

# HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL



# FIELD MONUMENTS

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

1 SITE CODE		H	N	C	4	6	S	W	0	0	2	
2 NGR		N	C	4	2	8	2	6	1	2	9	
3 QUAL												
6 SITE NAME		PORTNA CON										
10 GENERIC TYPE		SOUTERRAIN										
14 PERIOD/DATE		IA					15 DATING METHOD					TYP
18 SHAPE												
19 THREAT AND DATE												

4 DISTRICT		SUTHERLAND		5 PARISH		DURNESS	
7 AREA STATUS		8 SITE STATUS		9 REGIONAL STATUS		10 GENERIC TYPE	
		SCHEDULED				SOUTERRAIN	
11 CONCORDANCE OS		12 FORM		13 DIMENSIONS		14 PERIOD/DATE	
NC 46 SW 2		STANDING STRUCTURE				IA	
16 RELATIONSHIP OF ELEMENTS		17 CONDITION		18 SHAPE		15 DATING METHOD	
		INCOMPLETE				TYP	
20 LAND USE		21 GEOLOGY		22 SOILS		23 VEGETATION	
ROUGH PASTURE							
24 HYDROLOGY/DRAINAGE		25 RELIEF		26 ASPECT		27 ALTITUDE	
		MODERATE SPUR-NARROW VALLEY		SE		23=30m OD	

28 EXCAVATION (EXCAVATOR: DATE: EXTENT: QUALITY)	
29 BIBLIOGRAPHY (AUTHOR: DATE: TITLE: JOURNAL OR PUBLISHER: VOLUME: DETAIL)	
1. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1961: 6" MAP. 2. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1874: OBJECT NAME BOOK: : 11: 18. 3. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1908: 6" MAP. 4. BUXTON, H. J.: 1935: PROC. SOC. ANT. SOC.: : 69: pp 431-33 5. ROBERTS: 1911: SUTHERLAND INVENTORY: HRSO: No. 160. 6. HBM(SDD): 1985: LIST OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS.	
OVER...	
30 GROUND PLAN NO.	31 GROUND PHOTO NO.
32 SLIDES NO.	33 HR. AP. NO.
34 NMR. AP. NO.	35 OTHER AP. NO.: SOURCE
36 ARCHIVE AND LOCATION	
37 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY	38 SAMPLES
39 PALYNOLOGY	40 NUMERICAL DATES: RANGE: LAB NO.
41 SMALL FINDS	42 MUSEUM/LOCATION
43 OTHER	

44 NAME & ADDRESS OF OWNER		45 ATTITUDE OF OWNER	
46 NAME & ADDRESS OF TENANT		47 ATTITUDE OF TENANT	
48 ACCESS & RESTRICTIONS			
49 NAME & ADDRESS OF FINDER/RECORDER: DATE		50 RECORDER: DATE	51 CHECK: DATE
		HAR: 6.2.1985	HAR: 8-2-1985
52 TEXT			

'See photocopies attached for text.' (HAR: 6.2.1985)

"NC 428 613. Loch Eribol, Souterrain, 1000m N of Portnacorn". (6)

29. 7, CLOSE-BROOKS, J: 1986: EXPLORING SCOTLAND'S HERITAGE - THE HIGHLANDS: HMSO: p155

NC 4282 6129) Earth House

(1)

An Leabaidh-fholaich' - the Hiding Place (2) - or 'An Tigh Fo Thalaith' (3) - an apparently meaningless name, which may be for 'An Tigh Fo Thalaimeh' - the House below the Ground - is a souterrain which was cleared and drained by Buxton between 1927 and 1935. The entrance was blocked by a slab 3 ft 6 ins long and 2 ft 6 ins high which now lies beside it, and the flight of twelve stone steps which led down into the gallery had been infilled by earth and stones. The gallery itself was 27 ft long and 4 ft 4 ins to 5 ft 5 ins high; and the walls of undressed stone rose in an outward curve so that the width across the floor was 4 ft 3 ins, half-way up it was 5 ft and at the roof, where it was spanned by stone lintels, it was 3 ft 5 ins. The end chamber was 4 ft 9 ins high and 5 ft 7 ins wide and at the NE corner was a hollow in the floor 4 ft in diameter and about 2 ft deep, which may have been used to drain the gallery. No relics were found but, after draining, the floor deposit yielded fragments of bone which were, however, too small for identification.

(2)

(3)

(4)

The entrance passage to the souterrain measures 3 m long (OSFI:JLD:5.4.1960.) and 0.8 m wide. The gallery could not be examined as the floor is again flooded but it could be seen that the walls and roof were in good condition. A mound, 1 m high, covers the souterrain.

The souterrain is as described in the preceding reports. (OSFI:NKB: 12.5.1980.) It has been entered from within a hut circle in the SE arc but all that remains of the latter is an arc of walling extending for about 4.5 m on either side of the entrance to the souterrain. The wall is overlaid by debris (presumably cleared from the souterrain) but it appears to have been about 2.0 m wide, with five or six large stones on edge defining the inner face. The majority of the hut has been destroyed by the road and a ruinous field wall parallel to the road.

The entrance passage of this earth house measures 3.0m in length and 0.8m in width. The full length of the covered portion could not be accurately determined because of the lack of light and a flooded floor, but it could be seen that the dry-stone walls and lintelled roof were in a good state of preservation. A mound 1.0m high, covers the earth house

EARTH-HOUSE AT FORTNACON, SUTHERLAND.  
By Dr R. J. BUXTON.

In the *Report and Inventory of Monuments and Constructions in the County of Sutherland*, No. 160 of the Parish of Durness is a description of "Earth-house, Fortnacoon." This lies close to a road bridge, half a mile north of Fortnacoon Pier on the west side of Loch Eriboll, and was visited in 1909 when some measurements were taken, but these have since been found incorrect. In 1927 my brothers, Mr Alexander MacDonald, and I determined to explore it in spite of fearful warnings from the local inhabitants, some of whom assured us that the place was haunted and to meddle with it was courting disaster, and others that it was a great underground loch of unfathomable depth.

Despite these rumours, however, Mr D. M. Reid, of Harrow School, had been excavating at various times, and had discovered the roof of the building. Mr Donald MacDonald showed us a small hollow in the ground with a large heavy stone in it. At the lowest part of the hollow we could just see an opening. With the help of motor-jacks we removed this stone, which was 3 feet 6 inches long and 2 feet 6 inches high, and probably used for blocking the entrance. It now lies just outside it. Having removed the slab, we were able to dig out the heap of earth and stones which was blocking the tunnel. At length after many days' digging we came upon a small flight of stone steps between 17 inches and 28 inches wide, with a stone wall on each side. There was no mortar, and we could see no tool marks on the stones. Seven steps led down to the entrance of the gallery and then five more to a mud floor (fig. 1). These varied from 2 inches to 9 inches in height.

The entrance is 2 feet 4 inches wide and 3 feet high with no traces of jambs or bar-holes. At the foot of the staircase was a gallery filled with water, but we ventured a little way down the tunnel, and by tapping on the roof others outside were able to mark its direction so that we could examine it from the surface.

The roof was soon exposed, but before the gallery could be farther explored it was necessary to get rid of the water. We dug a trench from the end of the gallery to a burn nearby. This took us no little time as we were only able to work at it for a few weeks each year. Eventually it was finished. The trench dug was some 23 yards long, crossing the old road to Durness, the outline of which can still be traced. The structure was about 10 feet deep at the upper end, and from here we drained most of the water away, leaving a long low gallery from 4 feet 4 inches to 5 feet 5 inches high.

The floor is of earth covered with loose stones and the walls stoutly built of undressed blocks of all shapes and sizes, rising in an outward curve, so that while the width at the floor in the middle of the gallery is 4 feet 3 inches, half-way up it is 5 feet, and at the roof 3 feet 5 inches.

The roof is formed of stone lintels spanning the building; these average about 4 feet 8 inches in visible length, 1 foot 8 inches in width, and 8 inches in thickness.

The gallery itself is 27 feet in length along the middle of the floor and at the inner end 4 feet 9 inches high, with a width of 5 feet 7 inches (fig. 2). In the north-east corner of this widened part is a hollow in the floor, 4 feet in diameter and about 2 feet deep, by which the gallery may originally have been drained. To avoid its refilling we have put in a drain-pipe from this hollow to the burn.

Nothing of archaeological interest in the matter of relics was found during our excavations, but the earth-house is in a remarkably good state of preservation and can easily be visited by anyone passing along the road from Durness to Fortnacoon. Subsequently, when the structure was drained, Mr Alexander MacDonald examined the deposit on the floor, but he found only some fragments of bone too small to be identified.



Fig. 1. Fortnacoon Earth-house: entrance from interior.



Fig. 2. Fortnacoon Earth-house: inner end.