



Introduction

The purpose of this example is not to provide a definitive answer on how to provide access to archaeological sites on agricultural and forestry land. Each area and each site have their own constraints and as the examples here show, the compromises necessary for public safety and for the protection of the monuments are not always satisfactory.

Archaeological Background

The Kilmartin Glen is an area of exceptional and distinctive archaeological remains that has been ably interpreted as an ancient landscape with features surviving into the present. They consist primarily of an enigmatic range of burial and ritual monuments whose original purpose is dimly understood. They are important for being changing forms in a developing landscape and their significance is for the power they give us to understand the motives of the past and the influences this brings to the present. Landscape is not static. The surviving monuments are unique though similar elements can be viewed in other parts of Scotland. It is the density and quality of the remains that has led to the especial protection and display given to this area.

Monument types

There are a range of different monument types within Kilmartin Glen; many of them significant monuments legally protected as Scheduled Monuments of national importance. The following examples show the varied management responses taken to both preserving these monuments and displaying them to public view.

The earliest monuments were built at the time of the first farmers some 5,000 years ago.



Cairn at Temple Wood as currently displayed.



An aerial view of Kilmartin Glen taken in 1988.

Geomorphology and history

Settlement has been based on the landscape left at the end of the last glaciation, in particular a series of peri-glacial terraces rising above the valley floor. These provided a well-drained and relatively fertile soil for early farmers who built up a succession of major monuments such as burial cairns and standing stones. The size of some of the cairns, over 3 metres high by 30 metres in diameter, show major social efforts and also the surpluses of labour available 4,000 years ago to build these monuments. These were important to their local communities, even if we can only guess from our own experience at the significance they held for these people.

As the climate became wetter, peat began to form on the valley floor forcing settlement onto the higher ground. Many of the sites were masked by this peat until the agricultural improvements of the 18th and 19th century led to major land reclamation. The present landscape reflects this diversity of forms and processes.

Kilmartin House Trust

This successful development has been the down to the vision of key people but it has also involved a network of interested supporters. Funding has come from a variety of sources including Argyll & Bute Council, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Historic Scotland and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Substantial sums of money have been spent developing facilities and encouraging access for visitors.

The success of this can be seen in the creation of both fulltime and part-time posts at the Trust and the increase of bed nights spent in the local area in contrast to a decline in visitor numbers seen in other parts of the Highlands.



This reconstructed cairn contains stones with cup mark incisions almost certainly re-used from an earlier burial chamber.



Aerial view of the cairns in 1977.



Linear cairns

A group of three, formerly four, Neolithic/Bronze age cairns, extend down the centre of Kilmartin Glen. All the cairns have been excavated or ransacked since first recorded in the 19th century and are therefore considerably altered from their original form. The surviving cairns are held in guardianship by Historic Scotland and presented in a similar form with iron railings protecting and defining each site. This is unsatisfactory in terms of the visual location of the sites in terms of the local landscape (compare with the more open landscape view in 1988). Visitors are restrained down specific pathways. However this is a necessary compromise in order to protect the public from injury by stock. To allow unrestricted access would seriously impede the ability of the farmer to keep cattle on his land and affect the viability of this farm unit. The alternative is to supply substantial compensation to the farmer for restricting his management options.



Detail of stile, path and fencing used to access this monument.

Railings and access track angle around the cairn known as Nether Largie. The public are protected from cattle and a clear access route with stile is provided. Both the railings around the monument and the modern post and wire fence are intrusive elements in what should be an open landscape. It has to be accepted that allowing public access is often a problem of compromising between the safety of the monument and the public and the aesthetics of a monument's setting. Guided by Health and Safety legislation and the responsibility of Historic Scotland to preserve monuments for posterity the former predominates.



Rock art

Kilmartin Glen has the finest range and extent of rock art in Scotland (78 separate examples are listed in the RCAHMS Inventory for this area).

While the purpose for which the cup and ring marks were carved on these rock outcrops remains enigmatic, they are powerful images of the people of past and evocative to visitors of today. Some of the more accessible of these monuments are displayed to visitors.

Historic Scotland has taken the view that these monuments are vulnerable to visitor damage and stock damage and protected them with iron railings. This includes two areas in forestry land where no stock are present though the railings do restrict public access.



Where cattle are in a field the railing makes it easier to manage the site and prevents it being obscured by dung. Access is permitted by means of a stile though the public are encouraged not to walk on the monument. The railing does have the merit of defining the site for visitors less able to recognise their location.

The alternative to a defined display is this unsigned example obscured by moss which makes it difficult for visitors to find, let alone see in its entirety (see back page for a detail of this feature).

Perhaps there is a need for both, with defined areas where the casual visitor can visit and the more discrete hidden sites for the careful enthusiast who will respect the rights of land managers on accessing their land.





Standing stones

The stones at Ballymeanoch are a dramatic survival of what was once a possible stone row extending for some distance down the glen. At least one of stones, containing a curious hourglass-shaped perforation, has fallen in recent times. Only the stub remains and the top lies broken at the edge of the field. Because of the risk to the surviving stones Historic Scotland has agreed to pay the farmer for excluding cattle from this field.

Grazing by sheep continues and hay is cut as a crop.

Leaving the standing stones in a grazed field allows them to remain as visible monuments in the landscape and for a sense of continuity with the farming communities in the past. This makes the monument more accessible than putting a fence around it. However it also makes the stones vulnerable to poaching and rubbing by stock. This requires monitoring to prevent damage or collapse of the standing stones.





Forts

33 Duns and Forts have been recorded in this area. The most significant of these is **Dunadd** which has been identified as one of the key centres of the Dalriadic Scots, a tribe from Antrim who reputedly migrated here in the 5th century AD. They went on to successfully challenge the Pictish kings for control of the kingdom of Alba, leading eventually to the creation of the modern kingdom of Scotland.

Dunadd, as the iconic centre of the Dalriadic kingdom, is the only one of these forts which is displayed to the public. It is managed as a Guardianship site by Historic Scotland, though it remains in private ownership. Access is restricted by the rocky nature of the outcrop on which the fort is sited. Display material is limited to a board by the carpark at the base of the hill.



The terrain up to the fort is rocky and quite unsuitable for wheelchair or restricted access. Certain areas might be deemed treacherous in wet or icy weather and it is unclear where public liability for any potential accidents lies. To institute railings and steps would seriously reduce the historic value of this site. The rocky nature defines its defensive aspect and to make access easier would reduce its significance in the landscape.

Medieval buildings

Carnassarie Castle, the 16th century residence of the Bishops of Argyll is a fine example of a ruin protected by Historic Scotland. The structure has been made safe for visitors and by re-pointing and regular maintenance preserved for future visitors. Display boards and access routes are clearly defined and the grass is cut regularly to make access easy.



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Kilmartin Church has been an important religious centre for many centuries. Within the church are preserved an important collection of early Christian cross slabs as well as part of a formerly freestanding cross. Their location in the church means that they are preserved from further weathering and the designs etched into the stones are more easily seen. Being located within the church maintains an important sacral continuity .



These contrast with other examples still in the graveyard which are exposed to weathering and erosion from visitors. While it is unlikely any of the slabs are in their original location, the two methods of presentation provide a significant contrast and it is difficult to decide which is the more appropriate.





Conclusions

Kilmartin Glen is unusual for the range and quality of the monuments preserved and presented to the public. With the Land Reform Bill now passed through parliament there are increased pressures to ease public access to the countryside. This includes access to monuments such as these. To produce the level of protection followed for most of these monuments is likely to be expensive even with increased government grants to develop core path networks. Funds are available from sources such as the enterprise companies and HS and SNH where clear public benefit can be seen. In part this is because of increased public visits to the countryside and the consequent Health and Safety assessments for this increased access. The balance between health and safety, monument protection and presentation, cost and aesthetic situation is always one of balance. Attitudes and results will always depend on changing fashions as to what is appropriate.

Further information

There is a considerable literature on the monuments at Kilmartin and this is most easily accessed from the Kilmartin House website <http://www.kilmartin.org/>. This has considerably more detail than is available here including an interactive map listing all the major monuments in this glen. The site also lists recent research supported by Kilmartin Trust.

Stone Voices: The search for Scotland

This interesting publication touches tangentially on the monuments in Kilmartin, but is well worth reading for showing the significance of these monuments to local people and in a wider Scottish context.
Neal Acherson 2003 London, Granta

The environmental history of the area is equally interesting with the [Moine Mhor](#) 'Great Moss' protected as a National Nature Reserve.

F99LG29: The Environmental History of Kilmartin Glen Over the Last Two Millennia

This survey was commissioned by SNH but is no longer available online on their website at www.snh.gov.uk

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