

Kildonan – Iron Age

A pre-historic Highland community



Image: Iron Age roundhouses in the Strath of Kildonan.

During the Iron Age the Strath of Kildonan in Sutherland was home to many small farming communities. The relatively mild climate of this period enabled the cultivation of barley, wheat, and oats, and the keeping of horses, sheep, and cattle. Although much of the land had been cleared for agriculture, areas of woodland survived (providing shelter for deer, wild boar, and wolves).

The Iron Age residents of Kildonan lived in circular roundhouses, made of stone and turf, with conical thatched roofs. Hut circles from these long ago dwellings can still be seen today. More than 350 hut circles have been identified in Kildonan.

The roundhouses provided shelter for humans and animals. They were focused around a central hearth, with bays for sleeping and stalls for animals towards the walls of the house. Roundhouses were common throughout the British Isles. However, many of the roundhouses in Kildonan have specific regional variations – including passageways in the walls.

This reconstruction shows how roundhouses near Caen in the Strath of Kildonan may have looked about 2000 years ago. The dwellings are set within a wider landscape, which was already profoundly shaped by human activity. Partial deforestation, and the impact of growing crops and grazing animals, made this Iron Age environment far from its original wild state.

The project is funded by the Northern and Arctic Periphery Programme (ERDF).

How Did We Know What to Reconstruct?

Researchers have been interested in the pre-historic residents of Kildonan for some time. As far back as the nineteenth century antiquarians were recording hut circles and excavating Iron Age objects. Many of these artefacts are now cared for by [Timespan](#), and provided vital information for the furnishings represented in the reconstruction. Around the Caen Burn there is evidence of considerable pre-historic activity, including hut-circles and pre-historic field systems. The remains in this area were surveyed in the late twentieth century, and provided the basis for this reconstruction. Archaeological guidance for the reconstruction was provided by Jacquie Aitken (Heritage Officer for Timespan).

How Was the Reconstruction Created?

The buildings were originally modelled using SketchUp. They were then imported into Unreal Engine 4 (a platform for creating 3D virtual worlds). Videos and other media were created from the landscape in Unreal.

How Has the Reconstruction Been Used?

The reconstruction was featured as part of a [virtual event](#) in collaboration with Timespan in June 2020. It is part of the wider [CINE](#) project which focuses on digitally representing heritage in northern environments.

When Was the Reconstruction Published?

This version of the reconstruction was released to the public in May 2020.

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How to Access the Reconstruction?

There is a video preview of the reconstruction on [Vimeo](#).

A 360° tour can be found on [Roundme](#).


A tour of the reconstruction and discussion by Jacquie Aitken of the research behind it can be found [here](#).

The full reconstruction can be downloaded for Windows devices [here](#).

Discover More

The project is funded by the Northern and Arctic Periphery Programme (ERDF).

Information held by Historic Environment Scotland about pre-historic sites in and around Caen can be accessed via [Canmore](#). CANMORE

You can see how the area near the Caen Burn looks today on [Google Maps](#). 

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This reconstruction was part of the [CINE](#) project for digital heritage in northern environments. The project received funding from the European Union's [Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme](#).

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