

An Dun (1), Baligill, Farr, Sutherland

Grid Reference NC 8566 6626
HC SMR No. NC86NE 0002

An Dun was visited by Curle on 28th September 1909 and an abbreviated description was subsequently published in the RCAHMS Inventory for Sutherland in 1911 as No. 192. A more detailed description and survey was prepared by Alan Ayre of the Ordnance Survey on 8th November 1972. R.J.Mercer carried out a comprehensive survey of the site in 1981, reproduced below with modifications, but the accompanying commentary leaves much to be desired

DESCRIPTION

On a slight promontory some 60m above the sea are the indefinite remains of a dun, roughly oval on plan, and measuring about 18.0m NW/SE by 12.0m SW/NE. The wall on the western side has been reduced to a stony scarp about 3m thick, but the eastern side has been lost to coastal erosion. The southern sector of the dun has been damaged by the insertion of a sub-rectangular structure marked by a slightly stony bank measuring 7.5m E/W by 5.0m N/S, containing six upright stones up to 0.9m in height. There is no sign of an inner wall face but the outside is indicated by a length of walling some 1.3m long and 0.6m high in four courses in the SW quadrant. Outside the dun to the SE is a denuded rampart 12m in length and 0.6m high, with a spread of 3.5m.

About 15m west of the dun, on a shelf at a lower level, are the fragmentary remains of a settlement. The shelf is roughly semi-circular on plan, measuring c.18m N/S, x 10m E/W, on which are the foundations of a rectangular building c.8.0m x 2.4m with a cross-wall 3.0m from the western end, while a stone filled hollow about 4.0m across, some two metres to the south, may mark the position of another structure.

DISCUSSION

This slight promontory has been fortified by a small dun at some time during the Early(?) Iron Age. Extensive erosion and subsequent modification has resulted in its shape being lost, or at least not visible by field survey alone. The small length of walling still visible in the SW quadrant suggests that the dun was constructed of low-grade random rubble. Towards the seaward side, erosion has revealed a slope of boulder clay containing small stones, suggesting that the wall here was an outer skin with a boulder clay infill (below).

To the north and east, the lack of rubble in the turf and in the eroding profile, suggests either extensive coastal erosion, or an encircling turf dyke in places where the cliffs provided adequate protection from attack. There is nothing to uphold Mercer's suggestion that this could have been a broch (with walls 2m thick!).

The sub-rectangular structure set within the dun appears to have been a later insert, partially obliterating the dun wall on this side. The upright stones do not form part of the walling, but appear to have been set inside the structure, to create an aisled house (?) paralleled by the wags of Caithness. Mercer's comment that 'The later (?)

rectangular (?) structure, if such it be, set within the wrecked 'parapet' may possibly relate to the kind of tower-keep to which reference has already been made' can hardly be justified on the visible evidence.

The denuded rampart 4 or 5m south of the dun affords limited protection on this side, but it is a very superficial barrier which does not even have an accompanying ditch for additional security. One would have expected it to have been continued round into the SW quadrant, the direction from which an attack could be expected. Mercer's comment that 'An Dun may represent a similar site type with a massive defensive rampart structure' is inappropriate here as the rampart contains little more material than a well-built turf field dyke.

The building on the terrace to the west appears to be Mediaeval or later in character, although the same site could have been used in conjunction with the dun. It is a more sheltered location than the dun, and could have been improved by the erection of a protective dyke along the cliff edge. The stone-filled hollow to the south may have been a semi-subterranean dwelling or store. This is probably a multi-period site, last used in the Mediaeval period.