

EASDALE GENERAL

'It presents an unattractive appearance, but it is highly interesting for its valuable slate quarries.'
 Frances Groome, Gazetteer, 1884

The island of Easdale, along with the other 'slate islands', forms part of the Argyll seaboard in the Sound of Lorn, south of Oban on Scotland's west coast. Collectively the area was referred to as Easdale. Geologically, the area is referred to as the 'Easdale Slate belt'. Easdale covers some 25 hectares with the highest point at 38.0m. Its major quarries are below sea level and, apart from two, are now flooded. It was part of the extensive Breadalbane Estates. For many years prior to systematic commercial exploitation, slate was quarried and exported to other parts of the Breadalbane estates and elsewhere as roofing, hearths and gravestones.

QUARRIES

Large scale, concentrated exploitation of the Easdale slate belt began in earnest in the mid-18th century by the landowner, the 2nd Earl of Breadalbane. Slate production reached its height in the 1860s. Commercial quarrying on Easdale (and the other islands) had ceased by the First World War (1914) with the bankruptcy of the Easdale Slate Quarries Company in 1911. The slate production of Argyll found it difficult to compete with the Welsh slate industry. Today, there are no quarries in Scotland producing roofing slate. There is also evidence of early shoreline quarrying which would have predated and partially continued when the deeper quarries were dug inland during the latter 18th century. Eighteen areas of quarrying were identified during fieldwork. Some are known to have existed in the 18th century, others only appear on maps with little information known other than they were abandoned or closed by a certain date. Others were reopened and reused when the construction industry picked up again and roof tiles were in demand.

TIPPING

As you make your way around Easdale Island, the main characteristic of it is the slate waste underfoot and in waste heaps. This is because a large percentage of the extracted in slate quarrying cannot be sold. The constant tipping and re-tipping of waste means that any subtle remains of the quarries in the landscape have been lost. Wastage could well have been over 85% depending on the geology and the extraction and processing methods used. There was also a shortage of space in which to put the waste. The slate waste would have been either removed or heaped behind the quarry gang as they advanced forward.

INTERNAL TRANSPORT

Easdale slate quarrying had an integrated (if small scale) transport network to move slates and waste around the island. It had a harbour, cart pathways which later developed into temporary and permanent tramways using horses and wagons, tramways in the quarries themselves, as well as later buildings accommodating small locomotives from the 1860s on. Portable steam operated cranes on rails would also have been in use to lift the quarried slate out of quarries and onto wagons in the 19th century and into the early 20th century.

GARDEN ENCLOSURES

The garden enclosures on Easdale were created by the inhabitants to enable the growing of food from the 18th century on. All are built of slate waste. Food supplies would have arrived on the island by boat, but the time it took for boats to reach Easdale from Glasgow (the nearest large port) meant that fresh food was a rarity and so vegetables were grown in the enclosures to protect them from the salt air and storms. The soil from the enclosures is said to have come from Ireland as ballast on the return journeys of slate cargo boats.

17400

17300

17200

17100

17000

16900

16800

Aerial view of Windmill Quarry, Hill Quarry and original tramway bed and shoreline quarrying

Aerial view showing north workings features and quarries

Aerial view showing An Toll Mar Luaty and tipping

Aerial view of westerly quarries

Aerial view from north east

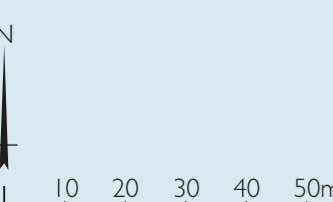
Aerial view of Fang and An Lub Chlear quarries

Aerial view of south shoreline showing later slate waste tipping

Aerial view of south coastal quarries with the flooded Fang Quarry beyond

Aerial view of coastal quarries from South

Aerial view from east showing east quarries and south east workings features



	Land
	Water feature - sea or quarry
	High water mark
	Pier edge
	Roofed building
	Quarrying edge
	Revetting
	Beach
	Path
	Outcrop
	Spoil heap
	Walls
	Tram track active 1871
	Tram track active 1898
	Tram track late 19thC - 1946
	Former quarries

PHASING

	Early coastal quarries
	Pre 1871
	Active 1871
	Defunct by 1898
	Active 1898
	Late 19thC - 1946
	Coastal erosion