Case information

Case ID	300009977
File Reference	AMJ/9342/1/1
Name of Site	Cnoc Sligeach, shell midden 270m SE of Airigh na Creige

Local Authority	Argyll and Bute
National Grid Reference	NR 37266 89084
Designation No. (if any)	SM13580
Case Type	Designation

Received/Start Date	01/09/2013
Decision Date	10/10/2016

1. Decision

The assessment against criteria demonstrates that the monument is of national importance. The decision is to add the monument to the schedule of nationally important monuments as **Cnoc Sligeach, shell midden 270m SE of Airigh na Creige**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The Cnoc Sligeach midden is currently undesignated. The monument lies within the boundaries of the Oronsay and South Colonsay Site of Special Scientific Interest, the Oronsay Special Area of Conservation, and the Oronsay and South Colonsay Special Protection Area.

2.2 Development Proposals

There are currently no known development proposals which would affect the assessment

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The site was considered for designation as part of a review of scheduled monuments in Oronsay and Colonsay during September 2013.

The site was visted on 03/09/2013.

3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

An assessment of the cultural significance of the site has been carried out following the criteria set out in the Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016 (Annex 1 paras 3-6). Having assessed cultural significance, the site was found to meet the criteria for national importance as set out in Annex 1 para 10.

Having considered the purpose and implications of designating, it has been concluded that scheduling is the most appropriate mechanism to protect the site.

Please see Annex A of this document for further information about this assessment.

The designation criteria are published in the Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 1, pp. 48-50.
https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/planning-and-guidance/legislation-and-guidance/historic-environment-scotland-policy-statement/

3.3 Other considerations

N/A

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ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria
Cnoc Sligeach, Shell Midden 270 m SE of Airigh Na Creige

1 Description

The monument is a partially excavated prehistoric shell midden probably dating to the late Mesolithic or early Neolithic around 4500-3400BC. The midden is visible as a large conical-shaped, grass-covered mound with a smaller midden mound located 5m to the southwest. The larger mound measures approximately 38m in diameter and stands around 3.2m above ground level at its highest point. The smaller mound measures approximately 15m in diameter and stands 0.5m above the ground. The midden is located at a height of around 10-15m above OD within an area of rocky outcrops and raised beach deposits approximately 200m inland from Port Dhun a' Gharaidh on the northeast coast of Oronsay.

The scheduled area is irregular on plan to include the remains described above and an area around them within which evidence relating to the monument's construction, use and abandonment is expected to survive, as shown in red on the accompanying map.

2 Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria (Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 1, pp. 48-50.)

2.1 Intrinsic Characteristics

Aerial photographs indicate that lazybed or rig and furrow farming was practiced around the midden and this may have involved the removal of midden material to improve soil quality. Excavations in the late 1800s, early 1900s, and during the 1970s indicate that the midden deposits extend at least 25m to the southeast from the top of the larger mound and to a depth of 1.7m. These excavations also identified structural remains including hearths, stone-filled post holes and other features, as well as lithic and organic artefacts including anvil stones and barbed bone implements. There is potential for survival of further midden remains in unexcavated parts of the monument which can enhance our knowledge of settlement in the Inner Hebrides during the late Mesolithic and early Neolithic periods.

The monument represents a focal point for coastal resource gathering probably during the late Mesolithic and early Neolithic periods. The pattern of midden deposits at Cnoc Sligeach suggests a complex sequence of occupation with the accumulation of midden material at two known locations. Carbon dating of organic objects suggests an early Neolithic date for the final phase of dumping of midden material between 5015± 210 BP and 6010 ± 450 BP. The age of the earlier levels of occupation at Cnoc Sligeach is less well understood but could be revealed by further investigations of the deeper midden deposits.

2.2 Contextual Characteristics

Today, Cnoc Sligeach is situated on an outcrop of rock around 200m from the sea. However, at the time of the site's occupation, relative sea levels were higher and the sea reached this point. This location would have offered the occupants of Cnoc Sligeach ease of access to a ready supply of shellfish and other marine resources.

Archaeologists consider Cnoc Sligeach the most extensive of a group of Mesolithic and Neolithic midden sites on Oronsay that evidence occupation by prehistoric hunter gatherers. In addition to Cnoc Sligeach, there are two middens known as Caisteal nan Gillean I & II (SM6288) located approximately 1.7km to the south west of Cnoc Sligeach and a third midden known as Cnoc Coig (SM13655) located 1.3 km to the west-southwest. As a group, these sites provide key evidence for mesolithic and early neolithic settlement of the islands of Western Scotland.

Although other Mesolithic sites are recorded on the nearby islands of Colonsay, Islay, Jura, Coll and Mull, the only known and comparable monument in form and in the extent of the recorded assemblage of artefacts outside of Oronsay is the shell midden on Risga (SM7829), Loch Sunart, approximately 40km to the north.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

There is a long history of investigation of Cnoc Sligeach – 'the shelly mound'. Artefacts arising from Galloway's investigations in 1884 are held by the National Museums of Scotland; the archive from Bishop and Buchanan's investigations 1911-13 is held by the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow. The excavations undertaken by Mellars in the 1970s are also well documented and, taken together with more recently published scientific analysis of the Oronsay middens, have significantly added to our understanding of Mesolithic hunter gatherers in Scotland.

Purpose and implications of scheduling

The monument is in a stable condition and has few management issues apart from isolated rabbit burrowing. The monument lies within an area protected for nature conservation purposes. Designation as a scheduled monument is the most appropriate mechanism to secure the preservation of Cnoc Sligeach, and ensure the recognition of its national importance as a historic environment asset.

3 Assessment of national importance

The monument is of national importance because of its potential to make a significant addition to our understanding of occupation of the islands of western Scotland during the late Mesolithic and early Neolithic periods. Although there have been various phases of excavation on the site, substantial archaeological deposits are expected to survive that can provide important insights into the relatively understudied transition from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic. Cnoc Sligeach remains an impressive monument in the landscape and is the most extensive site of an important group of prehistoric middens on the island of Oronsay, one of the largest concentrations of such sites in the UK. Our understanding of the distribution and

character of shell middens, and methods for gathering coastal and marine resources in prehistoric Scotland would be diminished if this monument were lost or damaged.

4 References

Historic Environment Scotland http://www.canmore.org.uk reference number Canmore ID 37801 (accessed 28/06/2016).

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