

## NOTES

### I. THREE BEAKERS FROM WESTER ROSS

WITHIN the last six years three beakers from Wester Ross have arrived in the National Museum of Antiquities, all from unpublished cist burials found accidentally.

1. *Poolewe*. The beaker was found in a short cist which was revealed during road works on 13th June 1938. The cist was  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ft. below the surface of the Poolewe-Gairloch road, four and a quarter miles S. of the bridge at Poolewe, at a place where the road runs close to the River Ewe, the outlet of Loch Maree (N.G.R. NG 860796, fig. 2, 1).

The cist measured about 3 ft. square by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ft. deep. No remains of a body were recorded.<sup>1</sup> The beaker is at present on loan to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland from Mrs MacKenzie of Gairloch.<sup>2</sup>

The vessel (fig. 3) is a short-necked beaker with a marked constriction between neck and body, in form and proportions typical of its class. It is 6.3 in. high, 5.7 in. across the mouth and 3.3 in. across the base. The ware is fairly good quality with fine to medium grits, pinky-buff outside with traces of burnishing, brownish inside, and with a dark grey core. The careful decoration, by a toothed comb stamp, is in three zones, on the upper part of the neck, at the angle between neck and shoulder, and half way down the body. Each zone is bounded by two or three horizontal lines, the space between being filled with either detached impressions or lattice. In the case of the detached impressions the stamp, 0.25 in. long, had four teeth, one of which generally did not register.

2. *Bruachaig, Kinlochewe*. The circumstances of the discovery of the beaker are recorded in a note kept with it. 'Found in July 1898 in a cist about 2 yds. out from the door of the wool store at Bruachaig, Kinlochewe. The cist was about 4 ft. in length and 2 ft. wide. The cist was covered by two flags which were on the surface level of the ground. A small opening between the flags drew attention to a hollow beneath and caused the flags to be raised. The earthenware jar contained nothing but a little loose earth.' The building in question is the byre of the Bruachaig steading. The site is a short distance from the river, about  $2\frac{1}{4}$  miles above the head of Loch Maree (N.G.R. NH 039621, fig. 2, 2). Other short-cist burials seem to have been found in the district.<sup>3</sup>

This vessel is also on loan to the Museum from Mrs MacKenzie of Gairloch. It is rather squat with a gentle S-profile, 6 in. high, 5.5 in. across the mouth, 3.4 in. across the base (fig. 4). The ware is fairly hard, profusely tempered with fine to medium grit, pinkish-brown outside with traces of burnishing, brownish-grey inside, with a dark grey core. The all-over decoration consists of six grooves round the neck, three or four incised lines round the lower part of the body, the remainder of the pattern being by impressed rectangular-tooth comb stamp. This pattern consists of six plain panels edged by chevrons and divided by groups of vertical lines with a row of herringbone down the centre; immediately below is a band of vertical impressions edged by a row of chevrons. Close

<sup>1</sup> The circumstances of the discovery are recorded in a letter of 29th June 1938 from Robert Bruce, Chief Supervising Engineer, Ministry of Transport, The Castle, Inverness, to the Director of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> We are most grateful to Mrs MacKenzie of Gairloch for permission to publish this beaker, and that from Bruachaig, and for placing them on loan to the museum. They were formerly kept at Conan House, Conan Bridge.

<sup>3</sup> J. H. Dixon, *Gairloch*, 1886, 101. 'I am told an ancient burial-place was discovered some years ago at Bruachaig, near Kinlochewe, where the bodies had been buried in a doubled-up position.'

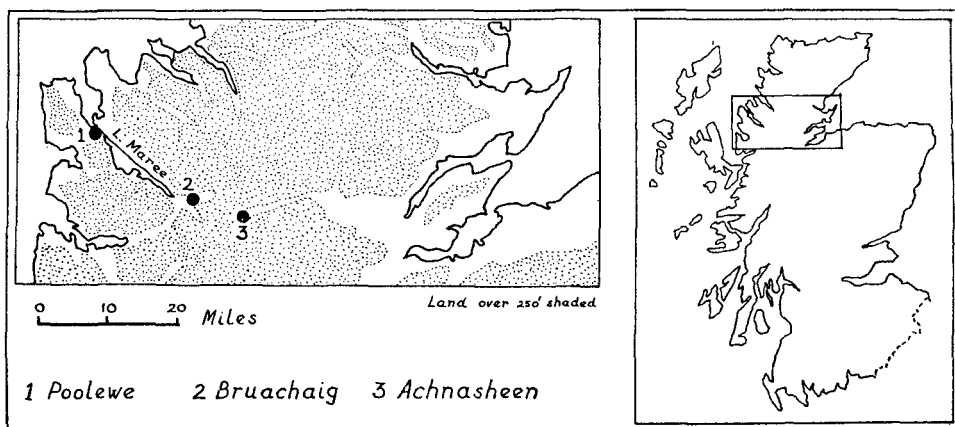


FIG. 1. Maps showing location of the three beakers

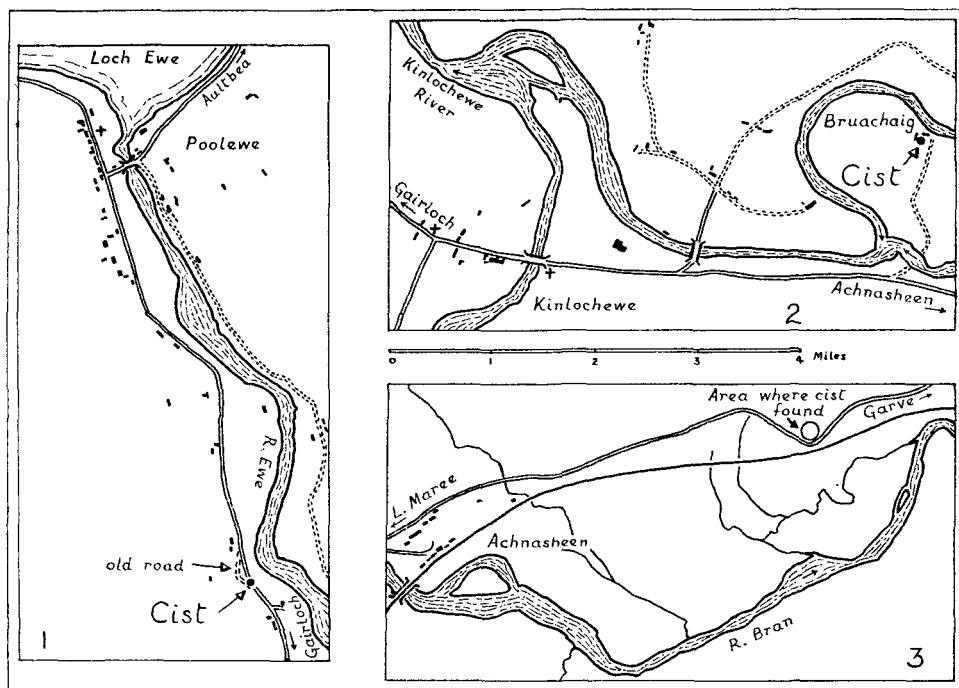


FIG. 2. Maps showing precise find-spots (based on the Ordnance Survey 6-inch sheets, by permission of the Director General)

inspection shows that the lower incised lines were made with the stamp, and it seems likely that the grooves were made in the same way. The stamp was 0.45 in. long with six teeth.

Beakers with panel decoration are not common and none provide a very close parallel but two are relatively near geographically, those from Rudh'an Dunain, Skye and Blackstand, Black Isle, Easter Ross.<sup>1</sup>

3. *Achnasheen*. The burial was found late in July 1959, during work on improvements to the Garve to Achnasheen road. The site is about three-quarters of a mile east of Achnasheen, in moorland, at a point where straightening the road entailed removal of a hillock

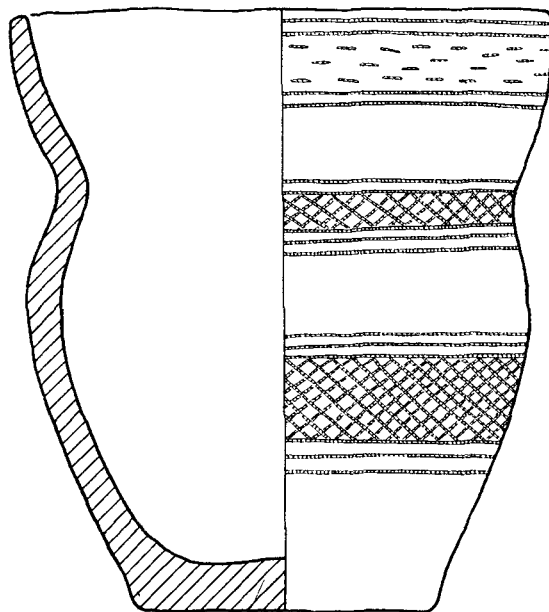


FIG. 3. The Poolewe Beaker (scale  $\frac{1}{2}$ )

of moraine gravel to the north of it (N.G.R. NH 173589, fig. 2, 3). A stone cist was discovered in the natural mound, but was largely destroyed before it was recognised. There were no remains of the body. However, sherds of a beaker and a piece of charcoal were recovered by Mr W. G. Bannerman.<sup>2</sup> Presumably the beaker had been intact for all the breaks are fresh, but only about two-thirds of it was found. The vessel has been presented to the National Museum of Antiquities by the County Council of Ross and Cromarty (EG 98).

The vessel (fig. 4) is short and squat with a slightly angular S-profile, 4.5 in. high, 5 in. across the mouth and 4 in. across the base. The ware is hard, tempered profusely with fine to medium grit, light brown on both surfaces with a black core. The outer surface has been well smoothed. Decoration is confined to two zones. The upper zone placed at the base of the short neck consists of four grooves of U-section bounded above and below by a fringe of short vertical lines made with a rectangular-toothed comb stamp. The lower

<sup>1</sup> P.S.A.S., LXVI (1931-2), 198; LXXXIII (1948-9), 235.

<sup>2</sup> We are grateful to Mr Bannerman for information regarding the circumstances of the discovery.

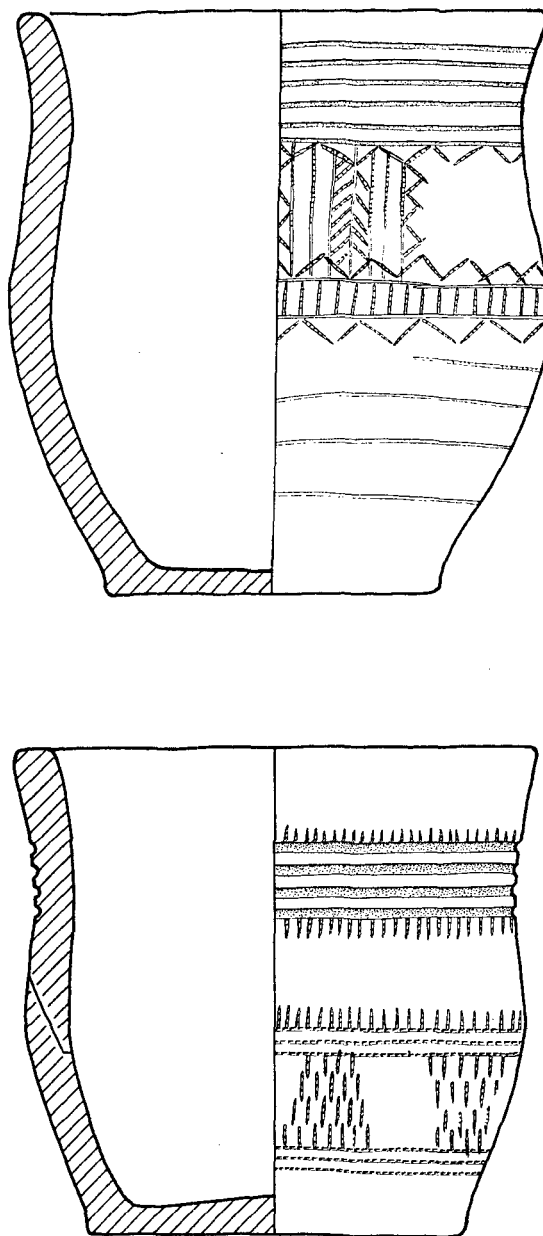


FIG. 4. The Bruachaig Beaker (above) and the Achnasheen Beaker (below) (scale  $\frac{1}{2}$ )

zone, placed on the body of the pot, consists of a row of alternate pendant and standing triangles formed by short vertical lines bounded above by two horizontal lines and a fringe of short vertical lines and below by three horizontal lines, all made with a rectangular-toothed comb stamp. At least two comb stamps seem to have been employed, of 0.35 and 1.15 in. width respectively, the larger being used in creating the continuous horizontal lines.

The general profile of the vessel and the layout of the decoration in contracted zones<sup>1</sup> with 'fringe' elements show the vessel to be closely related to the short-necked beaker series.

These three finds are significant, for beakers of any class are rare in NW. Scotland.<sup>2</sup> The siting of the graves gives added weight to the supposition that Strath Bran formed part of a natural route through which contact could be maintained at this period between the W. coast and the lands round the Firths of Beaully and Cromarty.

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