

Claire Christie



Claire has been researching the possible Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement systems on the West Mainland of Shetland for her PhD based at the University of Aberdeen. This has involved mapping the landscapes of the West Mainland, using high-resolution aerial photographs, to explore the extent and spatial distribution of the remains. This has been complemented by the excavation of the prehistoric house and field system at Troni Shun, West Mainland. The excavations were carried out during July 2016 and 2017 with members of Archaeology Shetland and funded by the Royal Archaeological Institute. In 2016 Claire paused her PhD for a year to take up a position with the Shetland Amenity Trust as a GIS Assistant working to update the Shetland Sites and Monuments Record. The results of this project are available on Pastmap.

Why archaeology?

I went to university to study History and History of Art and only took Archaeology classes to fill up my timetable. I remember nervously walking into the first lecture not knowing what to expect but by the end knowing it was for me – I was hooked. I help run the Young Archaeologist Club in Aberdeen and we often discuss how being an archaeologist is like being a detective, piecing together clues about the past.

What is your favourite site on Shetland?

On my very first visit to Shetland I was taken to see the archaeology around the Loch of Kellister on the West Mainland by Prof. Kevin Edwards. This was my first real introduction to the landscapes of Shetland and I was amazed to see the variety of upstanding remains from burial cairns to crofts. It's my favourite because it was the place/moment I realized that prehistoric Shetland was what I truly wanted to research.

What websites are your go to or favourites?

I use Pastmap a lot for comparing records and information held by different organisations. I also really like the National Libraries of Scotland website particularly the georeferenced maps as they are a brilliant resource.

If you could visit any site in the world where/what would it be?

There are so many sites I would like to visit it's hard to choose. We recently did a session at the Aberdeen Young Archaeologist Club on Pirate Archaeology so at the moment, if I could overcome my fear of diving, I would love to explore the sunken pirate city of Port Royal in Jamaica.

If you could time travel to any era/answer any question what would it be?

It would be amazing to travel back in time and help Charles Calder excavate Stanydale and the Neolithic/Bronze Age houses in Shetland. I have so many questions to ask him and it would be great to compare notes.

If you could have only one tool in the field what would it be and why?

My trowel is a must for excavating but I couldn't manage without my camera or notebook when surveying. Having said that, can a Thermos count as a tool? A cup of hot tea on fieldwork is essential!

Do you have a song/band you use for inspiration either in the field or the office?

On site I like to change/improve the lyrics of songs taking inspiration from the excavations. For example, we found a couple of ard points at Troni Shun so The Beatles classic 'A Hard Day's Night' was remixed as...

"It's been an ard day's night, and I've been digging like a dog"

If you could debunk one myth or misinformed idea in/about archaeology what would it be?

The old-fashioned image of an "Archaeologist". Archaeology is a broad subject that encompasses many techniques, skills and roles. These include excavation, post-excavation roles, artefact analysis, palynology, geophysics, management of resources and databases, material sciences, lab techniques, documentary research, museum roles, this list goes on and on.