

III.

TWO LONG CAIRNS (ONE HORNED) AND AN OGHAM INSCRIPTION,
NEAR POLTALLOCH, ARGYLL. BY J. HEWAT CRAW, SECRETARY.

HORNED CAIRN AT AUCHOISH, ARGYLL.

During April 1931 a further examination of sites on the Poltalloch estates was carried out by Sir Ian Malcolm of Poltalloch, K.C.M.G., and the Society, under my supervision.

On the 1-inch Ordnance Survey map is marked a cairn about $\frac{1}{8}$ mile

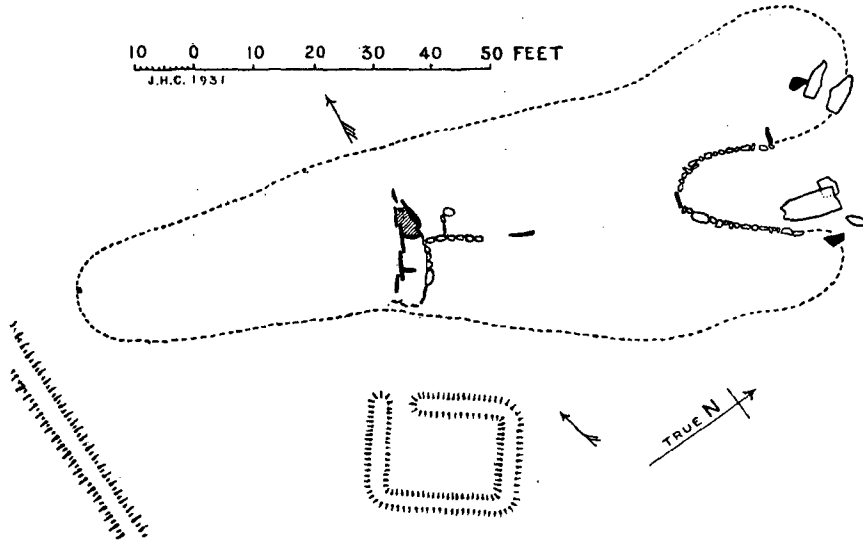


Fig. 1. Plan of Horned Cairn at Auchoish, Argyll.

north-east of Auchoish farmhouse, which stands about $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile to the north of Lochgilphead. I had examined the site the previous year, and found it, though much destroyed, to present the features of a neolithic horned cairn, the only one, so far as I am aware, in this district.

The site is some 450 feet above sea-level, and on gently rising ground facing the west. The cairn (fig. 1) measured 137 feet in length; its

¹ It is, of course, well known that "surnames" in the modern sense are of comparatively recent origin in the Gaelic area.

breadth was 43 feet at the bifurcation of the horns, diminishing to 30 feet at the middle and to 20 feet at the south-west end. The greatest height was about 5 feet at a distance of 15 feet south-west of the bifurcation; it diminished to 2 feet at the south-west end. Much of the material, however, had at some time been removed, the walls of enclosures to the south having doubtless been built from it, while to the east lay a rectangular construction, measuring internally 18 by 12½ feet, the material for which had also been taken from the cairn. The axis pointed approximately north-north-east (27° east of true north).

The work of examining this cairn was carried out with the help of three men from 6th to 10th April, involving about seventeen days' work of one man. A wide trench was made from the south-east side, immediately to the south of the horns, and after reaching the medial line was carried south-west along the whole length of the cairn. The inner edge of the horns was then examined, and excavations were made at intervals along the whole periphery in search of a kerb.

On the medial line, midway between the bifurcation and the south-west end of the cairn, was found a burial chamber of cist-like form, measuring 4 feet 5 inches by 1 foot 10 inches, and 2 feet 9 inches deep,¹ having its axis at right angles to that of the cairn. The bottom was roughly paved and was about 1 foot below ground-level. The sides were each composed of two slabs, the ends of which overlapped after the manner employed in segmented cairns. Outside the cist, to the north-west, was a single slab set in alignment with the south-west side of the cist. The north-west end was formed of two thin slabs placed one behind the other; the inner was of an L shape, one of the upper corners being cut off. The slabs forming the north-east side were much lower than those of the opposite side, and must have had stones resting on them to increase their height. No cover was traceable, and riddling failed to reveal any relics, not even charcoal or bones being found. Between the south-east end of the cist and the edge of the cairn was a passage 3 to 4 feet in width, formed of slabs and large boulders set with a slight curve. At the outer end were three small slabs set as a kerb and projecting a few inches from the ground. Midway between this kerb and the cist was an upright L-shaped slab projecting from the south-west side half-way across the passage. This slab was similar in form to that at the north-west end of the cist, both having been apparently formed by pounding and not by chiselling. From the north-west end of the passage a setting of six large boulders ran north-east parallel to the axis of the cairn for a distance of 10 feet. Three feet

¹ Measurements: north-east side, 4 feet 10 inches; south-west side, 4 feet 3 inches; south-east end, 2 feet 11 inches; north-west end, 1 foot 5 inches.

from the south-west end of this setting a slab 2 feet by 2 feet projected at right angles northward. At its north-west end four stones were built up one above another, so as to present an upright face to the north-east. A large boulder was then placed so as to form a face parallel to the setting of boulders already mentioned, and $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet from them. This construction had the appearance of having been the foundation of a chamber placed along the axis of the cairn, and destroyed at some previous time. Four and a half feet north-east of the setting of six boulders, and in alignment with it, was a slab measuring $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet in length, set on edge and projecting 1 foot 8 inches from the ground. This slab was also in alignment with the south-east edge of a large slab set on end at the bifurcation of the horns of the cairn. It may have formed part of a passage to the chamber, but no other evidence of such could be found.

The slab at the point of bifurcation was set at right angles to the axis; it projected 3 feet 2 inches from the ground, in which it was inserted to a depth of 3 feet. Eighteen feet north of this slab stood another slab, measuring 2 feet 9 inches by 2 feet 3 inches by 8 inches; it was set at right angles to the inner edge of the north-west horn. What had probably been a corresponding stone set at the inner edge of the south-east horn now lay on the ground; it measured 9 feet 8 inches by 4 feet by 1 foot 3 inches, and seemed to have stood at right angles to the edge of the horn. Some 10 feet to the north-east of these slabs the end of each horn had been probably marked by three upright stones; of these one was upright and two had fallen on each horn. Their measurements were as follows: North-west horn (standing), 5 feet 1 inch by 3 feet by 1 foot 8 inches; (fallen), 6 feet 7 inches by 2 feet 2 inches by 10 inches, and 6 feet 9 inches by 2 feet 8 inches by 1 foot 6 inches. South-east horn (standing), 3 feet 3 inches by 3 feet 9 inches by 2 feet; (fallen), 3 feet 5 inches by 1 foot 9 inches by 1 foot, and 2 feet 6 inches by 2 feet 3 inches by 1 foot. The height of the standing stones was measured from the ground; that of the fallen stones is the total length. The fallen stones may have been moved somewhat from their original positions.

During the excavation I picked up a flint knife from a molehill on formerly cultivated ground within the enclosure to the south of the cairn.

LONG CAIRN, AUCHNANGOUL.

Though situated in a different district of Argyll, another neolithic cairn may be here described, as it does not seem to have been recorded and is not shown on the Ordnance Survey map. I had the opportunity of visiting the site in April 1932.

The cairn lies about 380 feet above sea-level some 300 yards north-east of Auchnangoul, a hamlet about $2\frac{3}{4}$ miles south-west of Inveraray. The cairn is clearly visible from the main road, from which it is 550 yards distant. It lies on cultivated ground which slopes with moderate steepness to the south, and is about 50 yards distant from the uncultivated moorland above. The length is about 135 feet and the breadth 45 feet; the height is 4 feet 9 inches. There are no horns, and the axis points approximately north by east (30° east of magnetic north). Many of the stones seem to have been removed, especially from the north end, and field-gathered stones have been dumped on the southern part, which is partially covered with stunted trees.

The cairn has been explored at some time, the stones having been removed to leave a trench along the northern part of its axis, revealing a passage and two burial chambers. Some 6 feet from the north end are two portal stones 3 feet 9 inches in height and 1 foot 1 inch apart. To the south of these is a passage 2 feet 5 inches wide formed by two large slabs measuring 8 feet 4 inches and 7 feet 2 inches in length. This leads to a chamber formed by four slabs and measuring 7 feet 1 inch by 3 feet 9 inches by 2 feet 10 inches. The cover is an immense slab 10 feet 6 inches by 6 feet 5 inches, and about 1 foot 3 inches thick. It must weigh about 3 tons, and rests on three of the slabs beneath, there being between it and the north end-slab a space by which it is possible to enter the chamber. Twenty-four feet south of this chamber and placed to the east of the axis of the cairn is a smaller cist or chamber measuring 4 feet 10 inches by about 4 feet. Its axis is at right angles to that of the cairn, and the cover and north side-slab have disappeared.

AN OGHAM INSCRIPTION.

During the excavation of cists at the gravel-pit of Brouch an Drummin, near Poltalloch, in 1928,¹ when a jet necklace and other relics were found, four long graves, evidently of Early Christian date, at the opposite side of the pit were also examined. When revisiting the spot in 1931 my attention was attracted to an inscription in ogham characters cut on the angle of a small fragment of slab lying on the ground close to the position of these graves. The fragment (fig. 2) measures 10 inches by $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches by $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches, and the characters retain unweathered their sharply cut lines. There can be little doubt that it has been broken at some recent time from a slab of one of the graves.

Of some twenty ogham inscriptions that are recorded from Scotland, practically all have come from the east side of the country,

¹ See *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxiii. p. 154.

their range extending from Fife to Shetland. Only one seems to have been recorded from the west, on the Island of Gigha, though ogham characters were also found on the bone handle of a knife from North Uist.

The Society is indebted to Sir Ian Malcolm for placing the relic in the Poltalloch Collection on loan in the National Museum of Antiquities, and also for the help given by him during the excavations.

The following is the report on the inscription by Professor Macalister,

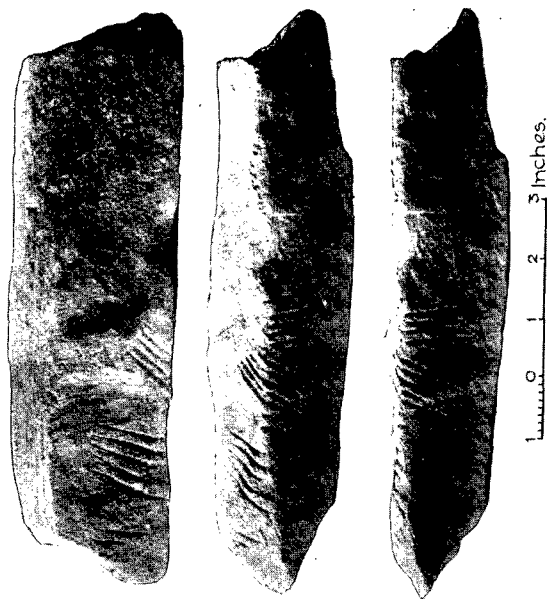


Fig. 2. Ogham Inscription from Poltalloch.

to whom the slab was submitted, and to whom my thanks are due for his careful examination.

The certain letters of the inscription are CRON. The O is represented by two vowel notches in a space which would hold three, and there is ample room for a third notch. Of this, however, there is no trace, and I feel sure that the letter cannot be the U, which three notches would represent.

After the N there are the remains of another letter on the same side of the stem-line. Three scores survive in part, and it is conceivable that some slight irregularities in the fractured surface further

on are the relics of two other scores. However that may be—and it is not to be stressed in any way—the probability that the imperfect letter was another N is overwhelming. CRON(a)V . . . and CRON(a)S . . . do not offer anything promising.

Between the N's there was most probably the single notch of an A, but the slight chip on the angle here has been just sufficient to carry it off.

Before the C there is a mark like a vowel notch. But comparing it with the genuine notches of the O, I am inclined to think it is a mere flaw on the angle.

Before this mark there is a fracture: a flake has scaled off the H surface of the inscription, carrying with it a portion of the arris of the stone, which in consequence here makes a wide shallow U-shaped curve. The left-hand end of the matrix of this flake is visibly an artificial score; and on the floor of the matrix traces of four other scores are to be detected. It is to be noticed that these are about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch shorter than the scores of the C following. They would collectively make Q; and I suspect that the engraver of the inscription inadvertently cut this letter, and then, realising that he had written one score too many, knocked off the flake with a slight tap on the stone and began again. A similar correction is to be seen on at least one other stone, now in the National Museum, Dublin.

The whole inscription as it remains on the fragment is thus CRONAN. That is not an uncommon name in Irish (diminutive of *cron*, brown): and in the misspelt form CRONUN it appears on a stone from Ballyknock, Co. Cork. It is a late example; in the usual ogham convention the name would appear as *Cronagni*. We can say no more unless and until the rest of the inscription should come to light.

It is very satisfactory to get one more ogham relic of the Dalriadic settlers in Argyll. Let us hope for further discoveries of the same sort.