

#### 4. A BRONZE AGE BURIAL AT EMBO, SUTHERLAND.

The village of Embolies on the east coast, in the south-east corner of Sutherland, 2 miles NNE. of Dornoch. Bronze Age burials have previously been discovered in the district.<sup>3</sup> The site of the recent discoveries was on the edge of a low terrace, on the links between the present limit of agricultural land and the sand-dunes, to the S. of the village (map ref. NH/817926). Boston House stands alone on the links, and about 50 ft. N. of the garden wall there are the remains of a cairn. It is now an irregular mound, obviously much disturbed, reaching a maximum height of about 6 ft. The edge is very indefinite, but the mound appears to measure about 38 ft. from E. to W. and about 46 ft. from N. to S. It is composed of small boulders and sand. It was already reputed to be a burial-place before the recent finds, which suggests that human bones had been found there previously.

On 17th to 18th August 1956, Mr J. W. Mackay was digging in the mound for stones, and after finding some human bones continued to explore the site. He reported his discoveries to Glasgow Art Gallery whence the information was passed to the National Museum of Antiquities, through which an investigation was made, unfortunately after the main burial had already been removed. The finds have been presented by Mr James Macintosh to the National Museum of Antiquities (registration numbers EQ 611-15) (fig. 4).

Near the centre of the cairn, and under its highest point, a short cist was found, orientated E.-W. It was placed above ground level; the cist measured internally 3 ft. long E.-W. by 2 ft. wide N.-S. and 1 ft. 6 ins. deep, the lower surface of the capstone being 2 ft. below the top of the cairn. The stones forming the sides fitted neatly together; the south slab was placed inside the ends of the east and

<sup>1</sup> For bracelets, see V. B. Proudfoot, *The Downpatrick Gold Find* (1955).

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished; lent to the Museum by the late Captain of Dunstaffnage.

<sup>3</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LXXIV (1939-40), 13-23; R.C.A.M. Inv. (*Sutherland*).

west slabs, and the north slab was placed against their other ends. The cist was not fully exposed, for its south side had appeared in a square cutting in the centre of the cairn, and it was examined by removing the south side slab. The cist was full of sand.

The skeletal remains were found mainly in the west half of the cist. Half of the pelvis was in the centre of this area, with teeth above it, but no skull survived. Both tibiae and fibulae lay across the north-west corner, and the other half of the pelvis was beneath them. In the sandy filling were bones of fish, young dog, young sheep, sea birds and rodents. The food-vessel was in the south-east corner of the cist, and the beads were scattered about the centre. The sherd and flint knife probably came from the cist also.

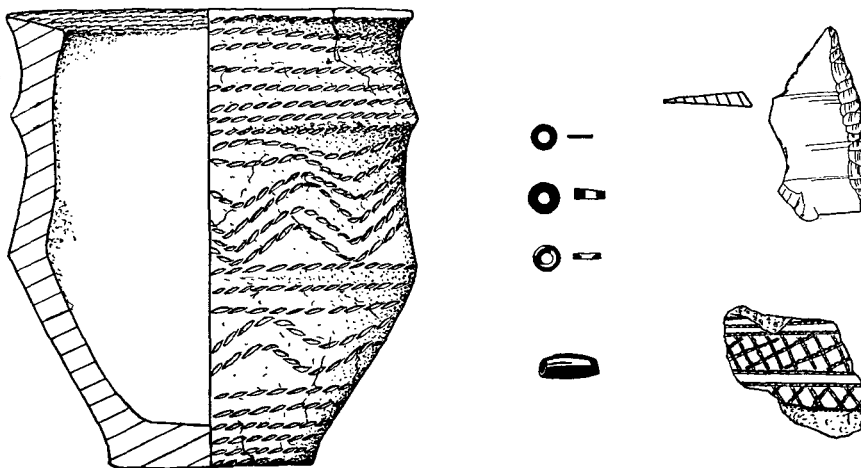


Fig. 4.

Three feet six inches to the S. of the cist there was a large upright stone aligned E.-W. Against the north side of this were reported to be two human skulls and other bones. These were about 1 ft. 6 ins. lower than the bottom of the cist, unlike the others in dark soil and probably on or just below ground level. There did not appear to be any other stones enclosing the bodies. Immediately W. of the end-slab of the cist was found a pelvis and vertebrae of another body. A mass of assorted human bones were found, apparently in disorder, throughout the area excavated. Amongst the cairn material were remains of the same animals as in the cist, and also adult examples of the mammals.<sup>1</sup>

The food-vessel is 4.6 ins. high, 4.1 ins. across the rim, and 2.1 ins. across the base. It is decorated all over with cord impressions. On the wide internal bevel of the rim are four concentric lines of impressions. Outside the vessel is divided into three areas by two mouldings, the upper only .9 in. below the rim. The two main bands of decoration are loosely executed chevrons or waves, and parallel lines fill the top, bottom and centre. The ware is coarse and friable, with a brown slip outside and dark grey core. The vessel is badly cracked and has warped. The sherd, of hard, dark brown-grey ware, is decorated with zones of comb-stamped lattice between parallel lines.

<sup>1</sup> The animal bones were examined by Dr A. S. Clarke, Royal Scottish Museum.

The beads are of jet. One barrel-bead only was recovered. It is lightly polished. The ends have been cut obliquely, and the upper part of the hole, particularly at one end, has been worn by the string. Thirteen disc beads were also found. In diameter they vary from 7 to 8 mm. The holes also vary slightly in diameter, and one of them has a considerable bevel on one face. The thickness of the beads varies more, from 1 mm. to 3.5 mm., and not all the faces are cut quite parallel to each other.

The knife is of pale grey flint, made from a flake with one edge fairly steeply worked, and the upper part of the other edge slightly retouched to form a point.

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*Report on the Human Remains.*

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*Teeth and Bones from the Cist.*—A substantial fragment of the mandible consists of almost the whole of the left side and a small part of the right. The alveolar part of it carried three left molars, two left premolars and the left canine tooth. These six teeth had been worn "level" with each other, were in good condition, showed no sign of caries, and some of the enamel was still present. A small fragment of the right side of the mandible bore three molar teeth in fairly good condition apart from slight erosion. The body of this small fragment is much thicker than the corresponding part of the substantial fragment and does not closely match it. Loose teeth included one premolar, one incisor and fragments of three other teeth.

The bones consist of a few very thin, finely edged fragmented flat bones showing serrated edges here and there. They were small enough to belong to the cranium of the human foetus. Fragments of adult bones included right and left forearm, left patella, left hip bone, humerus, ribs, vertebræ, a left cuboid, a big toe proximal phalange and one metacarpal. Two adults and one foetus (about four months old) seem to be represented by these bones from the cist.

*Bones found disturbed among the Cairn Material.*—These consist of the fragmented remains of two human skeletons. The humeri were definitely of two persons and along with two calcanea, two forearm bones and fibulæ served to group the remaining fragments. One of the persons was adult and the other juvenile. A few bone fragments could not be allocated to either person so that the possibility of another skeleton cannot be excluded.

*Bones from a Low Level of the Cist.*—There were fragments of axial and appendicular human bones including bones of the skull. Belonging to the right side were a scapula, radius, talus, zygomatic bone and the petrous, squamous, tympanic and mastoid temporals. In addition there were fragments of the frontal, parietal and occipital bones, five fragments of ribs and one thoracic vertebra.

In all from this site there appears to be the bones of five adults, one juvenile and one foetus.