**Highland Regional Council**

**Archaeological Sites and Monuments Record**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Parish</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caithness</td>
<td>Latheron</td>
</tr>
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**Site Code**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>HND 23 SW 006</td>
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**Situation**

- **Concordance:** OsND 23 NW 1
- **Area Status:** SCHEDULED
- **Standing Structures:** VERY COMPLICATED MULTI-PERIOD SETTLEMENT SITE.
- **Condition:** INCOMPLETE
- **Date:** 1985
- **Method:** ROW PASTURE
- **Soils:** MODERATE HILLSLOPE
- **Watercourse:** ESE
- **Height:** 110-120m OD

**Excavation**

1. CURLE A.O.: 1939, 1946-48: PARTIAL.

**Bibliography**

1. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1976: 1:10,000 MAP.

**Data**

- **Excavation:** HND 23 SW 006
- **Finder:** H.N. KNOX
- **Owner:** H.E. WILSON
- **Tenant:** H.E. WILSON
- **Access:** PUBLIC

**Description**

"See also card HND 23 SW 006 for map.(9)"
"See continuation cards for text."

- **Owner:** 10 205 352 WAG, homestead, 700m N of Forse House (10)
Wag of Forse: An Iron Age site with successive periods of occupation including a dun (5, 6) and wags, apparently only part of a complex which extends along the E edge of a rocky outcrop. It was partly excavated by Curle (2, 3) in 1939 and 1946-8.

The sequence of occupation appears to consist of huts of three periods, overlaid by a dun, which was succeeded and partly destroyed by a wag, both elongated and round. The site is partly bounded by a turf wall on a substantial stone base with, at least on the W, an external, V-shaped ditch, the period of which is unknown.

Jackie (6) likens the dun, with its massive double entrance to the pre-broch gatehouse forts of Shetland. It measures 47 ft in internal diameter within a wall 4 to 5 ft thick, rising from a heavy scarpment. Just inside the entrance a flight of stairs leads off to the ruined wall-head (recalling the entrances to some of the Caithness brochs, including that at Yarrows (HND 34 SW 001). Excavation finds, most of which were donated to the N M A S., included several saddle-querns but only one, broken, rotary quern. From the original hearth in hut 'C' (see plan) came a pot with LBA-RIA parallels (6).

The most sophisticated pottery came from a small round wag, not shown on plan, in area 'H'. No metal was noted.

A partially excavated Iron Age occupation site, consisting of a dun and galleried dwellings, as described and illustrated by Curle. Excavated material overlies some of the dwellings and the outer turf-covered wall, rendering their identification virtually impossible.

There are undoubtedly more huts beneath the tumble, and also to the S where numerous large slabs protrude through the turf. There was an associated field system, evidenced by a low bank running from the outer rampart, but this had been destroyed by much later field walls and cultivation, and cannot be accurately determined.

If the primary structure is a dun it is unique although the stair in the entrance section has analogies in the Kellas brochs (HND 36 SE 002 and 003).

The secondary longhouses are unusual in the British Iron Age but may bear comparison with the wooden longhouses with internal rows of roof-rafts of the northern European Iron Age.

It is quite possible that at some we have a rare fragment of evidence for the arrival in north-east Scotland of prehistoric settlers direct from the continent. An influx of people who may have laid the foundations of the Pictish nation of proto-historic times. Certainly the dun appears to be earlier than the Caithness brochs and to have contributed some elements of its architecture to them.

The entrance block in the circular ring-cort differs from that of the blockhouse forts in that the structure does not project forwards beyond the curve of the wall, which externally it does not interrupt, and it is of one build with the wall.

No change to the previous reports except that the protruding slab noted to the S by the previous field investigator do not appear to have any archaeological significance. Published survey (1:50,000) correct.

9. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1906: 25" MAP.
10. HBM(SDD): 1985: LIST OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS
II

AN ACCOUNT OF THE PARTIAL EXCAVATION OF A "WAG" OR
GALLERIED BUILDING AT FORSE, IN THE PARISH OF
LATHERON, CAITHNESS. BY ALEXANDER O. CURLE,
C.V.O., LL.D., F.S.A. SCOT., F.S.A.

Read January 25, 1911.

In the hill country forming the southern part of the parish of Latheron,
and chiefly in the region where a series of narrow watersheds separate
the numerous burns hurrying down to the sea, there lie a number of
peculiar constructions whose period and purpose have hitherto remained
undetermined.

Seeing that in a number of instances the term "wag," either alone
as "The Wag," or in combination as "Wagmore" and "Wagmore Rigg,"
has become the place-name of their sites, it is evident that such was their
original designation, though the application of the term to the structures
themselves has long fallen into disuse. In the Inventory of the Royal Com-
mission on Ancient Monuments (Caithness) they were designated "Galleried
Dwellings," by reason of a distinctive feature of their construction and
a misinterpretation of the purpose for which they were intended. The
buildings were either oblong with rounded ends or circular, but, in either
case, there ran around the interior a covered gallery, some 3 feet wide,
open to the interior, except for the interposition of pillars some 5 to 6 feet
distant from one another which supported the roof of the gallery. For
the most part they are situated comparatively near the burns, and some-
times, as in the case of two groups near the foot of Morven, in very remote
situation.

As will be demonstrated later on, these structures were in reality
folds for cattle, sheep, or other stock. Their distribution evidently ex-
tended into the adjacent region of the County of Sutherland,1 and it is
probable that excavation conducted on certain structural remains in the
parish of Reay2 would reveal the ruins of others in that neighbourhood.
It has been suggested3 that the term "Wag" has been derived from the
diminutive of the Gaelic word Uamh = a cave, Wamheg = a little cave,
owing to the cave-like appearance of the structures when complete, but,
from the details now revealed, this does not seem a very satisfactory
explanation, unless its application had been, in the first instance, to the
variety which was entirely roofed in, as afterwards described.

1 Report and Inventory, Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments (Sutherland)
   No. 475.
2 Ibid. (Caithness), Nos. 350-351.