

II.

DESCRIPTION OF PIT DWELLINGS AT DILLY-MENAN AND THE MIAAVE CRAIG, TARLAIR, NEAR MACDUFF, BANFFSHIRE. BY JAMES HUNTER, ESQ., BANFF, CORR. MEM. S.A. SCOT..

The coast of Banffshire is generally remarkably bold, the rocks rising sheer from the sea to the height, in some places, of from 200 to 300 feet. The prevailing rock near Banff, and to the eastward as far as Gamrie, is clay-slate, occasionally passing into graywacke. At some parts of the coast, particularly at Tarlair, about twelve miles to the east of Macduff, the waves have broken down the generally even face of the sea-wall, and worked the rocks into the most grotesque and fanciful shapes, so as to produce a wonderfully romantic piece of natural scenery. We find there occasionally large isolated rocks standing up in the sea like gigantic towers and castles. Occasionally, however, the outlying rocks are not entirely separated from the mainland, but joined to it by isthmuses, in many cases upwards of 100 yards long, and often so narrow that they afford breadth only for a footpath along their ridge, which requires to be trod with great caution. It is noteworthy that, on the little plateaus presented by the surface of the outlying rocks, and which are seldom more than a few perches to possibly a rood in area, I have found marks of ancient "pit-dwellings." In some cases, at least, we find the little pathway broken in the middle by a gap which appears to me to have been produced by hurling the rocks into the sea. This gap is especially distinct in the approach leading to the pit dwelling on a rock known as Dilly-mœnan. More extensive observation, however, is required to enable us to decide whether such a gap is so generally present as to entitle it to be regarded as a characteristic defence of these peninsular dwellings.

Another peculiarity worthy of note is, that the path to the dwelling at Dilly-mœnan presents appearances which suggest that it has been fortified at the mainland extremity. This defence has consisted of a fosse and mound. I visited this dwelling lately with Lieutenant Jones of the Royal Engineers, who is over the Ordnance Survey here, and he is clear that the mound and fosse, the traces of which are very obvious, are artificial, and have constituted a means of defence.

I ought probably to mention that at Dilly-mœnan the path does not proceed from the mainland along the crest of the spine, but winds along the steep side some 20 feet or 30 feet under the level of the ridge till you reach the gap, whence it proceeds along the spine. On the seaward side it is protected for a considerable distance by an earthen wall or dyke.

The habitations themselves I am less able to describe with accuracy, as that at Dilly-mœnan, which I have visited most frequently, had been explored before I heard of it, and has been visited by several parties with the view of picking up bones and teeth, who have thrown most of the *debris* of their excavations back into the cavity. Generally, I may say that the opening is a parallelogram, 14 feet long by 12 feet in breadth, resembling not distantly a large tanner's pit. I never dug to the bottom, as this involved more labour than I could command; but Mr Paterson of Longmanhill, who accompanied the late Mr Joseph Robertson when he visited it, tells me that they found it to be 14 feet deep. The floor they found to consist of baked clay. The statement as to the clay floor struck me at first with surprise, as there is not only no clay in the natural soil, which is simply sand mixed with a little decomposed vegetable matter, but it is not at all common in the district. It, however, subsequently received corroboration, which convinced me of its probable correctness. For I have found pieces of baked clay, small indeed, but well marked, in another pit dwelling in close proximity to this, on a rock known as the "Miaave Craig," a small specimen of which I forward. And, in addition, in digging into the floor of a cave dwelling, also close to Dilly-mœnan, I found it to consist of several alternate layers of comparatively soft clay, shells, and charcoal; but at the depth of 2 feet I came upon a distinct floor of hard-baked clay, which it required considerable exertion to penetrate with a trowel or a spade. Whether this hard layer is due to fires having been longer made at this level, or is really an artificially constructed floor, I do not assume to determine.

Judging from what I have observed, I think that there is evidence that these dwellings were surrounded on their outer edges by a low mound of raised earth. It appears to me that at Dilly-mœnan the sticks, which, like rafters, supported the covering of the dwelling, were inserted into the base of the mound, where it rested in the natural soil.

This is rendered more probable by the fact that, on two sides at least, the natural rock comes to the surface, into which sticks could not have been inserted, and consequently some device of this kind was requisite to enable them to be fixed. And again, by picking into the soil, close to where the mound would rest on the natural surface, we find charcoal in greater quantities than we do anywhere else, just as if the rafters had been burned, and the calcined extremities had been left sticking in the soil. Since I had the pleasure of visiting these dwellings with Dr Stuart, I found on a peninsular rock near Portsoy a beautifully complete quadrangle, about 20 feet long by 12 feet broad, marked out by a low mound or wall. So far as I could judge, this dwelling has never been opened. The rock on which it is known in the district as the "Castle rock." On another rock of the same character there are marks of a dwelling by no means so extensive, nor were the indications so clear.

In all, I have observed four or five of these dwellings—two at Tarlair and three (one doubtful) at Portsoy.

The dwelling on the Miaave Craig is remarkable from its position. The rock on which it is situated is almost an island, and nearly inaccessible. I believe that these dwellings on the rocks were only used occasionally as places of refuge, or when hunger drove the early tribes down to the coast. It is to be observed, however, that although a considerable number of shells are found among the *debris* of these dwellings, they do not occur in such accumulations there as in the cave dwellings in the neighbourhood. Bones and teeth, on the contrary, are abundant.

I send specimens of the bones found in the dwellings at Dilly-mœnan and the Miaave Craig. Some of the split bones are so small that the amount of marrow contained in them must have been quite immaterial. Might not this careful mode of splitting the bones longitudinally have been adopted with the view of fabricating rude instruments? None such, I regret, have been found. None of the bones present marks of fire. Long bones, as tibiae, ulnae, &c., are in greater proportion than others. Vertebrae and skulls are very rare, while solitary teeth are common. I note these facts, indicating no opinion. I have seen the theory that certain bones were used as charms; but these have no holes, as if they had been worn, nor do they appear to have been rubbed smooth.

No implements have been found in any of these dwellings, so far as I know. A glass bead, which is in the Museum of the Antiquaries of Scotland, was found by Mr Paterson, when exploring Dilly-mœnan along with Mr Robertson. Flint arrow-heads, Mr Paterson tells me, have been often found about it. Shells, specimens of which I send, are, as I have said, plentiful among the *debris*. Small pieces of charcoal are abundant, and small stones, burned so as to resemble those from a vitrified fort, but remarkable for their lightness, of which also I send specimens. These stones are found in great abundance in the bottom of the fosse of a large fort in the neighbourhood.

I have suggested that these isolated places of shelter could scarcely ever have been permanent dwellings. Many reasons concur in leading me to this conclusion. How, for example, assuming the flooring to have been baked clay, or even the natural rock, did the occupiers manage matters in seasons of heavy rains? And assuming the depth of the pit to have been, as stated, 14 feet, how did the dwellers get in and out? The walls appear perpendicular, and there is no appearance of stair. How account for the absence of certain bones—*e.g.*, skulls and jaw-bones? Why are there no fish bones? Were these pits “dwellings” in any sense? I offer no theory as to the race to which the tribes who dug them and used them belonged. The name affords no clue, as it is obvious that this might be applied to the rock by a succeeding race, who would see traces of the presence of man there fresher and far more numerous than those left to us to guess over.

The word Dilly-mœnan is, I think, obviously Cymric, and is a form of the Welsh “*Tylwith* or *Teulu*, a household,” and *Mœnan*, the genitive plural of *mœn*, a stone. The word means, then, simply “the dwelling on the rocks;” and certainly no name, assuming these to have been places of refuge, could have been more appropriate. Any one acquainted with the nomenclature of places on our north-eastern coast knows that it is probably more Cymric than Gaelic, as witness our Llan-bryde, Llan-morgan, Aber-dour, &c. May this Dilly in Dilly-mœnan not be another form of our *Tillys* and of the Irish *Tullas*, and afford a key to their meaning? The “*Miaave Craig*” is so called from the well-known sea-birds by which it is frequented, which are known in the south of Scotland as sea-maws. We have an example of a similar change in the

word *Law*, hill, which in the north-east of Scotland is changed into "Laave." In both cases the name sound of *e* is heard before the *a*, so that "Maave" is pronounced "Meeawve," and "Laave" "Leeawve."

FORTIFIED PENINSULA AT TARLAIR.

I send also two plans of a fortification defending a peninsula, about two acres in area, about half a mile west from Dilly-moenan. The lines are treble, consisting of three fosses alternating with three walls, and intersect an isthmus of some 30 yards. The outer wall, which has been worn down to the level of the soil, appears to have been of earth; the middle wall, which is about 14 feet broad, and at its highest part 4 feet above the level of the soil, has consisted of earth mixed with stones, about the size of a large fist, many of which are reddened by the action of fire. But it is the inner fosse and wall which principally claim and repay attention. On digging into the bottom of this fosse, I found it filled with burned stones (specimens of which I send), to the depth of at least 3 feet. This fosse is 87 feet long and 12 feet wide. The inner wall has been a large structure, and is composed of earth largely intermixed with stones of the same size as those in the second wall, all of which show the action of fire. Few of them, however, present the fused and vitrified appearance of those found in the bottom of the fosse. The stones are of the same nature as those found in the adjoining rocks and in the fields around. The approach, which has an average breadth of 12 feet, narrowing to 10 feet as it reaches the inner wall, runs along the edge of the western sea-cliff, and has been left undefended. It will be observed that, at the eastern extremity of the outer walls and fosses, the ground dips suddenly and steeply down to the sea, while the rocks forming the peninsula turn sharply towards the north. The inner wall is built, not on the isthmus, but on the peninsula, and follows its shape. At the point where it is not defended by the walls and ditches, and where yet the rocks are not so perpendicular as to be inaccessible, the face of the peninsula appears to have been scarped, and in some places it would appear as if it had been faced with stones.

At the eastern and seaward extremity of the inner wall, at 10 inches below the surface, I came upon a large deposit of comparatively fresh

charcoal. This was at one time a place famous for smuggling, and signal fires may have been lighted at this point.

In reference to the calcined state of the stones which I forward, I ought to mention that at one time kelp was largely manufactured in this district, and advantage may have been taken of the deep hollow of the inner fosse to kindle the fires there, and these fused stones may have been employed in the construction of rude fire-places.

I have found no trace whatever of any dwelling on the peninsula.

From the outside of the outer fosse to the inside of the inner wall—*i.e.*, the whole breadth of the fortification—is 100 feet; from the outside of outer fosse to centre of middle fosse, 24 feet; from centre of middle to centre of inner, 22 feet; and from centre of inner to inside of wall, 44 feet.

CAVE DWELLING.

The peninsula thus defended is a table-land, on a formation of clay-slate, elevated generally some 50 feet above the sea-level. Descending from the elevated surface to the base of the rocks, we find close to the sea a lofty natural cave, of a general width of 10 feet, and about 15 feet long. Two narrow rifts penetrate much farther in. The walls, which are of clay-slate, are comparatively smooth, but present no appearance of markings. I have dug into the floor of the cave to the depth of 4 feet, where I was stopped by water. After removing from 4 inches to 6 inches of natural soil, we came to a layer of sea shells, generally so much decayed as to present the appearance of slaked lime. This layer varies in thickness from half an inch to 2 inches. We have, then, layers of charcoal and soft clay of equally varying thickness. These layers of shells, clay, and charcoal alternate to the depth of 2 feet. It is particularly worthy of remark that each layer is homogeneous and well defined. Thus, the charcoal does not blacken the clay nor the shell deposit, but each, like repellent chemicals, is found nearly unmixed. It struck me that each season a new bed of clay must have been spread over the cave, on which new fires had been lighted and new shell-fish devoured. At the depth of 2 feet we came upon a hard floor of baked clay, about three-fourths of an inch in thickness. I regret that exposure to the air renders this friable, and changes even its colour.

This may be due to the efflorescence of the lime from the shells with which it is impregnated. When fresh dug into, it is penetrated by a spade with considerable difficulty, and that not by pressing, but by repeated strokes, when portions of it are broken off as you would break a flagstone. I am not enabled to say whether this layer covers the whole surface of the cave, as I made my opening in the centre, where probably the fire would be made; but on a second visit, when I very considerably enlarged the hole, I found it whenever we got down to its level. The whole opening I made would be about 4 feet square. I did not think myself justified in disturbing the floor farther, as I hope it will yet be examined by some one more competent to do so properly.

The baked clay floor was found, I have said, at the depth of 2 feet. On penetrating it we found again successive layers of shells, charcoal, and clay; but the deeper we went the layers appeared to me to be less and less pure. What struck me as strange was the fact that, the greater the depth, the shells appeared the fresher. Those lying amid the black water, at the depth of 4 feet, were so fresh and firm in their texture, that you might have fancied that they were but a few days, and not probably as many thousand years, out of their native element.

We found very few bones, and these very small and unsplit. I have forwarded and labelled what we did find.