

Report on the discovery of pottery sherds at Kilkenneth, Isle of Tiree.

Sandra Kelly. April 2017.

Abstract

Three sherds (two conjoining) of possible pre-historic pottery and three of possible Medieval style were found in a sand dune while visiting Kilkenneth Chapel site.

Site location

The sand dune lies equidistant between the ruin of Kilkenneth Chapel circa NL 943 447 and the unclassified road about 100m away. The location is on the eastern side of the Isle of Tiree. [See accompanying photographs of the location and site].

Site description and finds

[See the accompanying photographs]

The sand dune has been eroded on its southern side, most likely because of a cattle feeding station adjacent to it, the exposure being caused, or at least exacerbated by the cattle. Three distinct and irregular depths of sand layers are seen in the face of the dune, which is just under 2m in total height at the point where the finds were made. It is not known how these layers relate to the highest point of the dune dome which is several metres higher, all of which is covered in short grass.

The lower layer of sand is clearly a windblown episode of white sand which contains no inclusions apart from a distinct straight band of charcoal measuring about 0.5m long by 50mm deep.

The layer above is a light brown coloured sand, but this has numerous small sea shells of several types and occasional small stones and traces of bone; one vertebrae was recovered, possibly from a fish. Two conjoining pot sherds lay near the top of the thickest part of this layer, although they lay side by side they were broken in antiquity, but the breaks are extremely fresh. A further similar sherd fell from nearer the centre of the deposit, this one has possible soot or carbonised encrustation on both surfaces. The conjoining sherds together are 40mm by 20mm by 6mm thick, the other is 30mm by 25mm by 5mm thick. Another band of charcoal, this time curving and about 0.5m long by 50mm deep is seen below the two sherds described above.

At the eastern side of the exposure the shell layer appears to be interleaved by two white sand bands, or they may be separate episodes of deposition, however, three further sherds were seen in its face; the larger one of the three appears to be a rim sherd, expanding in thickness from 6mm on the body to 10mm at the flat rim, the other two are small, but all three appear to be kiln fired, judging by the fabric. Certainly, different vessels are represented by the sherds which will require more specialist knowledge to date them.

At first the three sherds found at the westerly side of the layer were thought to be Early Neolithic, but that view was changed to suspect they are Iron Age, based on the hardness of the fabric, the other sherds were originally thought to be Medieval, but on balance, it may be that

they all represent some Iron Age activity among the dunes, possibly involving fires and the consumption of sea foods.

The higher of the three bands of sands was a darker colour than the white basal layer but lighter in colour to the middle ‘occupation?’ layer, it was distinctive like the lower sand as having no inclusions whatsoever, indicating it was a windblown event over the activity zone.

It is highly possible that further finds may lie in front of the section, having fallen from it by weathering or by animal abrasion.

The finds were left with An Iodhlann Museum at Scarnish along with this report and a file of accompanying photographs of the site and the finds.

It is recommended that the site be investigated archaeologically in advance of further likely erosion, and that the charcoal deposits be sampled for analyses and possible dating.

Photographs





