

## Excavations at Dùn Mhic Choigil, Kintyre

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Dùn Mhic Choigil is one of 65 known dun sites in Kintyre, and excavations were undertaken on behalf of the Department of the Environment because of projected road widening by Strathclyde Regional Council which would damage the site. The situation was a classic one for this type of site, perched on an isolated rock stack, and therefore naturally defensible. Where vulnerable to the NW, thick outer defensive walls had been constructed. The S and W faces of the rock stack were divided from each other by a great chasm which provided access to a beaching point through a natural fissure (fig 1). Excavation work was confined to those parts of the site that were to be destroyed, which did not include the outer defences and enclosed courtyard, probably the best preserved parts of the site. Prior to excavation it was quite clear that the structure had been largely destroyed, and it was estimated that less than a thousandth of the masonry was *in situ*. The results of the excavation were therefore necessarily very limited.

Two phases of occupation were represented. The primary site, the dun, had been erected on the bare rock, which had been partially levelled by filling the natural fissures with pebbles.

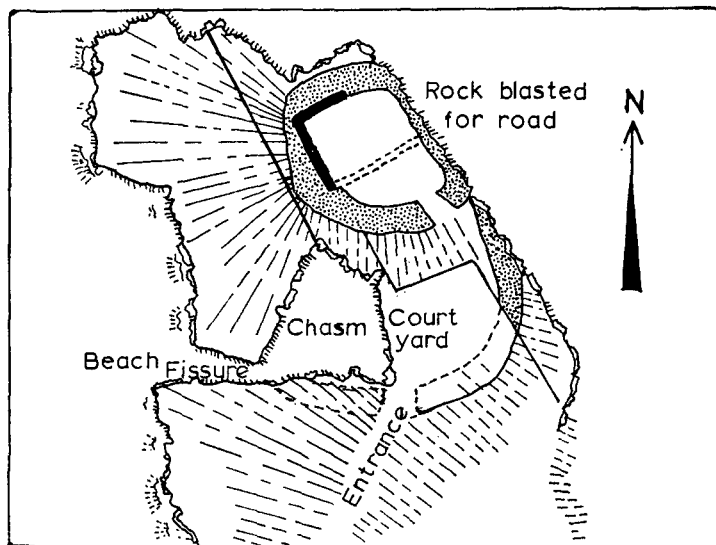


FIG 1 Dùn Mhic Choigil, Kintyre

Only the outer face of the dun wall was preserved, and it attained a maximum height of 0.54 m. The projected maximum width was *c* 3.50 m. The entrance faced SE, the most vulnerable part of the site, and led from a defended courtyard into the dun proper. It was 1 m wide, and 1.05 m from the entrance was a door socket in a long stone set across the main access. In general the dun wall followed the natural contours of the rock stack. Finds from the dun floor, which was barely distinguishable from the secondary occupation floor, included calcined bone fragments, chips of quartz, and very abraded pottery sherds of orange fabric. Six pieces of flint were recovered, as well as five small lumps of corroded iron.

The secondary occupation had been built in the N part of the main dun area and was represented by two sides of a flimsy sub-rectangular structure. It was possible to estimate that the building had been *c* 6 m by 7 m. Part of the walling had been built into the destroyed dun

walls. From the floor associated with this secondary walling came calcined bone fragments, large quantities of quartz chips and some two dozen abraded pot sherds of orange fabric. Seven pieces of flint, a whetstone fragment and part of a baked clay spindle whorl were recovered. Some lumps of corroded iron were found, one piece having the appearance of being part of a socketed implement. These represent the entire findings from wet sieving the whole of both floor levels.

A 2 m wide strip was taken from the dun through the outer defences down to the road level 10 m below. The outer defensive wall had evidently run from the dun along the cliff until turning along the natural terrace noted by RCAMS (1971, no. 205, p 84). The inside of the wall was well preserved, and at one point six courses attaining a maximum height of 0.64 m were observed. The maximum width was 2.5 m. Below this wall was a mass of rubble, evidently the second wall noted by the Royal Commission; the limited extent of the excavations made it impossible to prove whether this was in fact another wall or merely tumble from the one above.

There were no closely datable artefacts and no useful samples could be taken. It is impossible to say how much time elapsed between the abandonment of the dun and the erection of the secondary structure, although clearly the dun was in ruins by that time. A complete record of the excavation at Dùn Mhic Choigil is deposited with the National Monuments Record.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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#### REFERENCE

RCAMS 1971 Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Argyll: an Inventory of the Ancient Monuments*, vol 1, Kintyre. Edinburgh.

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