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Temple Bay, Harris

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Excavation

During fieldwork in 2011, a suspected Mesolithic buried land surface and midden deposits were identified eroding from a coastal erosion section at Temple Bay, below 8m of machair (DES 2011:187). Hazel nutshell fragments were recovered from bulk samples taken from the site and submitted for radiocarbon dating. The results indicated occupation of the site ranged between 5715-5386 cal BC (SUERC-38832: 6750±30 and SUERC-38834: 6525±30 calibrated using OxCal 4.1 – Bronk-Ramsey 2009, Reimer et al 2009), confirming the site as the third identified Mesolithic site in the Western Isles.

Further sampling of the eroding section was conducted in September 2012. The eroding section was cleaned back to expose a 5m stretch of deposits that were photographed, drawn and geo-referenced using GPS. Bulk samples were taken of all excavated material to maximise recovery of artefacts and ecofacts. In addition, multiple spot, column and Kubiëna samples were taken for geoarchaeological analysis, to assess site formation processes and aid interpretation of the stratigraphic remains.

The site was comprised of a buried land surface, a scoop feature and associated midden deposits. The scoop cut into the old ground surface and associated midden deposits and this feature was filled with an ash spread and a shell-rich midden deposit. The Mesolithic remains were overlain by a substantial machair dune. Processing of the bulk samples recovered thousands of burnt and unburned shellfish, fish and animal bone, charred hazel nutshells and charcoal. Worked flint and quartz flakes were also retrieved. The site continues to be threatened by erosion, therefore the exposed section was reinstated with stones and turf.

Bronk Ramsey, C 2009 ‘Bayesian analysis of radiocarbon dates’, Radiocarbon 51, 337-360.

Reimer, P J et al (27 co-authors) 2009 ‘IntCal09 and Marine09 radiocarbon age calibration curves, 0-50000 years cal BP’, Radiocarbon 51, 1111-1150.

Funders: National Science Foundation of America (Grant number 1202692), Historic Scotland and Durham University.