

II.

NOTICE OF THE DISCOVERY OF A STONE-AGE CIST IN A LARGE CAIRN AT STROANFREGGAN, PARISH OF DALRY, KIRKCUDBRIGHTSHIRE. BY JOHN CORRIE, F.S.A. Scot.

On the 11th November last I was informed by Mr Gourlay, Broomfield, Moniaive—a well-known South of Scotland agriculturalist—that some roadmen had discovered what was supposed to be an early grave on his hill-farm of Stroanfreggan, or as it is now called, Stroanpatrick. Four days later I cycled to Stroanfreggan, when Mr William Dickson, Mr Gourlay's shepherd, placed me in possession of the following information.

On Saturday, 29th October, four men were engaged digging in Stroanfreggan Cairn for road metal, when they encountered two large blocks of stone, one placed on the top of the other. The upper stone was removed, but the lower and larger stone was too heavy for removal. It was found possible, however, to dislodge one of the side stones, and when this had been done a burial cist formed of flat stone slabs was exposed, as shown in fig. 1. At the date of my visit this cist had been emptied to a depth of nearly two feet. Possibly the spirit of research had been whetted by a tradition—well known in the district—that the cairn concealed a bullock's hide filled with gold. Be that as it may, all that rewarded the searchers was a fragment or two of whitish clay.

Before I left, Mr Dickson handed me two other fragments of the same material. He likewise furnished me with particulars of a "piece of flint," which he had found when turning over some of the loose soil which had been thrown out of the cist. On the following day I returned to the cairn. All the loose soil found lying in the neighbourhood of the cist was passed through a fine-mesh riddle, but the results were

wholly negative. The remainder of the time at my disposal was devoted to observations of a more general character.

Stroanfreggan Cairn is $9\frac{3}{4}$ miles distant from Moniaive, and about 9 miles distant from Dalry. The road from Dumfries to Ayr by way of Moniaive and Carsphairn skirts it on the north, while on the south it is bounded by a small tributary of the river Ken, called Stroanfreggan Burn. As will be seen from the illustration (fig. 2), the

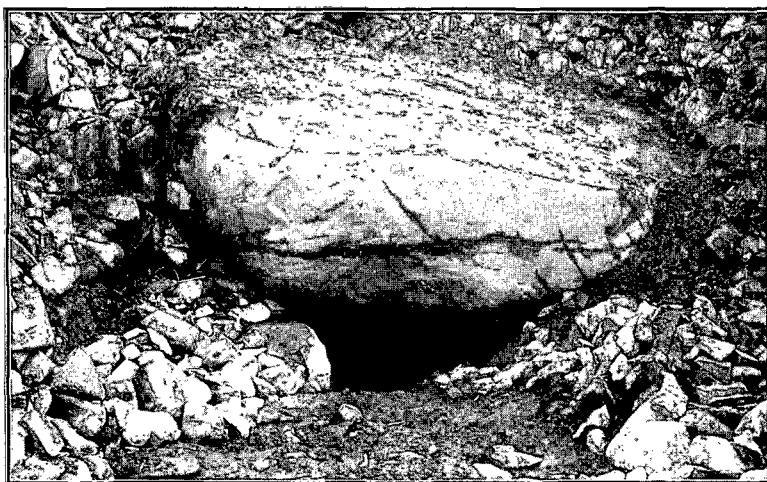


Fig. 1. View of the Cist as originally exposed.

cairn is situated in the heart of a moorland district almost untouched by cultivation. It is a district that may be considered rich in prehistoric remains. Two hill forts and a small cairn occur within a radius of a mile and a half. About two miles further north a horn of *Bos primigenius* was exposed some twenty-five years ago by the action of a hill burn. A knowledge of the existence of these objects is probably confined to the few, but the old gray cairn of Stroanfreggan is known to everyone. The cairn is circular in form, with a diameter of 86 feet, and a height of 5 feet 8 inches. The stones of which it is

composed are chiefly small, although a proportion of larger stones is found near the interior. It is said that the cairn was at one time surrounded by thirteen large stones placed at more or less regular intervals. Only three of these stones remain *in situ*, but several depressions in the ground probably mark positions that some of the other stones occupied.

Nothing further was done at the cairn until 23rd March. On that date Mr Gourlay, Mr M'Turk, Barlae, Mr Barber of Tererran, and one

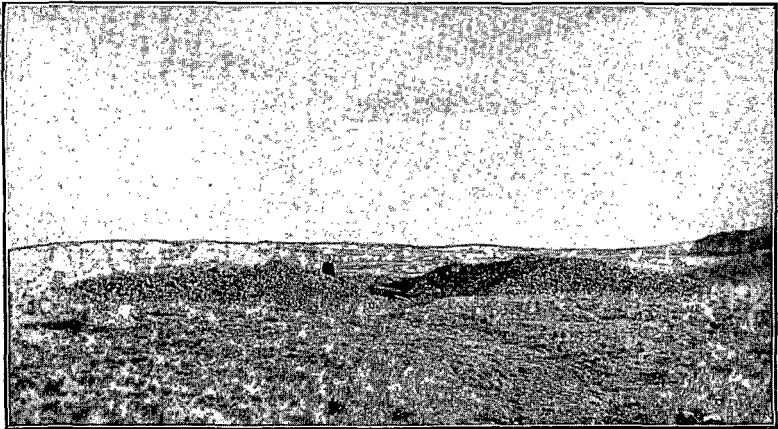


Fig. 2. View of the Cairn at Stroanfreggan.

or two other gentlemen interested in the investigations, attended. In the interval I had been in communication with Dr Anderson, who very kindly gave me the benefit of his special knowledge of such remains, and when we met at the side of the cairn on the date mentioned, the programme was as follows :—

- (1) To remove the covering stone.
- (2) To examine the cist to the bottom.
- (3) To take the dimensions of the cist.
- (4) To replace the covering stone.

This programme was carried out in its entirety. The removal of the covering stone was a task of some difficulty, but it was accomplished without mishap. The measurements of the covering stone are as follows : length, 5 feet ; breadth, 4 feet ; thickness, 1 foot 9 inches



Fig. 3. View of the Interior of the Cist.

to 2 feet. The cist lies almost exactly north and south. Its position is not in the centre of the cairn, but nearly midway between the centre and the line of circumference. It is constructed of four whinstone slabs inserted vertically into the subsoil. These slabs are from 6 to 8 inches in thickness. At the north end two patch stones have been used as shown in the illustration (fig. 3).

The internal measurements of the cist are : length, 3 feet $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches on the north side, and 3 feet 3 inches on the south side. The width is 2 feet, and the depth about 2 feet 3 inches. It will thus be seen that the shape is a nearly regular oblong. All the stones used in the construction of the cist are native to the district, and no artificial marks appear on any of them. Nothing was found in the bottom of the cist except fine sand and gravel.



Fig. 4. Flint Knife from the Cist. ($\frac{2}{3}$)

Some loose soil found lying in the neighbourhood yielded four small chippings of flint and traces of comminuted bones mixed with charcoal. These, together with the piece of flint and the two fragments of clay already mentioned as having been found by Mr Dickson, and a separate fragment of clay picked up by one of the workmen, are the only objects found in connection with the interment. The piece of flint found by Mr Dickson in the loose earth thrown out of the cist turns out to be a well-made knife of black flint (fig. 4), $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length and $1\frac{5}{8}$ inches in greatest breadth, the one end

rounded and trimmed to a sharp edge on both sides. A small fragment of clay reported to be in the possession of one of the workmen



Fig. 5. Finger-prints on the Clay Luting of the Cist.
(Enlarged to twice actual size.)

has not been recovered, but it would probably be found to be identical in character with the specimens exhibited. It is of interest to notice that some of the pieces of clay (fig. 6) bear distinct impressions of the finger. Dr Anderson tells me that clay was sometimes used as a
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luting in pre-historic cists, and the finger-marks to be seen on the pieces recovered were no doubt made when the soft clay was pressed in position.

No one can fail to regret that this fine old cairn should have lasted through those untold ages—only to be plundered for road metal.