

IV.

CHAMBERED CAIRNS NEAR KILFINAN, ARGYLL. BY PROFESSOR V. GORDON CHILDE, B.LITT., F.S.A.SCOT.

In describing the segmented cists of Arran, Professor Bryce mentioned the likelihood of finding similar structures along the shores of Loch Fyne.¹ As far as the western shore is concerned his prediction is verified by the discoveries at Balnabraid, south of Campbeltown,² and more recently at Auchoish, near Lochgilphead. The east side of the loch has, however, hitherto been a blank on the distribution map of such monuments. Now chambered cairns of the Arran type are only to be expected in the immediate hinterland of strips of raised beach platform or recent alluvium that provide well-drained, cultivable land adjacent to convenient landing-places. On the east side of Loch Fyne the land generally rises steeply from the shore to barren peaks or peat-covered plateaux of schistose rocks. Only in the vicinity of Kilfinan does the geological map show a considerable stretch of the well-drained soil that the builders of long cairns seem to have selected for settlement. The presence of copper lodes, recently worked, as near Kilmartin,

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. xxxviii. p. 77.

² *Ibid.*, vol. liv. p. 172.

provided an additional pointer to this district. Accordingly, seeing several cairns marked on the Ordnance Map, I visited the district with Mr Kilbride Jones, one of my students, at the end of March 1932, and found that two of the cairns indicated were indubitably of the chambered variety.

The first stands on the high moorland between the Kilfinan and Kilail Burns, less than $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile north of Kilfinan and about 1 mile from the shore. It occupies a slight depression on a small peat-covered plateau 220 yards due east of the road bridge that crosses the Allt Mor just south of Auchnaha Farmhouse. On climbing the ridge we

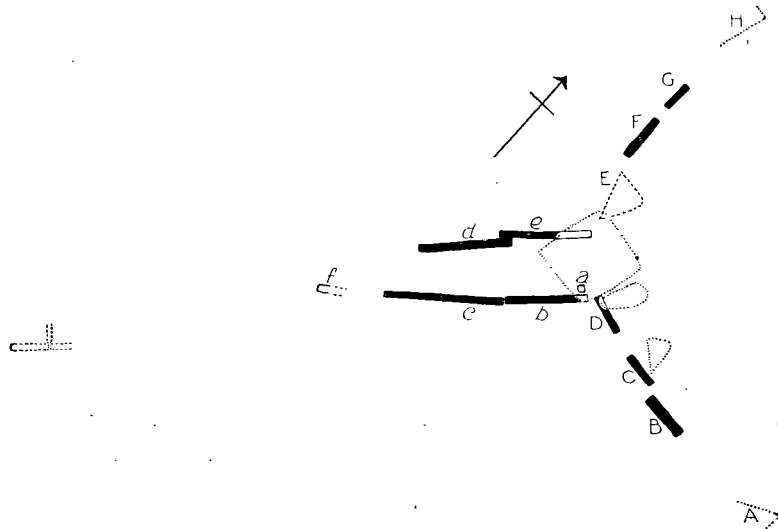


Fig. 1. Rough Plan of Chamber near Auchnaha (about $1\frac{1}{2}$).

were confronted with the imposing ruins of a denuded long cist with a semicircular façade of orthostats in front.

The attached sketch plan indicates the more salient features; the position of the principal uprights has been fixed by triangulation, but otherwise the plan makes no claim to accuracy, still less to completeness.

Of the cist itself two pairs of contiguous slabs projecting more than 4 feet above the turf enclose an incomplete chamber at least 17 feet long and 4 feet wide, orientated roughly north-east south-west. The entry lay to the north-east; the opposite end is still open, and earth-fast stones just visible through the heather suggest that the cist may have extended at least 6 feet further to the south-east. (The uprights *b*, *e*, *c*, and *d* are, respectively, 7 feet 4 inches, 7 feet 6 inches, 9 feet 8 inches,

and 8 feet in length, slab *e* overlapping slab *d* by about 1 foot, a feature characteristic of segmented cists.) Suggestions of a septal slab may be felt under the turf of the unexcavated chamber at the junction of the pairs of lateral slabs. Within the chamber near its opening is an upright pillar, presumably one jamb of the distinctive portal. Upon this pillar and the adjacent ends of the lateral slabs still rests a huge capstone which has, however, slipped forward into the semicircle in front.

The façade constitutes an additional link with Arran cairns, like



Fig. 2. Auchnaha : the Façade.

East Bennan and Carn Ban on Kilmory Water. Five orthostats are still erect, a sixth is slanting forwards, but the two terminal slabs are prostrate; other prone blocks in the area of the façade may likewise have fallen forward from it. The chord of the arc is 41 feet.

The bulk of the cairn must have been robbed in building a dyke which traverses the plateau about 200 yards to the south, and little is now visible through the peat. A little over 100 feet south-west of the portal of the chamber and set transversely to its main axis is a single standing stone. Since a stony ridge can be felt extending under the peat from the existing structure towards the standing stone it is likely that the latter marks the limit of the original cairn. A standing stone is similarly placed behind the segmented cist of Beacharra in Kintyre. Midway between the chamber and the menhir

are two apparently earth-fast slabs in line with a third at right angles to them. They may mark the site of a second cist of some sort.

On account of its continental parallels I regard the frontal semi-circle as an early feature in our chambered cairns. Tombs provided with it should be the first to be erected by the groups of immigrants landing on our shores. The situation of the Auchnaha chamber adjacent to a landing-place at Kilfinan is quite compatible with this view.

A mile and three-quarters across the moors north of the monument just described is Càrn Bàn, represented on the 6-inch Ordnance Map

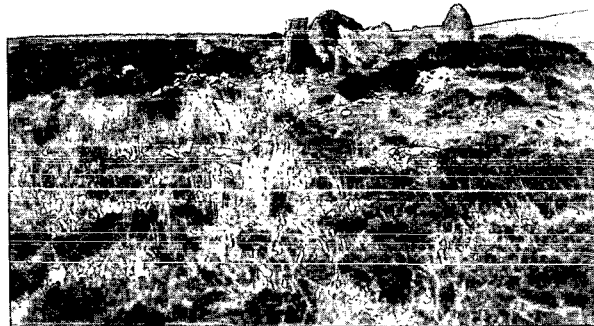


Fig. 3. Auchnaha Chamber from the south.

as an obviously long cairn. It stands on the 600-foot contour, far below the summit of the ridge on the north bank of the deep glen Eas an Fhir, through which Kilail Burn flows, and about 160 yards east of the junction of a tributary flowing in from the north. The cairn has been wickedly denuded, presumable in building a dyke that runs about 100 yards to the west; only at the east end do a heap of large boulders and a couple of earth-fast slabs—apparently part of the peristalith—project above the turf. But stones extending under the turf down-hill westward suggest a former extension of the cairn to a maximum length of 81 feet. Thirty-seven and a half feet west of the presumed eastern peristalith are two earth-fast slabs in line running north and south. They are 4 feet 10 inches and 4 feet 2 inches long, respectively, with a gap of nearly 9 feet between them. Parallel to

the southern slab and 2 feet west of it is another, 3 feet 2 inches long. The space between is closed on the south by a third slab set obliquely to the others. We have here doubtless the remains of a long cist, at least 18 feet long, and presumably once opening to the north. At this point the cairn seems to have been $31\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide.

It may then be assumed that Cárn Bán represents the remnants of a second chambered cairn in this district, though here no further details can be determined.

The Bronze Age on the east side of Loch Fyne is represented by (1) a small round grassy mound about 25 feet in diameter, with a standing stone about 100 yards to the east of it, on the raised beach platform north of Kilfinan Burn and close to the shore; (2) possibly by a "cairn," now removed, that once occupied a very similar position just north of Kilail Burn at Otter Ferry; and (3) by a large cairn 50 feet in diameter nearly five miles farther north. The last named stands on the summit of a bluff that rises steeply from the loch to a height of 639 feet, and is isolated from the main plateau by the channels of small burns.

In the Iron Age the popularity of the Kilfinan district is attested by the presence of no less than five forts between the Kilfinan and Kilail Burns. The only one visited, Barr Iola, occupies the summit of a bare peak of rock rising from the plateau to a height of 531 feet almost midway between the two chambered cairns already described. A double-faced stone wall, 10 feet thick, is here visible joining up masses of outcrop and enclosing an oval space of 73 feet by 55 feet. There are traces of an entrance to the south-west, with a cell-like structure built on to the main wall just within it on the left. Farther round on the same side are suggestions of a cell in the thickness of the wall. On a platform, just below the fortified summit, is a spring, and on the opposite side of the fort the foundations of a rectangular enclosure about 15 feet by 8 feet are visible.

Less than a mile and a half north of Kilail Burn is a sixth fort, marked "cairn" on the Ordnance Map. It stands on the 550-foot contour on the ridge which separates the two arms of Largiemore Burn and subsequently rises gently to a marshy plateau 800 feet above O.D. All that survives is a ring of stones with an over-all diameter of 75 feet enclosing a peaty hillock. On the east contiguous slabs on edge clearly mark the true outer face of the wall. Traces of a coursed inner face are visible 10 feet inwards, while a gap to the west must mark an entrance. On the sloping boggy ground between the enclosure and the burn are three or four heaps of stones that might be small cairns and some possible hut-circles that might, however, be decayed shooting-butts.

The only prehistoric monuments north of those described seem to be a fort that dominates the little alluvial triangle at Strachur and a *standing stone on the alluvial land itself*. The fort occupies a small wooded knoll just south of Inverglenn Farmhouse, about 100 feet above O.D. The summit is defended by a well-built stone wall that has, however, been plundered and disturbed by tree planting. The masonry recalls broch building. Both faces are well preserved on the east, showing that the wall was 13 feet thick; on the west the construction has been badly disturbed, but it looks as if the space enclosed measured 36 feet across. A cell (or stair) is traceable in the thickness of the wall on the north-east and an entrance on the north-west. This gave on to a lower saddle, itself defended by a narrow stone wall in which no trace of building is visible. The whole structure recalls a broch, but cannot without excavation be distinguished from duns like Druim an Duin and Ardifuair on Poltalloch¹ or Suidhe Chennaidh on Loch Awe.² Indeed, all the three forts here noticed belong to a type well represented in Argyll.

Since this paper was read before the Society I have found that the chamber near Auchnaha had been described by Rev. Frank Knight in a paper read before the Glasgow Archæological Society, which was only published in summary form in the *Glasgow Herald*, and accordingly was unknown to the author and the members of the Council of this Society to whom his paper was referred.

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. xxxix. pp. 286 and 183.

² *Ibid.*, vol. xxv. p. 120.