

# I.

## EXPLORATION OF SIX SMALL CAIRNS AT ABERLOUR, BANFFSHIRE. By THE HON. JOHN ABERCROMBY, SECRETARY.

On the 21st and 22d of August 1902 I opened, with the kind permission of Mr John Findlay of Aberlour House, Aberlour, several small cairns. They formed but a few of a considerable number distributed with great regularity in parallel rows on the sloping side of a moor called Kelter, on the north side of Meikle Conval, and to the east of Ben Rinnes. There were a sufficient number of these cairns, which could only have been sepulchral, to term the place a prehistoric cemetery, though in those examined no traces of interment could be found.

No. 1 had a diameter of 16 feet and a height of 2 feet. A few small pieces of charcoal were found in the earth and stones that composed the cairn, at a depth of 30 inches, and 9 feet 3 inches from the west end of the cutting. But there were no signs of cremation or of burnt earth. The stones were mostly rounded boulders of granite, such as could easily be lifted in one hand. The trench was cut from east to west, and enlarged at the centre to include a space  $9\frac{1}{2}$  feet by 7 feet; but no human remains were found, and no cist. The light yellow subsoil on which the cairn rested was quite hard, and had never been moved.

No. 2 lay 78 yards nearly due east of No. 1. It had a diameter of 17 feet, and was 2 feet 8 inches high. This was a cairn like the last, and here also a little charcoal was found at the middle and to the north of it, in very small quantity and much decayed. The transverse trench

from east to west was enlarged to cover an area of 8 feet square, but no cist or interment or relic was brought to light. The yellow subsoil had never been trenched before.

No. 3 was 66 yards south of No. 2, had a diameter of 14 feet and a height of 17 inches. An excavation  $7\frac{1}{2}$  feet by  $6\frac{1}{2}$  feet at the centre and carried down to the untouched yellow sandy earth below disclosed no traces of human handiwork, not even burnt wood.

No. 4 was 14 yards south-west of No. 3, had a diameter of 16 feet and a height of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  feet. It was made of stones with a little earth between like the others. An excavation 14 feet 9 inches by 6 feet 3 inches at the widest, and 4 feet 10 inches deep, was made across the centre, but nothing was found.

No. 5 lay 16 yards west of No. 4, and was a stone-setting rather than a cairn, but it formed part of the cemetery. It measured 39 feet by 4 feet 9 inches wide, was only a few inches above the level of the ground, and if prolonged would pass about one yard to the east of No. 2 as it lay nearly north and south. The south end was well marked by three large stones standing in the same line as the axis of the stone-setting. The centre one was upright and measured 2 feet high above ground, the other two were recumbent. All three stones were as much as two men with levers could move. I had 21 feet of the southern half of the setting cleared of stones, but found nothing. The stones were larger than most of the stones in the cairns already explored, and lay in one or two layers, according to size, on the top of the yellow subsoil, which was quite hard and had never been disturbed.

No. 6 measured  $14\frac{1}{2}$  feet and  $13\frac{1}{2}$  feet in its diameters, and was  $1\frac{1}{2}$  feet in height, and lay close to No. 4. An excavation 10 feet square was made at the centre to a depth of 2 feet, when the hard yellow stratum was reached. Here, again, no cist, relic, or vestige of bone, human or animal, was encountered.

Although the exploration of these small cairns was fruitless, it is not without interest. The interments seem to have been made by laying the corpse on the ground and covering it with a very low circular heap

of stones and sand. The nature of the moor is so wet that in a few years all trace of a body would probably disappear. From the absence of any cist or of the smallest object of sepulchral furniture for the deceased, it seems likely that these small mounds mark interments of comparatively late date.