

# HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL



# FIELD MONUMENTS

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

1 SITE CODE  
H N H 8 6 N W 0 0 1

2 NGR  
N H 8 0 7 0 6 8 9 8  
3 QUAL  
C E

6 SITE NAME  
D U N S K E A T H / C A S T L E

4 DISTRICT  
ROSS & CROMARTY

5 PARISH  
NIGG

7 AREA STATUS  
SSSI

8 SITE STATUS  
SCHEDULED

9 REGIONAL STATUS

10 GENERIC TYPE  
CASTLE + DITCH (ALLEGED MOTTE)  
+ MILITARY SITE,  
GUN EMPLACEMENT

11 CONCORDANCE  
OS NH 86 NW 1

12 FORM  
EARTHWORK + STANDING  
STRUCTURE

13 DIMENSIONS

14 PERIOD/DATE  
LM/C.1179AD + MO

15 DATING METHOD  
DOCS

16 RELATIONSHIP OF ELEMENTS  
OCCUPIED BY CONCRETE GUN  
EMPLACEMENT

17 CONDITION  
MUTILATED

18 SHAPE

20 LAND USE  
BACKSHORE

21 GEOLOGY

22 SOILS

23 VEGETATION

24 HYDROLOGY/DRAINAGE

25 RELIEF  
CLIFF TOP

26 ASPECT  
SE = S = SW

27 ALTITUDE  
25 = 60m O.D.

28 EXCAVATION (EXCAVATOR: DATE: EXTENT: QUALITY)

29 BIBLIOGRAPHY (AUTHOR: DATE: TITLE: JOURNAL OR PUBLISHER: VOLUME: DETAIL)

1. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1907: 6" MAP
2. MACKENZIE, W.M.: 1950: PROC. SOC. ANT. SCOT: VOL. 82: pp60-61
3. MILLAR, H.: 1834: SCENES AND LEGENDS OF THE N OF SCOTLAND: 46
4. MCQUEEN, J.: 1794: OLD STATISTICAL ACCOUNT: VOL. 13: p20
5. HBM(SDD): 1985: LIST OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS
6. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1980: 1/10,000 MAP
7. SOC. ANT. SCOT: 1979: ARCH. SITES & MONS. OF EASTER ROSS: RCAHMS: p29, No. 247

30 GROUND PLAN NO.

31 GROUND PHOTO NO.

32 SLIDES NO.

33 HR. AP. NO.

34 NMR. AP. NO.

35 OTHER AP. NO.: SOURCE  
RAF/CPE/SCOT/UK/223 4140-1/ 27-6-47

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  
SM: 6.11.1986

51 CHECK: DATE  
HSR: 10.11.1986

52 TEXT  
"See continuation card for text and diagrams."

"NH 807 689. Dunskeath Castle, North Sutor." (5) (6)

(NH 8070 6898) Dunskeath Castle (Site of)  
Moat

(1)

Dunskeath Castle was a mote-castle fortified by King William the Lion in 1179. Hugh Miller, in the early 19th c., says, "We can still trace the moat of the citadel, and part of an outwork which rises towards the hill, but the walls have sunk into low grassy mounds, and the line of the outer mote has long since been effaced by the plough". In recent years the almost levelled mound and shallow depression of the ditch were still discernible, but the site is now subjected to military occupation. (2) Scheduled . Visible on A/P's.

(2)

(3)

(5)

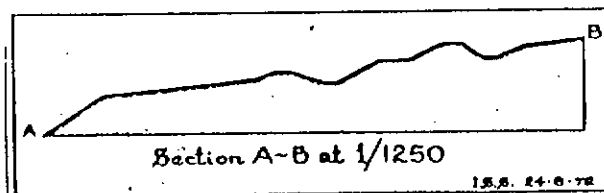
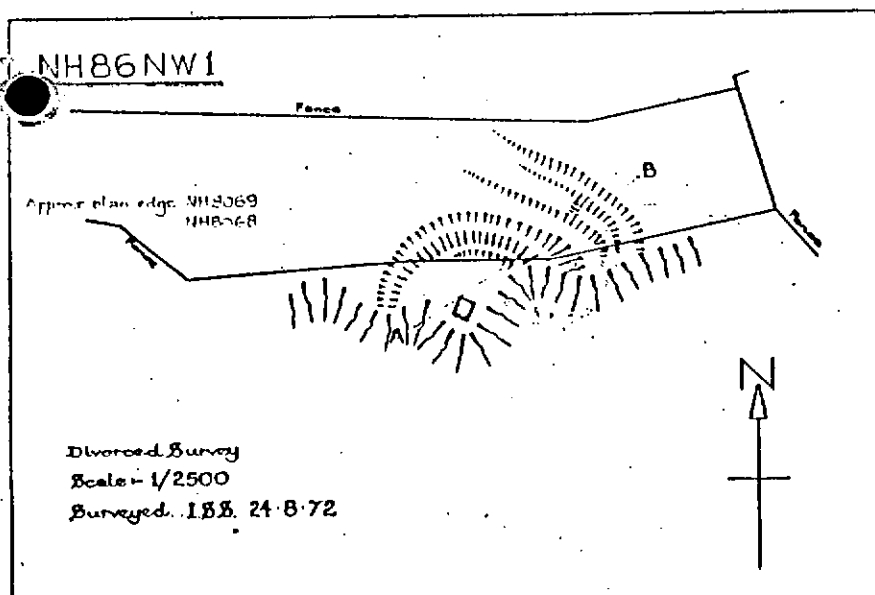
The surviving remains consist of two concentric (OSFI:AA:24.8.1972) semi-circular ditches with inner ramparts, terminating at each end in the S on steep naturally defensive slopes. (4)

The outer ditch, c. 7.0m wide and 1.5m deep, is truncated in the W by ploughing but its track is visible on A Ps. Its rampart has been mutilated by quarrying and only about 16.0m (9.0m wide and 1.5m high) survives in good condition. The whole of the inner ditch, c. 9.0m wide and 2.0m deep, is fairly well preserved, but its inner rampart is considerably reduced, probably by erosion. No entrance is evident through the defences, though one was visible in 1794. The irregularly-shaped enclosed area, (a natural spur) is partly occupied by a concrete gun emplacement, which has mutilated the interior.

The earthwork remains cannot be classified as a motte but are undoubtedly the remains of a defensive medieval ring work of some strength.

Resurveyed at 1:2500.

"A semi circular ditch 11m broad and 2m deep, with an internal bank 0.8m high and faint traces of an outer ditch on the NE, are all that remains of this promontory motte." (7)



(OSFI:AA:24.8.1972).

"NH 8070 6898, DUNSKEATH CASTLE, EARTHWORKS" (6)

"NH 807 689, DUNSKEATH CASTLE, NORTH SUTOR" (5)

In the Chronicle of Melrose it is told how in 1179 King William the Lion and his brother David led a large and powerful army into Ross and there fortified two castles, one named "Dunscath" and the other "Etherdouer."<sup>1</sup> The latter has been identified with Redcastle,<sup>2</sup> in the parish of Killearnan, on the south shore of the Black Isle. Dunscath is on the north Sutor of the Cromarty Firth, opposite the town of Cromarty across the

<sup>1</sup> P. 22. n. *Edir-dovar*, interpreted as "between the waters," i.e. the Beaully and Cromarty Firths, or "between brooks" (Watson, *Place-Names of Ross and Cromarty*, p. 142; *Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, p. 454). In Fordun (*Gesta Annalia*, xvi.), drawing on the Melrose Chronicle, the names are "Dunscath" and "Ederdone." Brother David is of course the Earl of Huntingdon.

<sup>2</sup> *Orig. Paroch. Scot.*, vol. iii, p. 529.

water, where the almost levelled mound and shallow depression of the ditch of the mote-castle founded by King William were still discernible till in recent years the site was subjected to military occupation.<sup>1</sup> The name is for *Dùn Sgàth*, "fort of dread,"<sup>2</sup> and the neighbouring farm is known as Castlecragg. We may infer a piece of land attached to the castle, as in 1456 the revenue from the "vill" (=to(n)n) of Dunscath was granted by James II to the church of St Duthus at Tain for the upkeep of a chaplainry, the grant including the ferry of Dunscath alternatively known as that of Cromarty,<sup>3</sup> all being thus Crown property; and the yearly payment of ten marks [£6.13.4] to St Duthus being quite a good income for a chaplain, who was also a singing-master.

In the ferry we have the strategic explanation of a castle at Dunscath, as also of that which supplanted it on the opposite shore at Cromarty. With the ferry from Ardersier to Chanonry or Fortrose it provided a short direct route to the farther north in place of the long, difficult circuit round the heads of the intervening firths. At Ardersier too, on the elevated land above Fort George, are the imposing earthworks of what has been a mote-castle,<sup>4</sup> which, like Dunscath or Cromarty, would have served as guardian of the ferry.

By this route two English agents travelled north to Orkney in the autumn of 1290, taking but one day to go from Nairn (Hibernairn) to Cromarty (*apud Crombasin*), which could be done only by using the ferry at Ardersier, as they must have done also on the return journey by Nigg, which adjoins Dunscath, reaching Nairn again in one day's journey.<sup>5</sup>

Dunscath was no doubt overshadowed and reduced in usefulness when

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Miller wrote, in *Scenes and Legends* (1834), p. 46 that "We can still trace the moat of the citadel, and part of an outwork which rises towards the hill; but the walls have sunk into low grassy mounds, and the line of the outer moat has long since been effaced by the plough."

<sup>2</sup> Watson, *Place-Names of Ross and Cromarty*, as cited.

<sup>3</sup> *per Aitegras firmas ville de Dunscathe cum le ferry ejusdem: unacum passagio aque de Crombalhy* (*Erchequer Rolls*, vol. vi, pp. 210, 463, 465, etc.; vii, pp. 126, 129, 356, etc.).

<sup>4</sup> Known as "Cromall Mount," but in the popular version as "Cromwell's Mount."

<sup>5</sup> See Stevenson, *Doct's. Illust. History of Scotland*, vol. i, p. 184.

on the opposite side of the Firth a tiny sheriffdom was carved out of what is now known as the Black Isle, with the appropriate accompaniments of a royal castle and a royal burgh.