

**Property in Care (PIC) ID:** PIC330 & PIC331

**Designations:** Scheduled Monument (SM90152)

**Taken into State care:** 1885 (Guardianship)

**Last reviewed:** 2004

**HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND  
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

# **DUN TELVE AND DUN TRODDAN (GLENELG)**



We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.



# DUN TELVE AND DUN TRODDAN

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The monument comprises two broch towers that are sited less than 500m apart in the valley of Gleann Beag in Glenelg. Dun Telve stands near the river and about one third of its wall still stands to a height of over 10m. Dun Troddan is set on a terrace in the hillside a little further up the Glen. About one third of the wall survives to a height of 7.6m and it is very like its neighbour in structural detail.

Each is accessible by a short walk from the road.

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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview

- There is a rich and fascinating antiquarian and later history associated with the discovery and interpretation of broch towers/complex roundhouses as a whole. Early antiquarian drawings exist for these monuments: Alexander Gordon, about 1720; Pennant in 1772. These monuments attracted attention from an early date because they are so well-preserved.
- These were some of the earliest monuments to pass into state care (1885) and both required urgent remedial action to stop them falling down.

### Archaeological Overview

- Neither of these sites has benefited from modern scientific exploration, so much important information was lost in the past. Of the works that ended at Dun Troddan in 1920, there is only a record of the excavation of the very lowest levels. Dun Telve was cleared out in 1914.
- It is highly unusual for two broch towers to be placed so close together, and in fact there is a third complex Atlantic roundhouse further up the valley at Dun Grugaig. This concentration is, therefore, highly unusual and warrants special explanation. Apart from the broch towers, to date little evidence has been found in the glen for what might be other Iron-Age activity.
- Broch towers were probably erected to reflect the prestige and status of their inhabitants. While they may also have some defensive qualities, their inhabitants were farmers like nearly everyone else at this time. Nonetheless, there would have been something else, perhaps control over land, people or other resources, that singled out broch tower inhabitants from others.
- The artefacts found at excavated broch towers and complex roundhouses often provide evidence for the long-distance contacts and wealth of their inhabitants, but little of any note has been recorded and saved from these sites.
- The nature of broch tower construction may argue for the existence of specialist broch tower builders. If so, this raises interesting questions about how society was organised and the role that such people played.
- The main centre for the development of complex roundhouses and broch towers would appear to be Orkney, which begs questions about the relationship between the élite groups here and those who lived elsewhere in the Atlantic province.

### Artistic/Architectural Overview

- Broch towers, drystone structures built with a hollow wall construction containing superimposed galleries and a range of other distinctive architectural

features, are a form of roundhouse found exclusively in north and west Scotland. (A small number of monuments in southern Scotland are clearly also influenced by this style of architecture.) They belong to what is known as the Atlantic roundhouse tradition, with origins (in north Scotland so far only) in massive simple roundhouses (dating around 800-400 BC) and more widespread, complex Atlantic roundhouses (dating around 500-200BC). Dating of the ultimate expression of this architectural form, broch towers, is problematic, but they seem to appear around 200 BC, occupation often being at its peak in the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD and sometimes continuing as residences (as opposed to 'squats') until as late as the mid 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD.

- This building form is unique to Scotland. Atlantic roundhouses are difficult to classify in the absence of excavation and because they have usually lost their upper levels, but the best estimate is that there may be 500 examples in Scotland, of which less than 100 fall into the category of broch towers. Dun Telve and Dun Troddan are two of the five broch towers (all in state care) that survive to anywhere near their original height.
- Both are representative examples of solid-based broch towers, which are more commonly found in the northern part of the Atlantic province.
- There is considerable debate about what form the roof of broch towers, indeed most Atlantic roundhouses, took. This is only one of the many perplexing questions about broch tower construction that make their study so fascinating. For instance, where was the main floor level and what are the laddered wall voids for? Given their surviving height, and the fact that sections of the wall are visible, these sites provide perfect opportunities to appreciate the architecture of broch construction. Dun Troddan is also one of the few excavated brochs where evidence has been found for a ring of post-holes that probably supported a floor or roof.

#### Social Overview

- Not known.

#### Spiritual Overview

- The house was at the heart of the community and increasing evidence is being found for how prehistoric house design, including that of broch towers, closely reflected the inhabitants view of the world (cosmology). Religious belief was not divorced from the domestic sphere and we still have much to learn here.

#### Aesthetic Overview

- Both monuments are sited in what is arguably one of the most beautiful valleys in the west Highlands of Scotland.
- Each ruin is striking in character for its scale, design and the quality of build.
- While presenting some management problems, the surrounding mature trees enhance the romantic qualities of each site.

#### What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- More research is required to determine their date and occupation and we have no scientific dates. The surviving archaeological potential of the interior of each is unknown but could be tested. The nature of the buildings outside Dun Telve also merits investigation.
- The landscape context of these brochs, and their relationship to the third complex roundhouse in the valley, merit exploration. What is so special about this place?

- Why is there so little evidence for settlement in the valley to the south yet occupation in the valley to the north, and does this relate to the presence of the brochs?
- Does any local folklore attach to these monuments?

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## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Key points

- Two of the most outstanding surviving examples of a very unusual and sophisticated type of later prehistoric (Iron-Age) settlement that is unique to Scotland and among the best preserved prehistoric architecture in Europe.
- Owing to their height, important sources of evidence for what architectural form the most complex broch towers took and what may have happened in their upper levels.
- Unusual instance of broch towers being located very close to each other, the reason for which has not yet been satisfactorily explained.
- There is very little reliable archaeological information about each site, their immediate and wider context.
- Important source of evidence for the nature and complexity of later prehistoric occupation of Scotland both before and beyond the Romanised parts of Britain.
- With the notable exception of Old Scatness (Shetland), Historic Environment Scotland cares for all the significant 'broch' historic attractions in Scotland, and these are well-distributed throughout the area in which Atlantic roundhouses were to be found.

### Associated Properties

Dun Grugaig (on private land), **Dun Carloway, Dun Dornaigil, Mousa, Gurness, Midhowe, Jarlshof, Clickhimin, Carn Liath, Dun Beag; Edin's Hall** (related architecture in southern Scotland). **Ness of Burgi** (related architecture in northern Scotland). The countryside is littered with unexcavated 'broch' mounds and the occasional excavated site, such as the Keiss brochs, Caithness. To date, the only significant formal non-Historic Environment Scotland heritage attraction that includes a broch is Old Scatness, Shetland, adjacent to Jarlshof.

The surviving finds from these sites are in the National Museums of Scotland.

Keywords broch towers, concentration of brochs, evidence for broch upper levels, Iron Age, outbuildings, Alexander Gordon, Thomas Pennant.