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Who ate all the mussels?

A TEAM of Forvie midden rakers hope to discover evidence which will answer a question which has bothered SNH staff at Forvie National Nature Reserve for decades - precisely when do the Forvie mussel middens date from, and who were the people who enjoyed this seafood diet?

writes Kenny Hutchison.
Over the past two weeks the team of archaeologists from the University of Aberdeen have been conducting a fingertip search through one mysterious ancient midden to find clues which might identify the people whose taste for seafood left behind such a huge cache of ancient shells.

The team will use carbon dating techniques on samples from the midden to establish which era it belongs to. Speculation on who ate the mussels and dumped all the shells ranges across the historic time line, from the stone age to the middle ages.

SNH reserve manager Annabel Drysdale is hoping the team can find some answers.
"Although we've known about the mussel midden as a feature of Forvie for a long time, it has never been properly investigated. Hopefully the team can come up with some specific dates and evidence which will help identify the people who created it. If they do we will gain another exciting insight into the history of human settlement and even our forebears' eating habits."
"We know that there have

been settlements at Forvie since the stone age, and that these settlements often relied on mussels from the Ythan Estuary as a source of protein."

Dr. Gordon Noble is supervising the excavations at Forvie, and says that the finds the group have made thus far are exciting.

"It's looking increasingly like the midden isn't from the Middle Ages, but from a time much, much further back, certainly prehistoric - possibly 6 or 7,000 years old. We've found flint tools at the bottom of the midden."

"We hope to have the carbon dating back within a couple of months, and that should tell us more accurately when the midden dates from."



The archaeologists who are investigating the Forvie Middens. From left to right: Lee Hastie, Gordon Noble, Emma Philip and Rick Knecht (Picture by Kenny Hutchison)