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## **Tràigh na Beirigh, Uig**

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Tràigh na Beirigh 1, Uig

Excavation

An excavation was conducted at a late Mesolithic, open-area shell midden at Tràigh na Beirigh, in September 2012. A full coastal erosion assessment in 2011, to establish the extent of the remaining midden, highlighted the imminent destruction of the site by coastal and wind erosion (DES 2011: 194-5). Therefore, full excavation was deemed necessary. Two small trenches were opened. The first, approximately 1.8m x 1.5m, targeted the northern extent of the shell midden. The midden deposits in this trench graded out towards the northernmost edge of the excavation, on to a rock outcrop. Underlying the main body of the shell midden was an old ground surface, overlying a basal layer consisted of inorganic sandy silt. Cut into this sand was a small scoop (c.0.2x0.2m in plan and c.0.1 m deep), filled by a shell-rich, silty sand deposit containing burnt shell.

The second trench measured approx. 2m x 1.1m and contained a more substantial deposit of the main shell midden (c.0.15m depth). This overlay an old ground surface and an inorganic sand, mirroring the sequence in the first trench. A scoop (c.0.7x0.3m in plan and c.0.1m deep) was cut into the basal sand and filled with a dark organic sandy-silt containing numerous shells and carbonised macrofossils. This feature in turn truncated a smaller pit. A third, circular negative feature (c.0.1x0.07m in plan and c.0.05m deep) was also identified cutting into the sand at the eastern extent of the trench, which was interpreted as a stake hole. Following the excavation of the old ground surface, a small oval depression (c.0.13x0.10m and c.0.03m deep) was observed in the bedrock to the south of the trench. The depression was smooth and appeared to have been pecked, thus making it likely to be of anthropogenic origin. Once the site was excavated, the exposed sterile basal layers in the sections were reinstated using stones, sand and turf.

A worked oyster shell was discovered lying flat on top of the old ground surface and immediately under the main body of the shell midden. The shell had been modified around the edges to make it circular in plan with a diameter of c.0.1m, and a circular hole c.0.03m in diameter was made in the centre (see figure 1). There is no apparent functional use for such an object as it was very thin and fragile. It is suggested that it may be decorative, perhaps as an adornment on clothing. It was flat on top of the old ground surface and its positioning

suggested that it may have been deliberately placed as a possible votive offering, prior to the deposition of the main body of the shell-midden.

All of the excavated archaeological remains were 100% bulk sampled to maximise recovery of artefacts and ecofacts. In addition, multiple spot, column and Kubiëna samples were taken for geoarchaeological analysis, to assess site formation processes and aid interpretation of the stratigraphic remains. Initial processing of the samples has yielded thousands of shellfish, crustacean, fish and animal bones. Worked flint and quartz flakes were also recovered, in addition to charred hazel nutshells and charcoal.

## Tràigh na Beirigh 2, Uig

### Excavation

In September 2012, bulk samples were taken from an unidentified shell midden eroding from the machair covered headland, immediately west of Tràigh na Beirigh. The site was exposed as a result of renewed coastal erosion and identified following survey approximately 50m along the coast from the excavation of a late Mesolithic, open-area shell midden at Tràigh na Beirigh (DES 2011:194-5; this volume).

The site was sampled as the basal deposits of the midden grade into an early to mid-Holocene soil, a stratigraphic sequence comparable to Tràigh na Beirigh. A 1.3m section was cleaned to expose the deposits along the eroding edge, however it was evident the deposits continue for a significant stretch along the headland, potentially over 10m in section and over 0.4m in depth. The site was comprised of an old ground surface overlain by a shell-rich midden deposit. The midden was covered by a layer of stones that seemed to be deliberately laid and subsequently filled in by interface deposits with the substantial machair sequence covering the site. The lowest deposits were heavily concreted by post-depositional carbonate deposits, as a result of groundwater outflow under the machair. It is suggested that the site represents an eroding part of a late Mesolithic landscape, containing both this site and the adjacent shell midden, which is overlain by the machair on the eastern slopes of the headland.

The section was drawn, photographed and geo-referenced using GPS, before bulk samples were taken for laboratory analysis. Initial processing of the samples has indicated the deposits contain struck quartz, burnt and unburned fish and mammal bones, shellfish, crustacean, charred hazel nutshells and charcoal. Three small fragments of heavily-abraded pottery were recovered from the upper interface deposits with the overlying machair. Radiocarbon dates will be obtained following the submission of suitable dating material to establish the chronology of the site.

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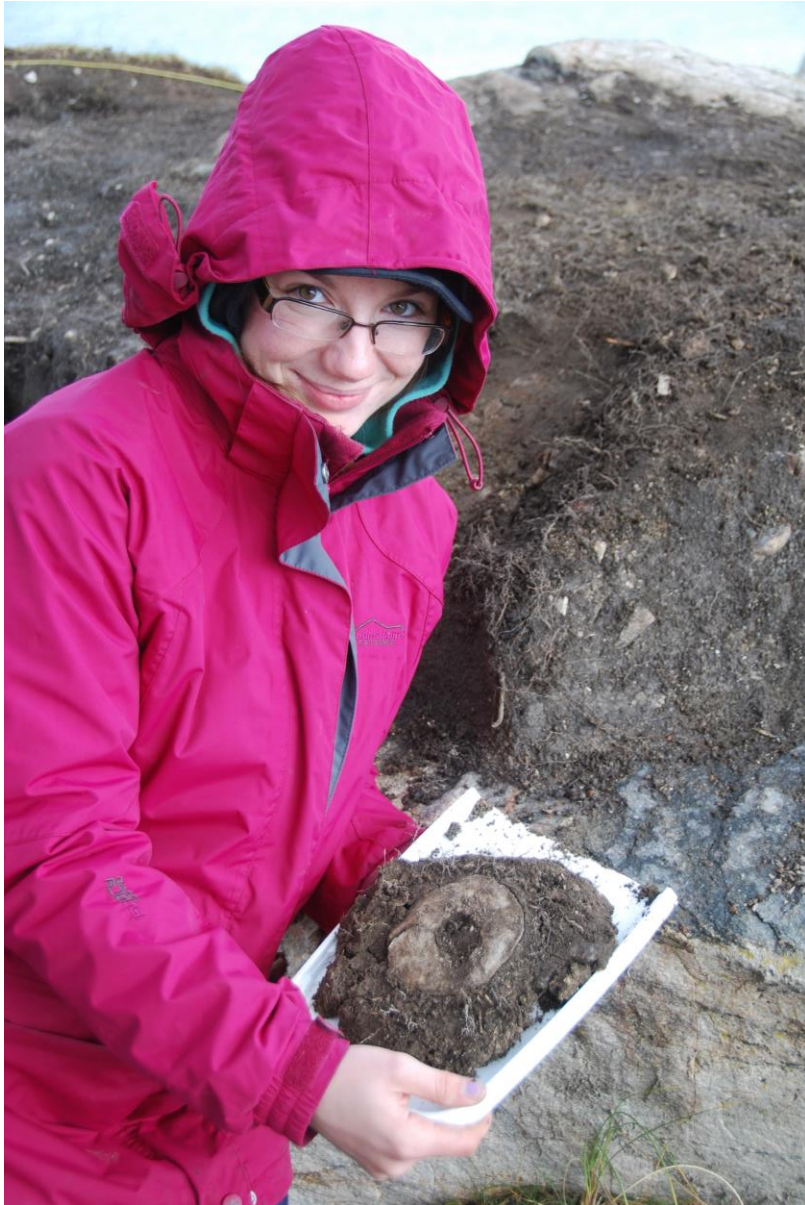


Figure 1: Lisa Snape-Kennedy holds the modified, perforated oyster shell immediately after lifting of the object (Photograph by Peter Rowley-Conwy)