

Managing archaeological sites in moorland

Why are archaeological sites found in moorland areas?

Over the 6,000+ years of human settlement in Scotland upland sites may have built in periods when the climate was more favourable to agriculture in the hills. Seasonal grazings and sites to extract minerals have also been important. Other sites such as cairns may have been raised as monuments in the landscape.

On lower ground moorland may have developed over ground once fertile but now made sour.

Why are these areas important?

Moorland areas can contain intact field systems and settlements not disturbed by later developments, as is more common on lower ground. The preservation and extent of these survivals in Scotland can sometimes makes sites in moorland of national or even international importance. These sites can have value both for visitors and for local communities as places to visit and learn about the past.



When heather burning or managing grazing over areas of archaeology try to manage them as single units to make them more visible in the landscape



Sites from different periods may survive in moorland and what suits a heather-clad roundhouse may not be the same requirement for a drystone shieling.

How do I find out if there are sites on my land?

Obtain an archaeological audit or if more detail is required commission an archaeological survey.

How should these sites be protected?

Avoid placing tracks or fences directly over sites and make sure you factor these sites into any management you carry out. While overgrazing and poaching can cause damage, archaeologists are keen to see grazing continue over these sites to keep them as visible features in the landscape. They have survived as open landscapes for thousands of years and farmers can play an important role in preserving them for the future.

GOOD PRACTICE

- Identify where archaeological sites are on your moorland by getting an archaeological audit or survey carried out.
- When claiming rural subsidies you should leave an appropriate buffer around known archaeological & historic sites, varying from 5-20 metres depending on the proposed management and type of monument.
- When designing a muirburn plan, treating bracken, placing new fencing or tracks over moorland, you should identify the effects these might have on archaeological sites and adapt your plans as appropriate to protect such sites.
- Try to manage archaeological areas as single units rather than dividing them into different fields or other management units.
- Suppress rank vegetation, including bracken & scrub, from obscuring archaeological areas. When doing so, follow the muirburn and other codes of practice.
- Encourage public access to these areas when it does not conflict with the farming or other rural land use.

Further information - see [Muirburn Code](#)



Understanding what archaeological features are, such as the remains of this turf house, part of a Sutherland township cleared in 1817, help explain the shape of the current landscape and the current vegetation.



Sites in moorland may be obscured by rank vegetation but this does not reduce their significance.