

## I.

ARCHÆOLOGICAL NOTES FROM AVIEMORE. By C. G. CASH, F.R.S.G.S.,  
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The stretch of country between Aviemore and Boat of Garten contains a considerable number of relics of antiquity—cairns, stone-circles, and hill-forts. In a previous paper (*Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, xl. 245) I reported the survey of stone circles at Aviemore and Grenish, as well as one at Delfour, and in this paper I wish to report on some cairns in the Grenish Moor, on the fort above Avielochan and that on Pityoulish Hill, and on the excavation of the Avielochan chambered cairn.

*Cairns on Grenish Moor.*—The land along the east side of the highway running north from Aviemore is conveniently spoken of as Grenish Moor. Parts of it are under cultivation or grass, but much of it is heather-clad, and was till recently under timber. This moorland contains a large number of cairns, some separate and scattered, and some in groups.

In his *History of the Province of Moray*, Shaw gives an account of the Battle of Cromdale, fought in 1690, and says that some of the defeated clansmen were pursued up the valley of the Spey, and “on the Muir of Granish near Aviemore some were killed.” Local tradition associates this incident with some of the cairns, and specially with a group in a hollow just south-west of Avielochan. This group (fig. 1) can be seen from the highway, and consists of two ring mounds and a straight ridge. The ring mounds are 60 and 40 feet in diameter respectively, the bank being about 10 feet wide; the ridge is about 40 feet long and 8 feet wide. They are all quite obviously artificial, and seem to consist of a low piling of stones, now almost entirely hidden in turf and heather. There is no appearance of standing stones, nor, indeed, of any arrangement of the stones.

About a quarter of a mile to the north-east of Loch-nan-Carraigan, and in a slight hollow about a hundred yards east of the old moorland road to

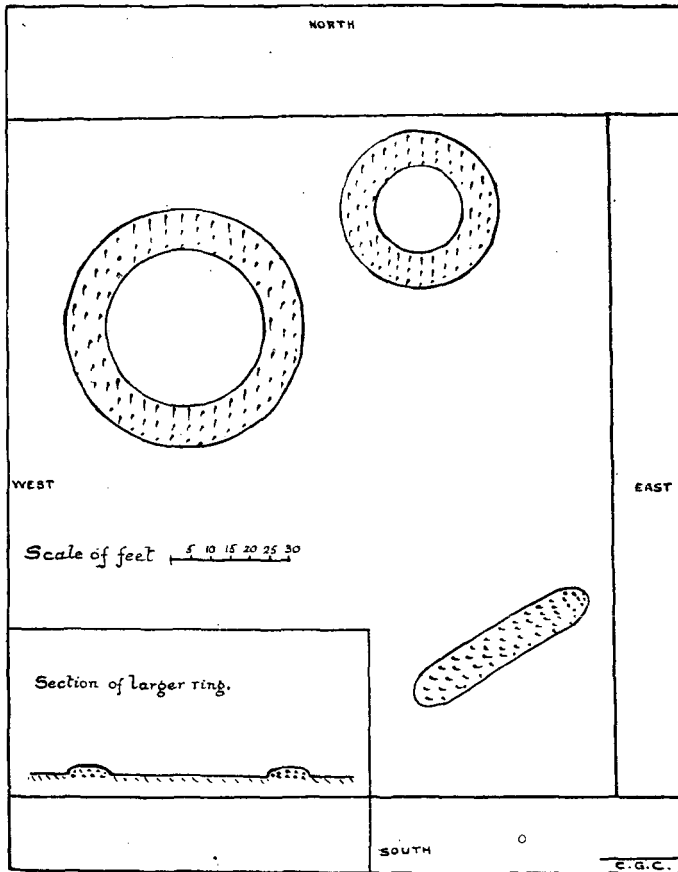


Fig. 1. Cairns on Grenish Moor.

Boat of Garten, I came across a number of cairns lying near together, and, with the help of Mr Robert Anderson, Editor of the *Aberdeen Daily*

*Journal*, I made a general survey of them (fig. 2). There are seventeen of them: fourteen circular, two long ridges, and one "Africa" shaped in plan. The circular ones vary in diameter from 5 feet to 12 feet; the two long ones are 40 and 53 feet long respectively, and  $7\frac{1}{2}$  and 9 feet wide; the "Africa" one is about 38 feet long, and about 25 feet in greatest breadth. They rise but slightly above the surrounding surface, and are plainly made of piled stones, now largely overgrown with moorland plants. There is no appearance of any standing-stones, nor any regular placing of stones.

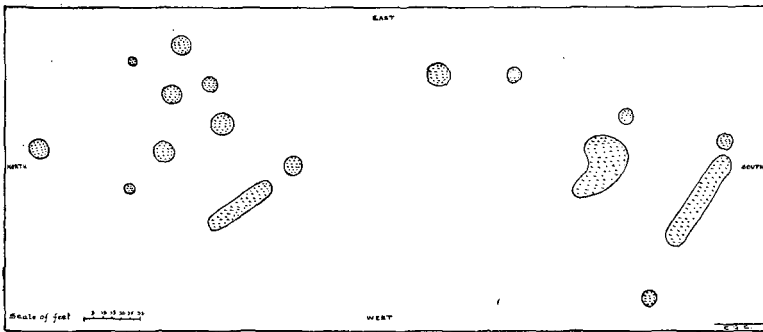


Fig. 2. Cairns on Grenish Moor N.E. of Loch-nan-Carraigan.

Similar cairns occur scattered on the Tullochgrue, the partly cultivated hill in the Rothiemurchus Forest, usually in pairs. One of these was cut through by gillies quarrying for road material. It showed under the outside layer of turf and peaty earth a layer of largish pebbles laid close together and slightly domed, and then a layer some 4 inches thick of dark-coloured earth resting on the pan earth. Examination of some of this dark earth revealed nothing of interest, nor did I see any appearance of charcoal in it. But examination of larger quantities might, of course, yield other results.

Another cairn attracted my attention. It lay in a wood on the west side of the highway, and very near a partly ruined little bridge

on General Wade's military road, which here is very well defined. This cairn was more than 20 feet in diameter, was constructed of large stones, and had evidently been disturbed. Inquiry brought out an interesting bit of folk-lore. A man that dreams of finding money in a recognisable place will find money if he searches in that place. Accordingly, someone having dreamed that he found money in this place searched the cairn, but did not find money, though he is said to have found human bones in a sort of cist constructed of slabby stones.

The notion of the existence of treasure in these cairns seems pretty general, and I rather wonder that so many of them remain undisturbed by searchers. When excavating at Avielochan I was several times asked, half jocularly, perhaps, whether I was searching for treasure; and on each occasion I took good care to explain that treasure in the sense of money or valuables was not to be expected in such places, but that their structure and arrangement gave interesting information, and that articles of archæological interest might be found, and should always be reported to competent authorities. It is pretty certain that interesting things are found at times, and that some of them fail to be reported. I had experience of such a case. On Mr Macintosh's farm at Avielochan there had long been an ancient cairn of very big stones, and this had gradually been covered by a pile of small stones cleared from the field. Mr Alex. Sinclair, the county roadman, in whose cottage we were staying, a year or two ago removed all these small stones and used them as road-metal, thus revealing again the old cairn. Last year Mr Macintosh wanted to plough the part of the field occupied by the cairn, which seems to have been of considerable size, and he got Mr Sinclair's help in breaking and removing the big stones. Under one of these stones Mr Sinclair found a bronze pin, all thickly coated with verdigris. To see what metal it was made of, he beat out and spoiled the point of it. Finding it not gold, he gave it to the farmer's son, Alec. When I heard of this matter, I asked to see the pin, and then to bring it to Edinburgh. It is figured here (fig. 3), and seems to me to be slightly different in pattern from any previously shown in the Museum. It is 4 inches in

length, and the head is round and flat, with projecting shoulders where it narrows to the pin. When first found the point was perfect. The metal is somewhat pitted and roughened by rusting. The pin is not unlike such as have been used for fastening a plaid or shawl when a brooch is not used.

At my request, Mr Alexander Sinclair, the finder, and Mr Alexander Macintosh, the owner, have consented to add the pin to the Museum collection.

On the Grenish Moor I saw and noted two other ring mounds. One was close to the west edge of Loch-nan-Carraigan. It had a diameter of about 50 feet, and was thickly covered with turf and heather. It was possible to imagine the existence of a small inner circle. The other ring mound was close to the main roadside, just opposite our cottage.



Fig. 3. Bronze Pin found in a Cairn at Avielochan.

Its diameter was about 48 feet, and the inside flat was not more than 14 feet across. The western face seemed to show a few stones of large size bounding the lower part of the mound. The eastern part of the mound was broken by a gap about 3 feet wide, and at the northern side of this gap there seemed to be a low cairn about 14 feet across. The whole is densely covered with turf and heather.

*Fort on Pityoulish Hill.*—Pityoulish Hill lies on the east side of the River Spey, nearly two miles in direct line and seven by the nearest road from our quarters at Grenish. It is the most westerly part of the Nettin or Kincardine Hills, and its western face boldly overlooks Loch Pityoulish. The fort is situated on one of its small northerly knolls, at an elevation of about one thousand feet, that is some three hundred feet above the low ground. The fort is circular, about 28 feet wide inside. The walls seem to have been of dry stone masonry, and are now in almost complete ruin. No part remains standing more than

about 4 feet high, but the quantity of stone scattered down the face of the knoll is enough for walls 9 feet high. A curious feature of the site is that while it commands a wide stretch of open country *down* the Spey valley, past Boat of Garten, Nethy Bridge, and Grantown, its outlook in the opposite direction is entirely blocked by a neighbouring knoll. This next knoll, scarcely one hundred yards distant, while having the same *northerly outlook*, commands also the view across Loch Pityoulish and away beyond Aviemore. This seems to suggest that the fort was an outpost against invasion from the north and north-east. But I could not at all see what it was intended to defend, nor where the defenders were to obtain water.

*Fort on Tor Beag of Ben Ghuilbnich.*—This fort is on the west side of the River Spey, less than half a mile north-west of Avielochan, and overlooking the main road about half-way between Laggantygown and Avielochan farm-house. I was first told of it by Mr Wm. Grant when I was visiting his cairns, and he pointed out to me the small hill on which it lay, though from below nothing can be seen of the fort because of the dense growth of birch and juniper. When I went to see it, I had the good fortune to meet with Mr Macintosh, on whose farm it is, and he accompanied me on my first visit.

The small Tor, or detached hill, is an outpost of Ben Ghuilbnich, from which it is separated by a deep and narrow ravine running down northwards. The hill-top is somewhat oval in plan, with a length of over 200 feet. About 20 feet below the highest part, a terrace completely encircles the hill. The terrace is about 6 feet wide, and about 730 feet in circumference. It is entirely artificial, and in some parts towards the north-east the stones used in its construction can be seen, but mostly it is plant-covered. The access to the fort is from the south. Here a zigzag roadway, still fairly visible, leads up the most gently sloping part of the hill. In each of its two sharp angles is a massive block of granite, suggesting points of defence. At one section of the upper part of the road, it is difficult to avoid thinking that the numerous rough stones lying on the hillside below the road are the remains of a

protecting wall, though there is certainly now no semblance of arrangement among them.

At the top of this access are the ruins of the defences of the entrance to the fort. Here the encircling terrace rises somewhat on each side, and narrows. In the plan (fig. 4), C D E shows the run of the terrace. At A and B are the inner defence walls, that at A still showing stones built up wall-wise, all the others being in utter ruin. From A and B

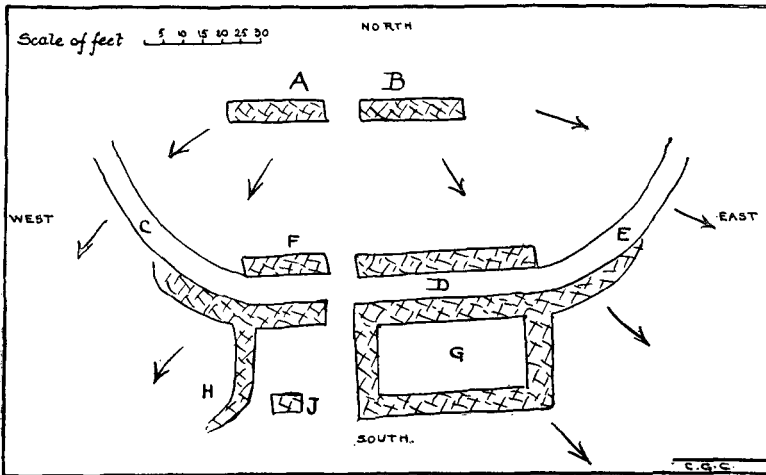


Fig. 4. Entrance to the Fort on Tor Beag.

the ground falls sharply to the outer defence and beyond it, the fall being greatest on the east side. The arrows show the direction of the fall of the ground, which is least steep along the line of the entrance passage. At F the evidence of the existence of a wall is slight; all the other walls are quite well seen, though entirely ruined. At D the terrace becomes a narrow passage between walls, and outwards from it is the outline of a guard-room, G. To the west of this the structure is less evident. The west wall at H seems to turn outwards, though this may simply be the running down of the fallen stones. At J is an indefinite





Fig. 5. Entrance to Fort on Tor Beag, looking inwards.



Fig. 6. Entrance to Fort on Tor Beag, looking outwards.



suggestion of wall, so that there may have been a defensive enclosure on this side of the entrance.

Many of the stones are of very great size, as will be seen from the views in figs. 5, 6, and 7. In the outer wall of the guard-chamber, G, near the entrance passage, one stone probably measures 80 cubic feet, and would weigh about 7 tons.



Fig. 7. Inner Wall of Entrance to Fort on Tor Beag.

As far as I know, this fort has not previously been reported. But I was much interested to find in one of Sir Arthur Mitchell's diaries a note of it, and a very rough sketch of its entrance defences. Sir Arthur also had been struck with the large size of some of the stones.

*Cairns at Avielochan.*—These cairns are about three miles north-north-east of Aviemore railway station, about a quarter of a mile east of the main road, and close to the west side of the Carr Bridge line of the Highland Railway. Hereabouts the land is largely under cultivation, and the

cairns lie in the edge of a ploughed field, near the north-east corner of the Avielochan that gives them their name. They can be approached by a farm road that leaves the highway just north of the Lochan, and winds along its north shore to a bridge over the railway. The cairns lie about a hundred yards north of the bridge. The small knoll on which they are placed is mainly natural, but it has been 'added' to by stones

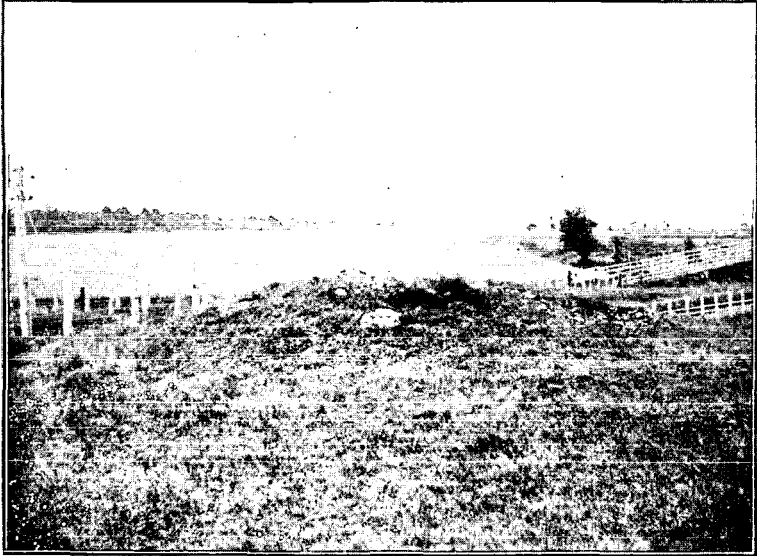


Fig. 8. The East Cairn at Avielochan, unexcavated.

gathered from the neighbouring fields, the soil of which is extremely stony.

I first knew of these cairns in August, 1906, and then found them quite overgrown with grass and heather. Mr Grant, on whose farm they are, told me that this had been their unchanged condition all through his time and his father's. The larger cairn, the west one, appeared to be about 36 feet in diameter, and showed the upper parts of eleven standing-stones in the south and west parts of its circumference. The

smaller cairn, the east one (fig. 8), about 36 feet away, was about 24 feet in diameter, and showed the tops of five stones at about equal distances on the circumference.

Last April, when my wife and I were spending a holiday at Aviemore, we heard that a few days earlier the surfacemen of the Highland Railway had been removing many of the loose stones for ballast, and had exposed much of the inner structure of the larger cairn. We visited the place, saw that this was so, and arranged to devote some days to the study of the cairn, in which there seemed to be some features rather different from those we had previously examined. Together we made measurements and notes, and I did some labourer's work in excavation.

As finally exposed (fig. 9), the cairn showed an outer retaining circle of large, somewhat bouldery stones set close together, an inner circular wall of a central chamber 10 feet in diameter, and a straight passage leading from the exterior into the chamber. The diameter of the outer bounding circle is about 36 feet. The length of the passage is about 13 feet, and its width rather less than 3 feet.

The outer circle consists of about forty-four boulder-stones, varying much in size and shapeliness, but on the whole decreasing in size both ways round from south to north. The inner enclosing wall of the chamber seemed, as at first exposed, to be made of stones laid flat, as in a dry-stone dyke, and the exposed stones of the passage presented much the same appearance (see figs. 10 and 11).

After returning to Edinburgh, I reported what we had seen and done to Sir Arthur Mitchell, Dr Anderson, and Mr Coles. They advised that the inner enclosure and the passage should be entirely cleared out.

At the end of July we returned to Speyside and resumed work. I got the help of John Grant, son of the farmer on whose land the cairns were, and he and I soon completed the excavation of the inner enclosure and passage down to the pan earth.

The excavation was carried down through a most irregular and structureless pile of loose stones of very varied size. They seemed to have been thrown in without earth, and the peaty earth had been added

at the top, and probably had partly formed there. We noticed that

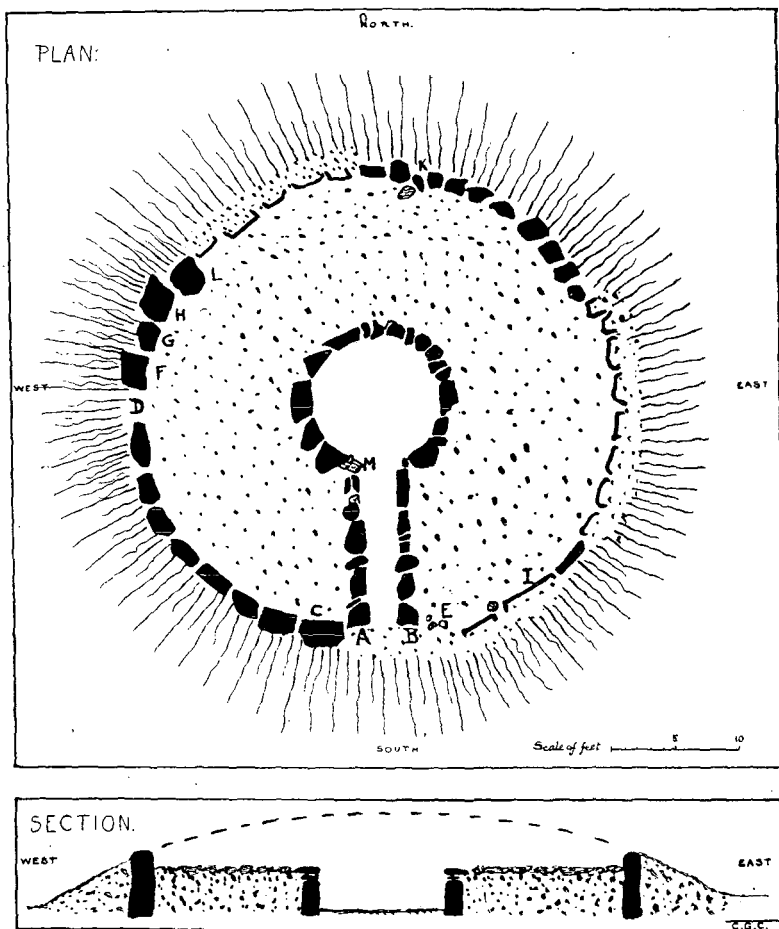


Fig. 9. Ground-plan and Section of Chambered Cairn at Avielochan.

very few of the stones were at all flattish in shape, and I certainly did not feel that there was in them the possible material for anything like a





Fig. 10. View of the Chamber in the West Cairn at Avielochan, from the South, after excavation.



Fig. 11. View of the Chamber and Passage in the West Cairn at Avielochan, from the North, after excavation.

chamber roof, though I am told that the cairn is to be classed as a "chambered cairn" of the Clava type.

The excavation was carried down to the pan earth, and showed that the inner enclosure was bounded by a circle of stones set edgewise in the pan earth, and carrying a coping of flat-set stones on their upper ends. The passage was of similar structure. This inner wall is about three feet in height.

Our find of relics was slight. In the mouth of the passage, during the Spring excavation, I found some few small fragments of charcoal and some almost microscopic scraps of bone.

In the inner circle and in the passage the layer of earth above the pan was on the whole darkish in colour and slightly unctuous, and in several places we found fragments of charcoal. We gathered all that were large enough to be lifted. In the north-west part of the inner enclosure we found, somewhat above the pan, about a dozen stones flattish and laid rather close together, somewhat like a very rough pavement. These we raised carefully, but found nothing special under them. In this same part of the enclosure, but well above these stones, John Grant found two pieces of thin bone each about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches long. These I have submitted to a medical friend, who reports that there is not sufficient evidence in them to determine whether they are human. In the passage, at about half its depth, I found a piece of a jet bracelet, flat on the inside, convex on the outer surface, and forming about a third of a circle of about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter. This has been well-shaped and polished, but is now somewhat stained and roughened, presumably by exposure to damp soil.

The plan and section (fig. 9) are drawn from our own measurements, and they and our notes were made on the spot. The plan and section show the condition of the circle after excavation. The stones drawn in full black are those that are exposed. Where the stones of the outer circle are still partly hidden under the bank, only their inner faces are indicated. The presence of loose stones between the circles is indicated by dots. In the section is indicated by a curved broken line the



approximate section of the whole cairn before it had been at all disturbed. The section of the unexcavated part is of course conjectural.

The photographs I owe to the kindness of two friends, Mr Walter Dempster, schoolmaster of Inverdrue, and Mr Alexander Campbell, shoemaker and postman, Aviemore.