

Researcher Unearths Iron Age Skeleton

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Archaeologists have discovered a Shetland burial ground dating back over 2,000 years. Experts who started work on the site on Unst two months ago have managed to rescue a number of artefacts and a human skeleton.

The burial site at Sand Wick is believed to date back to the Iron Age and has been badly eroded by waves. Team members, including Tom Dawson from the University of St Andrews Institute of Environmental History, believe they have obtained valuable information from the site before it is lost to the sea.

The skeleton was found lying on its back with a polished stone disc tucked inside its mouth. Near the arm was a tiny ornament made of rings of copper alloy and bone which the team believes was some kind of pendant. Team members also found hundreds of sherds of pottery, limpet shells and animal bones left over from ancient meals.

Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic Scotland, the dig was carried out by specialists from Glasgow University, Scottish Coastal Archaeology and the Problems of Erosion Trust (SCAPE), and local volunteers who form part of Shorewatch.

Shorewatch, managed by the University of St Andrews and SCAPE, is a collaborative project which monitors the state of archaeological remains along the Scottish coast. Their work aids decision-making on where more detailed work, such as surveys or excavations, should be carried out.

Coordinator Tom Dawson said, "By excavating this eroding site, we are both obtaining valuable information before the site disappears and giving people a chance to get actively involved."

Last October, the Shorewatch project received the top prize at the prestigious British Archaeological Awards – the ‘Oscars’ of British Archaeology.

Source: University of St Andrews

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