

II.

STONE-CIRCLES AT GRENISH, AVIEMORE, AND DELFOUR, STRATHSPEY. BY C. G. CASH, F.R.S.G.S.

In his *Vacation Notes in Cromar and Strathspey*, 1875, Sir Arthur Mitchell gives a brief account of the Grenish stone-circle. In 1877 Mr Angus Grant, then schoolmaster in Glen Urquhart, but previously resident at Aviemore, read a paper to the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club, in which he gave an account of several stone-circles, including those at Grenish and Aviemore. James Robertson, in the account of his tour, No. 858 in Sir Arthur Mitchell's List, reports a circle near Aviemore, apparently the Grenish one, as having in 1771 something like a cromlech in the middle; there is now no such structure there. In vol. vii. of the *Proceedings* of this Society, Mr John Stuart reports at the Aviemore circle a flat stone with three cup-marks; this stone seems to have disappeared. Of the Delfour stone-circle a brief account is given in the 1845 *New Statistical Account*; a considerable change seems to have been made in its appearance since that time.

I here record observations made by my wife and me during the spring and summer holidays of 1905, when we spent several days at these circles.

The Grenish Stone-Circle.—This circle stands about $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles E.N.E. of Aviemore Station, and about 350 yards east of the nearest point of

the main road, on the south side of the little Lochan nan Carraigan, "Loch of the Standing Stones." The site of the circle seems destitute of any decided features; it is not the highest point of the moorland, nor is it notably an elevation at all. One hundred and forty feet, centre to centre, to the south-east of the circle is a low, almost structureless cairn. This rises about 3 feet above the surrounding ground, has a diameter of about 22 feet, and seems to have been disturbed. On the north side of the lochan is another cairn, showing even less structure, and easily overlooked.

The stone-circle (fig. 1) consisted at one time of three concentric circles; the outer one, of eleven or perhaps twelve megaliths, had a diameter of about 103 feet; the middle one, of stones somewhat closely set, a diameter of about 56 feet; and the inner one, also of stones closely set, a diameter of about 24 feet. The ring enclosed between the second and third circles, about 16 feet wide, is entirely filled with loose stones, to the level of the tops of the set stones of these circles, thus forming a sort of low circular wall, a "ring cairn" as Sir A. Mitchell calls it. The space within the third circle was probably originally left free from loose stones, but now there are many lying in it, but not to any depth. A twin-stemmed pine-tree (A) grows in this inner space. Round the outside of the second circle there is a slight embankment of earth and stones.

The outer circle consisted originally of either eleven or twelve megaliths; of these but two remain, and they are prostrate. The south-westerly one (B) is just over 9 feet long, and has a trapezoidal section with a major diameter of over 3 feet. The more westerly one (C) is 7 feet long, and in section is an oblique parallelogram with a major diameter of 3 feet 7 inches. These have fallen, the first one outwards, and the second one inwards. Sites may be seen for four more (D, E, F, G), slight depressions in the ground, with small loose stones lying near, which I regard as packing to fix and steady the megaliths. Nearly due east of the common centre there is no sign of the former presence of a megalith (H), and the current account is that no stone stood there.

The sites of four megaliths on the northern side cannot be determined because of the growth of long heather, and to the north of east a site is doubtful (J). It seems that nine or ten of the megaliths have been

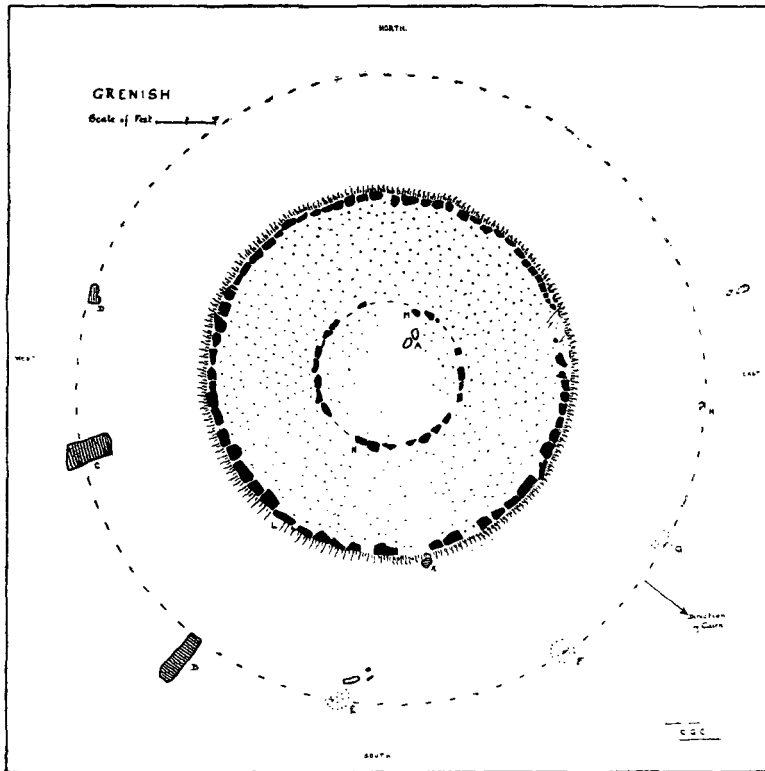


Fig. 1. Stone-Circle at Grenish.

removed, some of them to be used in the foundations of the threshing mill at Aviemore House. In connection with the removal of another of these stones a curious story is told. It was taken to be used as the lintel of the doorway of a byre. When the byre was finished,

difficulty was found in getting the cattle to enter or stay in it; they seemed overcome with fear. The farmer sent for one of the "men" of Duthil, and asked his advice. After religious "exercises" the "man" informed the farmer that the cause of the terror of the cattle was the presence of this stone as the lintel. The stone was removed and an ordinary stone substituted, and thenceforward the cattle occupied the byre in peace!

The second circle consisted of about seventy stones, of which sixty-six are visible in their places, one (K) has slightly fallen from its place, and a few are hidden in the growth of turf. There are three well-marked gaps in the circle: one on each side of the south stone, and one a little to the east. The tallest and most regularly shaped stone of this circle (L) is the fifth one to the west of the south stone. This is a slab of greyish granite, 3 feet 5 inches high, 4 feet 1 inch wide, 1 foot thick, and very regular in shape. No other stone of its circle quite equals it in appearance, but the stone next west from it is not much inferior. In general, the stones diminish in size and shapeliness each way from these two. The decrease is not regular, but is clearly intentional.

The third or innermost circle is much less obviously complete; this is partly due to the overflow of the piling of loose stones. It probably consisted of nearly forty stones, of which twenty-two remain visible in place, and one (M) has been displaced inwards. Here again the tallest and shapeliest stone (N) is in the same common radius with the tallest stone (L) of the second circle, and with the megalith (B) which is said to have been the biggest of the megaliths. Stone (N) is about 2 feet broad, and 10 inches thick. Its height is about 3 feet 6 inches, but probably not more than 3 feet of its inner face was originally exposed.

The stone packing in the ring between the second and third circles consists of loose stones of varied size. The largest I could see weigh about a hundredweight, the least are less than one's fist. In some places they have been howked out; hundreds of them have fallen or been pitched into the inner circular space, and some have tumbled out

through the gaps in the second circle. There is, of course, no actual evidence that this packing is part of the original structure.

Of the cromlech reported by James Robertson there is no remnant.

The authorities of the Seafeld estate seem to have no official knowledge of the circle, and there is no provision in the rules of the estate for its protection.

The Aviemore Stone-Circle.—The Aviemore stone-circle stands about half a mile north of Aviemore railway station, not more than 60 yards from the high-road, and just behind the United Free Church. As in the case of the Grenish circle, the site is not possessed of any notable features. As far as I know, there are no cairns in the neighbourhood of the circle.

The circle (fig. 2) is in some respects less complete than that at Grenish. Like that one it consisted originally of three concentric circles; the outer one, of detached megaliths, had a diameter of about 75 feet; the second, of closely set stones, a diameter of about 42 feet; and the inner, as to which the evidence is imperfect, a diameter of about 26 feet.

The outer circle probably consisted of twelve stones, for in this case there was and still is a megalith (A) in the eastward place. The south stone (B) stands 4 feet 10 inches high, and has a shape roughly suggestive of a cloaked human figure. The rest of the south-west quadrant has no stone, nor any evidence of the former presence of one. The north-west quadrant has no megalith now standing in its proper place; but there are some large boulder-stones lying against the outside of the second circle, and it is easy to suppose that three of these (C, D, E) may be the somewhat shapeless megaliths rolled inwards. The farm-steading was at one time close to the west side of the circle, and such displacement may well have taken place. There are also some other largish blocks of stone similarly placed (F, G), which probably did not belong to the circle; their fresher surfaces suggest that they were placed here when turned up by the plough, as have been also many smaller pebbles. In the north-east quadrant there are three stones that may have been megaliths (H, J, K), and three others that are probably

intruders (L, M, N). The most northerly of the megaliths (H) lies close in to the second circle, and has, I am informed, probably been recently moved into its present position. The second megalith (J) does not

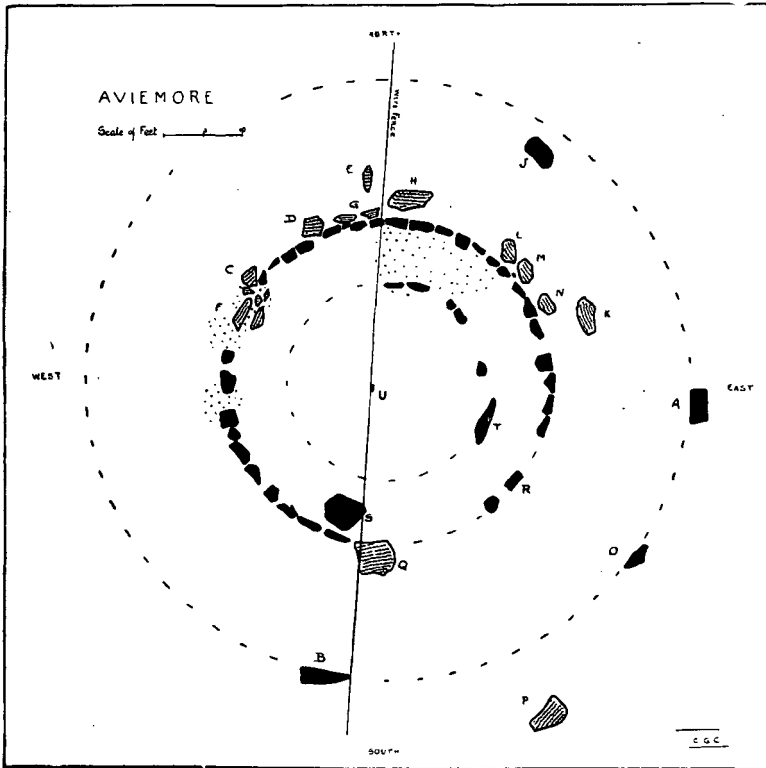


Fig. 2. Stone-Circle at Aviemore.

look as though it had been moved, but it is only 13 feet from the second circle, whereas the south stone is 16 feet 8 inches, and the two easterly ones are 17 feet 3 inches. The third stone of this quadrant (K), a low, flattish block, is only 5 feet from the circle, and has almost certainly been

moved. In the south-east quadrant there are three stones, two (A, O) standing, and one (P) fallen. These are well shaped, somewhat pyramidal blocks, 3 feet 10 inches, 4 feet 9 inches, and 4 feet 9 inches respectively in height. The fallen one has perhaps been shifted some distance outwards, as its nearest point is 23 feet from the second circle.

The second or middle circle is fairly complete. It consists of probably thirty-six stones. There is a considerable gap to the east of the south stone (Q), for which no stones appear, and there is another gap still farther round on that side. It may be noted that the stone to the south of this latter gap (R) is the handsomest of this circle, being 3 feet 3 inches high, fairly regular in shape, and light grey in colour. The tallest stone of this circle is the prostrate south stone (Q). This would be 4 feet high if standing on its base, which is upon the line of the circle. The stones next west from it are also large, standing each 3 feet high, the one 3 feet 7 inches, and the other 3 feet 10 inches wide. No other stone equals any of these four in size, but it can scarcely be said that there is a gradation of size round towards the north. Just behind the south stone, or rather behind its neighbour, is a large shapeless stone nearly a yard high, suggesting the "recumbent" stones found in many stone-circles. There is a slight, irregular embankment round the outer base of this middle circle.

The third circle, the innermost one, is very imperfect. Indeed we found but five, or possibly six, stones to indicate its position, and only one of these (T) is at all elevated. It stands about 2 feet high, but the others barely show above the ground. It is not easy to suppose the former existence of a complete third circle, still less to suppose what Mr Angus Grant asserts, that there was a ring of loose stones here like that at Grenish, for only in the north part of the ring are loose stones present in any notable quantity. Of the cromlech reported by James Robertson there is no remnant. Mr Cree, a member of this society, found what we took to be a "cup-mark" in a loose stone (U) which had been used as a prop for one of the posts of a wire-fence that cuts the circle; the cup is $3 \times 1\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

It seems evident that this circle has suffered considerable disturbance. It is not easy to account for the removal of stones from the innermost circle—if they ever were there. The megaliths have in several cases obviously been moved, and some of those on the west side have been taken away. It may be noted, however, that while three stones are missing from the south-west quadrant, there seem to be three intruders (L, M, N) in the north-east quadrant.

This circle is on the Seafeld estate, and, like the Grenish one, is ignored by the estate officials.

The Delfour Stone-Circle.—This circle (fig. 3) stands about 4 miles south-west from Aviemore Station and 2 miles N.N.E. from Kincaig Station. It is about half a mile west of the high-road, and may be approached by a farm-road leaving the high-road a little south of the eighth milestone from Kingussie.

But for the presence of one standing stone (A) of striking appearance, this circle might at first sight be supposed to be merely a heap of loose stones collected from the land around, for there are several such heaps in its neighbourhood. The *New Statistical Account* speaks of an inner circle 25 feet in diameter. This is now completely hidden in a pile of stones that quite fills all the space within the middle circle. I am, however, informed that for at least thirty-five years there has been neither addition to nor subtraction from the pile as it now stands, and that the factor allows no interference with it.

Of the outer circle of megaliths, if it ever existed, only one (A) now remains. This stands at a distance of 22 feet 6 inches to the south-west of the middle circle. It is a remarkably fine slab of quartzite, 9 feet 6 inches high, 1 foot 6 inches thick, 5 feet 6 inches wide at the base, and tapering irregularly upwards, so as to present a rough resemblance to a cloaked human figure.

The main or middle circle is 60 feet in diameter. Of its set stones only twenty-nine or thirty are visible, constituting about five-eighths of the circumference. The entire north-west quadrant and about half of the north-east quadrant show no set stones, these being hidden by the loose

stones, which in many places have been piled right over the retaining wall of set stones. Outside the circle of stones there is a banking of earth and stones, at its widest about 9 feet wide. The highest part of the "cairn"

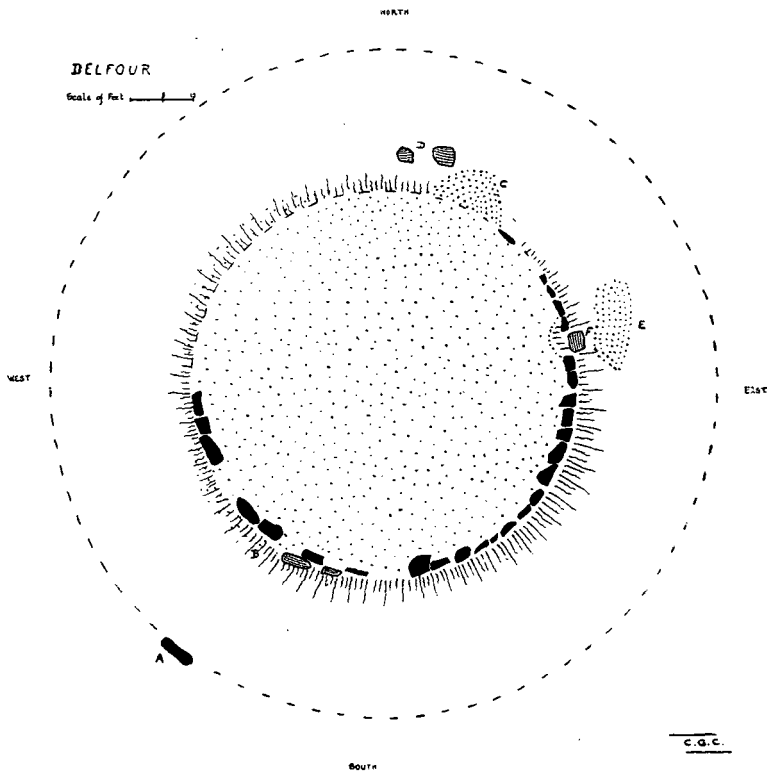


Fig. 3. Stone-Circle at Delfour.

is about 6 feet above the lowest outer base of this bank. As is usually the case, the largest stones of the circle are towards its south-west part, and there is a diminution each way around the circle. The tallest stone, the south-west one (B), stands scarcely 3 feet 6 inches above the bank, and the diminution is carried so far that at about the north-east point the

set stones disappear into the upper surface of the bank, which itself is here much less built up.

Further, the whole surface of the "cairn" drops towards this point, and it is easy to suppose that this was a place of entry for barrows loaded with the collected stones. Such entry would naturally be at the previously lowest point of the circle, and stones so carried and thrown down would make a mound gradually rising from the point of entry towards the remoter parts of the circle. The present appearance of the "cairn" strongly suggests such a procedure.

This involves the complete burial of the third or innermost circle mentioned in the *New Statistical Account*.

Outside the middle circle, on the west side of this "entrance," there is a considerable pile of loose stones (C), looking as old, weathered, and lichen-covered as those of the main pile; and against these are two large blocks (D), whose relation to the general structure is not apparent. Near the east side of the "entrance" there is a pile of fresh-looking stones (E), about which I made special but fruitless inquiries. They are not a very recent addition. Just here one stone of the circle (F) has been forced outwards from its place, and lies on its side, and the loose stones behind it have been much disturbed.