HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND | ÀRAINNEACHD EACHDRAIDHEIL ALBA

Property in Care (PIC)ID:	PIC104
Designations:	Scheduled Monument (SM90306)
Taken into State care:	1963 (Guardianship)
Last reviewed:	2021

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

TORR A'CHAISTEAL

We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.

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Cover image: oblique aerial view of Torr a'Chaisteal. Inner and outer wall-faces faintly visible under turf. © Historic Environment Scotland.

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CONTENTS

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1. SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

Torr a'Chaisteal[1] dun, is a circular, stone-walled settlement of Iron Age date, set on a knoll on the south-west coast of Arran, with a wide view over the sea. It survives as a grass-covered mound surmounted by a low, ring-shaped bank, within which only slight traces are visible of the original drystone walls. A gap on the eastern side may mark the original entrance. A low bank flanks the site on the eastern side.

The site was taken into State care under a Guardianship Agreement in 1963, and is designated as Scheduled Monument SM9036.[2]

The site is unstaffed, with information provided via interpretation panel. It is free to access year-round and is reached off the A841 coastal road; access to the site itself requires a short walk over agricultural land.[3]

1.2 Statement of Significance

Torr a'Chaisteal is of national importance as a representative example of a dun; a small stone-walled settlement. Duns are widespread in north and west Scotland and in the Western Isles. While usually regarded as fortifications, the demonstration of the social status of their owners was probably an equally important factor in their construction. Duns vary greatly in size and plan. Torr a'Chaisteal is a typical example of the smaller end of the spectrum. Its near-circular plan implies that it may originally have been fully roofed. It has been suggested that the dun's wall, which is up to 4m thick, may have been at least partially double-skinned: while by

[1] Alternative names: Tòrr a' Chaisteil, Torr A' Chaisteil, Corriecravie. Throughout this document, the spelling 'Torr a'Chaisteal' is adopted, as defined in the 2014 Scheme of Delegation for Properties in Care. The site name means 'the mound of the castle' (AÀA pers comm.)

[2] Scheduling details are accessible at: https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90306

[3] Public transport is recommended, as there is a lack of safe parking at the site. Stout footwear is required, as access is across agricultural land. Further access information is available on the HES website: https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/torr-achaisteal-dun/getting-here/

no means impossible, there is no visible evidence for this. Likewise, there is no evidence for how high the wall stood when first built.

Torr a'Chaisteal's grass-covered appearance probably results from the robbing-out of larger stones for later building use elsewhere, and from the fertile conditions offered by the crumbling sandstone of which its walls were constructed. The appearance of the mound suggests that rather more depth of deposits may survive than the 0.5 metres height of walling cited in one publication[4], though it does not appear that the mound is an entirely artificial construction, as others have suggested.[5]

By analogy with sites excavated in Argyll and elsewhere, a date in the last century BC or first few centuries AD seems most likely. However, it may well be that simple duns such as this span a much longer period than is usually ascribed to them. They may arise earlier (as has recently proven to be the case with the better-studied brochs, which are essentially a specialised class of dun[6]) and may also continue in use for longer – some duns appear to have continued in use into the early medieval period.[7]

The interior of the site shows slight signs of cultivation ridges of unknown date. These may be associated with an episode of cultivation recorded in local tradition.[8]

As the recorded excavations were very limited in extent and of a poor standard, it is highly likely that more extensive remains survive in situ, despite ploughing and the likelihood of unrecorded earlier digging.

Key aspects of Torr a'Chaisteal's significance include the following:

- The evidence it can offer for middle to late Iron Age enclosed settlement on a small scale (as compared with the more familiar hillforts of the earlier Iron Age), especially in comparison with larger enclosed settlements (such as **Rispain Camp**[9]) or the numerous duns of irregular and larger plan.
- The extent to which it typifies, or is exceptional to, the generality of later prehistoric settlement in upland Scotland, and in particular the relationship between thin-walled house circles, duns and brochs.

[4] Disagreeing with Stevenson 1985, 132
[5] Disagreeing with M'Arthur 1873, 68
[6] Dockrill et al, 2015,199
[7] Nieke 1990, 132-3;
[8] M'Arthur 1873, 68-9 – extracts of text at Appendix 2 below
[9] Throughout the text, site names in bold are managed by Historic Environment Scotland and are publicly accessible. Access information can be found at: www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/

- The evidence it may be able to offer towards the detailed construction, layout and internal use of simple, circular, duns – which in nearby Argyll probably represent about half of the total population of duns.[10]
- The possibility of surviving, undisturbed deposits capable of providing further information about the site's construction and occupation more generally.
- Its history of antiquarian and archaeological interest and investigation.
- Its relationship to other archaeological and landscape features.
- Its conservation, use and presentation as an Ancient Monument since it was taken into State care in 1963.

The above paragraphs outline the key significance of Torr a'Chaisteal. The following sections offer more detailed descriptions and analysis of the site.

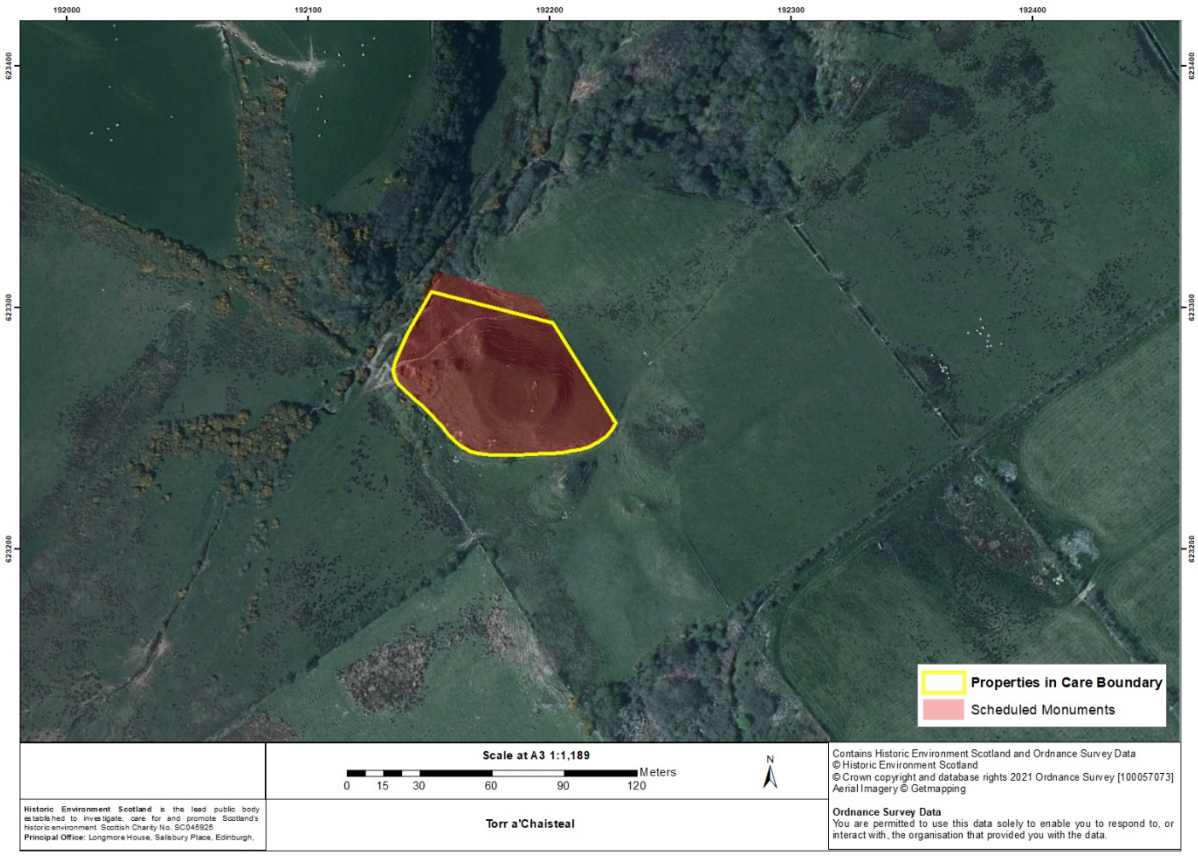

Figure 1: Scheduled Area and Property in Care boundary of Torr a'Chaisteal. For Illustrative purposes only.

[10] Nieke 1990, 136-7

2. ASSESSMENT OF VALUES

2.1 Background

2.1.1 Context: Iron Age settlement in Arran and surrounding areas

In terms of its prehistoric archaeology as well as its topography, Arran appears to have rather more in common with Argyll and the western Highlands and Islands than it does with lowland Ayrshire to the east, and it is in this context that Torr a'Chaisteal can best be understood.[11]

The hillforts which characterise the earlier Iron Age of southern Scotland do occur here, but are fewer number and smaller in scale. Sites such as Drumadoon on Arran or Dun Skeig and Balloch Hill in Kintyre represent the upper end of the scale in terms of their enclosed areas and relatively simple defensive works. The majority of local earlier Iron Age settlement is probably represented by simple roundhouses, a type which also occurs both earlier and later and is impossible to date without excavation.

By the last centuries BC, this pattern of generally open settlement with a few forts appears to change, with an increase in the number of small, stone-walled enclosed sites: generally referred to as duns.

The term 'dun' is very much a catch-all category. About half of known duns resemble Torr a'Chaisteal in being small (no more than 15m in internal diameter), near-circular on plan and capable of having been fully roofed. The remainder are very varied in plan, often with boundaries following natural features, and are likely to have contained free-standing circular houses within their outer walls. The smaller duns are effectively heavily-built and impressively sized roundhouses, while the larger, irregular duns are in essence miniature hill-forts.[12] The thickest-walled, most circular duns of all, with specialised architectural features which might have allowed them to be built to a considerable height, are called brochs: 'true' brochs, however, appear quite rare in this area: they are more frequent from Mull and Lismore northwards. It should be noted that Gaelic does not make any distinction between brochs and duns – they are all called *dun*, or more correctly *dùn*.

There have been few modern excavations of duns in the area, so precise dates for their construction are lacking. However, two unexcavated sites in Argyll (Dun Skeig[13] and Dun MacSniochan[14]) display evidence for duns being built within the defences of long-established and possibly abandoned hillforts, with the duns perhaps marking re-occupation of a

[11] The site is technically in the Central Lowlands, as the Highland Boundary Fault, which runs diagonally through Arran, lies a few kilometres to the north.
[12] Harding 1997
[13] RCAHMS 1971, 70-1, No. 165
[14] RCAHMS 1975, 69-70, no. 136

significant ancient site by the dun-builders. It may be that (as has been suggested for the lowland example of Edin's Hall[15]) possession and use of an 'old' hillfort was an indicator of high social standing.

Society at the time seems to have followed a chiefdom model, with power and status more widely distributed than in the earlier Iron Age, when hillforts point at regional hierarchies on a larger geographical scale. Social rank may have come to depend as much on intangible matters (such as descent or special skills) as on conventional wealth (such as holdings of cattle or extent of ploughland). There is evidence from across Scotland and further afield that portable wealth, in the form of jewellery and other fine metalwork, was becoming increasingly important as a means of displaying status.[16]

The landscape of Arran, at least along the coast, had long been managed and utilised by human populations, as the many Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments of western Arran testify. The environmental evidence from sites of this period excavated elsewhere points to mixed farming, with cattle prominent, but sheep, goats and pigs also raised. Crops included wheat and barley. Oats seems to have been a new introduction to Britain at about this time. Wild foodstuffs were also important, including venison, birds and fish. Most settlements would have stood at the centre of extensive areas of cleared and cultivated land, with livestock grazing on poorer soils and marshy areas providing hay for overwintering stock.

2.1.2 Descriptive Overview

Torr a'Chaisteal is situated on a natural knoll about 25m above sea-level, overlooking a stony but well-drained post-glacial raised beach, with a small stream just to its north. It has a very open outlook towards the south and west, commanding a view of the southern end of Kilbrannan Sound, which separates Arran from the Kintyre peninsula to the west, where the Sound widens out into the Irish Sea. Kintyre is clearly visible a few kilometres across the water. The little bay below the dun represents the nearest landfall for small boats coming from southern Kintyre to Arran, though the coastline lacks secure anchorage for larger vessels. Inland, the ground rises gently, but the site is not closely overlooked.

The visible remains are currently almost completely covered in close-cropped grass. They take the form of a hollow, near-circular bank, standing no more up to 1.0m high, with a dip marking a possible entrance from just north of east. Towards the base of this bank, traces of stone foundations protrude through the turf in a few places: these suggest a wall of between 3 and 4 metres thick, enclosing a near-circular area 14m across. The wall is

[15] Dunwell 1999
[16] Stevenson 1985, 132

faced with large stones inside and out, and old excavations revealed a core of smaller rubble. (It is possible that the wall thickness may contain internal chambers or a gallery running around part of its circuit, but the evidence is equivocal: there is nothing visible on site to support this interpretation.) A level area lies just outside the supposed entrance, and this is flanked on its eastern side by a grass-covered bank, perhaps representing a former rampart or wall, intended to protect the entrance from the natural line of approach.

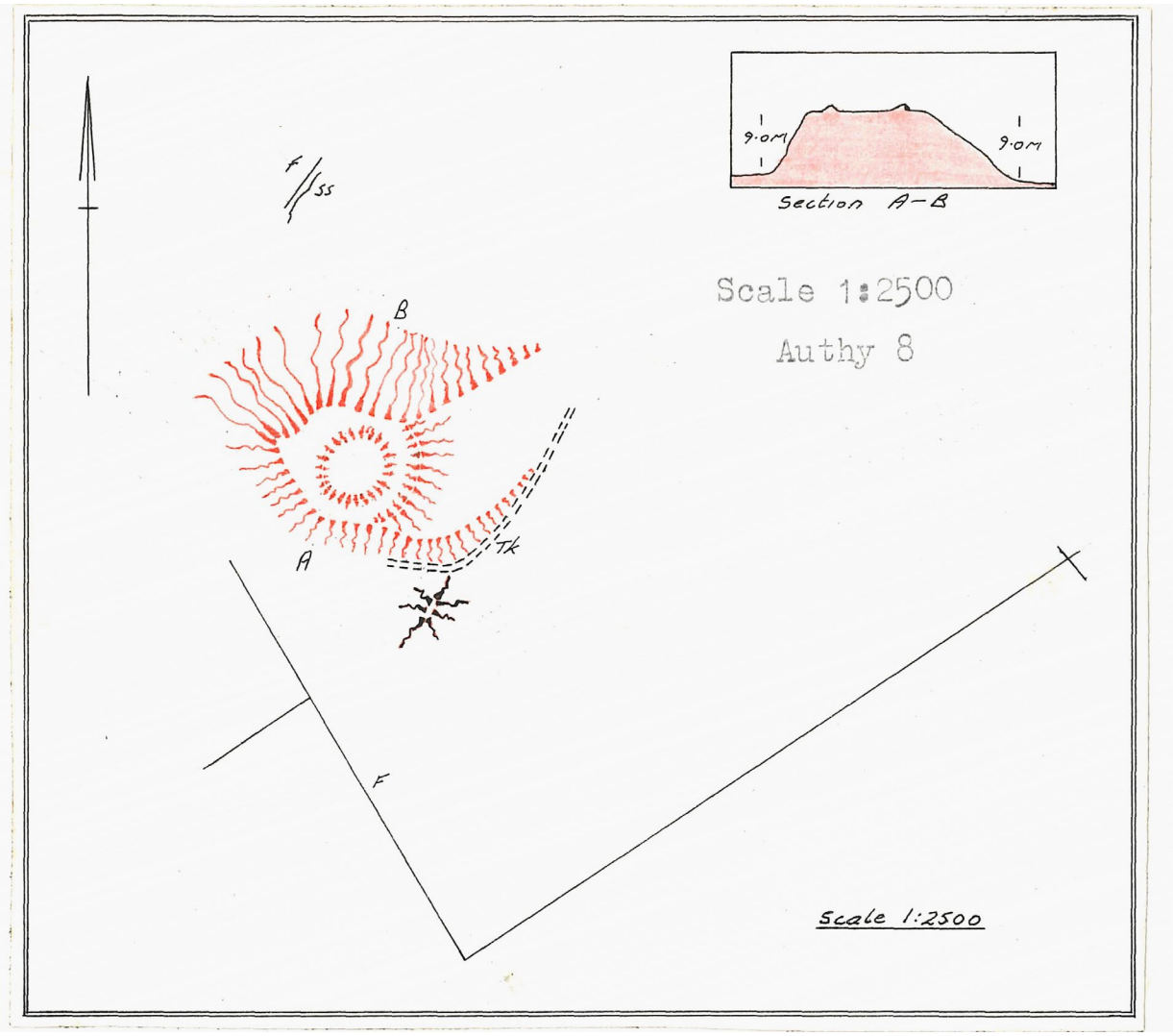

Figure 2: 1977 site plan copied from Ordnance Survey Record Card © Crown Copyright: HES (Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division).

2.1.3 Early antiquarian interest and activity

As 'Tor-a-Chaisteil', the site appears to be first mentioned in print in the 1845 *New Statistical Account*. The Parish Minister, the Reverend Angus Macmillan, offers a common-sense view of the site which would not be out of keeping with modern interpretations: 'Though generally regarded as a

Danish fort, its size, situation, appearance and name,[17] seem rather to indicate that it was a castle or circular building, roofed in either for refuge or defence.'[18]

As 'Torcastle', it was described in slightly more detail by John M'Arthur in 1857.[19] He believed that the knoll on which it stands is artificial, though this seems unlikely. He described the dun as having walls about 4 feet [1.3m] thick enclosing an area 54 feet [17 metres] in diameter, and reported the discovery of several human bones during the removal of stones from the interior some years previously. He reported that 'the natives in the neighbourhood have a tradition, that, in early times, a great battle was fought here'. By the time M'Arthur came to write his *Antiquities of Arran* a few years later, he had undertaken rudimentary excavations in and around the mound, finding large quantities of animal bones and shells in a 'dark, fetid loam'[20] and had also added considerably to the body of associated tradition: verbatim extracts of his lively account are included at Appendix 2 below.

John Alexander Balfour, author of the first volume of the *Book of Arran*, commenced excavation on the site in 1908 or 1909. He stopped after being informed that the site had been dug into twice before. His finds included the upper stone of a rotary quern and a piece of haematite iron ore.[21]

The site has not been investigated since.

2.1.4 Maintenance and conservation activity

After the site came into State care in 1963, no major work was undertaken beyond the erection of the first of several generations of on-site interpretation notices. It has continued under this low-input management regime, with sheep maintaining a short grass sward.

However, it has recently (2020) been noted that parts of the site are being degraded by the hooves of sheep, coupled with rabbit and mole incursions. Ongoing monitoring and management are therefore required to ensure the integrity of the site is not further threatened.

[17] N.B. The site name means 'the mound of the castle' (Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba pers. comm.)
[18] Macmillan 1845, 52 – The author, clearly a keen geologist, then proceeds to a detailed description and discussion of the Machrie Moor stone circles.
[19] M'Arthur 1959, 62
[20] M'Arthur 1873, 68-9
[21] Balfour 1910, 187-9

Figure 3: 1966 Photograph showing the approach to the site. © Crown copyright: HES.

2.2 Evidential values

The evidential value of Torr a'Chaisteal is high for what its physical fabric, location and setting might tell us about settlement during the latter part of the Iron Age and for its potential to yield further information through ongoing research and investigation. Although physically much reduced, it appears to represent a widespread class of site in the local area and western Scotland generally, and one which has been discussed but little examined. Therefore, Torr a'Chaisteal has a high representative value: evidence from it could be extrapolated to contribute to a broader picture of society in the area at this period, and likewise evidence obtained from other sites of similar character could aid in placing Torr a'Chaisteal itself into context.

The early excavations provided little of value beyond a very broad date: the rotary quernstone found in the early 1900's dig, although lacking a stratigraphic context, at the very least suggests that the site was occupied during the early centuries AD.[22]

[22] MacKie 1998 makes the case for this date.

Despite these excavations and at least one period of cultivation and earlier digging, significant archaeological evidence is likely to survive within the interior. It is also distinctly possible that slightly more of the wall footings may survive than is apparent, and that there may even be significant deposits around the mound, perhaps particularly on its eastern side in the vicinity of the supposed entrance, between this and the outer bank.

Despite earlier interventions, the site retains considerable archaeological potential:

- The interior, though disturbed, has probably not been excavated to natural soil level, so may hold deposits and structural evidence with the potential to provide additional evidence relating to contemporary land-use and economic activity and towards more precise dating of the enclosure. The area immediately outside of the supposed entrance, and the space between it and the outer bank, might be of particular sensitivity in this respect.
- The surviving wall footings may contain evidence for how the wall was constructed and may also seal beneath them evidence for use of the site before the dun was built.

The finds from the recorded excavations were few in number, apart for quantities of animal bone and marine shell (now lost). As noted above, the quernstone hints at the site being occupied in the early centuries AD: rotary querns are generally believed to have reached Scotland in the last century BC.[23] The only other artefact recovered was a small piece of haematite iron ore. While haematite was used as a source of iron, and also for polishing and burnishing, it was also one of several kinds of mineral which had talismanic value in medieval and doubtless earlier times, with small pieces carried as 'luck stones'.[24]

However, in considering the above, it must be acknowledged that Torr a'Chaisteal would not be the most likely choice of site on which to seek answers of wider relevance, and that any independent research team with adequate resources would be more likely to wish to explore other duns, perhaps in Kintyre, Mid Argyll or Lorn. Torr a'Chaisteal, while representative in terms of its size and location, gives too many signs of being robbed of stone, and possibly more extensively disturbed, to represent first choice for future research investigations.

[23] MacKie 1998, as above.

[24] The ancient values associated with haematite appear to have centred on courage, though modern crystal therapy values it as a "grounding" substance and an aid to concentration.

2.3 Historical values

The primary historical importance of Torr a'Chaisteal lies in its potential to contribute to evidence-based narratives describing how society in later Iron Age southern Scotland may have operated and changed over time. However, the absence of secure dates for this and other sites believed to be of the same general period currently limits that potential.

The site has additional historical significance due to the traditions associated with it in the mid-19th century. These are detailed in Appendix 2, but in summary record that after growing crops on the dun, several local families suffered bereavement which was viewed as supernatural retribution for disturbing the site. This story appears to be specific to the site rather than the generic legends which attach themselves to many ancient monuments. Whether or not they do, in fact, record authentic historical events, they indicate how this site came to be regarded in the centuries after it ceased to be used for its original purpose.

2.4 Architectural values

The architectural details of 'simple' duns have received much less attention than those of the more elaborate subset of duns which are known as brochs. In particular, there have been insufficient modern excavations to offer convincing evidence for (or against) the assumption that sites such as Torr a'Chaisteal represent the remains of stoutly walled, fully roofed, roundhouses. In this context, the site is likely to contain buried deposits and structures which might offer a contribution to furthering understanding, especially of the dates of such duns relative to their more architecturally sophisticated cousins, the brochs.

Excepting the stout, stone-built, outer wall, the basic structure of Torr a'Chaisteal would probably have been similar to larger Iron Age roundhouses elsewhere which were built entirely of wood.[26] For example, the excavated house at **Rispain Camp** in Wigtownshire is only marginally smaller in diameter. This poses the question of the extent to which 'simple' duns such as Torr a'Chaisteal were truly defensive, as opposed to representing a local expression in stone of the much wider later Iron Age phenomenon, that of impressive houses built to serve as an expression of rank or social prestige. There has been extensive discussion of the 'defence versus prestige' question, mainly in the context of brochs. The

[25] Accessible at: https://scarf.scot/national/iron-age-panel-report/
[26] Barrett 1982

answer probably lies part-way between; duns and brochs were most likely the habitations of significant local personages and built to appear impressive and intimidating, in the hope that their defensive capabilities would not be put to the test.

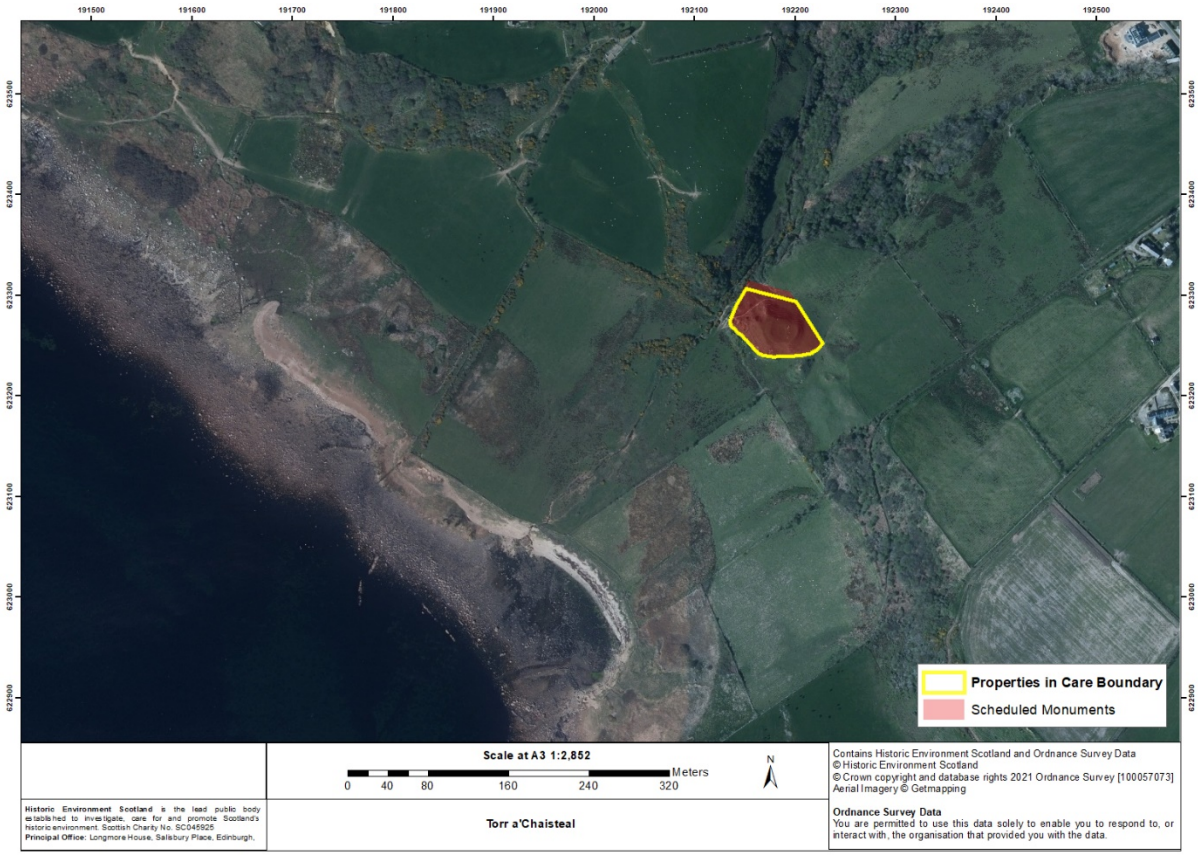

Figure 4: Position of Property in Care in relation to neighbouring coast. Boundaries for illustrative purposes only.

2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

Torr a'Chaisteal is a pleasant grassy site. It offers open views over the sea, to the west towards Kintyre and southwards towards Ailsa Craig, the South Ayrshire coast and Galloway.

Interest is added to the view by its location on the edge of a line of distinctive 'fossil' cliffs, which overlook the extensive raised beach formed during the higher sea-levels of the last glacial period. The site thus offers an insight into a deeper past, to a period around 10,000 year ago, when the first human settlers recolonised Scotland after the Ice Age.

The site's topographical location shows to advantage from the air, and oblique aerial views of various dates are held in the National Record of the Historical Environment.[27]

Figure 5: Oblique aerial view centred on the remains of the dun. © Crown copyright: HES.

2.6 Natural heritage values

Torr a'Chaisteal has some natural heritage value at a local level. The site and the land immediately around it are not currently (2021) designated for the protection of species or habitats. However, the inshore portion of the water it overlooks is part of the South Arran Nature Conservation Marine Protected Area, which is designated for its distinctive seabed deposits of maerl and gravel, and the wide range of marine species which live on and in these deposits.[28]

There are a few species of note on the unimproved neutral grassland of the monument itself, such as harebells which grow on the south facing banks of the outer ring mound, to the east of the entrance. The site perimeter is

[27] Accessible via: https://canmore.org.uk/site/39674/arran-torr-a-chaisteil?display=image
[28] NatureScot website, accessed 24/11/2020

un-improved marshy grassland and scrub which is a rare habitat of much value, providing food and shelter for animals and invertebrates.

The site provides a good vantage point for appreciating the landscape and wildlife: several species of raptor have been observed: buzzard (*Buteo buteo)* occur frequently, while both golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos)* and sea eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla)* have been seen occasionally, usually during the winter months. Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) can occasionally be sighted in spring or autumn as they pass through on their migration.

The plant species present here include birds-foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), crested dogstail (*Cynosurus crisatus*), germander speedwell (*Veronica chamaedrys*), harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), ladies bedstraw (*Galium verum*), nettle (*Urtica dioica*), perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*), red campion (*Silene dioica*), red clover (*Trifolium pratense*), soft rush (*Juncus effuses*), timothy (*Phleum pratense*), tufted hair grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*).[29]

The bedrock geology of the site is sandstone belonging to the Auchenhew Mudstone Formation, with Raised Marine Beach Deposits of both Holocene and Late Devensian origin.[30]

2.7 Contemporary/use values

There has not been a formal assessment of the value of Torr a'Chaisteal to contemporary communities, either of geography or interest. It is known of as an element of the area's rich heritage, and some are aware of the old traditions associated with it, but it does not hold the same degree of prominence as other prehistoric sites on Arran, such as Drumadoon and Machrie Moor.

It is visited by tourists who are interested in Arran's heritage. Visitors are not currently counted, but numbers are estimated by HES as 1160 per year for 2018/19.Visitors are encouraged to arrive by public transport and the site must be approached on foot. Stout footwear is required, as access is across agricultural land.[31] Many opt to view it from the main road before driving on to visit other sites.

[29] Tevendale, 2017
[30] British Geological Survey GeoIndex Onshore, accessed 01/02/2020
[31] Further access information is available on the HES website: https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/torr-achaisteal-dun/getting-here/

Images of the site have been used in archaeological guides and reference works, but it does not usually feature in general guidebooks. Even in specialist works, it is usually afforded no more than a brief paragraph.

On-site interpretation is currently provided by a single interpretation board.

3. MAJOR GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

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The lack of excavated sites means that local evidence to support an understanding of the place of duns in the Iron Age in Arran and the south-west Highlands is virtually non-existent. Interpretations have instead been extrapolated from other areas and type sites (including both the brochs and wheelhouses of the north and west, and the hillforts and enclosed settlements of the south-eastern coastal plain and eastern Borders) even though the regional variability of later Iron Age settlement patterns has long been recognised.[32] There are a few hillforts, which may be earlier than the duns (though only Balloch Hill in Kintyre[33] and Dunagoil on Bute[34] have been examined, the latter a century ago), while there have been no recent excavations on Iron Age duns of simple circular plan, similar in plan to Torr a'Chaisteal.

At present, therefore, it would not be unreasonable to take the view that *any* new information about the later Iron Age in the area would be of great value. However, it is possible to sketch out a short list of unanswered questions about Torr a'Chaisteal:

- How does Torr a'Chaisteal fit into the local Iron Age settlement pattern?
- What was Torr a'Chaisteal's internal layout when completed: was it a single roofed dwelling or did it contain a smaller dwelling with open space around it within the outer stone wall.
- What was the nature of human occupation and use of the area outside the wall?

[32] Hingley 1998, 44
[33] Peltenburg 1983
[34] Harding 2004 for a modern account

Added to the specific questions above, there are major gaps relating to the period to which Torr a'Chaisteal belongs. Key research questions relating to the Iron Age as a whole are contained within the ScARF National Framework Iron Age report.[35]

4. ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

Associated properties managed by HES

- Kilpatrick Dun (Arran)
- Rispain Camp (defended settlement, Dumfries and Galloway) – a circular house excavated within the enclosure appears to be of similar date to Torr a'Chaisteal(s)
- Dundonald Castle (medieval castle on site of earlier fort, East Ayrshire)
- Dumbarton Castle (medieval castle on site of earlier fort, West Dunbartonshire)
- Dun Struan Beag (broch, Isle of Skye) – present-day appearances gives an idea of Torr a'Chaisteal when at its full original height
- Other properties on Arran, although of different periods, including Machrie Moor standing stones and Moss Farm Road stone circle, Torrylin chambered tomb and Lochranza Castle.

Associated sites not managed by HES

- The Doon, fort, Drumadoon (hillfort, possibly earlier Iron Age, Arran)

5. KEYWORDS

Torr a'Chaisteal, Iron Age, dun, defensive, quern, roundhouse, Arran

[35] Accessible at: https://scarf.scot/national/iron-age-panel-report/

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Note: Footnotes throughout the text offer page numbers where appropriate. If no page number is given, this indicates that reference is being made to the general thrust of the publication cited rather than a specific point of detail.

Further Resources

Canmore ID: 39674
Site Number: NR92SW 2
NGR: NR 9219 2326

Canmore entry: https://canmore.org.uk/site/39674/arran-torr-a-chaisteil

Further information on Iron Age Scotland is to be found at https://scarf.scot/national/iron-age-panel-report/

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: TIMELINE

Later Iron Age	
(?first centuries AD)	Site constructed, occupied and falls out of use.
Modern times	
(?early 19th century)	Interior cultivated – apparently for a single year only.
Before 1873	J M'Arthur excavates a small area within the interior.
Before 1910	J A Balfour excavates a slightly larger area, seemingly unaware of any earlier excavation.
1963	Site is taken into State care under a Guardianship Agreement.
Mid 1960s	First of a succession of information panels erected outside the dun.
1994	Site re-scheduled.

APPENDIX 2: ANTIQUARIAN ACCOUNT

Extracts from John M'Arthur's *Antiquities of Arran* (second edition, 1873), pages 68-9

The next fort we meet in our ramble is that of TorCastle – Castle Hill – a little to the north of Slaodridh [Sliddery], situated on an artificial hillock, about fifty feet in height, near the shore. It is a round building, 160 feet in circumference, with walls from four to five feet in thickness. An adjoining outpost, or defence of smaller extent, protects the narrow entrance from the sea. The principal strength is skilfully and massively constructed. Its walls are now demolished, but the foundation stones remain – huge flat blocks of sandstone broken and chiselled by the native builder into regular and symmetrical proportions. On digging around the mound and within the ruins, we discovered large quantities of the bones of the ox, the boar, and the wild deer, mingled with the shells of the beach, and embedded in a dark fetid loam. Human bones are also said to have been found amongst the ruins...

...It is said that a battle was fought long ago around the Tor Castle, between the natives of Arran and a band of marauders from Kintyre. The Arran men were encouraged to victory by the cheers of their wives and children, who crowded the Clappen Hill to witness the conflict. After a desperate struggle the invaders were repulsed, and forced to seek safety in their ships.

Tor Castle is further remarkable for the existence of ancient plough marks, popularly known as *elf-furrows*, which are still clearly traceable over its summit. Tradition relates that the rich black mould of the mound tempted the natives to reduce it to cultivation. This was many years ago, when the old *rig* system of farming obtained in the Island. The lands of the neighbourhood were partitioned between twelve families, each of which claimed a rig of the Castle Hill. The mound was cleared of the rich verdure which mantled its surface, and drills of cabbages were planted within the ruined walls. But a signal retribution followed the commission of this daring sacrilege. Before the year closed, the children of the hamlet were fatherless, and eleven new graves were seen in the little churchyard of the district. The villager who escaped had been called to another part of the Island when the old building was being turned into a household garden, and thereby avoided the doom which befell his companions. The people of Arran still regard the old fortlet with a superstitious dread, and he is thought to have a bold heart who will venture to disturb its ruins or visit them after nightfall.

The popular tradition which prevails throughout the Lowlands respecting the origin of these early vestiges of hill cultivation, relates "that at a time when Scotland was under a Papal interdict, or sentence of cursing from the Pope, it was found that his Holiness had forgot to curse the hills, though he had commanded the land usually arable to yield no increase, and that while this sentence remained, the people were necessitated to seek tillage ground in places unusual or improbable. *Elf-furrows* have been discovered on many of the heights of Scotland, but they are of more frequent occurrence in that portion of the Western Highlands occupied by the Dalriadic colonists prior to the Scottish conquest, and have been supposed to indicate the existence of a very considerable population in those early times, possessing an intimate acquaintance with the means necessary to, and the advantages arising from, the agricultural deployment of their lands." [Citing Sinclair's *Statistical Account*, volume xvii, p 115.] It is no less probable, however, that at a period when the valleys and straths of Caledon were covered with dense forests and marshy jungles, the heath clad hills may have afforded the readiest and most accessible tillage ground for the immediate necessities of the newly arrived colonists.