Scheduled Monument Consent:
Report on Handling

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND | ÀRAINNEACHD EACHDRAIDHEIL ALBA

Case information

Reference/Case ID	201601340

Scheduled Monument	Slochd Measach,Giant's Grave,chambered cairn,Nereabolls		
Index no	M3927	**Grid Ref**	NR210564 121000.0000 656400.0000

Date of Application	09 June 2016	**Application Received**	09 June 2016
Summary of proposed works	Archaeological excavation/recording of monument		

1. Summary recommendation

This report recommends approval of proposals for geophysical survey and excavation at this monument, due to the likely resulting public benefits, provided in the form of a significant contribution to our knowledge of both the monument and the early prehistory of this part of Scotland.

2. Background

The monument contains the denuded remains of an Early Neolithic burial cairn (approximately 4000 BC - 3200 BC) of a type often referred to as a Clyde Cairn. The most visible feature is the long central burial chamber, formed by large stone orthostats. The chamber consists of four compartments, the rear two of which contain displaced capstones.

The entrance is flanked on either side by a number of stones, some of which are displaced or fallen, forming a façade. The cairn material, forming the main bulk of the cairn, is now subsumed in peat, but remains visible as a low mound surrounding the chamber.

All six of the chambered tombs in Islay are Clyde Cairns, sharing similar features: a long chamber, straight façade and trapezoidal shape. Two were excavated by antiquarians and only one to relatively modern standards in the 1970s.

Work elsewhere has highlighted that many Clyde Cairns were deliberately sited on earlier ritual and/or domestic sites. They are, consequently, key to understanding the transition from a Mesolithic society, broadly characterised by hunting and gathering, temporality and seasonal exploitation, to a Neolithic one, where tombs appear to have been used to dominate the landscape and which accompanied other marked

social, economic and technological changes, notably the adoption of farming, pottery and new tool assemblages.

The application is by the Islay Prehistory Project and is supported by a Project Design. This sets out a detailed research background, aims, methodology and community outreach and is summarised below.

The work is intended to contribute to a long term project and previous phases were granted Scheduled Monument Consent (Case ID: 201407980) and Section 42 Consent (Case ID: 201407979) in 2015.

Research Background

The transition from the Mesolithic to Neolithic (around 4000 BC) has increasingly become a focus for European archaeological research. This has concentrated on southern Britain, Ireland and the Continent. This is largely due to a scarcity of evidence from northern Britain.

The project team have undertaken a programme of intensive research, survey and investigation over the last two decades. This has established that western Scotland has a rich Mesolithic record on the Inner Hebrides and Argyll coastline. This level of richness is almost unique to Scotland. The results have transformed our understanding of Mesolithic lifestyles and exploitation of the environment.

The cairn at Slochd Measach is near to a large Mesolithic site at Bolsay. As an Early Neolithic Clyde Cairn it presents a likely location to investigate poorly understood aspects of the transition from Mesolithic to Neolithic ways of life.

In 2015 the team undertook some preliminary work at Slochd Measach, to try and answer their research questions. This included vegetation removal, survey and a programme of test pits across and around the site. This identified:

1) that the condition of the site may be affected by rank vegetation roots – the vegetation is anyway obscuring the monument;
2) that the chamber may have a complex construction history – consisting of more than one phase, and;
3) a number of other possible structures surrounding the cairn, which may be indicative of numerous phases of activity at the site, either pre- or post-dating the cairn itself.

Several 1m x 1m test pits over the cairn found that cairn material survived, but that, due to the size and density of the stones, it could not be penetrated. Consequently, little information pertaining to the cairn's construction or related activity was identified. Evidence for later, Iron Age activity and peat accumulation over the last 300 years was, however, recovered. These results have informed the current proposals.

Building on the aims of the overall project, to better understand the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition, and learning from the previous year's results the aims of this season's fieldwork are:

- To gain a better understanding of the morphology, stratigraphy and construction of the cairn.

- To gain understanding of the site prior to the construction of the chambered cairn.
- To gain understanding of the ways in which the monument and the site as a whole were used in the Neolithic and subsequent periods.
- To reconstruct an absolute chronology for all parts of the archaeological sequence including pre-, during and post-chambered cairn phases of activity.

A number of fieldwork objectives have been identified to deliver these aims:

- To investigate the deposits within the front two chambers.
- To investigate the development of site use and cairn development.
- To understand the features surrounding the cairn.

Conservation Issues

The potential adverse effect of rank vegetation on the monument's conservation has been noted by the applicants. Its growth is likely to have been caused by the monument's inclusion in a commercial forestry plantation, which transformed the surroundings from open moorland and is likely to have altered the drainage regime.

Roots are thought to be an active threat to archaeological remains on the site physically through root action. The most significant threat is within the front two compartments of the chamber. The remains may also be subject to waterlogging and further peat inundation.

Public engagement

The Project has been, and would be, accompanied by a public engagement programme.

3. Proposals

Strategy

Four trenches would be deliberately targeted to answer the research aims and objectives outlined above. Two are larger and conjoined (Trenches 1 and 2) and located over the remains of the chamber and the surrounding cairn. The smaller two (Trenches 3 and 4) would be positioned over geophysical anomalies away from the cairn.

Trench 3 is wholly outside the scheduled area, while Trench 4 is partially outside it (revised trench location plan emailed 18 July 2016). However, the applicant has stated that all would be excavated with the same methodology outlined in the application documents. They are all described here for clarity.

Trench 1 is to be 5m x 4m in plan, with a 2m x 1m extension on one side. It would include the first two cairn chambers and an extent of the body of the cairn and would investigate the development and phasing of the cairn structure. It would result in the exposure of the deposits within two chambers.

No features or deposits would be excavated in the chambers until discussions have taken place with HES, to ensure that the level of loss, recovery and mitigation is justified and a balance is maintained between preserving deposits for future

generations, where this is achievable given the potential fragile nature of some of these deposits, and recovery of information.

Trench 2 would also be 5m x 4m in plan. It would be an extension of Trench 1 and excavated in 2017. It would examine part of the forecourt and help reconstruct the cairn's façade, portal stones and the entrance. This information would contribute towards the overall reconstruction of the monument's appearance, an understanding of the development of the site and activities within the forecourt area, and add crucial data for 3D modelling.

As it is a continuation of Trench 1 it is implicit that excavation of sensitive deposits would not be carried out until discussions have taken place with HES as set out above.

Trench 3 would be 5m long and 2m wide. It would be positioned over two possible features identified by geophysical survey. It would assess their archaeological significance. Initially the upper deposits of peat would be removed and the upper archaeological deposits exposed. It is wholly outside the scheduled area.

Trench 4 would be 6m long and 2m wide and excavated in 2017. Like Trench 3 it would investigate two possible features identified by geophysical survey. It is partially outside the scheduled area. However, further excavations below the upper deposits of peat throughout the entirety of the trench would not be carried out until discussions have taken place with HES.

The works would also include vegetation clearance, the pumping out of water from the internal chambers, 3D laser scanning and photogrammetry. Whilst these do not require consent they are included here to provide wider context for the project.

Separate Section 42 consent is being sought for further geophysical survey. The methodology used would attempt to redress problems with previous survey work in this environment and expand the area surveyed.

Excavation and recording

All excavation would be by hand. The method of fieldwork and recording has been set out fully in the Project Design. It would conform to current archaeological standards.

The design includes for production of an appropriate archive of written and drawn records, photographs and survey data. It includes an appropriate sampling strategy. It sets out a robust method for recovery and recording of artefacts.

Reinstatement

The monument would be returned to its original state. All excavation trenches would be backfilled at the end of each season. Special care would be taken during the excavation and recording of the cairn material, which would be reinstated according to the 3D records obtained prior to its excavation, so it resembles its original appearance and stratigraphic order as closely as possible.

Post Excavation and Reporting

A Data Structure Report would be submitted to HES within 3 months of the completion of each phase of fieldwork. A summary of the results of the excavation would be submitted to Discovery and Excavation in Scotland (DES).

A Post-Excavation Design would be prepared within 6 months of the completion of the project. It would result in an academic article and a popular article. The project website hosted by the University of Reading would be updated after each fieldwork/post-excavation season.

The results of the project and its implications for Scottish archaeology would be submitted for presentation at the Archaeological Research in Progress conference organised by Archaeology Scotland and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 2017 or 2018.

Project Team

The team members in 2016 would consist of:
• Professor Steven Mithen: Co-Director for the project.
• Dr Darko Maričević: Co-Director for the project.
• Dr Karen Wicks, Project Manager and archaeobotanist.
• Sarah Lambert-Gates, staff member, with responsibility for photogrammetry, photography, recording and illustration.
• Dr Rob Fry, staff member, with responsibility for survey and geophysical survey.
• Nick Pankhurst and Tom Lyons, staff members, responsible for excavation.
• Six student volunteers from the Universities of Reading and Bournemouth.

All named individuals in the above list have extensive experience of archaeological fieldwork in western Scotland, including the Isle of Islay. There will be 50:50 staff to student ratio in the field at all times.

Public Engagement

During the course of the excavation a programme of public engagement activities would take place. These would be led by a recently established community organisation called ‘Islay Heritage’, formed to enhance the value and use of archaeological sites and monuments to residents and visitors.

Islay Heritage would present an exhibition at the Islay Show in August. During the excavation Islay Heritage would lead visits to the site for every Primary School on Islay, entailing about 100 children in total. This would then provide the basis for an Islay Schools Archaeology Project that would be undertaken during the autumn. It is currently proposed that each school would ‘adopt’ an archaeological monument to undertake its own scheme of activities, involving art, drama and surveying (with the support of archaeologists).

Islay Heritage would also lead a public visit to the excavation on one Sunday, jointly organised with the Islay Natural History Trust. A bank holiday event would be organised for the Islay & Jura Youth Action Group.

A public lecture about the excavation would be delivered by Dr Darko Maričević and, on the basis of previous lectures, this would likely attract a large audience of over 100.

Throughout the field work there will be regular updates on social media about progress of the excavation and the community engagement events.

4. Representations received

No representations were received.

5. Report

a) Policy considerations

The application should be viewed with the following legislative and policy considerations in mind:

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979

Part 1 Section 2 - Control of works affecting an ancient monument.

Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement, June 2016 (policy statement)

3.14. A monument is included in the schedule to secure the long-term legal protection of the monument in the national interest, in situ and as far as possible in the state it has come down to us. Scheduled monuments have an intrinsic value as monuments, not related to any concept of active use. It is the value of the monument to the nation's heritage, in terms set out in the section on Scheduling in Chapter 2 of this policy statement that is the primary consideration in determining applications for scheduled monument consent.

3.16. Works on scheduled monuments should therefore normally be the minimum level of intervention that is consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in a monument.

3.17. As each monument will require treatment specific to its individual nature, characteristics, significance and needs, any proposed change to it must be fully and explicitly justified.

3.18. Scheduled monument consent applications must be considered in terms of the cultural significance of the monument and the impact that the proposals would have upon this cultural significance. The more important particular features of the monument are to its cultural significance, the greater will be the case against interventions which modify these features.

3.19. Extensive intervention will only be allowed where it is clearly necessary to secure the longer-term preservation of the monument, or where it will clearly generate public benefits of national importance which outweigh the impact on the national cultural significance of the monument. Such public benefits could come from, for example, interventions which make public access to scheduled monuments easier, or assist public understanding, or will produce economic benefits once the works are completed.

3.20. Where change is proposed, it should be carefully considered, based on good authority, sensitively designed, properly planned and executed, and where appropriate in the context of an individual monument, reversible.

3.22. Where consent for the range of works set out in paragraph 3.4 is granted, conditions are normally applied to ensure the works are undertaken in an appropriate manner. Common requirements are:
a. the use of appropriate assessment methodologies to determine the full impact of any proposed management, use or development; b. the avoidance of irreversible change particularly wherever its effects cannot be adequately assessed;
c. that where change is necessary, strategies should be adopted to mitigate its impact and limit intervention;
d. that the management and execution of alteration, including remedial work, is sympathetic to the historic character;
e. that appropriate skills and techniques, materials and construction techniques are specified where appropriate;
f. that an appropriate level of record is made before, during and after any work and deposited in local and national archives, and, where appropriate, published;
g. that it is possible, on close inspection, to differentiate new work from old particularly on masonry structures;
h. that any archaeological excavation or other intrusive investigation should be based upon a detailed research strategy, with adequate resources, using appropriately skilled and experienced archaeologists with a satisfactory record of the completion and publication of projects (see Note 3.10); and,
i. that the design, planning and execution of works on scheduled monuments are undertaken by people with appropriate professional and craft qualifications, skills and experience.

b) Assessment

The Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (ScARF) Mesolithic Panel Report, notes that evidence for ritual practices and religion in the Mesolithic is extremely limited (p.103). It also notes that the Mesolithic to Neolithic transition remains one of the most controversial issues in British prehistory and that evidence of monumental practice from western Scotland is important to that debate (Section 6.2). ScARF acknowledges the contribution and importance of previous work on Islay by members of the Project Team.

ScARF and previous work provides a strong context for the results of the proposed work. It is clear the project responds to a nationally, and internationally, important research issue.

Survey has identified new features within the scheduled area around the cairn at Slochd Measach and the proposed work would improve our understanding of them and the cairn itself. In particular, the project would help understand: the nature of the possible features around the cairn; the cairn's development, activities in and predating the cairn's façade, and; activity predating the cairn. This should add substantially to our understanding of the monument, national research aims and allow a better reconstruction of the monument's original form.

The work would also have wider benefits related to enhancing appreciation of Islay's prehistory. This would be communicated to the residents of Islay, including school children. There is provision to ensure results and findings are communicated to a wider audience through presentations, social media, the internet, academic and popular publications.

A more complete understanding of the monument's significance and the wider Mesolithic-Neolithic period is in accordance with Aim Two of Scotland's Archaeology Strategy and a Strategic Priority in the Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland (B-Understand). It would also accord with the Key Principle set out in 1.9d of Historic Environment Scotland's Policy Statement, in that research should assist understanding of the historic environment by the people of Scotland.

The results of the work may also inform our understanding of issues related to the monument's conservation. In particular, any disturbance to sensitive deposits in the burial chambers being caused by vegetation roots. The vegetation regime at the site is likely to have changed relatively recently and it would be beneficial to understand whether this is likely to disturb previously stable deposits.

The works proposed to this monument are hand excavation of archaeological deposits within three trenches (another is outside the scheduled area). The trench dimensions are restricted to the minimum possible to achieve the project aims. However, in terms of area the trenches cover a relatively substantial proportion of the scheduled monument.

The precise percentage is difficult to calculate because the scheduled area is circular; it would certainly be less than 15%. However, the excavation of the trenches would cease when sensitive deposits are encountered and further discussions undertaken with HES regarding the scope of any further excavation: which should achieve a balance between conservation and information retrieval. However, the mechanism for clarifying HES's agreement is not explicit and it is recommended that a condition is attached for clarity.

The excavations would remove archaeological deposits and artefacts from the monument and so must be viewed as destructive. Given the controls outlined above the work would leave the majority of physical evidence *in situ* but given their size relative to the monument they would have a material effect on the monument's overall archaeological value.

The Project Design sets out a suitable method and timetable for reporting and process for designing post-excavation analysis and reporting. However, the mechanism for HES to review and comment on the Data Structure Report and Post Excavation Design is not explicit. It is therefore recommended that a condition is attached so that HES can ensure the content of these reports is appropriate and produced timeously.

The results would significantly enhance our understanding of the monument. They have the potential to inform our wider understanding of the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition in western Scotland, Britain and Europe. The monument has been chosen specifically for this purpose because of its relationship to a nearby settlement site. Other sites on Islay do not share this characteristic.

The project team are highly experienced and have an established track record of successful delivery of archaeological fieldwork projects through to publication. Accordingly, the specified method of the work is appropriate to ensure it is undertaken to a professional standard, including post excavation, reporting and archiving. It reflects all professional expectations.

The monument would be reinstated to its original form. Therefore the excavations would not visually alter the monument following their completion.

Other elements of the works, such as the survey and 3D modelling would create a digital record of the monument that would be beneficial to our understanding and the monument's management.

c) Other material considerations, including impact of the works on Protected Species and Places

The application site does not lie in a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protection Area. National Biodiversity Network GIS data sets indicate no evidence for Protected Species in the relevant 100m grid squares.

d) Conclusion

The works would involve controlled archaeological excavation within a relatively large part of a scheduled monument. The extent of this would be controlled by discussions with HMD during the excavation process. The excavations are the minimum necessary to achieve the project's objective. The proposed work would leave the majority of the site's archaeological deposits intact. They would not visually alter the monument but would destroy some of its archaeological significance.

The project is designed to address aims of ScARF and could address a research aim that has significance throughout Europe. The project has also been designed to have considerable public benefits focussed on the community that lives on Islay. This would improve an understanding and appreciation of this monument and the historic

environment more widely. Both outcomes should be regarded as a considerable public benefit.

Although the works are to some extent destructive this has been minimised and further intrusion would be controlled by HES. The results have demonstrable benefits in terms of meeting national research aims and wider public understanding that are consistent with the Policy Statement. The work is therefore justified under paragraphs 3.17 and 3.19 of the Policy Statement.

In general the Project Design makes clear that the work has been properly planned and is likely to be executed appropriately, in line with paragraph 3.20 of the Policy Statement. However, the Project Design does not make the mechanism for HES to agreeing the extent of excavations clear. Also, the Project Design does not provide an opportunity for HES to review and comment on the project's Data Structure Report or Post Excavation Design. Consequently, it is recommended that conditions should be applied to consent in relation to both these subjects, and in accordance with paragraph 3.22 of the Policy Statement.

The benefits the proposed work would bring are considered to be greater than the negative effects of the removal of some archaeological deposits. The proposal is concluded to be broadly consistent with relevant policy. However, the proposal is not considered the minimum necessary consistent with conserving the cultural significance of the monument. Hence there is a requirement to notify Scottish Ministers as per The Scheduled Monument Consent (Notification of Applications) Direction 2015.

6. Recommended decision

Subject to compliance with the schedule of conditions, the works proposed are considered acceptable in meeting the terms of national policy for scheduled monuments, and also accounting for other material considerations. It is recommended that consent is granted, subject to the conditions detailed below.

However, there is a requirement to notify Scottish Ministers as per The Scheduled Monument Consent (Notification of Applications) Direction 2015.

7. Conditions

1. No *in situ* archaeological deposits shall be excavated, subsequent to the removal of upper deposits, until the extent of any excavation has been agreed in writing by Historic Environment Scotland.

   Reason: to ensure that any impacts on sub-surface archaeological deposits are minimised and that any interventions are appropriate.

2. The Data Structure Report and Post Excavation Design shall be submitted as draft documents for review and approval by Historic Environment Scotland

prior to final copies being issued and in accordance with the timetable set out in the Project Design.

Reason: to ensure an adequate and accurate record of the works is maintained and that the scope of post-excavation work is appropriate.

8. Approval

Officer	**Simon Stronach**	**Date**	**30/06/2016 Amended 22/07/2016**
Approved by	**John Raven**	**Date**	**22/06/2016 Amended 25/07/2016**

Annex A – list of supporting documents
The Islay Prehistoric Project: An Archaeological Excavation and Survey of Slochd Measach (Giant's Grave), Isle of Islay: Project Design for 2016/17 fieldwork
Amended Location Plan (Email of 13 July 2016)
Amended Trench Plan (Email of 18 July 2016)