

Lynchat Souterrain

Access Audit 62

Parish of Alvie

Owner / Rep: Allan MacPherson-Fletcher, The Estate Office, Balavil, Kingussie, Inverness-shire, PH21 1LU (01540 662020 or 01540 661413)

Local contact: (Tenant farmer: Mr John Pirrie, Chapel Park Farm, Lynchat, Kingussie, 01540 661308)

Description

Large, impressively constructed souterrain with a significant roofed area remaining. The site is located on the upper break of slope, which rises above the Spey floodplain, immediately above the line of the Wade Military Road (still visible as a terrace). The area is currently under grazing, but the site itself is overgrown with bracken and nettles. This structure, known locally as Raitts Cave, is the subject of local legends, both colourful and historically (as folk tales) interesting as alternative perspectives on this as a structure, part of the local landscape. This is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Interpretation would be provided by a board placed close to the parking area and not on top of the site. A second interpretation panel could result from school project work, as Kingussie Primary School has expressed an interest in "adopting" the site. This adoption can only take place if the site is cleaned up and made safe in the way proposed below. Interpretation would then be nicely balanced between the archaeological information, perhaps including theories on the function of this structure, aerial photographs of crop-mark sites (as most souterrains, in agricultural land, are identified from the air); the results of the archaeological work, including geophysics, topographical map, etc – and the children's interpretation of the site, which could focus more on the folklore side of the site's history, with accompanying drawings – but very much from the children's perspective, not simply another text written for a lower reading age.

Pros

Impressive structure

Quite scarce in this part of the world, so important that it is recognised

Positive landowner

Can be connected to existing project work at Easter Raitts township, sharing facilities, such as parking, access track, sign-posting

Good site for children to visit (so suitable for adoption by Kingussie Primary)

Interesting “alternative” folk history, suitable for interpretation, which plays counter-point to the archaeological data

Cons

None – the fact that work needs to be done to prepare this site for visitors will add to the information that we have regarding the structure and its history – which is a plus

Proposals

- 1) Clearing out and limited excavation
- 2) Full, stone by stone survey of upstanding remains and topographical survey of locality
- 3) Geophysical survey of the immediate locality
- 4) Trial excavation of potential features identified by survey
- 5) Consolidation of the structure, where necessary, including flooring material to prevent water-logging and to protect underlying material from erosion
- 6) Bracken control measures in the immediate locality carried out in spring; must be repeated several years running to have effect
- 7) Stock control fence enclosing the site, plus gateway or stile
- 8) Upgrading of the access track, by machine scraping the surface and rebuilding, importing material where necessary; gateways or cattle-grids on this track, if parking is going to be provided at the top of the track
- 9) Provision of a designated parking area for 5 vehicles: the question is whether this is placed at the Lynchat end of the track (the area where temporary parking for the excavation has been located), or at the top of the track in what is now open field; this must be discussed with the landowner and the tenant farmer; if located at the top of the track in the field, it would involve sprung gates or cattle grids being constructed on the track (at least 3); control of stock will be an issue, and the solution must satisfy the landowner and tenant farmer

Costs

For items 1-4: £12921 (£11921 sought from Historic Scotland grant); (see accompanying notes)

This grant is dependent on the other funding partners for the community archaeologist project contributing to ensure that the other proposals are carried out.

- 5) Unknown until survey results are produced – estimate £1000 (5 days work (£500) plus materials)
- 6) Local volunteers; community archaeologist (4 days = £400)
- 7) @ £4 per metre, approximately 100 metres = £400
- 8) @ £10 per metre, approximately 200 metres = £2000; this allows for the provision of at least 3 cattle grids or sprung gates along the track (detailed quotes required from local contractors)
- 9) £2500

Cost to the community archaeologist budget: £7300 (with £1400 provided by employment of the community archaeologist within this project.

Bibliography

- Brewster, Sir D. 1863 "Notice of an artificial cave in the parish of Alvey, Inverness-shire", in PSAS 5 (1862-3) 119
- Foster, S.M. 1996 Picts, Gaels and Scots
- Lelong, O. 1997, 1998 & 1999 "Excavations at the Deserted Settlement of Easter Raitts, Badenoch"
- MacPherson, A. 1893 Glimpses of Church and Social Life in the Highlands in Olden Times
- Scarlett, M.H. 1988 In the Glens Where I Was Young