



Highland Archaeology Services Ltd

Bringing the Past and Future Together

Doune Strath Oykel, Sutherland



Archaeological Evaluation

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Doune Strath Oykel, Sutherland

Archaeological Evaluation

Report No.	HAS110501
Site Code	SYK11
Client	W Ross
OS Grid Ref	NC 4451 0090
OASIS	highland4-101448
HCAU / Planning Ref	10/03909/PIP
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Summary

Desk-based assessment and trial trenching evaluation were undertaken at Doune, Strath Oykel, Sutherland to establish the nature of a recorded archaeological feature which could be affected by the construction of a house. Archaeological evidence was discovered but its extent is limited and its nature is unclear. It is recommended that the archaeological area should either be preserved in situ, or recorded fully if removal is unavoidable.

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Acknowledgements

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Location

The site is centred at Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference NC 4451 0090 at a height of about 23 m above sea level.

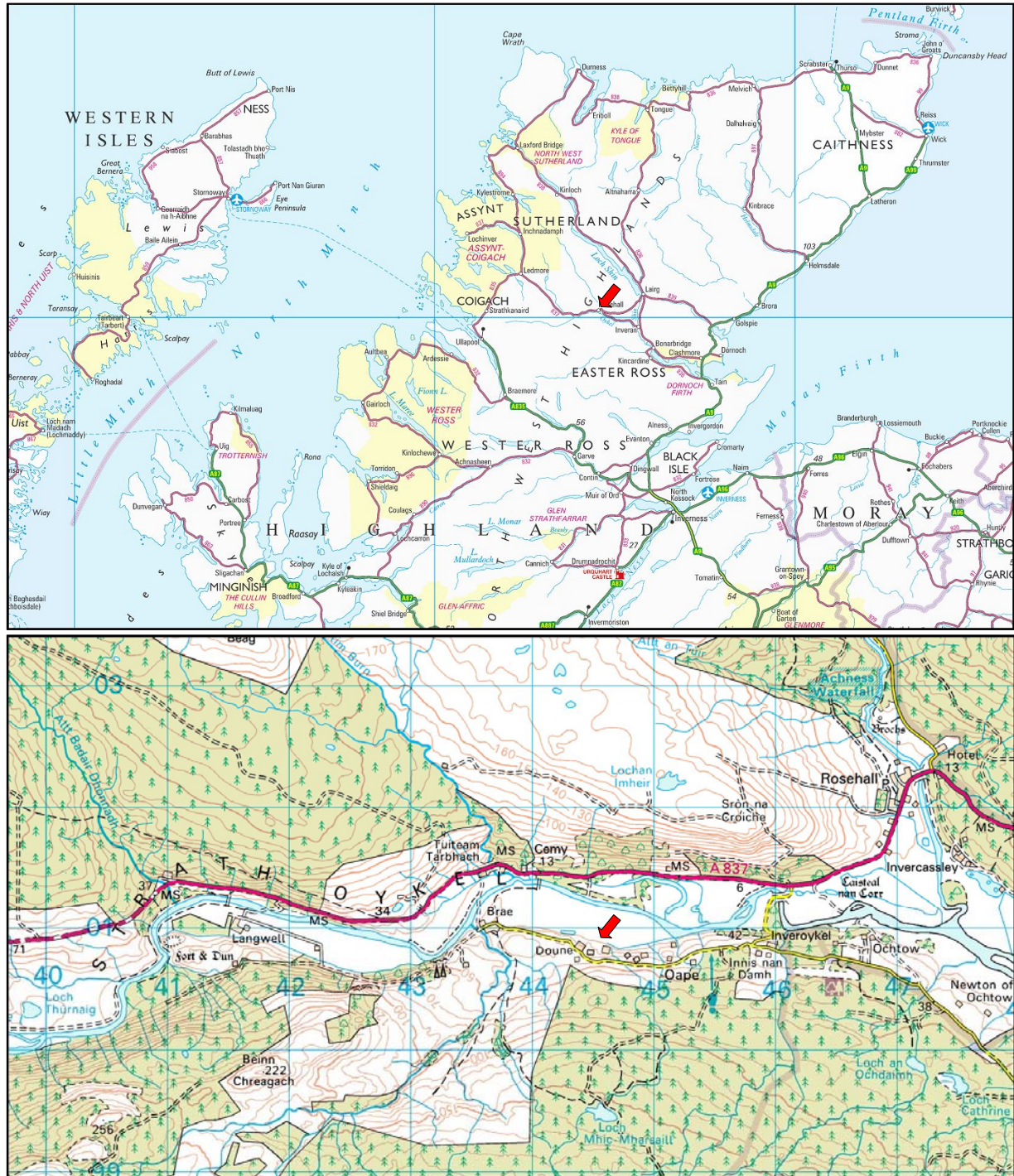


Figure 1 Site location

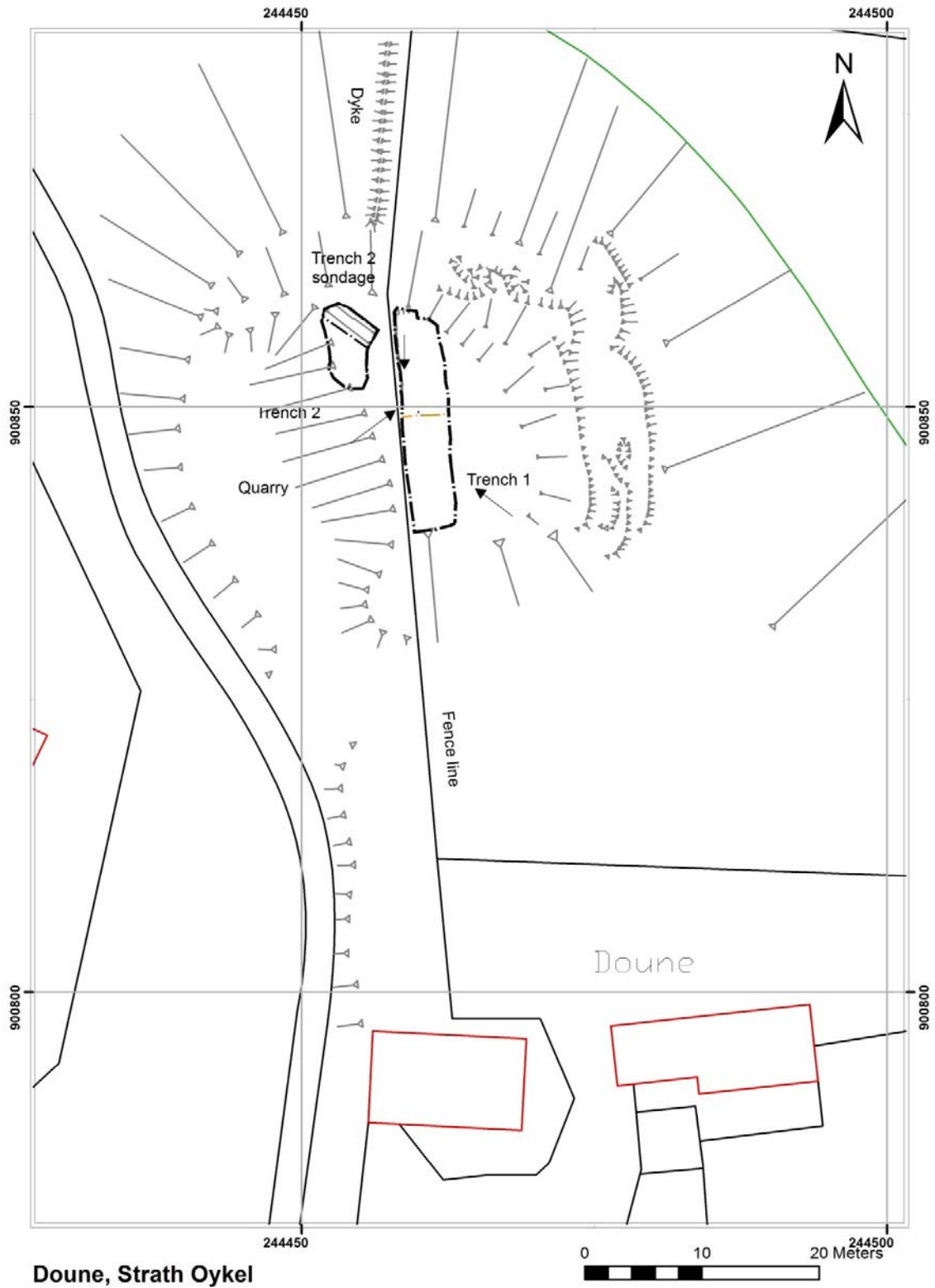


Figure 2 Overall site plan showing mound and positions of trenches

Introduction

A programme of archaeological work was undertaken by Highland Archaeology Services Ltd in response to a planning requirement at Doune, Strath Oykel, Sutherland. The purpose of this programme was to identify and record the nature of a possible archaeological feature affected by the development. It was carried out according to a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) agreed in advance by with the client and the Highland Council's archaeologist, although (as proposed in the WSI) some minor modifications to the scheme were found to be necessary according to the conditions found on site.

Archaeology and policy background

An archaeological evaluation was requested in this case because there was potential for a significant archaeological to be affected by the construction of a house. A prominent hillock which occupies part of the site has been recorded as a possible broch or dun . However this identification was uncertain, so the present proposed project aimed to clarify the nature of any archaeological evidence present to assist the Highland Council to reach a decision on the planning application.

The current planning and policy framework includes the Highland Council's *Structure Plan*¹, and the Scottish Government's *Scottish Planning Policy* (SPP), issued in February 2010, which consolidates and supersedes the previous SPP and NPPG series. The fundamental principles underpinning the above policies are set out in *Passed to the Future: Historic Scotland's Policy for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* (2002)² and the *Burra Charter* (Australia ICOMOS 1999).³

Programme

Initial Photography

An initial photographic survey of the site overall as existing was undertaken. The photographs are included on the CD enclosed with this report.

Desk Based Assessment

A check of all relevant archaeological / historical records, maps and aerial photographs was undertaken as specified by the Highland Council.

¹ <http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/planning/developmentplans/structureplan/thehighlandstructureplan.htm>

² www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pasttofuture.pdf

³ <http://www.icomos.org/australia/burra.html>

Field Evaluation

A planning application for the development of a private house at Doune has yet to be determined (App. No. 10/03909/PIP). The Highland Council's archaeologist advised that

The proposed plot is located on the site of a putative Iron Age broch (from which "Doune" likely took its name). See <http://her.highland.gov.uk/SingleResult.aspx?uid=MHG7408>. The photos show typical building material surviving in places above ground although much of the stone has now been robbed - there are, however, potentially significant subsurface remains still in situ. Given that we are unsure of the baseline condition of the remains (above and below ground), this would be a case of us recommending refusal unless a predetermination evaluation (both walkover and, if necessary, invasive trial trenching) was undertaken by the applicant to establish what is left of the broch and what impact a development in this location would likely have. If the broch does survive the cost of excavating it in advance of development would be astronomical and I would imagine entirely prohibitive - it would probably be in everyone's best interest to leave it in situ and it would certainly be our advice that development is not permitted to destroy what remains. If nothing, or little, survives we would be content to see the development proceed, with appropriate mitigation in place⁴.

Following a site visit by the present writer and a consultation with the Highland Council's archaeologist, a proposed evaluation scheme was agreed as shown in Figure 2 above. The objective in this case was only to clarify whether any evidence of structures survives on the mound at Doune. It was not intended to undertake a full trial trenching evaluation of the site as a whole. One trial trench was proposed, nominally 20m x 3m to include both opposite edges of the flat mound top; together with an investigation of the top of a quarry face created in the 1990s. The investigations therefore were to focus on the flat top of the mound, although this lies on the SE corner of the development plot, as this is considered to provide the best indication of the presence or otherwise of archaeology.

A stone dyke is visible running north-south across the mound approximately on the line of a modern post and wire fence. One trench was located across the line of this feature but it was found to have been removed across the flattened top of the mound. The client has indicated to the writer that he removed material from the mound top as well as the side for road-making in 1993.

Within the defined trench, topsoil was removed to the first visible soil change, using a back-acting mechanical excavator fitted with a straight-edged bucket. Surfaces were cleaned as necessary by hand to identify any features. No pits or negative linear features were identified and no sections were therefore cut. As this was a 'strip and map' exercise archaeological contexts were not defined.

It was proposed to clean a strip along the top of the 1993 quarry face to check for any structures. The width of this strip was to be decided on site but sufficient to clarify whether structural evidence is present. A shallow trench was opened at the northern end of the quarry face to check whether the archaeological features found in the other trench extended to the quarry face. Once it had been established beyond reasonable doubt that the southern part of the quarry face top was unlikely to produce archaeological evidence, cleaning stopped.

The WSI proposed that, following usual best practice, no archaeological excavation would be undertaken as part of this work beyond the minimum necessary to achieve the objectives above. Structural evidence was, as proposed, cleaned, photographed and drawn but not removed. It was therefore *not* proposed to attempt to establish the full extent of any visible structures, but if portable artefacts were found suggesting

⁴ Highland Council Archaeology Unit brief, 2011.

a significant site, the trench might be extended following the agreement of all parties to attempt to clarify matters.



Figure 3 Extract from 1st Edition OS 6 inch map (surveyed 1875)

Results

General Roy's map (1747-55) shows Doune in Strath Oykel as 'Down'⁵. Although the place-name might appear to indicate a dùn, (a fort or fortifiable hill), there is no mention of such a feature here until 1875, when it was first identified by the Ordnance Survey. The Name Book produced in that year describes it as

⁵ William Roy's Military Survey: <http://geo.nls.uk/roy/>

The summit of the natural knoll about 18m in diameter and disturbed by turf-covered stones and an old field wall which crosses it from north to south. The site is a likely one for a broch, but no trace of any structure can be seen⁶.

On the 1st Edition 1:10560 (6 inches to 1 Mile) map, surveyed in 1875 (see Figure 3) the site is marked as An Dùn (Site of a supposed Pictish Fort).⁷

However, the site was revisited by the Ordnance Survey in April 1963 and again in September 1976. On both occasions they found

The site of the possible broch, as described in the previous field report, is at NC 4445 0085. No name is known locally⁸.

In 1993 the present owner quarried part of the western side of the mound to construct a crofting access track which runs from the public road northwards to the fields by the river. It is understood that he also took material from the top of the mound at the same time, resulting in the present flattened top. The old, turf-covered dyke mentioned by the Ordnance Survey (which still indicates the croft boundary, although now superseded by a wire fence) has been completely removed across the top of the mound, probably at this time.

The quarry face from 1993 reveals very stony moraine material and it appears that the mound is itself of natural, periglacial origin. However, as noted by the Ordnance Survey in 1875, it would have formed an excellent site for a broch or small dùn with extensive views along the strath. It would also have been suitable for a gallows or windmill. Modern aerial photography (Plate1) clearly shows the quarried area, the boundary dyke, and extensive areas of stone diggings on the NE side of the mound.

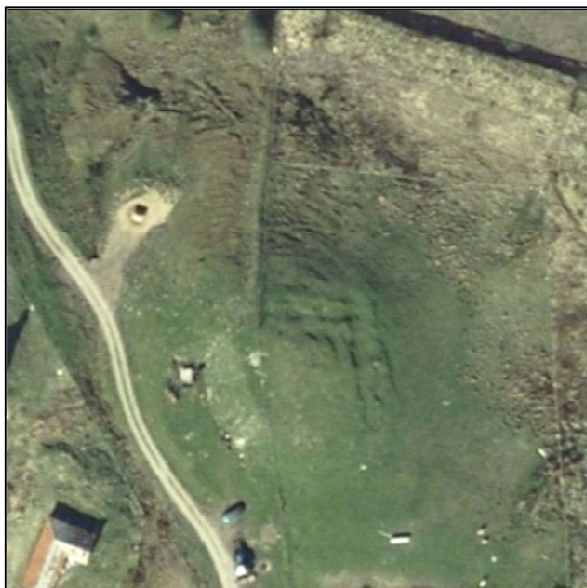


Plate 1 Aerial photograph

Courtesy of getmapping.com

⁶ Quoted on the National Monuments Record (NC40SW 2) and Highland Council Historic Environment Record (MHG7408)

⁷ Ordnance Survey Map - Ross-shire & Cromartyshire (Mainland) - 1:10,560 Sheet XI published 1881

⁸ See note 5

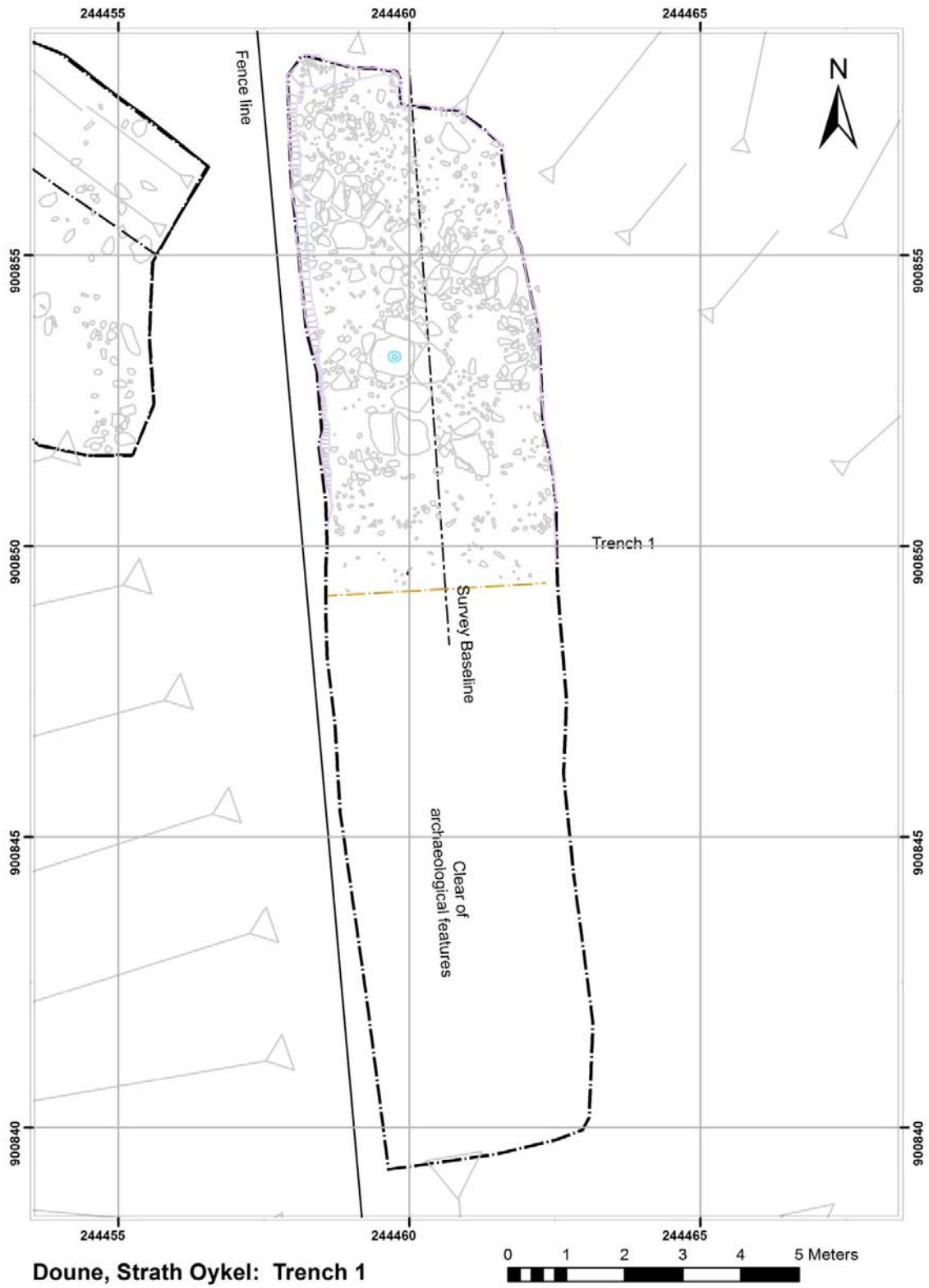


Figure 4 Trench 1

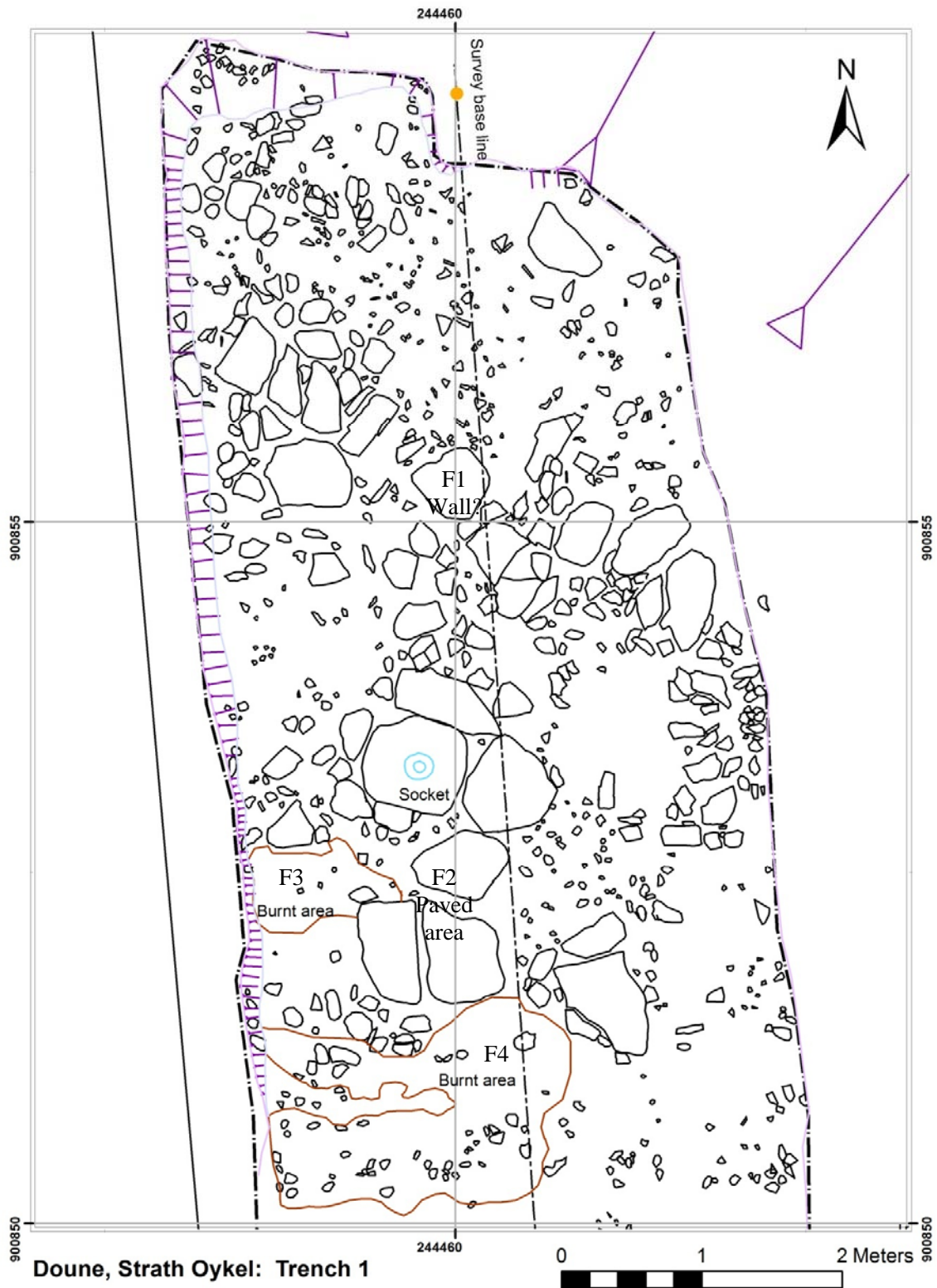


Figure 5 Trench 1: archaeological features



Plate 2 Trench 1: view north from southern edge of archaeological features showing paved area (F2) with socket stone and burnt area F3 against trench edge



Plate 3 Trench 1 from north showing probable wall (F1) and burnt areas (F3 and F4) beyond

Trench 1

A trench approximately 3m wide and 20m long was opened across the flat top of the mound, working from north to south (Figures 3 and 4 above). The northern end of this trench was 100mm deep, with a possible occupation surface just below the turf apparently sitting directly on the moraine material below. See Figure 5 above for the location of features described below.

Feature 1: A line of stones of visible length approximately 3m and approximately 0.4m wide suggested a possible wall face or kerb running NW – SE across the trench. Only a SSW facing edge could be seen, so either excavation did not uncover the other face or this had been constructed as a revetting wall or kerb edging a flattened area to the south. This is centred at approximately E244459, N900855

Feature 2: South of Feature 1 lay an irregular and apparently eroded area of flat paving stones which had also been disturbed by the digger. This extended a maximum of about 2.5m E-W and 2.8m N-S and was composed of large blocks from 0.4 to 0.7m across and 0.1 to 0.2m deep. These stones surrounded a substantial socket stone which rose higher than the surrounding slabs and measured approximately 0.62m x 0.75m. A conical socket in the centre of this stone measured approximately 200mm in diameter and depth, with a base diameter of 60mm. The socket is located at approximately E244459, N900853.

Feature 3: Feature 2 appeared to overlay a burnt surface formed of the same moraine material as around it, centred at E244458, N900852 with an irregular red core suggesting more intense heat extending about 0.5m E-W and 0.2m N-S. Surrounding this core was a blackened area extending to the flat stones of Feature 2, altogether approximately 1m wide. This and Feature 4 to the south may be part of the same burning episode.



Plate 4 Trench 1: view north from southern end showing clean periglacial moraine material, including a large rounded glaciated boulder (centre)

Feature 4: South of Features 2 and 3 was a further burnt but charcoal-free area, comprising a similarly blackened natural subsoil surface with a pale grey ashy material running through it. This is centred

approximately at E244459, N900850. It represents less intense burning than Feature 3 and it is probably part of the same episode, representing the outer limits of the fire, though the flat stones of Feature 2 would need to be removed to clarify this. It is worth noting that the flat stones of Feature 2 were not apparently burnt.

South of Feature 4, Trench 1 only revealed clean, natural moraine material. It is possible that archaeological features might have been removed unnoticed when the top of the mound was levelled in 1993. The trench depth at the southern end was 500mm.

Trench 2

This was opened in order to clean and examine the top edge of the quarry face created in 1993. The cleaned area was extended west for approximately 3m and also south along the break of slope. The western half of this area was found to be made up of loose, slipped material, with in-situ deposits only on the eastern side. Here, at a depth of approximately 200mm, beneath the turf, was a small burnt area at the northern end (Feature 5), but despite the features noted in Trench 1 to the east, no structures were identified here and, working from the north, after about 3m the conditions appeared completely lacking in archaeological indications. The slip line also ran eastward towards the fence. After a further 3m it was therefore decided not to continue cleaning this area.

Feature 5: This was an irregular, blackened but charcoal-free area about 0.5m by 0.3m located at about E244454, N900856 (See Plate 5 and Figure 6). This type of feature can be created by scrub burning. It is not likely to be archaeologically significant.



Plate 5 Trench 2, from NE, showing Feature 5



Figure 6 Trench 2

Trench 2 sondage

In view of the shallow nature of Trench 2, and the features identified nearby in Trench 1, the northern end of Trench 2 was then deepened using the digger under close observation to establish whether archaeological evidence might survive beneath the level reached. The sondage was excavated to a final depth of 1.6m but the material encountered all appeared to be natural. (See Figure 7 and Plate 7 below).

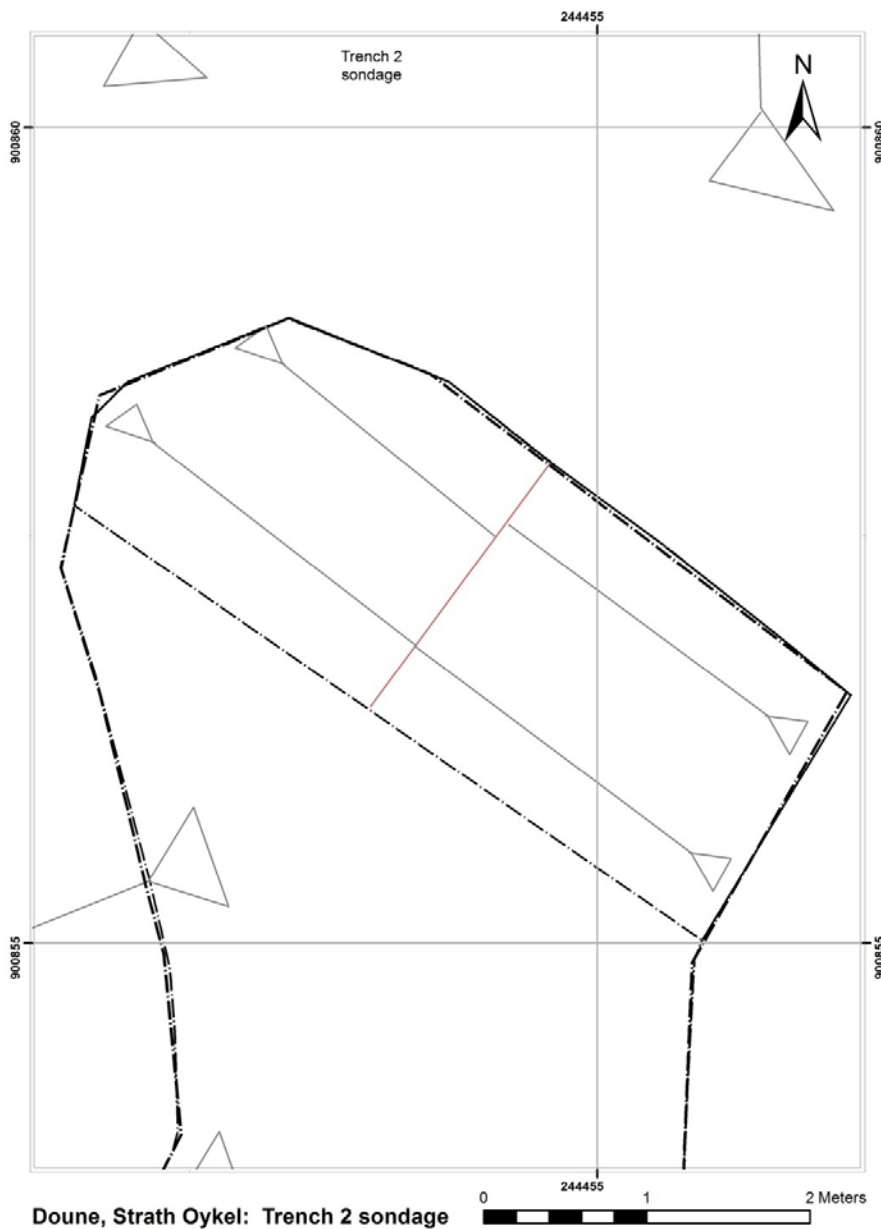


Figure 7 Trench 2: sondage



Plate 6 Sondage: view north, showing mixed and slipped material in section



Plate 7 Artefact reported by neighbour following completion of the excavation. Dimensions: 10cm diameter at rim; 6 cm high.

Discussion

Although archaeological evidence of structures was found, it was fragmentary and shallow in nature. Despite the presence of a short section of possible wall, it seems unlikely that this represents a dun or broch. Instead there seems to be an area of flat paving surrounding a substantial socket which may have been used for turning a post. This was associated with areas of burning although no charcoal was recovered. It is not clear what this evidence represents or when it was constructed.

No portable artefacts were found during the excavation but subsequently a stone bowl or cup, approximately 5cm high and 10cm in diameter with a flat, semicircular handle was submitted to the Highland Council by a neighbour. This is reported to be from a spoil heap near the NE corner of Trench 1 (see figures 8 and 9 below, and plate 6 above). The item resembles a single-handed Quaich. The cup is of grey stone and appears to have been recently excavated. It has two opposite areas missing from the rim, which might be consistent with damage from a digger bucket. Artefacts like this are extremely rare, but those found previously in Scotland have been assigned to the Iron Age (c. 2,700 – 1,500 years ago).

An apparently very similar example was recorded as found at Ardrishnich (near Achmelvich) some years before 1967, in which year it was in the possession of Mr and Mrs Campbell of Logie, Lochbroom. It was described as 'Of grey metamorphosed grit, cup is undecorated and measures 4" diameter and 2" high. It has short, stubby handle, convex underside of which forms a continuous curve with that of base'. In 1974 it was in the possession of a Mr and Mrs Campbell of Logie, Lochbroom, but there are no more recent records⁹.

Several other stone cups have been reported from the Highlands, most apparently found many years ago, but there are few details available and some have been lost. One is reported as having been found during excavation of a gravel pit at Inchnadamph before 1947. The dimensions and present location of this item are not clear but it apparently had a 'handle shaped for thumb and finger but not pierced, with an incised line 0.5" below the lip'.¹⁰ A 'cup-shaped stone lamp', found at Moniack about 1800, was donated to the National Museum in about 1957,¹¹ and a small stone (steatite) cup was found in August 1871 in Assynt – apparently near Clachtoll broch; but again, details are not available.

A 'handled stone cup' was found in about 1834 'within the circular base of an ancient Pictish house' in Resolis, on the Black Isle, according to the 2nd Statistical Account for the parish. However both the cup and the circular building have since been lost.¹² Another 'stone cup with a handle, extreme length 7", outside diameter 5", with across bowl 3.75", which was dug up on a moor near Achiltibuie' was reported as being at the hotel there by the Ordnance Survey in 1971. However when the Ordnance Survey returned three years later it had gone, and its present whereabouts is unknown.

Some broadly similar objects seem to have been interpreted as lamps: an early acquisition of the National Museums was a 'cup-shaped steatite lamp from Uplands' (near Tulloch Castle, Dingwall).¹³ A 'cup-shaped stone lamp found on Croft 386, Cagarve, Elphin (NC 2111) was donated to the NMAS by G MacLeod, Cagarve, 1956-7'¹⁴; while a 'cup-shaped stone lamp, decorated with incised chevrons, was found beside the Allt na Dionaite and was donated to the NMAS by Master Alistair MacKay, Tongue' in about 1966.¹⁵

⁹ Discovery and Excavation in Scotland 1967, 53; HHER MHG12997

¹⁰ HHER MHG12242

¹¹ HHER MHG3414

¹² HHER MHG8133

¹³ HHER MHG8952; NMAS Acc No: AQ 96

¹⁴ HHER MHG13038

¹⁵ HHER MHG12351

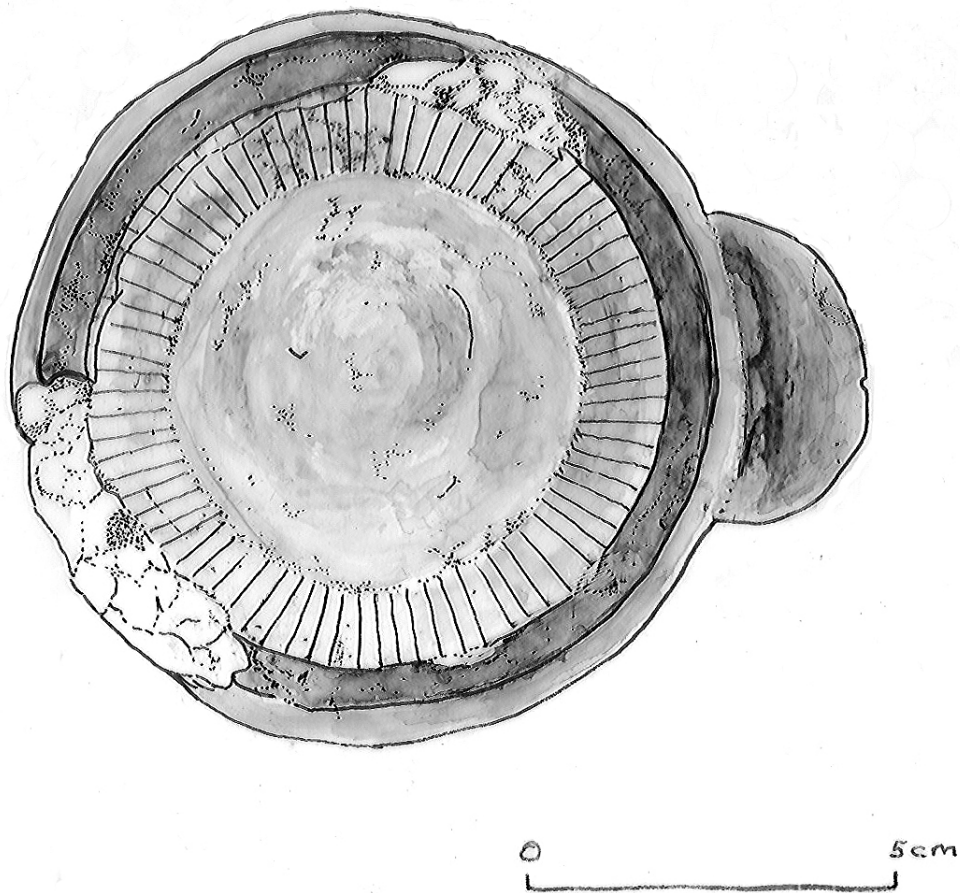


Figure 8 Stone cup: view from above

Dunrobin Museum has several stone cups in its collection, including one 'of brown sandstone, 4.3 ins by 4 ins by 2.4 ins high, with a loose label indicating that it was 'Found in Achintoul Burn (NC 884330) and presented by Mrs. Bannerman, Kilmore' is in Dunrobin Museum (Acc No. X59)¹⁶. Another 'stone cup with handle' was apparently found in 1864 'in the district of Muie a short distance south of the public road'. It is apparently labelled "From a cairn".¹⁷ A 'cup or lamp of grey stone with dark grey crystals, 5.5 ins in diameter by 2.9 ins high, with moulding at the rim, from Rogart' in Dunrobin Museum was 'probably received in 1887'.¹⁸

¹⁶ HHER MHG9409

¹⁷ HHER MHG12284; Dunrobin Acc No: 1864.1.

¹⁸ HHER MHG10632; Dunrobin Acc. No. 1887.3

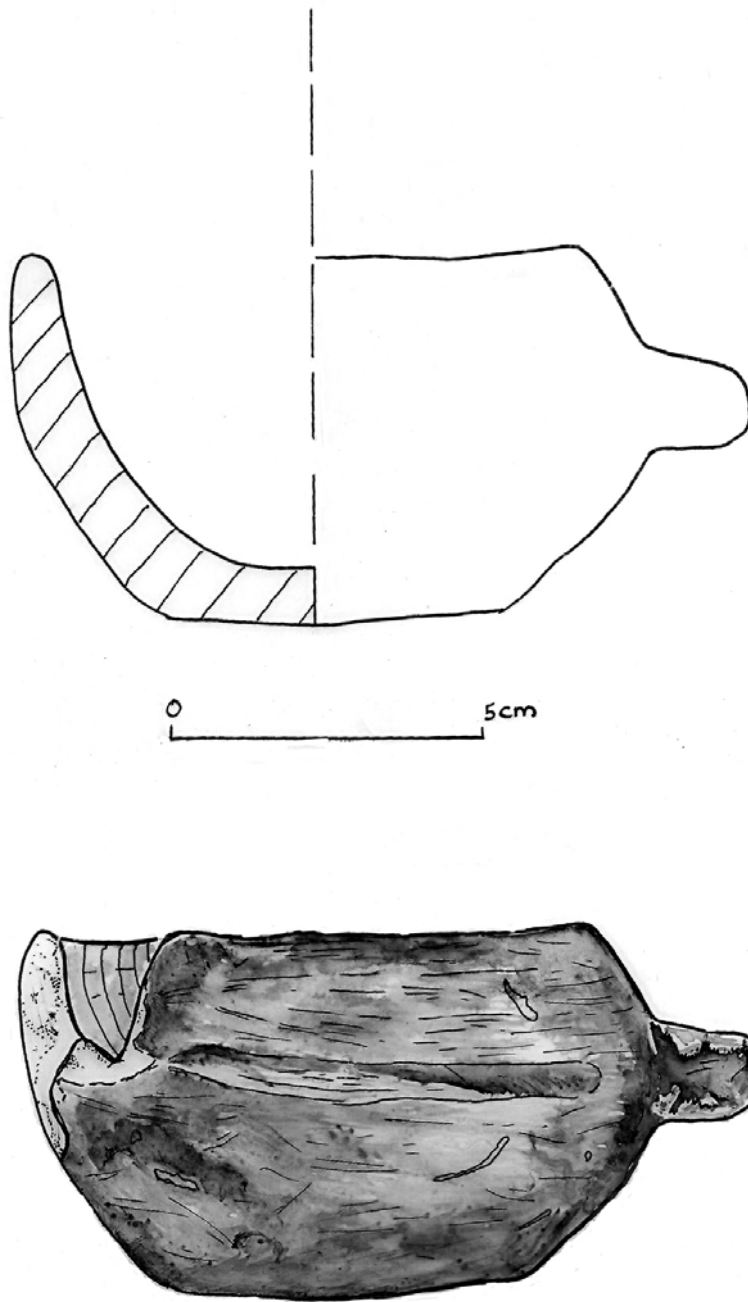


Figure 9 Stone cup: profile and side view

Conclusions

While the mound at Doune appears to be formed of natural periglacial moraine, there is clearly archaeology present at this site, including a short section of walling, flat paving stones, socket stone and burnt areas. However without further work it is not possible at this stage to clarify the purpose, date or extent of these features, which lie immediately below the turf at the northern end. The southern half of the flat mound top is apparently clear of archaeology and this may be because of levelling work the owner indicated he carried out in about 1993. At the same time, he quarried into the western side of the mound to win material for the access track which runs alongside.

The socket stone might be a part-finished millstone but it has apparently been set deliberately in its present position. Sometimes smaller but similar stones are found serving as the bases for door-turning posts in medieval and post-medieval buildings but in this position it is difficult to see this stone having that function.

The stone cup is a rare find but, like other recorded examples in the Highlands, it lacks a secure archaeological context.

Recommendations

If the site is to be developed as proposed, the archaeological features present should be excavated and recorded before removal. A search should also be made for the pieces missing from the stone bowl. If they were removed by the digger as suggested, these should be recoverable.

The features in the northern part of Trench 1 lie close to the modern ground surface and are as yet undated. Nor have their character and full extent been established. On the basis of the sondage excavated in the northern part of Trench 2, it would be surprising to find much depth of stratigraphy beneath them, but again this remains to be clarified.

We therefore recommend that the fence running across the site should be removed and Trench 1 should be extended to the full extent of the flat top of the mound, from the break of slope on each side. All features identified within this area should be fully excavated by an archaeologist and recorded before removal. On the basis of the work to date, the southern half of the mound seems unlikely to produce archaeology, but the unexcavated areas nevertheless need to be checked.

On the north and north-eastern sides of the mound are a number of grass-covered ditches and diggings which probably represent stone removal. These should be sampled to clarify this. At this stage we propose a single, 1.5m wide trial trench running vertically down the NE side of the mound in a NE direction for approximately 25m to the bottom of the slope. If these features appear to be archaeological in nature, or if there is other archaeology present in this area, a further decision will need to be made as to whether to safeguard or record and remove it.

Appendix: Table of Photographs

Photo No.	Location	Direction	Subject	Date
SYK11- 1	CP1	E	Trench 2	26/04/2011
SYK11- 2	CP7	N	Pre-ex	25/03/2011
SYK11- 3	CP13	N	Trench 2	26/04/2011
SYK11- 4	CP2	N	Pre-ex	25/03/2011
SYK11- 5	CP13	N	Trench 2	26/04/2011
SYK11- 6	CP18	E	Pre-ex	25/03/2011
SYK11- 7	CP21	W	Trench 2	26/04/2011
SYK11- 8	CP18	E	Pre-ex	25/03/2011
SYK11- 9		W	Trench 2	26/04/2011
SYK11- 10	CP2	S	Pre-ex	25/03/2011
SYK11- 11	CP3	E	Trench 2	26/04/2011
SYK11- 12	CP2	S	Pre-ex	25/03/2011
SYK11- 13	CP4	S	Trench 2: burnt area	26/04/2011
SYK11- 14	CP2	S	Pre-ex	25/03/2011
SYK11- 15	CP5	NW	Trench 2: burnt area	26/04/2011
SYK11- 16	CP2	N	Pre-ex	04/04/2011
SYK11- 17	CP6	E	Trench 2 sondage	26/04/2011
SYK11- 18	CP6	E	Pre-ex	25/03/2011
SYK11- 19	CP3	NE	Trench 2 sondage	26/04/2011
SYK11- 20	Public Road, E of site	W	Pre-ex	23/05/2011
SYK11- 21	CP2	S	Trench 2 sondage	26/04/2011
SYK11- 22	CP6	W	Trench 2 sondage	26/04/2011
SYK11- 23	CP8	S	Trench 1	26/04/2011
SYK11- 24	CP9	N	Trench 1	26/04/2011
SYK11- 25	CP9	NW	Trench 1	26/04/2011
SYK11- 26	CP8	N	Trench 1	26/04/2011
SYK11- 27	CP10	W	Trench 1	26/04/2011
SYK11- 28	CP11	N	Trench 1: socket stone (close-up)	26/04/2011
SYK11- 29	CP12	N	Trench 1: socket stone	26/04/2011
SYK11- 30	CP14	S	Trench 1 (zoom)	26/04/2011
SYK11- 31	CP14	S	Trench 1	26/04/2011
SYK11- 32	CP15	WNW	Trench 1	26/04/2011
SYK11- 33	CP15	WNW	Trench 1	26/04/2011
SYK11- 34	CP15	WSW	Trench 1: socket stone	26/04/2011
SYK11- 35	CP15	WSW	Trench 1: socket stone	26/04/2011
SYK11- 36	CP15	W	Trench 1: socket stone	26/04/2011

Photo No.	Location	Direction	Subject	Date
SYK11- 37	CP10	W	Trench 1: socket stone	26/04/2011
SYK11- 38	CP16	N	Trench 1: socket stone & burnt area	26/04/2011
SYK11- 39	CP16	N	Trench 1: socket stone & burnt area	26/04/2011
SYK11- 40	CP17	N	Trench 1: socket stone & burnt area	26/04/2011
SYK11- 41	CP18	S	Trench 1	29/04/2011
SYK11- 42	CP2	N	Fence line, dyke	29/04/2011
SYK11- 43	CP19	S	Trench 1	29/04/2011
SYK11- 44	CP19	S	Trench 1 showing bedrock	29/04/2011
SYK11- 45	CP18	SE	Trench 1	26/04/2011
SYK11- 46	CP18	S	Trench 1	26/04/2011
SYK11- 47	CP20	S	Trench 2	26/04/2011
SYK11- 48	CP20	S	Trench 2	26/04/2011
SYK11- 49	CP6	W	Trench 2: burnt area	26/04/2011

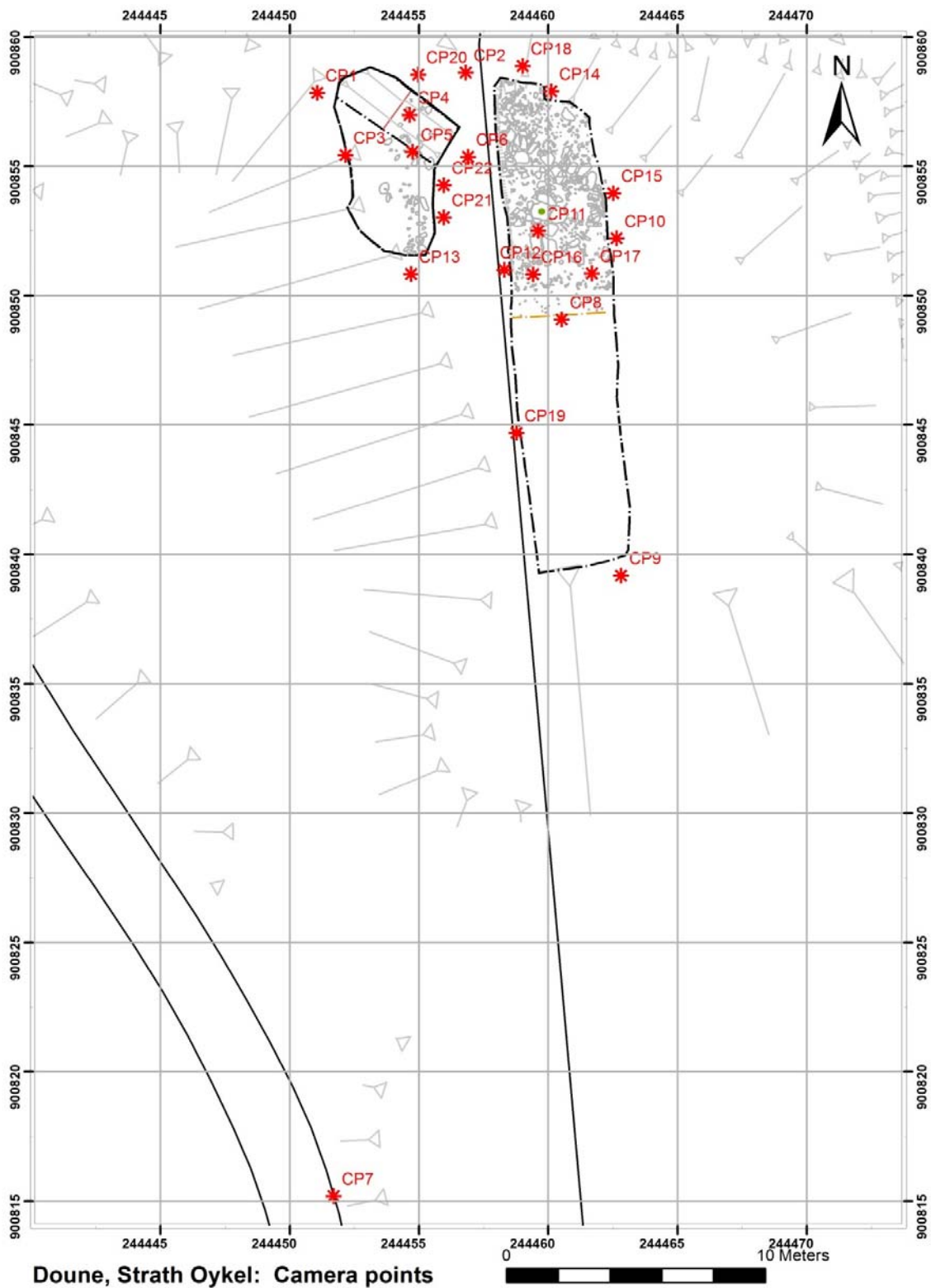


Figure 10 Camerapoints

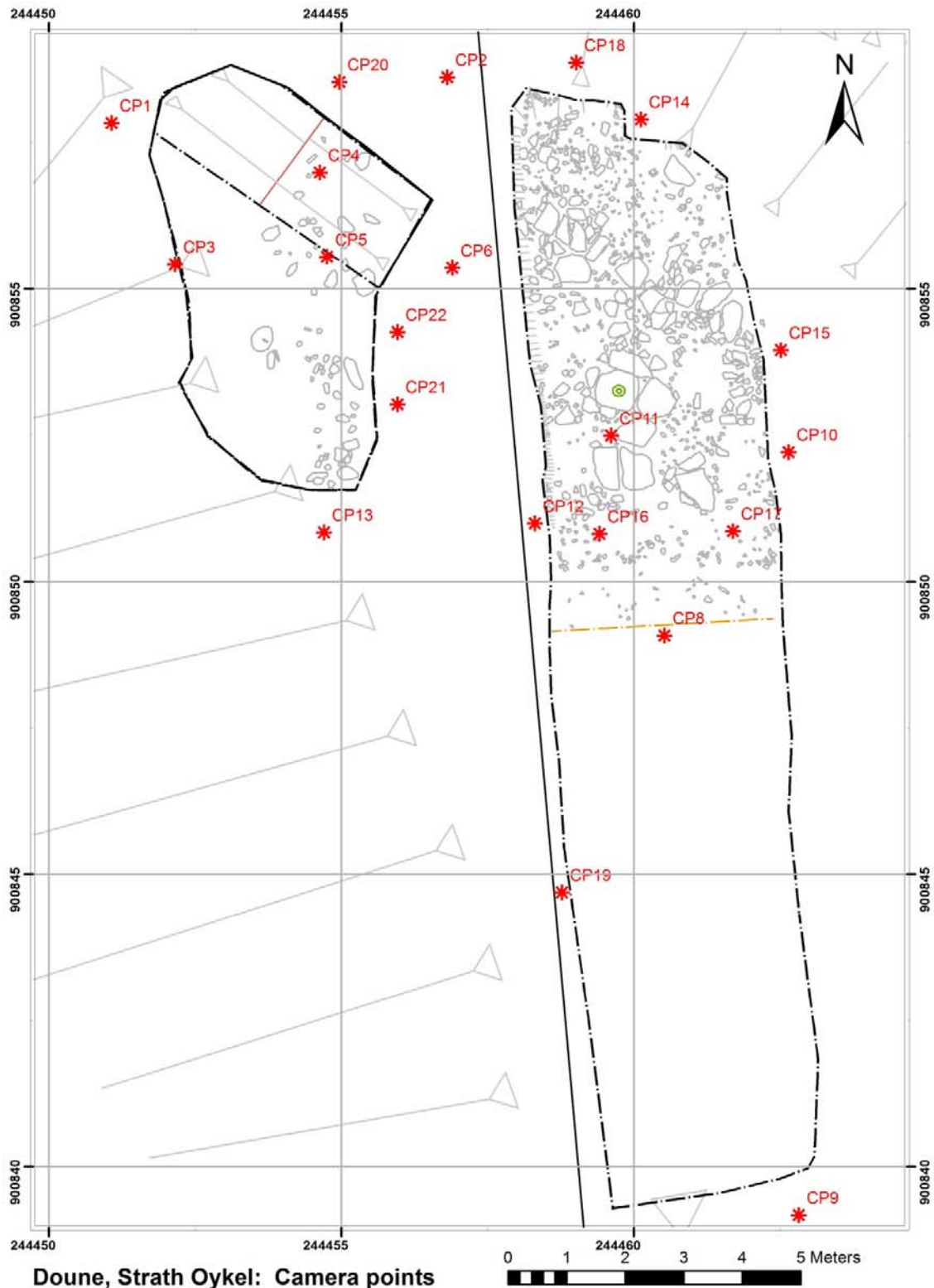


Figure 11 Camera points - Trenches