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As I stood on the rain-sodden hillside, soaked, surrounded by two-metre-tall ferns and being bitten by a biblical plague of midges who viewed me as a three-star Michelin meal, I wondered: Is archaeology really worth it? However, once I'd brushed myself down, killed a thousand or so midges and began to move again, I realised I wasn't finished with archaeology yet. Sometimes you have to remind yourself that there is almost no other job like it. Where else can you find yourself walking across a bit of countryside discovering the history of the landscape? This particular day, I was an archaeologist with a mission. I was looking for something not from our ancient past but rather more recent: I was seeking the archaeological remains of the First World War.

The field work is part of a HES project to survey and record the defences of the Clyde from both wars, as part of the Discover the Clyde programme (<http://discoveringtheclyde.org.uk>)

The sites I was looking for were military blockhouses. These are timber buildings which housed soldiers and were surrounded by an earth and sandbag wall providing a fighting position or strongpoint to defend an area of ground. I had with me copy of a map from The National Archives on which was drawn the position of a number of blockhouses on the hill. I had many questions to answer: were the blockhouses actually built? What did they look like? How accurate was the annotation on the map? Had they survived or had forestry ploughing destroyed them? So many variables and combined with the new trees and suffocating ferns, it was going to be a challenge to find them.

With the start of the Scottish version of a monsoon, I made my way upwards to a low summit which I thought might be my best chance. For me, the thrill of fieldwork is the finding of archaeology, be it a cairn or rig, a hut circle or blockhouse.

As I reached the summit I found a small square concrete hut base which was not quite what I was expecting, but I recorded it and moved on. I carried on through the undergrowth and stumbled upon a large, square enclosure with a partial earth wall measuring about 5m by 5m.



The first Blockhouse found © HES

Was this what I sought or was it something else? Indeed it was close to the position on the map. I needed a comparison. Some more scrambling and two thousand dead midges later, I found a second rectangular enclosure on the edge of a steep slope covered in dense ferns and fallen trees but measuring the same internal size. Success!



The second Blockhouse built on the edge of the slope covered in dense tall bracken © HES

As it turned out, these were indeed the sites of two blockhouses. We discovered two almost identical sites about 2km to the north later that day (see <https://canmore.org.uk/site/331613>). We have now found six of these blockhouses which defended Ardhallow Coast Battery on the Clyde from landward attack. The quest will continue as somewhere in the dense forestry lie three more.



A blockhouse was in there somewhere © HES

Is archaeology worth it, on a day like this one it really is!