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Tràigh na Beirigh 2, Uig

R R Bishop, M J Church, C Clegg, L Johnson, S Piper, P A Rowley-Conwy, L Snape-Kennedy

Durham University

Excavation

In September 2013, over 380 litres of bulk samples were taken from a Late Mesolithic shell midden eroding from the machair immediately west of Tràigh na Beirigh (Figure 1). The site was identified in 2012 (DES 2012: 190) and radiocarbon dating of charred hazel nutshells from the main body of the shell midden date the accumulation to c. 6.5-6.1k cal BP.

It was evident that the archaeological deposits span a significant stretch of this part of the Cnip headland, potentially over 10m in section and over 0.4m in depth. In 2013, a 6m section was cleaned to expose the deposits along the eroding edge, revealing an old ground surface overlain by a series of shell-rich midden deposits. The midden was covered by a layer of stones that appeared to have been deliberately laid, before being covered by a substantial machair sequence. The upper shell-midden deposits were heavily concreted by post-depositional carbonate deposits, as a result of groundwater outflow under the machair. The midden and old ground surface were eroded in some places along the excavated section edge but the midden appears to continue for at least 0.4m into the section and underneath the overlying machair. It is suggested that the site represents part of a late Mesolithic landscape on the eastern slopes of the Cnip headland, containing both this site, the adjacent shell midden (TNB1 - DES 2012: 190) and the anthropogenic remains at TNB9 (DES 2013: this volume).

The section was drawn, photographed and geo-referenced using GPS, before bulk samples were taken for laboratory analysis. Initial processing of the samples has indicated the deposits contain struck quartz and flint, burnt and unburnt fish and mammal bones, shellfish, crustacean, charred hazel nutshells and charcoal.

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Figure 1: Excavation in progress at Tràigh na Beirigh 2