Managing Scotland’s Archaeological Heritage

A GUIDE TO THE CARE AND MANAGEMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES FOR OWNERS, OCCUPIERS AND OTHER LAND USERS
When agricultural boundaries cross monuments, different types of management can arise on either side. A field boundary dissects this fort at Habchester in the Scottish Borders. The ramparts have been levelled by ploughing on one side of the wall, whereas they are much better preserved on the other.

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Ivy growth on Prestwick Old Parish Church, South Ayrshire
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Volunteers clear dense vegetation from the interior of a broch in the Highlands.
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A guide to the care and management of archaeological sites for owners, occupiers and other land users
Images
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INTRODUCTION

Scotland is rich in the remains of past human settlement and activity. The first people arrived here at least 10,000 years ago, and settled farming communities began to be established about 6,000 years ago. Most archaeological sites in Scotland date from the last 6,000 years.

These remains, generally known as “monuments”, range from prehistoric roundhouses, burial tombs, standing stones, and forts, crannogs, medieval or later farmsteads, castles and abbeys to fishtraps, limekilns, other industrial remains and even Second World War military defences. They may be recognisable as banks, ditches, walls, or other upstanding structural remains, but much of a monument may survive beneath the ground, often extending for a considerable distance beyond the visible remains.

Many sites have only been discovered by aerial photography and are visible from the air as cropmarks. Such sites are difficult to detect on the ground, particularly if all the remains have been ploughed flat. Nonetheless, excavation has shown that important information is frequently preserved immediately beneath the ploughsoil. Scatters of artefacts in the topsoil, such as worked flint or pottery, may indicate the presence of structures below.

The Roman fort and temporary camp at Dalginross show up as cropmarks on this aerial photograph. The temporary camp is the large rectangular shape in the centre of the photograph, and part of the fort with its triple ditches is visible bottom left. The entrances to both the fort and the camp can also be seen.

Through careful examination of these remains by different types of survey, and sometimes excavation, archaeologists can tell much about the way people lived, farmed, and buried their dead in the past, how they managed their farmland, woods and other natural resources, and about the contemporary environment.

It is important that the most significant of these sites are preserved for future generations. They contain information which can help us to understand not only how people lived, worshipped, and managed the land, but also how the development of the landscape we know today has been influenced by its previous inhabitants. They are the only sources of evidence for much of Scotland’s past: without them the nation’s full history cannot be documented or understood.

The excavation of an enclosure at Dryburn Bridge in East Lothian seen from the air. Sites such as this are obviously vulnerable to further ploughing.

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PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT

Many sites are legally protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. These are called "scheduled monuments".

However, most monuments have no legal protection at a national level, although they may be recognised as sites of regional or local significance and protected through local planning and countryside policy (for example, policies within Strategic and Local Development Plans). In the main, the vast majority of monuments continue to survive, as they have done in the past, because of the interest and care of land owners, managers and users.

Society relies very much on the goodwill of the land-using community to preserve and manage monuments. Historic Scotland hopes that everyone will continue to do their best to protect monuments from harm, and that as many land owners as possible will be interested in positive management to enhance their condition.

If you have a scheduled monument on your land, one of Historic Scotland’s monument wardens will visit periodically to inspect the monument and to discuss any problems which might have arisen in the protection or management of the monument. They would be pleased to offer advice on how the condition of the site might be improved and what funds may be available.

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THE GUIDELINES

This leaflet is intended to guide owners and farmers on some simple measures that can help protect and improve the condition of monuments. Many monuments are in a stable condition and require little attention but, by following the basic guidelines below, you can help ensure that the legacy of past generations will survive in the best condition for the benefit of future generations. These guidelines provide general advice on how to manage monuments and the archaeological remains associated with upstanding historic masonry (but not the structure of the buildings themselves). In the case of scheduled monuments, you must always seek advice from Historic Scotland before undertaking any activity that might affect them.

At the end of this booklet is a list of online resources and information on how to obtain further guidance and advice.
AWARENESS

Ignorance is the greatest threat to our archaeological heritage. When sites are damaged or neglected, it is usually because people don’t know they are there, how important they are, or what actions might cause damage. So it is really important that everyone working on the land (including contractors, who may be less aware of local heritage features) should be informed of the presence, extent and value of monuments in the area. It is also important to consider each site in its landscape setting, as the context of the monument may be important to help us understand and appreciate it, and there may be invisible archaeological remains below the ground surface, around the visible features.

- Sources of information and advice on the location and extent of known archaeological sites and monuments are listed at the end of this booklet.
- The location of sites and monuments should be marked on appropriate land management maps and shared with all those working on the land.
- It is important to recognise the full extent of each site, particularly if works are planned in the vicinity which could have an adverse affect on the archaeology. If in any doubt about the extent of a site, please seek archaeological advice from Historic Scotland or your local council archaeology service.
- If works of any kind are proposed close to a monument (for example, development, tree planting, or ploughing in previously unploughed areas), it is sensible to arrange for archaeologically sensitive areas to be marked out on the ground before work starts, to minimise the risk of accidental damage. (If the monument is scheduled, fence posts should be placed outside the scheduled area.)

Blindwells stone circle, Perth and Kinross, lies within the heart of a wood. The archaeological remains were threatened by tree growth in the area and a number of trees had blown over. Clearance of trees and brash from the monument and an area around it has significantly improved the appearance of the site and reduced the risk of further damage to the remains. Monitoring is needed to prevent the site from becoming overgrown with regeneration.

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CULTIVATION

- Ploughing or other soil disturbance should be avoided during re-seeding (even of pasture), to prevent the destruction of fragile features in and around archaeological sites. Sites which are already ploughed should not be ploughed any deeper. Pan-busting, sub-soiling and de-stoning are particularly damaging operations and should be avoided on or near archaeological sites.
- A buffer zone at least 5 metres wide should be left unploughed around the edge of an upstanding monument which survives as an isolated feature in a ploughed field, or, if it is scheduled, around the legally protected area. The buffer zone may require active management to prevent encroachment of scrub or rabbit damage, but it could also create a valuable wildlife habitat, particularly if linked to field margins or other non-cultivated areas.
- If the monument survives as a number of isolated features which are close together, a single buffer zone around all of these will allow the components of the group to be appreciated as a whole, as well as increasing the nature conservation interest of the area.

This 4,000 year old stone circle sits isolated in a ploughed field. The unploughed area around it is too small, increasing the risk of damage to the standing stones and buried archaeological remains.
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Grazings and Their Management

Light grazing is often a benign and beneficial way of maintaining archaeological sites in good condition.

- Existing grass or heather cover should be maintained on archaeological sites to protect them from erosion damage.
- Any necessary re-seeding and other grassland improvement should not include ploughing or soil disturbance (except where the ground is already regularly ploughed).
- Archaeological sites usually benefit from light grazing in order to keep sites free of scrub and bracken and reduce the risk of fire, but heavy stocking can damage both archaeological and nature conservation interest through erosion, poaching and other physical damage.
- Sheep usually cause less damage than cattle to earthwork banks and other historic features.
- Burning should only be undertaken as part of a carefully planned muirburn programme as recommended in the Muirburn Code (Scottish Government, 2008). Particular care should be taken to avoid loss of soil cover on archaeological sites.

A combination of rabbit burrowing and cattle trampling is badly damaging this 800 year old motte in Aberdeenshire. Prompt filling-in of scrapes or natural erosion (with rabbit control, as appropriate) will help to protect sites.

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Recent muirburn has taken place on the hills near Laurencekirk where there are remains of one of the best-preserved medieval deer dykes in Scotland.

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The growth and spread of tree roots and scrub can disturb and damage buried archaeological deposits and undermine above-ground masonry. Windblown trees may uproot large volumes of soil, disturbing and destroying archaeological remains.

- Trees should not be planted within 20 metres of the edge of a monument, nor regeneration encouraged. Forestry processing and conversion operations should also not be carried out within 20 metres of a monument.
- Forestry rides should be located so as to avoid directly crossing monuments (although it is helpful to be able to access monuments from forestry rides).
- There is often scope for designing woodland so that monuments are located in forest clearings. These sites can make a positive contribution to the public’s appreciation and enjoyment of woodland, but require active management to prevent them becoming overgrown.
- To avoid ground disturbance, trees should be cut off at ground level and the stumps treated to prevent re-growth. Timber and brash should be removed with care. Stumps should be left to rot rather than dug out, but brash should be removed from the site as it can encourage rabbit colonisation. If possible, the trunks of wind-thrown trees should be cut and the root-plate eased back into place.
- Remember that a Felling Licence from the Forestry Commission may be needed.
- Remember to follow the UK Forestry Standard, which includes guidance on managing archaeological sites and cultural heritage features.
- If the site is a scheduled monument, consult with Historic Scotland before felling trees or removing scrub. If it is included in The Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland, it would be sensible to consult Historic Scotland before felling, replacing or replanting trees.

- As a general rule, saplings and woody plants should be removed by cutting off the stems close to the ground and treating with herbicide, while scrub and bracken may be controlled through foliar spraying.
BRACKEN AND OTHER INVASIVE VEGETATION

Controlling bracken on archaeological sites is highly desirable – not only because it obscures monuments, but also because its rhizomes (root system) can cause significant damage to buried archaeological remains. Other types of vegetation, such as woody plants and ivy, can also damage sites, as well as obscure the remains and attract burrowing animals.

- Cutting or crushing bracken fronds twice a year (about mid-June and again 6 weeks later for at least 3 years in a row) is an option for light infestations.
- Spraying is another course of action, but the use of heavy machinery should be avoided, since this could damage archaeological features.
- Further advice is available in Historic Scotland’s Technical Advice Note 17: Bracken and Archaeology.

EROSION

Where sites have suffered from erosion, and the protective cover of turf or soil has been broken, earthen monuments and archaeological deposits can quickly deteriorate, particularly if the problem is ignored.

- Stock proof (and where necessary rabbit-proof) fencing may be necessary to reduce damage, but any enclosed areas will need subsequent management – usually controlled grazing – to prevent them becoming overgrown.
- Re-seeding of eroded areas should be with a mixture of native grasses and wildflowers appropriate for the site. Advice on this is available from Scottish Natural Heritage.

Sites sealed by sand can quickly become vulnerable if the sand is eroded or blown away. Measures to prevent dune erosion, or to stabilise deflated surfaces (such as planting marram grass) are to be welcomed. You should seek archaeological advice if ancient remains are exposed in the surfaces which need to be planted.

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RABBIT CONTROL

Rabbits love the soft soils of archaeological sites, but they cause immense damage to surviving features through burrowing and subsequent erosion. All efforts to control rabbits are therefore to be welcomed.

- Rabbit control requiring ground disturbance should be avoided. Any necessary rabbit fencing must be carefully sited so as to avoid sensitive archaeological areas.
- Other types of burrowing animal also disturb archaeological sites and should be controlled wherever possible. Further advice is available in Historic Scotland’s Technical Advice Note 16: Burrowing Animals and Archaeology.

DRAINAGE, WET SITES AND PEAT

The oxygen-free conditions of waterlogged areas can preserve important organic remains, ranging from wooden posts of earlier buildings, textiles and leather, to the remains of plants and seeds which can help archaeologists reconstruct the past environment. If the water table is altered, these organic remains can dry out and decay very quickly.

- New drainage should normally not be carried out within 30 metres of a monument.
- Particular care is required when maintaining existing drains to avoid new disturbance.
- Consideration should be given to re-siting drains which directly affect archaeological sites.
- Peat cutting should not be undertaken on or around monuments.

SHORELINE AND UNDERWATER SITES

Monuments are not only found on land: Scotland’s rivers, lochs, beaches, estuaries and seas also contain the remains of past human activity. The locations of these sites mean they are less at risk from day-to-day land management activities, but much of the guidance that applies to landward sites can also apply to submerged monuments. Awareness and avoidance are the best means of preventing damage to such monuments.
FENCING, QUARRYING, DUMPING AND STORAGE

Monuments should never be quarried or used as dumping grounds or for storage.

- Where possible, any existing dumped or stored material on monuments should be removed.
- Quarrying or mechanical excavation should not be permitted on monuments.
- When deciding on the line of a new fence, monuments should be avoided because of potential damage from fence and strainer posts. It may also be desirable to move a fence from an archaeological site if this will enhance the condition of the site.

VEHICLES, TRACKS, SERVICES AND CONSTRUCTION

Vehicles, tracks, services and construction should all avoid monuments.

- Wheeled or tracked vehicles should not be driven over or parked on monuments, to avoid the risk of accidental damage and rutting.
- If crossing a site by vehicle is unavoidable, this should be done in dry weather when possible. Particularly vulnerable monuments may be protected by laying brash matting or other protective materials. Any protective material should be removed subsequently if this can be done without causing damage.
- New tracks, constructions or services should be at least 10, and preferably 20 metres clear of the edge of monuments.
- Consideration should also be given to re-routing any track which currently runs across a monument. Similar consideration might also be given to re-siting hard standings or other constructions.
- All new built structures, such as farm buildings, ponds, reservoirs, polytunnels, including those planned on land by third parties (such as the erection of electricity poles, telecommunication masts, or the construction of gas or water pipelines), should not be sited on or routed through a monument.

The remains of a pre-improvement farmstead near Mintlaw, Aberdeenshire overlies an earlier settlement and field system some 4,500 years old. The use of farm vehicles and erosion from cattle, particularly around the feeder, has caused damage to the site. © Crown Copyright: Historic Scotland
NATURE CONSERVATION

Management which is sympathetic to nature conservation and landscape is usually beneficial to archaeological interests. The planting of trees and regeneration is a notable exception.

- Wherever possible, the relative interests of archaeology and nature conservation should be balanced, seeking professional advice as appropriate, and remembering that many monuments, including scheduled ones, may also lie within Sites of Special Scientific Interest or other areas designated for their natural heritage interest.

HISTORIC LANDSCAPES

In some cases archaeological sites and monuments survive as extensive relict landscapes, showing how people lived and interacted with the environment around them. Settlement and use of the land through time has had a profound impact on the landscape we see today, not only in the physical traces of settlement and other activities, but also in the patterns of our fields and vegetation, as well as in our streets. Some historic landscapes are protected in their own right, either as scheduled monuments, or through inclusion in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes, or the Inventory of Historic Battlefields. In managing our archaeological heritage, it is important to remember that individual sites may lie within these wider landscapes and that historic landscapes have their own management needs.

- The Historic Land-use Assessment (HLA) is a digital record of the various components that make up this historic landscape and shows how they relate spatially and chronologically. It provides a powerful insight into many of the processes that have created the modern landscape and shows how historic features continue to influence the present.
CARVED STONES AND MASONRY STRUCTURES

The conservation of these monuments requires more specialist types of technical input. In the first instance, advice can be sought from Historic Scotland, though it may be necessary to employ an architect with experience in such work. It should be borne in mind that archaeological evidence is likely to survive beneath the floors and within the fabric of historic standing buildings in both town and countryside.

Vegetation growth poses a threat to many upstanding masonry monuments. Control and removal of vegetation will help to limit structural damage.

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VISITORS

Scheduling gives no public rights of access and Historic Scotland does not promote access to scheduled monuments in private ownership. However, it does not change the wide-ranging provisions for public access to land, and many people enjoy visiting monuments of all kinds.

- Visitors can accidentally damage monuments, for example, by wearing footpaths across sensitive features, lighting fires, or simply by not being aware of the presence and importance of a site. Any potential adverse impact should be assessed before visitors are actively encouraged to visit a site.
- The Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP), administered by the Scottish Government, includes an option for providing improved or new public outdoor access opportunities, which could include provision of access to monuments.

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Metal detecting on scheduled monuments without the prior written consent of the Scottish Ministers is illegal because of the disturbance it causes. In general, metal detecting on archaeological sites should be discouraged. Finds always have greater significance in an undisturbed context and in many cases will lose their archaeological value if dug up and removed from a site. Historic Scotland can issue stop notices to prevent metal detecting and other harmful activities on scheduled monuments.

Finds

All objects found in Scotland whose rightful owner or heir cannot be identified belong to the Crown, not to the finder or landowner. This applies regardless of whether the find is a silver hoard or a piece of pottery, and regardless of how it was originally deposited or lost. When the Crown claims a find, the finder is rewarded with its full market value and it is allocated to an approved museum or museum service. Any finds should therefore be left undisturbed and reported to your local council archaeology service or local museum. Material found on a coastal beach or foreshore may be defined as “wreck” and should be reported to the Receiver of Wreck.

When an Orkney farmer found this strange object on the beach at Scar in Sanday, he thought it was part of a car battery. Archaeologists recognised it as a lead weight from a Viking boat burial which was being swept away by the sea. Excavations led to the discovery of one of the richest and most intriguing pagan Viking burials in Britain. The finds were claimed as Treasure Trove.

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LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Many sites and buildings are scheduled (legally protected) under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

- Anyone wanting to carry out work on a scheduled monument must first contact Historic Scotland to obtain advice, since many types of works require prior consent, including some of the positive actions outlined above – for example, tree felling, scrub removal and bracken control.

- Please note that damaging or destroying a scheduled monument, or carrying out prohibited work on a scheduled monument without consent, is a criminal offence punishable by fines of up to £50,000.

- If you are a land manager and receive Single Farm Payment, or you receive agri-environment payments or woodland grants through the Scotland Rural Development Programme, there may be conditions attached to these payments relating to the protection of archaeological features on your land. You should check the conditions attached to your payments for more information.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Historic Scotland’s monument wardens and heritage management staff can offer free advice on how best to manage scheduled monuments, as well as guidance on the financial assistance which may be available for their management. In exceptional circumstances they may also be able to help with advice on the management of unscheduled monuments.

Management Agreements between Historic Scotland and owners or occupiers can make financial provision towards any capital costs required for improving the condition of a site over an agreed period (usually 5 years), and an annual payment based on the size of the area being managed.

Ancient Monument Grants may be available towards one-off works to protect a site, such as fencing. In these cases, consideration always needs to be given to the longer-term management of the site once such works have taken place.

If you are interested in applying for a Historic Scotland grant or management agreement, please send an email or write to us with details of the site(s) concerned, specifying the management changes proposed.

Funding may be available for the management of archaeological sites through schemes operating under the Scotland Rural Development Programme. Check the SRDP website or consult your Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate (SGRPID) area office for further information.

Voluntary sector or local community groups may be able to help owners and others manage the monuments on their land, for example, by clearing invasive vegetation. Such groups are also eligible to apply for Historic Scotland grants to carry out management works (with the owner’s agreement). This can be a great help when owners are not themselves able to arrange management work. For example, Archaeology Scotland administers the Adopt-a-Monument Scheme whereby local groups, in partnership with owners, are encouraged to take an active role in managing monuments in their area.
ONLINE RESOURCES AND PUBLICATIONS


Historic Scotland’s website for information about scheduled monuments at: [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/heritage/searchmonuments.htm](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/heritage/searchmonuments.htm)

You can also search, view and download maps and information on scheduled monuments, including PDF versions of the legal documents, on Historic Scotland’s data website: [data.historic-scotland.gov.uk](http://data.historic-scotland.gov.uk)

**Historic Land-Use Assessment data** is available through HLAmap at [http://hla.rcahms.gov.uk/](http://hla.rcahms.gov.uk/)

**The Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes** is at: [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/gardens](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/gardens)

**The Inventory of Historic Battlefields** is at: [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/battlefields](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/battlefields)

The location of all known sites and monuments (scheduled and unscheduled), and protected historic landscapes, is shown on PASTMAP at [www.pastmap.org.uk](http://www.pastmap.org.uk)

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) holds Scotland’s national collection relating to the historic environment. Information is available online via the Canmore database at: [www.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk), which contains details of some 270,000 archaeological sites, monuments, buildings and maritime sites in Scotland, and an index to the collections. You can search for information by name, location, site type or collection, or by using the Canmore mapping service.

Most local authorities in Scotland maintain an Historic Environment Record (or a Sites and Monuments Record) containing information on all the known archaeological and historic features in their area. For a complete list of council archaeology services, see: [www.archaeologyscotland.org.uk/?q=node/214](http://www.archaeologyscotland.org.uk/?q=node/214); also available on the RCAHMS website: [www.rcahms.gov.uk/links](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk/links).

For advice on managing archaeological and historic sites, see Archaeology Scotland’s web page at: [www.archaeologyscotland.org.uk/index.php?q=node/51](http://www.archaeologyscotland.org.uk/index.php?q=node/51). This includes links to other online guidance such as Archaeology Scotland’s Archaeology and Rural Landuse Advice Notes and HELM’s Managing Earthwork Monuments.

Information on **historic wrecks and marine archaeology** can be obtained from Historic Scotland’s website:  
**www.historic-scotland.gov.uk**

**Free booklets** and downloads from Historic Scotland include:

- Scheduled Monuments: A Guide for Owners, Occupiers and Managers
- Archaeology on Farm and Croft
- The Control of Vegetation on Scheduled Monuments and Other Archaeological Sites
- Metal Detecting, Yes or No? Metal Detecting, Scheduled Monuments and the Law
- The Carved Stones of Scotland: A Guide to Helping in their Protection
- The Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland: A Guide for Owners, Occupiers and Managers

**Technical Advice Notes** (TANs) on the management and conservation of monuments are available for purchase from Historic Scotland, including:

- TAN 16: Burrowing Animals and Archaeology; and
- TAN 17: Bracken and Archaeology

To obtain copies, tel: 0131 668 8638 or email: hs.cgpublications@scotland.gsi.gov.uk.

For information and advice on **access** in Scotland, visit: **www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/**
CONTACTS AND LINKS TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Historic Scotland
For advice on scheduled monuments, details of grants, copies of the booklets mentioned above, or further copies of this booklet, contact:
Historic Scotland, Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH
Tel: 0131 668 8716
Email: hs.schedulingteam@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS)
RCAHMS is the national body for the survey and recording of architectural and archaeological monuments of all periods in Scotland, and provides the national database of archaeological sites and monuments, working closely with council archaeology services. RCAHMS does not give advice on the preservation and management of sites or monuments – that should be sought from council archaeology services or Historic Scotland. The Commission welcomes visitors to its collections. No appointment is necessary, but it is advisable to telephone in advance:
RCAHMS, John Sinclair House, 16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 9NX
Tel: 0131 662 1456; Fax: 0131 662 1477/1499
www.rcahms.gov.uk

Council Archaeology Services
Contact your local council archaeologist or archaeology service (often based in the planning authority) for advice on development control matters or on managing unscheduled monuments. See www.archaeologyscotland.org.uk/?q=node/214 for a complete list of council archaeology services

Archaeology Scotland
Coordinates and manages the Adopt-a-Monument scheme, and its Rural Land-use Adviser works with farming and crofting communities, agricultural advisers, land managers and others to improve the management and understanding of archaeology in the rural context.
Tel: 0845 872 3333
Email: info@archaeologyscotland.org.uk
www.archaeologyscotland.org.uk

Treasure Trove Unit
To report finds or for further information on the law on Treasure Trove and finds reporting:
Tel: 0131 247 4355
Email: info@treasuretrovescotland.co.uk
www.treasuretrovescotland.co.uk/
Volunteers from Scottish Conservation Projects Trust clear dense vegetation from a prehistoric fort. A management agreement with the owner will secure the longer term management of the site.

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