

Finds in Fife during 2003

Mid-Later Bronze Age Looped Palstave Axe

(c.3,000 years old)

Found recently by a metal detectorist in a stubble field in East Fife, this outstanding example of a rare looped palstave axe is perhaps one of the defining achievements of middle/late Bronze Age metal working.

Unlike the largely later socketed bronze axes, palstaves utilised the spilt end of a wooden shaft for hafting - the axe being set into the wood as far as the stop-ridge. The exact function of the loop is unclear, but it was probably used to assist in the binding of the axe head to the wooden shaft, or possibly it allowed for a cord to be tied between the axehead and the shaft to prevent the former flying away from the shaft should the fixing become weakened through use.



The unusual name given to such axes is Dutch and arose in the mid-19th century when examples of this type of axe were first 'scientifically' recorded and compared with foreign examples. It was found that this artefact was well known in Holland where the term 'palstave', coming from the Old Norse *páll* spade and *stafr* staff, was used to describe such axes.



Neolithic Leaf-Shaped Arrowheads

(c.6,000 years old)

Bronze Age flint arrowheads are not uncommon archaeological finds but the earlier, Neolithic leaf-shaped examples are much less common.

What is extremely uncommon, however, is for two arrowheads to be found together and this is exactly how these examples were found, when they were noticed eroding out of a path on the West side of East Lomond Hill in central Fife.

So how do we account for this discovery? Well possibly, this find might indicate the spot at which a wounded animal, hit by two arrows some 6,000 years ago, ran off to and died – the carcass of the animal rotting away leaving the robust stone arrowheads to drop to the ground and become buried over time. Or perhaps, a hunter whilst out hunting might have dropped the leather pouch in which he kept his spare arrowheads. However, the location of this extremely unusual find may well be significant. Indeed, it is not impossible that these arrowheads were deliberately buried on the side of Fife's most prominent landmark, perhaps as a votive offering.

(right) East Lomond Hill, with Maiden Castle Iron Age fort in the foreground



Neolithic Polished Stone Axe

(c.6,000 years old)

This particularly fine polished axe was found recently at the foot of East Lomond hill in central Fife. The find came to light in a ploughed field, where it was noticed just lying on the surface of the ground.

The axe is made from a very distinctive fine-grained grey-green metamorphic rock. Indeed, so distinctive that we can identify it as a calc-silicate hornfels derived from a rocky outcrop on the side of Creag na Caillich peak, near Killin at the western end of Loch Tay. It is one of about only 30 axes known from this "axe factory" site and the first one to be found in Fife.

