

9. SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE BADNABAY CORRIDOR-TOMB, NEAR
LAXFORD BRIDGE, SUTHERLAND.

In West Sutherland, near the road between Scourie and Rhiconich and about one mile west of Laxford Bridge, is an interesting group of fifteen standing-stones. There can be no question that these stones are the remains of a neolithic corridor-tomb or passage-grave and that they were originally covered by earth and rubble to form a mound or cairn (Pl. XLIII, 1).

This tomb, which is not indicated on the 1-inch Ordnance Survey map, was visited in June 1909 by the Ancient Monuments Commission, and a brief description is to be found in their report for Sutherland, item No. 172, under the title *Chambered Cairn (remains of), Badnabay*. The Commission regarded the chamber as bipartite with an inner and an outer compartment, the approach being by a corridor 9 ft. in length. It would seem more probable, however, that the grave consisted of a single chamber, polygonal in shape, and that the outer compartment was part of the corridor, making the latter 13 ft. in length. Most of the slabs of this corridor, of which at least one appears to be missing, were placed at right angles to its long axis. There is no trace of either lintels or capstones, the existence of which is also precluded by the varying heights of the monoliths. It is probable therefore that the interspaces were filled in with dry-walling, surmounted by a

corbelled roof, similar to many of the chambered cairns of Caithness as described by Anderson in his *Scotland in Pagan Times*, II. The whole would then be covered over by loose stones and peaty earth to form a mound. Traces of the perimeter of this mound still persist, and its general outline, as accurately as possible, is given on the accompanying plan (fig. 12).

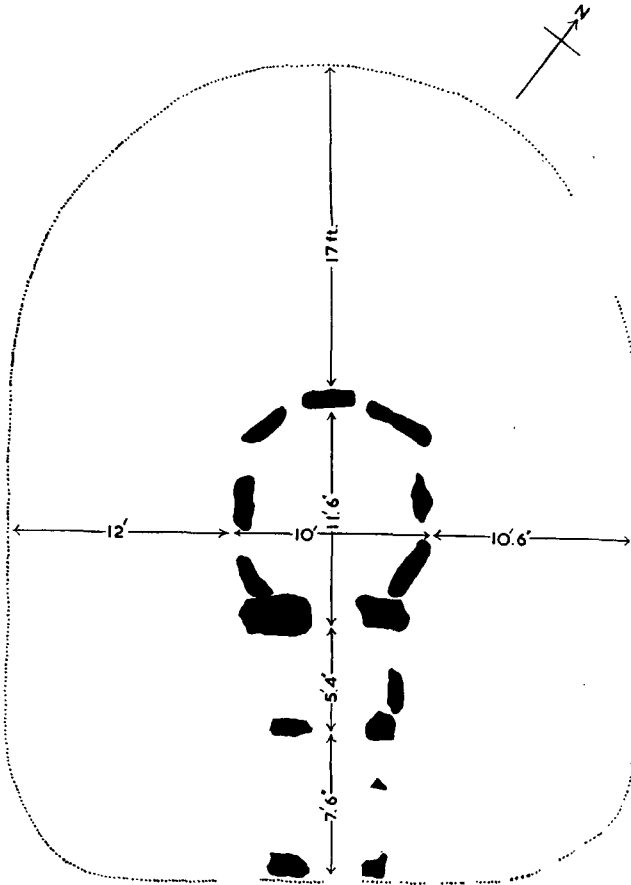


Fig. 12. Plan of the Badnabay corridor-tomb, showing probable perimeter of enclosing mound. The stones vary considerably in height, ranging from only 2 ins. to 3 ft. 6 ins. above the ground.

(Scale: 1 inch = 5 feet.)

The direction of the long axis of the tomb is approximately NW.-SE., an orientation shared by many Cotswold barrows, such as Belas Knap, Norn's Tump, and others. But, as the axis direction of tombs and barrows varies considerably, it is doubtful if their orientation has any special significance. It is, however, interesting to note that, whether by intention or by chance, the long axis of the Badnabay tomb points directly to the summit of Ben Stack, a mountain four miles away, 2364 ft. in height, and consisting almost entirely of gneiss.

The stones consist of local granitic gneiss—one of the hardest rocks known—and here perhaps the most outstanding feature of this passage-grave emerges. The five separate faces of the headstone are each practically rectangular and, in the writer's opinion, these configurations have been produced artificially. Anyone familiar with the characteristics of this gneiss will agree that, although *in situ* the natural fractures are sometimes rectilinear, it is virtually impossible to find a rock with five separate planes at right angles to each other. It would therefore appear that the working and dressing of large stones, so strikingly manifest at Stonehenge, was an art of which the builders of the Badnabay tomb had at least some knowledge. This fact may serve as an aid to the more precise dating of this monument, which undoubtedly owes its existence to the maritime travellers who have left similar relics of their occupation in Skye, the Outer Hebrides, and especially in Caithness and the Orkneys.

Considering the extreme probability that this tomb in the past has been rifled and its dry-walling removed, doubtless as convenient building material or of use in road construction, it is in a remarkable state of preservation, nearly all of the uprights remaining in the upstanding position.

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