

APPENDIX B Assessment of waterlogged samples from the outer enclosure ditch

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1.0 METHOD

Five unprocessed samples were received from recent excavations at Tarbat, Easter Ross undertaken by Field Archaeology Specialists Ltd. The samples were taken from the outer enclosure ditch (F132) and were identified as being organic in character. A 0.5ml sub-sample from each was gently sieved through a 500µm and 200µm sieve then scanned using a binocular microscope to assess organic preservation.

2.0 RESULTS

| Context No | Sample No | Composition |
|------------|-----------|--|
| 1401 | 726 | Wood fragments and mosses with seeds of <i>Sambucus nigra</i> , <i>Rubus</i> sp., and <i>Stachys sylvatica</i> . Insect remains also present. |
| 1404 | 745 | large quantity of wood fragments and root debris with seeds of <i>Sambucus nigra</i> , <i>Potentilla</i> sp., <i>Stellaria media</i> and <i>Ranunculus</i> sp. High concentration of insect remains also present. |
| 1405 | 132 | Wood, bark and leaf fragments, occasional tree buds and rush stems with seeds of <i>Sambucus nigra</i> , <i>Rumex</i> sp., <i>Urtica dioica</i> , <i>Stellaria media</i> and <i>Sonchus asper</i> . High concentration of insect remains also present. |
| 1407 | 743 | Wood and leaf fragments with <i>Sambucus nigra</i> and <i>Chaerophyllum temulentum</i> . High concentration of insect remains also present. |
| 1408 | 744 | Gravel and sand with no organic material surviving |

3.0 DISCUSSION

Four out of the five sub-samples (C1401, C1404, C1405, C1406 and C1407) showed good organic preservation with seeds fruits and insects surviving. The plant assemblages were dominated by wood fragments and elder seeds (*Sambucus nigra*). Smaller seeds were also present including cinquefoil (*Potentilla* sp.), buttercup/spearwort (*Ranunculus* sp.), blackberry/bramble (*Rubus* sp.), dock (*Rumex* sp.), hedge woadwort (*Stachys sylvatica*), chickweed (*Stellaria media*) and stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*). In addition, a large quantity of well-preserved leaf fragments were recovered from C1705.

There is general continuity throughout both the early and later ditch fills with the seeds and fruits being primarily from plants that are specific to shrub and hedgerow habitats. The plant assemblages suggest that the ditch bank was relatively stable and covered by elder shrub or hedge. This may have been a deliberately managed hedgerow specifically cultivated as a screen for the ditch or for field enclosures, however, this cannot be identified purely from the plant assemblages.

One tentatively identified *Chaerophyllum temulentum* (rough chervil) fragment was found in C1407. This plant is also specific to hedgerows and wooded areas but is more commonly found in the south. It is therefore an indicator of the milder micro-climate found in the coastal regions around the site.

Significantly, there is no evidence, from the assessed fraction, for the presence of aquatic plants indicating that the ditch did not contain standing or flowing water. It was however damp enough to result in the anaerobic conditions needed for preservation of the plant remains.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Removal of a 100cc sample of weeds seeds from each context for an AMS date
- 2 Further analysis of each sample would provide a more accurate picture of the ditch environment and once dating of the samples has been undertaken it may be possible to identify real trends within the data
- 3 Further assessment of the insect remains from an upper and lower ditch fill with a view to identifying the surrounding landscape and any changes that may have occurred through time. Analysis of the plant remains indicate the immediate ditch environment and further assessment of the insect remains would add information on a wider scale possibly indicating surrounding habitats such as arable, heath or pasture land.
- 4 Identification of the leaf material present in C1405 to complement detailed identifications and production of a catalogue of different plant taxa.



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