

Archaeology from the Wetlands:
Recent Perspectives

Archaeology from the Wetlands: Recent Perspectives

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Foreword

It was a great pleasure to be asked to speak to the delegates of the 11th International Wetland Archaeology Conference when they met in Edinburgh in September 2005. It is an equal pleasure to introduce the proceedings of that important gathering, now brought so promptly and attractively into print.

A significant feature of the conference was the evidence of strong and growing co-operation between official bodies such as Historic Scotland and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland; historic environment curators working with Scotland's Councils; the Universities and Research Councils, and the voluntary and commercial archaeological sectors. To build upon this strong collaborative trend I charged Historic Scotland with leading a thorough assessment of how we can develop policies which address the topics discussed: understanding and conserving the archaeology of our wetlands. That task is now well under way. We have a firm commitment to conserve and manage our historic environment and to do this we face difficult questions of how to target our efforts and resources upon what is truly important.

Wetlands archaeology is important, and not merely for archaeologists. It provides wider lessons, the clearest of which is the impossibility of fully separating human influences and natural processes. This is particularly relevant as we grapple with current concerns such as climate change and sea-level rise. The evidence for understanding human interaction with natural processes offered by wetlands archaeology can – and indeed must – make a contribution to addressing these global issues.

Seeing Scotland's world-class archaeological resource recognized and set into its international context emphasizes just how much we hold in trust: for future generations of Scots and for humankind as a whole. As we strive to protect and understand our surviving wetlands and to identify and rescue sites and information which we cannot protect, the knowledge that we are doing so in co-operation with so many partners, both at home and abroad, is a true source of inspiration and energy.

I commend this volume to everyone who cares about understanding our past and using their understanding to sustain our future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patricia Ferguson', written in a cursive style.

PATRICIA FERGUSON, MSP
Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport
The Scottish Executive

Edinburgh, October 2006

Archaeology from the Wetlands: Recent Perspectives

The 11th International Wetland Archaeology Research Project (WARP) Conference, Edinburgh 2005

The Scottish Wetland Archaeology Project (SWAP) was initiated in 1998 in response to John Coles' energetic encouragement of the Scottish delegates to the Dublin WARP Conference. Over the following years, SWAP members and others have worked on wetland materials and projects, leading to the hosting of the 11th International WARP Conference in Edinburgh in September 2005, which was attended by delegates from Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA, as well as those from Britain and Ireland. This conference came at a significant time for wetland studies in Scotland and its significance for us was highlighted by the attendance of the Scottish Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, Patricia Ferguson MSP, who announced that Historic Scotland would be tasked with re-evaluating the nation's wetland archaeology. That re-evaluation is now underway and significant projects will roll out over the next five years. The timing was also significant in that the conference came on the eve of the UK's signing of the European Landscape Convention, raising hopes that with new landscape designations it might at last prove possible to preserve wetland sites as significant elements in cultural

landscapes rather than as incidental inclusions in nature reserves. The conference just preceded the publication of the first book wholly dedicated to the theoretical framework of wetland archaeology (*Rethinking Wetland Archaeology* by Van de Noort & O'Sullivan) and two papers by the authors of that book introduce a new level of intellectual analysis to the topic. Finally, and perhaps more significantly, the conference came at a time when the preoccupation with wetland archaeology as a 'separate' discipline is being supplanted by the need to integrate the evidence from wetland sites into mainstream archaeology, which, ironically, means dryland archaeology.

In addressing wetland landscapes, the proceedings of this conference not only bear witness to a *risorgimento* in Scottish wetland studies but introduce, or re-introduce, wetland sites as elements in the cultural landscapes of the world, brought theoretical considerations into full focus for the first time and contributed to the maturation of the relationship between wet and dry archaeology. If that is not sufficient to justify these proceedings, the range, quality and interest of the papers published here quite certainly does.

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