

# The Caithness Broch Project [C1]

Questa iniziativa archeologica unica nel suo genere mira a promuovere il patrimonio locale e il turismo nella regione di Caithness, in Scozia.

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Founded fifty years ago by the Council for British Archaeology, Butser Ancient Farm in Hampshire, England has become internationally famous as an example of living history. A resource for schools, it also frequently appears in documentaries and films. Its success has inspired similar projects in other parts of the British Isles. The Caithness Broch Project in the north of Scotland **aims** to transport visitors two thousand years into the past with its Big Broch Builds. Brochs are mysterious conical structures unique to Scotland. One aspect of the brochs which has fascinated archaeologists and architects **alike** is the incredibly sophisticated level of engineering, as well as the understanding of the materials, which **enabled** the Iron Age **masons** to build such massive towers in drystone. The archaeologists concluded that the only way to truly understand how they managed to do it was to try to build one.

## PLANNING LAW

To find out more, Speak Up contacted Dawn Mackay, an architectural technician who is a member of the project team. While it has been **up and running** for at least a decade, the planning phase of the project has taken some time. Mackay's role has been to navigate the complex planning system, dealing with local **councils**, engineers and ecologists. Like any modern building site, this ancient reconstruction requires a **junction** from the main road, a car park, paths and **drainage** — with all the correct permits. Even the choice of site has proved a challenge. The team began with many possible locations, but most had to be rejected, as Mackay explained. **Dawn Mackay (Scottish accent):** The site selection process has been arduous. The sites list, at the beginning, **if my memory serves me correctly**, was thirty-five. So the sites have been **ticked off** for various different reasons, mainly things like they're not authentic enough, the **landowner** doesn't realise how

much land we need and doesn't want to give us that amount of land, we can't afford to buy the land... There's various different reasons but we have actually now finally narrowed it down to two sites, both of which are obviously in Caithness.

## PRECISION SPENDING

As the team is a charity, meticulous management of funds is also very important, as Mackay explains. **Dawn Mackay**: It's a very slow process. And also because we're a charity, we deal with public money, we'd require funding for a lot of things, we don't want to just spend money willy-nilly. We have to be accountable. So it's taking a long time but we feel that it has to be done correctly when you're spending other people's money.

## HISTORICAL VALUE

In spite of the bureaucracy, Mackay and the rest of the team are convinced that the Big Broch Build will be of considerable value, both historically and in reviving building techniques that may have been lost in history. No broch has been constructed in over two thousand years and there is very little written history from the Iron Age period in Scotland. With so little to go on, the team members will have to try and interpret ruins and how they fit in with their landscapes. But that's the beauty of the archaeological experiment, says Mackay: it's all part of the learning process. **Dawn Mackay**: We'll have to test how they might have gone about doing this. We may fail, we may have to start again, we may have to come at it in different ways, to see if it works. Because, what we don't want to do is use modern techniques, because in the Iron Age they wouldn't have had steel, they wouldn't have had cranes, they wouldn't have had lifting equipment. They would have had to do these builds with the things that were available to them at the time. So in that way I think there're a lot of archaeologists who are really interested to see how this is going to work. How did they manage to build a ten-metre, sometimes twelve-, fifteen-metre high stone building, without any mechanical help whatsoever.

## CHANGING LANDSCAPES

Scotland's landscape has changed. Timber would certainly have been available to the builders, but there is little evidence that it was used in broch construction. **Dawn Mackay:** Scotland was covered in forests, as you probably know, and because of sheep grazing and now deer — they just eat everything —, Scotland is pretty much a wet desert now. So I think that the Iron Age landscape would have been very, very different. Having said that, there's not a huge amount of evidence of them using a lot of wood. Although the roof we think would have been made out of timber and thatch. But there's not a lot evidence left, because, as you can imagine, after two thousand years, although the stones are still there, the timber is long gone. And I think in archaeology, they're reticent to say anything for sure, when you have no direct evidence of it.

## CAITHNESS CULTURE

Aside from finding answers to archaeological questions, Mackay hopes the Caithness Broch Project will bring visitors to Caithness and be a source of pride for the local community. **Dawn Mackay:** We'd like it to be two things. One, an archaeological experiment. But also, our county here in Caithness, we've lost so many young people moving away for work, we've had issues with people not staying in Caithness. They travel through Caithness to get to Orkney, but they don't tend to stay here, so we felt that we wanted to create something that was unique to Caithness, in fact unique to Scotland, and even the UK, so that it would encourage people not to just drive through here, but to stay here. And that would lead to them thinking "Well, what else can I see while I'm here?" And then they would go to other attractions in Caithness. I mean our coastline is spectacular, we've got lots and lots of archaeology, just the same as Orkney does, but it's just not as well advertised here. So we would like to make it a tourist attraction, but it would be part of the bigger picture for Caithness. [www.thebrochproject.co.uk](http://www.thebrochproject.co.uk)

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# Glossary

- **lifting equipment** = attrezzatura per sollevamento
- **whatsoever** = qualunque, qualsiasi
- **aims** = aspirare a
- **alike** = ugualmente
- **masons** = muratori
- **junction** = accesso
- **charity** = organizzazione benefica
- **steel** = acciaio
- **thatch** = paglia
- **is long gone** = è scomparso da tempo
- **drainage** = fognatura
- **if my memory serves me correctly** = se la mia memoria non mi inganna
- **ticked off** = cancellare
- **landowner** = proprietario terriero
- **cranes** = gru
- **deer** = cervi
- **county** = contea
- **up and running** = in attività
- **councils** = amministrazioni comunali
- **accountable** = responsabile
- **issues** = problemi
- **enabled** = permettere
- **narrowed it down** = limitare
- **In spite of** = nonostante
- **Timber** = legname
- **grazing** = pascolare