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WWII PLANE PROPELLER DISCOVERY ON ARRAN SPARKS INVESTIGATION FOR NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND

- **WWII plane propeller blade discovered in a remote part of Arran**
- **Debate around the origin of the parts found outside crash sites on Coire a' Bhradain**
- **Trust discovery made during programme of work to restore peatland on mountain**

The discovery of a propeller blade in a remote part of Arran, thought to be from a World War II plane, has sparked an investigation for the National Trust for Scotland as it tries to identify its origin.

A contractor working for Scotland's largest conservation charity, found the objects in an isolated location in Coire a' Bhradain, as he conducted peatland restoration to protect this vital resource in the fight against climate change.

The finding of the propeller blade has left experts at the Trust debating where it came from as the location of the discovery falls outside the two previously known crash sites in the area.

Derek Alexander, Head of Archaeology for the National Trust for Scotland, said: "We are intrigued by the discovery of the propeller blade which certainly looks to be from a WWII plane. There are two previously known plane crash sites further up the glen on the steep cliff side of Beinn Nuis but this object was found outside the mapped spread of debris from both of these, which has caused some uncertainty around which aircraft they belong to.

"The plane part was discovered when our contractor's excavator bucket hit something solid and metallic. On closer inspection we found it had been wrapped and tied in a potato sack which has added further intrigue to the find that lay some distance from the spread of the wreckage of the former crash sites. It may have been gathered during the clean-up of the site in the 1940s, immediately after the impact, or through subsequent work by the Trust in the 1980s. It's too early to tell but we are determined to get to the bottom of it.

"We know from a previous archaeological survey carried out by Dr Terence Christian around the crash sites back in 2013 the extent of the debris fields, so we know there is historic merit to the findings, we just have to work out which plane the part came from to piece the story together. There have been six WWII plane crashes on Trust-owned land on Arran which are now protected sites so we have to work with the relevant

organisations and follow procedures, such as informing the Military Crash Register, before any further work can be carried out.

“The crash sites on the island have been well documented by Arran Museum which has an informative display about the WWII aircraft involved, so we can narrow down the types of plane to a B17 Flying Fortress or a B24 Liberator, but both use the same sort of propeller blades, which adds to the confusion. From Dr Christian’s survey work in 2013 we know that the closer of the two sites to where the Propeller blade was found is the B24 Liberator, which crashed on 24th August 1943 with the loss of all eleven crew and passengers. The bodies were recovered from the crash site shortly after, but the locations are still protected today under the 1986 Protection of Military Remains Act.

“We are not permitted to remove wreckage from such sites without first obtaining permission – so the accidental discovery of a propeller blade, out with the known spread of fuselage debris, that had obviously been previously moved is quite an unusual situation. We are working with an aviation and aircraft expert to identify the objects, and there is potential to match up the serial numbers of the parts to historic records held by the Military. This will help us get closer to the origin of this fascinating discovery, continue to share these stories and remember those who lost their lives.”

Kate Sampson, Senior Ranger at the National Trust for Scotland on Arran added that the discovery demonstrates the importance of the work the Trust carries out to protect Scotland’s rich cultural and natural heritage for future generations.

“The findings were made during our charity’s work to restore peatland in Coire a’Bhradain. Our peatland restoration programme not only helps to reinstate our beautiful landscapes but is also vital in helping to restore the peat’s carbon storing properties to help mitigate against climate change. I think our contractor got a bit of a shock when he saw the end of the potato sack sticking out of the bog as his first thought was that it could be human remains. However, with careful excavation the wrapped propeller was revealed with a rope still tied around it, and we suspect someone might have been dragging the propeller down the hill when it sunk deep into the peat, not to be recovered until now. Understanding the cultural significance of our peatlands and protecting this natural resource at our special places will help to ensure it benefits future generations in the long term. Our peatland restoration project is supported by the Scottish Government’s Peatland Action Fund delivered in partnership with NatureScot.”

Dr Terence Christian, Lead Archaeologist on the 2013 survey, said: “The discovery of this propeller blade outside previously mapped debris fields adds critical diagnostic information to the two aircraft wreck sites nearby: B-17G 42-97286 and B-24D 42-41030. Further analysis should enable archaeologists to associate the propeller with one of the two aircraft wreck sites and to adjust the aircraft wreck site boundaries to better preserve these important pieces of national history. The discovery was made wrapped in a potato sack during peat restoration works suggest removal following the crash

event, but this hypothesis will need further study. The associated potato sack should provide a timeframe for the propeller's removal from the main debris field, adding new information to the wrecks' post-crash stories.

"Historic and natural conservation are important initiatives to preserve and maintain both our historic past and the natural environment in which historic events were experienced. Aviation archaeology only recently began to be a focus of Conflict Archaeology. The National Trust for Scotland, however, has been a leader in aviation archaeology and crash site historic preservation for more than a decade. I applaud the Trust for continuing their pioneering work in aviation archaeology and crash site historic preservation with the discovery and continued analysis of this WWII aircraft propeller."

The work by the National Trust for Scotland's archaeological team, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2023, supports the charity's vision to care for, share and protect Scotland's nature, beauty and heritage for everyone to enjoy, as outlined in its 10-year strategy, launched in 2022.

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About the National Trust for Scotland

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland's largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland's magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022, the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland's heritage which doesn't have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit www.nts.org.uk.

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.