

XIII.

NOTES ON THE ANTIQUITIES OF THE BLACK ISLE, ROSS-SHIRE, WITH
PLANS AND SECTIONS. BY ANGUS J. BEATON, MUNLOCHY.

The Black Isle, Ross-shire, is singularly rich in archæological remains, and more particularly the district under description. Here, within a comparatively small area, there is a considerable group of antiquities of great interest and importance to the archæologist.

The district seems to have been in those early ages densely populated, judging from the number, and, in some instances, the extraordinary magnitude of its ancient forts. Among these are the vitrified fort on Ord Hill of Kessock, near Inverness; and about two miles south-west of Carn Inenan is "David's Fort," pronounced by an eminent authority to be the finest example of the "earth construction" in the north.

In proportion to its area, it possesses more ancient remains than any similar area in the north. Five stone circles, twelve ancient forts (earth-works), one vitrified fort, and over a score of cairns and tumuli, are known to the writer.

KILCOY DISTRICT.—Kilcoy, the property of Mr. Charles Mackenzie, is the north-east portion of the parish of Killearnan, situated on the southern slope of the *Mhaol Bhuie*, or Yellow Moor, an anticlinal ridge of old red sandstone traversing the entire length, and forming, as it were, the backbone of the Black Isle, Ardmeanach or Ardmanach,¹ which terminates in the Sutors of Cromarty. Kilcoy is distant from Inverness about eight miles as the crow flies.

Carn Inenan.—Beginning at the watershed of the Millbuie, at Carnurran, at a height of 500 feet above the sea, and commanding an extensive

¹ Ardmeanach, a height in the middle, was the ancient name of the Black Isle, called by some Ardmanach, the Land of the Monks. Either of those names is appropriate, the peninsula being formed like a house ridge, and "the territory of the monks" being equally applicable to it on account of its containing the ecclesiastical settlements and lands of Fortrosse, Rosemarkyn, and Beauly.

view of the country for miles around, is a very complete stone circle called Carn Inenan, from which the parish of Killearnan evidently

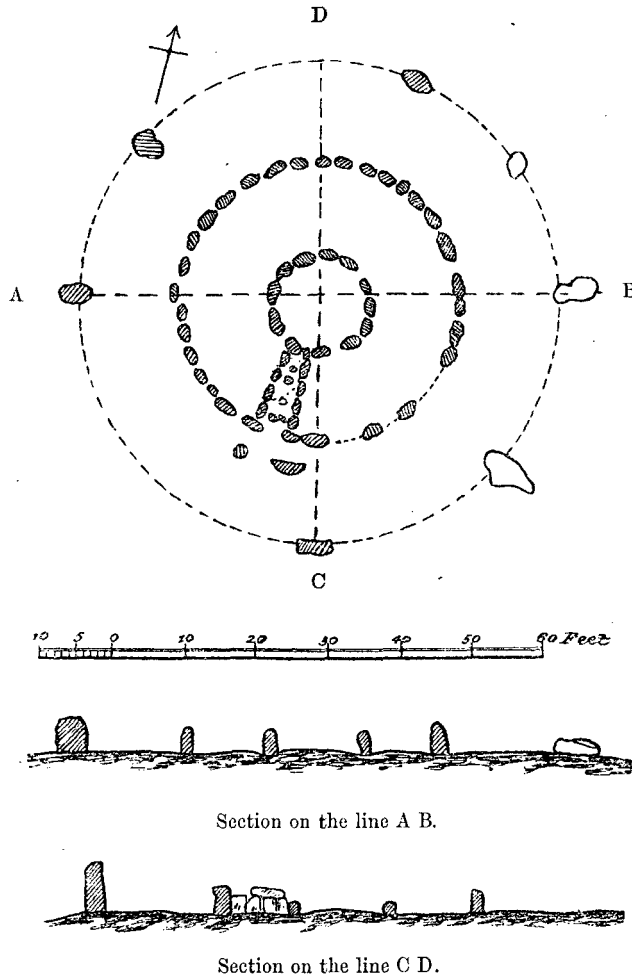


Fig. 1. Plan and Sections of Carn Inenan, Black Isle, Ross-shire.
(Stones still standing are hatched; fallen ones are shown in outline only.)

derives its name. It consists of three concentric circles. The outer ring is 66 feet in diameter, and consists of seven large stones averaging 5 feet high, four of which are still standing; the remainder have tumbled down, but are evidently not shifted from their places. The middle ring is 38 feet in diameter, and consists of thirty-one stones. The inner ring is 14 feet in diameter, and consists of twelve stones. They are chiefly of gneiss and granite, with two or three conglomerate boulders. Extending from the intermediate to the inner ring are two rows of stones, four on each side, packed between with small stones and covered with a large slab partially displaced. There is a tradition which associates it with the burial place of a Celtic king called Urnan, around whose shoulder was placed a massive chain of gold.

I remember coming across a stone circle of somewhat similar construction in Orkney in 1876, on an island in a loch, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile south of Birsay Palace. The draining of the loch revealed the remains of a rude causeway leading from the shore to the circle. As at Carn Inenan, there were twelve stones, extending from one circle to the other, and about 3 feet to 4 feet wide, six stones being on each side. (I regret that the sketch I then made of it, with the notes, have gone amissing, preventing me from giving a plan.)

Carn Glàs.—About three-quarters of a mile south-east of the circle of Carn Inenan is a huge cairn of stones called Carn Glàs¹ (the Grey Cairn); it covers a base of 1340 square yards, and stands 21 feet high, being an aggregation of about 1200 tons of stones.

Tumuli, &c.—A little to the north of Cairn Glàs is a tumulus of no very great dimensions, and many smaller ones are scattered between this and the stone circle referred to. In the field immediately adjoining, flint arrow-heads have been found; but unfortunately the finder informed me, when I questioned him, that not knowing them to be of any interest, he employed them with his “steel” in making fire for

¹ The appellation *Grey Cairn* or *Cairn Glàs* is often associated with those piles of stones we find in many districts; fully half a score exist in the north of Inverness and Ross-shires.

his pipe, but promised, should he ever come across more, to keep them safely for me.

At the boundary between Kilmuir West and Killearnan numerous cairns and mounds are scattered all over the moor.

I was informed by Mr. Alexander Grant, draper, Inverness, that some time in 1875 a hut circle was removed in course of improvement. Nothing was found in the interior but a few handfuls of fine sand, with some pebbles.

South-west of Carn Glàs, about 200 yards, is a regularly-built tumulus, about 40 feet in diameter and 15 feet high. The outside of the tumulus is covered in regular courses with stones averaging 12 inches in size, and firmly embedded in a red tenacious clay. Close by this tumulus is the remains of another large cairn, covering nearly one-third of an acre. It is now greatly demolished, a great part having been removed in course of improvement, and the stones used in building dykes. I have failed to ascertain if any remains were found under the portion removed.

Further west is a large cairn of stones, at a place called Drynie Park; and below this, at Millton village, is a heap of stones at a point considerably below high-water mark.

Stone Coffin.—While Mr. Colin Grant, Braes of Kilcoy, was reclaiming a piece of outlying land on the 25th of August 1881, he came across a large slab of sandstone, about eighteen inches below the surface of the ground, which proved to be the covering of an ancient grave. The slab was roughly of the form of a rectangular prism, 5 feet 3 inches long, 3 feet wide, and 9 inches deep at the apex, tapering to about 3 inches at the sides. It was of old red sandstone, similar to that excavated at the Redcastle Quarry, about two miles south-west of the grave.

The grave was 3 feet 9 inches long, 2 feet 3 inches wide, and 3 feet deep. The sides consisted of four slabs of gneiss, two on either side; while both the ends were formed of a single stone each, of the same kind; a few smaller stones were lying above and at the sides, in a bed of gravel and fine sand, evidently used as packing. The grave was carefully and substantially built, the stones being all in their natural dressed surfaces.

The skeleton enclosed was that of a full-grown man in a very advanced stage of decay, most of the bones crumbling to dust after a few days' exposure to the atmosphere. Fortunately the cranium was in a fair state of preservation. The teeth were exceptionally sound, although very much worn, fourteen being in the upper jaw and twelve in the lower. The back part of the skull was decayed, from being in immediate contact with the ground. It was well developed, and gave no indication of belonging to a degenerated race, or presenting any remarkable lowness of type. The skeleton was evidently in a contracted position, and had been placed apparently facing the north-west, or that direction where the sun for the greater part of the year sets.¹ No trace of anything of human workmanship was found in the grave.

The Kilcoy district thus contains many objects of interest, historic as well as prehistoric. To the north, immediately below Carn Urnan, is Kinkell Castle, erected in A.D. 1614; and to the south, about 600 yards below Carn Glàs, is the ruins of Kilcoy Castle, supposed to have been erected in the sixteenth century; while at Millton village is Red Castle, which is said to have been built in 1179 by William the Lion, and is thus supposed to be the oldest inhabited castle in Scotland.

DRUMNAMARG DISTRICT.—Drumnamarg or “Drium-na-marbh,” signifying the ridge of the dead, lies about $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles in an easterly direction from Kilcoy.

The name suggests a place of great interest, and, in point of fact, within a radius of half a mile there are four ancient remains still well preserved, while several others have been removed within the recollection of individuals still alive.

Fort Allanriach.—Of these No. 1 is a circular structure called “Fort Allanriach.” It is situated in a plantation about 50 yards from the public

¹ The writer was informed by an old man that tradition indicates a time when a dead body was placed facing the point where the sun “stood” when he departed hence; but almost invariably all skeletons exhumed face the east, *i.e.*, towards the rising of the sun; and at the present date this custom of *facing* the body eastward is rigidly adhered to.

road leading from Kessoek Ferry to Dingwall, and opposite the fourth milestone from Kessoek.

The circle is 58 feet in diameter inside; the wall is 3 feet thick, and

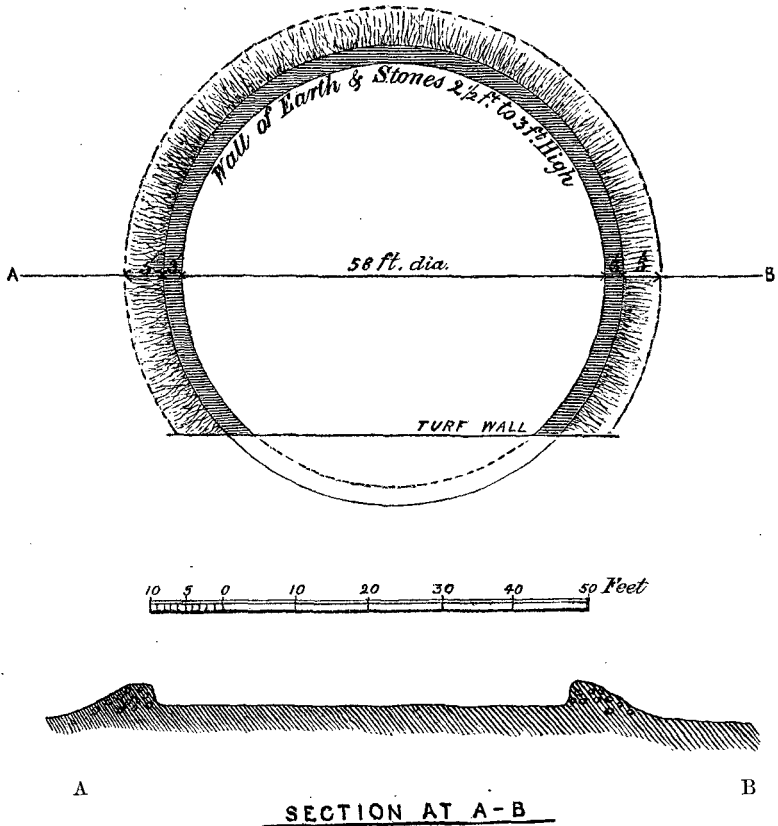


Fig. 2. Ground Plan and Section of Remains at Allanriach.

stands $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 feet high, having a slope of 5 feet. It is formed of stones and earth. The portion shown on the plan was evidently removed when the plantation dyke was erected.

J. F. Mackenzie of Allangrange, on whose property the circle is situated, informs me of a very fine example of a fort with ditch or moat in the

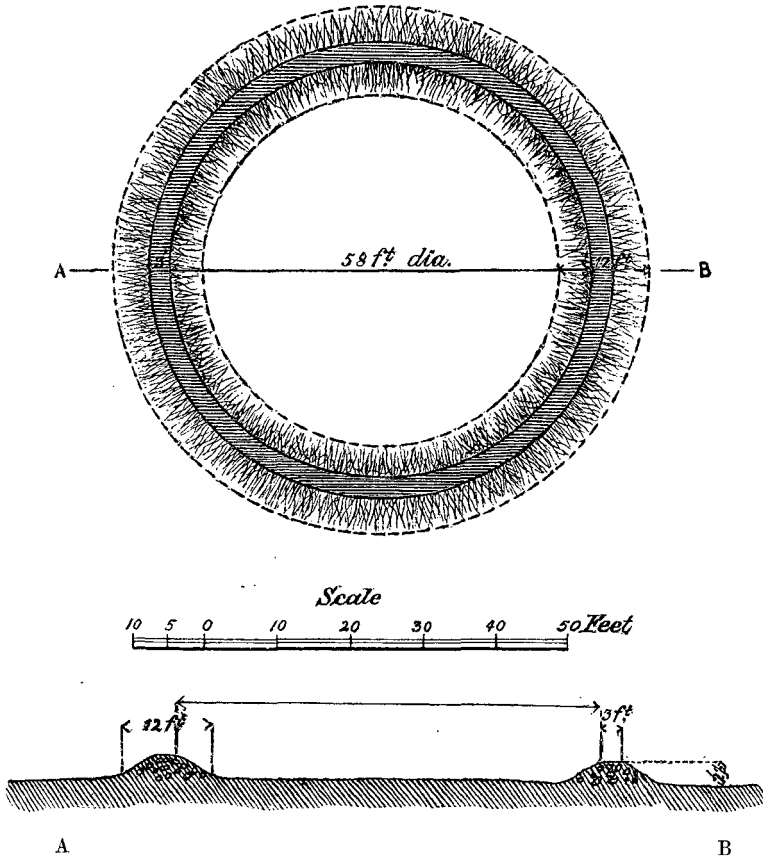


Fig. 3. Plan and Section of Remains at White Bridge, Stratherrick, Inverness-shire.

Fairburn Wood, at the western extremity of the Black Isle, which I have never before heard noticed.

At Broomhill, a little south-east of Allanriach, a stone cist, containing

human remains and fragments of a clay urn, was discovered a number of years ago, but no definite information can now be obtained regarding it.

I have annexed a plan and section of a "supposed burial-place," at

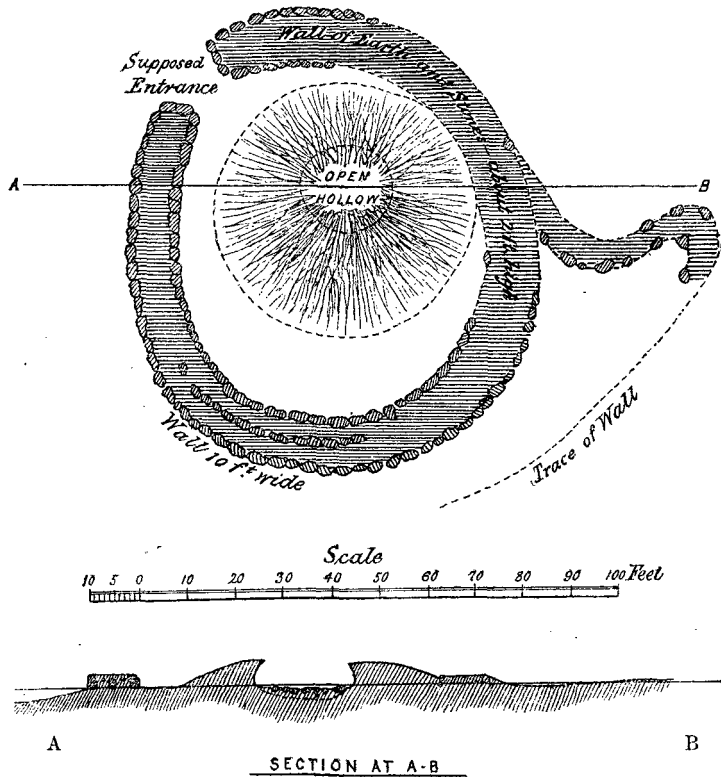


Fig. 4. Ground Plan and Section of Remains at Crofterunie, Black Isle, Ross-shire.

White Bridge, Stratherrick; from its close similarity to the remains at Allanriach, illustrating the analogy between circles in different localities.

Beehive Structure.—Below the farm of Crofterunie, and 500 yards east

of No. 1, is a curious structure¹ (fig. 4), the features of which are shown in the plan and section annexed. The outer wall is 10 feet thick, and from 2 to 3 feet high, formed of large boulders of gneiss, regularly and closely laid together on the outer and inner faces, while the space between is firmly packed with smaller stones and soil. In the centre is a circular hole partly filled with stones, and still 5 feet deep, although its original depth must have been considerably more. It has the appearance of having once had a widely vaulted roof, but it is so much destroyed and overgrown with bushes that it is very difficult to make out its original form.

I have only drawn those portions still remaining and distinctly traceable.

Burial Cairn and Circle.—Two hundred yards north-west of No. 2 is a very interesting mound (No. 3), surrounded by a circular wall of stones and earth. The surrounding ring is 78 feet in diameter, 3 feet wide, and standing on an average about $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet above the ground level. Near the centre is a mound or cairn 24 feet long, by 15 feet wide at the middle, of an oval shape, with a depth of $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet at the centre. (See fig. 5.)

My first impression was that it must be a burial-place; accordingly, with the assistance of Mr. James Stuart, farmer, Crofterunie, we dug the cairn on the 22nd April 1882. The surface was covered with small boulders, carefully and closely laid together upon a bed of fine black soil, which stood at the centre, 4 feet 6 inches above the natural surface, gradually diminishing to nothing all round. At 3 feet from the south edge of the cairn (as shown on plan and section), we found a circular hole in the hard gravelly pan, 2 feet in diameter, 18 inches deeper than the natural surface. The matter in the hole consisted of soft mossy stuff, then tenacious clay, burnt charcoal, and a few fragments of burnt bones. At 18 inches from the north edge of the last hole, we came across a circular aggregation of six stones closely grouped together, no other stones being found in any part below the causewayed covering. Having removed the stones, a similar hole of dimensions and shape almost identical with

¹ Since this paper was read the Inverness Scientific Society visited the remains, and came to the conclusion that it was a Beehive dwelling.

those of the last one revealed itself. In this hole a weapon-sharpening

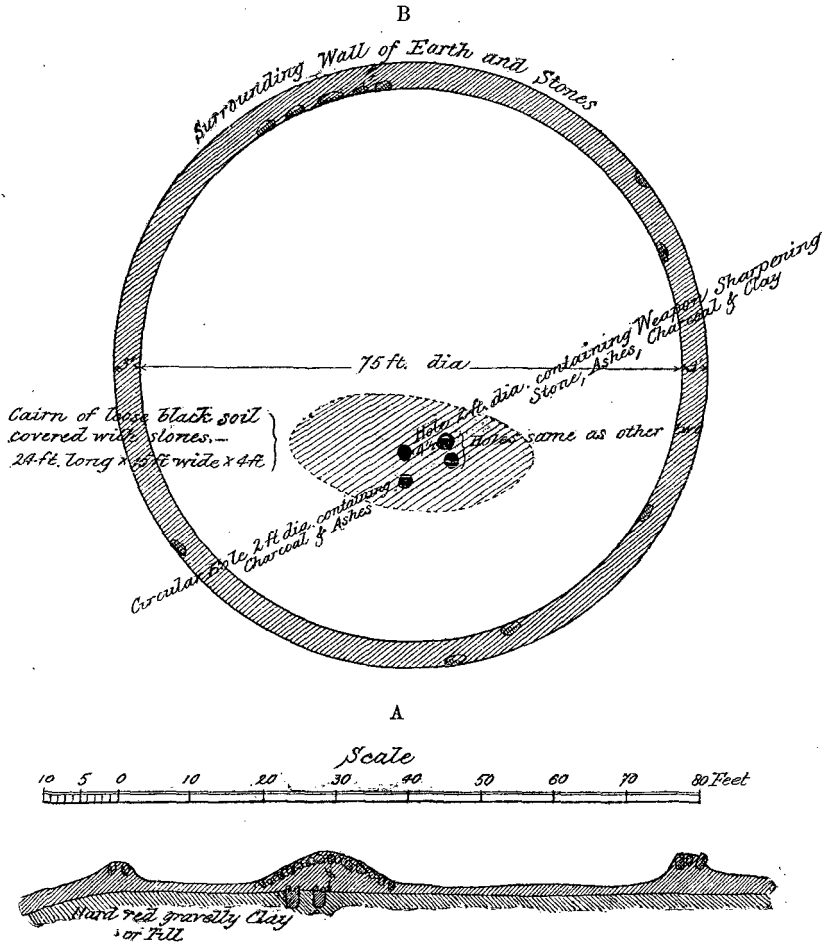


Fig. 5. Burial Cairn and Circular Wall at Crofterunie.

stone was picked up of an oval shape, and smoothly ground, the edges bearing very distinct marks of the friction.

Upon the 29th April we again dug still further in the cairn, and found two more holes, 4 feet 6 inches north of those found on the 22nd, and of the same dimensions, each containing—first, clayey stuff, then dark matter like decayed animal matter, charcoal, and fragments of burnt bones. The nature of the ground in which the holes were dug was a hard reddish gravelly till, so firm that a pick with difficulty could only be forced in a few inches. The holes might once have contained clay urns, which owing to the wet oozing through the mound might have become decomposed, and thus left the traces of clay which we observed; but it is more probable that the holes dug in the hard subsoil were used as substitutes for urns, in which the ashes and charcoal were deposited. Part of the cairn is still to be examined.

None of these remains are on commanding eminences, the district being comparatively flat, and about 250 feet above sea-level.

The Temple.—Half a mile east of No. 3 are the remains of a structure called “The Temple” (fig. 6). It is situated in a clump of trees on the summit of the ridge called Drum-na-marbh. The original form was evidently that of a circular structure, whose total diameter was 95 feet, having a central hollow or vacant space 20 feet in diameter. As it now remains, the outer circumference is quite discernible, and the central hollow is open and fully 4 feet deep, but much encumbered with stones. Traces of an outer or surrounding wall can be seen, but it and the mound itself were greatly destroyed not many year ago by a farmer removing stones for building purposes. The mound still stands from 6 to 8½ feet high, as shown in the accompanying plan and section. The origin of the erroneous epithet “Temple,” which is now applied to it, may be explained by the idea current that all such remains are “Druidical Temples.”

Immediately to the south of the remains of the structure called “The Temple,” a fine stone battle-axe was picked up by Mr. Stuart, farmer, in 1875, but was given by him to Mr. Kenneth Cameron, presently in the County Buildings, Edinburgh, whom, after no little trouble, I succeeded in finding at that address, but unfortunately he had left the axe with a

friend in his native village, who can find no trace of it now. Mr. Cameron describes it as being of the size of ordinary small wood-chopping hatchets, and finely, smoothly, and neatly finished. Mr. James Stuart

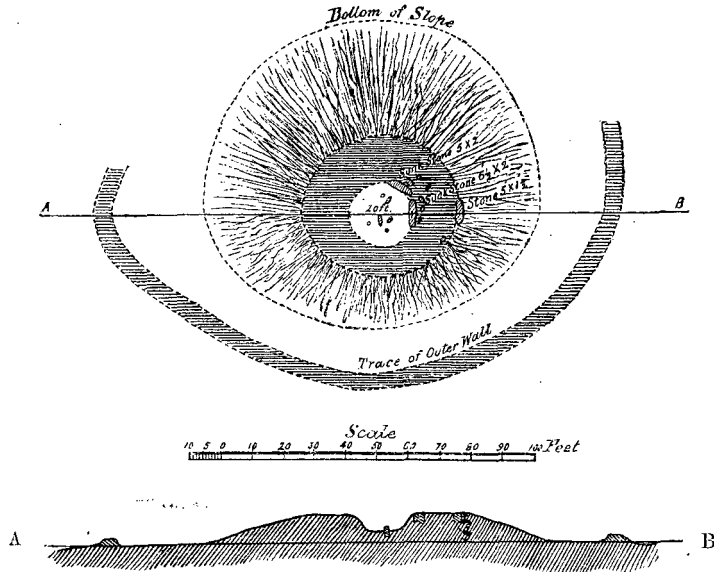


Fig. 6. Ground Plan and Section of "The Temple" Drum-na-marbh, Black Isle, Ross-shire.

has informed me that two smaller axes were picked up subsequently near the same place, but unfortunately I can find no trace of them.

The Balnaguirie Remains.—At the distance of $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile in a north-east direction from "The Temple" is a curiously-formed structure, composed of a rectangular enclosure, formed of eight stones, including an area of 20 feet by 6 feet. The largest stone, which is partly fallen, is $6\frac{1}{2}' \times 4\frac{1}{2}' \times 2'$. This stone forms the west end of the enclosure. The remainder of the stones average about 5 feet in height, the highest being 7 feet. The rectangular space is surrounded by a roughly circular wall, 100 feet in diameter.

The mound, which stands about $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, is composed of small stones. Between the enclosure and the outer wall on the west side, and 30 feet from the latter, is a semicircular wall or mound of the same kind of

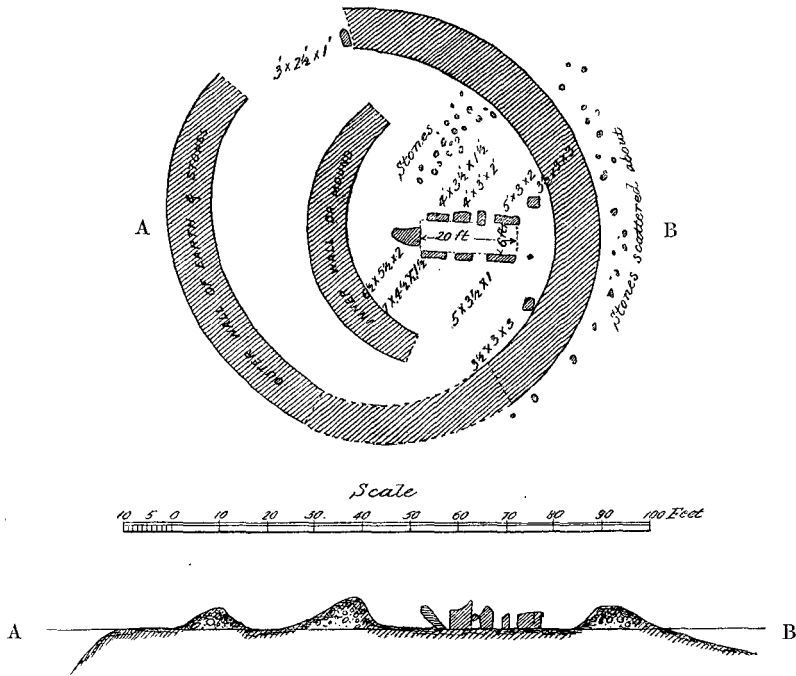


Fig. 7. Ground Plan and Section of Remains at Balnagie, Black Isle, Ross-shire.

structure as the outer wall, and $6\frac{1}{2}$ feet above the level of the edge of the terrace on the west side. On the north side, between the stone space and the outer wall, numerous stones of various sizes are scattered about.

At 150 yards in an easterly direction, on a small knoll, is a tumulus of a 40 feet base, with fully 5 feet curvature at the centre.

BELMADUTHY or BRAEDOWN.—*Stone Circle*.—At Braedown, “The Brae

of the Dune," near Belmaduthy, $1\frac{1}{4}$ mile north-east of Balnaguie, are the remains of what is called a stone circle (fig. 8). It cannot, however, be properly called a circle, as its remains indicate its form to have been two

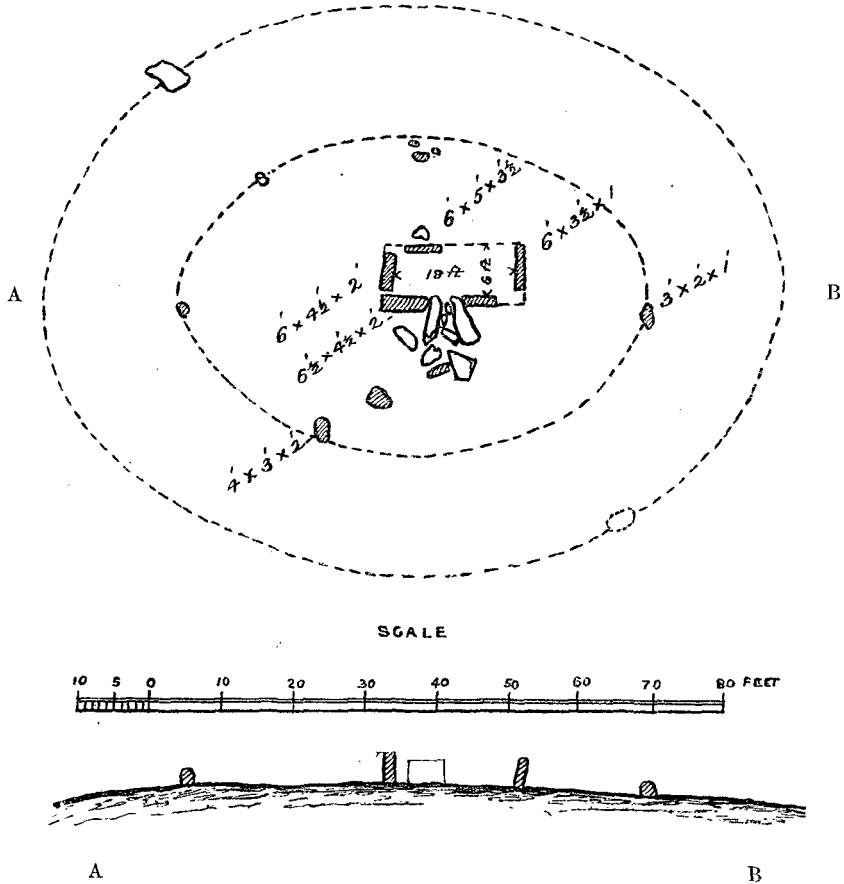


Fig. 8. Plan and Section of Stone Circle at Belmaduthy.

ellipses, enclosing a somewhat rectangular space, 18 feet long by 6 feet wide, being 2 feet shorter, but the same in width as the Balnaguie

enclosure. The largest stone, which is at the west end also, is $6\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, of a pyramidal form, $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet broad at the base, and 2 feet thick, perfectly smooth on both faces. As shown in the accompanying plan, it

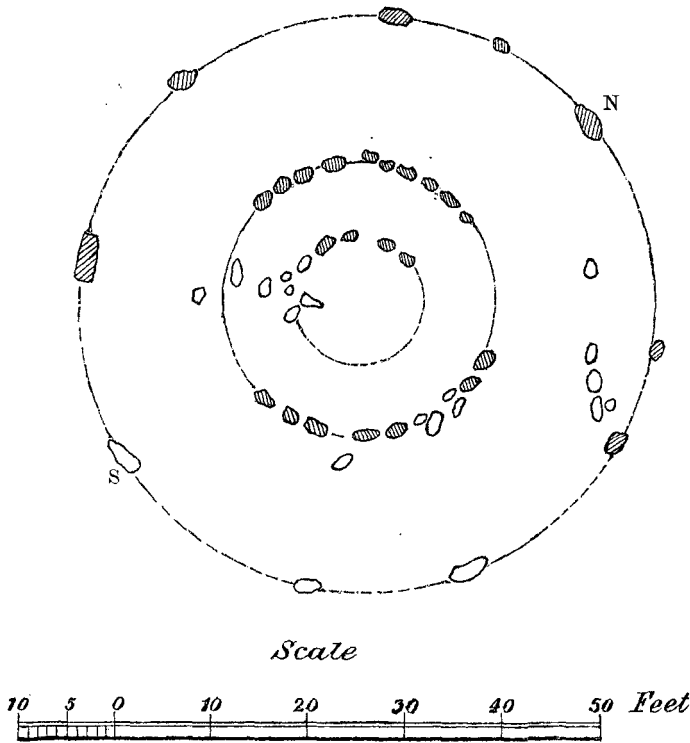


Fig. 9. Plan of Stone Circle at Scaniport, Inverness.

The diameter of the outer circle is 60 feet, of the second 30 feet, and of the inner circle 14 feet. The stones in the outer circle vary from 6 feet to about 3 feet in height.

has been greatly demolished, and the amount of stones in its vicinity indicates the great size of the structure.

At Cnoc-na-gonnan, near the village of Munloch, Mr. Angus Bethune,

Gateside, the writer's grandfather, while improving that part of his farm, a good many years ago, discovered a cist on the edge of a sandy terrace. The cist, which was only about 2 feet square, was built with flagged stones, and contained a complete human skeleton, and the fragments of a clay urn, artistically ornamented. It was sent to Belmaduthy House, to Sir Colin Mackenzie of Kilcoy.

I have also given the plan of a stone circle (fig. 9), still existing, in a wood near Scaniport, about 5 miles from Inverness, towards Loch Ness, to contrast its structural features with those of the circles in the Black Isle.