A HIGHLAND VIEW FROM EDINBURGH

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Like a number of other archaeologists, I haven't been working within archaeology for a some months now. I was fortunate that following finishing my degree studies, I was working continuously – in some form or another – right up until Christmas last year. Since then I've been seeking gainful employment outside the archaeological world always with the hope of getting back into it. Jobs have been applied for, interviews taken, rejections accepted… Still, I'm a determined individual and accept that while it may take some time, I *will* be employed within archaeology again. I believe that with enough time, effort and blind faith, my determination will pay off. Though it may worth asking me in a year's time if I still see this the same way…

So, this 'day in the life of' will be slightly different as I'm not – strictly speaking – an archaeologist, merely someone who wishes to be one (again). I live in Edinburgh, Scotland and in

many respects it is a fantastic place to be situated as an archaeologist. There is an abundance of commercial units, government agencies and fantastic museums all of which provide great opportunities and resources for interested parties of all kinds – whether students, professionals or others. Indeed, it's these 'others' that I'm interested in as an archaeologist. I see archaeology as a discipline breaking down into 3 basic (and, yes, exceptionally generalised) categories: academic, commercial and public. Now, I don't really agree that there should be a separate branch of archaeology called 'public'. I think that *all*archaeology should be public. This is an attitude that not everyone agrees with and an attitude that is very difficult to fulfil within the commercial and academic sectors. Happily, however, the importance of public archaeology is increasingly being realised and evermore funding and resources being given towards it. For anyone reading not immediately familiar with what 'public archaeology' means, it is a democratic approach to studying our past: ensuring the transparency, accessibility and opening up of archaeology to everyone. Community involvement and support is absolutely critical to this.

My own interest stemmed partly from what I was learning at university and my frustrations with hitting a brick wall of grey literature at seemingly every turn, and partly the fieldwork I undertook as part of my degree studies. I consciously chose sites that were varied, working with a wide variety of individuals and an equally as wide variety of subject matters. While I didn't realise it at the time, my interests were drawn towards projects where there was a degree of community involvement and within cultural landscapes with which I identified (silly me thinking it'd be just the archaeology drawing me to a place!). These landscapes are the Scottish Highlands, or more specifically the *Gaidhealtachd* – the Gaelic-speaking Highlands. As a native Gaelic-speaker myself and having been brought up in the Highlands perhaps somewhat inevitably a significant part of my fieldwork experience has been in this area.

The Gaelic language is absolutely intertwined with the landscape of the Gaidhealtachd. Language and culture there go hand-in-hand, as does language and environment. Gaelic is a product of its surroundings, and the landscape of the Highlands and Islands speaks of the language as well as the people who have spoken – and lived – it over the centuries. Gaelic has been predominantly an oral language, meaning that for centuries, knowledge, songs, poems, stories and geneaology have been passed down through generations by word of mouth. Now, of course, it's a living, breathing language on paper as well as spoken. However, the oral tradition has meant that the connection between the landscape and language is still strong, and a matter of importance for both Gaelic speakers and non-speakers. So much about the landscape can learnt from the language that it is invaluable for archaeology. From local knowledge – particularly placenames – a much greater depth to the local environment and topography can be understood. The benefits for this are obvious: knowing a few key terms for non-speakers can indicate the nature of the terrain, historical reasons for particular placenames and provide real insight to an area beyond just words on a map. In turn, Gaelic speakers can share a greater depth of understanding to the landscape to others not familiar with the language.

I feel it's imperative to utilise local knowledge and with local communities taking their collective past into their own hands, it is a prime opportunity to do so. That's what I love about community archaeology – it's the professionals and volunteers both learning from each other. Across much of Scotland, Gaelic has a key role to play. This is no more true than in the Gaidhealtachd where the language is still alive and integral to understanding the land and our past. This is just the very tip of a much broader conversation regarding language, people, landscape, research and archaeology which is deserving of many more hundreds of words and much greater depth being dedicated to it than there is space to here. I do hope, however, that I've given some insight to my own views on Gaelic and community archaeology, and perhaps piqued the interest of someone else.

I hope to continue combining my passion community participation within archaeology and my passion for Gaelic throughout my career. Perhaps I will be at the next Day of Archaeology.

(Photos are all my own and scenes from some of my fieldwork placements.)