in 1921 it was presented to the British Museum in London. However the following year it was returned to Scotland and it is now in the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. In 2000, a new stone was set up at the chapel site, which was carved to reproduce as closely as possible the design of the surviving face of the original.



The main panel depicts a woman mounted on horse-back, accompanied by other mounted figures, musicians and animals in a detailed hunting scene. A mirror and comb symbol is to her left. Above are a crescent and V-rod and at the top, a double disc and Z-rod.



Accessible all year. Park in the lay by and follow the path to the site, which is in the care of Historic Scotland. Note: there are no laid paths within the site itself.

11. Portmahomack - Tarbat Discovery Centre (collection)

Housed in the refurbished interior of Tarbat Old Parish Church, the Centre displays fragments of Pictish sculpture revealed by ongoing excavations at the site. They include cattle licking their new-born calf, a rooting wild boar, and a snarling dragon with a serpent head on its tail. There are also replicas and photographs of the pieces of Pictish sculpture from Tarbat which are now in the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh.



The excavations by the University of York have revealed an 8th-century Pictish monastery, its stone buildings, farm, and metalworking shop. The Centre has interactive touchscreens with information on the Picts, and shows a video on the Picts of Easter Ross. When the dig is in progress, tours guided by archaeologists are included in the admission charge to the Centre.




Open: 1st Sat. in March to 1st Sat in May 2-5pm; 1st Sun in May to last Sat in Sept 10am-5pm; last Sunday in Sept to 23 December 2-5pm. Closed January & February. Contact: Tarbat Discovery Centre 01862 871351.

12. Tain and District Museum (collection)

Outside the museum door, in the churchyard, is the Ardjachie Stone (Class 1), found at Meikle Ferry (NH 746 845) in 1960. One face has about 30 irregular cup-marks and two unusual symbols - a spoked wheel and an inverted L.

Visible all year - it is just inside the churchyard gate to Castle Brae, outside the museum doorway.

In the museum itself are fragments of two Pictish stones found at Edderton Churchyard (No.13) in 1992, and also a fragment of the Nigg stone (No.8) found in 1999.

 Limited parking is available in Castle Brae - otherwise park by the Royal Hotel and walk down. Wheelchair access via Tower Street entrance. Museum open March to October 10 am-6 pm, or at other times by appointment. Contact: Tain Through Time 01862 894089.

13. Edderton - Churchyard

A Class 3 cross-slab, now leaning, in the churchyard of the former parish church. On the west face is a Celtic cross, with a broad circle around the intersection; on the east face a Latin cross (upright, with the lower limb longest) and a horseman in relief, with two lower horsemen now concealed beneath the ground. No Pictish symbols are visible. The trees and shrubs in the church grounds illustrate the Gaelic Tree Alphabet. The first letters of their Gaelic names spell *Eadar Dun*, the old name for Edderton. Fragments of Pictish stones found in the churchyard are now in Tain Museum (No.12).



Visible all year - in the churchyard, to the right of the path to the church. Those wishing to visit the church should contact Edderton Old Church Trust 01862 812245

14. Edderton - Clach Biorach

The Gaelic name of this tall, rough monolith means the 'sharp stone'. It is supposed by local tradition to mark the grave of a Danish prince killed in battle nearby. However it is in fact a Class 1 Pictish stone with an incised fish symbol over a double-disc and Z-rod, so it must pre-date the Norse period. It is in fact probably a Bronze Age standing stone that has been reused. The carving is weathered and can be quite hard to see.




Turn off the main road through Edderton village. The stone is in a field on the left. Visible all year, but please view from roadside - do not climb over the fence.

15. Ardgay - Kincardine Old Church

The Kincardine gravemarker is the most northerly example of a coffin-shaped monument unique to the Picts. Among its weathered carvings are David rending the jaws of a lion, with the lamb he has saved and his harp nearby, as on the Nigg cross-slab. No other surviving monument of this type is carved with scriptural imagery. It is now kept inside Kincardine Old Church.



 For admission to the church please contact: Kyle of Sutherland Heritage Society 01863 766700.

16. Creich - St. Demhan's Cross

A rough, unhewn standing stone, bearing an incised Celtic cross. Like the *Clach Biorach* at Edderton (No. 14) this could be a re-used Bronze Age standing stone. The carving probably dates to the 9th or 10th century AD. This may have been used as a preaching cross rather than a grave-marker. The fair of St Devenic (or Demhan) was still held here in 1630.




Visible all year. Outside the old churchyard, in the field east of the old graveyard adjoining to the east. Please take great care if parking here as the road is narrow and visibility is poor. Not accessible to wheelchairs.

17. Golspie - Dunrobin Castle Museum

This fascinating Victorian museum, in the grounds of Dunrobin Castle, holds an outstanding collection of over twenty Pictish stones assembled by the Dukes of Sutherland in the 19th century. It includes both Class 1 symbol stones and Class 2 cross-slabs collected from the south-east Sutherland coast, from Craigton and Little Ferry north to Navidale. A large cross-slab from St Andrew's churchyard, Golspie, has both Pictish symbols and an ogham inscription.



 Open: 1 April to 30 May and 1 to 15 Oct 10.30am-4.30pm (Mon-Sat) 12-4.30pm (Sun); 1 June to 30 Sept 10.30am-5.30pm (Mon-Sat) 12-5.30pm (Sun); Closed 16 Oct to 31 March. Contact: 01408 633177.

And finally . . .

Superb early medieval carved stones can also be seen elsewhere in the Highlands. Continue on to Caithness for the Pictish fragments at Dunbeath Heritage Centre and the fine cross-slabs at Thurso Museum. The cross-slab at Farr Church, Bettyhill (North Sutherland) and the standing cross and fragments at Applecross Church (Wester Ross) should also not be missed. For details of these and other carved stones contact the Archaeology Unit.

Further reading

- J.R. Allen & J. Anderson 1903 The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland
Note: illustrations of Pictish symbols and line drawings have been taken from this source. It was reprinted, paperback in 2 vols, with an introduction by Dr. Isobel Henderson, in 1993.
- J. Close-Brooks 1989 Pictish Stones in Dunrobin Castle Museum
J. Close-Brooks 1995 Exploring Scotland's Heritage: The Highlands
J. Close-Brooks & 1982 Dark Age Sculpture
R.B.K.Stevenson
S. Foster 1996 Picts, Gaels and Scots
R. Hanley 1994 A Catalogue of the Class 1 Pictish Symbol
 Stones in the Collections of Inverness Museum
 and Art Gallery
- L. & J. Laing 1993 The Picts and the Scots
E. Macnamara 1999 The Pictish Stones of Easter Ross
A. Ritchie 1989 Picts
RCAHMS 1999 Pictish Symbol Stones - An Illustrated Gazetteer

**Most of the sites included in the Pictish Trail are cared for by local volunteers.
Donations to help this work will be much appreciated locally.**

Otherwise, please take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints...

**For further details of any of the sites listed, contact
The Highland Council Archaeology Unit, Planning and Development Service,
Glenurquhart Road, Inverness IV3 5NX. Tel: 01463 702550
E-mail: Archaeology@highland.gov.uk
Web: www.higharch.demon.co.uk**