

Stitching

Common Ground

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We would also like to thank our artist in residence, Deirdre Nelson for the extraordinary work she has enabled through her residency, the children from the primary schools of Isla, Kirkmichael, St Stephens, Rattray and Alyth for the creativity of their textiles and those who contributed their stitching talents through the workshop we ran over the period of March – July 2017.

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Booklet Design: Andrew Hunter.

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Part of Luminare: Scotland's creative ageing festival



The Project

Common Ground formed part of the launch programme of the Cateran's Common Wealth initiative, which is using the Cateran Trail as a stage for a multi-year programme of diverse arts, cultural and heritage activities and events aimed at inspiring people to think about and celebrate our 'common wealth'. In addition to publishing this booklet and displaying some of the photographs and all of the textiles through an Exhibition, new place name research of the Cateran Trail area was commissioned, which can be found online at www.commonculture.org.uk.

Introduction

The upland rural landscape of Eastern Perthshire that we know today is the result of over six thousand years of people settling, farming and improving the landscape around them. The physical traces of past human activity survive all around us and through archaeology, it is possible to decipher these remains and reveal some of their fascinating stories. One of the best ways to appreciate the scale of human occupation in the Cateran Trail environs is from the air. This booklet, which accompanies an exhibition, is the culmination of a project called **Common Ground** that captured the great variety and richness of the area's historic environment through specially commissioned and curated oblique aerial photography of the locality. These photographs were then used as inspiration for a series of new textiles created by local people through an artist residency with Deirdre Nelson, one of Scotland's foremost contemporary textile artists.

This section of the booklet, written by Deirdre Nelson, focuses on the artist residency.

The artist: Deirdre Nelson

Deirdre studied textiles at Glasgow School of Art. Although interested in making, she was also very interested in working with communities and after graduating, worked in education and arts and health. She also developed her own arts practice alongside and later began to do residencies which integrated making and work with communities.

Cover: Cover. Fish stitched into an aerial photograph of the River Ericht, photo Deirdre Nelson.



Deirdre Nelson at Diarmuids Grave, Glenshee, photo Clare Cooper.

Diarmuid's Grave is a classic four poster stone 'circle'. It is unusual in being situated on the top of a small knoll with virtually no flat room outside of the circle. Excavation showed the knoll to be a glacial deposit.

“My core interest is in people and how we can value their diversity and their individual skills. My work tries to find ways to celebrate what individuals have to offer to the world around them – their special skills which are often overlooked. Celebrating the ordinary and the every-day, highlighting the overlooked, discovering the small things that are going on in people's lives and communities is what motivates me. Even though there are lots of challenges around us I'm always looking to find way of being celebratory and positive.

Finding ways to create quality projects that have minimum environmental impact is central to my work. I try to be thoughtful and consider every aspect of a project. This involves being careful about your choice of material, who you work with and designing the end of the project at the beginning so that you are really forcing yourself to think about the long term 'legacy' of your work. I'm also very committed to using traditional craft skills – needlework and knitting for example and finding ways of passing those skills on.”

Theme 1 Walking and Archaeology

Walking across landscape can tell us much about past places and landscapes but also add to our ways of knowing and accumulation of archaeological knowledge. Walking, the most ancient exercise, is an essential part of our engagement with place and the routes we walk affect the way we see the landscape and archaeology.

The many archaeological sites on the Cateran Trail provide interest for both walker and archaeologist and artist alike. Archaeological features in certain areas are more visible from the air than on the ground. Differences in ground surfaces caused by buried features can be viewed from the air and varying ground levels, soil, colour and texture provide not only information on new archaeological sites but both exciting colour and visual inspiration for creative activity for the many artists living around the Cateran Trail.



The path to Diarmuid's Grave, photo Deirdre Nelson

The Cateran Trail passes the site shortly after it leaves the Spittal of Glenshee



Grey Cairn, Balnabroich, Pitmacarrick photo © Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust The large cairn known as the Grey Cairn was excavated some years before 186 by a Dr Wise and Principal Campbell of Aberdeen. Wise found a passage of slabs large enough for a person to crawl through which led towards the centre of the cairn but no chamber was found.

Theme 2 Commons and Layers of Meaning

‘We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.’ *Aldo Leopold*¹.

The aerial photos taken by Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust provide a vast visual and textural resource for visual art and design and will inspire many local artists over time. Originally we had discussed a Cateran Cloth using the images as inspiration but on exploring the idea of Commons further, cloth or multiple cloths which were accessible to many local people seemed more appropriate. In thinking more about community and commons it was important that the project reached out as far as possible into the communities around the Trail. Each group decided who they would like to make textiles for, and what they would make. The groups made cushions, a banner, a window blind and bunting which will be placed in local care homes local shops, a new school and an outdoor centre.



Left: Tullymurdoch, photo © Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust

This settlement of ten stone-walled huts occur within a small contemporary field-system marked by stone clearance heaps and ruinous walls. These are partially overlain by rig and furrow cultivation.

¹Foreword. *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* 1949 Oxford University press.



Stitching Barry Hill Fort, Kirkmichael Primary School, photo Deirdre Nelson

The fort which crowns Barry Hill overlooks the mouth of Glen Isla and commands an extensive view across Strathmore. Barry Hill is impressive for the sheer scale of its defences which are both complex and multi-period.

Theme 3 Aerial, Digital and Stitching the Land

In keeping with the areas rich textile history, the photographs have been digitally printed onto a variety of materials such as cotton, bamboo and linen. Each new digital textile incorporates the archaeological photographs as a background on which to add new layers of stitch. The groups highlighted existing archaeology and added new mark making through coloured stitch. For many of the children, stitching was a new and exciting activity for them.

It was essential that the children were involved in creating a high quality product which allowed them to view their surroundings in a new way whilst learning a new skill. Many of the children had not stitched before and were very enthusiastic to get involved. Not only is it a fun activity but stitching develops and matures finger dexterity, hand eye coordination, fine motor skills. Creative thinking skills are stimulated and the completion of a quality product fosters a sense of accomplishment and pride.

'manual competence makes you feel better, and behave better. It gives you a sense of autonomy, a feeling of responsibility for your work and for the material world, and ultimately makes for better citizens....'

Oliver Burkeman.²

Viewing their work appreciated by the community and in use in the local area fosters additional confidence and pride in local surroundings. It is particularly apt that two of the groups decided to make cushions which tie in with the idea of rest after a long walk. The new 'archaeological' textiles provide an opportunity to rest and contemplate their rich and diverse local archaeology and surroundings. Bunting allows the school and village an opportunity to celebrate their landscape and display their craft skills for many years to come.



Stitching Red Stitch, St Stephens Primary School Photo Deirdre Nelson

²*Working with your hands the secret for happiness' The Guardian 2010*



Above: Cody Stitch, Isla Primary School,
photo Deirdre Nelson



Left: Stitching the River Erich,
St Stephens Primary School,
Photo Deirdre Nelson

Theme 4 Archaeology of the Ordinary

Legacy and outreach have been crucial in the development of the project and the textiles will begin day to day life in a local care home, grocer, farm shop, outdoor centre, craft group, church, village hall and schools. This amplifies the idea of Commons and land and resources belonging to a whole community. The textiles have been on display at the opening of an outdoor classroom, end of year school prize giving, and as part of Alyth and District Agriculture Show, the Alyth Creates Festival, the Blairgowrie and Rattray Arts Festival and the Luminare Festival and textiles have been offered for local raffles raising money for local causes.

‘In time, she hopes, these objects will become part of an evolving culture – its accumulation of meaning in the archaeology of the ordinary’.

Ruth Little³.



Gifting one of the cushions to Margaret Ferguson, shop owner Alyth, Photo by Clare Cooper

One of the aerial photos of Alyth showed Forfar Carpets Mill, a mid 19th century, 2-storey, 9-bay rubble building with a small single-storey engine house at one end and single-storey weaving sheds at the rear. The cushion used the photo as a background using new layers of stitch over Margaret’s Shop across the Alyth Burn from the Mill.

³From *Vocabulary of Islandings; an essay by Ruth Little for Blow in Bespoke an exhibition by Deirdre Nelson An Tobar Mull.*



Left: Stitching the Trail at the Alyth & District Agricultural Show, photo Clare Cooper

Above: Gifting one of the cushions to Marshalls Farm Shop, Photo by Clare Cooper

Story 6: Caulfeild's Military Roads

One of most notable changes to the post-medieval rural landscape of Scotland was the arrival of metalled roads. The establishment of a road network was part of measures taken by the British Government to control the Highlands in the aftermath of the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1719 AD. General George Wade began the work in 1724, supervising the construction and improvement of forts, barracks and a military road system connecting them. The network allowed troops to be easily and quickly deployed throughout the Highlands and came into its own during the final Jacobite rebellion of 1745 AD.

In 1732 AD Major William Caulfeild took over from Wade and brought the first continuous metalled road through Glenshee, connecting the barracks at Coupar Angus with Braemar. Work started from Blairgowrie and Braemar in 1749 AD with the route eventually extending to connect Perth and Fort George, near Inverness. The roads would have had a significant visual and social impact on the people living in Glenshee, improving communication links and access to more distant markets, whilst also imposing a strong symbol of central government power that would have disrupted established drove routes and land divisions.

Much of the network now lies beneath modern roads but in some places, such as around Bridge of Cally, sections are still clearly visible. Notable archaeological traces on the route include snow marker stones, overnight camps, stone quarries and bridges such as the fine example at Spittal of Glenshee.

Further Reading:

Farquharson, L. (2011) *General Wade's Legacy: The 18th Century Military Road System in Perthshire*. Perth: Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust.
Barthorp, M. (1982) *The Jacobite Rebellions 1689-1745. Men-at-Arms 118*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing.



Above: To the north of Bridge of Cally, a section of the military road built under the supervision of Major William Caulfeild in the mid-1700s AD is visible. The distinctive banks of earth and stone that were thrown up along either side of the road by the soldiers during its construction are particularly clear, photo © Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust

Left: Major Caulfeild's Bridge over the Shee Water at Spittal of Glenshee. In the field to the right of the present church, the rectangular outline of the 18th-century chapel, contemporary with the bridge, can be observed. The long lines of rig and furrow cultivation can also be appreciated within the same field in this image, photo © Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust

Story 5: The Post-Medieval Rural Settlement Landscape

By far the most visible physical remains of past rural settlement around the Cateran Trail date from the 1600s to mid-1800s AD. This is the greatly romanticised period of Scottish history where we find legendary cultural characters such as Rob Roy MacGregor, Bonnie Prince Charlie and Robert Burns. From the air it is possible to identify the remains of permanent farmsteads and fermtooun (farm-town) settlements in the main valleys. Here, visible remains of dwellings are generally rectangular and stone built, often with associated cultivation scars. Additional features such as byres, storage barns, lime and corn-drying kilns, mills with lades, retting ponds (where flax was soaked to process it in textile manufacture), stone dykes, track-ways, and enclosures for garden cultivation and penning stock can also be seen. Higher in the tributary-valleys, lower hills and upland moors are the remains of shellings - small bothies used by herdsmen while grazing their cattle, and later sheep, on higher summer pastures.

Prior to the agricultural improvements of the 1700s, farming followed a communal, subsistence pattern with the *toun* serving as the basic unit of landholding. Rental prices were calculated on the amount of arable land held. Where larger tracts of arable land existed, fermtooun communities developed where tenants worked together to produce a sufficient food surplus to pay rent to the laird. Historical rent books, census documents and maps can tell us more about these people and where they came from. Records show, for example, that the Fleming and Spalding families, both of immigrant Flemish descent, were part of the Easter Bleaton fermtooun community in Glen Shee around the 1640s AD.

Further Reading:

Dodgshon, R. (2002) *The Age of the Clans: The Highlands from Somerled to the Clearances*. Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd.

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland [RCAHMS] (1990) *North-East Perth: An Archaeological Landscape*. London: HMSO.

Above: Easter Bleaton is an exceptionally well preserved example of a linear post-medieval fermtooun settlement. The stone footing remains of at least fifty-two buildings together with a series of enclosures and four corn drying kilns can still be seen. From the disposition of the buildings it is possible to suggest the presence of at least eight different farmsteads, perhaps reflecting the properties of individual tenants, photo © Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust



Theme 3: Catearans and Drovers

Story 4: The Catearans and Drovers

The Cateran Trail incorporates many historical paths, trackways and old military roads into its 64 mile circular route. Some sections follow paths once used by Drovers and Catearans which were the only terrestrial ways through Glenshee and Strathardle before the military roads came in the AD 1700s. Cateran derives from the Gaelic

word *ceatharn* meaning a lightly armed warrior. References first appear in historical records of the late AD 1300s with reports of livestock being raided by armed bands of Catearans. These were harsh times in the highland glens of Strathardle, Glenshee and Glen Isla where a wetter, colder climate, plague, and the recent wars with England made it increasingly difficult to make a living from the marginal farmland. Livestock were a high value commodity and raiding them offered a viable solution to financial hardship. The other alternative to raiding cattle was to drive large herds of them to

market and sell them.

The Scottish cattle droving trade emerged out of this same poor climate where long winters and infertile soils meant a shortage of stored feed to sustain the large numbers of cattle produced through the feudal open common grazing system.

The solution was for local men to visit surrounding farms, negotiate a price for small numbers of cattle and gather them together into large herds of 100-2,000 strong. The Drovers would head south and east, trading livestock at markets where demand and profits were higher. Through trade between Drovers, cattle from the Highlands could reach as far as York and London. The drove roads were long and the journey full of hazards, from fording fast flowing rivers to the threat of Cateran raids. In the middle of the 18th Century, Kirkmichael's Michaelmas Fair was a major cattle market and drove roads connecting the village to Spittal of Glenshee and Ballinluing can still be walked today.

Further Reading:

Haldane, A.R.B. (2015) *The Drove Roads of Scotland*. Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd.

McNiven, P. (2017) *Placenames of the Cateran Trail*. www.commonculture.org.uk

Above: Looking north-west through Glen Shee towards the village of Spittal of Glenshee with Dalmunzie House in the distance, photo © Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust



Theme 2: Pictish Settlement

Story 3: Early Historic Pictish Settlement

Archaeologists surveying North East Perthshire in the 1980's identified a series of buildings previously unseen anywhere else in Scotland. Named 'Pitcarmick' buildings after the estate in Strathardle where they were first discovered, these unusual buildings appear as low earth banks, and have an elongated rectangular form between 5m and 30m in length with slightly curved side walls and rounded gable ends. Excavated examples from the groups at Pitcarmick in Strathardle and Lair in Glenshee have revealed that the buildings functioned as byre-houses and were primarily constructed of turf and earth, sometimes with a stone foundation. In these byre-houses, people would have lived in one end whilst cattle were overwintered in the other. A gently sloping floor allowed animal waste to flow away from the living quarters whilst a hearth provided heat and light. Radiocarbon dating has shown that the Pitcarmick-type longhouses were built in the Early Historic, or Pictish, period (c.600-900 AD).

The presence of small enclosures, additional buildings and cord-rig cultivation remains near to the longhouse settlements suggests that the Pictish dwellers were practicing mixed farming. Environmental samples taken from a peat fen at Lair have shown that the land was heavily grazed and cereal crops such as barley, oats and rye were being grown. Cattle bones excavated from a pit at Lair offer evidence of butchery suggesting that animals were being reared for meat as well as dairy products. The discovery of decorated stone objects, iron artefacts and metalworking waste paints a picture of a sophisticated and self-sufficient people living in the uplands of North East Perthshire between 1,100 and 1,400 years ago.



Top: This image was captured by a low-level small unmanned aircraft. It features Building #7 at Lair, in Glen Shee, a medieval turf and stone longhouse, prior to its excavation as part of the Glenshee Archaeology Project in 2014, photo © Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust

Above: The rich archaeological landscape of Lair in Glen Shee. Visible are the prehistoric ring-cairn enclosures that have been investigated as part of the Glenshee Archaeology Project. This image centres on a single compartment building adjoined by a roughly rectangular enclosure which may have been used for livestock or garden cultivation, photo © Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust

Further Reading:
Carver, M. (1999) *Surviving in Symbols: A Visit to the Pictish Nation*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd.
Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland [RCAHMS] (1990) *North-East Perth: An Archaeological Landscape*. London: HMSO.

Story 2: The Settlement Landscape of Later Prehistory

North East Perthshire has one of the densest concentrations of surviving prehistoric settlement remains known in Scotland. From the air, these traces appear as single or clustered groups of circular earth-covered banks which represent the remains of late prehistoric houses. Round houses emerge in Scotland around 4,000 years ago and continue as the primary type of domestic dwelling throughout the Bronze and Iron Age until around 600 AD. Their walls could be made of stone or turf supporting a conical thatched roof. Large and small open settlements of houses around 8-15m in diameter are visible throughout the Cateran Trail environs with associated stone clearance cairns and earth banks indicating the layout of field systems for growing crops and enclosures for keeping livestock. Double-walled round houses, such as those at Drumturn Burn, are a fascinating elaboration on the type and are found almost exclusively in Perthshire.

Around 3,000 years ago, people began defining and enclosing their settlements. This was a time of climatic deterioration. As conditions became colder and wetter, cultivation of higher altitude land became less sustainable and people began to move into lower lying areas. This contraction of viable land is one suggestion for why late prehistoric people felt the need to define and protect the land where they lived. Hillforts are a very distinct form of enclosed settlement that emerged during this period of change and there are few examples more dramatic than the fort at Barry Hill near Alyth. Hillforts are highly visible and would have played a key role in prehistoric society, perhaps displaying the power and control of their occupants over the surrounding land and resources.

Further Reading:

Hingley, R. (1998) *Settlement and Sacrifice: The Later Prehistoric People of Scotland*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd.

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland [RCAHMS] (1990) *North-East Perth: An Archaeological Landscape*. London: HMSO.



Above: The fort which crowns Barry Hill overlooks the mouth of Glen Isla and commands an extensive view across Strathmore. Barry Hill is impressive for the sheer scale of its defences which are both complex and multi-period, photo © Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust

Left: This large group of roundhouses and cultivation remains extend across the south-west flank of Beddingreew, to the West of Drumturn Burn. At least twenty-two hut-circles and a platform can be identified.



Story 1: Ritual Landscapes of Early Prehistory

Some of the earliest physical evidence of human activity in the area relates to death rather than life. During the Neolithic period, around 6,000 years ago, people gradually became less reliant on hunting and gathering and began to settle as they adopted farming. These first farmers felled and burned the native forest to create open arable land and reared domesticated cattle, sheep and pigs. Remains of where they lived are difficult to identify amongst the layers of later prehistoric activity, however, some of their often substantial burial places and ritual monuments remain prominent features in the landscape.

Neolithic farmers built the earliest formal burials that we know about in Scotland and these often involved a stone burial chamber covered by a mound of earth and stone. These monuments are referred to as cairns and are roughly circular with large, upright kerb stones around their circumference. In North East Perthshire they vary in size with the most remarkable group of four cairns located at Balnabroich where the Grey Cairn is 27m in diameter and once stood 6m high! Cairn Gleamnach by the Forest of Alyth and the ring-cairn at Lair, Glenshee are other notable examples.

Excavation of tombs often reveals human bones but not full skeletons - just skulls and long bones. This suggests bodies were exposed to allow the elements to decompose the skeletal remains before burial and the tombs repeatedly used, with the bones rearranged each time. Unlike us, perhaps in Neolithic society people weren't represented in death as individuals but as a collective community of ancestors?

Further Reading:

Barclay, G. (1998) *Farmers, Temples and Tombs: Scotland in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd.
Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland [RCAHMS] (1990) *North-East Perth: An Archaeological Landscape*. London: HMSO



Above: The remains of a substantial prehistoric burial cairn are situated on a low knoll in the saddle between the Hill of Kingseat and Saebeg hill. The cairn is roughly circular, measuring 19m in diameter with at least sixty visible kerbstones, photo © Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust

Left: This image is a 2D orthophoto created using a series of overlapping vertical images taken using a low-level unmanned aircraft. It shows the ring cairn, longhouse #1 and surrounding trackways at Lair prior to excavations by the Glen Shee Archaeology Project in 2014, photo © Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust



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Seeing