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CANMORE

NATIONAL RECORD OF THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

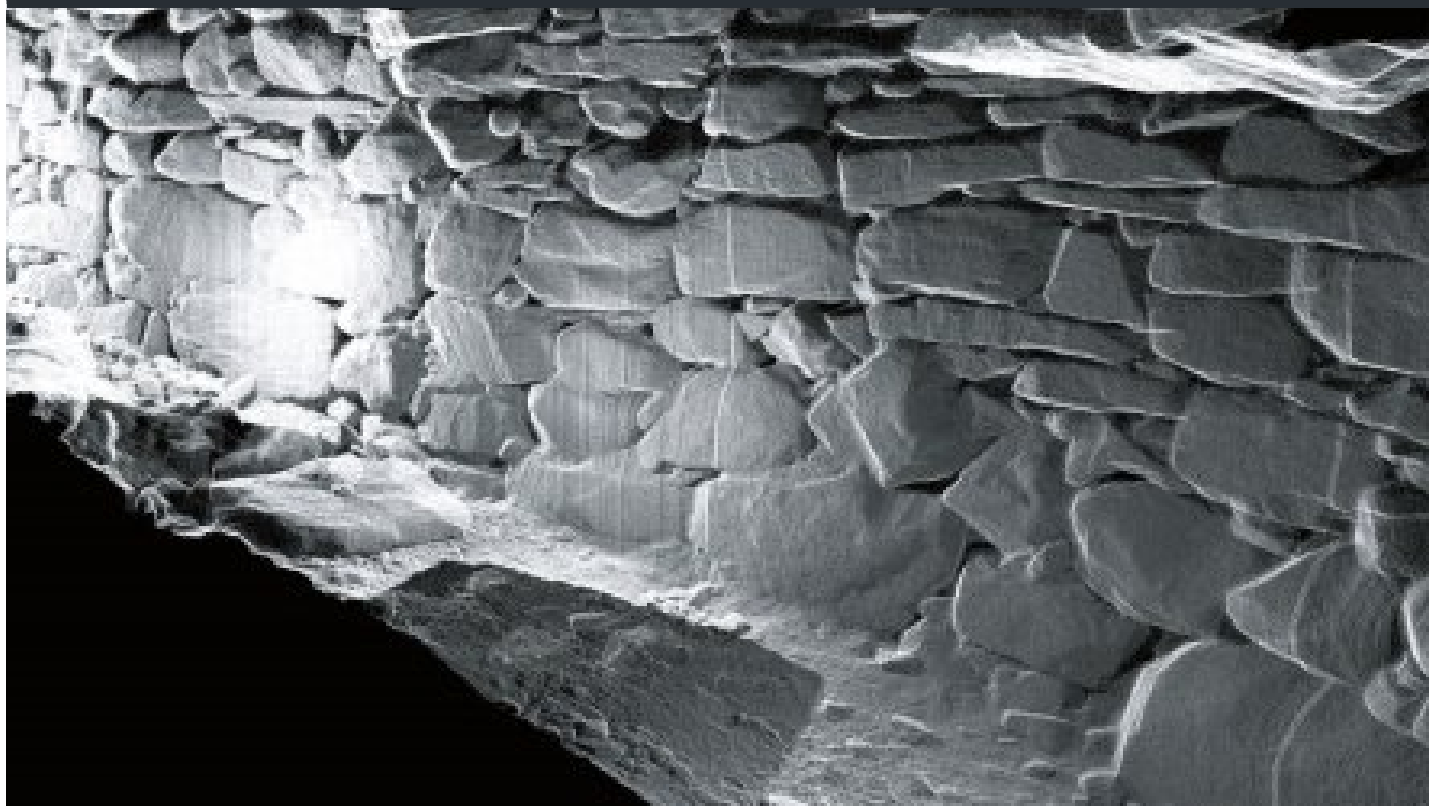


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Cracknie Souterrain - Sutherland, Highland





Archaeological Measured Survey

A souterrain is an underground stone-lined cellar, usually dating from the Iron Age. The word comes from the French 'sous terrain', which means 'underground'. The souterrain at Cracknie is a particularly good example. It leads from a narrow entrance on the surface, gently sloping downwards to reach a small chamber at its end. It was probably associated with a roundhouse built on the ground surface above and could have been used to store food (most likely meat and cheese), or as a secret refuge or even a prison for slaves.

The entrance is marked by a small hollow and a number of large stones, including one fallen cap stone. The full length of the souterrain is 13.2m and it measures about 1.3m in height and about 0.8m in width. The souterrain is curved on plan – as is usual for such sites – with a distinct sub-circular chamber at its end. The walls are carefully built without mortar and it is roofed with large slabs overlapping each other.

The souterrain was recorded by terrestrial laser scanning and the results – illustrating the well preserved walls and roof lintels – are displayed as orthographic views and line drawn elevations. The baseline measured survey was supported by a detailed condition statement and an assessment of cultural significance, providing both an enhanced historic environment record and placing the site within its regional context.

Souterrains are some of Scotland's most mysterious structures. They are intimate and domestic, their scale and simplicity creating a very personal connection to the past. You wonder who built it and why? But you are also an intruder, disturbing the silence and chill darkness. You are under someone's house...





An asset management approach

Forestry Commission Scotland's historic environment programme includes a wide range of sustainable conservation management, from path repair on ancient duns and hillforts to masonry consolidation of 18th century military bridges. But in order to protect the many archaeological sites, historic structures and cultural landscapes across Scotland's national forest estate, we must first identify and assess their surviving remains to inform conservation and management.

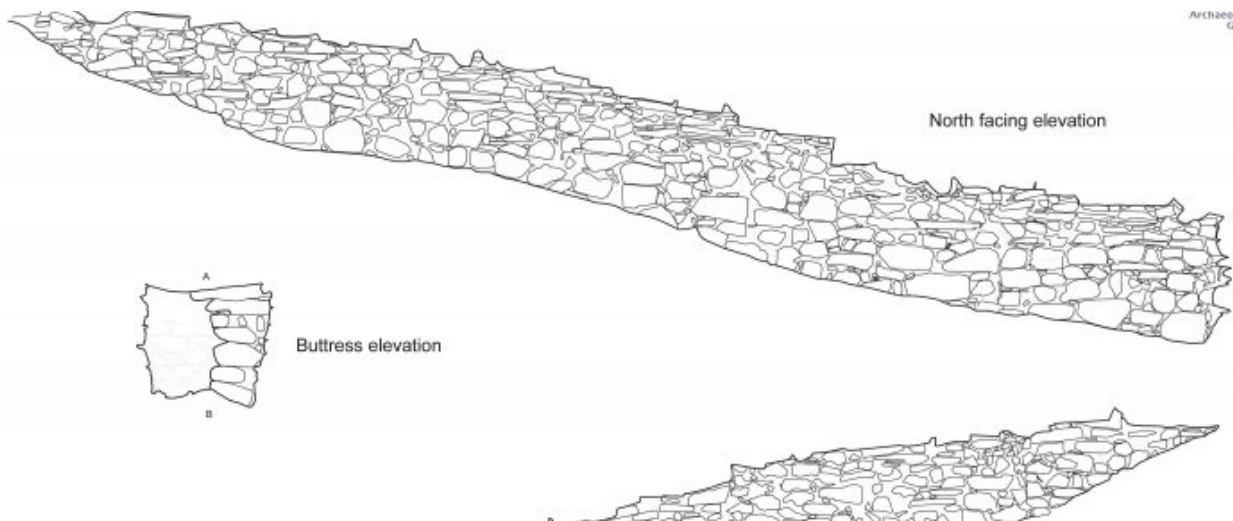
An asset management approach requires a baseline knowledge of the resource, including an overall asset register, thematic and site-based surveys, individual site-based

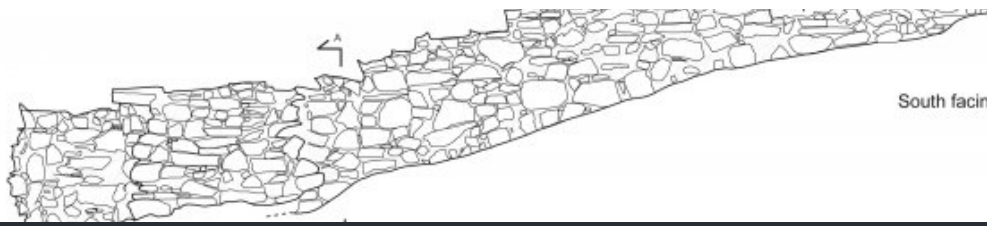
condition monitoring and an appreciation of the wider context. Identifying the most significant aspects of the historic environment in any given area is important, as is undertaking archaeological measured survey in advance of conservation management projects. Cracknie souterrain is a designated asset (a scheduled monument) and a particularly well preserved example of an important and unusual site type.

The detailed archaeological measured survey and associated photographic recording will help us to both better understand the site and to monitor its condition. This archaeological recording is the bread and butter of the asset management approach, informing subsequent conservation management and repair. However, the creative use of archaeological measured survey can also form an important element of cultural heritage interpretation. By combining new archaeological survey techniques with an aesthetic illustrative methodology, we can produce detailed site records alongside innovative and spectacular illustrations, encouraging greater engagement and understanding.

The Very Archaeological Cut Out of Cracknie Souterrain is part of a series created to explore the potential of archaeological measured survey in model making, promotion and outreach. Model making can be a great way to engage children and adults with the physical scale of a site, both as it survives today and how it may have looked like in the past. It may be fiddly to build, but it is strangely satisfying to peer down the tiny aperture of the model of Cracknie souterrain and see its drystone walls and roof lintels disappearing into the dark!

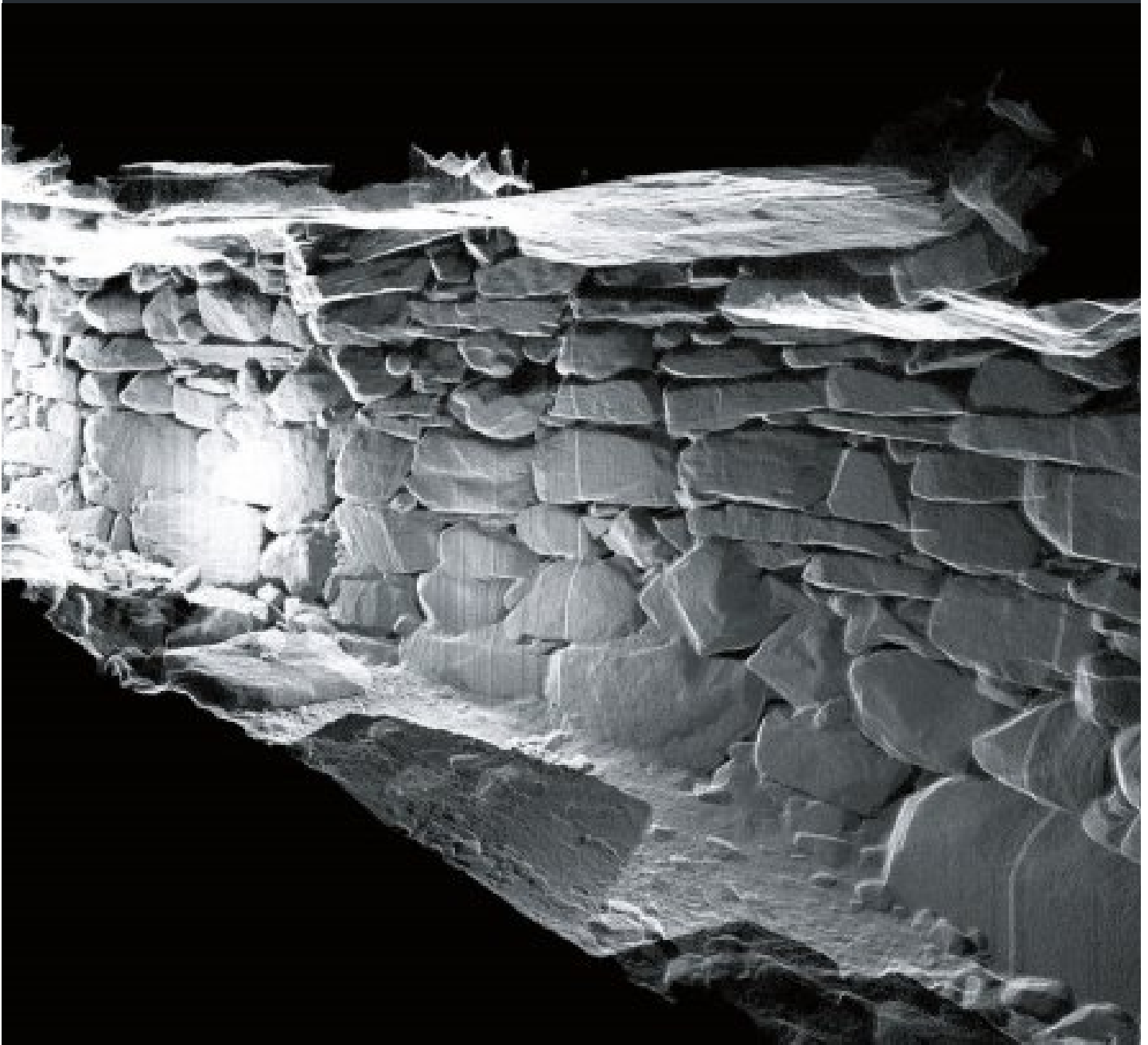
Matthew Ritchie - Archaeologist, Forestry Commission Scotland





South facing elevation

<https://canmore.org.uk/site/5765/cracknie>
<http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/managing/work-on-scotlands-national-forest-estate/conservation/archaeology/investigation/cracknie-souterrain>
<http://her.highland.gov.uk/SingleResult.aspx?uid=MHG12621>



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