



The lochs of Scotland and Ireland are dotted with tiny islands. Islands that hold an interesting secret. They were the foundations of ancient circular homes, some dating back to the Neolithic period more than 5000 years ago.

These islands and the homes they supported are called crannogs.

The Scottish Crannog Centre in Perthshire features the Oakbank Crannog, an authentic recreation of the original dwelling. Visitors to Oakbank walk over the loch on a wooden causeway into the year 500 B.C. The cold waters of Loch Tay preserved a wealth of artifacts which underwater archeologists studied and interpreted to recreate the dwelling visitors see today.

Inside Oakbanks' woven hazel walls are all the conveniences of life in Iron Age Scotland. A central clay and stone fire pit provides warmth and hot meals. Benches around the perimeter are padded with animal fleeces for comfort. The walls are stuffed with sheep fleece, goat fibers, and bracken to help keep out the draft. The floors are covered with aromatic herbs to cover the scent of the animals kept in a pen near the door. They also help insulate the family from the cold waters of the loch below. In one corner a loom holds a piece of cloth woven with skill and artistry. A large flat stone called a saddle quern sits on a bench next to a smaller grinding stone. It holds remnants of spelt flour used to make bread.

In wooded areas crannogs were built on timber pilings driven into the loch bed. The house was built of woven branches with a thatched roof. In more barren areas, tons of stone were used to create the island foundation and to build the house.

Many of the crannogs in Scotland and Ireland remained in use into the 17th century. Archeologists believe crannogs served as farmers' homesteads, status symbols, refuges in times of trouble, hunting and fishing stations, and even holiday residences. Most supported single families but some were enlarged to accommodate extended families.

While many crannogs have been explored, rising water levels in the lochs and rivers have hidden an untold number from view. Who knows what secrets they may hold?

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Questions 2 Ponder

Can Cold Water Really Preserve Homes and Artifacts?

Why do you think early Celts built their homes on the water?

Crannogs: Home, home on the lochs

Why do you think the cold water preserved so many artifacts?

Media Stream



Oakbank Crannog

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