

Loch Sloy! A Call to Arms: Preserving our Heritage through the Generations

There are three “Scheduled Ancient Monuments” amongst the islands of Loch Lomond. These are protected by the Scottish Government as nationally important historic sites and are under the care of Historic Scotland. Two of the three, Inveruglas Isle and Island I Vow (Ellan Vhow), are home to the ruined remains of Macfarlane strongholds and have been in steady decline since the late 17th century. There is new hope for the preservation of these sites as contemporary archaeologists document the need to protect and preserve these sites ... and inspire the next generation to the same worthy end.

A young archaeologist led the first thorough archaeological survey of the islands of Loch Lomond from 1995 to 1997. Fiona Baker, Director of Firat Archaeological Services, expanded our knowledge of the archaeology of these islands from 12 recorded sites to over 380 recorded sites. The initial reports spanned five volumes. Ms. Baker re-surveyed the island sites some ten years later in 2007 only to find that all but one had continued in decline ... and one had been totally lost to the waters of loch.

Another young (aspiring) archaeologist came to Loch Lomond in the summer of 2012 with hopes of an independent study project and a trip to ancestral castle ruins on Ellan Vhow (ca 1577-1750). Her last visit to the island castle and its “dungeon” had been fourteen years earlier when she was two years old.

Katherine reached out to several people, including Fiona Baker, for suggestions. She could not have imagined what would follow. Ms. Baker suggested that Katherine repeat the 2007 Survey for Ellan Vhow and document any changes in condition of that site. Further, in spite of a very full personal and professional schedule, Fiona agreed to *supervise* Katherine’s work. After a few more email exchanges, the two had arranged for two full days of archaeological exploration covering five island sites and a crannog. Fiona’s kindness in mentoring Katherine led to a once-in-a-lifetime private lesson in archaeology.

The first lesson was held at the ruins of Inchmurrin, a 14th century castle built by Duncan, Eighth Earl of Lennox. Plans for the day and initial lessons were discussed in a nice spot next to the north window ... where King Robert I may very well have rested while taking refuge on the island after his defeat by the MacDougalls.



Figure 1 - Planning the day at Inchmurrin

The history of these islands is rich and fascinating and is well documented in the 2007 “Summary Report of the Archaeological Field Survey and Re-appraisal of Sites and Castles” by

Firat Archaeological Services and the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs.

The rest of the morning curriculum was focused on Inveruglas Isle. Inveruglas Isle and castle are well known to Macfarlanes worldwide and David Starbuck's work in 2000 has significantly improved the condition of the site. *(A gun flint and additional pottery were found this visit.)* As can be seen in recent photos, mature and fallen trees continue to threaten the integrity of the walls and further work is needed.



Figure 2 - Inveruglas Southwest Tower

After lunch, the classroom moved back down the loch through the beautiful "Narrows" to probe the mossy ground on Inchconnachan for the outlines of a medieval farmstead. A little further down the loch, the day ended on Inchgalbraith, a thirteenth century castle jutting from the water with remnants of a fine portcullis gate. Arrow slots face inward onto a central courtyard. Wall lines (only evident at low loch levels) indicate that this castle was formerly twice its current size. Inchgalbraith is likely to be the next site lost to the loch through erosion.



Figure 3 - Inchgalbraith

The following day, June 13, was spent updating the 2007 survey on Ellan Vhow and discovering new treasures revealed by the low loch levels. Katherine and Fiona are preparing a full archaeological report documenting several new discoveries and this should be available in the next few months.

As a sneak preview ... tapered slates indicating that the castle had a conical tower, a finished window stone etched to receive glass, iron slag, and more were found this trip ... as well as some other significant findings about the grounds and purposes of the five buildings. More to follow!



Figure 4 - Ellan Vhow Castle Interior (south). "Dungeon" entrance is just past the mature tree (right center).

The castle is increasingly overgrown with ivy and the building's integrity has been compromised by saplings growing from the walls (Figure 4). The mature tree to right center of the photograph is threatening the structure of the intact "dungeon" (cellar) of the castle. Approvals are being sought now for works to coppice or remove the tree threatening the cellar and to manage the foliage for the preservation of the site. Longer term it has been recommended that the ivy be removed and the masonry re-pointed. There is much for us to do to protect our heritage!



Figure 5 - Can you spot your ancestral home?

Most importantly, a recently fallen tree was diverting summer foot traffic across one of the historic buildings and was already damaging that building. The team was able to get a Scheduled Monument Consent (in record time) to remove that tree and protect the site. A second expedition in August, removed the tree (under Fiona's supervision) and brought the Historic Scotland inspector, in person, to the island ... yielding invaluable advice and clearing the way for future preservation works.

This article is not as much about archaeological findings or even about the need for preservation. It is about people gifting their time and resources ... from one generation to the next ... to protect our heritage. It is about perseverance. It is about taking the long view ... but also constantly pressing for action and sparking real progress.

Katherine will be eternally grateful to Fiona for her mentorship. We all will be grateful to Fiona, David, Katherine, and *all those* who act to preserve our heritage.



Funds are currently being raised to support the preservation work at Ellan Vhow through The Ellan Vhow Preservation Fund at

EllanVhow.org