

I.

CIRCULAR FORTS IN LORN AND NORTH PERTHSHIRE ; WITH A NOTE ON THE EXCAVATION OF ONE AT BORENICH, LOCH TUMMEL. BY PROFESSOR WILLIAM J. WATSON, LL.D., F.R.S.E., F.S.A.Scot.

In a paper printed in the *Proceedings* of the Society for 1912-1913, I described a number of circular structures built of drystone, undressed, the remains of which exist in the basins of the Lyon, the upper Tay, the Tummel, and the Braan. I now give the results of further observations, made during the summer and autumn of 1913, chiefly in the Tummel basin and in the neighbourhood of Dalmally in north-east Lorn.

At the outset I wish to correct two slight misstatements on p. 56 of that paper. There it is stated that there are remains of a fort on the farm of Deanshaugh, at the mouth of Glen Cochuil in Strath Braan. There are no remains now, but only tradition supported by the term *caisteal* in the place-names. Further, there are only two forts in all in the western part of Glenquaich, both of them a little to the east of the shepherd's house at Garrow, on the right bank of the stream. The remains of these are quite distinct, though the wall is gone. They were of the usual type, but are unique, so far as I have seen hitherto, in being only about fifteen yards apart. One of them is in a cultivated field; the other is to the south-west just outside the field. The site is flat, and about a hundred yards from the stream. Unnoted on O.S. maps.

In these additional notes, I shall begin with the remains in Glen
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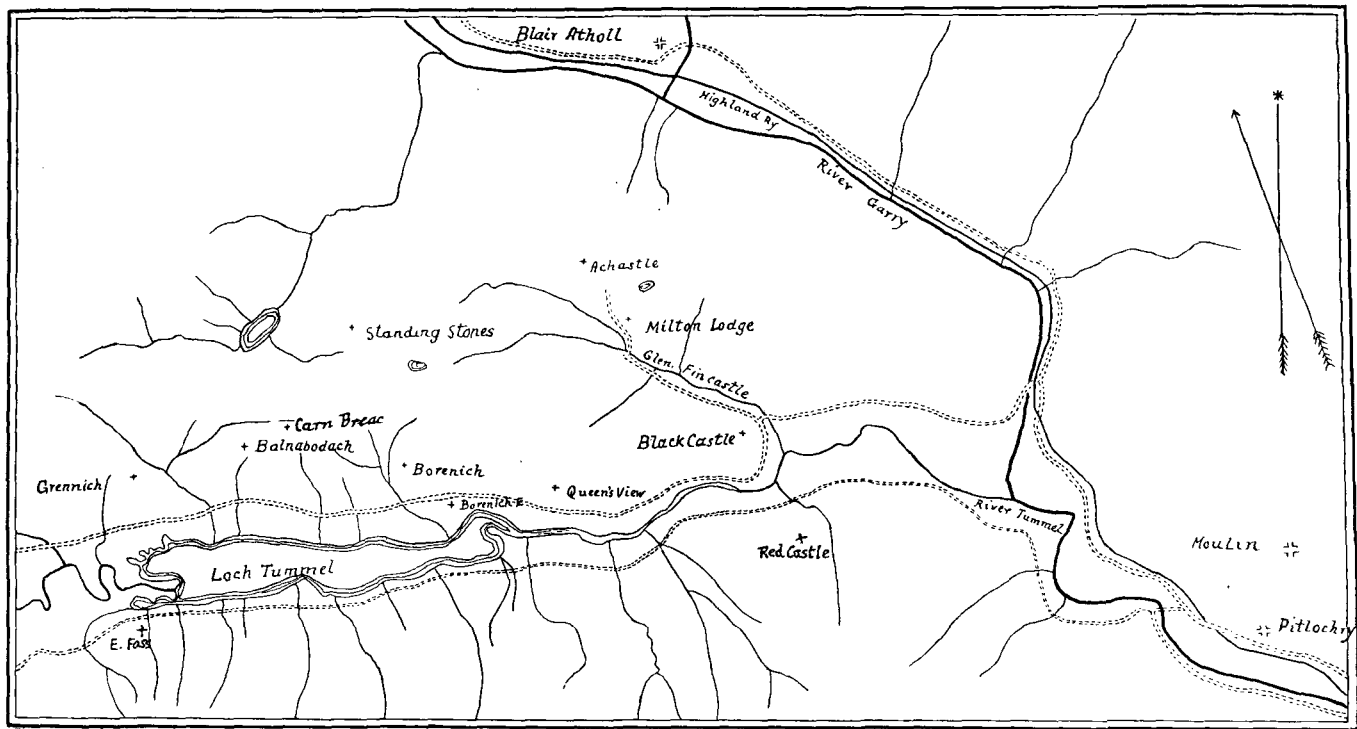


Fig. 1. Map of Tummel Valley, showing positions of the Forts.

Fincastle, which opens off the left bank of the Tummel, five and a half miles above Pitlochry. It is a short glen of three or four miles, but fairly fertile and of good exposure. The name Fincastle is accented on the second part, and it is pronounced in Gaelic *Fonn Chaisteil*, the Castle land. The writer of the *Old Statistical Account* of the parish of Dull (vi. 155) notes in his parish "a very great number of old castles, many of them like watch towers. There is in one glen no less than the ruins of 15 of them. It is called Fincastle or *Fonnchaisteal*, the Land of Castles."¹ It is difficult to believe that in so small a glen fifteen castles were to be

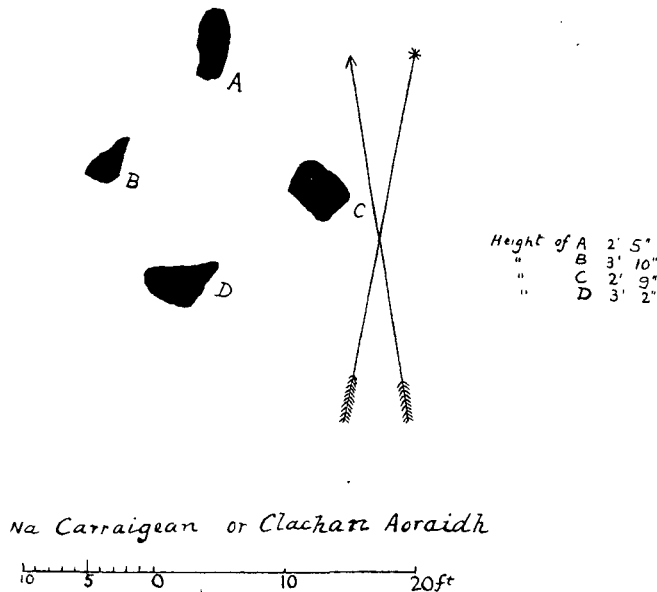


Fig. 2. Group of Standing Stones near Edintian Farm.

found at any time, and it is possible that there is here a confusion between the structures existing in Glen Fincastle alone and those in Glen Fincastle and Loch Tummel side. If the latter were included, the statement was probably correct when written, for I know of the remains of twelve in that district now, and have heard of one or two others now gone.

Beginning at the head of Glen Fincastle, the first object of interest is the four standing stones (fig. 2) situated about $1\frac{3}{4}$ mile west of Edintian farm, at an elevation of about 1300 feet. These stones are shown on the

¹ The writer gives *Fonn Chaisteal*, genitive plural; what I heard was *Fonn Chaisteil*, genitive singular.

six-inch O.S. map, and are named *Na Carraigean*, "the rocks," but the name given to me by the people was *Na Clachan Aoraidh*, "the stones of worship." They stand about 10 feet apart, roughly in the form of a rectangle, and vary in height from 3 feet 10 inches to 2 feet 5 inches. They are somewhat squat in appearance. The plan of these, and the other plans which follow, I owe to the kindness of Mr John Mathieson of H.M. Ordnance Survey, who visited the district with me and surveyed a number of the antiquities.

Caisteal Achadh a' Chaisteil or *Achastle Fort*.—This fort (fig. 3) is

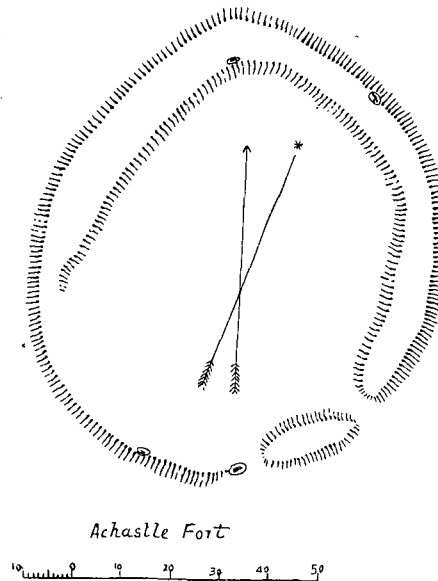


Fig. 3. Achastle Fort.

situated near the head of Glen Fincastle, on the side of a hill, near the top of a field, and about 300 yards N.W. of Achastle steading. It is about 1100 feet above sea-level. There is little to be seen except a grassy wall rising 18 inches to 2 feet above the level of the ground. The shape is oval, its longer diameter being 92 feet and its shorter diameter 80 feet to the outside of the wall. There are four stones to be seen, three on the outer edge of the wall and one on the inner edge. There are two openings at the S.E., but the structure is too dilapidated to say with certainty that either of them formed the original entrance. Unnoted on the O.S. maps.

Milton Fort.—This fort (fig. 4) is situated in a field about 200 yards west of Milton Lodge, and stands about 900 feet above sea-level. It is

about a mile from the one just described. The structure is much dilapidated, many of the larger stones having been used for building the adjacent stone walls. In shape it is nearly circular, with an outside diameter of 70 feet and an inner one of 45 feet. It was a comparatively small fort. Unnoted on O.S. map.

An Caisteal Dubh or *Black Castle* (fig. 5).—Occupies a commanding position on the spur of land projecting between the valley of the Tummel and Glen Fincastle, right behind Fincastle post office. It commands a view in all directions except to the west, where it is overshadowed by

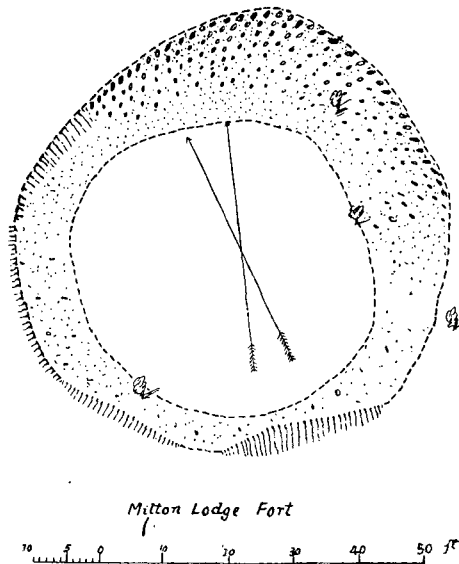
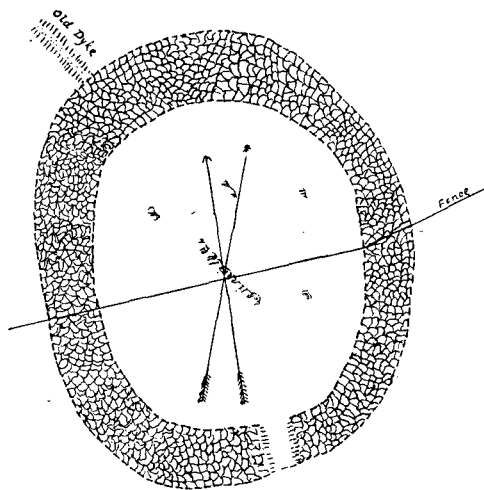


Fig. 4. Milton Fort.

Cnoc Chomhairle, "Council Hill," a significant name unnoted on the maps. The fort is built on a rocky top, and is of an oval shape: larger diameter 69 feet external and 49 feet internal; smaller diameter 57 feet external and 41 feet internal. The walls are 1 foot 6 inches to 2 feet 6 inches high. An old dyke runs up to it on the north-west corner. The opening of the door is visible on the south side. Marked *Castle* on O.S. maps.

Queen's View Fort (fig. 6).—Already described at p. 53 of former paper. It stands 830 feet above sea-level, and measures 78 feet outside and 59 feet inside, which agrees with my own rough measurement. One of the stones measures $4 \times 2 \times 2$ feet, or 16 cubic feet, which should weigh well over a ton. Others are nearly as big. Unnoted on O.S. map.



Black Castle

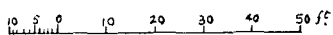
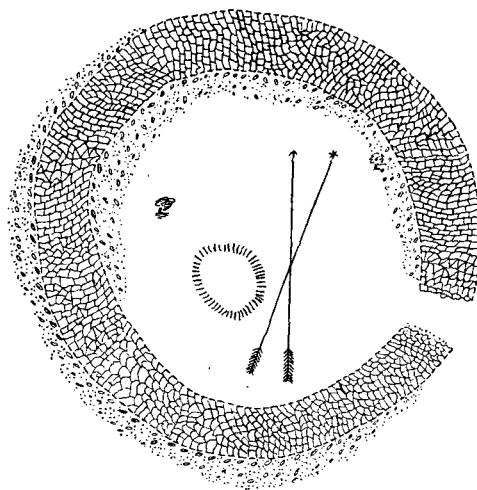


Fig 5. Black Castle Fort.



QUEEN'S VIEW FORT

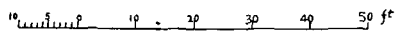


Fig. 6. Queen's View Fort.

Borenich Lower Fort (fig. 7).—Described on p. 52 of former paper. Its greatest outside diameter is 67 feet and its inside diameter 48 feet; its lesser diameters are 63 feet and 44 feet respectively, which again agrees with my rougher measurement. Unnoted on O.S. map.

Borenich Upper Fort (fig. 8).—Described on p. 47 of my former paper. It stands about 950 feet above sea-level. Three old dykes run up to its walls. Outer diameter 69 feet, inner 49 feet. Unnoted on O.S. map.

Hut Circle.—This is about 250 yards S.E. of the Borenich (upper) fort, and is oval-shaped, its greater diameters being 38 feet external and

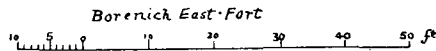
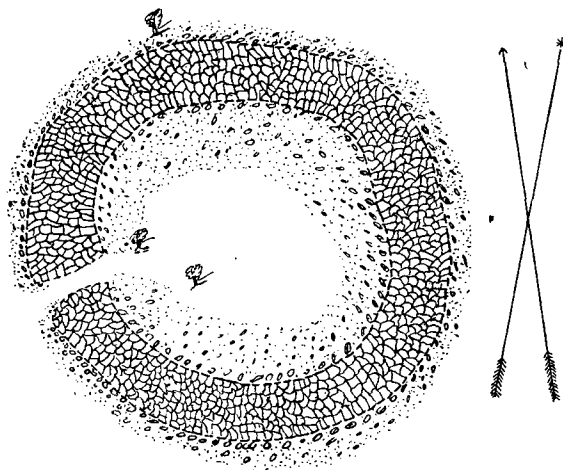


Fig. 7. Borenich Lower or East Fort.

31 feet internal, and its lesser diameters 32 feet and 27 feet respectively. The walls are in some parts about 2 feet high, but in others it is difficult to trace the outline on the ground.

Balnabodach Fort (fig. 9).—Stands on a rocky ridge in a cultivated field about 1100 feet above sea-level, N.W. of Balnabodach farmhouse and N.E. of Ballintuim farmhouse. It is referred to sometimes as *Caisteal Baile nam Bodach* and sometimes as *Caisteal Baile an Tuim*. It commands the whole of the Tummel valley from Loch Rannoeh to the eastern part of Loch Tummel. The remains consist only of a grassy bank, with 17 stones—as shown in the plan—appearing on the outer edge of the wall, and 2 on the inner. It is circular, and measures 84 feet in diameter to the outer edge and 67 feet to the inner edge of

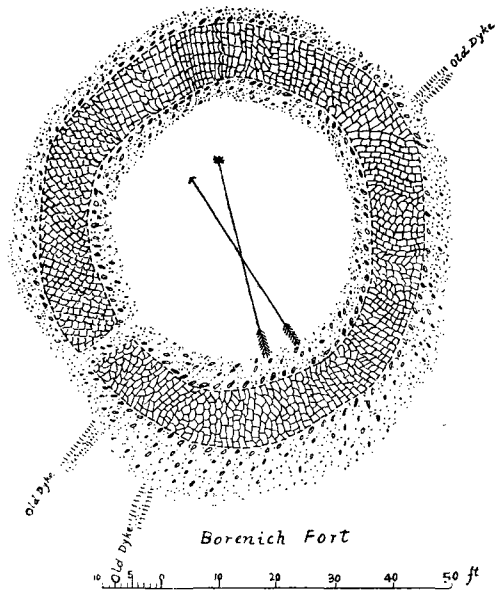


Fig. 8. Borenich Upper Fort.

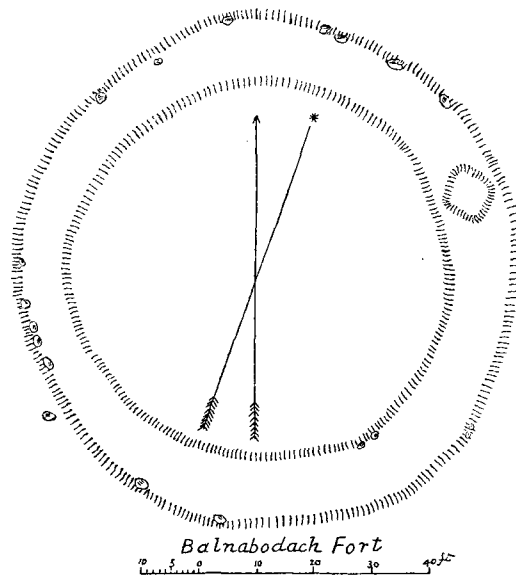
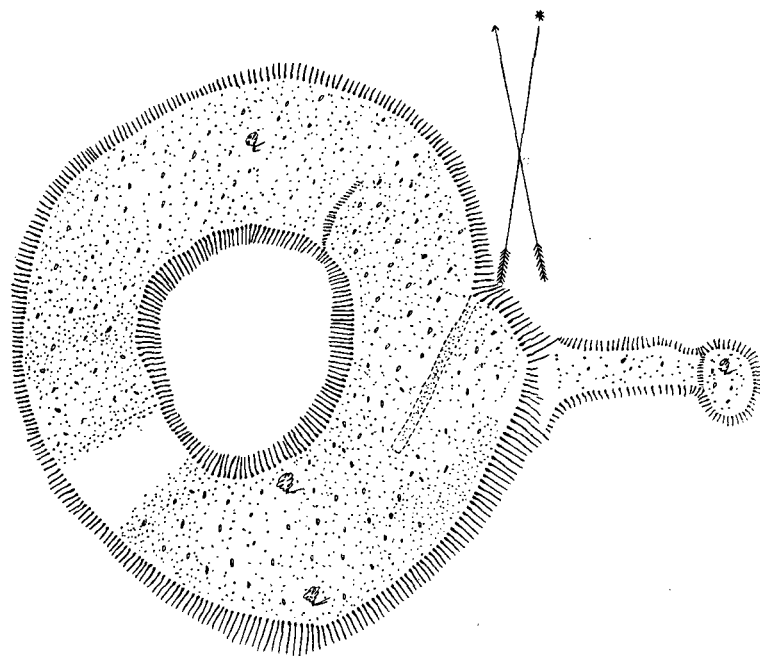


Fig. 9. Balnabodach Fort.

wall. An intelligent man told me that in his father's time a good deal of the wall was standing. Unnoted on O.S. map.

I was told of a "castle" on the high ground N.E. of Balnabodach, and found the place easily. There was, however, no "castle," but a large cairn rather irregular in shape, but on the whole roundish. It is about half a mile N.E. of Balnabodach, on a knoll on the moor called



Greenwich Fort

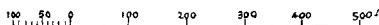


Fig. 10. Greenwich Fort.

Cnoc na Gaoithe, "windy hill." The cairn itself is named *An Carn Breac*, "the spotted cairn." Unnoted on O.S. map.

Greenwich Fort.—This fort (fig. 10) is situated about a mile west of the last, in a cultivated field about 300 yards N.E. of Greenwich farmhouse, and about 1000 feet above sea-level.

The writer of the *Old Statistical Account* of the parish of Blair Atholl and Strowan says: "Here" (*i.e.* at Greenwich) "are the remains of a very extensive Druidical work: a large circular wall, either a castle, or the foundation of a very large cairn, with small cairns innumerable on the barren ground above it, which were probably

graves. About a mile to the northward of these is a large cairn that appears only to have been begun, the circumference being laid of great stones and a parcel of lesser ones thrown within it" (*O.S.A.*, ii. 479). The cairn referred to appears to be *An Carn Breac* above mentioned, though neither the description nor the situation quite fits.

The fort is in a dilapidated condition, as most of the large stones have been removed, and the enclosure itself has been made a dumping-ground for small stones gathered from off the adjacent fields. Its greatest diameter is about 95 feet. What appears to be an old dyke runs in to its eastern side. About 30 feet to the east are the remains of a small structure which may have been connected. Unnoted on the O.S. maps.

The above structures were all surveyed in course of a somewhat arduous day and a half. I may add that Mr Mathieson and myself closely examined also the rocky wooded promontory at the S.E. end of Loch Tummel, called in Gaelic *Dun Teamhalach*, "Tummel Fort," and written in English, incorrectly, Duntanlich. The place is one of considerable natural strength, being surrounded by water on three sides, and connected with the land by a neck about 100 yards wide (or less). We found, however, no traces of fortification, and concluded that the neck may have been defended by a palisade. For the remaining forts I have no plans to submit.

Foss A.—There are some remains of a fort about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile east of Kynachan farmhouse, among some copses on the flat outside the cultivated land, and a little to the N.E. of a farm-labourer's house. The structure is so dilapidated that it shows hardly any plan, and it might be mistaken for a casual collection of stones, were it not for the clear tradition of a fort having stood there. Unnoted on O.S. map.

Foss B.—A little more than a mile to the east of Foss Church, and about 300 yards to the south of the public road, there stood a fort of which considerable remains, speaking comparatively, still exist. It occupies an elevated site overlooking the extreme S.W. end of Loch Tummel, among some trees just above a cultivated field, and a little to the west of a small burn. It was of about 55 feet internal diameter. About 6 feet of the S.W. part of the wall remains, showing a fairly good face of masonry. The wall is said to have been much higher forty or fifty years ago, and the fort is, on the whole, perhaps the least dilapidated of the Loch Tummel group. Unnoted on O.S. map.

Drumnakyle.—The remains of another fort are said to be at Drumnakyle, less than $\frac{1}{2}$ mile in a straight line S.W. of Foss Church. I have not seen this ruin. Yet another is said to have stood near the shepherd's house at Braes of Foss, but I was unable to visit the site. The height of this latter one above sea-level would be about 1200 feet.

Neither is noted on O.S. map. I could find no traces of these structures on the south side of Loch Rannoch, but some may possibly exist between Kinloch Rannoch and Braes of Foss. I cannot speak for the north side of Loch Rannoch.

An Caisteal Dearg.— This fort stands on the right bank of the Tummel, opposite the mouth of Glen Fincastle. It is rather difficult to find, owing to woods, and I did not attempt to see it, but there is no doubt of its existence.

Passing from the Tummel basin, I now proceed to give some notes of similar structures in the neighbourhood of Dalmally, that pleasant fertile district at the eastern end of Loch Awe. The writer of the *New Statistical Account* of Glenurehy and Inishail notes that "on a height above the water of Teatle, on the farm of Duchoille, may be seen the ruins of an old fort or castle. Tradition does not indicate either the object or the period of its erection. It was built of dry stone and resembles those old ruins so frequent in the Western Isles, which are called Danish forts. Another, apparently of the same description, stood on the farm of Barchasttallain, a little to the westward of the inn of Dalmally. . . . The late Dr Donald Smith claimed for this ruin a very remote antiquity. He considered it one of the residences or castles of the Fingalians. The tradition of the country agrees in ascribing the same antiquity to it. On the farm of Castles stood another of these buildings. . . . Not a vestige of it now remains."

The last statement, as I am informed, is not quite correct, for there appear to be still some measurable remains of one, if not two, of the ancient forts which gave the farm its name of Castles.

Barr Chastulain.— The remains of this fort, though it is quite dilapidated, can still be traced with sufficient clearness to show that it belonged to the type under consideration. It stands on a ridge within about five minutes of Dalmally Hotel, as indicated in the *N.S.A.*, with crofters' houses immediately adjacent to it. Here the famous Macnab smiths and armourers had their workshop. The shape of the fort is rather oval than circular, with a short diameter over all of about 57 feet. Little remains of the wall, and the outer face is probably gone. Several people reported that formerly two forts had stood there, but I could see no trace of a second. A little to the south is a higher spur called *Barr nan Eirionnach*, "the Irishmen's Height" (or, as an aged man on the spot translated it, "Paddy's Point"). Lying by the wall there is flag nearly two feet long with a circular cup mark near one end, about 6 inches across and 4 inches deep, very symmetrical and tapering to a round point.

Duchoille Fort. — The fort of Duchoille (or Dychlie, as it is sometimes spelt) is on a knoll overlooking the left bank of the Teatle, below Duchoille farmhouse. It is quite close to the river, and about two miles from Dalmally. If the Teatle is low and fordable, the easiest way to the fort is by Duncan Macintyre's monument. One passes the monument on the left, by the road to Blarchaorruinn. About 250 yards beyond the monument the road bends to the left, and at this spot the fort comes in sight to the right beyond the Teatle, and one gets to it by striking across the moor and fording the river. The fort is rather under the usual size, and the wall is thinner than usual. On the same little ridge are the remains of several small structures of stone.

The Barr Chastulain and Duchoille Forts are noted by Dr Christison in his paper on the forts of Lorn (vol. xxiii. of *Proceedings*).

NOTE ON EXCAVATION OF CIRCULAR FORT NEAR BORENICH, LOCH TUMMEL-SIDE.

This piece of work was made possible by the help of the Council of the Society, who provided the necessary funds, and by the courtesy of the proprietor, G. F. Barbour, Esq., of Bonskeid, who gave permission to excavate and took much interest in the work. I was much indebted to Mr Hugh Mitchell, Pitlochry, for valuable practical assistance.

The fort selected for excavation was that marked above as Borenich Lower. It is situated about half a mile east of Borenich farmhouse, in an open glade in the birch wood, and about fifty yards to the south of the public road. The condition of the fort before excavation is shown by the photographs in my former paper. It contained a large quantity of stones fallen in from the north and east sides. The space comparatively clear of stones was covered with grass, bracken, and some birches. The aim in view was in the first place to determine the nature of the structure, the quality of the masonry, whether it possessed chambers, the type of door or doors. The second object was to recover any articles that might throw light on the state of civilisation of its occupants and perhaps help to assign an approximate date of occupation.

The excavation was begun, on 25th August 1913, and the work lasted for a fortnight, three, and sometimes four, men being employed continuously under the supervision of Mr Brander, contractor, Pitlochry. The weather conditions, except for excessive heat, were most favourable. The whole of the interior was systematically cleared down to the natural gravel and often further, and all the soil moved was carefully riddled. The depth attained varied from a foot to eighteen inches below the cleared surface, when the hard gravel was met.

The nature of the masonry is shown by the illustration from a photograph. It was rude, and not to be compared to that of the brochs, and though the wall was 10 feet thick or so all round, it is difficult to suppose that it could have attained a height of over 10 or 15 feet. It contained no chambers; they could not have been constructed in such a wall. The stones used were seldom large, except in the foundation. I was at first inclined to think that the place had possessed a floor of beaten clay, but latterly I decided against that view. The structure was built on a slope, and the lower half had naturally a larger accumulation of debris, the lower layers of which had been apparently



Fig. 11. Masonry of the Inside Wall of the Fort.

trampled by usage to somewhat of the consistency of a floor over the hard gravel below. The entrance was at the west side, where the wall thickened from about 10 feet to nearly 13 feet. The entrance passage was in two sections, the outer narrow, the inner wider, the division being caused by two door checks, one at each side. The checks consisted of fairly heavy flat stones built in at right angles to the line of the passage. On the inside at either side of the entrance (fig. 12) were two massive upright stones. On the left-hand side of the outer section (looking outward) a heavy slab placed horizontally low down had fallen slightly out of position. Another was found lying in the passage. The outer section of the passage was about 3 feet wide at the level of the ground, but narrowed to 2 feet 7 inches at a height of

about 3 feet. In the inner section, the heavy stones placed at the inner end were 4 feet 9 inches apart at bottom and 4 feet 2 inches apart at top. Each of the door checks projected 8 inches. On the outside, slightly to the south of the entrance passage, and resting obliquely on stones fallen from the wall was a slab 5 feet long, 1 foot $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick, and 2 feet $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, which had apparently served as a lintel. Its weight would be rather over a ton.

In respect of objects recovered, the results were disappointing. The first day produced the half of a quern found in course of clearing the surface, and quite near the top. Small shapeless pieces of iron were



Fig. 12. View of the Doorway of the Fort, looking outward.

found from time to time, one of which showed a minute trace of bronze. A well-formed bone bodkin and another implement of bone were found in the lower strata, also a stone spinning whorl. A number of circular stone discs were found, varying in diameter from $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches to 5 or 6 inches. Three fireplaces were found: one, by the side of the wall right opposite the door, had left distinct traces of smoke on the stones of the wall. Another was near the wall at the north-west side; near it the spinning whorl was found. The third was about the middle of the southern or lower half. It was backed by two stones set upright with their edges touching at an angle of about 45° : one of these was a regular flat oblong about 18 inches by 10 inches; the other was the broken half of a much worn quern. All the fireplaces, of course, contained charcoal, though not in any great quantity. Charcoal appeared also

over the whole of the floor, not in a continuous layer, but thinly; here and there a small pocket of it appeared. The charcoal showed up well against the sand and gravel of the floor. No pottery was found. In the lower (or southern) half especially we came across a number of shapely flat stones, which may have been used for some purpose. They were scarcely numerous enough to have formed a pavement, and they were in great disorder. It is unfortunate that no relics were found to which an approximate date can be assigned. The result, however, shows that the place was a fortified residence, inhabited by a people who used iron, who ground, and therefore grew, corn, and who span, and therefore possessed wool and sheep. The round discs of stone may have been used as coverings of jars, and, if so, the absence of pottery is the more remarkable. This evidence of agricultural and pastoral pursuits is borne out by the position of the structures. Every one of these which I examined is either on or near what is now cultivated land. As to choice of situation, it appears to have been often determined by the extent of view, but seldom or perhaps never by strength of position. Nearness to water seems to have been of no special consequence. In every case that I have seen, however, the site has been chosen with regard to some pass or passes.

The fort excavated was, perhaps, not a good example in respect of its masonry. Its door arrangements may be compared with those described by Dr Christison in his excavation of *Suidhe Cheanathaidh*, Kilchrenan (*Proceedings*, vol. xxv.). Indeed, I feel fairly certain that the fort on *Suidhe Cheanathaidh* is to be classed with those I have been describing, though in its diameter it resembles the broch. This latter fort was stated to myself on good authority to have been 16 feet high in living memory. My informant told Dr Christison that it had been 20 feet to 30 feet high in his father's time. No doubt the quality of the masonry may have varied, but I imagine that a wall 20 feet high of the sort of masonry seen at Borenich would have been rather a source of danger than a means of defence to the occupants.

In respect of distribution, these structures appear to be the typical ones in the district immediately south of the Grampians from the valley of the Tay to the Western Sea, and probably from Tay to Forth. North of the Grampians, at least from Caithness to Inverness-shire inclusive, they seem to be very rare. Mr A. O. Curle, however, in his *Report on the Ancient Monuments of Sutherland*, describes a structure apparently of the same type, near Achinduich, Invershin (p. 21). This "fortified enclosure" had a wall 10 feet thick, except at the entrance, which was 14 feet. The entrance passage is 3 feet wide, and faced west. Internal diameters measure 51 feet from north to south and 48 feet

from east to west. I am not aware of any sure case in Ross or Inverness. Dr Christison's paper on the Forts of Lorn, however, has some instances, in addition to those mentioned above, which appear similar. On p. 58 of vol. xvii. of the *Old Stat. Account* of the parish of Lecropt, written by the Rev. Dr James Robertson, minister of Callander, there is described a chain of forts, called *Kiers*, that run along the north side of the valley of Menteith. They appear to be similar to those described by me, but I have not seen them. *Kier* can hardly be dissociated from Welsh *caer*, a castle, and, on that supposition, would imply strong Welsh influence.

In my former paper I suggested that these structures were connected with the Verturiones or men of Fortrenn, the ancient province between Forth and Tay. Since it was written, additional experience has deepened the impression of a tribal origin. It is specially instructive to consider these midland structures alongside of the totally different class of fortified residence so typical of the counties of Midlothian, Haddington, and Peebles, that is, of the district of the ancient Guododin or Votadini. I venture to think that it might be worth while, given a sufficient induction, to consider first, the geographical distribution of the various types of fort, and, thereafter, how far that typical distribution corresponds with what is known of ancient tribal divisions.