

Beveridge's plant records revisited

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Erskine Beveridge systematically visited the archaeological features of North Uist starting in 1897, many of them duns on islands in lochs. He documented his findings comprehensively in a book called North Uist (Beveridge 1911), which is widely available as a reprint. Many of the sites which he describes are inaccessible to domestic grazing animals. Although they are readily accessible to deer, they are apparently not often visited by them, presumably because the reward is not worth the effort, and therefore are subject to reduced grazing pressures. Within his accounts Beveridge made comments on the flora of a number of duns and islands, and these records are abstracted in Table 1.

page	type	species	grid ref	locality
184	dun	<i>Inula helenium</i>	NF780621	Dun Mor, Baleshare
189	island	ferns	NF748701	islet in Loch Vausary
189	island	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	NF748701	islet in Loch Vausary
189	island	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	NF748701	islet in Loch Vausary
189	island	<i>Salix repens</i>	NF748701	islet in Loch Vausary
197	island	<i>Petasites hybridus</i> 'strong growth'	NF748758	Eilean a Ghallain
199	island	<i>Phragmites communis</i>	NF767738	Loch nan Clachan, island
199	island	<i>Salix repens</i>	NF767741	Loch nan Gearrachan, island
214	island	<i>Primula vulgaris</i> 'in quite abnormal dimensions'	NF761756	Lombaidh, Vallay Sound
175	dun	<i>Osmunda regalis</i>	NF855569	Dun Ban, E end Loch Caravat, Grimsay
175	dun	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	NF855569	Dun Ban, E end Loch Caravat, Grimsay
175	dun	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	NF855569	Dun Ban, E end Loch Caravat, Grimsay
175	dun	<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	NF8755	dun in Loch a' Mhuillin, Grimsay
175	dun	<i>Empetrum nigrum</i>	NF8755	dun in Loch a' Mhuillin, Grimsay
175	dun	<i>Vaccinium vitis-idaea</i>	NF8755	dun in Loch a' Mhuillin, Grimsay
175	dun	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	NF8755	dun in Loch a' Mhuillin, Grimsay
175	island	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	NF865578	island W end of Loch Hornary, Grimsay
170	dun	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	NF885594	Loch Dun an t-Siaman, dun
170	loch	<i>Rosa</i> sp.	NF8859	Loch Dun an t-Siaman, nr east edge
249	barp	<i>Digitalis pupurea</i> 'luxuriant growth'	NF833695	Marrogh Barp (Tighe Cloiche)
180	dun	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	NF844620	Dun Siar, Loch Caravat
180	dun	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	NF844620	Dun Siar, Loch Caravat
180	dun	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	NF844620	Dun Siar, Loch Caravat
180	dun	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	NF844620	Dun Siar, Loch Caravat
177	dun	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	NF860601	Dun Ban Hacklett, Loch nan Garbh Clachan
177	dun	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	NF860601	Dun Ban Hacklett, Loch nan Garbh Clachan
177	dun	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	NF860601	Dun Ban Hacklett, Loch nan Garbh Clachan
178	island	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	NF866605	Loch 'ic Colla, island SE corner
178	island	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	NF866605	Loch 'ic Colla, island SE corner
178	island	<i>Urtica dioica</i>	NF866605	Loch 'ic Colla, island SE corner
165	dun	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	NF863639	Dun Breinish
165	dun	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	NF863639	Dun Breinish
166	loch	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i> (<6')	NF864625	Loch na Ceithir-Eileana
166	loch	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	NF864625	Loch na Ceithir-Eileana

221	island	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	NF842730	Eilean an Tighe, Geireann Mill Loch
221	island	<i>Rosa</i> sp.	NF842730	Eilean an Tighe, Geireann Mill Loch
221	island	<i>Osmunda regalis</i>	NF842730	Eilean an Tighe, Geireann Mill Loch
224	dun	<i>Ribes rubrum</i> , one plant	NF856738	Dun Aonghais, island end of causeway
154	dun	<i>Digitalis pupurea</i>	NF879712	Dun, Loch Fada
154	dun	<i>Pinguicula vulgaris</i> (white-fl'd)	NF879712	Dun, Loch Fada
149	dun	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	NF890745	Dunan Dubh, Loch Mairbh
167	island	<i>Betula</i> sp.	NF9061	Loch Obisary, island in E end, nr Burrival
167	dun	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	NF900626	Loch Obisary, dun nr shore
167	dun	<i>Juniperus communis</i>	NF900626	Loch Obisary, dun nr shore
167	dun	<i>Empetrum nigrum</i>	NF900626	Loch Obisary, dun nr shore
160	dun	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	NF902653	Dun Ban, Loch Hunder
160	dun	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	NF902653	Dun Ban, Loch Hunder
160	dun	<i>Digitalis pupurea</i>	NF902653	Dun Ban, Loch Hunder
167	island	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	NF9263	Loch Crogavat, island in
163	dun	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	NF922640	Dun Caragarry
155	island	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	NF9070	island, W end Loch na Buaile
155	island	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	NF9070	island, W end Loch na Buaile
144	dun	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	NF917770	Loch Iosal an Duin
144	dun	<i>Urtica dioica</i>	NF917770	Loch Iosal an Duin
144	dun	<i>Ribes rubrum</i>	NF917770	Loch Iosal an Duin
144	dun	<i>Angelica sylvestris</i>	NF917770	Loch Iosal an Duin
113	cliff	<i>Populus tremula</i>	NF9570	W end of cliff with cave, by Abhainn Loch Gille-ghoid
146	dun	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	NF953723	Dun Righean Righ Lochlainn, Loch an Duin

Table 1: Observations of plants made by Beveridge (1911).

Although many of the species in Table 1 are widespread and not particularly remarkable, several of Beveridge's records are of particular interest. I have attempted to refind the most interesting ones, and report the outcomes under the accounts below.

Alnus glutinosa (Alder)

Alder is widely planted in modern times, but may possibly be native in a few localities in the Outer Hebrides (Pankhurst & Mullin (1994) say that it is "doubtfully native", based on a specimen from Allt Volagir, S Uist). A record from an island in a loch away from habitation is more likely to be native and therefore useful evidence about the status of this species. A circumnavigation of Loch 'ic Colla on 5 May 2016 failed to locate anything suitable, and if it was present it is now gone.

Betula sp. (Birch)

Birch is another uncommon native tree, and although there are plenty of stands in Lewis and Harris, native bushes in the Uists are unusual (Bennett & Fossitt 1988). There are no records of native birches in N Uist, so Beveridge's observation is a tantalising glimpse of what might once have been. A rather early-year visit (May 2014) showed no sign that any remain on the islands in the E of Loch Obisary.

Pinguicula vulgaris (Common Butterwort)

This is a common and widespread species in the Outer Hebrides, but Beveridge reports a white-flowered population, which is unusual. I have found only one other such population in more than 20 years of botanising in the Outer Hebrides, in Gleann Bhaltois.

Populus tremula (Aspen)

There is still aspen on the cliff with the cave by Abhainn Loch Gille-ghoid (the outflow from the loch – there is another cave NW of the loch itself, but my interpretation is that Beveridge referred to the one SE of the loch). There are only a few shoots of aspen remaining here, although there is a larger stand further east.

Ribes rubrum (Redcurrant)

Beveridge reported a single plant on the causeway at Dun Aonghais, but that seems not to have persisted. He also reports it on Loch Iosal an Duin, and here it still covers the whole dun on an islet in the loch; one plant had managed to seed and survive amongst willow and bramble on the loch shore in August 2010.



Fig. 1: Dun in Loch Iosal an Duin, covered in *Ribes rubrum*, *Rubus fruticosus* agg. and *Rumex obtusifolius*. © Paul A. Smith

Beveridge's observations thus provide a very useful insight into the presence of some interesting and some common species. The main result of following up his observations a century later are that almost all of them are still there – away from the main areas of habitation where anthropic forces do cause change, there seem to be relatively few changes in the flora, and it is often possible to re-find old records. And it seems that duns and similar archaeological sites are potential refuges for some uncommon species.

References

- Bennett, K.D. & Fossitt, J. (1988) A stand of birch by Loch Eynort, South Uist, Outer Hebrides. *Transactions of the Botanical Society of Edinburgh* **45** 245-252.
- Beveridge, E. (1911) *North Uist, Archaeology and Topography*. William Brown, Edinburgh.
- Pankhurst, R.J. & Mullin, J.M. (1991) *Flora of the Outer Hebrides*. Natural History Museum, London.