

A Neolithic chambered long cairn at Edinchip, Perthshire

J L Davidson* and A S Henshall†

In 1980 an unrecorded Neolithic long cairn with Clyde-type chambers was discovered on the estate of Edinchip, near Lochearnhead, Perthshire, by J Alexander of the Ordnance Survey in the course of re-mapping the district, and was reported to the Archaeology Branch. A visit by one of the writers (JLD) confirmed the identification, and in 1982 the writers prepared a plan and description. The cairn is of considerable interest for its position within the distribution of Clyde cairns, for the structures within the cairn though these are only partially exposed, and not least for its survival in spite of the proximity of both an old road and a railway line. It is surprising that it has escaped recognition until now.

The cairn (at NGR NN 575 218) is 2 km SW of Lochearnhead, only some 30 m W of the now disused Callander and Oban railway line where it crosses the 18th-century military road from Stirling to Fort William. The cairn is situated low on the hillside which slopes down from NW to SE in a number of uneven and interrupted terraces. It is sited along one of these terraces at 162 m OD.

From the entrance to the E chamber the long axis, lying ENE to WSW, is fairly level; the gentle slope down across the site becomes steeper just beyond the S edge (for convenience of description it will be assumed the axis lies E to W). At the W end the ground drops quite steeply to a burn running in a gully, and round the N part of the E end there is a steep drop to a burn which skirts this part of the cairn in an arc. The hillside is rough grazing, and from about the level of the cairn to the bottom of the valley carries a sparse cover of trees, mainly oak and birch. The cairn itself is partly covered with turf and bracken, and supports several small trees. There are large boulders scattered on the hillside. Occasional outcrops of rock, one of which is only a short distance N of the cairn, are an obvious source for the structural slabs used in the cairn.

The cairn is composed of rounded stones. Its edge is reasonably well defined though doubtless the cairn material has spilt beyond the original limits. The length, excluding the tumbled stones beyond the E end, is c 53 m; the maximum breadth at the E end is c 16 m, tapering to c 10 m near the W end. The cairn has been considerably robbed and disturbed, but when measured from the S edge it still remains c 1.5 m high in the area of the E chamber and extending almost as far as the W end, except for severe robbing W of the W chamber. The height, measured along the N side, is 0.8 m for most of the length, but due to the drop in ground level opposite the E chamber it is as much as 2 m. East of the chamber entrance the ground falls steeply, and the

* RCAHMS, 54 Melville Street, Edinburgh

† Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh



FIG 1 Edinchip long cairn: location maps (land over 300 m stippled)

cairn certainly extends 6 m in this direction at which point it is 1.2 m below the entrance; cairn material has spread for at least a further 3 m with the edge some 2.5 m below the entrance. Viewed uphill from the E, the cairn is still impressive, crowned by a tipped-up capstone of the E chamber. Two large boulders on the S edge, near the E and W ends, are almost certainly natural features.

The E chamber is placed at the end of the level part of the site, and consists of two compartments entered from the E. The entry is 0.75 m wide between a slab on the N side set transversely to the axis, 1 m long and leaning slightly to the W, and a stone on the S side 0.6 m long leaning to the N which forms part of the S wall of the chamber. After a gap on both sides, the inner part of this compartment is formed by a slab on each side, that on the N 1.2 m long, that on the S considerably smaller. The two compartments are divided by a transverse slab projecting half-way across the chamber from the S side, the gap to the N being partly filled with rough walling. The upper N corner of this divisional slab has been fractured, and it is possible the stone once reached across the chamber. The outer compartment measures 2.2 m long by 1.3 m wide at the W

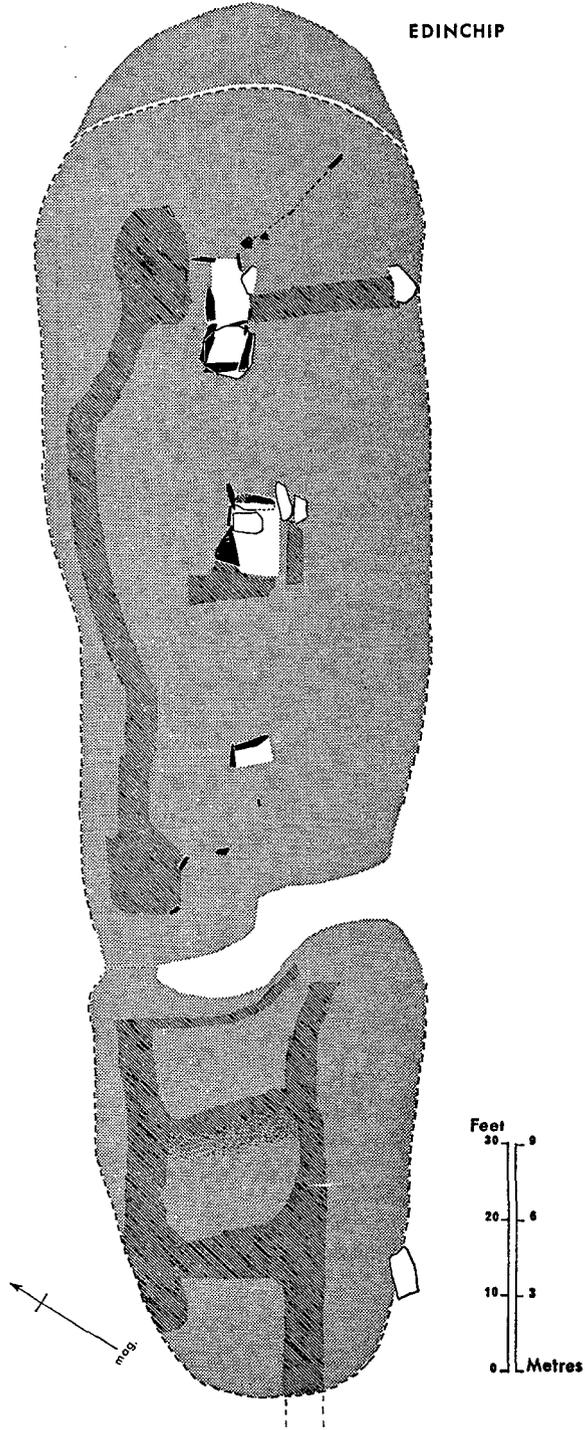


FIG 2 Edinchip long cairn: plan

end, the structural slabs projecting 0.25 m at the maximum except for the 0.5 m high divisional slab. A large flat slab lies over the gap in the S wall.

The inner compartment measures 1.6 m long by 1.4 m wide and seems to have been cleared-out at some time, the floor being c 0.3 m lower than that of the outer compartment. Each side is composed of a substantial slab with a level upper surface, that on the N 1.7 m long and 0.3 m thick, that on the S over 1.3 m long and at least as thick as the other; they are exposed for 0.6 and 0.5 m above the floor. A small upright slab fills the gap between the S side slab and the divisional slab. The pointed back-slab is the tallest stone in the cairn, exposed for 1 m above the floor. The capstone of the compartment has been displaced, tipped up at an angle of 45° from the lowest point against the W face of the divisional slab, resting on the side slabs and on the top of the back-slab, the W edge high above the cairn behind the chamber. The capstone measures 2.1 m E to W by 1.9 m N to S, by 0.25 m thick, and has been broken at the NE and SW corners. Crude later walling has been built round the outside of this compartment.

There appears to have been a V-shaped façade of spaced stones in front of the chamber, sloping downhill and almost completely hidden by the cairn material now filling the forecourt. Four stones can be identified on the S side extending in an almost straight line for 4.5 m. Near the entrance are two upright stones, triangular in plan with shattered tops; to the SE is a small slab on edge, with a substantial slab 1 m long and 0.3 m high at the end of the series. As the second stone leans to the SW and the last leans to the NE, the bases of these stones are probably more accurately aligned than now appears. On the N side no façade stones can be certainly identified, but a loose, thin, upright slab with shattered top just protruding, may be a broken façade stone more or less *in situ*.

A second chamber lies 4.5 m W of the first. The N wall consists of three stones. The western is a very large flat-topped block measuring 1.6 m long by 0.8 m in maximum thickness, 0.4 m high and 0.3 m higher than the adjacent slabs; this block is almost certainly rock outcrop. The eastern slab is of moderate size, 1 m long by 0.3 m thick, and between the two and overlapping them on the N side is a third rather slight slab with a shattered edge 0.9 m long by 0.1 m thick. At right angles to the E end of this wall there is a large slab 1.5 m long by 0.3 m thick, only just visible and leaning acutely to the W. In a vertical position it would probably butt against the E end of the E side slab. This leaning stone is evidently the back-slab of the chamber. At its S end lies a heavy displaced block 1.5 m long, 0.5 m wide and 0.4 m thick, rectangular in cross-section. Its size and shape suggest that it may have been split from the upper part of the back-slab which has horizontal fractures developing. To the S of this block, and also within the chamber, there lie several large flat slabs, the largest measuring 1.2 by 1 m, either parts of a capstone or corbel stones. The interior of the chamber is full of loose cairn stones, and no structure can be seen on the S side nor at the W end where the entrance is likely to have been. Remains of rough later walling on these sides have formed a small enclosure.

A third chamber lay 7.2 m further W, but all that survives is a short slab on the N side, 0.9 m long, 0.15 m thick, and exposed 0.5 m high, with a slightly skew slab 1.4 m long, 0.3 m thick, and 0.25 m high, butting against its E end. These are probably the back-slab and E side of a small lateral chamber, the W side of which has been removed and the interior cleared out.

To the W and NW of this chamber there are a number of rectangular-section slabs set on end, some quite substantial, but not forming any coherent pattern. West of them, robbing has been increasingly severe. The cairn has clearly been dug into from the S side, and removed to ground level in one area where it has been almost bisected. The W end of the cairn has been greatly disturbed and distorted by secondary structures which are now almost formless. Rough amorphous walling can also be traced running a little within the N edge of the cairn and approach-

ing the N side of the E chamber where there may have been a bothy. Another wall ran from the S side of this chamber to the boulder in the S edge of the cairn.

It is unfortunate that the precise form of the E chamber is uncertain. It is evident that the roof of the inner compartment was low, with the capstone resting on the back-slab; the height of the side slabs must have been increased somewhat, perhaps by the addition of one substantial horizontal slab. The divisional slab, if originally stretching across the full width of the chamber, may have been high enough to block access from the outer to the inner compartment, even if it did not reach up to the capstone. If so, the chamber would be of the 'closed' type with antechamber similar to Cairnholy or Lenihuline Wood (Henshall 1972, 55-7). But without excavation it must remain uncertain whether the gap at its N end is original. If it is, this arrangement would be very unusual.

Some anomalies in the layout of the cairn and chambers may be noted. The two parts of the E chamber are slightly skew, the outer compartment being on the central axis, the inner compartment being angled about 15° to the N. The three chambers are not in line, the centre chamber being S of the cairn axis; also the W chamber does not seem to have been at right angles to the axis. The centre chamber appears to have been encapsulated in the cairn without means of access, strongly suggesting that this is a two-phase, if not a multi-phase, monument. The possibility that a fourth chamber once existed in the severely robbed portion may be borne in mind, for it is likely that robbing was aimed in the first place at recovering large slabs.

The cairns of the Clyde group are concentrated on the W coast of Scotland south of Loch Etive, with a few outliers extending their range. A detached group has been recorded in Perthshire, consisting of two long cairns with chambers, Clach na Tiompan (PER 1) and Kindrochat (PER 2), a third long cairn probably containing chambers perhaps of Clyde type at Rottenreoch (PER 3), a fourth site at Cultoquhey (PER 4) consisting of a Clyde chamber not in a long cairn, and a possible fifth site Cairnwochel (PER 7) destroyed in the 18th century (Henshall 1972, 468-78, with references.) Three of these sites (PER 2, 3, and 4) lie in Strath Earn E of Loch Earn, another (PER 1) in Glen Almond to the NE of Loch Earn, and the last (PER 7) to the SE near Braco.

Edinchip lies to the W of Loch Earn, bringing the Perthshire cairns closer to the main group. Edinchip also lies near an important junction of natural routes through the highlands of central Scotland, on a N to S route through Glen Ogle and Strathyre which links with the W to E routes from Loch Awe to Strath Tay or to Strath Earn.

Kindrochat (PER 2) is the closest long cairn to Edinchip 16 km to the W, and is only slightly smaller. It too has a V-shaped forecourt leading to an axial chamber, and two other chambers though in this case both laterals. At least one of these is a two-compartment Clyde-type chamber. The much longer cairn, Clach na Tiompan (PER 1) has four lateral chambers, and these (as far as can be seen) are not entirely characteristic of the Clyde type. The chamber at Cultoquhey (PER 4) is of two compartments of normal Clyde type, though in other respects the site is most unusual.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Mr R Duberry, Edinchip, generously gave us access to the Edinchip cairn, for which we are grateful.

REFERENCE

Henshall, A S 1972 *The Chambered Tombs of Scotland*, vol 2. Edinburgh.