

P26 Clachtoll Broch



Project Overview:

Clachtoll broch is one of the most iconic monuments in northern mainland Britain and a Scheduled Ancient Monument. It was in a dilapidated state and choked with rubble debris. As a result, visitors could only access the broch by climbing over rubble to walk around the site on the wall head. This was both damaging to the broch and hazardous for visitors. Local concerns about the deterioration and public safety were raised in 2006 and resulted in a 2009 Conservation Management Plan funded by Historic Scotland. Further consolidation to secure the entrance area took place in 2011 and emergency propping for the south wall in 2014.

The aims of the project were to:

- Excavate the site giving visitors a unique insight into the broch's original structure and use, as well as safeguarding it for future generations.
- Restore visitor access through the original entrance, open up the interior of the building and improve understanding of how the settlement surrounding the broch was used.
- Explore options for an architect designed structure that gives access to the broch and protect it from further wind and wave damage.

Project lead organisation and other organisations involved: Historic Assynt

Project Location: NC0366 2784 Clachtoll, Assynt, Sutherland

Project dates: July 2017 – March 2022

Project Outputs

Measure	Target	Delivered	Notes
0.2ha of surrounding area stabilised	0.2	0.2	Achieved
Excavated broch site with artefacts analysed and displayed for view	1	0.9	Excavation and artifact conservation and analysis complete. Website www.clachtollbroch.com launched. Physical display of 3D printed replicas ready for display when new Clachtoll interpretation centre built
Broch officer in post for two years through the excavation programme	1	1	Broch Officer's worked throughout the excavations in 2017 and 2018 and also for the experimental programme in 2019. Now completed
Viewing structure installed within the excavated broch	1	0.5	Installation delayed until Spring 2022
Interpretative material available for viewing close to site	1		Interpretative material is ready. The website is about to be launched. A small information panel will be on display on the Broch viewing platform and the major display will be in the new Clachtoll Interpretation

Measure	Target	Delivered	Notes
			centre due for completion before the end of the year
100 people trained in archaeological skills	100	55	25 respondents to excavation survey said they had learned new skills. 12 attendees on average at finds workshop. 6 attended corbelling workshop. Year 2018 & 2019 additional 12 people trained in excavation and experimental skills
500 visitors/participants to the project	500	2205	1323 visitors and 52 on site volunteers plus 6 involved in finds recording but not working on site, average of 12 per week at finds workshops. (volunteer tab shows more because of returning volunteers). Plus, additional 186 attending weekly tours Jul-Sept. Figures may include multiple visits by some of the same individuals. 2018 658 visitors recorded by Historic Assynt. 2019 120 visitors recorded by Historic Assynt
100 school pupils visiting	100	200	2017 140 school pupils from local schools plus Sunnyside Primary, Glasgow; 2018 two High School S1 visit of 60 pupils.
1 fully excavated, consolidated & interpreted monument	1	1	
Volunteer Days	150	454.8	2017 351.9 volunteer days, 2018 Volunteer days 263, 2019 25 volunteer dates.

Scheme Outputs

How has the project contributed to the CALLP Scheme Outcomes:

Y	1. The key features of the Coigach and Assynt Landscape will better understood and restored with a fit for purpose system in place to ensure the benefits are sustained. <i>Clachtoll broch is one of the most obvious ancient structures on the Coigach/Assynt coast and the excavated and conserved site itself, the improved access, interpretation material, popular book etc provide copious amounts of information to enable more people to better understand the site and its context.</i>
	2. Where appropriate the connectivity and diversity of selected habitats will be mapped.
Y	3. Increased awareness and understanding amongst all individuals and groups of what makes Coigach and Assynt special and the threats to the unique heritage. <i>P26's award winning excavation and interpretation has enhanced the local, regional and national profile of Clachtoll Broch and highlighted the uniqueness of the Iron Age architecture of northern Scotland and Clachtoll's importance as a fascinating insight into life in the broch in the final phase of occupation.</i>
Y	4. Important elements of the built, cultural and natural heritage will be recorded, improved, made publicly accessible and celebrated by the local community. <i>See 1, 7 & 8</i>

Y	5. People will have gained new skills in researching, restoring and understanding their heritage. <i>All P26 volunteers involved in the excavation, post excavation cataloguing of finds and the various experimental workshops have acquired new knowledge and skills.</i>
Y	6. Collected data, information and interpretation will be more accessible in the public domain including posting on appropriate websites. <i>P26 is providing a new website, popular book, interpretation materials and full academic reports of all its work and findings.</i>
Y	7. Local groups and individuals understand, enjoy, value and take action in the Coigach and Assynt area in ways they did not at the outset. <i>Although many local people valued Clachtoll broch as a familiar and known ancient structure P26's discoveries have highlighted the national significance of Clachtoll broch in ways not previously appreciated locally and this has increased appreciation of the building's importance.</i>
Y	8. Increased access infrastructure at key strategic locations enabling people to enjoy the natural and cultural heritage of the area. <i>Access into the broch interior is now fully available to all those able to walk out to the monument and the new viewing platform will enable high level access while discouraging walking on the surviving walls.</i>
Y	9. Increased opportunities for informal recreation that promotes health and well-being benefits. <i>The already popular walk to the broch and round the headland is now more widely known and used and the excavation and experimental workshops etc encouraged active and demanding exercise for all who chose to be involved.</i>

Reflecting on the last 5 years, what's the one thing that you're most proud of that has come from your project being part of CALLP?

Current Archaeology Rescue Project of the Year Award 2021

The award signals UK wide recognition of the importance of the conservation and excavation work at Clachtoll Broch The biggest surprise has been the extraordinary survival of so much evidence for the final occupation period of the broch in the period 50BC to 50AD. Many of the finds were in unexpectedly excellent condition, especially the 30 recognisable iron farming tools – unprecedented on a coastal broch site where iron would be expected to have decayed beyond recognition

What difference has this project made to the built, cultural and natural heritage of Coigach and Assynt?

It has opened a vivid window on the past

The project has immensely enriched and deepened our understanding of life in the area 2000 years ago. The excavation was followed by the national media through two digging seasons and the awarding of a national award recognises the importance of the excavation and conservation work on the national level. See new website www.clachtollbroch.com

What difference has this project made to People?

Increased appreciation of the rich built heritage of the area and provided archaeological excavation experience for volunteers

Very high numbers of visitors during the excavations and on all organised tours. Regular report back sessions in Stoer Hall always well attended by local people who showed a great deal of interest and had plenty of questions and comments. Comments from visitors and tours were not recorded by those from schools and volunteers were; those below are typical

Comments from School visits

It was a really good experience

*Overall it was an enjoyable experience
it showed us how Iron-age people lived*

Comments from volunteers

Outside, great location, absorbing and interesting occupation, working with interesting people, learning new skills.

it's fantastic fun! Fascinating insights into prehistory, learn lots and meet lots of interesting people with a great sense of humour! Couldn't recommend it more strongly and this was my first venture in archaeology!

Useful Links

<https://coigach-assynt.org/2018/11/ullapool-high-school-students-survive-the-iron-age/>
<https://coigach-assynt.org/2020/12/clachtoll-broch-project-nominated-for-current-archaeology-mag-award-please-vote/>
<https://coigach-assynt.org/2021/03/clachtoll-broch-wins-top-award/>

New project website is: www.clachtollbroch.com

Future Plans and Legacy

More questions and continuing investigation.

The excavations resolved some issues but many questions remain about the nature of iron age life in the area and especially why the broch and several contemporary sites all went out of use at the same time. The wealth of information is being developed into a substantial document and the project will produce a popular publication that describes the project and finds.

Historic Assynt's general investigations into the wider archaeology of the area continue and in time new projects will be devised to follow up on the Broch project and those other investigations.

Lessons Learned

What are the three positive lessons gained from the scheme:

1. The immense ability of a community archaeology project to foster local pride, focus voluntary effort and provide discoveries of more than local archaeological and historical value.
2. The value of being part of a partnership for such a large and complex project. The administrative and financial burden would have been impossible for a small, entirely voluntary organisation like Historic Assynt to achieve on its own.
3. That however much people believe they know and value their locality there is always more that can be discovered that can add to their appreciation of their own heritage.

What are the three negative lessons gained from the scheme:

1. The sheer complexity of implementing a project located on an exposed site away from roads and accessible footpaths scheme making suitable access to complete the project is a constant problem.
2. Never to underestimate the number of things that can go wrong.
3. Never to underestimate the length of time a major project like the broch can take to complete.

Funding Partners



The Pilgrim Trust

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Photographic Evidence



Drone view of excavated site showing access and excavated interior © Historic Assynt



Volunteers actively excavating under professional supervision © Historic Assynt



Iron Age feast for the opening an iron age style pit kiln with pots made in two pottery workshops © Historic Assynt



fully excavated paved entrance path and the conserved walling of the broch tower © Historic Assynt