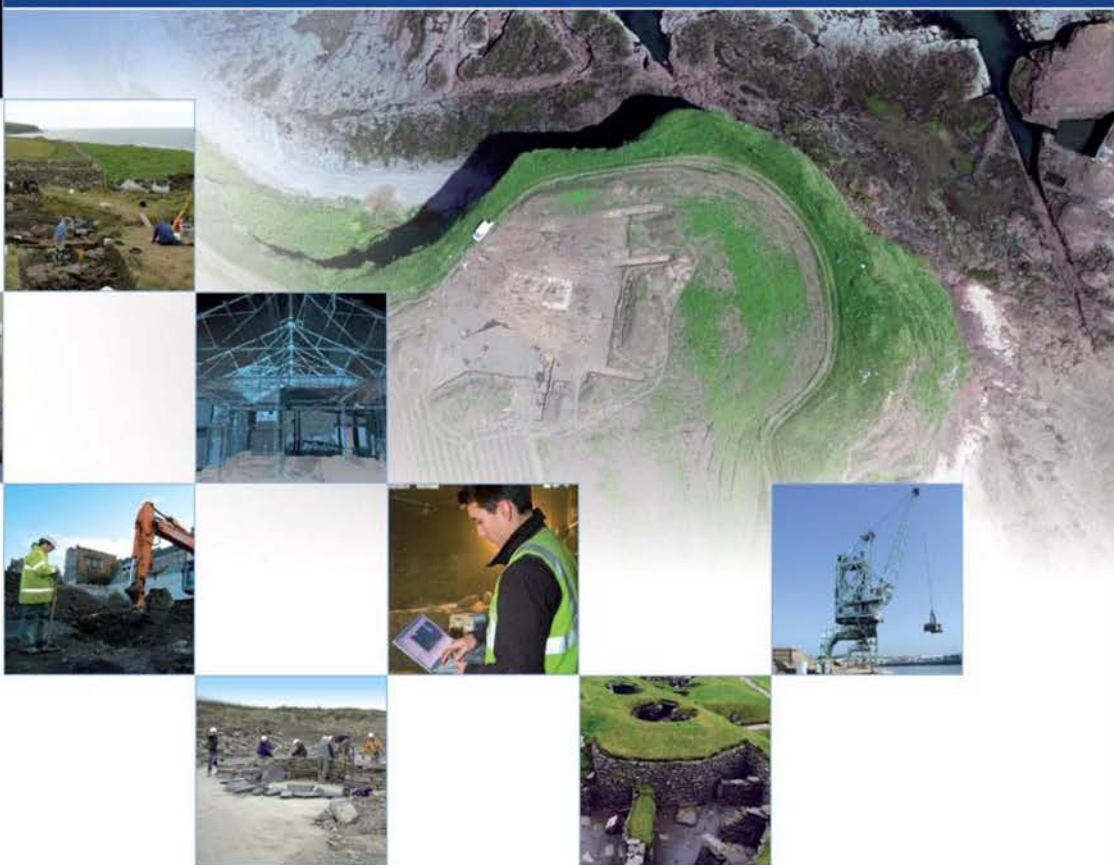


Historic Environment Scotland Human Remains Call Off Contract Ardnave, Islay, Argyll & Bute: Archaeological Excavation Data Structure Report

AOC 22470-20
26th May 2017



Ardnave, Islay, Argyll & Bute: Archaeological Excavation Data Structure Report

On Behalf of:

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Non-technical Summary

An archaeological excavation and recording of an inhumation was conducted by AOC Archaeology at Ardnave, Islay, Argyll & Bute. The works were carried out under the terms of the Historic Scotland Human Remains Call-off Contract.

Human remains had been discovered within a wind erosion gully close to the western edge of Loch Gruinart in May 2017. The remains had been partly disarticulated by the erosion of the ground beneath the grave, but were otherwise intact.

The skeleton was laid in a crouched position, aligned south east to north west with the head to the south east. The body measured approximately 1.5 m long and had been laid in a crouched position measuring 1.0 m in length and 0.65 m in width. It was located within dune sand that had covered an earlier shell midden that was exposed at the base of the erosion gully.

No artefacts were found within the excavated area and no other features were noted in the vicinity to suggest it was part of a larger cemetery.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 AOC Archaeology Group undertook archaeological works at Ardnave, Islay, Argyll & Bute under the terms of the Historic Scotland Human Remains Call-off Contract on 17th to 19th May 2017. The works were undertaken following the discovery of human remains within an erosion gully on the western edge of Loch Gruinart. The local police were informed of the discovery, who in turn requested assistance from Historic Environment Scotland under the terms of the Human Remains Call-Off Contract.

1.2 Site Location

- 1.2.1 The erosion gully is on the western edge of Loch Gruinart to the east of Ardnave House (centred on NGR: NR 2910 7310; Figure 1). The area comprises a series of dunes that are being eroded by winds from the east creating gullies up to 100 m long from the loch edge. The gully containing the site is 100 m by 20 m and slopes from north-west to south east, measuring up to 3.0 m in depth over the exposed shell midden.

1.3 Archaeological Background

- 1.3.1 The site is within a rich prehistoric landscape with a number of sites noted close to the remains as well as nearby that all appear to relate to long standing prehistoric use of the area. The site location is already noted as the location of two middens of unknown date (Canmore ID 350161 & 350162) and the find spots of pottery and flints (Canmore ID 37505). Furthermore, within a few hundred metres of the site there are further middens, a hut circle, a building and further find spots of flints and pottery. The most significant of the sites surrounding it is a cist of unknown date (Canmore ID 37495), as well as the possible location of a Crannog within Ardnave Loch to the west.

2 OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The objectives of the archaeological works set out in the Project Design (AOC 2017) were:

1. Upon arrival pre-excavation photography will be undertaken of both the general area of the human remains as well as detailed views of the feature in order to establish both the condition of the site prior to AOC conducting any works and the parameters of the site.
2. The immediate vicinity (50 m by 50 m square centred on the burial) of the find will be subject to a visual inspection to determine the possibility of further remains. A written record of the feature and immediate area will be made which will include detail on the nature and extent of the archaeological remains present, and a description of the disturbance with reference to the processes at work on the site.
3. All of the archaeological remains at risk will be excavated and recorded including removal of the human remains and any other human remains such as cremation deposits.
4. The remains of the remaining grave fill will then be excavated and 100% sampled. The grave cut (if visible) will be recorded in plan using drawings and photographs, and a written record will be made on pro-forma sheets.
5. All finds including bone will be lifted and bagged as appropriate.
6. Any burnt bone and charcoal will be subject to 100% sampling.

7. Control soil chemistry/pollen samples will be retrieved from the topsoil (if present) and natural subsoil.
8. The position of the excavation area will be accurately located by Total Station or GPS survey and tied into the National Grid.
9. A series of photographs documenting the condition of the site including site access will be taken on arrival and departure.
10. A draft Data Structure Report will be produced within four weeks of the completion of fieldwork and once approved by the Human Remains Call-Off Manager would be issued within two working days of comments being received.
11. A costed single phase post-excavation research design will be produced and presented to Historic Environment Scotland for approval. The document will contain a table clearly setting out the major themes to be explored within the post-excavation programme and methods for addressing issues identified.

3 METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 All of the above objectives 1 to 9 were conducted during the archaeological works. The total area excavated was approximately 1.0 m by 0.65 m. All hand excavation was conducted by an experienced field archaeologist and all recording was carried out according to AOC Archaeology Group's standard practices. The entire skeleton could not be fully exposed for photographic recording due to the abundance of dune sand covering the left arm and knee. These parts were only exposed prior to lifting so as to minimise the possibility of collapse.

4 RESULTS

- 4.1 The recording, survey and excavations were conducted between the 17th and 19th May 2017 in favourable weather conditions. The various data gathered from the excavation are presented as a series of appendices:

Appendix 1: Context Register;
Appendix 2: Photographic Register;
Appendix 3: Samples Register
Appendix 4: *'Discovery and Excavation in Scotland'* Report

- 4.2 The skeleton [008] was exposed on the south western slope of an active wind erosion gully, approximately 4.5 m below the current dune surface [001], and 1.5 m above the shell midden at the base of the gully (Approx. 7 m OD; Plates 1&2; Figure 2). Two former soil horizons [003] and [005] that post date the burial were noted on this side of the erosion gully at depths of 1.4 m and 3.0 m respectively.
- 4.3 There was no visible sign of a grave cut above or around the skeleton, most likely due to the sterile nature of the dune sand into which it had been interred. The skeleton was crouched into a 1.0 m by 0.65 m space, and would have measured closer to 1.5 m in length if fully elongated. The body was laid on its left hand side aligned south east to north west with the head raised up and turned to face

west. The legs had been bent, as had the arms, with the right hand over the pelvis and the upper left arm parallel to the vertebrae and the lower left arm parallel to the upper legs (Plate 3).



Plate 1: General view of erosion gully

- 4.4 The right arm and parts of the rib cage had become disarticulated by the erosional processes, with the humerus, radius and ulna all on the sloping sand to the north east. Parts of the left leg and left knee, along with the end of the left arm and left hand were all under the erosional section and were only exposed for removal, disturbing the least amount of the dune sand above it.



Plate 2: General view of shell midden in gully

5 DISCUSSION

- 5.1 The skeletal remains revealed by the erosional processes in the area are just one of a number of probable prehistoric sites that have been covered by the dune sands. The presence of stable soil horizons within the dunes indicate periods of stability and vegetation growth on the dune. The two visible stabilisation layers [003] and [005] appear to postdate the burial though without a definite grave cut and a direct relationship to these layers the exact sequence is unclear. Samples recovered from these layers may allow these stabilisation layers to be dated which would also allow relative dating of some of the other features present within this dune system that are at present undated.



Plate 3: General view of skeleton [008]

- 5.2 Looking more closely at the burial, the crouched nature of the burial suggests a prehistoric. As most funerary rites from early prehistory are typically monumental in nature and communal rather than individual it is more likely that the remains found are likely to be later prehistoric, most likely Bronze Age or possibly Iron Age in date. A Bronze Age cemetery at Allasdale, Barra may provide an example of a similar grave where a crouched inhumation was set in a grave with no cist (Cook & McLaren forthcoming). This grave was found within a cemetery of short cists and cremations, indicating the variable nature of burial rites at this time.

- 5.3 A site closer to Ardnave that also shows the variable nature of burial rites in the Iron Age was seen at Sanaigmhor Warren, Islay. These excavations revealed two cremations within urns that had been placed in short cists, and due to the nature of the urns and the burial rite used, were originally deemed to be Bronze Age in date (Cook 1999). Later radiocarbon dating actually provided Iron Age dates for the skeletal material, indicating that use of burial rites to date individual graves can be inaccurate.

6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 All of the projects objectives were met with regards to the excavation and recording of the human remains found. The discovery of the human remains in this area will only add to an already burgeoning prehistoric landscape, and its stratigraphic position in relation to an earlier shell midden demonstrates the changing use of the area throughout prehistory.
- 6.2 As stated earlier, the nature of the burial and the surrounding features would benefit greatly from further analysis and study to allow for accurate dating of the burial and stabilisation layers. As per the objectives set out in the Project Design (AOC 2017), the details of the recommended post excavation analysis and research will be set out in a Post-Excavation Research Design.

7 REFERENCES

AOC 2017 *Ardnave, Islay: Historic Environment Scotland Human Remains Call Off Contract Project Design* Unpublished client report

Cook, M 1999, Excavation of two cists, a cairn and associated features at Sanaigmhor Warren, Islay, Argyll & Bute, *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, Vol 129, 251-279

Cook, M & McLaren, D (forthcoming) The excavation of a Bronze Age cemetery, Allasdale, Barra, Western Isles

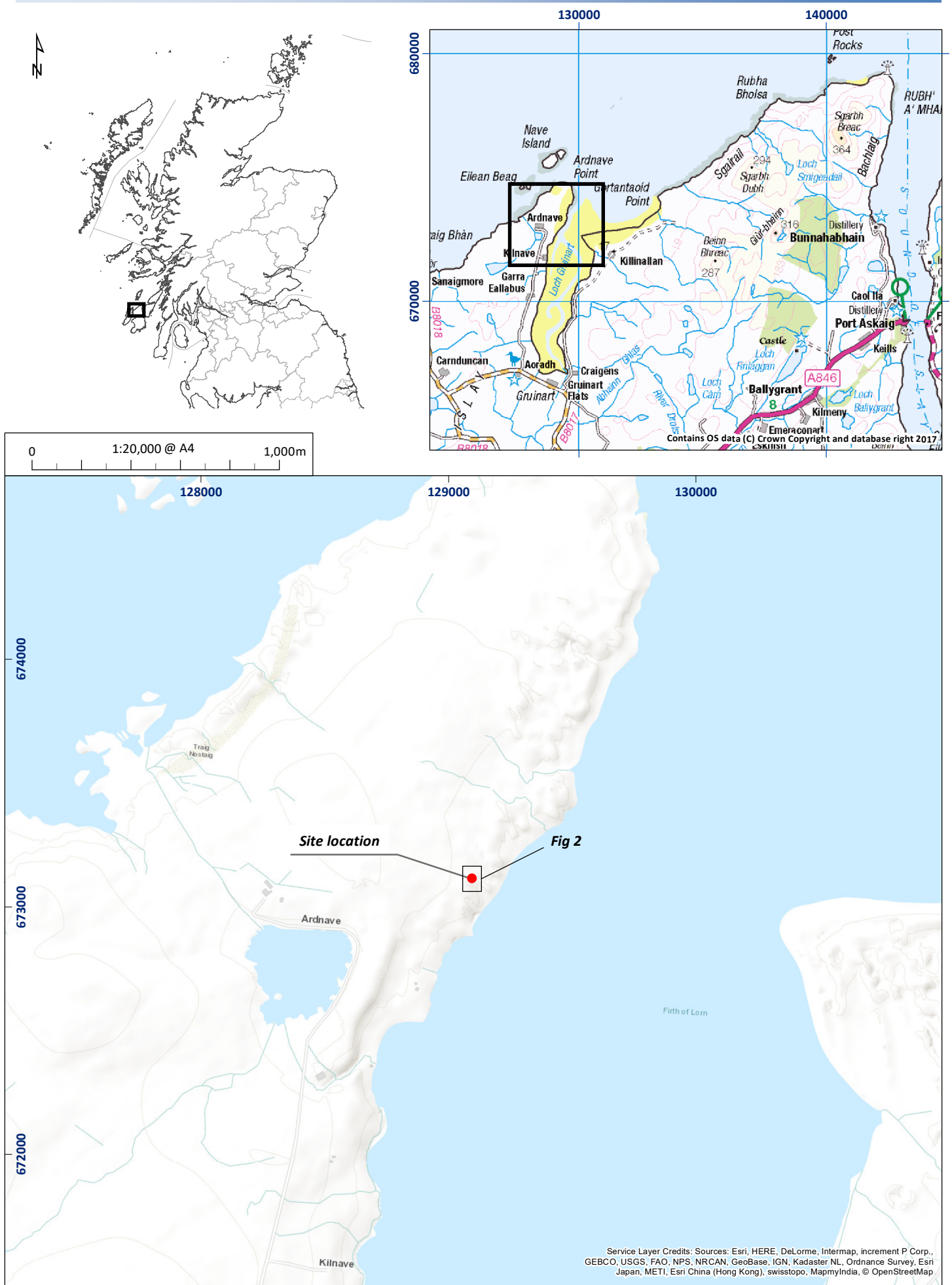


Figure 1: Site location plan

01/22470-20/REP/01/01

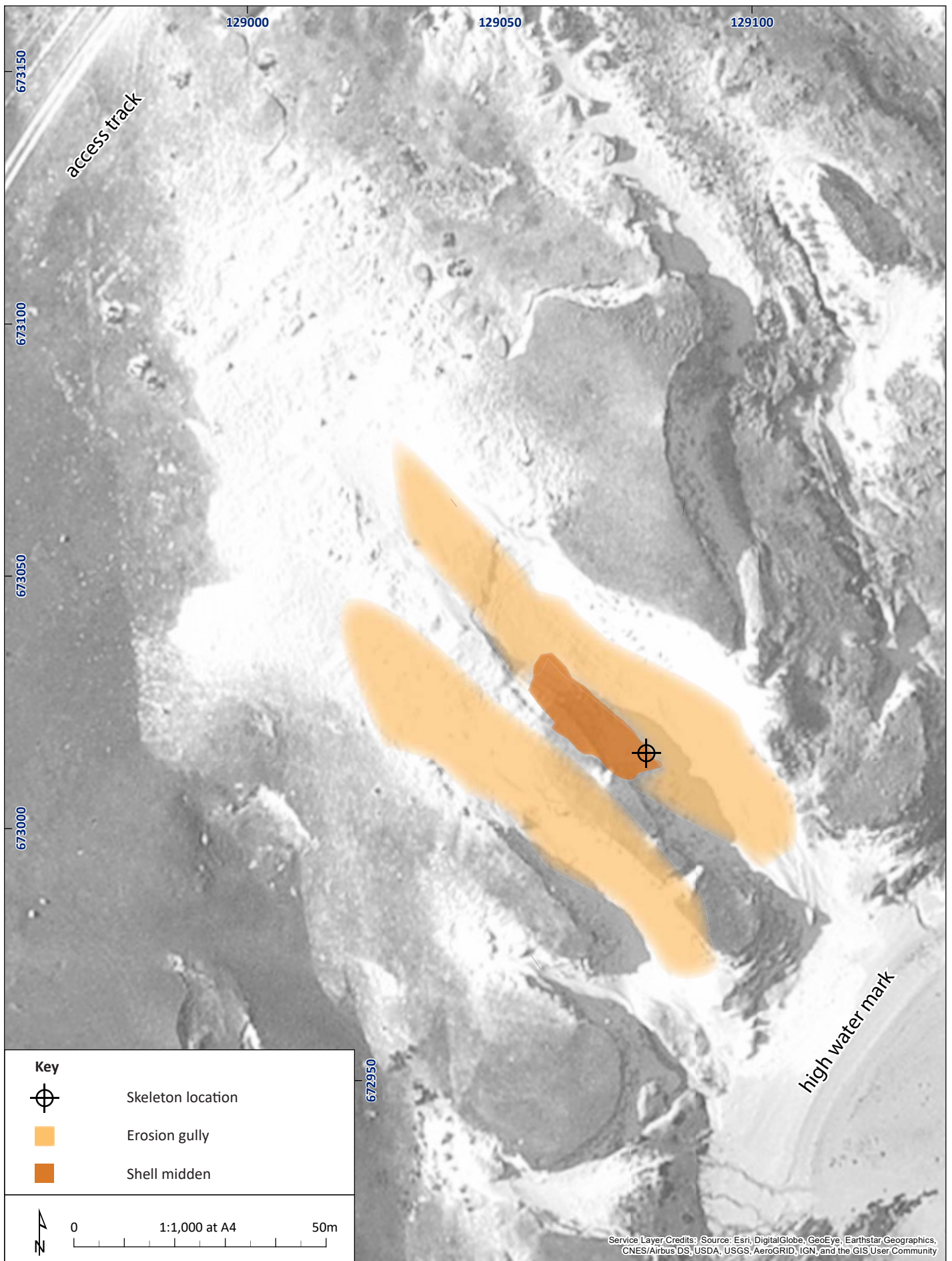
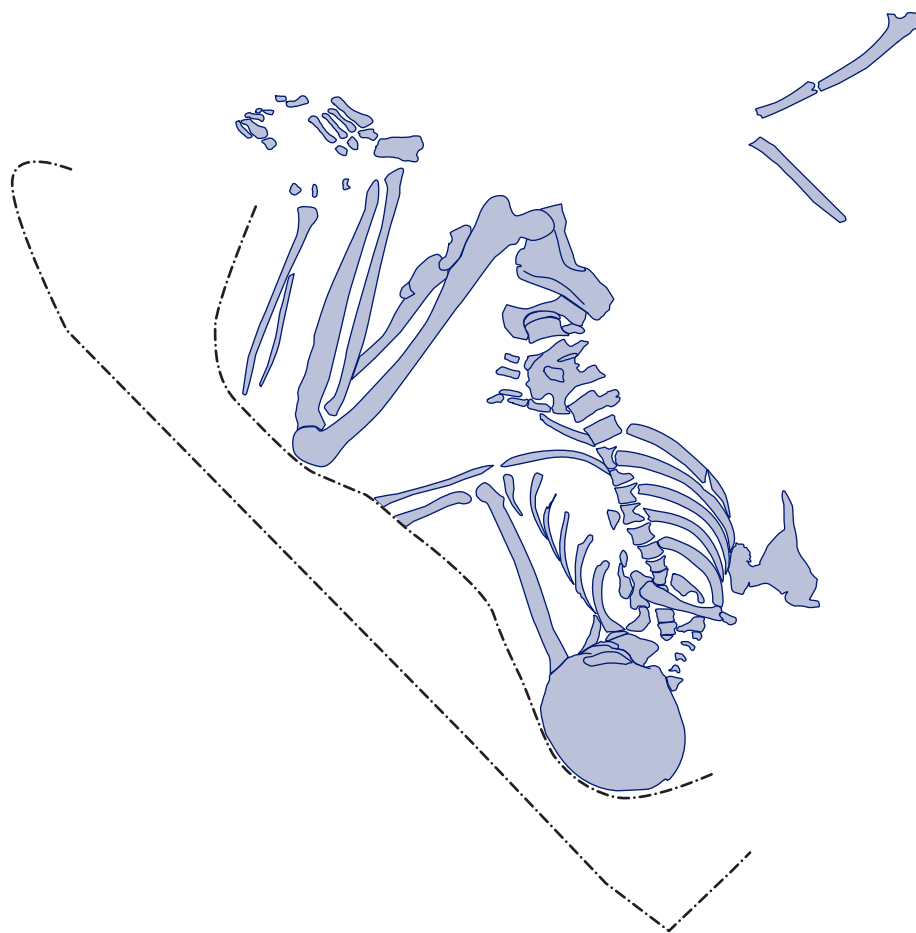


Figure 2: Detailed location of remains showing erosion gullies

01/22740-20/REP/02/01



Key



Bone



Limit of excavation



0

1:10 at A4

0.5m

Figure 3: Detailed plan of Skeleton [008]

01/22470-20/REP/03/01

Ardnave, Islay, Argyll & Bute: Archaeological Excavation Data Structure Report

Section 2: Appendices

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT REGISTER

Context No.	Description and Interpretation
[001]	Yellowish brown sand and grass roots measuring 0.2 m thick. Modern ground surface
[002]	Yellowish brown sand measuring 0.7 m between [001] and [003]. Wind blown dune sand
[003]	Mid brown silty sand with occasional small shell inclusions measuring 0.13 m thick. Covered by dune sand [002]. Former soil horizon 1
[004]	Yellowish brown sand measuring 1.9 m between [003] and [005]. Wind blown dune sand
[005]	Mid brown silty sand with occasional small shell inclusions measuring 0.13 m thick. Covered by dune sand [004]. Closest soil horizon over skeleton [008] Former soil horizon 2
[006]	Yellowish brown sand measuring 2.75 m between [005] and base of erosion gully/shell midden. Wind blown dune sand
[007]	Same as [006] – arbitrary context for sand immediately surrounding skeleton [008]. 1 m by 0.65 m by 0.3 m. Contains skeleton [008]. Grave fill around Sk [008]
[008]	Partly disarticulated skeleton within grave deposit [007]. Right arm disarticulated by erosion but still salvaged from slopes of erosion cut. Skeleton is in crouched position aligned SE-NW with the head more upright and facing west. Arms and legs both bent with right hand on pelvis and left hand level with left knee. Condition of the bones is very good with only some fragmentation on ribs and scapula that have been exposed. Sternum not present but sacrum and vertebrae in very good condition. Measures 1 m by 0.65 m in burial position. Would have measured approximately 1.51 m at full height. All teeth present with large hole in one molar. Skeleton
[009]	Same as [006] – arbitrary context for the base of the grave. Approximately 0.05 m of sand directly underneath skeleton [008]. Contained a single disarticulated finger bone. Deposit immediately under Sk [008]

APPENDIX 2: PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER

Frame	Description	From	Date
1-9	Views from burial location	Var	17/5/17
10	Cover put over remains by police	E	17/5/17
11-12	Views of gully	N	17/5/17
13-84	Views from track to ravine past burial to loch edge	Var	18/5/17
85-90	Views of site at 18/5/17	Var	18/5/17
91	Views of burial with covers	E	18/5/17
92-93	Disarticulated arm bone	Var	18/5/17
94-95	Ribs disarticulated removing covers	S/E	18/5/17
96	Skeleton uncovered	E	18/5/17
97	Toe bone dislodged during cover removal	E	18/5/17
98	Skeleton and disarticulated bone to the E	E	18/5/17
99-101	General views of skeleton revealed	E	18/5/17
102	Toe bone rectification shot	-	18/5/17
103	Toe bone location shot	E	18/5/17
104-105	Arm bone rectification shot	E/N	18/5/17
106-107	Views of skeleton pre-ex	E/N	18/5/17
108-109	Working shots	Var	18/5/17
110	Mid excavation view	N	18/5/17
111-115	General views of Sk [008] exposed	Var	18/5/17
116-138	Photogrammetry shots	Var	18/5/17
139	Sk [008] and view to loch	N	18/5/17
140-141	Grave fully excavated	Var	18/5/17

APPENDIX 3: SAMPLES REGISTER

Context No.	Quantity (litres)
[002]	5
[003]	5
[004]	5
[005]	5
[006]	5
[007]	50
[007]-head	10
[007]-pelvis	10
[009]	10

APPENDIX 4: 'DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION IN SCOTLAND' REPORT

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Argyll & Bute Council
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Ardnave, Islay
PROJECT CODE:	22470-20
PARISH:	Killarow and Kilmeny
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	Kevin Paton
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	AOC Archaeology Group
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Excavation
NMRS NO(S):	N/A
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	Burial
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	None
NGR (2 letters, 6 figures)	NR 2910 7310
START DATE (this season)	17 th May 2015
END DATE (this season)	19 th May 2015
PREVIOUS WORK (inc DES)	N/A
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (May include information from other fields)	<p>An archaeological excavation and recording of an inhumation was conducted by AOC Archaeology at Ardnave, Islay, Argyll & Bute. The works were carried out under the terms of the Historic Scotland Human Remains Call-off Contract.</p> <p>Human remains had been discovered within a wind erosion gully close to the western edge of Loch Gruinart in May 2017. The remains had been partly disarticulated by the erosion of the ground beneath the grave, but were otherwise intact.</p> <p>The skeleton was laid in a crouched position, aligned SE-NW with the head to the SE. The body measured approximately 1.5 m long and had been placed within a possible cut of around 1.0 m in length and 0.65 m in width. It was located within dune sand that had covered an earlier shell midden that was exposed at the base of the erosion gully.</p> <p>No artefacts were found within the excavated area and no other features were noted in the vicinity to suggest it was part of a larger cemetery.</p>
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	None
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRATIONS:	N/A
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Historic Environment Scotland
ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:	AOC Archaeology Group Edgefield Road Industrial Estate Loanhead, Midlothian, EH20 9SY
EMAIL ADDRESS:	admin@aocarchaeology.com
ARCHIVE LOCATION	Archive to be deposited in NMRS



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