

II.

CAIRNFIELDS IN SCOTLAND.

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I. INTRODUCTORY.

This paper is intended to ventilate a subject to which little attention has so far been paid in Scotland—that of the assemblages of small cairns or mounds which occur in many upland regions. Their existence is, of course, well known; they are mentioned, though cursorily, in the literature,¹ and many of them are marked, usually with the appellation “Tumuli,” on the O.S. maps. But detailed information about them is remarkably scanty. Many have been pulled to pieces, and little has come to light in the way of relics or sepulchral construction—though this negative evidence cannot be regarded as conclusive, as cists are occasionally found and no chemical tests have been made for vanished organic matter. Again, as to numbers and distribution we are far from being well informed—partly because “small cairns” are often mentioned only vaguely, as appendages to other monuments such as hut-circles or large cairns, and partly because the records, having been made over a long period of years by observers with differing interests and points of view, are themselves of uneven quality, and tend to leave the student uncertain as to what is actually meant. For this reason no attempt has been made in the present paper to prepare any kind of list. We can, however, be confident that these groups of cairns are more numerous than is generally supposed. For example, subject to the factors of uncertainty just mentioned, it seems probable that more than ninety sites are covered by the published Inventories of the Ancient Monuments Commission—excluding those of Orkney and Shetland, where conditions are not certainly comparable with those of the mainland, and also that of Sutherland,² where the numbers are so large as to suggest the influence of some special local circumstances—while the Commission’s unpublished records account for some fifty more.

The cairnfields differ widely in size, situation and character. A small group may contain perhaps a dozen or more cairns, while a large one may hold scores, spread over many acres of ground. The cairns themselves,

¹ See especially Childe, *The Prehistory of Scotland*, 216.

² The figure for Sutherland is about a hundred and seventy, while that for Caithness is only six. The late Dr A. O. Curle, who surveyed both counties for the Commission, drew attention (*Inventory of Caithness*, p. xxxviii) to the comparative rarity of small cairns in the latter.

which often appear as peaty or turf-covered mounds, with stones protruding through their surface, may measure from 5 ft. to 20 ft. in diameter, some 10 ft. to 12 ft. being probably the commonest dimension; in height they rarely exceed 2 ft. 6 ins., while many are so low that they may easily escape observation where the herbage is rank. The main question to consider is whether the cairnfields are cemeteries or simply collections of stone-heaps formed in the process of clearing land for cultivation, and its answer is the harder to find as not all the evidence points in the same direction. For that matter, we can hardly be confident that all the recorded cairnfields necessarily belong to one and the same class, and great caution is consequently needed in the drawing of wholesale conclusions. Ideally, no doubt, this problem calls for an exhaustive ground-survey followed by selective excavation with modern technique; but the present study is much less ambitious in scope, its object being merely to see what preliminary lessons can be learned by means of superficial observation on a limited number of sites. And here I wish to thank the Ancient Monuments Commissioners for permission to make use of unpublished matter from their files, as well as for a grant of special leave to devote to field-work. I am also indebted to Professor Piggott, Mr C. S. T. Calder, Mr R. W. Feachem and Mr A. Maclaren for help and information.

II. DESCRIPTION OF SITES.

The following twelve sites were visited during the summer of 1957:

A. CHAPEL HILL, Edinkillie Parish, Morayshire. Six-inch O.S. Sheet XXI NW. National Grid NJ[38]/0347. Elevation 860 ft. to 970 ft., on a low shoulder rising from a shallow valley with its bottom at about 700 ft.

This site is about half a mile NE. of Site B (*q.v.*) on another part of the same main feature. The ground is everywhere covered with a layer of peat, supporting ling and deer's-hair grass and with sphagnum moss appearing in the wettest places. As a result of these conditions it is impossible to judge whether the underlying soil could or could not have been cultivated before the peat was formed, or whether it is particularly stony. The group now appears to contain some thirty or forty cairns spread over an area of perhaps as much as 10 acres, and unless there are a good many more hidden by the peat and heather—as might happen if they were small and low—this is not a dense concentration. The cairns show occasional stones protruding through their covering of peat, and they seem to be unusually large—two of them measuring 24 ft. and 21 ft. respectively in diameter while the rest vary down to a minimum of about 12 ft. The 24-ft. example happens to have been thoroughly robbed, and it could thus be seen to possess a solidly built foundation-ring; it is also surrounded by a slightly raised circular ridge, evidently a low peristalith of small stones overgrown with peat,

and may consequently be regarded as sepulchral (*cf.* p. 19). There were no signs of hut-foundations or enclosure-walls, and in fact no evidence of function of any kind apart from the peristalith just mentioned. On the other hand, additional features may well have been swamped by the peat or hidden by the heather.

B. CHAPEL HILL, Edinkillie Parish, Morayshire. Six-inch O.S. Sheet xx NE. ("Cairns, site of"). National Grid NJ[38]/0346. Elevation, c. 670 ft. to 850 ft., on a moderately steep hillside rising from the wide, shallow valley through which the Dorback Burn runs, about a mile and a half away, at c. 550 ft.

The cairns begin immediately above Dallasbroughty farm and extend to the top of the hill. As part of the area, at and near the top, was under crop when visited, and other parts had evidently been so in the past, there can be no doubt that the whole hillside is potentially cultivable. Cairns are present in great numbers, especially on the lower slopes, where they do not seem to have been interfered with; on some of the higher ground, which has gone back to heather after improvement, they seem to have been ploughed down, and now appear as slightly raised, grassy spots. The lower ground is so heavily overgrown with whins that the cairns on it could not be properly examined; at least one certain hut-circle was noted there, with an internal diameter of 15 ft., but under such conditions it is difficult to tell a hut-circle from a robbed cairn. The cairns hereabouts seem quite numerous enough to have prevented the use of a plough drawn by animals, and if they are in fact the result of land-clearance it is allowable to guess that they belong to a phase of culture in which hoes or mattocks were the only implements in use.

C. DAVA STATION, Edinkillie and Cromdale Parishes, Morayshire. Six-inch O.S. Map xxiv SE. ("Cairns," "Stone Cist," unnoted). National Grid NJ[38]/013389 (approximate centre). About 500 yds. ENE. of Dava Station, at an elevation of 1050 ft. to 1200 ft. on a moderate slope overlooking mosses, at c. 900 ft., at the head of the Dorback Burn.

Conditions were exceptionally good for observation, as the site had fairly lately been swept by a fire which had been hot enough to burn off not only the heather but some of the peat as well. The soil to-day consists of peat, from 3 ins. to 15 ins. thick, lying on hard yellow gravel or disintegrating rock. In the gravel there are many smallish boulders, while enormous numbers of larger ones, and of angular blocks, lie in or on top of the peat. The soil's original character has no doubt been greatly altered in the course of the centuries, but one may guess that the hillside was originally covered by a glacial deposit from which a poor sandy loam might have been derived; that this was subjected to erosion, which carried down the lighter materials (sand and clay) and left the boulders and rock-fragments resting for the

most part on the gravel; and that finally peat formed and covered everything up. On this showing a cultivable soil might well have been present during some part of the second stage of the process, and this could have attracted settlers to a site which was at least more favourable than the swamps below or than another poorly-drained area, now a peat-moss, which lies immediately above.

However this may be, and notwithstanding the presence of two cists in one of the cairns,¹ there is ample evidence to show that the cairnfield as a whole represents an agricultural settlement. This evidence may be recognised in the following features: (i) An oval plot, c. 66 ft. by 40 ft., defined by stony rickles and quite clear of stones internally. Small cairns, evidently of material collected from its surface, have been formed against the rickles. (ii) Two similar plots, less well marked out. Their clear interiors contrast with the numerous cairns that occur just outside them. (iii) A slightly scooped area about 25 ft. in diameter, defined by rickles of stone but having an open end. A cairn stands just outside it. (iv) A bare, cleared area, perhaps up to one-fifth of an acre in extent, adjoining the road to Aittendow at about NJ/014388. It is defined on its upper side by a well preserved rickle, and above this the hillside remains in its natural state with a plentiful crop of loose stones. The contrast between the condition of the ground inside and outside the rickle is very marked. (v) A bare plot 30 ft. in diameter bounded by a rickle and three stone-piles. (vi) A similar plot measuring about 50 ft. by 60 ft. (vii) Another plot, less well defined and not measured. (viii) A length of rickle bordering the base of a slope from which the stones have not been cleared, and dividing it from an area which, though now a peat-moss, nevertheless shows the tops of several cairns protruding through its surface. The rickle is heavily built, and presumably contains some of the cleared stones. (ix) A flattened plot 24 ft. in diameter, partly marked out by traces of a stony rickle and adjoined by a ring of stones apparently representing the outline of a hut 10 ft. in diameter. (x) Traces of an oblong enclosure, marked out by set stones and measuring 15 ft. by 10 ft. (xi) A few cases of cairns being founded on what are either rock-outcrops or large earthfast blocks lying flush with the surface. The object has apparently been to economise ground fit for cultivation.

The foregoing observations make it sufficiently certain that this cairnfield is the result of land-clearance. If some of the cairns were used, as one of them certainly was used, for purposes of burial, this fact may be accepted as illustrating a contemporary practice but it does not prove, in the face of all the other evidence, that the whole cairnfield was a cemetery.

¹ These cists were observed by the late Professor Childe, in 1943, in a cairn which lies exactly on the line of the parish boundary-fence, and which has been opened up to make room for the wires. It is at a lower elevation than nearly all the rest, being about 100 yds. NE. of a small reservoir, on the Cromdale side, which forms an unmistakable landmark. Professor Childe's notes are preserved in the files of the R.C.A.M.

It may also be inferred that the agriculture practised in this settlement must have been based on the mattock or the hoe, as was suggested in the case of Site B, as the marked-out plots amount to no more than gardens while the arrangement of the cairns on the unenclosed ground is at once so close and so irregular as to preclude, to all appearances, the use of ploughs drawn by animals.

D. GREENISH MUIR, Duthill and Rothiemurchus Parish, Inverness-shire. Six-inch O.S. Sheet LVIII (unnoted). National Grid NH[28]/910155. Elevation 720 ft. to 750 ft., virtually on the floor of the Spey valley, at a point about a quarter of a mile NE. of Loch nan Carraigan.

This is an area of low, rolling hummocks and ridges in moraine deposit, the soil being mainly sand, with a thin covering of peat and containing a great many boulders. The vegetation has been burned off by recent fires, but ling and broom are returning and, notwithstanding the infertile appearance of the ground, the growth of grass and meadow plants in a similar situation near by shows that it can be improved. The cairns are small, none being noted as over 12 ft. in diameter, and they are probably more numerous than is indicated by Cash's record;¹ but as they are sometimes difficult to distinguish from exposures of glacial boulders, nothing definite can be said about their numbers or distribution. However, the most certain examples were found in hollows, which moisture and accumulated soil are likely to have made more suitable for cultivation than the sandy hummocks; and two of these hollows are also traversed by lines of set boulders, apparently the remains of divisions between fields or plots. These facts tell in favour of the cairns having resulted from the clearance of the ground for cultivation. No hut-foundations were seen, but a rectangular setting of stones measuring 6 ft. by 4 ft. may represent the remains of a hearth connected with some building which has now vanished. A similar setting of boulders (7 ft. by 5 ft.) may be seen in association with two hut-circles and at least two small heaps of stone in a hollow among the sand-dunes on the West Links, North Berwick, about a mile NE. of the sepulchral cairnfield recorded at the Black Rocks.²

E. BURN O' VAT, Glenmuick, Tullich and Glengairn Parishes. Six-inch O.S. Sheet LXXXI SW. ("Tumuli," "Circular Foundations"). National Grid NO[37]/423997. Elevation 800 ft. to 900 ft. on a SE.-facing slope which falls to the Burn o' Vat and overlooks, at about a mile's distance, the low, rolling ground of the Muir of Dinnet (c. 550 ft. to 600 ft. elevation) with its adjoining mosses and lochs.

The soil is a sandy or gravelly loam, resting on rock and covered by a layer of peat. There are few outcrops of rock but many superficial boulders, some of them large. The most recently burned areas support mainly purple

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, XLIV (1909-10), 190 f.

² *P.S.A.S.*, XLII (1907-8), 332 ff.

and bog heathers, with rushes, bearberry and seedlings of rowan and pine. Elsewhere there is ling, and at the lower levels bracken. Though this area may itself be just within the theoretically cultivable limit, above it there is nothing but peat, with boulders and bare rock. The ground immediately below, between the cairns and the burn, is too rough and broken for cultivation.

Notwithstanding the "tumuli" marked on the O.S. Map, this site may perhaps not be fully analogous with the others included in this study. For example, only nine cairns were identified with certainty although Ogston recorded fifteen¹—the O.S. Map, it is true, marks thirty-six, but this may possibly be due to confusion between the cairns and some small mounds of the typical form produced by the roots of trees overturned by the wind.² Again, although the area over which the various remains are spread amounts to perhaps 10 acres, six of the nine cairns are grouped fairly closely together, near its lower edge, in a manner which gives a very low overall density. The site, however, does possess some features which are highly relevant to the enquiry. In addition to the cairns, the remains include at least one hut-circle and traces of some enclosure-boundaries. Evidence of land-clearance is also to be seen, principally along the upper margin, where there is a length of broad, stony rickle evidently formed of material from the ground immediately below it. This ground is pretty free of stones, and makes a striking contrast with the very stony hill-top above. Elsewhere there are occasional settings of large boulders in line, but none of them continues for a long enough distance to indicate the outline of a plot. The six grouped cairns occur in association with two lengths of walling and a hut-circle. The walling is composed partly of large boulders piled together and partly of stony rickle of slighter construction. The boulder wall is 55 ft. long by 6 ft. thick, and finishes at one end on a large block purposefully placed, while from its other end a rickle 15 ft. long diverges at less than a right angle. This rickle forms one side of a kind of passageway, 8 ft. wide at its narrowest, the other side consisting of another rickle at least 45 ft. long and curved in its alignment, one end of which merges into the foundations of a hut-circle about 20 ft. in diameter over all (fig. 1). The cairns lie from 15 yds. to 45 yds. NW. of the opposite end of this second rickle, three of them being virtually in alignment with one another and also with three large stones and a small stone-heap, which link the end of the rickle to the nearest cairn. These cairns vary in diameter from 9 ft. to 13 ft., have solid foundation-rings³ of boulders, and are made up of smaller boulders no doubt collected from the surface. One contains a cist, now badly ruined; this was probably at least 4 ft. 6 ins. long, and its cover, a massive triangular slab, measures

¹ Ogston, *Antiquities of Cromar*, Spalding Club, 113 ff.

² Such mounds tend to be oval or longish on plan, and to be flanked on one side by a slight hollow.

³ This ring is fully exposed in one member of the group (fig. 1, C), which has recently had its centre torn out and has been cleared internally down to the natural soil.

7 ft. by 3 ft. and is over 12 ins. thick. These cairns suggest a small cemetery-group near the settlers' huts and farmstead; but even so the difference from the other sites may well be one of degree rather than of kind, as superficial stones were evidently being disposed of here as elsewhere and cairns built primarily as graves may also have possessed some incidental utility as dumps.

F. CAMPSTONE HILL, Fetteresso Parish, Kincardineshire. Six-inch O.S. Sheet xv NE. ("Stone Circle," "Traverse" (3), "Circles"). National Grid NO[37]/833906. Extending from immediately above West Raedykes

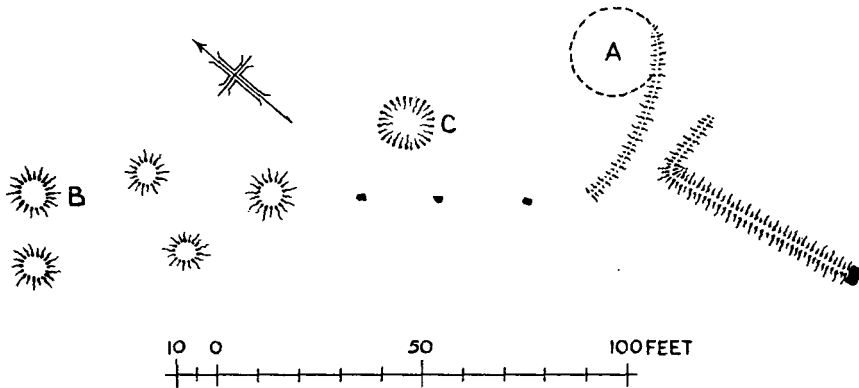


Fig. 1. Sketch showing approximate relative positions of rickle-walling, hut-circle (A), cairns and set stones. Cairn B contains a cist and Cairn C has been robbed and hollowed out.

farm, at c. 600 ft., up a moderate slope to the summit of a shoulder (643 ft.) and on the broad ridge-top beyond. The shoulder overlooks lower ground (c. 400 ft.) along the Cowton Burn, and at a greater distance the main valley of the Cowie Water.

The soil on the summit is a sandy loam generally covered by thin peat. On this the vegetation is ling, with rush, woodrush and blaeberry, but there is also a good deal of better ground bearing various grasses and such plants as tormentil and heath bedstraw. There are many clumps of whin, and at the lower levels thick bracken. Much, if not the whole, of the ground thus seems to be potentially cultivable, and no outcrops of rock were seen, but the arable fields of the farm, immediately below, were reported to be very stony. The cairns vary in diameter from about 9 ft. to 15 ft., one standing 3 ft. in height but the majority being very much lower. They are built of boulders and large stones, presumably collected from the surface, and have good basal kerbs. Their numbers were impossible to estimate, as many must have been hidden under the bracken while robbed cairns, which were rather numerous, were difficult to distinguish from small huts—of which some undoubted examples were also present. The cairns were

not, however, nearly so densely concentrated as at Sites C or G, and a plough could no doubt have been used over the whole area.

No opinion regarding the character of the cairns in this group can be formed without consideration of the other remains on the hill. These comprise (i) two large but heavily robbed burial-cairns,¹ which show affinities with the Clava ring-cairns; (ii) the "traverses" of the O.S. Map—actually the foundations of three ruinous stone dykes, of rickle construction but faced with upright kerb-stones, which cross the shoulder transversely in the manner of the ditch-and-bank "cross-dykes" of the Cheviots;² (iii) faint traces of at least two much slighter rickles, on the slope descending from the south-easternmost "traverse" to West Raedykes; (iv) two ruinous circular structures, respectively 20 ft. and 28 ft. in diameter, lying between the two large burial-cairns; in 1957 these had all the appearance of hut-circles, but in 1922 they were described as cairns;³ (v) an oblong hut with an annexe, lying NW. of the north-western burial-cairn. The presence of the large burial-cairns naturally suggests that the cairnfield as a whole is a cemetery, on the assumption that two splendid original monuments invited later burials on the same ground. On this showing the ring-foundations of the robbed circles might be held to have enclosed a space in which a body was deposited; though this is by no means certain as a solid foundation might well have been desired, both here and in other places where the same feature occurs, simply for the sake of stability. On the other hand, one small cairn and what may be either a robbed cairn or a small hut are built up against the south-easternmost "traverse" in a manner which shows that they are later than it in date; while if the large circles are really huts, and not cairns, they are likely to belong to some altogether later culture, unrelated to that of the burial-monuments into whose immediate vicinity they intrude. It is thus possible that the site may have been in use over a long period, and if so the following succession of phases might account for the complex of remains: (i) the construction of the original large burial-cairns; (ii) possibly some later burials, in smaller and simpler cairns, not now distinguishable from clearance-heaps or, when robbed, from small huts; (iii) a first systematic clearance of a largish area for cultivation, resulting in the construction of the "traverses" to hold the collected stones; (iv) closely connected with the last, the building of whatever structures can be identified with certainty as huts, and also of the boundaries of fields or plots, as represented by the slighter rickles; (v) the formation of additional small cairns from time to time, as fresh stones worked up to the surface.

An interesting comparison with the Campstone Hill "traverses" is provided by an earthen bank 107 ft. long and three stone walls or rickles, respectively 140 ft., 95 ft. and 60 ft. long, which appear on a plan of a

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, LVII (1922-3), 20 ff.

² *R.C.A.M.*, *Inventory of Roxburghshire*, 52 and references there given.

³ *P.S.A.S.*, LVII (1922-3), 20 ff.

rather sparsely stocked cairnfield at Balmenach, Morven, prepared by the late Mr Alexander Keiller and now preserved in the Department of Prehistoric Archæology, University of Edinburgh.

G. KINNAIRD BURN, Moulin Parish, Perthshire. Six-inch O.S. Sheet xxxi SW. (unnoted). National Grid NN[27]/962605 (approx). On a low ridge broken up into knolls and hollows, between the Kinnaird Burn and Allt na Cachailleith at an elevation of 1050 ft. to 1100 ft., and with hanging valleys to E. and W. which jointly form a kind of shelf overlooking the Tummel valley (c. 270 ft.) some two miles and a half distant.

The soil is sandy loam on rock, with a thin peat covering, there are many boulders and some outcrops. The hollows are wet and moss-filled. Before the formation of the peat the ground was doubtless cultivable, as arable fields to-day extend from below to within quite a short distance, with woods in sheltered positions. The vegetation has evidently been much modified by burning, and recent fires, by removing the thick heather from part of the area, have made detailed observation easy. The remains consist of cairns, huts and enclosures, and are similar to others which were noted in 1942 on the opposite side of the Kinnaird Burn.¹ Most of the huts are in the lower part of the area, and the cairns are least numerous in their immediate vicinity, but both seem to be placed in spots where the natural drainage is best. Of twenty cairns picked at random, ten were built with kerbing, five had no visible kerbs, and five were doubtful. Some, both kerbed and unkerbed, were built on outcrops of rock, presumably to keep them off ground which was fit for cultivation; and the remains of a length of rickle similarly had stones heaped against it in at least four places. The cairn-bearing area ends abruptly on the N. at the much-wasted remains of another rickle-dyke; and although there are many boulders within this area, among the cairns, outside it they are much more plentiful.

It is safe to identify this group of remains as an early agricultural settlement. The cairns are evidently heaps of land-gathered stones, and no question of a cemetery arises. It must be remarked, however, that many of the cairns are so close together that agriculture must have been on quite a primitive scale; while the situation of the settlement—at the upper limit of cultivation in a large and fertile valley—suggests that it may date from a time when the lower slopes were occupied by dense forest.

H. MUIR OF GORMACK, Kinloch Parish, Perthshire. Six-inch O.S. Sheet LII SW. ("Cairns, site of"; "Circles, site of"). National Grid NO[37]/1247. Elevation 600 ft. to 750 ft. in the foothills of Clunie Forest, on the right bank of the Lornty Burn S. and SE. of the Buzzart Dykes.²

¹ Record in R.C.A.M. files.

² In 1942 the late Professor Childe noted other similar cairns N. and W. of the Buzzart Dykes, those on Cochrage Muir being at a considerably higher elevation than the Muir of Gormack. (Record in R.C.A.M. files.)

The low ground of the Lunan Burn, with Lochs Cluny and Marlee, lies some 2 miles distant to the S., at an elevation of about 150 ft.

Though part of this ground bears ling, and even deer's-hair grass, much of it could rank as rough pasture, and a great deal could no doubt be made cultivable. Arable fields, in fact, adjoin the cairnfield on the E. at only a slightly lower elevation. No outcrops of rock were observed. The remains consist not only of cairns—which appear for the most part as mounds, being largely coated with turf—but also of hut-foundations and of rickles or lines of set stones which evidently defined plots. The largest cairn measured was 25 ft. by 17 ft., and the smallest 10 ft. in diameter. Many of the cairns have been robbed or opened out, and some of these examples are difficult to distinguish from small huts. The robbed cairns can be seen to have been built of rounded boulders of various sizes, on a foundation-ring of large material carefully set in the earth. They vary in density, but are probably nowhere numerous enough to have prevented the use of a plough drawn by animals; the small size of the plots (*infra*), however, shows that cultivation was on a primitive scale. The huts appear to predominate at the west end of the area and the cairns at the east end; in fact conditions at the west end are rather those of a settlement with associated cairns than anything describable as a cairnfield.

The following selection of features will illustrate the character of the site as a whole. (i) A large stone hut or small enclosure, on the lip of the heugh of the Lornty Burn just W. of the stone dyke that marks the west end of the Muir. The bulk of this structure has been removed by landslides, but an in-turned entrance can be seen. (ii) Hut-foundations associated with numerous mounds, approximately where the word "Muir" [of Gormack] appears on the 6-inch map. (iii) Faint traces of an oval plot measuring 27 yds. by 17 yds. and defined on three sides by occasional large stones and a length of slight rickle. It lies just W. of the last. (iv) A smaller plot with a large oblong pile of stones in one corner. One end of this pile is hollow and the other is heaped up, but the resulting resemblance to a robbed burial-cairn is almost certainly accidental. (v) A plot about 18 yds. in diameter, defined partly by two small cairns and partly by a longish heap of stones which has its inner side curved to conform with the shape of the plot. (vi) A mound partly overlying a row of set stones in a way which suggests that it is later than these in date.

On the whole, therefore, this site seems to qualify as an early agricultural settlement, and not as a cemetery. The huts, the enclosed plots and, in particular, the disposition of some of the cairns in relation to the plots all point clearly to this conclusion. The appearance of the plots is primitive, and the west part, at any rate, of the group is probably earlier than the Buzzart Dykes, themselves undated but quite possibly medieval—this inference following from the fact that one of the cairns is isolated from its

neighbours by the westernmost section of the south side of the Dykes, as if this part of the work had been carried through the outskirts of a pre-existing settlement. It is thus not surprising that the origin of the cairns had become mythical by 1793, when they were known as the "Pechs [Picts'] cairns."¹

J. HARE LAW, Carnwath Parish, Lanarkshire. Six-inch O.S. Sheet xx SE. (unnoted except "Site of Cairn" on summit). National Grid NT[36]/0049. Extending from the summit of Hare Law (966 ft.) to near the Edinburgh-Lanark highway on the S. and to about 750 ft. elevation on the right bank of the North Medwin on the SE.; also on some high ground SW. of the summit, towards Yelping Craigs.

The soil on this site, though now covered with peat, is a sandy loam and must be potentially cultivable—apart from areas of moss, which the cairns avoid—as some land in a comparable position on the south-east face of Windy Gate, the next main feature to the SW., has been enclosed and improved, while the east side of the same feature bears a great range of abandoned rigs. Very few outcrops were noted, but some large boulders and rock-fragments² appear in the sub-soil where this has been exposed in old quarries. The principal soil-cover is ling, much of it high and rank.

The cairns are made of the usual boulders and large stones, but are now largely covered with peat. Some, which have been opened up, can be seen to possess solid foundation-rings, but no trace of a cist was found. They are most closely set near the top of the Law and their arrangement is quite irregular; it would seem impossible to use an animal-drawn plough on this part of the site, though in the area SW. of the summit (*supra*), where the cairns are fewer, some very faint rigs can be seen, introduced among them. The rigs are evidently subsequent to the cairns, and may perhaps not have been used for more than a very few seasons in view of the unfavourable conditions prevailing on this high and exposed ground. No hut-circles were noted, though their traces might well have been hidden by the rank heather; but on the upper part of the Law there were at least two lengths of rickle—probably the boundaries of plots, as one of them had stones heaped on and near it. One cairn is built on top of a stout, stony rickle forming a ring 40 ft. in overall diameter, which crowns the Law and encloses, though excentrically, a modern surveyors' landmark which seems to be based on the ruin of a prehistoric hill-top cairn.

There is nothing in the foregoing observations to suggest that the cairns are other than heaps of land-gathered stones. They are on potentially cultivable ground; they avoid both an undrained peat-moss and the lowermost slope descending to the North Medwin, which was most likely

¹ *Stat. Acc.*, IX, 258.

² The dense concentration of boulders or rocks indicated by the 6-inch O.S. Map may perhaps be the result of a confusion between rocks and cairns.

under forest in early times; and they are associated with some traces of enclosures, if slight ones. One of them, at least, is later than the hill-top ring, itself probably dating from some time in the Bronze Age, while the contrast between the good preservation of the cairns and the ruined and tenuous state of the plot-enclosures suggests that here, as at some of the other sites, the agricultural settlements may have passed through more than a single phase.

K. WESTRUTHER BURN, Carnwath and Dunsyre Parishes, Lanarkshire. Six-inch O.S. Sheet XXI SW. ("Cairn," also "Cairn, site of" on Horse Law and "Pile of Stones" W. of the Westruther Burn). National Grid NT[36]/0249 and 0250. On the lower slopes—SW., W. and NW.—of Horse Law along the east side of the shallow valley of the Westruther Burn,¹ between elevations of about 780 ft. and 950 ft.

The soil here consists of clay-loam covered by about 9 in. of peat, the existing vegetation being largely ling, with grasses, woodrush and moss. The farm-tenant, Mr J. P. Kaye, said that the loam would be perfectly cultivable in the absence of the peat, and that any arable land in this neighbourhood, if neglected, would revert in some 20 years to the condition here seen. Boulders occur in fair numbers, but no outcrops of rock were noted except in a single small gully. The cairns are in general turfed over, though stones show through the covering and any which have been disturbed are seen to be made of larger or smaller boulders and stones from the surface. A typical round example measured 12 ft. in diameter and had a good kerb, but some are larger, many have no kerbs, and some are of rounded-oblong form or shapeless. The greatest height measured was 3 ft. 6 ins. The cairns are very numerous, but are not everywhere closely set; the densest concentration is to be seen well up from the damp ground along the burnside, and, where the cairns are dense, they seem to be intermixed with patches of clear ground. In a few places lengths of set boulders were noted, suggestive of plot-boundaries; but an oblong paddock with rounded corners, about 35 yds. long by 25 yds. broad, which is very faintly discernible on a small flat just below the chambered cairn (*infra*), may not be of any great antiquity. Only two hut-circles were noted.

In the light of the foregoing facts, these cairns would seem to fall readily into place simply as heaps of stone gathered on agricultural land; but some evidence must now be considered which tells in an opposite direction. (i) About half a mile N. of Burngrange (NT/029494 approx.), there are the remains of what appears to be a long chambered cairn.² (ii) The cairn on

¹ The area examined in detail extended for nearly a mile northwards from a point about a quarter of a mile N. of Burngrange; but further cairns were observed on the west side of the Westruther Burn, and they may well extend also to the north and south slopes of Horse Law, which were not visited.

² Some particulars of this cairn, which had not previously been reported, are now on record in the files of the R.C.A.M.

the top of Horse Law, which is not more than 350 yds. from the nearest of the cairns in the cairnfield and resembles them in size and build, yet occupies a position typical of a class of hill-top burial-cairns. (iii) On the west side of the valley there are five cairns which are definitely larger than those in the cairnfield (24 ft. to 30 ft. in diameter) and, in addition, what is marked on the O.S. map as a "pile of stones"—actually the ruin of a very large cairn comparable with the two between Medwinhead and North Slipperfield, some 5 miles distant, which are likewise associated with cairnfields. (iv) One ordinary unit in the cairnfield, which has been opened, contains the remains of a cist. This has been built of stones laid in courses, not of upright slabs, and before disturbance may have measured about 5 ft. by 2 ft. The "small" cairns are thus in association with important sepulchral monuments, and it is tempting—particularly as at least one of their number itself contains a cist—to suggest that they really form an enormous cemetery going back to Neolithic times. To do this, however, would necessitate throwing over the equally valid evidence for agricultural clearance—and that, presumably, not only for this cairnfield alone but also, by implication, for the neighbouring sites J and L. It is consequently safer to suppose that settlement, agriculture and burial went on here concurrently, and for a long period, the building of cairns—especially of the very large cairns—leading to or helping in the clearance of plots large enough to cultivate, and stone-heaps, primarily formed for agricultural purposes, proving convenient on occasion for cisted burials. As at some other sites, the well-preserved "small" cairns may well belong to a later phase than the plot-boundaries, which are wasted and scanty.

L. MEDWIN WATER, Dunsyre Parish, Lanarkshire. Six-inch O.S. Sheet XXI SE. (unnoted). National Grid NT[36]/085501-092502 and 090508. On sloping or broken moorland on the right bank of the Medwin Water, between elevations of about 880 ft. and 1000 ft.¹

This site is thoroughly blanketed with peat, and in consequence nothing can be said about the nature of the soil or the incidence of surface stones. The cairns fall into two groups, separated by a wet, mossy flat. The lower group consists of about forty cairns, which avoid the boggiest ground and are not closely spaced. It extends westwards nearly to the West Water. The cairns of this group measure from 7 ft. to 20 ft. in diameter and are evidently of stony construction, though now largely peat-covered. Some have indentifiable kerbs. One, which is 12 ft. in diameter, stands within a ring of small set stones 28 ft. in diameter, which now shows in the peat only

¹ This was the upper limit of the ground examined, but information was obtained locally that the cairns continued up the side of the valley at least as far as the Covenanter's Grave, itself stated to be a large cairn, which stands on the top of Black Law (1336 ft.). Nor can this right-bank cairnfield be readily dissociated from its left-bank counterpart, on the south-west flank of North Muir Hill, which again ties in with another on the east flank of the same hill, near the Upper Cairn.

as a slight circular ridge. Two lines of set stones were observed which suggested the boundaries of plots, and in one place four cairns flank a flat space, apparently cleared, which measures about 100 ft. by 50 ft. The upper group is on better-drained ground, sloping and free of bog-holes, which overlooks a wide bend in the Medwin Water about half a mile below Medwinhead. The cairns are similar to those in the lower group but stand rather higher, some of them up to 3 ft. Other remains include: (i) Vestiges of at least two long-shaped huts or very small houses, probably much later than the cairns. (ii) A linear mound or heavy rickle of boulders, with a turf covering, irregularly aligned and measuring 120 ft. in length by about 6 ft. in thickness; its east end, which is undamaged, is rounded like the arc of a cairn, and its west end is finished, like that of a rather similar structure at Site E, with a large slab, now fallen.

It thus appears that, while the cairns on this site are associated with some traces of agricultural enclosures, and themselves occur in greatest numbers where the soil is likely to have been most favourable, at least one of them is plainly sepulchral and they are also in the fairly close neighbourhood of a large sepulchral cairn, the Covenanter's Grave.¹ They are therefore probably to be accounted for in much the same way as was suggested in the case of Site K (*supra*).

M. NEWHALL HILL, Traquair Parish, Peeblesshire. Six-inch O.S. Sheet xvii (unnoted). National Grid NT[36]/308320. On the ridge that descends from Blake Muir towards Traquair Church, at an elevation of some 1140 ft. O.D. and 400 ft. above the Newhall Burn.

The soil here is thin and peaty, with rock near the surface in many places, and is largely covered with heather; but modern cultivation extends almost to the crest of the slope rising from the Newhall Burn, while the west flank of the ridge likewise soon falls away to ground which, though unimproved, is evidently of better quality. The cairns are small, from 5 ft. to 8 ft. in diameter, and are so low that they can easily be missed in the rank heather and grass. All are thickly turfed over, but most of them show a few protruding stones. Not more than two dozen were found, and they are very widely scattered—extending, in fact, for a distance of some 400 yds. along the ridge-top. It is difficult to believe that they have resulted from the clearance of the land, as their aggregate content is insignificant in relation to the area concerned; though it is just possible that each cairn, or each group of two or three cairns where they occur in groups, may represent the clearings from a small isolated plot, and that the poverty of the soil has discouraged the exploitation of the ridge-top as a whole. On the other hand, no positive evidence was noted which would suggest a sepulchral origin.

¹ See preceding note.

3. CONCLUSIONS.

It is now possible to summarise the results of the whole enquiry and to draw some conclusions.

At nine of the twelve sites visited there appear lines of set stones, or slight rickles, suggestive of enclosure boundaries or divisions between plots of land (Sites C, D, E, F, G, H, J, K, L); at six, hut-circles (Sites B, E, F, G, H, K) and at one what may be an outdoor hearth (Site D); at four, small plots with outlines at least partly identifiable (Sites C, G, H, L); at three, noticeable contrasts between areas from which stones have and have not been cleared (Sites C, E, G); at three, substantially built rickle-walling (Sites E, F, L); and at two, cairns set on rock-outcrops (Sites C, G). All these features point to agricultural settlement and, by inference, to the cairns being heaps of land-gathered stones. Other features, however, point to sepulchral uses. Thus in two cases a cairn contains a cist (Sites C, K), the cairn in question at Site C actually containing two; in two others, a cairn is surrounded by a ring of set stones (Sites A, L); with two cairnfields there are associated large and important burial-cairns of Neolithic or Bronze Age types (Sites F, K), and again with two, smaller burial-cairns which are likewise presumably of the Bronze Age (Sites J, K); one cairnfield contains what is probably a cemetery group (Site E); and one seems too widely dispersed to have held any useful quantity stones gathered from the land (Site M). These apparent contradictions can, however, be largely resolved by supposing that the functions of burial and land-clearance were not mutually exclusive, and that the kind of process suggested in the case of Site K (*supra*) may well, *mutatis mutandis*, explain the origin of most if not all of the cairnfields. Settlement, that is to say, called for the clearance of stones from the cultivable ground; some of the stones were made use of in the demarcation of plots and the rest were piled up wherever they were least in the way—*e.g.* on outcrops of rock—while an unknown number of the cairns so formed were used for burial, with or without cists. Very large, pre-existing cairns may have attracted cairnfields to their vicinity, either for purposes of burial, through their sanctity or magical qualities, or because the collection of the stones required for their construction had already cleared up useful areas of ground. It also appears that the settlements associated with the cairnfields are quite different from the enclosed homesteads or settlements of the Iron Age, being more nearly comparable with the unenclosed hut-colonies, of uncertain cultural horizon, that are found here and there in the Highlands; that they are, for all that, of a more substantial character than mere seasonal grazing-camps; that they probably belong to a period when the higher-lying ground was relatively free of peat, and when the best soils of the valley bottoms were still obstructed by forest; and that the settlers, or at any rate some of them, were ignorant of

the use of ploughs drawn by animals. On this showing the cairnfields should contain useful evidence on the domestic life and social organisation of their times; it may, therefore, well be that they deserve a fresh approach and study on appropriate lines.

A NOTE ON THE CLEARANCE OF STONES FROM AGRICULTURAL LAND.

It may be thought that too much has been made in the foregoing paper of what is, at best, quite a minor operation of farming, and that such hosts of small cairns as we see in some places must have had some less commonplace origin than the mere clearance of fields. It will, therefore, be worth while to glance at some items of evidence which tell in a contrary direction, and which, without touching more than the fringe of the subject, yet show that farmers have been concerned to collect stones, and to pile them up into heaps, from the earliest times and in widely separated regions. Thus in Shetland certain groups of small cairns, identified as resulting from field-clearance, are attributed to the local late-Neolithic culture.¹ Mr Calder's plans show that the cairns are very plentiful in the enclosed fields associated with the houses of this culture, and that most of them are within the enclosures though some occur outside as well. Where heel-shaped cairns occur in the same vicinity, they are placed well away from the settlements—not close to them, like the stone-heaps.² Another group of clearance-heaps in Shetland, this time in an Iron Age context, was noted at Wiltrow; the cairns examined here were found to be placed on rock-outcrops.³ In Wales, at Penmaenmawr, Mr Griffiths excavated some cairns which were believed to be a cemetery and showed them to be clearance-heaps, probably of Iron Age date. As a result of his experience he recorded the following conclusion on the Welsh material: "Until more is known of the characteristic features of undoubted necropolises of the Late Bronze and Iron Ages, the temptation to classify automatically groups of stony mounds on the Welsh uplands as 'cairn cemeteries' must be resisted."⁴ In Iron Age Denmark land-gathered stones were used to form divisions between cultivated strips and were also piled up into heaps, generally round a large earthfast stone or in some other position where they were out of the way.⁵ Some of these Danish clearance-heaps appear to go back to Neolithic times.⁶ The following passage,⁷ which refers to ground showing no field-divisions, is of especial interest: "The areas in question have at one time been cultivated

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXIX, 357 f.

² I am indebted to Mr Calder for this piece of information.

³ *P.S.A.S.*, LXX (1935-6), 161, 165 f.

⁴ *Arch. Camb.*, 1954, 80 ff.

⁵ G. Hatt in *Acta Archaeologica*, II, fasc. 2 (1931), 121, 132.

⁶ G. Hatt in *op. cit.*, 156.

⁷ *Ibid.*

. . . [as] the stones are gathered into heaps, which are placed irregularly. Sometimes a very big stone is the nucleus around which the heaps of stones were formed." From a Norwegian report¹ very much the same impression is to be gathered, the cultivations here studied belonging to the Migration Period. The fields contain both clearance-heaps and burial-mounds, between which the author seems able to distinguish with confidence; and it is worth noting that these heaps appear to have been carefully made, with larger stones below and smaller ones above.¹ Modern parallels are provided by the dumps of stone that are often to be seen at the edges of fields which are still under normal cultivation; some conspicuous examples—well out in the cultivable areas and not on the field-margins—appear on the right bank of the Gala Water, from half a mile to a mile and a half NW. of Stow station (NT[36]/4345, 4445, 4444). Finally the following note² deserves quotation, as illustrating very recent and present-day practice in the West Highlands: "It was, a very short time ago, perfectly normal practice to gather stones off the land and make small piles of them to clear the ground for the plough; this was done by women and children with baskets. The piles were usually on top of an outcrop of rock . . . or anywhere that would not be of any use for ploughing. . . . Nowadays, with tractors, the ground is more deeply worked and the stones are taken off in trailer loads. . . . But in gravelly glacial soils stones go on rising to the surface so we go on taking them off."

¹ A. Hagen in *Universitetets Oldsaksamlings Skrifter*, iv (1953), 362 ff.

² In a letter from Miss Campbell of Kilberry.