

Atlantic Coast (Wester Ross) Project

Topic Paper:

Historic Environment

1. Introduction

This paper is one of a series prepared to help inform the future use of the coast and inshore waters of Loch Broom, Little Loch Broom, the Summer Isles and Gruinard Bay. The paper represents the results of basic survey and evaluation work and should not be regarded as a policy document. It is however intended to help in the formulation of policy and to promote discussion. The Atlantic Coast project seeks to develop and test an integrated coastal zone plan for this area which can help in the evaluation of development proposals, guide investment, and minimise conflicts of interest. It aims to promote a balanced approach: one that can safeguard the area's core natural assets and sustain or enhance its productivity over the longer term.

Human beings have lived in Wester Ross for around 10,000 years, and have naturally impacted on the landscape for much of this time. The range of archaeological sites around the coastline of the project area shows clearly the significance of the sea and coast in the area's history.

The Historic Environment is the broad term used to describe the physical remains of human presence and activity. These remains may be defined as archaeological or historical sites, or they may be elements of larger landscapes. They may date from as early as 8000 BC to as recently as the end of the Second World War or later.

Many sites are land-based or survive in the foreshore. However, maritime sites can also include the remains of shipwrecks or net fastenings which can occur close to the coast or further out to sea. These sites can be of exceptional importance due to the range of artefacts and "eco-facts", rarely found on land-based sites, which they may hold.

Many sites, both land-based and maritime, may not yet have been recorded. Over recent years Historic Scotland has funded Coastal Zone Assessment Surveys. However, these cover only around 25-30% of Scotland's coastline.

Archaeological remains represent a finite and non-renewable cultural and educational resource. Development is important for the future of the Highland area, but attention must be paid to the archaeology as part of any development process. The Highland Structure Plan and Wester Ross Local Plan both refer to the need for the built and cultural heritage to be protected throughout the development process.

2. Archaeology and cultural heritage in the project area

The project area covers the coastal fringe from Coigach in the north to Greenstone Point in the south. In such an area, human exploitation of the natural resources

would have initially concentrated on the marine resources of fish and shellfish. Travel too would have been mainly by small boats. The earliest settlers would have maintained a partially nomadic lifestyle and would have lived in either caves and rock shelters or temporary structures. They would have gathered shellfish, nuts and berries, and would have fished and hunted to supplement this diet. As populations became more settled, the use of seaweed as a fertiliser was significant in allowing agriculture to develop. It was not until the last two centuries that land-based travel around the area superseded boats as the most common mode of transport.

The Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) is a database of all known cultural and built heritage sites in the Highland Council area. Nearly 500 sites are currently on record in the project area, including Listed Buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and regionally and locally important sites. In 1996 Historic Scotland funded a Coastal Assessment Survey from Ullapool to Lochinver, thus covering the north-eastern part of the project area. At that time, the survey recorded 192 archaeological sites. Importantly, 136 of these were unrecorded prior to the survey. This demonstrates the high level of unrecorded archaeological sites across the Highland area – in this case 71%, and the need for development policies to take this into account.

Coastal archaeological sites in the project area cover a very wide range. They include caves and rock shelters used as long ago as 8000 years BC, defensive sites such as brochs and duns, and field systems, chapel sites, farmsteads, and clearance villages. They also include fishing stations and fish traps. Ullapool itself is a fine example of a planned fishing village. The marine area has a number of wrecks, most of which are relatively recent fishing or cargo vessels, but artefacts dating from the Armada have been recovered in the area.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

Scheduled Ancient Monuments are nationally important archaeological sites which are protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. The list of these is maintained by Historic Scotland, on behalf of the Scottish Ministers. Five such sites are designated in the project area: Dun Canna, on the coast close to the mouth of the River Kanaird (HS index no 2419); Dun an Ruigh Ruadh (2427), which is the ruins of either a broch or a galleried dun at Rhiroy on Loch Broom; Dun Lagaidh near Blarnalearoch on Loch Broom (2523), a multi-period site with remnants of a vitrified fort, a galleried dun, and a castle; a hut circle close to the beach at Mellon Udrigle (6181); and a ruined chapel at Sand of Udrigil, Laide (6322).

Archaeological Heritage Areas

Archaeological Heritage areas are zones of exceptional archaeological and historic interest, identified by the local authority on the basis of the density of important sites. Seven Archaeological Heritage Areas have been identified in the project area, which between them cover over 90% of the coastline:

- Coigach peninsula and the Summer Isles
- Isle Martin, Ullapool and Loch Broom
- Upper Little Loch Broom
- Badcaul and Durnamuck (Little Loch Broom)
- Scoraig, Annat Bay and Badluarach
- Priest Island and Glas Leac Beag
- Gruinard Bay (Greenstone Point to Mungasdale)

Archaeological Heritage Areas are listed as 'nationally important' in the Wester Ross Local Plan. However, this must not be confused with the legally designated 'nationally important' scheduled monuments.

Non-scheduled sites

In addition to Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Heritage Areas, the Highland Council Archaeology Unit has identified a number of sites which it considers very likely to be of regional or national importance. This process is not complete, but sites identified include the township, field system, standing stones and graveyard at Kildonan on Little Loch Broom, and the harbour, crofting township and chapel on Isle Martin.

The Council has also commissioned a recent survey of access to archaeological sites. This survey identified fifteen coastal sites within the project area which would be of interest to visitors and which are either already accessible or for which access could be improved.

Maritime sites

Records of marine sites in the project area are patchy at best, as archaeological interest in this subject is relatively recent. The Highland Council was the first Scottish authority to research and develop a maritime Sites and Monuments Record. This was based on data collated from old maps, shipping records and other documents. But no actual marine survey work was involved. Although a number of the wrecks in the project area are well-known and visited regularly by recreational divers, no specific surveys have been carried out to document known sites or to record new ones. As a result, our knowledge of the marine archaeology of the project area is very poor.

There are over twenty wrecks in the project area, many around the exposed parts of the Summer Isles. These are mainly fishing and cargo vessels which ran aground in the course of the last sixty years or so. However there is also a legend of an Armada vessel wrecked somewhere in the area, which was lent some support by the discovery of a Spanish gold coin on Horse Island.

Listed structures

Listed buildings are man-made structures of special architectural or historic interest protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas)(Scotland) Act 1997. The lists are compiled and maintained by Historic Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Ministers. Listings are divided into three categories to distinguish between different levels of interest. Buildings of national or international importance are listed category 'A', buildings of regional importance, or major examples of a particular period, style or type, are listed category 'B', and buildings of local importance are listed category 'C(S)'.

There are twenty-two listed buildings around the project area, of which two (Udrigle House, Laide, and the old Ullapool parish church and burial ground, Ullapool) are listed in category 'A'. Fourteen buildings are listed in Ullapool, which is of particular interest as a planned fishing village. Around the project area, the majority of listed buildings are houses, but they also include the old fishing station and quay on Tanera Mor, the old mill in Achiltibuie, and the bridge over the River Lael.

3. Key issues and priorities

3.1. Assets

- The coastal zone has a considerable number of historic assets, including important sites such as Dun Canna and Dun Lagaidh, and Ullapool itself which is a fine example of a planned fishing village;

- There are several maritime sites popular for diving, including the wreck of the fishing boat 'Fairweather';
- Ullapool Museum is an excellent local source of information on the history, archaeology and cultural heritage of the project area;
- Active local heritage societies exist in the project area.

3.2. Issues

Archaeological sites are irreplaceable and non-renewable. As they are often located within living and evolving communities and landscapes, they can be at risk from either deliberate or inadvertent damage as well as long-term deterioration due to exposure to the elements.

Issues and threats affecting the cultural heritage sites in the project area fall into 3 main categories: -

- **Coastal erosion** is a significant cause of damage to coastal built heritage sites in Scotland. However, the coastline is relatively stable in the project area and this threat at present remains small.
- **Developments on the coast** involving building, demolition, extraction or the deposition of materials have the potential to damage built heritage. In the project area, such developments could be associated with general building work, fish farm shore bases, and access points such as jetties, piers and slips (some of which may be Listed). To retain their integrity, archaeological sites must either be preserved in situ, or (in exceptional circumstances where in situ preservation is impossible) be fully excavated and recorded.
- **Dredging, trawling, and physical developments below the surface of the sea (eg extraction, waste disposal, or the setting of moorings)** all have the potential to cause damage to marine archaeological sites. However, there is no indication that fishing activities have caused any damage to known marine archaeological sites in the project area to date. The proposed underwater power cable from the Western Isles will, if approved, make landfall in the project area, and efforts must be made to ensure that marine archaeological sites are not damaged during the laying of the cable.
- **Fish farms** have the potential to cause damage from silting, if sited over or near to a historic asset.

A further issue is the lack of information on archaeological sites in the area. A recent survey, which included the northern part of the project area from Ullapool to Reiff, recorded 192 coastal archaeological sites, of which only 56 had been recorded previously. This suggests that the remaining parts of the project area can be expected to have many more archaeological sites than are known at present. Maritime sites have never been surveyed.

3.3. Priorities for management of the historic environment in the project area

- A coastal archaeological survey is needed from Ullapool south to Greenstone Point.
- Marine surveys are needed, to explore and document known wreck sites and to investigate whether and where any further wrecks may exist.

4. Development opportunities

4.1. Outlook

The slow rate of coastal erosion in the project area means that coastal archaeology is not in imminent danger of disappearing into the sea. However, guidelines set out in

the Highland Structure Plan and Wester Ross Local Plan need to be followed carefully to ensure that cultural and built heritage sites are not damaged by new developments. The need for further survey work is key because the considerable gaps in our information on archaeological sites in the project area mean that new developments could damage or destroy sites before they are discovered.

4.2. Opportunities for development

- As a popular tourist destination, there is potential for signage, interpretation and improved access to important or visually impressive archaeological sites in the project area.
- There is some interest locally in producing a guide to dive sites in the project area. This might be a good opportunity to include information on the history and archaeological significance of some of the more frequently-visited wrecks, as well as to raise awareness of the responsibilities of divers to preserve these sites.

5. Conclusions

A considerable body of information exists on the cultural and built heritage of the project area, but there is still a lot to be learned, especially on the maritime side. However, the Atlantic Coast project provides an opportunity locally to improve the system for protecting known sites from potentially damaging developments, and to identify the most important information gaps.

6. Acknowledgements

Much of the information in this paper was provided by the Highland Council Archaeology Unit. Thanks are due in particular to Hilary White and Dorothy Maxwell for their input.

7. Comments and additional information

Information in this paper was gathered from published documents, agency records, and local individuals and organisations. If any of the information in the paper is inaccurate, or if there are significant elements missing, please contact the Atlantic Coast Project Officer at the address below:

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Appendix 1: Significant archaeological sites in the project area

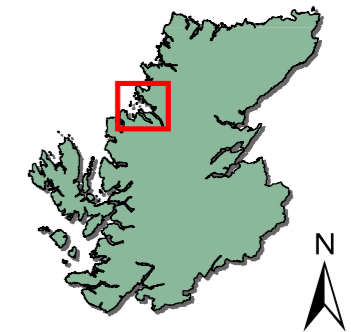
The table below gives details of sites mentioned in the text, and includes all Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Category 'A' Listed Buildings in the project area.

Site	Location	Description	Status	Priorities
Chapel, Sand of Udrigil	Laide	18 th century ruined chapel on 7 th century site	Scheduled Ancient Monument	Stabilisation of ruin
Hut circle, Camus Charraig	Mellon Udrigle	Hut circle, close to the beach, in good condition	Scheduled Ancient Monument	
Udrigle House	Udrigle, Laide	House	Listed Building, category A	
Cattle pens, Camus Gaineamhaich	Gruinard Bay	Cattle pens used to unload cattle carried by boat from the Western Isles. There is a car park and good access		Interpretation would be worthwhile at this site
Inverlael fish trap	Inverlael, head of Loch Broom	Fish trap built from boulders at the head of the loch		
Inverlael Bridge	Inverlael	Bridge over the River Lael	Listed Building, category B	
Kildonan	Little Loch Broom	Township, field systems, standing stones, graveyard	Very probably of national importance	Improved access would be of value
Dun Lagaidh	Near Blarnalearoch, on Loch Broom	Multi-period site, first established as a vitrified fort, replaced later by a galleried dun, and then by a castle	Scheduled Ancient Monument	Requires path improvement, structure stabilisation and interpretation
Dun an Ruigh Ruadh	Rhiroy, on Loch Broom	Ruins of either a broch or a galleried dun	Scheduled Ancient Monument	
Former parish church and burial ground	Ullapool	Remains of church and burial ground	Listed Building, category A	
Morefield	Near Ullapool	Crofting township		
Isle Martin	Loch Kanaird	Crofting township, harbour, St Martin's chapel, graveyard, cross-marked slab	Almost certainly of national importance	
Dun Canna	Close to the mouth of the River Kanaird	Site of a dun or fort	Scheduled Ancient Monument	Negotiate better access via south Keanachullish estate, and parking.
Watermill	Achiltibuie	Former mill with dam and lade	Listed Building, category C(S)	
Broch and	Polglass, near	Ruined broch, port,	Very probably	Negotiate better

settlement, Loch Pollan Dunain	Achiltibuie	fish traps, nausts (<i>boat havens</i>), kelp kilns and depopulated settlement	of national importance	access via adjacent crofts
Township	Badentarbat	Township and field system		
Tanera Mor	Summer Isles	Fishing station and quay, burial ground, cross-marked slab, links with the naturalist Frank Fraser Darling	Listed building, category B	Structure requires stabilisation.
Remains of watermill, Loch na Totaig	35 minutes walk from Reiff	Lade and millstone visible at the mouth of the river		







Atlantic Coast (Wester Ross) Project

Archaeology





Legend







Topic: Archaeology

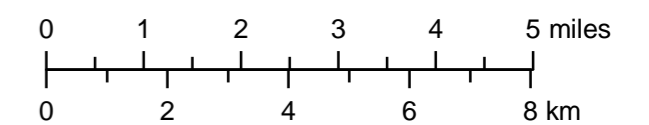
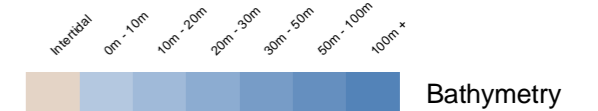
-  A Listed Building
-  B Listed Building
-  C Listed Building
-  Scheduled Ancient Monument
-  Wreck (from Sites and Monuments Record)
-  Archaeological Heritage Area

Topic: Project Area

-  Project Area
-  Seaward Boundary

Topic: Map Base

-  Settlement
-  Main Peak
-  Trunk Road
-  A Road
-  B Road
-  Other



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