

III.

EXAMINATION OF A CHAMBERED CAIRN BY THE WATER OF DEUGH, STEWARTRY OF KIRKCUDBRIGHT. BY ALEXANDER O. CURLE, C.V.O., F.S.A.Scot.

In the remote upland region that lies westward of Loch Doon and on the border between Ayrshire and the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, the Water of Deugh winds its way southwards, past the house of Waterhead, to join the Carsphairn Water a short distance above the township of that name. On the right bank, some $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles distant from the junction of the streams, and some 400 yards back from the stream, there lies a cairn in a ruinous condition, known locally as the "King's Cairn." In 1911, when making the survey of this region for the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments, I inspected this cairn,¹ and from the evidence supplied by certain upright stones emerging from the debris, concluded that it was of the chambered variety. Some years subsequent to my visit the road up the glen from Lamford was repaired, and unwittingly, the cairn was pillaged as a ready source for road-metal. In the process its true nature was revealed, and two chambers were exposed. The cairn was thereupon scheduled for preservation by the Office of Works. As it was desirable that the chambers should be examined

¹ Such exploration was carried out in 1930, showing that the cairn was unhorned and 130 feet long, as will be described in a subsequent number of the *Proceedings*.

² *Proceedings*, vi. pp. 340-351.

³ *Inventory of Monuments in Galloway*, vol. ii., County of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, No. 91.

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and a plan made, the approval of that Department and the consent of the proprietor were duly obtained, while Mr Gourlay, F.S.A.Scot., offered to provide labour and make all arrangements necessary for the undertaking. Accordingly in June 1928 Mr Gourlay and myself, accompanied by Mr James Flett, Master of Works for the Crichton Royal Institution, Dumfries, made our way thither.

The cairn had been much denuded since I had seen it previously, but it still consisted of a considerable mass of stones, and the chambers,

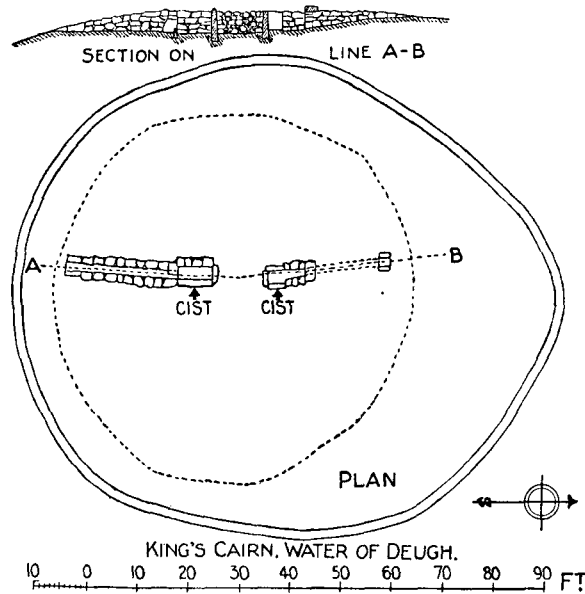


Fig. 1. King's Cairn, Water of Deugh, Stewartry of Kirkcudbright : plan and section.

though uncovered, were fairly perfect, the whole enclosed by a modern dyke as shown on the plan (fig. 1). In form it was circular, with a diameter of about 70 feet. The chambers, of which there were two, were set in alignment with their longest axes north and south, on a line passing directly through the cairn some 10 feet to the west of the centre. A space of 10 feet intervened between the back slabs, over which lay the usual material of which the cairn was formed (fig. 1). The chambers measured respectively 6 feet 6 inches, and 7 feet in length, that to the north being the longer. The southern chamber had a uniform width of 2 feet 6 inches, while the northern was of that width for a distance of 3 feet from the back wall, where an intake reduced it to 2 feet, whence it gradually narrowed to some 18 inches. Each chamber

was approached by a passage built on the sides, and originally covered with flags, a few only of which remained, that from the south measur-



Fig. 2. King's Cairn : view from north before excavation.

able for a distance of 22 feet, that from the north for 17 feet. The chambers were formed partly with upright slabs, and partly built. In



Fig. 3. King's Cairn : walling on west side of south chamber.

that to the south the east wall consisted of one large slab varying in thickness from 15 inches to 6 inches, and weighing probably about

2 tons. The west wall of the same chamber was entirely built, as shown in fig. 3. The north chamber was formed with flags at its inner end as shown on plan (fig. 1), and built towards the entrance (fig. 2). Previous to the recent act of spoliation, the northern chamber still retained its roof which, as I was informed by a man who helped to remove it, consisted of one large slab.

The chambers and passages were filled with debris. The former were entirely cleared out, and the surface soil to a sufficient depth examined with the aid of a riddle. The result was completely negative. No relics of any sort were recovered. There was not even a trace of human bone.

Cairns containing several chambers occur at more than one place in Galloway. In a demolished cairn at Cairnderry in the parish of Minnigaff,¹ three chambers are exposed; and the "Caves of Kilhern,"² in the parish of New Luce in Wigtownshire, consist of the four exposed chambers of another cairn.

I must express my indebtedness to Mr Gourlay for making this examination feasible, and to Mr Flett for his survey and plan.