

# WATERLOGGED DAY, WATERLOGGED WOOD....

June 29, 2012 Anne Crone Day of Archaeology 2012, Environmental Archaeology, Iron Age Anne Crone, AOC Archaeology Group, archaeologist, Archaeology, British Columbia, Castle Kennedy, commercial, crannog, dendrochronology, Europe, Fortification, Graeme Cavers, Ireland, Lynne Roy, post-excavation project manager, Prehistoric Europe, project manager, Scotland, soil micromorphology, Stone Age Europe, waterlogged wood

My name is Anne Crone and I am a post-excavation project manager at AOC Archaeology Group, working in their Loanhead office in Scotland. I am currently managing a number of large post-excavation projects, the most important of which is the Cults Landscape Project – important to me because I also carried out the fieldwork in partnership with my colleague, Graeme Cavers, and because it has enabled me to ‘indulge’ many of my research interests, in crannogs, waterlogged wood and dendrochronology.



*The Cults Loch  
crannog under  
excavation*

The fieldwork project has involved the excavation of a number of sites in and around Cults Loch, a small kettlehole loch at Castle Kennedy, near Stranraer in south-west Scotland. The project arose out of the initiative of the Scottish Wetland Archaeology Programme, the aim of which was to more fully integrate wetland archaeology into more mainstream 'dryland' archaeology. So we selected a landscape in which the archaeological sites appear to cluster around the loch and within which there were two crannogs – these are man-made islands found only in Scotland and Ireland and which are repositories of all sorts of waterlogged organic goodies! We have excavated one of the crannogs which sits on a little man-made promontory jutting out into the loch, the promontory fort that lies on the other side of the loch, overlooking the crannog, and one of the palisaded enclosures that lies on the grassland around the loch.

And now we are halfway through the post-excavation programme. We know that this is a later prehistoric landscape because we have 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC radiocarbon dates from the promontory fort and crannog. But more exciting – I have been able to dendro-date some of the oak timbers from the crannog and we now know that most of the building activity took place in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> decades of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, and that there was refurbishment of the causeway in 193 BC – for me these more specific dates bring the occupants more clearly into focus...

Today – well, it started off with a 3 mile walk to work – usually a great start when I can think through my schedule for the day – but today the heavens opened and I was soaked by the time I arrived at the office! After drying out I settled down at my desk to read the report on the soil micromorphology from the crannog which my colleague Lynne Roy has just finished. As project manager I need to edit and check each report before it is sent out to the client, in this case Historic Scotland, but as the archaeologist I also want to read it for the insights it will give me into the taphonomy of the deposits on the crannog. And it is really fascinating! We found large patches of laminated plant litter, interspersed with gravel and sand layers which we interpreted as floor coverings that had been repeatedly renewed. Lynne's analysis has revealed that the occupants probably cleaned away as much as possible of the dirty floor coverings before scattering over a sand and gravel subfloor and then laying down fresh plant litter. She can tell which surfaces were exposed for a length of time while others were covered almost immediately. And her work on the hearth debris indicates that peat turves were probably the main form of fuel on the site.

Like many archaeologists the majority of my time is spent at my desk, writing reports, editing reports, filling in/updating spreadsheets, and dealing with emails. So it is a pleasure to be able to don my lab coat and spend some time in our warehouse handling waterlogged wood. I am currently writing the report on the structural timbers from the crannog. The majority of the timbers were undressed logs or roundwood stakes, mostly of alder and oak, so most of the recording and sampling was done on the crannog. Samples for dendro and species identification

were brought back to the lab but we only brought back complete timbers which displayed interesting carpentry details and were worthy of conservation. I have been completing the recording of these timbers and deciding which ones should be illustrated for the final report. There are some interesting timbers in the assemblage –large horizontal timbers with square mortises, presumably to take vertical posts, but what is the function of the horizontal timbers which have very narrow notches cut diagonally across them? Next week I will be off to the library to look for comparanda and to find explanations for some of the more unusual aspects of the assemblage



*Recording timbers in the warehouse*

[Read more about Cults Loch here](#)