

## Using archaeological records to investigate Scotland's rural past

This is an extract of the entry for the rural settlement of Rosal from Canmore, the public interface to the RCAHMS database ([www.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk)). Canmore contains details of around 270,000 archaeological sites, monuments, buildings and maritime sites in Scotland, together with an index to the drawings, manuscripts and photographs in our collections. Images of over 80,000 of the photographs or drawings in the collection are also available online. You can search for information by name, location, site type or collection or search using the Canmore mapping service.

A site description is a descriptive written account of what is known about an archaeological site. The description is created as a result of archaeological fieldwork or documentary research, and gives a picture of how the site appeared when it was visited by an investigator. Each time a new piece of archaeological investigation takes place, the site description gets updated. Over time a fuller picture of the site and its history gets built and changes in the state of preservation at the site can be documented and recorded.

The site description for Rosal is as follows:

### **Rosal**

**Alternative Names:** Naver Forest; Strath Naver

**Type of Site:** Township, Head Dyke

**Map reference:** NC689416

**NMRS Number:** NC64SE 12

**Parish:** Farr

**Council:** Highland

**Former District:** Sutherland

The remains of the township of Rosal whose lands are first on record in 1269 and which was cleared 1814-18, since when it remained relatively undisturbed until in 1962 excavation and survey by Fairhurst made it a type-site for clearance depopulation. The arable lands of the township extended over 60 acres and were enclosed by a dry-stone dyke, the plough rigs surviving as a green island in the rough moor. Seventy structures were recognised of which 15 to 18 were long-houses, the remainder being barns, outhouses, stackyards and corn-drying kilns. The barns were rectangular with one rounded end. A few of the buildings had bowed walls and rounded ends and it is suggested that these may be earlier than the others. Selective excavation was undertaken on a typical complex consisting of long-house, barn, stackyard, outhouse and corn-kiln. The long-house was built on a slope with first, a small room at the upper end, then the main living quarters around a central hearth and finally the long byre giving an overall length of 85ft, though other long-houses reached a length of 108ft. The walls consisted of dry-stone work up to a height of 2 or 3ft, presumably forming the base for a turf wall. The roof was supported on couples which rose from ground level. Efforts to locate Medieval house-sites proved fruitless presumably because the buildings were constructed without foundation trenches and were abandoned and the building stones re-used at relatively short intervals. Earlier occupation of the site is indicated by the Iron Age hut-circles and souterrain (NC64SE 28).  
H Fairhurst 1969.

A township comprising nine unroofed buildings, one of which is T-shaped, one unroofed structure, which may be another building, and a ring dyke is depicted on the 1st edition of the OS 6-inch map (Sutherland 1878, sheet xlv). Thirty-nine unroofed buildings, what may be the remains of a two-compartment, long building, one enclosure and a ring dyke are shown on the current edition of the OS 1:10,000 map (1992).

Information from RCAHMS (SAH) 5 October 1995

### Simplified version

Rosal was a farming settlement in Sutherland and is first mentioned in records dating from 1269. The **township** was cleared between 1814 and 1818 during the Sutherland Clearances to make way for a sheep farm. It lay undisturbed until 1962 when an archaeologist called Horace Fairhurst surveyed and excavated the site to discover what life was really like in a highland township during the Clearances.

The township is surrounded by over 24 hectares of **arable** land where the inhabitants would have grown their crops. You can still see clear evidence of where their fields were located by the **rig and furrow** in the surrounding land. The settlement and fields are surrounded by a **dry-stone dyke**.

Fairhurst identified over 70 structures in the township of which 15 to 18 were **byre dwellings**, the remainder being **barns, outhouses, stackyards** and **corn-drying kilns**.

An archaeological excavation was undertaken on one typical group of farm buildings consisting of byre dwelling, barn, stackyard, outhouse and corn-kiln. The byre dwelling was built on a slope with first, a small room at the upper end, then the main living quarters around a central **hearth** and finally the **byre** giving an overall length of 26 metres. Other byre dwellings in Rosal reached a length of 33 metres.

The walls were built of dry-stone work up to a height of 1 metre, presumably forming the base for a **turf wall**. The roof was supported on **crucks**, which rose from ground level. No evidence of any **Medieval** house-sites was found, presumably because any such older buildings were built without **foundation trenches** and after they were abandoned the building stones were re-used, removing any trace of them from the site. Much earlier occupation of the site is indicated by the presence of **Iron Age hut-circles** and a **souterrain**.

## Examples of how to use this resource

- Read through the simplified description and find a definition for each of the highlighted keywords. A glossary of keywords has been provided. Encourage your class to use different sources to find definitions for the words, for example, Google, dictionaries, reference books. You can find a glossary of terms on the Scotland's Rural Past website ([www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk](http://www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk)). It is located in the following section: Home / Doing / Doing field work / [Glossary of terms](#).

### Keywords

**Township** A farming settlement made up of a group of dwellings, farm buildings and land, held by two or more joint tenants usually working the land communally

**Arable** Land used for growing crops

**Rig and furrow** A series of ridges (rigs), separated by furrows, visible in the landscape created by ploughing in the past. Fairhurst refers to the rig and furrow at Rosal as *plough rigs*

**Dry-stone** A method of building walls by laying carefully selected stones one on top of another without using any cement or mortar

**Dyke** A wall, often built to keep animals away from growing crops

**Byre dwelling** A rectangular building which developed during the medieval period, comprising a dwelling for people and accommodation for animals under one roof. Fairhurst refers to the byre dwelling at Rosal as a *long-house*

**Barn** A farm building used primarily for the storage and threshing of grain

**Outhouse** A farm building used for the storage of hay, and farm equipment

**Stackyard** A farmyard or enclosure where sheaves of cereals are stored before threshing

**Corn-drying kiln** A bowl-shaped structure used for drying cereals

**Hearth** A slab, structure or place on which fires are made.

**Byre** A cattle shed

**Turf wall** A wall built out of turf (layers of grass-covered earth)

**Crucks** A pair of curved timbers, often built into the walls of a building, forming an A-frame to support the weight of the roof. Fairhurst refers to the crucks at Rosal as *couples*

**Medieval** In Scotland, the period of time between 400 and 1500 AD

**Foundation trench** A trench in which the foundations of a building are built

**Iron Age** In Scotland, the period of time between 750 BC and AD 400

**Hut circle** A low, circular or oval bank of turf, earth or stone, which are the remains of a Bronze Age or Iron Age roundhouse

**Souterrain** An underground chamber or passage sometimes used as a store, often found at Iron Age settlements

- Go to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland's website – <http://www.rcahms.gov.uk>. Log in to Canmore and use the following terms to find records of other abandoned rural settlements in your own area:
  - **Township**
  - **Farmstead** (A farmhouse and ancillary farm buildings forming a group)
  - **Byre dwelling**
- Use the SCRAN website <http://www.scran.ac.uk> to try to find images for Rosal and for each of the keywords highlighted in the simplified site description.
- Using the site description as an example, write a simple description for your school, or another notable building familiar to you. Describe the location, size, and materials used in construction.

- Contact your local museum or library service to find out about the rural past in your area.
- Research what life was like in a township. Learning and Teaching Scotland have some excellent resources:
  - [http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishhistory/stewartscotland/stewartociety/Everyday\\_Life\\_in\\_the\\_Highlands\\_in\\_the\\_17th\\_Century/index.asp](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishhistory/stewartscotland/stewartociety/Everyday_Life_in_the_Highlands_in_the_17th_Century/index.asp)
  - [http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishhistory/industrialrevolution/dailylife/Working\\_on\\_Farms/index.asp](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishhistory/industrialrevolution/dailylife/Working_on_Farms/index.asp)
  - [http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishhistory/industrialrevolution/clearances/The\\_Highland\\_Clearances/index.asp](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishhistory/industrialrevolution/clearances/The_Highland_Clearances/index.asp)