

A cairn on the Keills Peninsula, N Knapdale, Argyll

by *A J Haddow and D Hannay*

This cairn was noted by one of us (A J H) in 1935 while taking a short cut across the hills from Cosandrochaid to Keills Chapel and recently it has been revisited several times. It lies near the S end of the long ridge of Druim Buidhe (NGR NR 700812). On the 1900 edition of the six-inch map (Argyllshire, sheet CLXXIX, NW) the identification is with the 240 ft spot-height, lying just S of the march-dyke bounding Lon an t-Sagairt. The cairn is at, or within a few yards of, this point. Dr Euan W MacKie, of the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow University, has visited the site with the writers. As it is not mentioned by Campbell and Sandeman (1964) in their invaluable survey of the monuments of Mid Argyll, and as they have shown that in this area 'round cairns' rarely occur at heights over 200 ft, a preliminary note seems desirable.

The cairn itself is greatly denuded and forms only a gentle mound, completely turfed over. As permission has not been sought, no attempt has been made to open it, but probing suggests that it is composed of the usual loose stones. There is little sign of disturbance in the central area, and a total absence of the loose slabs which so often indicate a plundered cist. The kerb stones, which are the main feature of the cairn as it now is, are not large. The tallest is just under three ft high, the broadest approximately four ft wide. The accompanying figure, made from a tape and compass survey (true bearings are shown on the sketch) suggests that the cairn was egg-shaped, with a main axis, approximately 28 ft long, pointing approximately NNE by N but it must be emphasised that proper excavation would be necessary before the original outline could be established with confidence (fig 2). Until this has been done it would be premature to indicate the geometry more precisely and the line in the figure, indicating the probable shape, was not computed but was fitted by eye. It will be remembered that the cists in many of the round cairns in this area, particularly those around Kilmartin (Craw 1929) show this type of (midsummer sunrise) orientation (Somerville 1923). Almost due N of the cairn, about 135 ft from the centre, a pair of boulders with a narrow gap between them lies on a flat area of exposed bedrock. There are various prominent features on the N skyline but a line from the cairn through the gap between the boulders does not align with any of them.

Now inconspicuous, the cairn must at one time have been very prominent. It can still be seen easily, when one knows where to look, both from the Tayvallich-Keills road and, at a distance of 1½-2 miles, from the Achnamara-Kilmory road, E of Loch Sween and N of Castle Sween. Rapid excavation would be possible as the monument is small and the bedrock close below the surface. Proper examination might prove worth while as so many of the cairns in the area were crudely excavated by amateurs in the last century. Many of these are on low-lying acid soil, and the accounts sometimes mention black unctuous substance, presumably the macerated body. The particular interest of the monument here discussed is that, though the adjoining soil

is peaty, the cairn is situated on the crest of the ridge and any bones it may contain will have been exposed to rain water only and could be in good condition. Even a few scraps would permit radiocarbon dating, badly needed for this area.

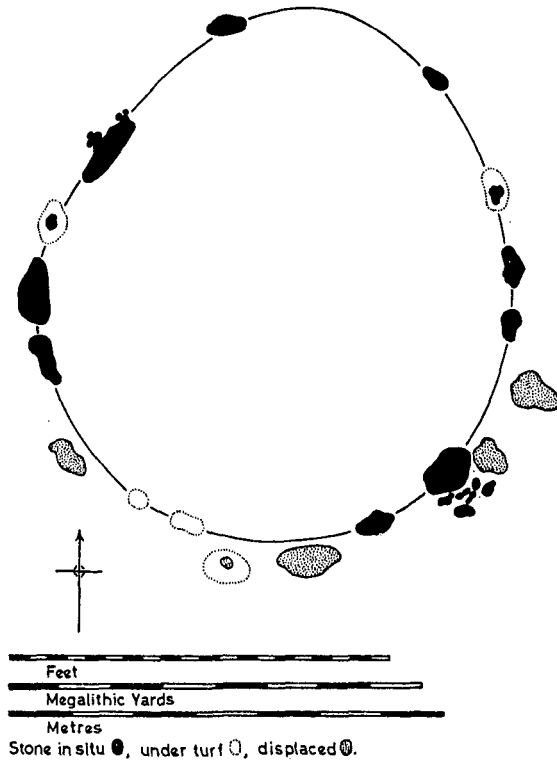


FIG 2 Plan of cairn on the Keills Peninsula, Argyll

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