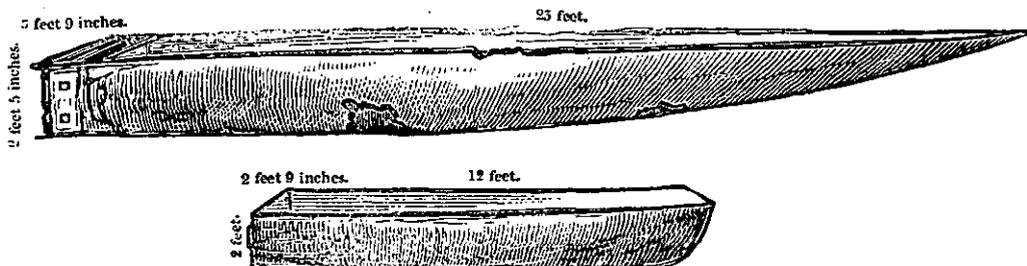


XXI.—*Account of the Discovery of a number of Ancient Canoes of solid oak, in Loch Doon, a fresh-water Lake in the County of Ayr.*

Communicated by Lieut.-Colonel the Honourable FREDERICK MACADAM CATHCART, of Craigengillan.

[*Read to the Society 9th January 1832.*]

THE waters of Loch Doon, a fresh-water lake in the county of Ayr, seven miles long, and distant twelve miles from the sea, having fallen to an unusually low level, in consequence of the long-continued drought of the preceding summer, some objects having the appearance of parts of canoes and other large pieces of timber became visible under the water, close to the rock on which Doon Castle stands, immediately in front of the principal entrance, and near the spot where two canoes were found some years since. These objects having excited considerable curiosity, and given rise to several ineffectual attempts to raise them, proper means were at length taken for that purpose; and after great labour and difficulty, three canoes measuring about twenty-three feet in length, two feet five inches in depth, and three feet nine inches in breadth at the stern, inside measure, and one canoe about twelve feet in length, and two feet nine inches in breadth, and of nearly the same depth, were finally drawn up out of the water, and securely placed on the rocks.



Of these, only one of the larger, and the small canoe (represented in the prefixed Sketch), were sufficiently entire to admit of being removed otherwise

than in mere fragments; and these two, after the Marquis of Ailsa's sanction had been obtained, were floated upon casks, and so conveyed by boats to the basin among the rocks at the source of the river Doon, in the grounds of Berbeth, where they now remain.

These canoes are all formed out of a single oak tree. The smaller one is without a joint of any kind, and appears to have been merely intended to be towed by others, there being no trace of the marks made by oars or paddles, which may be seen in the large canoe, while there is a round hole in the prow, well adapted for fixing a towing line. The larger canoe is equally hewn out of a single tree, without joints, with the exception of the stern, which is formed by a broad plank fitted into a groove, which is cut in the solid wood, left thicker for that purpose, on each side, at the end, in hollowing out the tree. There is also a smaller similar groove near the middle of the canoe, apparently intended to receive on each side the end of a cross bench. The plank forming the stern is further strengthened and secured by two strong pins of wood passing through well cut square holes, at a little distance from the end on each side.

There is no appearance of carving or ornamental work about these canoes, but they had evidently been pitched within and without, the pitch being still visible in some places. In attempting to pull out the canoes now described, and which, from their being in nearly a vertical position, were the only ones that could be distinctly seen, or which appeared to offer, at least, the best chance of success, so great a resistance was encountered, that not only the strong ropes and other implements used were frequently broken, but it also seemed probable for some time that the canoes would be entirely destroyed in the efforts made to move them. It was afterwards discovered that this unexpected resistance was occasioned by a great many other canoes which were lying in all directions above, below, and across those finally got out, but which, from the depth and thickness of the water, and the quantities of large stones, sand, and mud with which they were surrounded, could not be seen, though they were distinctly felt and traced by the feet of the men, who were wading up to their necks amongst them.

The waters of the loch having about this period begun to rise again to their usual level, no further researches could be made; nor was any thing discovered which could throw light upon the period or nature of the catastrophe by which so numerous a flotilla had been suddenly overwhelmed at this spot. The only articles of any interest that were found in or near the canoes above described,

consist, *1st*, Of the head of a battle-axe of iron and steel, or perhaps of a mixture of iron and silver, of good workmanship, but not differing in size or shape from many well-known specimens of ancient arms. *2d*, Of the head of a mop, which had obviously been used for spreading the pitch over the canoes. It is made of several pieces of coarse cloth of different colours, with a large iron nail passed through them, exactly in the same way that the sort of mop now used in cleaning carriage-wheels is made at this day. It is remarkable, that after this mop had been a short time in a warm room, the pitch which had remained among the rags became liquid, and is now as fresh and black as it ever can have been. The pitch on the canoes is of a whitish colour, and more resembles paint. *3d*, A rude oak club, about three feet in length, and of a size that would render it necessary for a man of ordinary strength to employ both his hands in wielding it. *4th*, A few teeth, apparently those of large cattle, but of which only the hard enamelled parts remain entire; and, *5th*, A considerable quantity of hazel nuts. No traces of human bones have been found; and it does not appear that there is any popular tradition or belief in the neighbouring country concerning the canoes, except a vague rumour that upwards of thirty had been sunk, and were still lying in the place where the two canoes formerly discovered were found, which, from the circumstances above detailed, seems to be well founded.