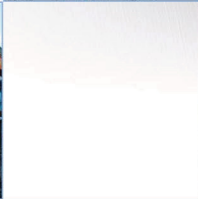
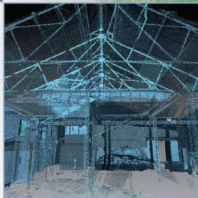
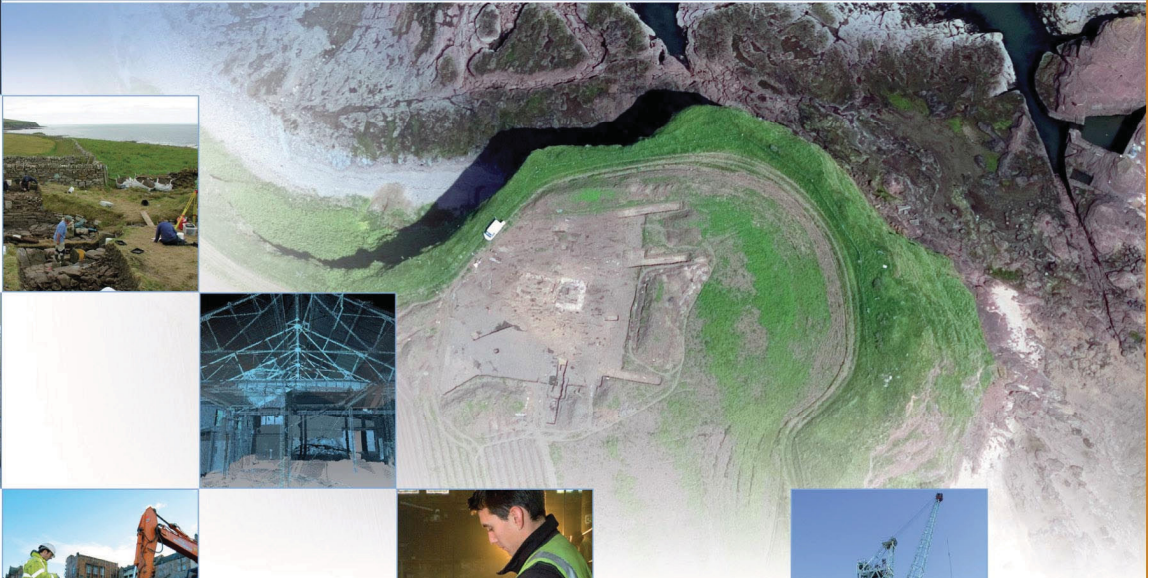
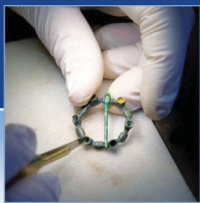


Black Loch of Myrton Crannog, Montreith

Site Assessment Report

20238-8

10th September 2010



ARCHAEOLOGY

HERITAGE

CONSERVATION

Black Loch of Myrton, Monreith Assessment Report

On Behalf of:	Historic Scotland Longmore house Salisbury Place Edinburgh EH7 1SH
National Grid Reference (NGR):	NX 36104 42835
AOC Project No:	20238-8
Prepared by:	G.Cavers
Illustration by:	G.Cavers
Date of Fieldwork:	29th-30th July
Date of Report:	10th September 2010

This document has been prepared in accordance with AOC standard operating procedures.

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List of illustrations

Figure 1: Detail of the Black Loch of Myrton, as depicted on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1848).

Figure 2: Field drainage dug in 2010 in the fields to the E of the forested area.

Figure 3: The run-off trench, dug through the forested area

Figure 4: Outflow of the run-off trench

Figure 5: Topographic survey of the Black Loch, showing locations of wood fragments, cores and test pits

Figure 6: Aerial photograph of the Black Loch (top left) showing the mound in as an island in the flooded area. The White Loch of Myrton crannog is visible as a tree-covered island on the right. Photograph taken March 2006.

Figure 7: Pile and two horizontal timbers encountered in TP4.

List of appendices

Appendix 1: Core Descriptions

Abstract

Following the discovery of worked oak timbers during field drainage operations in the former Black Loch of Myrton on the Monreith Estate, a reconnaissance survey was carried out aiming to establish the extent of the surviving site. Test pitting and coring encountered charcoal in the peat deposits, piling and horizontal timbers typical of a crannog. It is likely that the new drainage poses a significant threat to the survival of these organic deposits.

Black Loch of Myrton, Monreith, Wigtownshire

Condition Assessment, July 2010

1.0 Introduction

1.1 In July 2010 the discovery of worked oak timbers during drainage operations on the Monreith Estate was reported to John Pickin of Stranraer Museum. Mr Pickin reported these finds to Dumfries and Galloway Council Archaeology Service and AOC Archaeology Group, and following discussions between DGCAS, Historic Scotland and AOC it was agreed that a condition survey should be carried out on the site in order to assess the potential impact of the drainage on surviving archaeological remains.

2.0 Black Loch of Myrton

2.1 The Black Loch of Myrton is one of two lochs that were originally located close to Monreith house. The other, White Loch of Myrton, still exists, and contains at least one crannog; the site at NX 3585 4328 was recorded as part of the South West Crannog Survey, and has yielded a radiocarbon date of 2080 ± 50 BC (GU-10921), calibrating at 350-50 BC.

2.2 The Black Loch may have originally been of a similar size, but drainage operations for the purposes of land reclamation had already begun by the time of the 1st edition Ordnance Survey Map in 1848 (see figure 1). In the 1880s, what was probably a crannog was investigated by Maxwell in the drained basin of the loch. Maxwell describes several stony mounds on an artificial islet, one of which he excavated (Munro 1885), finding several hammer stones and a whetstone (Maxwell 1889). The Black Loch crannog was included in phase 1 of the Southwest Crannog Survey (Barber and Crone 1993), but could not be located at that time.

2.3 Today, there is no open water at the Black Loch. A forested area covers boggy ground which seems to have been close to the original centre of the loch, and the fields surrounding this plantation are wet and peaty, particularly so to the E. At the time of survey the fields were in use as pasture. According to the farmer, drainage of the fields has always been problematic, hence the need for the new field drains cut in 2010.

3.0 The 2010 drainage works

3.1 A series of new drainage channels have been dug in the field to the E of the forested area, comprising narrow field drains with plastic perforated piping at their base (see figure 2). A run-off channel, designed to collect water drawn from the field drains, has been dug through the forested area to meet one of the 19th century drainage channels. This channel is approximately 1m below the ground surface in the forested area (see figures 3 and 4). It was in the course of cutting this run-off channel that the worked timbers were encountered, at the point marked on figure 5.

4.0 Archaeological survey

4.1 A visual inspection of all of the backfilled drainage channels was carried out and their positions surveyed. Timber fragments were noted at several points across the field to the E of the forested area, including several fragments of oak, but these were too fragmentary to be confidently identified as archaeological. The locations of timber fragments are marked on figure 5.

- 4.2 A reconnaissance coring survey was carried out along part of the line of the run-off channel in order to inspect the sediment profile and assess the presence of archaeological deposits; these are marked on figure 5. The cores indicated that deep natural peats exist in the forested area, while the cores closer to the find location of the worked timbers contained charcoal in the upper peats. Cores 4 to 7 contained a thick grey clay in the upper levels, possibly indicating eroded material from the crannog. Summary descriptions of the deposits encountered are included in appendix 1.
- 4.3 Close to the centre of the forested area and to the S of the run-off channel the ground is more solid, suggesting the presence of a mound within the peat. The area was very overgrown at the time of survey, but several stone mounds were visible within the trees in this area; these seem likely to be those referred to by Maxwell. Probing from the mound towards the run-off channel indicated that the mound drops away to the N, towards the channel. It therefore seems likely that the run-off channel has clipped the edge of the site. It is likely that this mound is the location of the site described by Maxwell; in aerial photographs taken by RCAHMS in 1996 this mound is visible in wet ground within the forested area (figure 6).
- 4.4 In order to assess the potential for the survival of archaeological deposits close to the run off channel, seven small test pits were excavated (see figure 5). The majority of these encountered peats and clay deposits similar to those recorded by the cores, but TP4 (figure 5) encountered timbers very likely to represent a crannog or similar structure. A single vertical pile and two horizontal timbers, all non-oak, were encountered (figure 7). These were sampled for species ID and radiocarbon dating. The timbers were in relatively good condition, although are now situated above the water table, which may be expected to drop as the drainage draws water away from the site.

5.0 *Recommendations*

- 5.1 The Black Loch site is clearly of high archaeological potential, and the new drainage operations have shown the probable location of the site investigated by Maxwell, which had previously been uncertain. The site can now be confidently identified at **NX 36104 42835**. The oak piles retrieved during the drainage cutting are well preserved, suggesting that much of the site may be in a similar condition.
- 5.2 The following work on the materials retrieved during the reconnaissance survey is recommended:
- Radiocarbon dating of the oak piles and the non-oak timbers from TP4 should be undertaken in order to gain an estimate of the date of the site
 - Dendrochronological dating of the oak piles should be attempted, and the wood working recorded in full before the wood deteriorates
- 5.3 The alteration of the water level at Black Loch caused by the new drainage operations poses a significant threat to the survival of the organic remains on the site, and thus the most desirable course of action is to record the site as it currently survives through excavation. It is recommended that an evaluatory excavation be carried out in the vicinity of TP4, in order to assess the extent and character of the surviving remains. An outline proposal for this work is attached.

References

Barber, J. and Crone, B.A. 1993 'Crannogs: a diminishing resource? A survey of the crannogs of South West Scotland and excavations at Buiston crannog', *Antiquity* vol.67, pp.520-33

Maxwell, H.E. 1889 'Primitive implements, weapons, ornaments and utensils from Wigtownshire', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot.* vol.23, pp.200-32

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APPENDIX ONE: Core Descriptions

Core 1: Core extended for 5m and deposits not bottomed. Comprised organic rich silts and clays.

Core 2: 0-130cm brown organic rich silts and sands; 130-200cm grey/brown organic rich silts and sands

Core 3: 0-200cm brown organic rich silts and sands

Core 4: 0-30cm grey clay with angular stone inclusions; 30-80cm partially humified reed; 80-100cm deposit not recovered; 100-200cm brown organic rich silts and sands.

Core 5: 0-50cm grey clay; 50-125cm partially humified organic material in grey clay with angular stone inclusions; 125-200cm brown organic rich silts and sands.

Core 6: 0-40cm grey clay with angular stone inclusions; 40--200cm partially humified reed grading into brown organic rich silts and sands

Core 7: 0-35 cm yellow/grey clay; 35-70cm partially humified reed; 70-100cm yellow/grey clay; 100-200cm partially humified reed grading in to brown organic rich silts and sands.

FIGURES



Figure 1: Detail of the Black Loch of Myrton, as depicted on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1848).



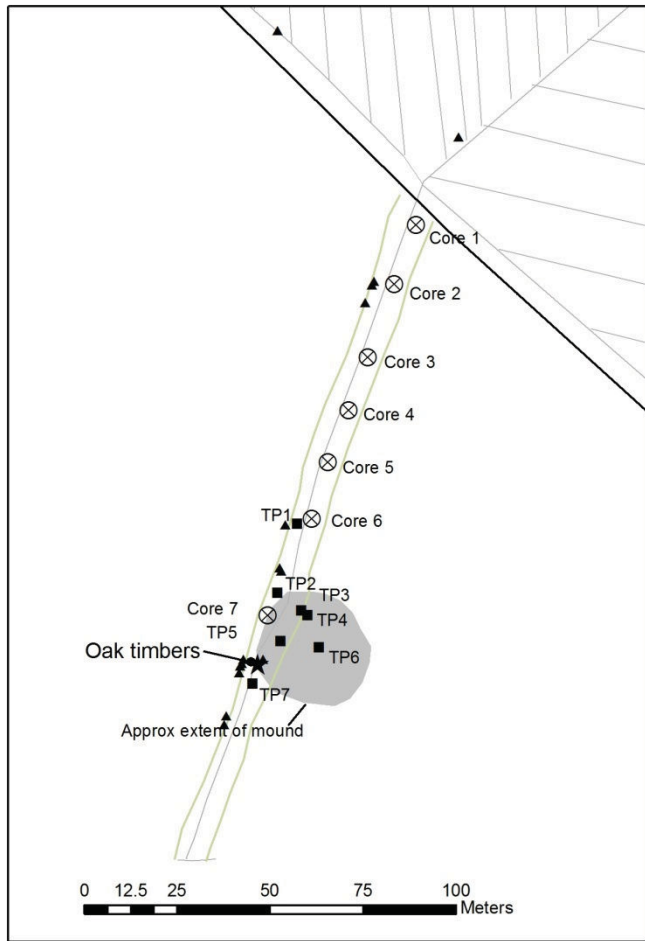
Figure 2: Field drainage dug in 2010 in the fields to the E of the forested area.



Figure 3: The run-off trench, dug through the forested area



Figure 4: Outflow of the run-off trench



Legend

- ▲ Wood
- ⊗ Cores
- Test pits
- Fence
- 2010 drainage channels
- Site

20238-8 Black Loch of Myrton

Figure 5: Topographic survey showing drainage channels and location of mound.

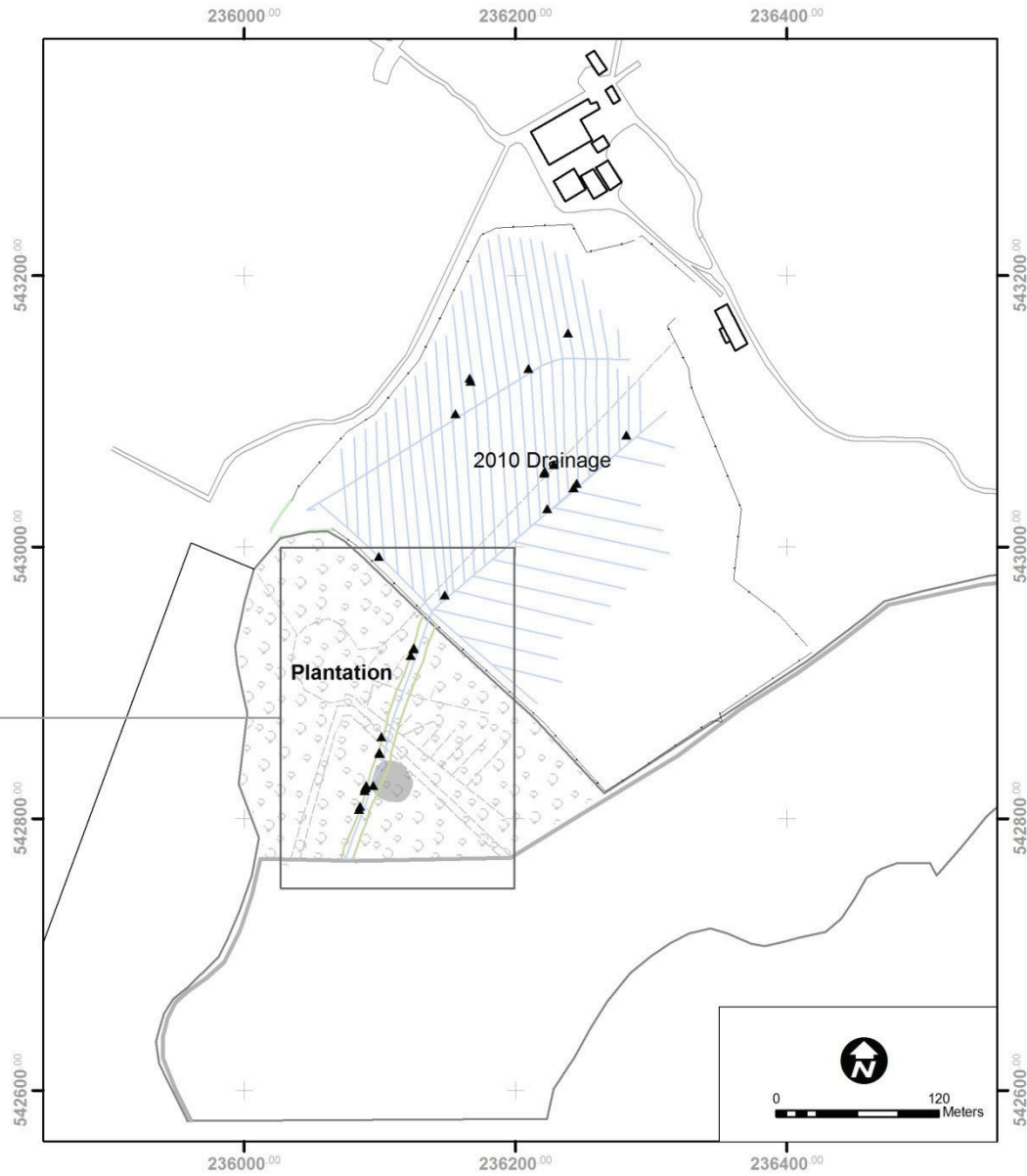




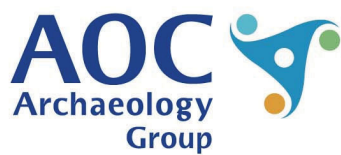
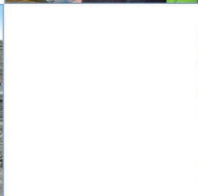
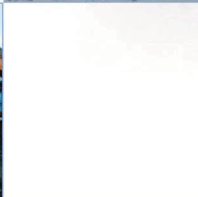
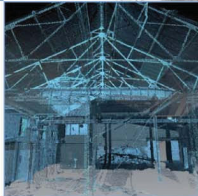
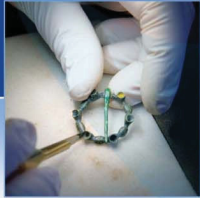
Figure 6: Aerial photograph of the Black Loch (top left) showing the mound in as an island in the flooded area. The White Loch of Myrton crannog is visible as a tree-covered island on the right. Photograph taken March 2006 (RCAHMS).



Figure 7: Pile and two horizontal timbers encountered in TP4.



Figure 8: Oak timber recovered during the drainage operations.



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