

An Tilleadh

(The Return)

Comunn Eachdraidh Nis (CEN) is pleased to announce the launch of a special exhibition on the 18th April 2023. Following a year of planning between CEN and The National Museum of Scotland, locally discovered Bronze Age finds will be returning to Ness.

In 1910, an eclectic hoard of objects was recovered while peat digging near Adabrock.

This hoard dates to the Late Bronze Age (c.1000-800 BC). It contains bronze axeheads, a spearhead, three razors and other tools, as well as fragments of a decorated vessel, two whetstones and rare beads of glass, amber and gold. It is one of the most diverse hoards in Britain.

Two Late Bronze Age bronze swords were found on separate occasions while peat digging at Aird Dell in 1891 and 1892. These swords are characteristic of the period, bearing elegant 'leaf-shaped' blades. One sword is incomplete, whereas the other one is still complete and reasonably sharp, even after three thousand years in the ground.

More remarkably, an original horn handle survives on the second sword with attachment rivets embedded in the hilt.

Dr Matthew Knight, Senior Curator of Prehistory at National Museums Scotland, responsible for the Chalcolithic and Bronze Age collections said:

“We’re delighted to be bringing the Adabrock Hoard and Aird Dell Sword on loan to Comunn Eachdraidh Nis as part of our programme of sharing material on loan from the National Collection across Scotland. These Bronze Age objects represent the rich spectrum of life in the Western Isles three thousand years ago, including tools, weapons and gold, amber and glass beads. Of significance are fragments of a bronze cup that would have been imported from Continental Europe suggesting widely connected communities. It is a wonderful collection of objects from Bronze Age Lewis and we hope that it attracts many visitors.”

Dr Knight specialises in the production, use, treatment and deposition of Bronze Age material culture in Britain, particularly metalwork. He has published widely on the topic, exploring how objects were treated as well as the value and meaning of deposition to Bronze Age communities. He will deliver a talk at the official opening event, entitled:

Burying valuables and valuable burials: The Adabrock Hoard, the Aird Dell Swords and other Bronze Age metalwork from western Scotland.

The Adabrock hoard is one of the most eclectic groups of material from Bronze Age Britain. Containing tools, weapons and jewellery, it speaks to the diverse nature of Bronze Age life as well as connections across Britain and Ireland and beyond. Not far from Adabrock, around the same time, two swords were placed into the bog at Aird Dell. Again, these were valuable objects, functional for fighting and displays of power. These are not isolated cases. During the Late Bronze Age, thousands of objects were placed into the ground across Europe. What was the meaning behind giving up these valuable items? This talk will examine how and why Late Bronze Age objects were buried across western Scotland and explore their meaning for the Bronze Age communities living here three thousand years ago.

We are grateful to our funders: Museums Galleries Scotland, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn for supporting this project and to staff at the National Museum of Scotland for advising and guiding us through the loan process.

The interpretation for this special exhibition was designed by LOOM Graphics and installed by Graphite Signs. Both companies are based in Stornoway, Isle of Lewis.

To book a place at the launch event, call CEN on 01851 810377 or e-mail office@cenonline.org Numbers are limited so early booking is recommended.

The exhibition will run until April 2024.

Photographs credit: Duncan McGlynn

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