

Roinn na
Gaidhealtachd



Highland

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Our ref.

Extension No. 447

Your ref.

Date 3.2.87

Susan Read
An Sithean
Bonar Bridge
Sutherland
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Dear Ms Read

Many thanks for your letter and the samples. These are fragments of bloomery waster material, which accumulates at the bottom of a 'bloomery' or first-stage furnace in the production - in this case - of small-scale iron manufacture. The 'blooms' produced are the rough ingots which are then reformed into tools, weapons and so on. These pieces, which are full of impurities, pour down through the furnace and gather on the bottom of the forge.

The bloomeries themselves are frequently no more than bowls cut into the slope of a hill. A fire is laid in the bottom, and when burning strongly, fed with charcoal; the ore is placed on top, and the whole sealed except for a vent at the base. Air is pumped in through bellows, providing the fierce heat needed to separate the metal from the ore. These sites are common, but improperly recorded, and I would be very glad to know exactly where this is. The bloomeries usually lie where both ore (probably from peat bogs where iron pan gathers in thick layers) and charcoal (ie forests) are readily to hand. It probably dates from the 17th-18th century, as after this time blacksmiths could obtain their ore more easily by trade from the large ironworks of the West Coast or from Central Scotland.

I hope this information is both interesting and useful. If I can help any further, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

Robert Gourlay
Archaeologist

P.S. Do you wish the samples returned?