(Z. W. MacKie)

This unique site, visible from afar as a spread of grey stones among the grass, was excavated in 1939 and 1946 by Dr A. O. Curle who revealed two main phases of building. The first structure on the site was a massive, circular drystone enclosure with an internal diameter of 14 m and a wall 1.2 m thick. This building was interpreted by the excavator as a cattlefold but is perhaps more likely to have been a defensive structure, a round dun in fact. It has a much thicker wall immediately around the entrance passage, on the north, which recalls the 'blockhouse' forts of Shetland.

Within this entrance section, which still has one lintel in position over the passage, there are the remains of a stair to the wallhead on the left as well as a passage or guard chamber leading off from the right side. The stair presumably gave access to a look-out point as well as allowing defenders to get to the wallhead. On the west side the inside face of the wall is again enlarged to accommodate a mural cell. If the structure is a dun it is unique although the stair in the entrance section has analogies in the Keiss brochs. There are traces of a turf wall with an outer ditch surrounding the settlement; it may be an outer defence, or stockyard, for the dun.

At a later stage several long, rectangular stone buildings were erected on the site and one of them partly overlies the dun which, one may suppose, was largely demolished for building material at this time. The best preserved of these long-houses is to the southwest of the dun and several members of the double row of internal standing stone pillars can still be seen. These presumably supported the roof. These long-houses are of particular interest (there are similar ones at the broch of Yarrows, because the great majority of Iron Age dwellings discovered in Britain are round. On the other hand wooden Iron Age long-houses with internal rows of roof-posts are common in northern Europe—in Denmark for example. It is quite possible that at Forse 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 few finds made at Forse include none of the novel items which are associated with the brochs.

There is a green mound, an unexcavated broch, 200 m away to the north-east.
Wasp of Forse, Caithness