

## The History & Mystery of Dun Deardail

Freja MacDougall

*“The oddest thing is these vitrified forts in Scotland. I just thought, how? After all, lasers were not common in the Stone Age.”*

**Arthur C. Clarke, Writer & Inventor**

For over two-hundred and fifty years, archaeologists studying ancient Scottish ruins have reported a type of construction said to defy explanation. Vitrified forts, like Dun Deardail in Glen Nevis, continue to bewilder even the sharpest mind but this month Nevis Landscape Partnership & Forestry Commission Scotland will attempt to understand this fascinating process and the people who inhabited this impressive Iron Age settlement when we begin our third and final year of excavations.

*“Some people think vitrification was a status symbol, some people think a settlement would be set alight and inadvertently vitrified in the process by attackers and some people think it’s a structural thing to do with strengthening the walls of the fort. Bottom line is, we’ll never know! That’s what’s nice about archaeology, different people come away with different interpretations about the history of Dun Deardail.”*

**Andy Heald, AOC Archaeology**



CROSS-SECTION OF VITRIFIED ROCKS FROM DUN DEARDAIL, GLEN NEVIS  
CREDIT; RARE BREED PRODUCTIONS

The first and second seasons focused on two main aspects of the fort; the enclosing rampart wall and the internal terraces. Excavation has revealed the rampart wall was far thicker than originally thought and was probably topped with a strong timber palisade or timber superstructure. Slots for horizontal timbers within the wall were also discovered and traces of the charred timbers themselves which, thanks to radiocarbon dating, helped confirm that Dun Deardail has been around since 500BC.

The wonderful thing about archaeology is that for all the forensic investigation and laboratory analysis, we still need to use our imagination to recreate the past. Matthew Ritchie, Forestry Commission Scotland Archaeologist, has linked the burning of Dun Deardail with the Irish tale of the tragic heroine Deirdru. The creative narrative has been included in a new Outdoor Archaeological Learning resource, encouraging teachers to explore the use of archaeological methodology in the classroom and outdoors.



DUN DEARDAIL ARCHAEOLOGY FESTIVAL, AUGUST 2016  
CREDIT; PETER DEVLIN PHOTOGRAPHY

**The Dun Deardail Archaeology Festival on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2017** in Glen Nevis is a celebration of this project drawing to a close, the volunteers who have helped us dig up the past and the wonderful history of Glen Nevis. Get the whole family down Glen Nevis to enjoy Pictish arts and crafts, Iron Age warrior school, ancient storytelling, open-fire cooking and shuttle trips up to the hill-fort to see for yourself what goes on during an archaeological dig.



ARTEFACTS FROM DUN DEARDAIL EXCAVATION  
CREDIT; RARE BREED PRODUCTIONS

Take a step into the past and watch our short film to get excited for a month of history, heritage and archaeology right here in Glen Nevis. For more information on the Dun Deardail Archaeology Festival, get in touch!

[www.vimeo.com/nevislandscape/fort](http://www.vimeo.com/nevislandscape/fort)

(01397) 701088