

## **Surveying the Past - Teaching, Learning and Doing May 2009**

Members of NWMCWC and Mull Historical & Archaeological Society met on a very wet morning on 1<sup>st</sup> May for a day's work on teaching and learning how to review and survey an archaeological site.

Michelle Cowe, Bill & Suzanne Patterson and Kevin Luscombe were accompanied by Ishbel MacKinnon from Scotland's Rural Past, running the course for 4 members of each organisation. The arrangements were made by Michelle and Bill.

The morning session was held in Dervaig Church Hall, Bill giving a short resume on plans for the day and subsequently introducing the concept of seeking information from people's local knowledge of the past and archives local and National.

Ishbel then explained how to look at maps through time (from the present backwards, showing what was new relatively recently and going back to more ancient buildings, use of land, etc. She also explained how to look at the whole landscape round a site, to sketch the site and get the feel of how people might have lived and coped long ago. Ishbel showed the use of aerial photographs showing features too large to appreciate on the ground and for comparison with maps old and new.

Finally, Kevin demonstrated the use of the plane table and alidade, accurately drawing the ruins on Polyester film with H6 pencils - the plan so produced can be drawn even in pouring rain and does not smudge if rubbed in wet or dry state thereafter.

After a picnic lunch, the rain cleared and the sun even managed show itself intermittently. The group moved to Antuim with its ruined settlement to the right of the Salen Road, by very kind permission of Hugh Boa despite being lambing season. Ishbel and Suzanne conducted the group round the site, looking at its place in the landscape containing very old and more modern dividing walls, past and present flow of rivers, and at ruins obvious to see and much more obscurely covered with turf and moss. Meanwhile, Michelle, Kevin and Bill set up three plane tables and formed three groups to survey three of the ruins, the three surveys then being overlapped to show that whole part of the site.

Everyone seemed to have enjoyed the day of learning and many were happy to follow up with a day of fresh surveying of the settlement at Kildavie (Cill da Bhidhe). For this and a second day one week later, several new learners as well as Anita and Sue from The Ross joined in to complete a comprehensive plan of most of the ruins. A further building remains was found which had not previously been identified. This will be investigated in the near future and may be the corn kiln which the late Roy Douglass did not manage to locate. Finishing the survey along with further investigation of the possible corn kiln and completing the "unwrapping" one of the ruins of its turf, moss and bracken (as agreed with Scotland's Rural Past) will be undertaken shortly, when those who have already taken part would be happy to have more newcomers joining them.

The enthusiastic group now knows how to look at archaeological site, learn about them, survey them and imagine what life there must have been like. They intend to continue

work on other sites, made more feasible with a further set of equipment being very kindly donated to the Woodland Company (for anybody to use) by two local residents.

Further courses will be organised if there is a demand for more people to learn how to look at the evidence of the past which is so widespread throughout the Island. Please contact Bill (MH&AS) at [bill@mullpattersons.co.uk](mailto:bill@mullpattersons.co.uk) or Michelle (NWMCWC) at [michelle@nwmullwoodland.co.uk](mailto:michelle@nwmullwoodland.co.uk). Scotland's Rural Past is very willing to give more help and material for such events as part of their policy to encourage "cascading" teaching and learning about our ancestors.