

Muinntir nan clach

People of the Stones



Four small Mesolithic flint blades, or microliths, found at Kenavara. These were made by the island's first visitors 9,000 years ago



Tùr MhicChaluim in Kilkenneth was erected to commemorate Donald MacCollum, who was minister on Tiree in 1887. He supported the crofters in their struggle for land. It was built on a Neolithic grave



Cup markings on Cnoc Fhoimeagal, Corraibeg. Cup markings were probably used in magic rituals and can be seen on several prominent rocks on the island



The Ringing Stone. Its old name was Cairé Fionn mac Chumhaill after the hero of an ancient Irish legend

They left no words, but the island's first peoples left their mark from the flint tools to the broch towers.

The first people to set foot on Tiree came to the island over 9,000 years ago, having island-hopped from the mainland to Mull, and then on to Coll and Gunna. They arrived not long after the climate warmed at the end of the last Ice Age. The shoreline was roughly as it is today but the island was covered with a scrubby woodland of hazel, alder and birch.

These first visitors were **Mesolithic** hunter-gatherers, who came to the island in summer to feast on limpets and birds' eggs from the Kenavara cliffs. They also fished and ate hazel nuts, the roots of silverweed and probably seals. In the winter they are likely to have retreated to the shelter of Mull or the Oban area. Another of Tiree's major attractions would have been the nodules of flint, rare in the Inner Hebrides, which are washed up on our western beaches.

No one has been able to explain the find of a rare 'tanged' flint (a flint point whose base is tapered) by an archaeologist digging in the 'Red Mound', Balevullin, in the 1920s. It is similar to flints made in Northern Europe 30,000 years ago.

Around 6,000 years ago, in the **Neolithic** period, people in Scotland learned how to grow primitive barley and domesticate pigs, cattle and sheep. The light, easy-to-plough Tiree soil seems to have attracted the island's first year-round settlers. These people buried their dead in tombs that stood out on the skyline, like one at *Tùr MhicChaluim*, Kilkenneth. Elsewhere they made circular cup markings on many prominent rocks on the island, such as the Ringing Stone.