



Galloway Glens 'Can You Dig It' Community

Archaeology project – Technical notes.

#7: The Hut Circles of Moss Raploch – Reconstructing the Iron Age

Located within the Galloway Forest Park, the original site of Moss Raploch is within north-east corner of Clatteringshaws Loch (NX 55307765) east of the A712. Parking is available at the Forestry & Land Scotland visitor centre, located at Clatteringshaws Farm. Walking the path to Moss Raploch, you pass the remnants of the reconstruction.



The discovery of submerged houses

Clatteringshaws Loch was created in 1937 by the damming of the Black Water of Dee. This process flooded the surrounding landscape, including the bog at Moss Raploch. Progressive erosion over the following decades revealed in May 1974, during drainage operations, two hut circles on the bed of the reservoir at Moss Raploch.

The [Moss Raploch hut circles](#) lay 80m apart on level ground on the east side of the valley, at a point where Clatteringshaws Lane flows westwards towards the Black Water of Dee. Both hut circles appeared as penannular stone banks 1.4m broad enclosing an area 5.5m in diameter.

The excavations

During July and August 1974 the more readily accessible [hut circle](#) was excavated due to the danger of further erosion damaging the archaeological site. The excavation, which covered an area 10m square, removed a residual thin layer of silt and peat to reveal over a brown loam extensively flecked with charcoal. Stripping off this loam revealed the floor plan of the hut.

The circular interior contained a slight platform to the rear, defined by an arc of stones. A central hearth was identified formed by a 0.2m deep patch of reddened, heat affected clay. This clay, set into a pit, contained small fragments of burnt bone. The hearth was surrounded by a small area of paving, slightly recessed into the ground. The entrance to the hut was located to the south-east arc of the structure, it was paved with a raised sill-stone that was embedded in the subsoil. The sill stone aligned with a possible setting of upright stones which projected towards the hearth creating a possible porch area.

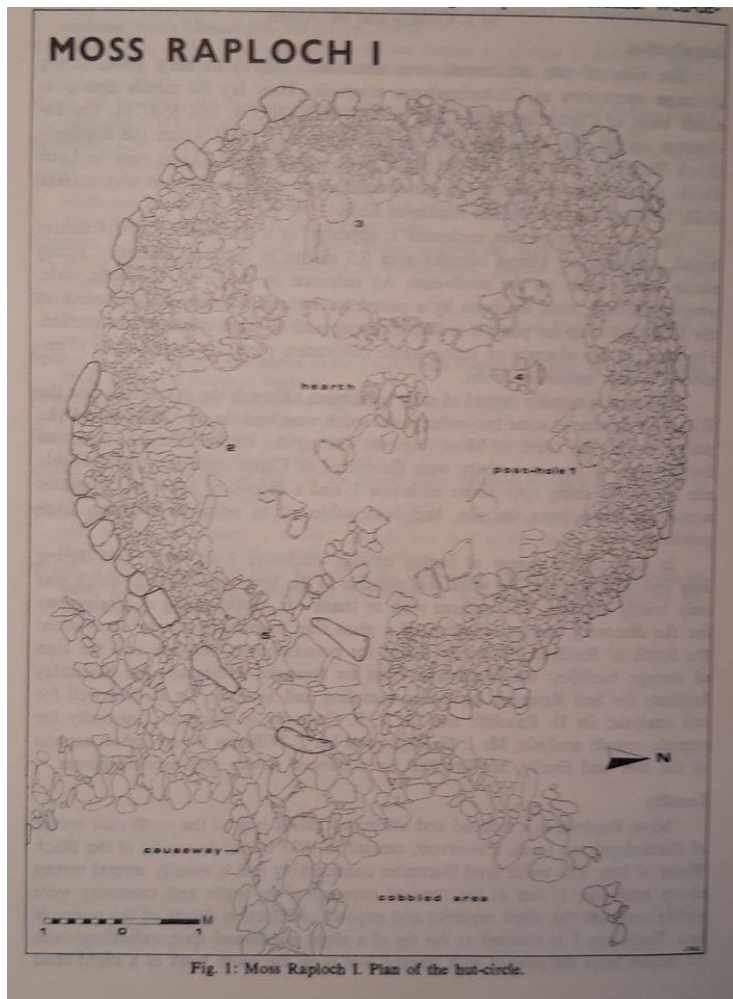


Fig. 1: Moss Raploch I. Plan of the hut-circle.

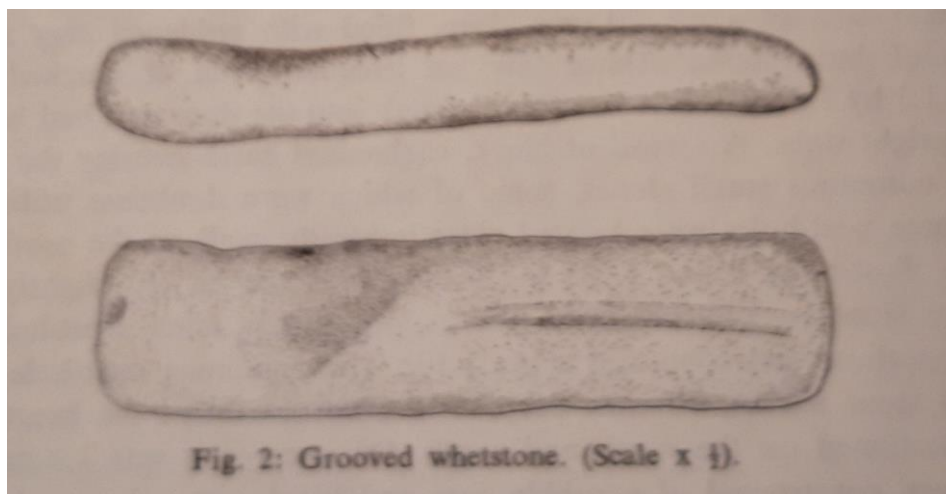
Excavation plan of hut circle

The hut's wall, sectioned in the north and south, was shown to have a width of 1.4m. The wall was formed by kerb stones on the outer face, these were more evident in the southern arc, with a rubble core behind. There was no evidence that this wall was at any point more than a single course high. Post holes were uncovered on the inner face of this wall in the north, west and south of the interior, these post holes ranged from 0.25m-0.30m in diameter and were stone packed. The posts that would have rested in these holes presumably supporting the roof.

Works outside the entrance revealed a narrow spread of rough paving forming a causeway that extended towards the course of the burn - though at the point where the ground falls to the burn the paving petered out. There was also a small cobbled surface that formed a rubble foundation measuring 0.8m by 1.2m in plan outside the entrance, extending from the hut in an irregular arc.

Finds

There were very few finds from the excavation, suggesting that the occupants had regularly cleared the interior and that the structure had not been used for dumping after its abandonment. A small selection was recovered: from the cobbled foundation outside the hut a fragment of a blue glass ring and a flake of flint thought to be a scraper; from the causeway a fragment of white glass ring, streaked with blue and green; amongst the stones overlying the hearth a minute fragment of bone with incised cross hatching; and from the loam over the northwest arc of the hut wall a grooved whetstone of micaceous mudstone. The two glass ring fragments were tentatively ascribed a 1st to 2nd century AD date, suggesting a late Iron Age date for the settlement - during the Roman campaigns in Scotland.



Grooved Whetstone

Discussion

Unenclosed round houses such as that at Moss Raploch are typically ascribed to the Bronze Age, the marked tendency being for round houses in the Iron Age to be sited within enclosures or to be of overly robust character. The dating evidence at Moss Raploch places this unenclosed round house in the late Iron Age, making the unenclosed and slight character of the site notable -

perhaps a reminder that general trends in settlement do not constrain all settlement.

In terms of the use of space, the Moss Raploch house exhibits many common characteristics from later prehistory. A circular floor plan with the entrance in the south east; interior space focused on a central hearth which has been formally constructed. There are no clear radial divisions, though the edge set stones forming the 'porch' do suggest some internal partitions. The raised platform to the rear is proposed by the excavator as for storage, though a sleeping platform has equal merit.

The slight, but broad, form of the wall suggests the potential for turves to have been used in the superstructure. Equally the presence of only three earthfast timbers to support the roof (assuming all timbers were earthfast and not supported by heel stones) suggests that the typical architectural form of the time - a ring beam to support rafters forming a conical roof - is not credible. The overall picture is of a conventional floor plan and use of space, but with an unusual, slighter superstructure compared to most excavated examples of later prehistoric round houses.

From Reconstructed Round House to Hut Circle

The Forestry Commission (as they then were) decided to build a reconstruction of the Moss Raploch site next to the visitor centre at Clatteringshaws Loch. Given the uncertainty as to the roofing and form of the walls, a liberal interpretation was followed with the reconstruction owing more to better understood more substantial round houses. Over time the thatched roof was not renewed, the timber roof structure was removed and now only the stone wall remains - a modern hut circle, though still much more robust and substantial than the excavated site.



Reconstruction partway through loss of the superstructure

Conclusion

Moss Raploch provides us with a glimpse into a domestic native structure during the Roman campaigns in Galloway, challenging some of the easy assumptions as to the character and form of these buildings. The surviving reconstructed hut circle, while not representative in terms of its robustness, offers the ability to consider the use of space within such a home.

Further Reading

Condry, J & Ansell, M (1978) '*The Excavation of a Hut Circle at Moss Raploch*', *Trans Dumfriesshire Galloway Natur Hist Antiq Soc*, 3rd, vol. 53, 1977-8. Page(s): 103-113

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