Unfolding Argyll’s Archaeological Story: Research Framework Symposium, November 2015

The Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age in Argyll

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Part 1: archaeological work (from antiquarian activity onwards) undertaken to date

Note: for the purposes of this document, ‘Argyll’ covers the current Local Authority Area of Argyll & Bute.

Compared with some other parts of Scotland, the region is relatively well served in terms of archaeological survey, fieldwork and research, extending back at least as far as the early 20th century with Professor Thomas Bryce’s excavations of several chamber tombs on Arran and Bute in 1903 (Bryce 1904). Bryce’s work followed on from earlier, antiquarian investigations, principally by Canon Greenwell (who excavated the Clyde cairn at Nether Largie in Kilmartin Glen, among other sites in Argyll and elsewhere: Greenwell 1868; Kinnes and Longworth 1985). Significant contributions to survey, fieldwork and research during the third quarter of the 20th century were made by female archaeologists, namely Marion Campbell of Kilberry, who collated information about archaeological sites in mid-Argyll in the 1950s and early 1960s (Campbell and Sandeman 1962); Audrey Henshall, whose magisterial survey of the megalithic monuments – part of a nationwide survey of such monuments (Henshall 1972) – remains the key source of information on these sites; Dorothy Marshall, who excavated several Neolithic and Bronze Age sites on and near Bute, including the very important Early Neolithic shieling-like settlement at Auchategan in Glendaruel (Marshall 1978), and who worked tirelessly to promote and research the archaeology of Bute (e.g. Marshall 1978); and Elizabeth (Betty) Rennie of the Lorn Archaeological and Historical Society, who has undertaken field survey and excavation and has enthusiastically promoted the prehistoric archaeology of Lorn (e.g. Rennie 1993). The survey and excavation work undertaken by Graham Ritchie and his Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) colleagues in preparing their Inventories of on the sites and monuments of Argyll, principally during the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. RCAHMS 1988; cf. J.N.G. Ritchie 1977), not only synthesised the results of previous work but also very substantially added to our understanding of specific sites and types of monument, most notably the closed megalithic chamber and simple passage tomb of early Neolithic date at Achnacreebeag (J.N.G. Ritchie 1970); kerb (and other) cairns (J.N.G. Ritchie et al. 1975); and the Early Bronze Age settlement at Ardnave on Islay (J.N.G. Ritchie and Welfare 1983). Further influential research into
megalithic monuments in the region was undertaken by Jack Scott between the 1950s and 1970s: not only did he define Clyde cairns as a regionally-specific type of chamber tomb (J. Scott 1969a), he also undertook excavations at the Clyde cairns at Brackley (J. Scott 1955) and Beacharra (J. Scott 1964) and at the Temple Wood stone and timber circles in Kilmartin Glen (J. Scott 1989); work at the latter sites included an investigation of the circles’ possible archaeoastronomical orientation. Archaeoastronomy features prominently in the study of prehistoric sites in Argyll, with Alexander and Archibald Thom having made claims for various orientations and observational devices as a result of their investigations from the 1960s to the 1980s (e.g. Thom and Thom 1990); Gerald Hawkins discovering a fallen standing stone in Kilmartin Glen, and discussing the orientation of several monuments in the Glen (Hawkins 1983); and Clive Ruggles producing a measured critique of previous work both here and elsewhere in Britain, and demonstrating the lunar orientation of the short stone rows of western Scotland (Martlew and Ruggles 1996; Ruggles 1999). Interest in this aspect of prehistoric monuments in Argyll continues with Douglas Scott’s observations of solar and lunar orientations of monuments in Kilmartin Glen (D. Scott 2010) and elsewhere.

Much other survey, fieldwork and synthesis work has taken place in the region. Caves in Argyll have been investigated by Christopher Tolan-Smith, Clive Bonsall and the Lorn and District Archaeological Society (Tolan-Smith 2001; Bonsall et al. 2012; Connock 1985), with Bonsall et al. demonstrating that a shift in their use can be discerned during the early Neolithic period, when in this part of Scotland they began to be used for funerary purposes (Bonsall et al. 2012). Argyll’s rich and varied rock art has also received much attention, its location and meaning being explored in Richard Bradley’s Rhind lectures publication, Altering the Earth (Bradley 1993). More recently, excavations by Andrew Jones at Torbhlaren in Kilmichael Glen shed new light on the possible date of rock art, and experimentation there by Hugo Anderson-Whymark demonstrated how such designs had been created and how they would have appeared when new (Jones et al. 2011). The timber circles of Argyll have been considered as part of Kirsty Millican’s survey of prehistoric timber monuments in Scotland (Millican 2007); and locational (and other) aspects of Argyll chamber tombs were discussed as part of Shannon Fraser’s study of Neolithic monumentality in the west of Scotland (Fraser 2004). The prehistoric (and other) archaeology of Bute has recently been explored in depth in the Discovering Bute Landscape Partnership Scheme (Duffy 2013; see in particular Finlay 2013 and Sheridan 2013) – an initiative that included updating the sites and monuments records in a community co-production initiative by RCAHMS (Geddes and Hale 2010) – while a synthesis of the Neolithic to Bronze Age prehistory of Kilmartin Glen has been presented by the current author (Sheridan 2012a).

While there has not been as much developer-funded excavation as in some other parts of Scotland, several sites of key importance to our understanding of the periods in
question have been excavated over the last 40 years, either as rescue or research projects. The rescue excavations carried out from 1982 to 2005 in the gravel quarry at Upper Largie highlighted the wealth of non-megalithic prehistoric monuments in this part of Kilmartin Glen, with finds including an Early Neolithic post-built cursus, a timber ‘avenue’, a timber circle, a Continental (arguably Dutch)-style Beaker grave and an Early Bronze Age grave yielding a unique, Irish-and-Yorkshire style of Food Vessel (Cook et al. 2010; Sheridan 2008; 2012b). Just outside Argyll & Bute, but geographically integral to our narrative, Alison Haggarty’s excavations on Machrie Moor, Arran (Haggarty 1991), revealed that this complex of stone circles had been preceded by a Late Neolithic timber circle associated with Grooved Ware pottery – a rare find in this part of Scotland – and the current author was able to draw out the broader significance of these finds in terms of a southerly spread, from Orkney, of the use of this kind of circular monument and of Grooved Ware around the 30th century BC (Sheridan 2004a). Important information about prehistoric settlement and land use, particularly during the Bronze Age, was provided by Colin Burgess’ (and others’) excavation of an Early Bronze Age settlement at Kilellan on Islay (A. Ritchie 2005) and by John Barber’s excavations along a transect across part of Arran (Barber 1997). These latter revealed the attempts made by prehistoric farmers to deal with the issue of peat expansion during a second millennium climatic downturn. Most recently, Oliver Harris’ excavation of the Cladh Andreis Clyde cairn, Ardnamurchan (Harris et al. 2014) and Vicki Cummings’ excavation of a Clyde cairn at Blasthill on the Kintyre peninsula have produced some valuable new chronological data for this type of chamber tomb (Cummings and Robinson 2015), while the Forestry Commission recently commissioned a measured survey of the chamber tombs on its estates on Arran (http://www.scottishheritagehub.com/content/survey-arran).

In addition to the site- and area-based work mentioned above, there has been a considerable amount of research on the artefacts and human remains found in Argyll, some of it undertaken as part of more geographically-extensive corpora. Thus, for example, the small number of Early Neolithic axeheads of jadeitite found in Argyll (e.g. at Appin) have recently been analysed and published as part of a major international French-led research project, Projet JADE (Sheridan and Pailler 2012), while the similarly-rare, later Neolithic carved stone balls found in Argyll were listed in Dorothy Marshall’s nationwide corpus (Marshall 1977). Torben Ballin’s recent research on the use of Arran pitchstone (Ballin 2009) has documented the increase in its use and in the distribution of pitchstone artefacts during the Neolithic. The Beaker pottery of Argyll was covered in David Clarke’s nationwide corpus of funerary Beakers (Clarke 1970) and in Alex Gibson’s corresponding study of non-funerary Beakers (Gibson 1982); and the region’s Vase Urns and Collared Urns featured in the corpora by Trevor Cowie (1978) and Ian Longworth (1984; see also Waddell 1995 on Cordoned Urns). The Irish connections of many of Argyll’s Food Vessels were highlighted by Alison Young’s study
of Tripartite Vase Food Vessels (Young 1951), and the daggers of Argyll (including an example with a gold pommel-band from Blackwaterfoot on Arran) were catalogued by Audrey Henshall (Henshall 1968) and Sabine Gerloff (Gerloff 1975; see Sheridan and Cowie 2003 for a more up-to-date distribution of Scottish dagger and knife-dagger graves). Needham and Cowie’s recent study of a probable representation of a halberd on a decorated slab from the Ri Cruin cist has discussed the significance of halberds more widely (Needham and Cowie 2012), and further discussion of the halberd hoard from Largiezean on Bute can be found in Sheridan’s review of the Chalcolithic and Bronze Age in Bute (Sheridan 2013). The Early Bronze Age jewellery of jet and jet-like materials is the subject of ongoing long-term nationwide research by the current author (e.g. Sheridan and Davis 1995; Sheridan 2013), while the Bronze Age gold finds of Argyll were dealt with in George Eogan’s corpus of Irish and British gold (Eogan 1994). The remarkable Late Bronze Age wooden figure found at Ballachulish featured in a broader study of prehistoric British wooden figures by Bryony Coles (Coles 1998), while the remarkable and very rare Late Bronze Age bronze flesh-hook from Inveraray was discussed in Stuart Needham’s and Sheridan Bowman’s study of this specific class of artefact (Needham and Bowman 2005). As for other artefact studies, Jack Scott, following Isla McInnes (1969), attempted to characterise the Neolithic pottery of this part of Scotland, coining the terms ‘Rothesay style’ (J. Scott 1977) and ‘Beacharra Ware’ (J. Scott 1964) for specific types of Early to Middle Neolithic pottery. (See also Sheridan 2003 for a more recent summary of the development of Neolithic pottery in western and south-west Scotland). Scott also discussed the distribution of imported Antrim flint, of porcellanite axeheads from Antrim and of tuff axeheads from Great Langdale in Argyll, comparing the pattern with that of Dumfries and Galloway (J. Scott 1969b). Further research into imports of Antrim flint, by Alan Saville, was triggered by the discovery of a large hoard at Auchenhoan in 1989 (Saville 1999).

Radiocarbon-dating programmes by Rick Schulting (Schulting 2004), by National Museums Scotland (as reported annually in Discovery and Excavation in Scotland since 2005, and more occasionally between 1997 and 2003) and by the Beaker People Project ( Sheridan et al. 2007) have clarified the currency of Clyde cairns and of Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age ceramic traditions, while Clive Bonsall’s dating of human remains from Raschoille Cave near Oban has demonstrated their Early Neolithic date (Bonsall et al. 2012). Isotopic analysis of human remains by Rick Schulting and Mike Richards (e.g. Schulting and Richards 2002; Richards and Schulting 2006; Schulting 2013) has made a major contribution to the debate concerning the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition, demonstrating a contrast between the terrestrial-based diet of Neolithic coast-dwellers and the strongly marine-based diet of the Late Mesolithic inhabitants of Oronsay. Other isotopic analysis, undertaken on Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age skeletal material from Argyll as part of the Beaker People Project (and, before that, as part of Janet Montgomery’s doctoral research) has confirmed that
people’s diet continued to be overwhelmingly terrestrial in nature. It has also highlighted the non-local origin of the young man buried with an early, All-Over-Cord Beaker at Sorisdale on Coll (Jay et al. 2012; Parker Pearson et al. in press), contrasting with the more local origin of the somewhat later young woman who had been buried wearing a spacer-plate necklace of jet and jet-like materials on Inchmarnock (Sheridan 2013). Other research into human remains from the region has confirmed a rare case of trephination (i.e. ‘surgical’ removal of bone from the skull, thereby perforating it in an attempt to heal an illness) at Mount Stuart, Bute – another case of a young woman buried wearing a spacer-plate necklace, this time mostly of jet (Kranioti and Sheridan 2012).

Some important palaeoenvironmental research has been undertaken in Argyll, most recently involving a detailed reconstruction of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic landscape around Torbhlnaren rock art site (Tipping et al. 2011; see also Tipping et al. 2012 and http://www.scottishheritagehub.com/content/44-landscape-environment-climate for a more general assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the palaeoenvironmental record in Scotland, and for some interesting suggestions concerning climate change during the period in question.

Finally, the contribution of community-based (and community-orientated) archaeology cannot be overstated. The region is blessed with highly active Societies, museums and individuals with a passion for archaeology; their activities have greatly contributed to enhancing understanding and awareness of the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age (and other) archaeology in this part of Scotland. The Discovering Bute Landscape Partnership Scheme (Duffy 2013) demonstrated just how much can be achieved through community co-production; and that is also a theme of much of the work undertaken by Northlight Archaeology (e.g. in its experimental construction and burning of a timber circle on Arran http://northlight-heritage.co.uk/conc5/index.php/whatwedo/burning-circle/) and by the Forestry Commission on its estates, led by Matt Ritchie (http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/news/1216-archealogy-and-art-in-woodlands [sic]).
Part 2: Research themes and priorities

Main themes for the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age

1. The Mesolithic–Neolithic transition

A key theme for the beginning of our period is the appearance of a wholly new way of life, based principally on agriculture and using domesticated animals, together with the new technology, practices and beliefs that accompany this novel subsistence strategy. As argued elsewhere (e.g. Sheridan 2010), the evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of the arrival of small groups of farmers as the agent for this novel phenomenon; the alternative argument, for its deliberate adoption directly from the Continent by indigenous groups of fisher-hunter-foragers as a result of long-standing, long-distance and regular contacts with the Continent (e.g. Thomas 2013), lacks any credible supporting evidence (Sheridan 2015).

In Argyll there is evidence for two strands of Neolithisation. The first relates to a northward movement up the Atlantic façade of small groups of settlers from the Morbihan region of Brittany, as attested by the Morbihan-style closed megalithic chamber and simple passage tomb, with Morbihan-style pottery (including a Late Castellic bowl), at Achnacreebeag (Ritchie 1970; Sheridan 2010). Similar monuments are known elsewhere in western Scotland (e.g. the north-west chamber at Greadal Fhinn in Ardnamurchan: Ritchie 1970, 37), at the north-west and south-west tips of Wales, and around the northern half of Ireland, always in coastal (or near-coastal) locations. No settlements or other evidence relating to the builders of these monuments have yet been found in Britain and Ireland, but it is known that they were farmers in the Morbihan. Similarly, there is no radiocarbon date for the construction of the Achnacreebeag monument (and no chance of obtaining such a date), and radiocarbon dates obtained for similar monuments at Carrowmore in County Sligo, Ireland, have been subject to trenchant (and justified) critique (Bergh and Hensey 2013). At present their dating, and that of Late Castellic pottery, is based on dates from Brittany and Normandy, where they date to between 4300 BC and c 3900 BC. The British and Irish monuments and pottery are therefore likely to fall within this date bracket, and could lie towards its end.

The second strand of Neolithisation in Argyll relates ultimately to a different northward movement, again of small numbers of immigrant farmers, this time from the Nord-Pas de Calais; this has been named the ‘Carinated Bowl [or ‘CB’] Neolithic’ (Sheridan 2007). Its appearance in Argyll – extending as far north as Islay and the Cowal peninsula, as excavations at Newton and Port Charlotte on Islay, and at Auchategan, Glendaruel
make clear (McCullagh 1989; Harrington and Pierpoint 1980; Marshall 1978, and see Sheridan 2012a on the ‘CB Neolithic’ presence in Kilmartin Glen) – is likely to relate to a rapid south-westerly spread of settlers from eastern Scotland, moving along major river valleys and the Great Glen, rather than to direct movement from northern France. Much more is known about these people: in addition to their distinctive pottery style (Carinated Bowl pottery – one of several variants of Chasseo-Michelsberg pottery that developed around the end of the fifth millennium in northern France and Belgium), we know that:

- in some parts of Scotland the first arrivals built large rectangular communal timber houses (halls), staying there until people felt sufficiently well established to ‘bud off’ into individual households;
- they initially used non-megalithic communal funerary monuments, usually involving rectangular timber mortuary structures that were usually burnt down and covered by long or round mounds; importantly, however, we know that they also buried their dead in the cave at Raschoille near Oban (Connock 1986; Bonsall et al. 2012), and elsewhere in Scotland (and Ireland) they also cremated people on open pyres, covering them with round mounds (as at Boghead, Aberdeenshire: Sheridan 2010);
- they brought with them their sacred and ancient axeheads made of jadeitite and other Alpine rocks, as precious and talismanic heirlooms (rather than as workaday axeheads);
- they introduced to Scotland the practice of using ground stone axeheads – necessary for clearing the forest and working timber for their houses, tools and monuments – and they sought out good sources of stone for making them;
- they also introduced new styles of small lithic artefact (e.g. leaf-shaped arrowheads) and a new style of knapping flint (Warren 2005), and they also sought good-quality flint and other types of stone; furthermore, they introduced technology relating to the processing of cereals (i.e. saddle querns and rubbers);
- they rapidly established networks of contact over which they exchanged objects (such as pitchstone artefacts and stone axeheads), ideas and probably people;
- they grew cereals (wheat and barley) and flax in small plots on good agricultural land that they had sought out, and kept domesticated cattle, sheep/goats and pigs. They also hunted wild animals (as is clear from the yew bow found at Rotten Bottom, Dumfries & Galloway: Sheridan 2007) but they did not consume marine foods (Schulting and Richards 2006). The site at Auchategan (Marshall 1978) suggests that they practised transhumance, this being a probable summer camp.

The date of the arrival of the CB Neolithic in this part of Scotland is likely to fall within the first two centuries of the fourth millennium BC. (See Sheridan 2012c for a critique of
Whittle et al.’s (2011) Bayesian-modelled dates for its appearance in different parts of Scotland.

There is much that we do not know about these putative immigrant farmers, and about their relationship with the indigenous groups of fisher-hunter-foragers. As Mithen’s contribution to this current initiative has argued, there is evidence that the latter lifestyle continued at least until the opening centuries of the fourth millennium BC, and this is confirmed by recently-obtained radiocarbon dates on human and boar remains from the Cnoc Coig shell midden, which lie within the first quarter of the fourth millennium (corrected for marine effect; Oliver Craig and Sophy Charlton pers. comm., and see also Milner 2010). Indeed, the population density for both indigenous and putative immigrant groups will have been so low that it is quite possible that they had co-existed without meeting each other for several generations. However, clearly a process of acculturation seems to have taken place eventually, and possibly swiftly, with the demise of the purely fishing-hunting-foraging way of life. This is starkly illustrated in the isotopic and lipid evidence relating to human diet, with no individuals having a ‘Mesolithic’ dietary signature being known to post-date the aforementioned Oronsay shell midden individuals. (For a recent summary of the ‘diet’ issue, see Sheridan and Pétrequin 2014.) It appears that indigenous groups may well have ‘bought into’ the promise of a superficially more reliable food supply, adopting farming.

The key research questions, then, are as follows:

1. What exactly was the process, timing and tempo of the acculturation of indigenous fisher-hunter-gatherer groups? How late did a lifestyle based solely on the exploitation of wild resources continue? Is there any reason to accept Bonsall et al.’s (2002) argument for environmental change having an impact on the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition?

2. Where did the builders of the Breton-style closed chambers and simple passage tombs live, and what was their lifestyle and subsistence practice? And when, precisely, did these putative Breton immigrants arrive?

3. Where (in addition to the sites we already know) did the CB Neolithic settlers live, and what precisely was their subsistence strategy? Is their settlement organisation the same as elsewhere in Scotland (as reviewed, for example, in Sheridan 2007)? And are there any non-megalithic CB funerary monuments in Argyll and Bute, such as we see at Lochhill and Slewcairn in Dumfries and Galloway, for instance (Masters 1973; 1975; Millican 2012)?

4. Why were some of the early Neolithic inhabitants buried in a cave (Raschoille cave) as opposed to a built funerary monument?
In order to address these questions, the following will be needed;

Question 1: In addition to the examination of ‘Mesolithic’ assemblages for signs of ‘Neolithic’ traits (and vice versa), as Mithen advocates – something that will have to take into account any possible time interval between the deposition of the ‘Mesolithic’ and ‘Neolithic’ material, and the question of residuality – we need to examine and date more shell middens (cf. Bonsall et al. 2012) to assess how late the process of exploiting marine resources continued, and to what extent this was part of a purely ‘Mesolithic’-type lifestyle. Furthermore, work is currently underway to assess the aDNA profile of Mesolithic individuals from Cnoc Coig and their contemporary ‘Neolithic’ counterparts from Raschoille Cave. This should reveal whether we are dealing with (at least) two discrete populations in early fourth millennium Argyll and Bute.

Question 2: This requires field survey, particularly in the areas around the monuments: not easy given the rough pasture that surrounds most of the candidate sites. It also requires palaeoenvironmental investigation, to check for signs of Early Neolithic cereal cultivation in the area. For dating the appearance of the Breton ‘strand’ of Neolithisation, it will be necessary to undertake excavation at ‘candidate’ monuments.

Question 3: This, too, requires field survey and palaeoenvironmental investigation; and should any candidates for non-megalithic funerary monuments be found, excavation is recommended.

Question 4: In theory, if there were sufficient individuals from a range of funerary sites to provide aDNA data, we might be able to detect whether the specific choice of funerary practice related to the traditions of different groups. Currently, however, while the Raschoille Cave individuals offer excellent prospects for gaining aDNA evidence, there is a dearth of contemporary human remains from built monuments in the area, with Achnacreebeag having been looted long ago.

There is also a general requirement for palaeoenvironmental investigation to assess the vegetation (and changes thereto) and climate around this period. It may also be necessary to refine our understanding of sea level at this time (although this will not affect our interpretation of the use of boats to travel across the sea).

2. Subsequent developments during the Neolithic period, from c 3750 BC to c 2500 BC

Note: since these have already been discussed by the present author in some detail in previous publications (most recently Sheridan 2012a, and see also Sheridan 2004a), the reader is recommended to consult those for a fuller discussion.
It is clear that once both sets of putative immigrant farming groups (i.e. the Breton ‘strand’ and the ‘Carinated Bowl Neolithic strand’) became settled in Argyll and Bute, they flourished and spread. This is seen, for example, in the construction (probably around 3600 BC) of a bigger, ‘better’ passage tomb at Achnacree, not far from Achnacreebeag (Henshall 1972, 355–7), and the expansion of passage tomb building to the Hebrides, the NW and NE mainland of Scotland, and the Northern Isles (Sheridan 2004b; 2014a). It is also seen (with regard to the ‘CB Neolithic’) in the construction of the simple stone chamber at Ardnadam, Mid-Argyll (Henshall 1972, 331, 333) and, subsequently, of ‘Clyde’-type chamber tombs in Argyll and Bute (e.g. Nether Largie South: *ibid.*, 338–40 and Cladh Andreis on the Ardnamurchan peninsula: Harris *et al.* 2014). Both forms may indeed be present as sequential phases in the construction of the chamber tomb at Blasthill on the Kintyre peninsula (Cummings and Robinson 2015). These represent translations into stone of the timber funerary monument tradition brought by the earliest CB Neolithic communities, and to judge from the currently-available dating evidence, the ‘Clyde cairn’ format was being constructed by the mid- to late-38th century BC, with clear evidence for use during the 37th and 36th centuries BC. Other ‘CB Neolithic’ constructions include the cursus monument at Upper Largie in Kilmartin Glen (Sheridan 2012a, 170).

Interaction between the ‘Breton’ and ‘CB Neolithic’ communities is abundantly clear from the sharing of ceramic designs, with a distinctive, fluted or burnished tall-necked carinated bowl type of pot, probably dating to the 36th century BC, being found both in the Achnacree passage tomb and in the Nether Largie South Clyde Cairn, for instance (*ibid.*, 170). There is also abundant evidence for the exchange of ideas, designs, objects and probably also people between Argyll and Bute and Ireland for most of the Neolithic period, as seen for example in ceramic similarities and in the sharing of the ‘Clyde cairn’ constructional tradition (which is expressed as ‘court tombs’ in Ireland) (Sheridan 2004a). Further afield, at Clettraval on North Uist, a dramatic example of the melding of the two ancestral Neolithic traditions can be seen in the design of a chamber tomb that combines elements of both the passage tomb and Clyde cairn traditions (Henshall 1972, 506–511).

Relatively little is known about developments between c 3500 BC and c 3000 BC in Argyll and Bute (Sheridan 2012a, 171) even though palynological evidence from Kilmichael Glen indicates a strong signal for barley cultivation from 3600 BC (Tipping *et al.* 2011, 161), and there is evidence for the continuation of extensive exchange networks, such as had been involved in the transportation of the Antrim porcellanite axehead – and perhaps also its associated wooden haft – found at Shulishader, Lewis, during the second half of the fourth millennium: Sheridan 1992. It is during this period that farming communities were flourishing in the Outer Hebrides.
Around and shortly after 3000 BC, however, there is clear evidence for new developments, relating to the operation of an extensive network of contacts, extending from Orkney in the north to Ireland in the south, over which novel ideas, traditions, beliefs and practices were travelling. Essentially, this was connected to the undertaking of long-distance journeys from Orkney to the Boyne Valley by the ambitious emerging elite of Orkney: these individuals would have visited the renowned Boyne valley with its magnificent passage tombs of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth, and they brought back to Orkney design ideas that were expressed in the construction of Maes Howe-type passage tombs, and the practices of using megalithic art and of aligning Maes Howe on the midwinter solstice sun (Schulting et al. 2010). These people in Orkney, who were engaged in a process of competitive conspicuous consumption, invented a new style of pottery – Grooved Ware – and also seem to have invented the henge with internal stone circle, as seen at the Stones of Stenness. They also used a range of carved stone objects as symbols of power. Between c 3100 BC and c 2900 BC we can trace a reciprocal movement of ideas and objects between Orkney and Ireland, with Grooved Ware, the practice of using stone (and timber) circles and the use of maceheads and – in miniature form – of carved stone balls travelling southwards from Orkney to Ireland (Sheridan 2004a; 2014b). Argyll and Bute were on this ‘Atlantic façade’ route, and the involvement of its inhabitants is shown in the construction of the timber and stone circles at Temple Wood in Kilmartin Glen (with their specific astronomical orientations: Scott 2010); in the use of carved stone balls and maceheads; in the pecking of designs resembling those seen on Irish and Orcadian passage tombs and in sites such as Skara Brae and the Ness of Brodgar (and on Orcadian Grooved Ware); and finally in the use of Grooved Ware itself, at Townhead, Rothesay, Bute. This overall phenomenon is discussed at length in Sheridan 2004a; 2012a; 2014b; and Schulting et al. 2010, so will not be discussed further here.

One additional novelty that may well have appeared during the first half of the third millennium is the use of cup-and-ring rock art (Webb 2012). With its widespread comparanda in Britain, Ireland and Galicia, this offers additional evidence suggesting that the inhabitants of Argyll and Bute were interacting with a range of external contacts, far and wide. Excavations at Torbhluaran in Kilmichael Glen provided tentative support for a dating during the first half of the third millennium (Jones et al. 2011). Again, this phenomenon is explored further in Sheridan 2012a (and see Bradley 1993, and the British Rock Art Group websites, for a broader discussion of rock art).

The key research questions for this period would appear to be:

1. What is the precise nature of the settlement pattern and subsistence strategy for the inhabitants of Argyll and Bute between c 3750 BC and c 2500 BC – especially during the relatively poorly-attested period 3500–3000 BC? Are we correct in assuming that
population was increasing over this period? And is there any evidence for survival of indigenous Mesolithic communities after c 3750 BC?

1a. A specific rider to this is: where did the people who constructed the Nether Largie South Clyde Cairn and the other Neolithic monuments in Kilmartin Glen live? Currently there is no unequivocal evidence for Neolithic settlement in the Glen; was it solely a ‘ceremonial landscape’ at the time, or are there remains of habitation waiting to be found?

2. What was the full range of funerary practices used during this period? And we need better dating of passage tombs and Clyde cairns (and related monuments).

3. What was the specific trajectory of ceramic development (and development in other aspects of material culture) over this period in Argyll and Bute? The proposed ceramic sequence for western and south-west Scotland as presented in 2003 (Sheridan 2003) needs to be underpinned by more dates, for example.

4. Is there further evidence for participation in the Orkney-Boyne nexus in the centuries around 3000 BC? Is there much more evidence for the use of Grooved Ware to be uncovered in Argyll and Bute? And where, apart from Townhead on Bute, are the settlements that date to this time? What did participation in this extensive network mean for the social organisation of the farmers in Argyll and Bute? Were they, too, engaging in some kind of competitive conspicuous consumption?

5. How does cup-and-ring rock art fit into our overall understanding of the nature of society, beliefs, and external contacts in Argyll and Bute? Currently it tends to be studied in its own right, but it needs to be situated within Late Neolithic practices.

3. Chalcolithic novelties, 2500–2200 BC

The appearance in Argyll and Bute (and elsewhere in Britain and Ireland) of a wholly novel ‘package’ of objects, traditions and practices during the 25th century BC – the so-called ‘Beaker’ phenomenon, so named after the style of pottery used – is believed to relate to the arrival of small numbers of individuals from the Continent (Sheridan 2008; 2012a; 2012b; 2013). Again, since this has been discussed extensively elsewhere, only a summary will be offered here; see, for example, Sheridan 2012b for a list of the novelties (which include the earliest metal objects – here, of copper – and a funerary tradition featuring individual interment).

Essentially, the key evidence comes from two graves – one at Upper Largie in Kilmartin Glen, and the other at Sorisdale on Coll. These are Continental in style and in grave goods, and the current author has argued for a Rhine delta connection, at least for the Upper Largie individual (e.g. Sheridan 2008). Sadly, no human remains survived from
that individual but the young adult male from Sorisdale has been shown, from isotopic analysis of the enamel of one of his molar teeth (undertaken for the Beaker People Project), to have been a non-local (Sheridan 2012b). The broader picture of Beaker arrivals in Britain and Ireland suggests that some people may have come up the Atlantic façade, while others came from other parts of the Continent (Needham 2005; 2012).

As for the reasons for this small-scale movement, it appears that certain individuals from the Continent undertook heroic long-distance journeys (presumably along with their retinues) in order to consolidate their standing in Chalcolithic society, while others may have been drawn to certain areas (e.g. the Stonehenge region) by the fame of the ceremonies undertaken there. Yet others will have come prospecting for copper and probably also gold, while some may have come as family groups, seeking a new home. The various mechanisms and reasons are explored elsewhere (e.g. Needham 2012).

While the earliest Beaker presence in Argyll and Bute does not currently include any metal objects, from a few generations later there is a tanged copper knife from Callachally on Mull, associated with a stone wristguard/wristguard ornament, another Continental Beaker novelty (Baker et al. 2003, 116); and from Largizean on Bute there is a magnificent hoard of four copper halberd blades (Sheridan 2013, 54 and 56), of which three are made of Irish copper and the fourth of copper that may have originated in Iberia. Furthermore, at Ri Cruin, a slab in a cist appears to show a representation of a halberd – a weapon that was popular in Atlantic Europe, and especially in Ireland, at the time (Needham and Cowie 2012). Such objects remind us of the extensive networks of contacts over which precious materials were circulating at this time.

Other evidence for Chalcolithic activity in Argyll and Bute is reviewed in Sheridan 2012a and 2013. Clearly, the practice of using Beaker pottery, and the associated novel practices and beliefs, was adopted by the inhabitants of this part of Scotland. Their graves are sometimes located in significant relationships to extant monuments, as with the two Chalcolithic cists outside the Temple Wood South stone circle or the Beakers found inside Nether Largie South Clyde cairn (Sheridan 2012a).

Outstanding research questions regarding this period include the following:

1. Was there any prospecting for, or extraction of, copper in the region at this time? It is known that copper-bearing rock is present near Kilmartin Glen, for example, but there is no evidence for its use at this time.

2. Where did the users of Beaker pottery live, and what was their subsistence strategy? (The evidence for Beaker settlements in the Outer Hebrides seems strong.) How did the initial immigrants relate to the indigenous population? (It would appear that they were accepted.) How many incomers were there? The users of Beaker pottery appear to
have belonged to a socially-differentiated society; how did this relate to the nature of social organisation before 2500 BC?

3. Were these people engaged in the north-eastwards movement of copper from Ross Island in County Kerry to north-east Scotland, via the Great Glen, as seems to have been the case from 2200 BC onwards? (The answer is probably yes.)

Ways to address these questions include field survey to try to locate settlements, and surveying for traces of prehistoric copper extraction around the source areas. If further early Beaker graves are found (which seems likely), then isotopic analysis, and possibly also aDNA analysis, will need to be undertaken to explore their identity.

4. The Early Bronze Age – a ‘golden age’ for Argyll and Bute (and especially Kilmartin Glen), 2200–1900 BC

As explained in detail elsewhere (principally Sheridan 2012a), this was the time when the elite of Argyll and Bute were able to profit from controlling the north-easterly flow of copper from Ireland (and possibly of bronze as well) as it passed up the Great Glen to the Migdale bronzeworking ‘industry’ of north-east Scotland. (Some insights into the nature of this movement are clear from graves around Inverness that have strong links with Ireland: the pair of graves at Seafield West, including a logboat coffin with a bronze dagger made using Irish copper, and a wooden ‘cist’ containing an Irish Bowl Food Vessel (Cressey and Sheridan 2003); and a rich Beaker grave from Culduthel, whose adult male occupant has been shown from isotopic analysis to have originated on the Antrim Plateau: Sheridan 2012b.) This wealth was expressed in terms of conspicuous consumption on prestige items such as daggers (for men), Whitby jet necklaces (for women) and new-style Food Vessel pottery of Irish style (for both sexes), and on the construction of imposing funerary monuments. The linear round cairn cemetery of Kilmartin Glen was constructed now, as were large round cairns elsewhere in Argyll and Bute. The ancient chamber tomb of Nether Largie South was remodelled to make it into a round cairn. Temple Wood South stone circle was converted into a ring cairn, with a cist in its centre for a local member of the elite, and it is likely that the Temple Wood North stone circle was dismantled at this time and its stones were taken for reuse elsewhere (e.g. in a cist inside Ballymeanoch henge, itself probably constructed at this time as a prestigious and novel form of funerary monument: ibid., 177). Furthermore, at Nether Largie North, a slab of by-then ancient and probably sacred cup-and-ring rock had been prised from bedrock for use as the capstone of an important person’s (probably man’s) cist, its marks overlain by carvings of flat metal axeheads (ibid., 177). The elite in Kilmartin Glen (and elsewhere in Argyll and Bute) were connected with Ireland, with north-east Scotland and with Yorkshire, and the unique footed Food Vessel from Upper Largie (Cook et al. 2010) encapsulates both the Irish and Yorkshire links.
That it was not simply the elite of Kilmartin Glen who were enjoying a period of prosperity is clear, for example, from the distribution of Whitby jet spacer plate necklaces (Sheridan 2013; Kranioti and Sheridan 2012) and bronze daggers (Baker et al. 2003).

Invaluable evidence relating to the everyday life for people elsewhere in Argyll and Bute is provided by the settlements at Kilellan and Ardnave on Islay (Ritchie 2005; Ritchie and Welfare 1983).

Key research questions for this period include the following:

1. Where did the people who were buried in the ostentatious graves live? (Once again, it appears that Kilmartin Glen was used just as a place of burial and ceremony.) And was there a hierarchy of settlement, reflecting an inegalitarian society?

2. What was the nature of subsistence activities during this time?

3. Was control over the flow of metal the only source of wealth and power in this part of Scotland at that time?

4. Was the incoming metal just Irish copper, or were bronze items or ingots also coming in? And was there any local exploitation of copper?

Once again, field survey (including fieldwalking) to locate settlement evidence – and any evidence relating to metal prospecting – is required, and palaeoenvironmental investigation is needed to shed light on both vegetation cover and farming practices.

5. The rest of the Bronze Age (1900–800 BC)

Our understanding of this period is dominated once again by funerary evidence and by other monuments; not enough is known about where and how people carried out their everyday lives.

Developments between 1900 BC and 1500 BC include the switch to cremation as the predominant funerary rite by around 1900/1800 BC (with burial of the cremated remains often in ceramic cinerary urns of various kinds); the construction of a timber circle at Upper Largie between 1600 BC and 1400 BC, of a timber post-hole row there between 1870 BC and 1650 BC, and of an enigmatic monument there probably during the first half of the second millennium (Sheridan 2012a, 178–9).

For the period 1500BC –1000 BC, we see the establishment of the short stone rows of the west of Scotland, and probably also of the more complex setting at Nether Largie in Kilmartin Glen. Some of these monuments incorporate slabs with cup-and-ring designs, which must have been over a millennium old when they were prised up and erected as parts of monuments designed to mark significant ‘standstill’ points in the moon’s long
cycle (Ruggles 1999; Scott 2010). Another novelty of this period was the use of kerb
cairns – a distinctive type of funerary monument, again with an astronomical alignment
(Sheridan 2012a, 179–180).

Details of the material culture in use during this time (other than funerary pottery) are
somewhat sparse, as revealed for example in John Coles’ distribution maps for Middle
Bronze Age metalwork in Argyll and Bute (Coles 1964).

Some evidence for deteriorating climatic conditions, and consequent expansion of peat,
has come from John Barber’s excavations on Arran where it appears that various
attempts to continue cultivating the land were made in the face of peat expansion
(barber 1997).

From around 1000 BC there appears to be a hiatus in activity in Kilmartin Glen that
lasted for over a millennium, and this may well relate to further climatic deterioration and
the expansion of the Mòine Mhór. Elsewhere in Argyll and Bute, however, during the
Late Bronze Age there is evidence for participation in a flourishing and extensive
Atlantic Europe network of elite contacts, with the associated lifestyle of feasting and
actual (and stylised) combat. This is reflected, for example, in the flesh hook from
Inveraray (Needham and Bowman 2005), the hoard of swords and other weaponry
found at Torran (Campbell and Coles 1963), and various ornaments of bronze, gold and
amber found in Argyll and Bute, e.g. at Croig Cave on Mull (Mithen and Wickes 2012).

An end to this particular lifestyle (involving a collapse of the ‘bubble’ of competitive
conspicuous consumption) around 800 BC has been identified, and described in
compelling detail, by Stuart Needham (Needham 2007). While the fortunes of the elite
will have been significantly affected by this, nevertheless life did not cease – as is
revealed, for example, by the Early Iron Age wooden figure that had once stood, around
600 BC, overlooking a perilous stretch of water at Ballachulish (Coles 1998).

The many research questions pertaining to this period include:

1. The choreography of climate change and its effects on human behaviour needs to be
refined for this period. How did settlement and land use change?

2. What was the nature of settlements and farming activities at this time? Was there a
hierarchy of settlement?

3. How did social organisation change over this period? Why the decline in expressions
of wealth and power between c 1900 BC and the early first millennium BC? Does the
apparent proliferation of weaponry during the Late Bronze Age relate to an increased
incidence of conflict?

4. From where was the metalwork being obtained over this period?
To address these questions, a combination of fieldwork and palaeoenvironmental investigation is needed, together with further analysis of metal objects (especially the rare gold items).

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