Shieldaig Farm, Gairloch, Wester Ross

Proposed New Planting Areas

Archaeological Desk-Based Evaluation

Catherine Dagg

For

Scottish Woodlands Ltd
Mayfield
High Street
Dingwall
Ross-Shire
IV15 9ST.
Shieldaig Farm, Gairloch, Wester Ross

Proposed New Planting Areas

Archaeological Desk-Based Evaluation

1.0 Background

This evaluation covers an area of proposed enclosure for tree planting or regeneration east of the Badachro River on the south side of Loch Gairloch in Wester Ross. This area contains archaeological sites identified during previous survey work (see below, section 2.0) and at this stage of planning of the scheme it is felt that a desk-based evaluation of the existing survey results will adequately give an assessment of the potential impact of the scheme on the archaeological record and make recommendations for targeted fieldwork to identify other sites before planting.

The *Forests and Archaeology Guidelines*, produced by the Forestry Authority, recommend that:

- No new planting should occur on archaeological sites. Normally an unplanted area should extend for at least 20m beyond the outermost recognised feature of the site
- Where groups of archaeological features are close together they should be incorporated into a larger area of open space
- Fencelines should not cross the archaeological site
- Archaeological sites should not be used as a source for stone or other materials

In addition, it is generally accepted that the best management practice for archaeological features is light grazing, to prevent the features from being obscured or damaged by vegetation growth within fenced areas even if the site is left clear of tree planting. Where the site is close to the perimeter fence, the fence line should be altered to exclude the site.

2.0 Archaeological Background

Three commercially commissioned surveys have been carried out over parts of the proposed planting area:

1. **Wordsworth J. 1997: Coille Dubh, Gairloch WGS EH491** A walk-over survey of all the area of ground north of the road and east of Shieldaig Farm
2. **Dagg C. 1998: Archaeological Survey of a Proposed Woodland Grant Scheme plantation at An Torr, Badachro, Gairloch, Wester Ross EH424** A walk-over survey of the An Torr area, north of the road and lying between Badachro and Camusnaharry. As well as locating the hut circles previously identified by
Wentworth, this survey located minor features associated with Early Modern cultivation, peat cutting and fishing.

   This survey followed a broad corridor along the proposed route of the water main between Leacnasaidhe and Shieldaig farm, a route which passed along the south boundary of the existing woodland of Camassie Wood. As well as locating existing archaeology, the survey identified other minor archaeological features associated with land use and communications within this corridor.

A fourth survey covers an area immediately to the SW of the proposed planting area:

   Commissioned by NoSWA to cover the Intake Line Renewal – Badachro Water Phase 2, covering a broad corridor on the SW bank of the river. This survey located a series of walls and possible structures consistent with post-mediaeval settlement.

In addition, the whole area has been covered by a walk-over survey by R. Wentworth, former curator of Gairloch Museum (1989). This survey work appears to have concentrated on prehistoric sites, primarily hut circles, but taking note of associated features of cultivation. It is worthy of note that none of the subsequent investigations found any further prehistoric sites.

An ongoing project, recording hut circles in their environment in the Wester Ross area, initially a dissertation project for Aberdeen University by Anna Welti of Ullapool, has also failed to locate any further hut circles within the area of this evaluation.

While it can be concluded with some confidence that Prehistoric hut circles have all been identified within the area of this evaluation, it is less certain that other sites, particularly dating to the post-Mediaeval period, have been adequately plotted. While there is no documentary or cartographic evidence for permanent settlement away from the coast, it is likely that shielings and hill fields associated with the known settlements will be located inland. Comparison between the known sites and the predicted number of such sites will show where the likely gaps in the archaeological record are, and highlight areas where further archaeological investigation may be advisable before fencing and planting.

### 3.0 Historical and Cartographic Evidence

Roy’s Military Survey, carried out in the 1750s, shows the only townships within the evaluation area as being three building clusters at Shieldaig, on what is now the improved farm fields and hotel grounds. Arable ground associated with these settlements is also limited to the farm land. To the south, no inland settlements are recorded apart from one to the SE of Loch Gaineamhach.

As Leacnasaidhe and Camas na h’Airidh do not appear as settlements on Roy’s survey, they are likely to be 19th century in origin and date to the re-organisation of Gairloch estate into sheep farms. The name *camas na h’airidh*, bay of the shieling, suggests that this was originally a shieling site. The hill field on An Torr, recorded during the 1998 survey and the
small enclosed area on the east bank of the Badachro River are most likely Early Modern areas of seasonal cultivation or shielings, probably later used for sheep farming purposes, the sheep farm being centred on the Shieldaig farm steading and associated enclosed fields.

The trackway from Shieldaig which follows the Abhainn Braigh to Loch Gaineamhach and on to Torridon is likely to be an old route, as is the remains of the track immediately south of the present road at Shieldaig, noted during the 2008 survey, which is the east continuation of the ‘Sean Rathad’ or old road connecting South Erradale and Badachro, in use in 1755. The present public road was built as a famine relief project, funded by the Destitution Fund and organised by the Gairloch Mackenzies around 1848 during the potato famine. Initially the road ran as far as Badachro to assist the development of the cod fishing

The conversion of the ground to sport shooting with the building of Shieldaig Lodge appears to have left little archaeological evidence.

The Badachro River is likely to have formed the traditional boundary between the hill ground of the townships of Badachro to the west and Shieldaig to the east. This would place the shielings grounds at Camas na h’Airidh and on An Torr within Shieldaig, while a second shieling site was probably around Loch an Feur. It is common for shielings to occupy the same ground as earlier Prehistoric settlements, so further shielings or hill fields are likely to be located north of the Cammassie Burn, west of Loch an Feur and along the NE bank of the Badachro River.

4.0 Gazetteer of Recorded Sites

The following sites are recorded on the Highland Historic Environment Record (HER) or within the survey reports

1. **An Dunain, dun** at NG 7869 7393
   HER. Ref: MHG 34862
   Located on the small tidal island
2. **Creag Bhan naust** at NG 7970 7387
   HER ref: MHG 42834
   Located on the shoreline
3. **Port nam Marag bothy** at NG 7870 7387
   HER Ref: MHG 34863
   Located on the high tide line above site 2
4. **An Torr hut circle** at NG 7820 7343
   HER Ref: MHG8276
   Occupying a broad flat, heather-covered area immediately above the tree line (1998)
5. **Camas na h’Airidh: Rig cultivation, hill field, structure** centred on NG 7929 7337
   HER Ref: MHG32465
   A group of features occupying the east-facing slope of ground. The small structure is 6.5m north of the hut circle, site 6, and is connected to a hill field of approximately 20m square, defined by low rubble banks. The area of the hill field is almost exactly
defined by the bracken cover (1998). Within the enclosed area are scattered field clearance cairns. The rigs are to the west, south of an area of peat cutting.

6. **Camas na h’Eirbhe hut circle** at NG 7922 7346  
   HER Ref: MHG 8288  
   Located within site 5, partly under bracken and partly short-cropped turf (1998), spread stone walling standing to a height of 0.7m

7. **Camusnaharry hut circle** at NG 7928 7327  
   HER Ref: MHG8287  
   Located on the south side of the small watercourse falling steeply to the bay, on a slight terrace below an outcrop.

8. **An Torr hut circles, group of 4:**  
   An Torr 2 MHG 8297 at NG 7869 7312  
   An Torr 3 MHG 30972 at NG 7867 7311  
   An Torr 4 MHG 8282 at NG 7866 7309  
   An Torr 5 MHG 8281 at NG 7872  
   These hut circles are all along the break of slope, within thick growth of bracken and birches, and are visible as rubble walling. Three contain later small circular or rectangular structures. To the east, the level ground shows evidence for extensive peat cutting.

9. **Cammassie Burn hut circle 1** at NG 7997 7276  
   HER Ref: MHG 41316 and MHG 8290  
   On a platform dug into the hill, with one stone field clearance pile noted 10m to the NW

10. **Cammassie Burn Hut Circle 2** at NG 7983 7268  
    HER Ref: MHG 8291 and MHG 41457  
    Areas of rig cultivation noted to the N and NE

11. **Cammassie Burn Hut Circle 3** at NG 7973 7258  
    HER Ref: MHG 8286

12. **Cammassie Wood**: bank, rubble dyke at NH 8031 7258.  
    What may be the remains of a low, spread turf and rubble dyke along the south boundary of the Camassie Wood is visible here for 10m but was not investigated further. It is possible that the wood, described by Watson as ‘more or less natural’ was enclosed to prevent grazing

13. **Trackway** from NH 8042 7246 to NH 8050 7235.  
    The faint traces of a path or track contour round the south of the ridge. As it drops down to Shieladig Farm, there are traces of stone outer edging, otherwise it is only visible as an eroded route. This is likely to be the east continuation of the ‘Sean Rathad’ or old road connecting South Erradale and Badachro, in use in 1755 and presumably until the construction of the new coastal road in c1848 during the potato famine

14. **Allt a’Mhuilinn**: Rubble bank at NH 80575 72800.  
    The remains of a rough rubble dyke running down the west bank of the stream

15. **Shieladig Hut Circle. At NG 8057 7238**  
    HER Ref: MHG 6334  
    This hut circle is located on a platform on the NE side of the ridge above the farm, immediately NE of the rubble dyke. There is no obvious cultivable ground on the ridge

16. **Shieladig Hut circle** at **NG 8061 7237**
HER Ref: MHG 8385
This hut circle is located further NE than no. 4, overlooking the fields and screened by rising ground and woodland from the pipeline route

17. Glac Shildaig hut circle at NG 8038 7235
   HER Ref: MHG 43854 and MHG 8296
   Located on open ground, probably on a knoll to the north of the broad peaty area draining into the Allt a’ Mhuilinn. Described as peaty, turf covered walls, with external stone settings

18. Limekiln at NG 8082 7240
   HER Ref: MHG 34873
   Recorded on the 2nd edition OS map

19. Creag na h’Iolaire limekiln at NG 8111 7241
   HER Ref: MHG 34872
   A kiln, set into a natural slope in the saddle between Creag na h-Iolaire and an unnamed hill to the NE, was noted by J Wordsworth during a pre-afforestation survey. The kiln bowl measures 2.5m in diameter and is set within walls almost 1m thick and 1.5m high. It is possibly an old limekiln as there is no evidence of intense burning. An irregular hollow to the NW may be a quarry.

20. Glac Shildeag hut circle at NG 8038 7180
   HER Ref: MHG 43835 and MHG 8382
   Single hut circle with substantial stone walls, to the east of the track, on the east bank of the small stream. No recorded associated field system, but a stone setting extends from the entrance of the hut circle

21. Lochan Feur Hut Circle and field system at NG 7965 7102
   HER Ref MHG 7669 and 41229
   Located to the west of Lochan Feur, one hut circle with a later drystone shieling built within its walls. The hut circle is within a heather-covered field enclosure 130m by 60m, the walling of which is probably post-mediaeval but enclosing ground cultivated in the prehistoric period

22. Bad a’Challa enclosure at NG 7900 7150
   HER Ref: MHG 21447
   Recorded on the 1st edition OS map, a section of dyke encloses an area of ground to the east of the Badachro River. This has not been visited but is likely to be another hill field and could contain the remains of prehistoric settlement or later shielings.

5.0 Discussion

Of the 22 sites already recorded within the evaluation area, thirteen are prehistoric, dating to the Bronze or Iron Age, five are Early Modern and would have fallen out of use in the early 19th century, and four are of uncertain date but again are likely to have fallen out of use in the 19th century. It would appear that the majority of the hut circles are located on small areas of cultivable ground which was still in use, either as a hill field or as a shieling site, in the Early Modern period, indicating the relative scarcity of fertile ground and the continuity of use. Where hut circles are recorded without any information on associated field systems, it is likely that they will be found to be present, and, equally, it is likely that further prehistoric remains will be located within or adjacent to areas of Early Modern activity.
It should not be assumed, however, that all Early Modern sites will match the pattern of distribution of the prehistoric sites. It is probable that Wentworth’s survey work in 1989 did locate all the hut circles, but he was not recording later features, nor is it certain that he recorded all contemporary areas of cultivation. The three commissioned archaeological surveys give an indication of the frequency and type of archaeological features which may be located within the area not covered by these surveys. These include trackways, dykes, enclosed hill fields, areas of rig cultivation and possible water management features along the watercourses. These sites are most likely to lie on the lower ground, along the NE bank of the Badachro River and around Lochan Feur and Loch Braigh.

6.0 Recommendations

The 22 recorded sites should be protected from planting or from damage during fencing according to the Forests and Archaeology Guidelines. This would include a programme of ongoing management to clear regenerating growth back from the sites. Groups of features, for example site 4, consisting of four hut circles, should be treated as one site and consideration should be given to the visual relationship between more scattered sites such as sites 9, 10 and 11.

It is recommended that, prior to fencing or planting, a rapid walk-over survey be carried out along the NE bank of the Badachro River and Lochan Feur, the areas considered to have the highest potential for unrecorded sites.

As no photographs are available to aid identification of features, it may be advisable for all the recorded sites to be identified and marked on the ground before planting. This would be best carried out by a professional archaeologist.

Catherine Dagg
2, Ruigh’Riabhach
Scoraig Peninsula
Dundonnell
Wester Ross
IV23 2RE
Tel: 01854 633 337
e-mail cathydagg@tiscali.co.uk

17.2.10
Appendix 1. Data sources and Bibliography

The following data sources were consulted during the desk-based evaluation:

- Historic Environment Record (HER) held by HCAU in Inverness
- Early maps held by the Map Library within the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh

The following publications were consulted:

- Dagg, C. 2008 Shieldaig Water Main Renewal: Walk-over survey
- Dixon JH. 1886 Gairloch and Guide to Loch Maree
- Kendrick, J. 1998 Badachro River Archaeological Survey


This was carried out on 18.2.08 in clear, dry weather conditions

Route Description

1. Badachro: The Mains replacements are taking place along the boundaries of modern houses and their gardens or access roads

2. Leacnasaide: The pipeline route begins on a knoll overlooking the former improved ground of Leacnasaide township to the north, now one private dwelling. The knoll is wooded with both mature trees and new planting, with a mossy and grassy forest floor. The route descends steeply SE from the knoll to the Leacnasaide access road, crossing a rubble dyke on a small stream which may be the former township boundary, and passing the modern development of houses and gardens to the public road.

3. Camassie Wood: The route skirts round the north edge of the wood following the road verge. The ground here is poorly drained with both mature trees and natural regeneration and a thick undergrowth. At the Camassie Burn the route leaves the road and ascends steeply through the wood, which is mostly large mature trees with a mossy forest floor strewn with overgrown loose stones. The route passes along the southern edge of the wood, which consists mostly of scrub willow encroaching into heather upland, crossed by a broad strip of open ground where the overhead power lines pass.

4. Glac Shieldaig: The route descends gently from the ridge to cross the wet peaty bog contained behind the rocky knoll that rises to the north. This wet ground slopes gently down to and drains into the Allt a’ Mhuilinn.

5. Allt a’Mhuilinn: this shallow stony stream runs through thick vegetation, including rhododendrons and regenerating birch and willow

6. Shieldaig Farm: between the public road and the Allt a’Mhuilinn are improved fields, enclosed by a single skin drystone dyke. SE of the hill access track the ground is not improved although the original terrain is difficult to discern as it is overlaid by quantities of imported soil. However, recent ditching reveals pure peat overlying subsoil. The mid-19th century farm steading and sheep pens are located here, with a footpath and the remains of a footbridge crossing the Allt a’Chobhain leading towards the farmhouse on the other side of the road
Impacts on Recorded Archaeology

1. **Camassie Burn: Hut Circle, clearance cairn.** This site is now within an area of woodland regeneration, separated from the roadside by a new fence. The water main runs along the roadside.  
   **Risk of damage by water main:** low

2. **Shieldaig Lodge Hotel, Farm, Township:** the former township of Shieldaig, as recorded on Roy’s military survey in the 1750s, consisted of three groups of buildings and cornlands corresponding to the present improved ground. The township named specifically as Shieldaig is in the approximate location of the present hotel and is presumably where the inn was, as late as the 1850s, from which a boat could be hired to take travellers to Loch Torridon. The name Allt a’ Mhuilinn suggests a mill on this stream, but for the most of its course it is shallow and slow. The likely location for the mill is at the outflow into the sea, where the channel has been artificially divided; one channel is now blocked off with rubble walling. The townships are assumed to have been cleared initially to make way for the improved farm, probably around 1847 when the Gairloch estate improvements took place. Minor features associated with the township survive in the surrounding area, including a lime kiln to the north of the farm, earth and rubble boundary dykes and at least one enclosure on the ridge between the township area and Glac Shieldaig. Features of the improved farm and the shooting lodge/hotel are still standing buildings and dykes, visible in the landscape.  
   **Risk of damage by water main:** low

3. **Shieldaig Farm Farmsteading** U-shaped steading constructed in the mid-late 19th century, standing on unimproved ground to the south and east of the farm’s fields. The steading is derelict but roofed and recent ditch clearing has taken place. The associated lime kiln mentioned in the SMR entry is some distance away, to the NE of the hotel at the field edge.  
   **Risk of damage by water main:** low

4. **Shieldaig Hut Circle.** This hut circle is located on a platform on the NE side of the ridge above the farm, immediately NE of the rubble dyke (see below, feature 11). There is no obvious cultivable ground on the ridge and the site is relatively inaccessible from the fields to the NE. Rising ground and woodland prevent any direct line of sight to Glac Shieldaig and the pipeline route.  
   **Risk of damage by water main:** minimal

5. **Shieldaig Hut circle.** This hut circle is located further NE than no. 4, overlooking the fields and screened by rising ground and woodland from the pipeline route.  
   **Risk of damage by water main:** minimal

6. **Badachro crofting township.** The early township, recorded by Roy, was concentrated around what is now the harbour area, and early fishing and fish processing activity took place on Eilean Horrisdale and to the west of the bay. Some 19th century crofts were laid out along the public road, where there are still scattered 19th century croft houses interspersed with later housing. The areas of water main improvement are not on former croft land and are now fully developed with modern housing, access roads and gardens.  
   **Risk of damage by water main:** low

Minor archaeological sites noted during the walk-over survey

7. **Leacnasaide:** structures at NH 79898 73090 and NH 79901 73087. On the top of a wooded spur of high ground to the south of the improved ground of Leacnasaide and overlooking the access road. The low, mossy rubble footings of two buildings. The first is rectangular, aligned N-S and measures in total 5m by 2.5m, with a clearly visible door opening in the east wall. The second, slightly to the SE of the first, has rounded ends and measures 5.5m by 2m. It is
aligned NW-SE. In both structures the stones of the footings are relatively large and not mixed with or overlaid by earth, suggesting a stone walled construction. The northern of the two buildings probably corresponds to a roofed building at this location recorded on both the 1st and 2nd OS maps.

**Significance:** local

**Risk of damage by water main:** possible accidental damage during construction

8. **Camassie Wood:** bank, rubble dyke at NH 8031 7258. What may be the remains of a low, spread turf and rubble dyke along the south boundary of the Camassie Wood is visible here for 10m but was not investigated further. It is possible that the wood, described by Watson as ‘more or less natural’ was enclosed to prevent grazing

**Significance:** local

**Risk of damage by water main:** possible destruction of section crossed by main

9. **Trackway** from NH 8042 7246 to NH 8050 7235. The faint traces of a path or track contour round the south of the ridge. As it drops down to Shieldaig Farm, there are traces of stone outer edging, otherwise it is only visible as an eroded route. This is likely to be the east continuation of the ‘Sean Rathad’ or old road connecting South Erradale and Badachro, in use in 1755 and presumably until the construction of the new coastal road in c1848 during the potato famine

**Significance:** local

**Risk of damage by water main:** low

10. **Allt a’Mhuilinn:** Rubble bank at NH 8057 72800. The remains of a rough rubble dyke running down the west bank of the stream

**Significance:** local

**Risk of damage by water main:** possible destruction of section crossed by main

11. **Shieldaig Farm:** Enclosure dyke at NH 80700 72320. The field to the west of the steading is enclosed by a drystone dyke of single skin construction. This dyke turns west and climbs onto the wooded knoll, becoming broad, spread and consisting of small stones. This may be the remains of the township dyke, or continue NW to become the dyke running along the south boundary of the wood (feature No. 2)

**Significance:** local

**Risk of damage by water main:** possible accidental damage during adjacent excavation

12. **Shieldaig Farm:** Sheep pens at NH 80700 72300. Attached to the south face of the steading are probably contemporary sheep enclosures of double skin, drystone construction. The sheep dip to the east is probably later.

**Significance:** local

**Risk of damage by water main:** possible accidental damage during adjacent excavation

13. **Shieldaig Farm:** Path, bridge footings at NH 80750 72370. A constructed footpath maintains a level course, edged by large set stones, as the ground drops away to the stream. This runs to the narrow rubble piers of a former footbridge. These features are recorded on the 1" and 2nd edition OS maps.

**Significance:** local

**Risk of damage by water main:** possible accidental damage during adjacent excavation and stream diversion

Recommend: sites 7, 11, 12, 13 mark as archaeology and discuss methodology for protection. If damaged, rebuild dykes in original style

Sites 8, 10, long linear features small amount of damage, no protection recommended