

## II.

### THE PREHISTORIC ANTIQUITIES OF BENDERLOCH AND APPIN.

BY MARGARET E. CRICHTON MITCHELL, F.S.A.Scot.

The following notes on prehistoric antiquities in the vicinity of Appin, Argyll, were recorded during the month of June 1932.

#### STANDING STONES.

From Connell Ferry on Loch Etive to Ballachulish at the northern end of Loch Linnhe is a distance of approximately 30 miles. Six standing stones occur at irregular intervals along this line (fig. 1). Two are situated on low-lying marshy ground at the west side of the main road near Benderloch station. The most southerly of the two (fig. 2, No. 2) is 6 feet 6 inches in height and its main axis runs N.N.W.-S.S.E. (magnetic). Around the base of the stone for a distance of 19 feet by 29 feet there is coarse luxuriant vegetation which contrasts vividly with the drab surrounding meadow. There is a local tradition that this stone once formed part of a circle.<sup>1</sup> The ground in the immediate vicinity is uneven, and many water-worn pebbles are lying on the surface. The stone at New Selma just north of Benderloch village is 5 feet in height with its main axis in a line N.N.E.-S.S.W. (fig. 2, No. 1). From this stone the Benderloch example must originally have been visible though the view is now interrupted by a modern railway embankment. The third stone

<sup>1</sup> Dr Angus Smith, *Loch Etive and the Sons of Uisnach*, London, 1879, p. 175.

PREHISTORIC ANTIQUITIES OF BENDERLOCH AND APPIN. 321

is a thin erect slab 7 feet in height (fig. 3) situated on an elevated ridge near Dalintober farm and overlooking the southern shore of Loch Creran. The main axis of the stone lies E.N.E.-W.S.W. The fourth

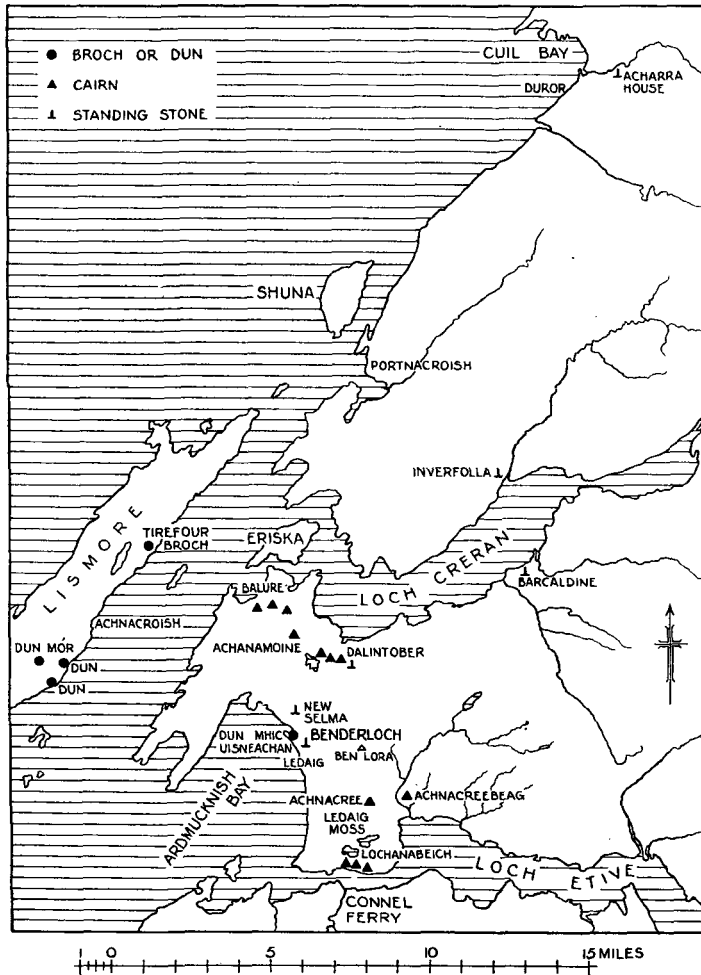


Fig. 1. Map of Benderloch and part of Appin.

stone (fig. 4) lies in a meadow 50 yards from Barcaldine schoolhouse. Actually there are two slabs here, 5 feet 3 inches and 5 feet 6 inches in height respectively, with their broad faces set parallel to one another in a line N. 10° W.-S. 10° E. (magnetic). For a diameter of 8 feet around the base of the stones there is a thick growth of rushes, while the





Fig. 2. Standing Stones : No. 1 at New Selma ; No. 2 near Benderloch Station ;  
No. 3 at Acharra House.



Fig. 3. Standing Stone near  
Dalintober.



Fig. 4. Standing Stone,  
Barcaldine Schoolhouse.



stones themselves are embedded in a packing of small boulders. The fifth stone is on the northern shore of Loch Creran, at Inverfolla, almost exactly opposite to Barcaldine. It is a thin slab which has now fallen, though when the ground was surveyed in 1860 it was recorded as erect. In length it measures 12 feet 3 inches. The most northerly example (fig. 2, No. 3) stands in a meadow to the west of Acharra House, near Duror. It is a magnificent specimen measuring approximately 14 feet in height, with its main axis in a line N.E.-S.W. There is a possibility that these stones bear some relation to each other, that they were in fact the signposts of an ancient trackway.<sup>1</sup>

#### CAIRNS.

On the north-eastern margin of Ledaig Moss stands the well-known chambered cairn of Achnacree. This was excavated by the late Dr Angus Smith.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of my visit was to examine the evidence for his statement of an association of a ditch and bank enclosing the cairn. Such a combination would constitute a type of monument whose number and distribution are strictly limited. An examination of the surface features suggested that the ditch and bank were part of a natural formation. The builders of the cairn had selected a depression in the ground on which to erect it. Whether Ledaig Moss was then the peat swamp it is now, or whether it was covered by a dense primeval forest, must depend upon pollen statistics which are not as yet available. Since the site of an Iron Age crannog only half a mile to the west is recognisable as a patch of brilliant green grass amid the surrounding black peat, the forest was probably already decayed in Neolithic times. There was then all the more reason for selecting a green hollow outwith the limits of the tree-covered area. Within the hollow the cairn builders first erected a platform of closely laid boulders which was to act as a foundation for the superincumbent mass. But the platform does not extend to the edge of the depression, and the gap thus created between the edge of the platform and the wall of the hollow, more especially towards the south, gives the appearance of an artificial ditch and bank. Actually there is no such feature.

At Achnacreebeag, on the south-eastern slopes of Ben Lora, there is a ruined circular cairn which has once covered two dolmenic chambers.<sup>3</sup> The latter lie 35 feet apart in a line approximately N.W.-S.E. Both chambers are oval in form and have no vestiges of an entrance. The western example has five rounded boulders, which serve as uprights

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.* (1928-29), vol. lxiii, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.* (1870-72), vol. ix, p. 409.

<sup>3</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.* (1926-27), vol. lxi, p. 226.

to support a single capstone. The other chamber is larger, being formed of ten uprights with two capstones.<sup>1</sup> It is of interest that the uprights in this example have been embedded in a packing of small rounded stones, which may originally have been carried up to fill the interstices of the wall. Both these chambers approximate closely to a certain type of dolmen, and so far they are the only examples of this class found in Scotland. On the Continent analogous structures occur in Portugal, and in view of the fact that the prototype of the Arran segmented chambered tomb is to be found at Puig Rodo, in Catalonia,<sup>2</sup> this Portuguese parallel becomes significant.

Along the northern shore of Loch Etive there are three circular cairns



Fig. 5. Ruined Megalithic Cist near Dalintober.

all very much dilapidated. The most westerly has been entirely demolished in order to build the steading of Lochanabeich farmhouse. The basal platform, however, can still be traced, and its diameter of 81 feet by 78 feet proves that the original structure must have been of considerable size. The second, which lies on the south side of the road 50 yards to the east, has a maximum diameter of 76 feet, but this probably represents a spread of the cairn material. A third, 50 feet farther east, is less ruined, and its margin is marked by a distinct bank of earth and stones.

Near Dalintober farmhouse, on the south side of the road westward to Balure and Eriska, there is a group of three cairns situated in a low-lying meadow. They are 50 yards apart. The centre one is reduced almost to ground level, but a peripheral ring of rounded boulders can still be traced. The most westerly example measures 36 feet in diameter, and has been erected on a specially prepared plat-

<sup>1</sup> Dr Smith mentions ten uprights. Mr Thomson mentions only seven *in situ* and a possible eighth.

<sup>2</sup> According to Professor V. Gordon Childe.

form of earth, the longer axis of which is 77 feet. Beyond the southern margin of the cairn by 12 feet, yet still within the boundary of the platform, is a ruined megalithic cist (fig. 5). Two slabs lie parallel to one another 3 feet apart. They are 3 feet 3 inches and 2 feet 6 inches in height, and lie in a line E.-W. The other cairn of this group is much reduced in height, but still retains an almost complete marginal setting of boulders.

In a line E.N.E. from the farmhouse of Achanamoine, and situated on an elevated ridge to the south of the road, is a large cairn 69 feet in diameter and completely overgrown with whin and scrub. Westwards from this point there stretches a great expanse of bleak peat moss devoid of habitation, while in the distance rises the rugged outline of Eilean Dubh and the long horizon of Lismore. The Ordnance map marks the sites of three cairns on this area. The middle one of the group has been so far reduced in height as to expose the cover-stone and lintel of a megalithic chamber. This cairn, which has a diameter of 35 feet by 38 feet, must have been built on the original land surface beneath the peat, since the cover-stone is now on a level with the surrounding moss. The most westerly cairn is outwith the limits of the peat bog, having been erected on the verge of the 25-foot beach platform. It is 78 feet in maximum diameter, and approximately 12 feet in height. Numbers of white quartz pebbles were noted on the surface of the cairn material. The easternmost cairn is 38 feet in diameter and now reduced to ground level. There is no peat encroachment as the monument has been erected on a natural elevation in the moss.

#### DUNS.

On the eastern shore of Ardmucknish Bay, close by Benderloch station, stands a rocky promontory which has been fortified in prehistoric times. This is the vitrified Dun Mhic Uisneachan. Excavations were made within the occupied area by the late Dr Angus Smith, but he found little of significance. To-day there are few surface indications, but it is interesting that the vitrification has been most intense along the western side.

At the southern end of the eastern shore of Lismore the Ordnance map marks the sites of three "broughs." Examination proved these to be circular duns. The most northerly of the group, known as Séan Dun, is situated on the cliffs a short distance south of Achnacroish Pier. The defences consist of a single wall 4 feet to 6 feet in thickness, and the internal diameter of the fortified area is 53 feet by 58 feet. The entrance has been approached up an artificial ramp, which at its lower end

debouches on to a circular green plateau occupied by what appears to have been a huge communal hut-circle 44 feet in diameter. Numerous partition walls within this area are probably secondary. Immediately below the dun is a suitable landing-place, a feature none too common on this precipitous and rocky section of the coast.

Half a mile south along the cliffs from Séan Dun is another circular enclosure only 27 feet in diameter and with no apparent entrance. The smallness of this structure, combined with the magnificent view which it commands both south to Kerrera and north to Appin, strengthens the supposition that it was never more than an outpost.

A short distance inland from Séan Dun stands Dun Mór. Its situation has strong natural defences, being on a rocky hillock precipitous on all sides except to the west. In form the fort is oval, measuring 64 feet by 115 feet and lying N.-S. The single wall is from 6 feet to 8 feet thick, and where the entrance gateway cuts it there are two flanking guard-chambers, circular structures, which impinge upon the inner face of the wall.

Half a mile north of Achnacroish, Tirefour Castle is marked on the Ordnance map. There was unfortunately no opportunity for visiting this site, which is that of a typical broch.

Miss Campbell of Ledaig, whose father was a personal friend of Dr Angus Smith and assisted him in the excavation of several prehistoric sites in the neighbourhood, has in her keeping an almost perfect Early Bronze Age food-vessel.<sup>1</sup> It was found with no associations at the base of Dun Bhaile an Rìgh, a cliff which overhangs the main road immediately south of Benderloch village. The urn, which belongs to type B,<sup>2</sup> is 4 inches high and ornamented on the upper portion by rows of oblique strokes executed by a finger-nail. The rim is steeply bevelled and the base is flat. Miss Campbell has also in her possession various other relics, mostly from the crannog on Ledaig Moss, and these include a beautiful specimen of a polished stone axe.

I should like to place on record my appreciation of the kindly hospitality shown to me by Miss Campbell and her sister.

<sup>1</sup> Figured by Dr Angus Smith.

<sup>2</sup> According to a new nomenclature of Scottish Early Bronze Age pottery worked out by the author and shortly to be published. Abercromby Type 3 (concave neck).