

ASS NOCS: LOCHINDORB

Divers probe Wolf's watery lair for clues to turbulent past

THE cold, dark waters of Lochindorb may yield long-submerged secrets this week as divers begin a search beneath the surface of Scottish history.

An underwater survey of the island fortress of Lochindorb Castle, an infamous lair of the Wolf of Badenoch, began on Monday led by Dr Nicholas Dixon of the Scottish Trust for Underwater Archaeology.

Dr Dixon views the week-long dive as the first exploratory phase of a long-term and wide-ranging examination of the loch, near Grantown-on-Spey.

"We are at a very early stage and this week our aim is simply to gather enough information to allow us to plan properly for future work," he said. "It is the first organised underwater research to be undertaken at Lochindorb and given its history, it is an exciting project to be involved in."

Amateur diver Mr Ken McComiskie has been a pivotal influence behind the project since, after diving at

Lochindorb over the past five years, he first approached Dr Nicholson about the loch.

Mr McComiskie and geologist Mr Matt Kaye are in the process of establishing the Lochindorb Heritage Trust to promote archaeological, geological, and environmental research and co-ordinate fund-raising.

"In the best possible world, we would twin the underwater work with an archaeological investigation of the castle itself, but that is something that may take place in years to come," he said.

"At the moment, I am delighted to see the underwater archaeology work begin and I would certainly hope research will continue for several years."

One of the priorities of the project is to establish if the 13th century castle stands on a natural island or a crannog, a man-made structure of stone and timber. Divers from the STUA, based at Edinburgh University, have already established, and are reconstructing, a Bronze

Age crannog at Loch Tay.

It was from his Lochindorb stronghold that the Wolf of Badenoch, Alexander Stewart, who died in 1394, launched his strikes against Forres and Elgin which, amongst other activities, ensured his place on the some of the blackest pages of Scottish history.

The castle's first recorded owners were the Coymns and Black John Comyn of Badenoch, Governor of Scotland, died there in 1300. The castle was to change hands many times but in 1455, King James II, bent on removing a secure refuge for rebels, reputedly paid the Thane of Cawdor £24 to destroy the castle.

Its turbulent history continued well into this century, however, when it was used for target practice during World War II. Indeed, in recent years, divers have recovered a number of unexploded devices from the loch bed.

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5/8/93

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