

NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND MEDIA RELEASE

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300 year-old musket ball and mortar shell discovered from the Battle of Glenshiel

A team of archaeologists working at the scene of Scotland's 'forgotten' Jacobite uprising have uncovered the first historic remains of the decisive 300-year-old battle which ended James Francis Edward Stuart's ambitions to take the throne.

The team, which is being led by the National Trust for Scotland, has been working at the scene of the Battle of Glenshiel and uncovered several large fragments of a coehorn mortar shell that had been fired at Lord George Murray and the Jacobite right wing on the knoll south of the River Shiel. A musket ball fired by government forces at the Jacobites was also uncovered.

The coehorn was a small squat gun that could lob shells in high arcs onto the Jacobite and Spanish positions causing noise and explosions that must have caused disorder and panic in some of the Jacobites. One reference also suggests the grass and heather was set alight by the red-hot fragments, adding to the confusion.

The battle of Glenshiel was the first time that the device had been used on British soil, making it an exciting find for the team. The mortar shells also confirm the interpretation of a smaller fragment found on the north side of the river last year.

Today, Monday 10 June, marks the 300th anniversary of the battle of Glenshiel where a force of over 1000 Jacobites, including troops sent from Spain, attempted to restore 'the Old Pretender' James Francis Edward Stuart to the throne of Great Britain.

To mark the anniversary, archaeologists, volunteers and people signed up for the National Trust for Scotland's Thistle Camp, working holidays which are run by the conservation charity, have been excavating an area where the Spanish troops were positioned.

The team soon picked up a signal with metal detectors and carefully dug out a flattened musket ball.

"This is the first positive piece of evidence that we have found from the battle," explained The Trust's Head of Archaeology, Derek Alexander.

"We were excavating just below the Spanish position, where there is quite a large outcrop of bedrock with a vertical face. We picked up a strong signal with the metal

detector and, working with Historic Environment Scotland we were allowed to excavate four or five objects. The first that we looked at was the musket ball.

“It had been fired from below, up at the Spanish position. It hit the bedrock, flattened and fell to the ground and lay there. It was fired three hundred years ago, hit the wall and fell to the ground. Now it has been found.”

Tests will now be carried out to determine the calibre of the ball and just who fired it, with government troops using a variety of muskets or carbines. Finds such as this allow historians to create a fuller picture of just what happened that day and to bring the events to life.

Cared for and protected by the National Trust for Scotland, Glenshiel is often described as Scotland’s most picturesque battlefield. It remains largely unchanged since the time of the battle and visitors to the site can still see the walls built by the Jacobites as they took cover during the mortar barrage by government troops.

“Finds like this are really important,” continued Derek. “They are the tangible remains of historic events, which can be quite rare. When we hold something in our hands that we know came from a single event, 300 years ago – that is incredibly powerful.

“In order to understand the battle better, we need to know a lot more. The understanding of battlefield archaeology can be a slow process and it’s something which happens over a longer period.”

In the wake of the defeat the Jacobites were scattered, with several of their leaders going back into exile on the continent. The Spanish troops were captured, marched to Edinburgh Castle where they were held before eventually being released later in the year.

The anniversary was marked at the weekend by a gathering of clans on the site and while the 1719 rebellion is often overlooked, compared to the risings of ’14 and ’45, the defeat had a lasting impact on both the Highlands and the Jacobite cause.

“The rising fizzled out, but it led to the arrival General Wade and his building of the road systems and garrisons in locations across the Highlands. It fixed the government’s minds on the clans and the Jacobites.

“It’s failure also meant that there was little appetite for another uprising until Bonnie Prince Charlie and the ’45. It effectively put paid to Jacobite ambitions for 30 years, which is a long time.”

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