

#### Managing archaeological sites in wetland areas

##### Why are wetland areas important to archaeologists?

Archaeological finds in wetlands are important because waterlogged conditions can preserve materials like wood, leather, textiles and seeds that do not survive on normal dry land sites. They can therefore provide more detailed information on how people lived in the past and worked with their local environment.

##### Why do you find archaeology in wetland areas?

People have used wetland areas as a source of food or as a place of refuge over centuries. Changes in climate and soils have made areas that were once dry ground into wetland areas. Peat growth in particular obscures large areas of prehistoric settlement. Peat is excellent for preserving evidence of past climate and vegetation in the form of pollen as well as organic materials like wood. Silted up ditches and old watercourses may also contain significant deposits.



Bracken and heather cling to a low ring that marks the walls of a roundhouse, perhaps 2,000 years old. The low mounds behind mark contemporary stone clearance heaps, part of former fields now obscured by peat and bog.



This wooden platform for a house site dating to the early centuries AD, still survives in modern farmland at Buiston Ayrshire. The quality of preservation has declined significantly since it was first examined in the 19th century.

##### How do I find out if there is significant archaeology in my wetland areas?

Existing archaeological records or audits may have identified significant features. Other deposits can be inferred from surviving remains such as silted up ditches, known sites in the vicinity and high water tables.

##### Why do these sites need protection?

Apart from mechanical damage, the main threat is from drainage and alterations to the water table causing organic deposits to dry out. Recent work suggests that nitrates and other farm chemicals can accelerate the decay of buried organic materials.

*Much of Scotland's archaeological heritage lies in rural areas. This sheet is one of a series giving advice on some of the ways these important remains can be protected during normal rural land management.*

### GOOD PRACTICE

- Identify where archaeological sites are on the ground so that they will not be damaged by future farming activities. Information on where archaeological sites lie on your land can be found at [PASTMAP](#) or through an archaeological audit. For more detailed information on the extent of individual sites contact your local council archaeology service.
- You must contact Historic Scotland before carrying out works such as drainage that may affect a Scheduled Monument.
- Do not drain wetland areas that are of archaeological interest.
- Where existing drains are sited through archaeological sites, consider whether these need replaced and take advice from your local authority archaeologist as to what is appropriate.
- Maintain water tables in areas of known wetland archaeology by blocking drains and reducing water extraction (grants may be available under the SRDP programme and from Historic Scotland to pay for such activities.)
- Avoid spreading fertilisers and pesticides over areas where they may affect archaeological deposits and finds.

Further information - see **Management web pages**



Wetland areas of high archaeological interest, such as this ditch around a medieval fort near Inverness, should not be drained of water`.



Pollen and plant analysis of a peat bank below a 4,000 year old pine forest on Rannoch Moor.

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