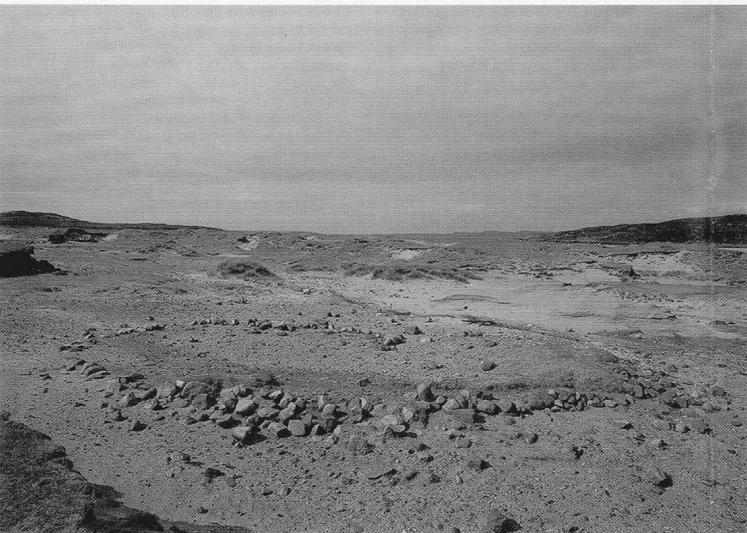




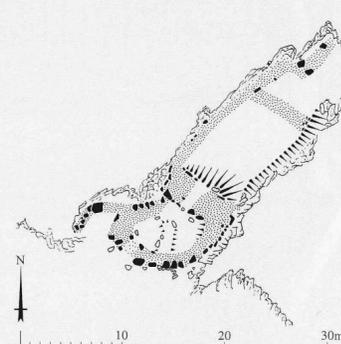
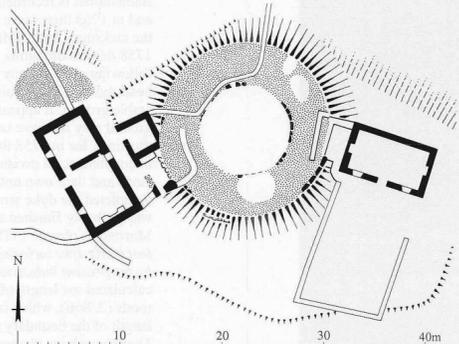
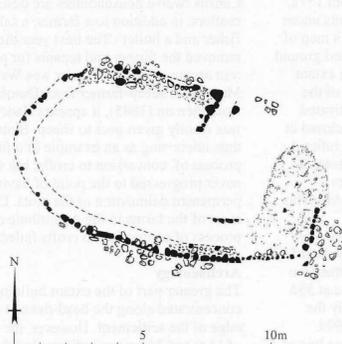
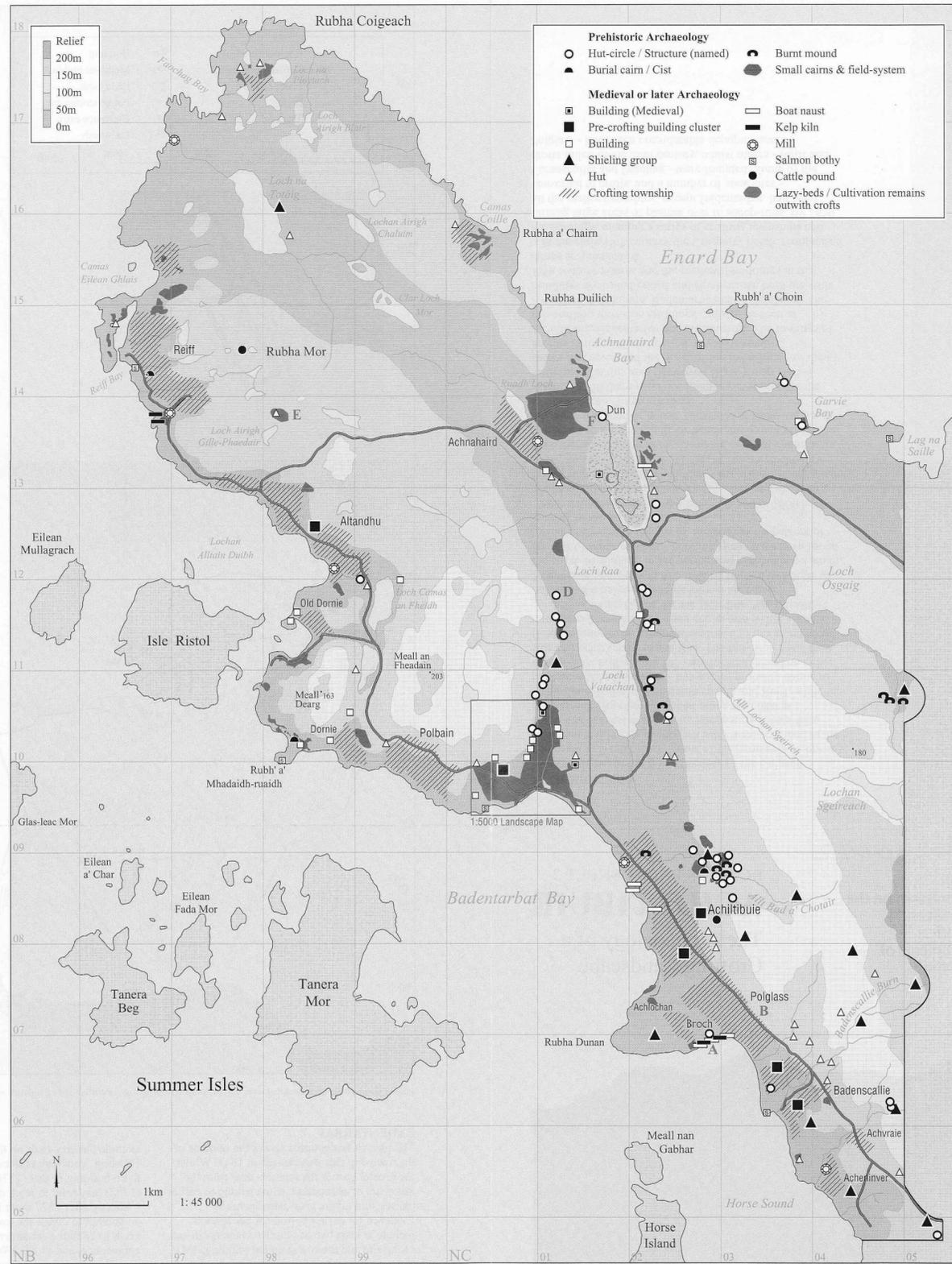
Broch, Loch Poll an Dunain, Polglass, Achiltibuie (A on the map): the massive wall of the broch has been quarried to provide stone to build a 19th-century farmstead.



Crofts, Polglass, Achiltibuie (B on the map): the abandoned mid-19th century croft houses are set within fenced arable plots running downslope towards the reed-beds in Loch Poll an Dunain (the reeds would have been suitable for thatching). The higher ground behind the crofts provided pasture for cattle and sheep.

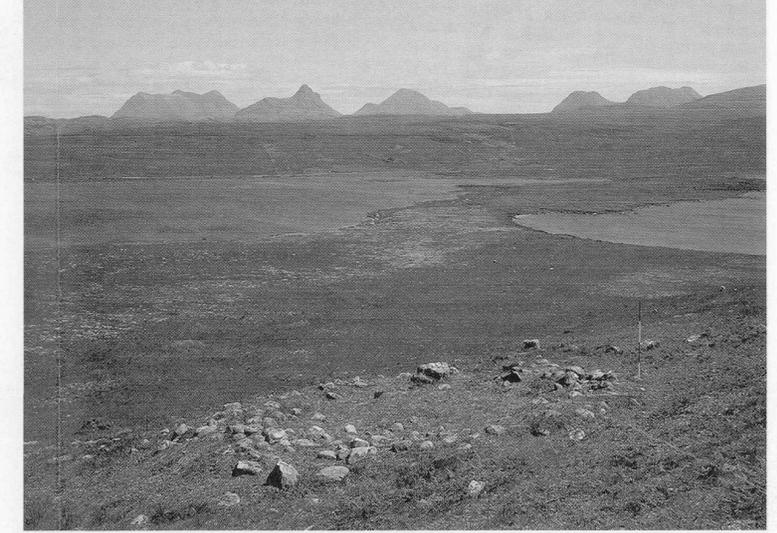


Norse house, Achnahaird (C on the map): wind erosion in the sand-dunes has revealed the footings of what is probably a Norse house. It is one of a group of buildings currently being exposed in these dunes.



ACHILTIBUIE

The Archaeology of a Crofting Landscape



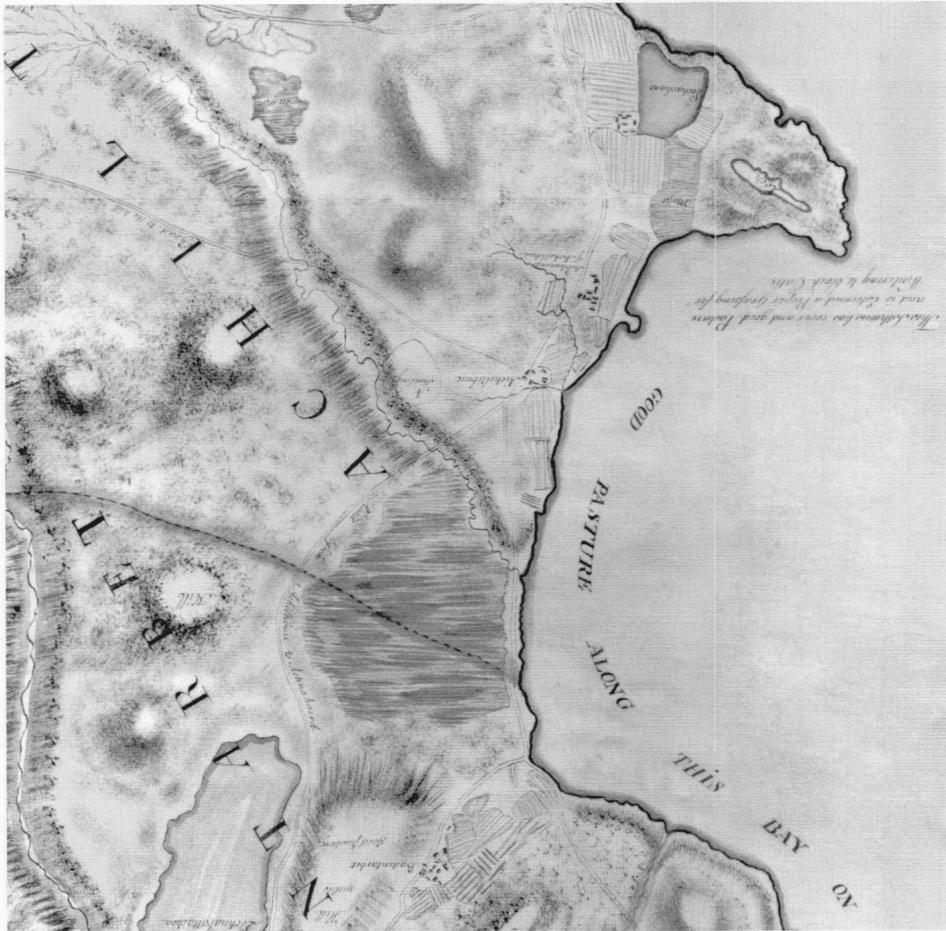
Hut-circle, Loch Ra (D on the map): this hut-circle (a prehistoric farmstead) lies on a terrace above the loch and looks E towards Stac Pollaigh. On the opposite side of the loch there is a former shieling ground and a deserted 19th century farmstead.



Lazy-beds, Loch Airigh Gille-Phaedair (E on the map): this field of lazy-beds (spade-dug cultivation rigs) is depicted on May's map of 1758 as a shieling ground.



Dun, Achnahaird (F on the map): the Iron Age dun (a small fort) occupies a rocky promontory at the SE end of a sandy beach.



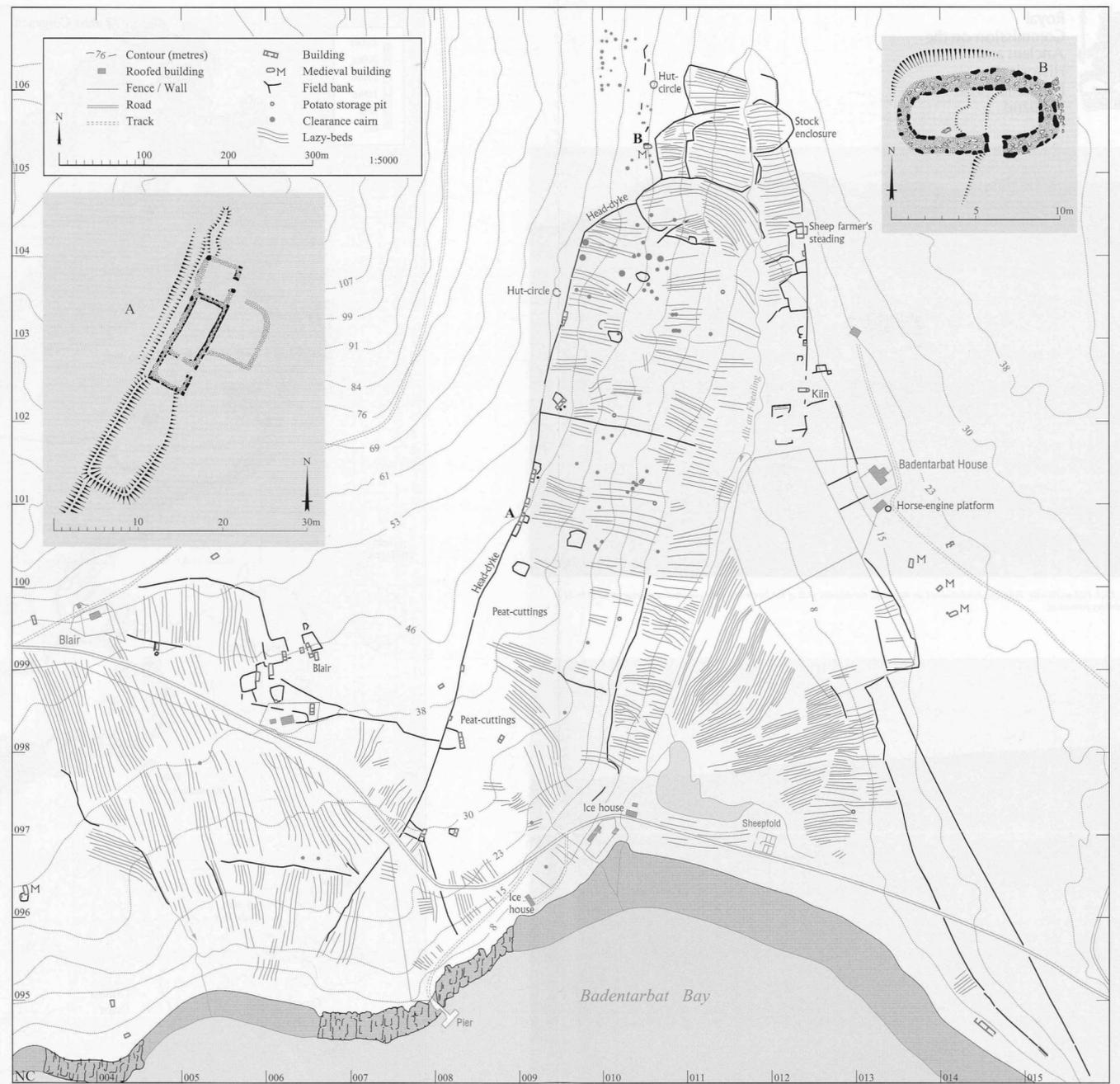
INTRODUCTION

Achiltibuie lies at the NW extremity of the Colquhoun peninsula in West Ross. Most of the peninsula comprises mountain and bog, with modern settlement confined to the coast. The earliest settlement occupation comes from three Bronze Age burials found along the coast at Achiltibuie, Rubh a' Mhadaidh-ruadh and Keitt, while the first recorded settlements - hut-circles probably dating to the early 1st millennium BC - are located inland on either side of Lochs Vatachan and Raa. The hut-circles and their field-systems lie on ground abandoned to moorland in the mid 1st millennium BC, when cooler and wetter climatic conditions set in. Hence, by the later Iron Age (300BC-AD300), the only settlements known are a broch at Achiltibuie and a dun at Achnahard, both of which lie on the coast. In addition to the permanent settlements, a small number of burnt mounds - cooking sites - have been found inland, and point to the use of these areas for pasture or hunting in the prehistoric period.

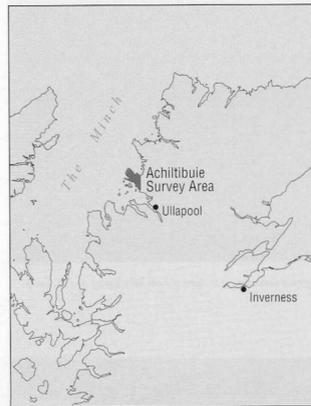
Few settlement sites dating from AD 500 to 1500 have been identified in mainland Scotland, but, at Achnahard, the movement of sand in the dunes has revealed the remains of two medieval buildings. The more readily visible is a boat-shaped building of faced-rubble, with an entrance on one side and a stone plinth, or bench, built on both sides of the interior. A similar house, excavated at Drimore, South Uist, produced Norse artefacts.

Before 1550 there is no documentary evidence for the settlements in this area. However, Blair's map (1654) shows that several of the pre-crofting townships had their origins in the medieval period, i.e. Badenscallie, Achiltibuie, Badenarbat and Achnahard. The footings of pre-crofting township buildings can still be seen at Achiltibuie, Achiltibuie, Badenarbat and Achnahard. The buildings are round-ended and smaller than both the 18th/19th century houses and the medieval buildings in the dunes at Achnahard.

In the early 19th century the Cromarty Estate reorganised the holdings, creating a series of crofting townships and turning large areas of pasture over to sheep-runs. By 1850 all the earlier townships, except Badenarbat, had been converted to crofts, and a number of new sites - Camascolle and Fochang - were founded. Some of the crofts failed in the 20th century, whilst others - Keitt and Polglass - have seen considerable depopulation.



Plan of the township of Badenarbat with, top left, an early 19th century farmstead (A on plan) and, top right, an earlier building (B on plan). Based on the OS 1:10,000 map, reproduced with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.



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Further information about the sites illustrated in this broadsheet is available from the NMRS.

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Front cover: Johnny Ali MacKenzie, crofter-Polbain, with a cas chrom (foot plough) about 1955 (photograph courtesy of Mr R F Macleod).



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ACHILTIBUIE
The Archaeology of a Crofting Landscape



BADENTARBAT

The plan of Badenarbat shows the remains of the township that was cleared in 1842. Whilst the greater part of the features date from the last years of occupation, some belong to earlier phases, and others post-date clearance. Evidence for earlier periods of occupation include at least two hut-circles at the north end of the site and the round-ended buildings (M) around the fringes of the township.

History

Badentarbat is recorded as a farm from 1572, and in 1763 there were four sub-tenants under the tacksman Angus MacAulay. May's map of 1758 depicts the limits of the cultivated ground following quite closely the line of the extant head-dyke, at least around the N end of the arable ground. It appears that the cultivated ground may not have been wholly enclosed at this time, for in 1758 the sub-tenants refused to countenance a division of the tacksman's lands and their own until the tacksman completed the dyke around the township. This was probably finished soon after, as Morrison's plan of 1775 depicts 'a stone and feal (turf) dyke inclosing the arable and made by the present industrious tenants'. Morrison calculated the length of the head-dyke at 536 rods (2.7km), which is approximately the length of the boundary surveyed in 1994. There have been changes to the precise line of the dyke since Morrison's survey, most notably on the NE, where Morrison's dyke appears to

exclude the lazy-beds on the E of the Allt an Fhealing. Vouchers granted in lieu of rent for dyke-building in feal (1776-80) and stone (1782) may refer to work on this dyke.

Shortly after 1827 there is some indication of an attempt to divide the township into crofts. First, in 1829 the settlement of Blair makes its appearance, and in 1833 William Mackenzie is described as a sheepfarmer, with the implication that a division between his and the tenants' lands had been achieved. In the 1841 Census twelve householders are described as crofters, in addition to a farmer, a salmon-fisher and a boiler. The next year the factor removed the farmer and tenants for persistent rent arrears. The new farmer was Walter Mundell, a sheep-farmer from Dumfries, and from then on (1845), it appears Badenarbat was wholly given over to sheep. Badenarbat is thus interesting as an example of a farm in the process of conversion to crofts, but which never progressed to the point of having a permanent delineation of the plots. Unlike most of the farms in the Achiltibuie area, the process of conversion to crofts failed.

Archaeology

The greater part of the extant buildings are concentrated along the head-dyke at the W edge of the settlement. However, the surveys of May and Morrison indicate that the settlement focus, at least in the third quarter of the 18th century, was on the E side of the

valley, in the area around the 19th century Badenarbat House and the improved grazings to the SW, but today there is very little visible evidence for such settlement.

The buildings can be divided into two groups. Around the fringes of the township there are four or five buildings of subrectangular or round-ended plan with either stone or turf footings, which may either be medieval or at least pre-19th century in date. The other buildings are rectangular, with faced-rubble walls, about 0.65m thick. The twelve larger buildings are likely to have been dwellings (matching the number of crofters recorded in 1841), and, apart from the cluster at Blair, they are well spaced along the W edge of the township. They are divided into two or three compartments and, in all but two examples, the building appears to have been entered through the smaller compartment. At least one building has a byre drain in the smaller compartment, running out through the entrance. Three buildings have an outshot at one end and all but two have a small yard or enclosure attached to one side. In addition, there are low mounds, probably middens, visible outside two of the buildings. Several garden enclosures are scattered amongst the lazy-beds, and there are also storage pits, possibly for potatoes.

In all, about 35ha of ground are enclosed by turf and stone dykes, and there are an additional 12ha in the triangular area

associated with Blair. There are clearly several phases of enclosure involved, particularly at the north end of the township where there seem to have been several episodes of expansion and infilling. Other banks within the main head-dyke hint at a subdivision of the township, perhaps relating to the reorganisation of the 1820s. It may be that a D-shaped enclosure on the E side of the burn at the north end, which contains well-preserved lazy-beds, was originally constructed as a stock enclosure, as the enclosing dyke has a vertical stone face on the inside, suggesting that enclosure, not enclosure, was the original aim.



Badentarbat House: horse-engine platform with the remains of the drive mechanism still in place.