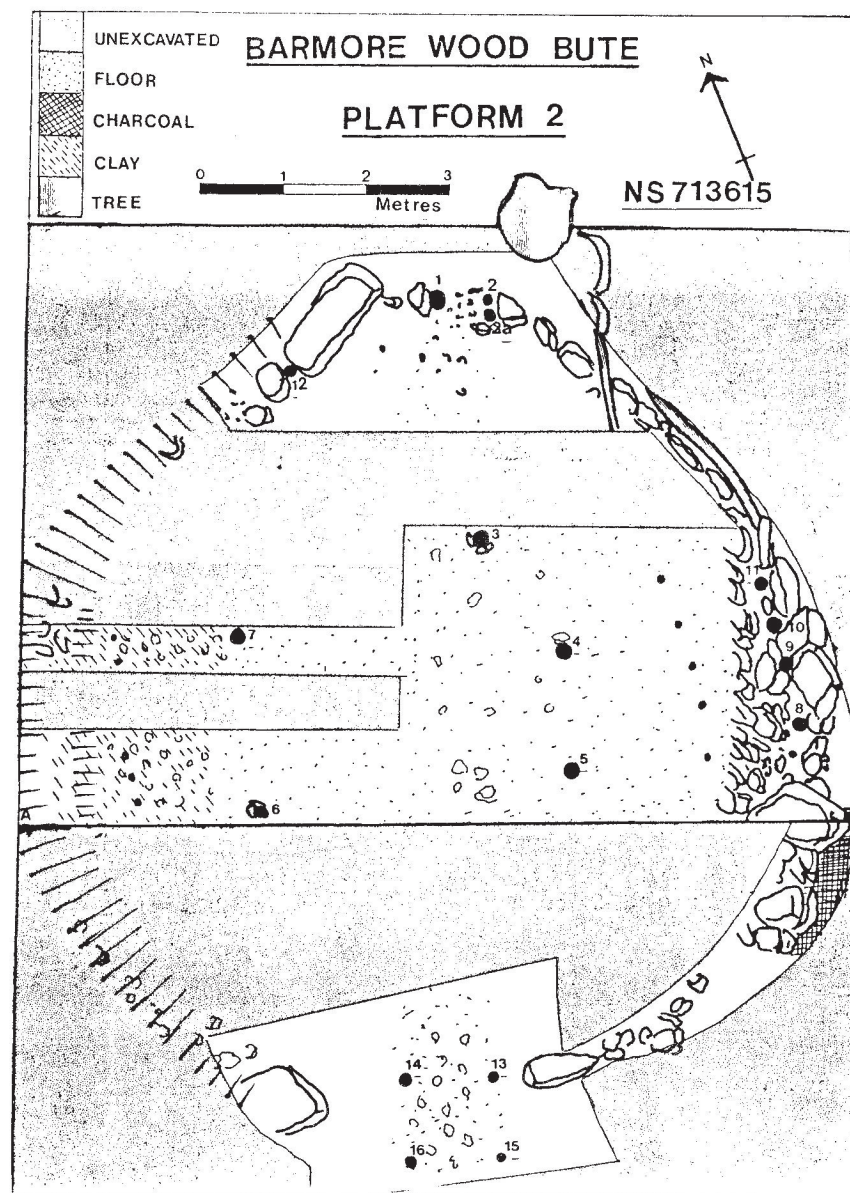




A SMALL STRUCTURE ON ARDROSCADALE FARM Andrina Ross

In a corner of a field at Upper Ardroscadale farm (NS 042 649) is an interesting but puzzling site which was first investigated in the 1920s. According to local legend, this was a place where witches were burned. This rather doubtful explanation failed to satisfy Dr J.N. Marshall who showed the site to the eminent archaeologists Professor J. Ritchie and Ludovic Mann, in the hope of finding a more satisfactory explanation of its use. Each had his own interpretation of the site and these will be discussed later.

By the time the site was investigated again, in 1987, the area was overgrown and there had been a large accumulation of soil. The site had to be re-excavated and it was noted by Miss D.N. Marshall that there had been a general deterioration since she had first seen it with her father about sixty years before. However, the main features still remained intact.

The site comprises a circular hollow, approximately 0.7 metres in depth and with a diameter of 2.5 metres. The north side of the hollow is lined with a well-built semi-circle of orthostats but the rest of the hollow has no such definite walling. At the east side is a tumble of large stones. At the south of the hollow is a break in the circle, perhaps forming an entrance.

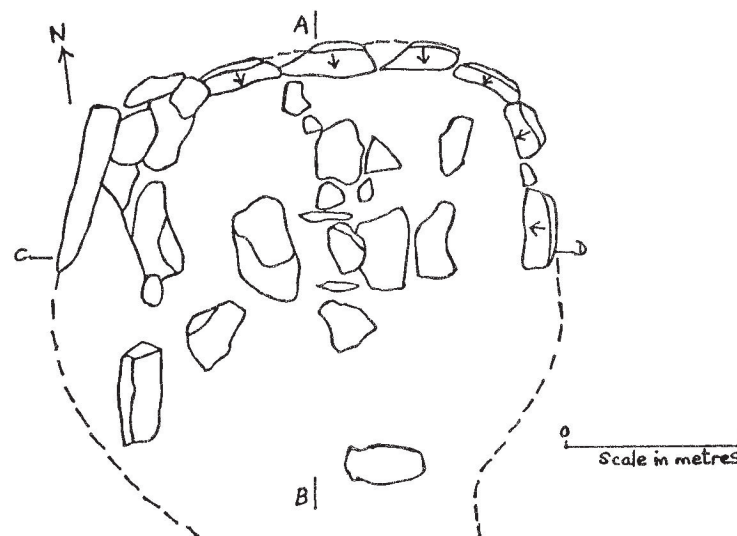
In the centre of the circle are three placed upright stones, a fourth stone lies flat, close by the three uprights. These stones would probably have supported a square post. There is evidence that the floor of the hollow had been paved. This, however, had deteriorated since the early investigation but Miss Marshall remembers it as having more extensive paving than is now evident.

No firm conclusions were drawn in the 1920s. Ludovic Mann suggested that a pillar might have been placed in the posthole for astronomical sitings. This explanation is unlikely because of the position of the site.

Professor James Ritchie suggested an agricultural use for the site. He had knowledge of whin-crushing mills in the north-east of Scotland and he saw some similarities at Ardroscadale. In much of Scotland, whin shoots were used to feed cattle and horses. In the north-east, these shoots were crushed by means of an upright stone which revolved in a shallow circular trench. A wooden post acted as a pivot in the centre of the circle. A horse or ox turned the stone by means of a beam which passed through the centre of it.

The circle at Ardrosdale has a central posthole but the setting of the stones implies a square rather than round post. Also, the whin mills are reported to be about 4.8 metres in diameter whereas Ardrosdale measures only half of that. There is no history of whin being used on Bute as fodder and no remains of other possible whin-crushing mills. Professor Ritchie's suggestion, therefore, remains unproven.

That leaves the problem of the use of the site unsolved. The orthostats are so well-built that its use was obviously more than just as a simple storage pit. The central upright stones suggest a central post which could have been used as a pivot or as a support. The ruin at the top of the hollow has not been investigated yet, for evidence of a construction over it. There have been no finds at the site by which to date it. The reason for constructing this circular hollow at Ardrosdale, be it agricultural or for a use known only to Bute's earlier inhabitants, remains a mystery.



ARDROSCADALE JULY 1987

