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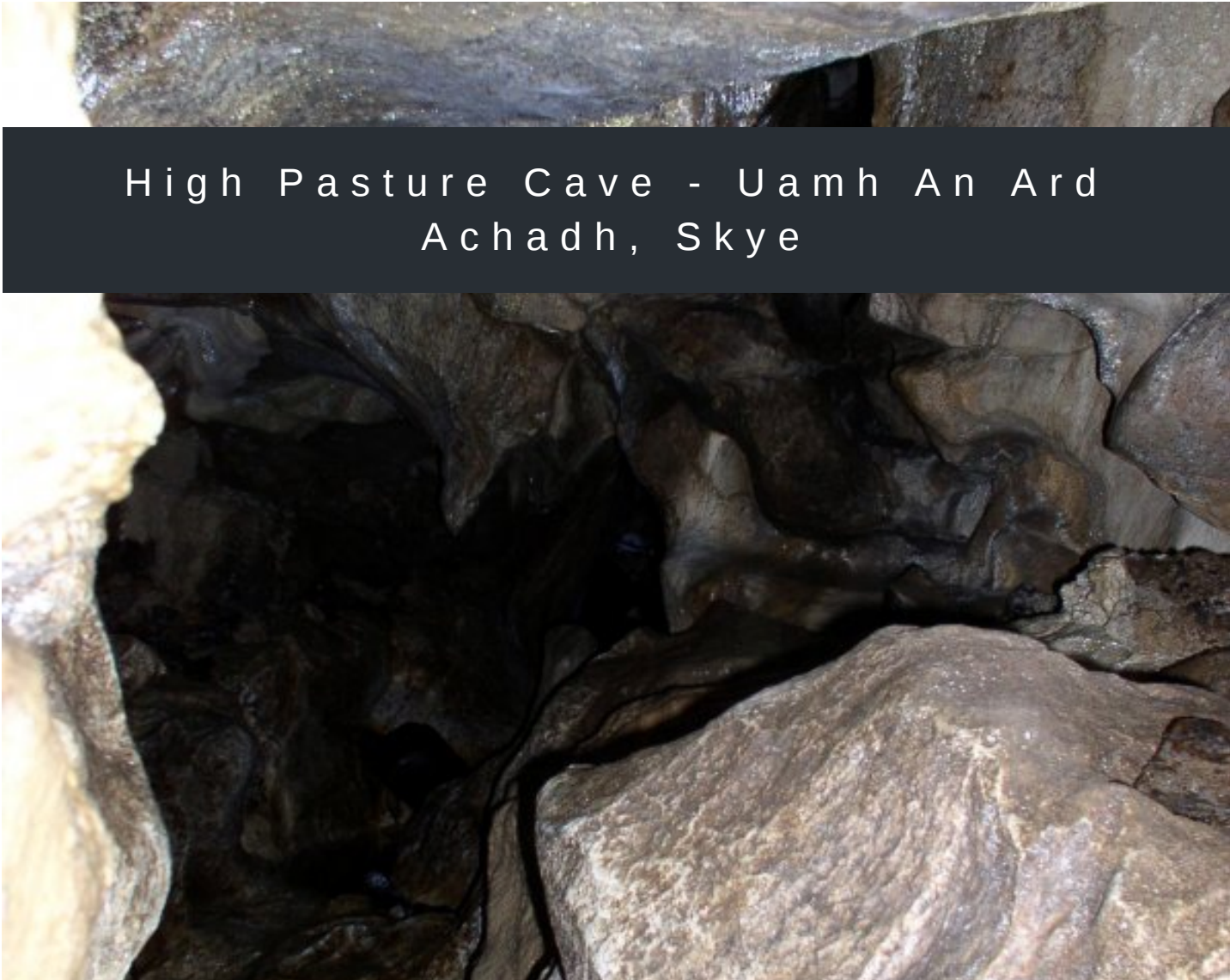
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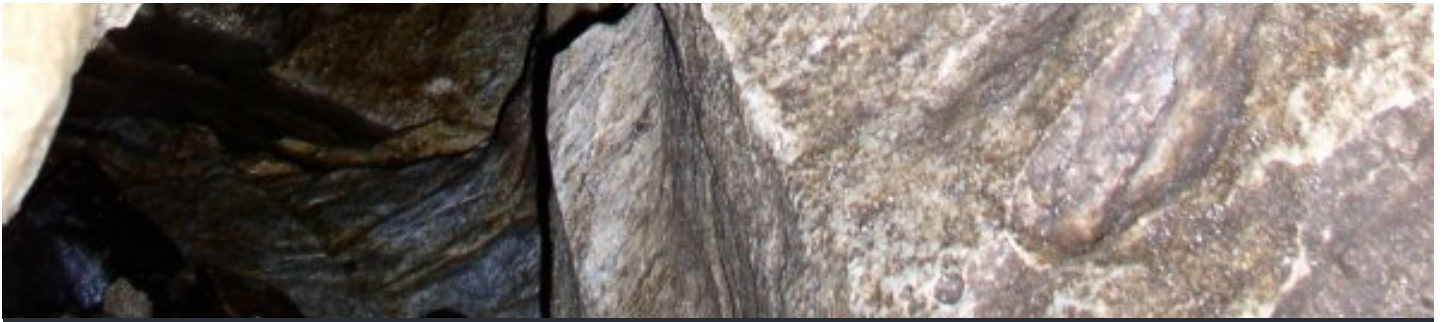
## Archaeology InSites



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High Pasture Cave - Uamh An Ard  
Achadh, Skye



## What Lies Beneath

*High Pasture Cave is situated on the Isle of Skye 1.5km south east of Torrin. It is the second longest cave complex on Skye and contains 320m of accessible passages. The cave is formed from the Cambrian Durness limestone that outcrops in the area, and shaped by volcanic activity from the central Red Cuillin complex. Caves are sites of endless fascination and trepidation for people. They were some of the earliest sites to be explored by antiquarians. These natural structures, often modified by human hands, are fixed points in the landscape and so are much more likely to endure than archaeological remains on the surface. However, archaeological remains in caves are far from static. Animals, natural processes such as the movement of rainwater and other human visitors to the cave can all have an effect on the stability of the interior, and it was the latter which highlighted the significance of this site. The material which Steven Birch came across in 2002 included animal bone, fire-cracked pebbles, charcoal and pottery, strongly hinting at an important archaeological site.*

*Since the discovery, fieldwork has included a survey of the cave passages and investigation of surface features, including a geophysical survey, in addition to excavation. Excavations were undertaken by Steven Birch and Martin Wildgoose with help from students, local archaeologists and volunteers and have now been completed. Throughout the investigations, the local community supported and assisted the archaeologists. The impending final publication of the project will not only illuminate this unique multi period site, but also locate it with its broader landscape context.*



## A Special Place

*High Pasture Cave was likely a known waypoint for many years before evidence was left at the cave which would attest to its occupation. It was probably used as a shelter or stopping place by hunter gatherers, and among the artefacts which attest to its early occupation are a leaf shaped arrowhead, a microlith and a polished stone axe. People were clearly present here in the Mesolithic and Neolithic, although why and for how long, we cannot say.*

*In the early Bronze Age, a small recumbent standing stone and a kerb were installed close to the site. Ard marks, evidence of ancient ploughing, were found below the stone setting. Pits and post holes close to the standing stone indicate the presence of a shelter, which may be the earliest building to be constructed on the site. Within the cave, sherds from 10 vessels were found at the darkened northern end of Bone Passage. Bone Passage remained the focus of activity within the cave until its 'closure' at around 100BC.*

*The majority of activity on the site dates to the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age. Access into the cave began to be modified and elaborated at this time. The precinct in front of the cave saw the construction of several hearths and working surfaces. Paved walkways were installed and three successive stairwells provided access into the cave. Within the cave, there is evidence of the deliberate and patterned placing of objects, or 'structured deposition', dating to the 9th century BC. These votive deposits were at their most concentrated at the point where the paved walkway meets the interior of the cave.*

*Later phases within the cave have been dated to the 4th-2nd centuries BC, and this includes domestic refuse and lots of burnt material. The number and variety of small finds deposited increased at this time and appear to be more widespread within the cave. A large faunal assemblage points to the use of the site for feasting, and animal and plant remains were also deposited as offerings. Metalworking was also clearly important here, and slag and crucibles are attested among the finds from the site. The importance of fire at the site manifested itself as a massive burnt mound which accumulated at the entrance to the cave. Evidence for feasting activities in front of the cave make it clear that this was an important meeting place.*

*The site was ritually closed around 100 calBC. It was backfilled with midden and human and animal remains were deposited on top of the stairwell. Clearly this was no ordinary occupation site. Access to the cave appears to have become more defined and controlled. A processional entrance appears to have lead up to the site. Successive walls were erected to delineate and enclose the precinct. Could this be a type of shrine, a special passage leading into the earth which was set apart from normal life? Perhaps a mysterious gateway into another world? We may never be certain, but it is truly a fascinating window into prehistoric life on Skye. Publication of the investigations is expected in Summer 2017.*

Dr Kirsty Owen, with invaluable additions by Dr Lisa Brown, Archaeology and World Heritage Team





<https://canmore.org.uk/site/273776/skye-uamh-an-ard-achadh>  
<http://www.pasthorizonspr.com/index.php/archives/03/2008/excavations-at-high-pasture-cave>  
<http://www.high-pasture-cave.org/index.php/home/>



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