X.

EXCAVATIONS AT CLACH NA TIOMPAN, WESTER GLEN ALMOND, PERTHSHIRE.

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Introduction.

In the course of compiling a corpus of Scottish Neolithic chambered cairns three outliers of the Clyde–Carlingford group had to be considered. These outliers are in Perthshire, at Kindrochat near Comrie,[1] Rottenreoch near Crieff,[2] and Clach na Tiompan in Wester Glen Almond. Kindrochat had been examined by Professor Childe in 1930.[3] Now that opportunity offered, it seemed desirable to excavate at Clach na Tiompan with a view to comparing its lay-out with that at Kindrochat and establishing its structural affinities with the many variations of ground plan within the Clyde–Carlingford group. Also it was hoped to augment the sparse series of grave goods which this group of chambered cairns has produced. In this we were disappointed, as there were no relics.

Clach na Tiompan would seem to be situated on the NE. fringe of the area occupied by the builders of Clyde–Carlingford cairns. There are long cairns in Kincardineshire, Aberdeenshire and Banffshire,[4] but their structure and ritual have not yet been investigated. Westward, Clach na Tiompan and the other Perthshire examples are linked with the long cairns or remnants of long cairns on Stockiemuir,[5] Dumbartonmuir,[6] Blochairn [7] and Cardross.[8] These in turn lead back to the main grouping of Clyde–Carlingford cairns in Arran, Bute, Kintyre and Argyll.

The long cairn now under consideration was referred to by Professor Childe in 1943,[9] but had previously been described by F. R. Coles,[10] who also

[1] *P.S.A.S.*, lxiv (1929–30), 264–72; *Ibid.*, lxv (1930–1), 281–93.

[2] *Ibid.*, lxxvii (1942–3), 31.

[3] See also *Discovery and Excavation, Scotland, 1955* (1956), 23, for a recently recognised ruined chambered cairn possibly of Clyde–Carlingford type at Dull, Strathtay. If of Clyde–Carlingford type, the siting would lend emphasis to the suggestion of a west to east penetration along Loch Tay (see *infra* under Discussion, p. 120).

[4] *P.S.A.S.*, lviii (1923–4), 24; lix (1924–5), 21, 24–26; *T. Buchan Field Club*, xvii, ii (1952), 60; *P.S.A.S.*, lxiii (1928–9), 34, 63.

[5] *P.S.A.S.*, lxxxiii (1948–9), 230.

[6] Unpublished.

[7] Ure, D., *History of Rutherglen and East Kilbride* (1793), 87.

[8] *Council for British Archæology, 9th report, Scottish Regional Group* (1954), 9.

[9] *P.S.A.S.*, lxxvii (1942–3), 35.

[10] *Ibid.*, xlv (1910–1), 98–100.

drew attention to the conspicuous standing-stone 143 ft. SE. of the E. end of the long cairn, which traditionally is part of a circle of standing-stones. It seemed desirable to examine this ruined site at the same time as the long cairn was being excavated (see p. 122).

The sites lie some 6 miles from the head of Glen Almond and $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles above Newton Bridge, where the River Almond turns S. to flow through

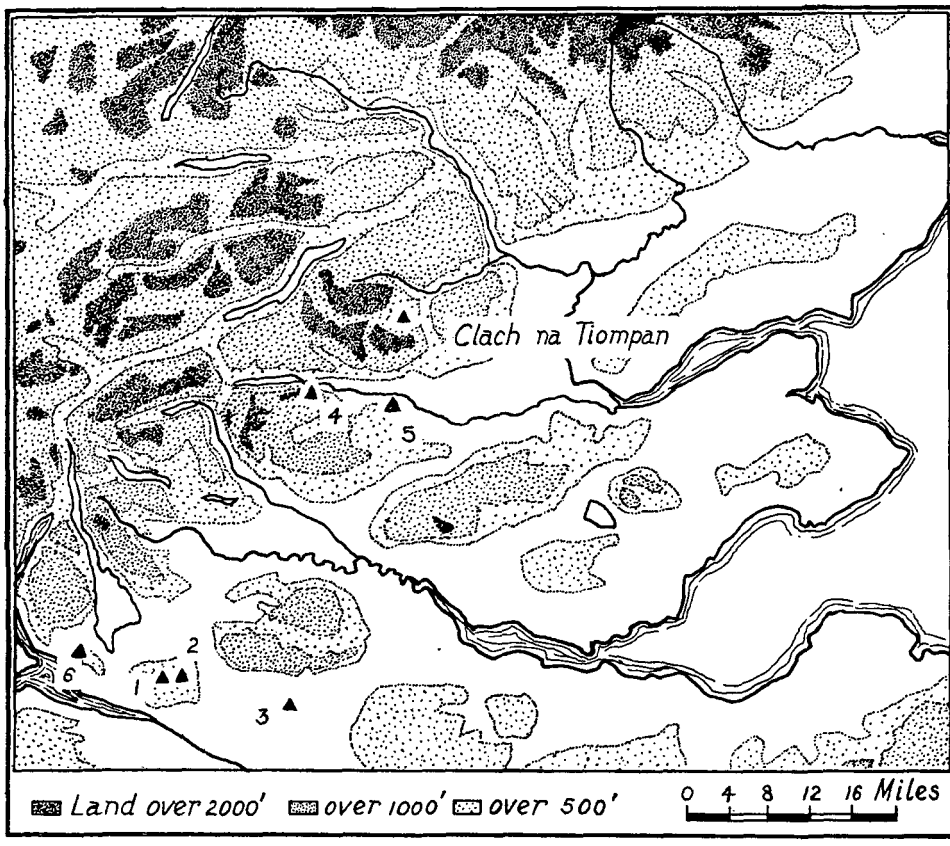

Fig. 1. Distribution Map of Clyde–Carlingford cairns in Central Scotland: 1. Dumbartonmuir; 2. Stockiemuir; 3. Blochairn; 4. Kindrochat; 5. Rottenreoch; 6. Cardross.

the Sma' Glen to join the River Tay above Perth (National Grid reference to the sites 27/831329). From the head of Wester Glen Almond an old right-of-way crosses the watershed to the N. and comes down on the S. shore of Loch Tay at Ardtalnaig. If, as seems likely, the builders of Clyde–Carlingford tombs were in some way linked with early prospecting for copper and tin, then it is significant that copper occurs at Ardtalnaig.

The sites are situated on a terrace 50 ft. above the river and on the 900-foot contour, at the foot of the hills which rise steeply to the N. Many

hillocks of morainic material are noticeable on the valley floor, and both sites were found to be built on this moraine material which consisted of yellowish sandy clay with pebbles of various sizes.

The excavations were carried out during a remarkably fine week in April and a wet week in September/October 1954. Clach na Tiompan is a scheduled site, and excavation was sanctioned by the Ministry of Works. Our thanks are due to the Ministry, to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland for a generous grant towards the cost of excavation, to Major-General Sir John Whitaker, Bart., owner of the site, for permission to dig and for his kind interest, to Sir William Rootes for allowing us to use an estate road for access to the site, to Mr D. A. P. Downs who drew the plans in the field, and to all those who provided the necessary labour.

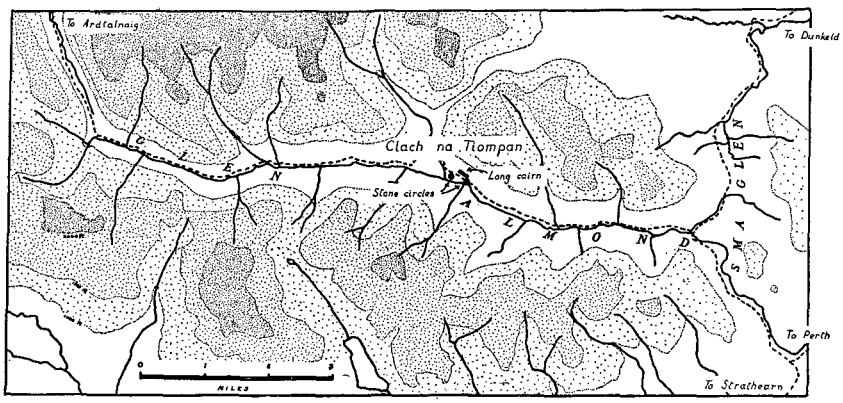

Fig. 2. Map of Wester Glen Almond.

Description of the Cairn.

The long cairn extends for 190 ft. E. and W.[1] along the river terrace. Beyond the road which runs along its southern margin the ground falls steeply to the river. To the N. there is a peaty hollow before the hills rise. The cairn has acted as a dam to the water draining off this hillside, and as a result water has collected along the northern margin before seeping gently through and round the cairn. This fact caused considerable trouble when excavating the burial chambers. The cairn has been severely robbed, mainly for road metal.

The cairn is 20 ft. wide at the W. end and 38 ft. wide at the E. end. It rises gradually in height from W. to E. The material of the cairn is round water-worn boulders and stones among which a number were of quartzite. There was very little accumulation of earth, and as a result much of the cairn was free of turf. Before excavation the inner ends of three large cists

[1] Although the long cairn is actually orientated SE.–NW., for ease of description it has been treated as lying E. and W.

or chambers were visible, with their main axes at right angles to the main axis of the cairn, but a fourth chamber, shown on Cole's plan, had been totally destroyed.

Excavation of the Cairn—Sections through the Cairn Material.

Three partial sections were cut across the cairn (fig. 3). The first, 25 ft. long and 4 ft. 6 ins. wide, was 12 ft. from the apparent eastern end of the cairn. The primary purpose of this cut was to test for the existence of a chamber orientated along the axis of the cairn and entered at the eastern end, as at Kindrochat. No sign of such a chamber was found, but the section was instructive in showing how the cairn material had been made

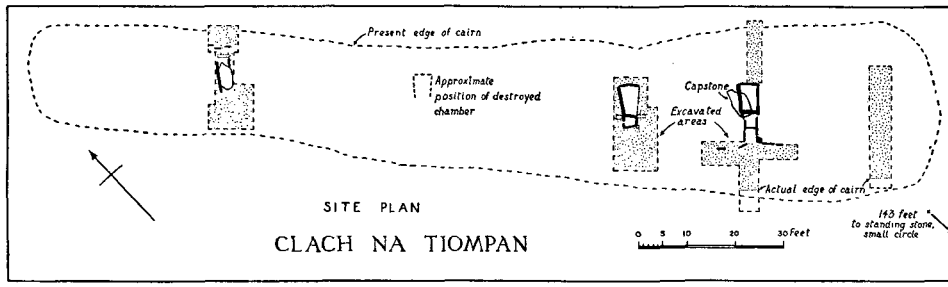

Fig. 3.

up. There was earth and some vegetation on the top, and earth occurred in the interstices between the stones immediately above the natural moraine material. Between these layers there were considerable air spaces between the stones. At the bottom along the medial line of the cairn there were large boulders of a size that could only be handled alone with considerable effort. There was no trace of any structure in the cairn nor of a retaining wall at the edge.

The second section was carried from beyond the back slab of the eastern-most chamber to the northern edge of the cairn. Here the general picture was the same. Immediately behind the back slab of the chamber the stones were more angular and were carefully and closely laid. At the northern end of the section the spaces between the stones were filled with very wet black clayey earth which had accumulated due to the drainage conditions of the site.

The third section was between the back of chamber 3 and the northern edge of the cairn. The cairn narrows to 21 ft. at this point, and only a couple of feet behind the end of the chamber inward slanting slabs were found which had the appearance of being a revetment wall (fig. 6, Pl. XXV, 2). The slabs lay in a double row. The inner row were slightly bedded in the

natural subsoil. The outer row were lying on cairn stones and were resting at an increased angle. Over these slabs were large stones of the usual cairn material and a considerable admixture of brown earth. On the northern margin of the cutting where conditions were very damp a layer of grey clay, which had the appearance of being a natural deposit, overlay the subsoil.

Excavation of the Façade and Easternmost Chamber.

Of the easternmost chamber (chamber 1) the back slab to the north, two side slabs and a capstone were visible before excavation. The capstone was the only one extant and still partly overhung the burial chamber. On excavation it was found that there had been a façade of slabs on either side of the entrance to the chamber. Like all the structural stones in the cairn they were set very slightly into the natural. This may not have been done on purpose, but may have been the result of setting them on a wet clayey subsoil. Smaller stones had been set on the outside of the façade stones to act as wedges and prevent the feet of the larger slabs from moving forward. In the only place where the back of the façade slabs was examined a large boulder had been placed to provide a firm backing.

In front of the façade slabs to the E. of the entrance to chamber 1 and below the cairn material were traces of carbonised substance. It consisted of tiny fragments scattered sporadically against the front of the façade stones. Below and separated from it by from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 ins. of dark sticky earth were thin black greasy smears, in one case underlying one of the wedge stones of the façade. These smears probably represented the old turf level. Two of the façade stones had fallen forwards and were lying flat. There was no cairn material below them but there was a little of the black sticky earth. In front of the façade the cairn material was found to a depth of 2 ft. 3 ins. and extended 11 ft. down the southern slope. When the two façade stones fell there was no cairn material in front of them. This suggests that the façade was designed to show and that the cairn material must have fallen forward subsequently. Such a quantity of cairn material in front of the façade is surprising. At present the cairn material is flush with the tops of the façade stones and the side stones of chamber 1 (see also p. 121).

The investigation of the façade was limited by the time available, but apparently the entrance to chamber 1 had been flanked by a row of four stones on either side. The entrance was unsymmetrical. To the W. a flat façade stone lying horizontally on edge formed one side of the entrance, while on the E. a portal stone 5 ft. high projected above the surrounding stones and made a conspicuous feature of the entry.

The original blocking of the entrance was found in place. Six carefully laid horizontal slabs were resting on the paved floor, wedged between the portal stone and the first stone of the western wall of the chamber. Outside

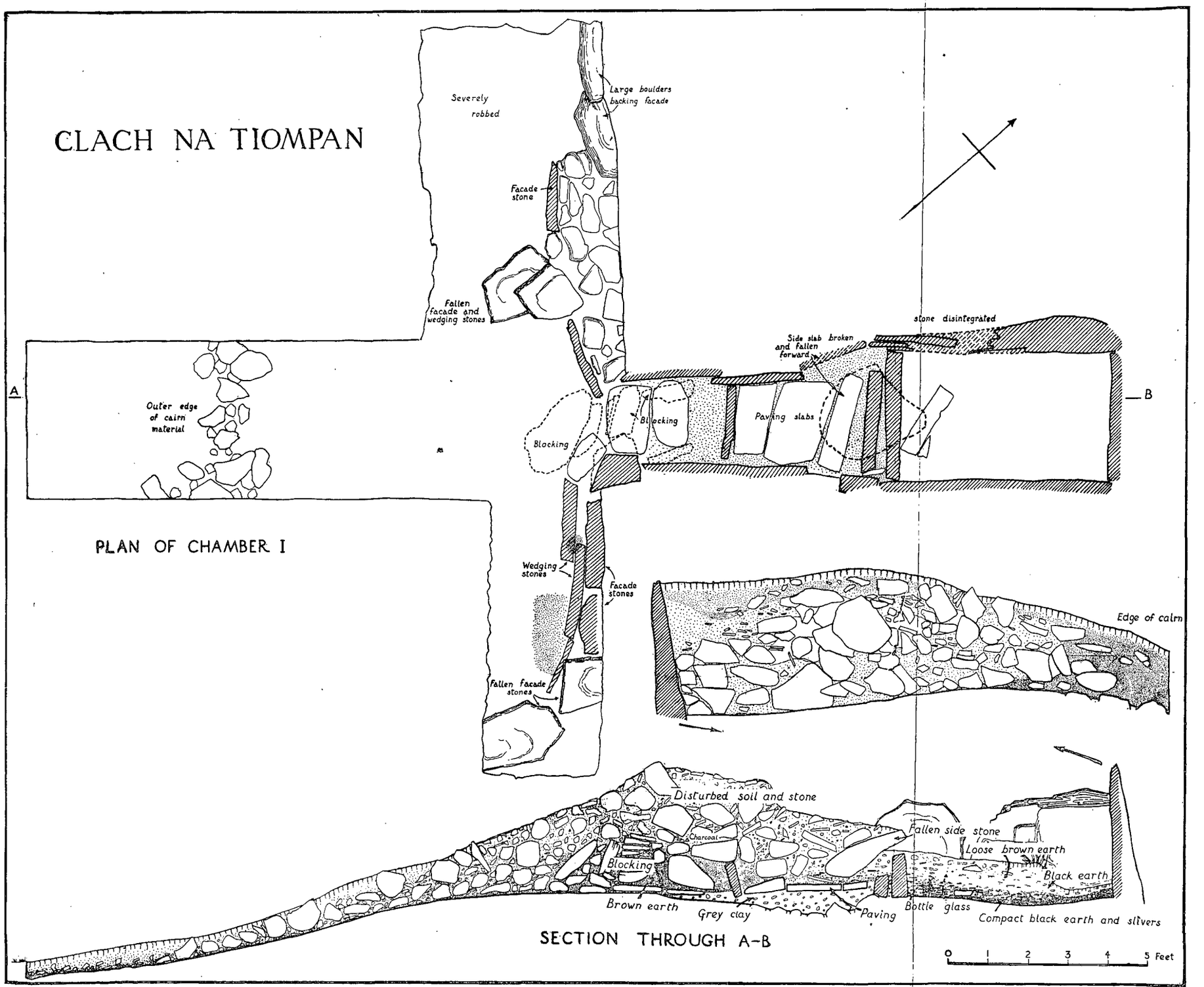

Fig. 4.

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[*To face p.* 116.

two large slabs had been set leaning against the built blocking. The outer compartment of the chamber was also filled with blocking consisting of small boulders.

The façade and entry when first erected must have been impressive approached as they are uphill.

Chamber 1.

Chamber 1 was divided into three compartments by septal slabs. The outer septal slab rested on grey clay. The inner, which consisted of two slabs lying one in front of the other, lay on the natural subsoil.

The innermost compartment had been very thoroughly rifled. Dark humus lay on top of loose brown earth both recently accumulated. Beneath was a layer of hard dark earth containing many slivers of stone from the disintegrating western side slab. This layer may represent at least a part of the Neolithic level disturbed by the 19th-century roadmakers.

In the middle compartment the side slabs were considerably decayed. The floor was formed of smoothly laid and closely fitting paving set at a higher level than the floor of the inner compartment. The paving had been set in a layer of imported grey clay containing numerous small round pebbles and lying above the natural subsoil. This clay was quite absent from the inner compartment. In the outer compartment paving was again laid on clay which thinned away at the entrance where the pavement rested on the natural subsoil. The clay must have been laid down after the side slabs and inner pair of septal slabs were in position, but before the outer septal slab and paving were constructed.

The blocking in the outer compartment consisted of two upright stones set against the side stones at a higher level than the paving, between which a number of boulders were wedged together, one of quartzite.

CHAMBER 2.

Chamber 2 was much ruined; indeed the western stone of the inner compartment was the only slab upright in its original position. The reconstruction of the ground plan of this chamber is tentative, due to the fact that the constructional stones had been so slightly set into the subsoil. This combined with the wet conditions made it impossible to recover on the ground the exact position of the fallen stones. The inner compartment would have had a height of at least 3 ft. and was wider at the inner end. The end and the western slabs were in position, though the former was leaning inwards. The eastern slab had fallen and had exposed behind it two large boulders which had acted as a backing. The floor had been covered by a double layer of paving. The lower layer consisted of large slabs carefully laid but not completely covering the natural subsoil. On top were numerous smaller slabs. Many of these rested directly on the lower paving with no

accumulation of earth between indicating the approximate contemporaneity of the two layers.

The two septal slabs were both small slight stones different in character from those in chamber 1.

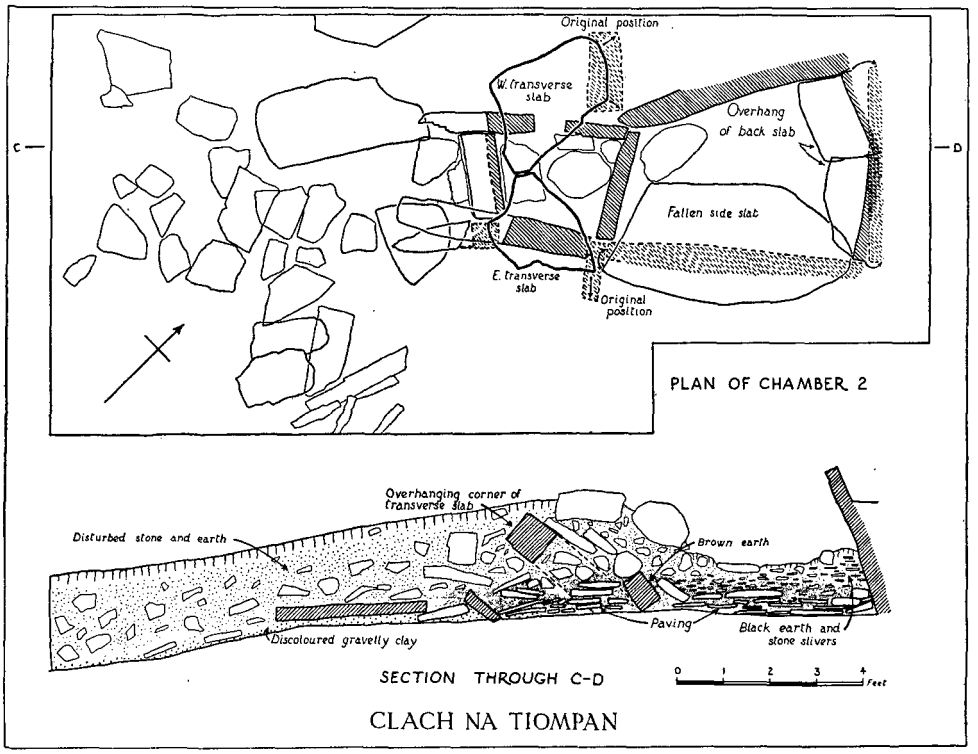


Fig. 5.

The outer compartment was very ruined but had been paved in a similar way to the inner compartment. At no point was the paving of chamber 2 comparable to that of chamber 1.

To the S. of the outer compartment the reconstruction of the plan is very uncertain. Several pieces of disintegrated slabs lying to the E. may be the remains of a ruined façade linking up with the façade to the W. of chamber 1. If this is the case, then the façade stones would have had to have been set up at least 4 ft. in front of the outer septal, presuming that the façade stones of the two chambers were in alignment. It may be noted that chamber 1 did not have a septal slab across the entrance, a further suggestion that the outer septal of chamber 2 is not indeed the entrance. Chamber 2 probably had an outer compartment similar to that in chamber 1.

A curious feature of chamber 2 was two very large slabs which were found leaning southwards over the side slabs and wedged together, thus blocking the middle of the compartment. At first they were thought to have been upright slabs set outside the chamber and at right angles to its main axis, perhaps in some way connected with supporting the roofing of the chamber, as are the tall slabs outside the chamber at Kilchoan, Argyll [1] (the stones are marked on the plan as "transverse slabs" and their possible original positions have been hatched). The W. slab would have been let 4–6 ins. into the ground and the stone would have stood 3 ft. 4 ins. high if this supposition is correct. However, it is just possible that the slabs are in fact capstones from the front and central compartments of the chamber, though it is difficult to understand how they could have reached the positions in which they were found even in the course of the almost total wrecking of the chamber.

Chamber 2 had been ruined in a rather curious way. All but two stones are inclined towards the S. and some have been pulled through an angle of 65°. It is almost as though the stones having been loosened had then been hauled downhill by some mechanical means and this process had completed the demolition of the outer compartment. But it is difficult to attribute the destruction to recent times. The front slabs lay in discoloured gravelly clay immediately above the natural subsoil with no debris beneath them. The eastern side slab of the inner compartment had collapsed with only a slight accumulation of earth below it.

Chamber 3.

The westernmost chamber was even more ruined than the middle chamber. Only the stump of what had been the back slab remained. The main western side slab was leaning slightly towards the interior of the chamber but the base was probably in its original position. The eastern side slab had broken in two and one-half had fallen across the chamber. To the S. only two bedded stones were found and it was not possible to reconstruct the plan. From the extent of the chamber it seems probable that it was similar in plan to the others.

When the floor of the chamber was scraped, darker disturbed patches appeared in the natural subsoil which at this point was dry and gravelly. The stains were from 1 to 2 ins. in depth. One of the stains was found to be under the original position of the fallen western side slab which had been removed in the course of excavation. A centrally placed stain may possibly indicate the position of paving or a septal slab which, though they would have rested on the natural subsoil, may have been removed by pick and shovel which would have disturbed the underlying gravel.

[1] *P.S.A.S.*, VI (1865–6), 353.

Discussion.

The geographical position of the long cairn can be interpreted in one of two ways: either it represents a northern outlier to the examples in Strath Earn at Kindrochat and Rottenreoch, or else it is indicative of a parallel

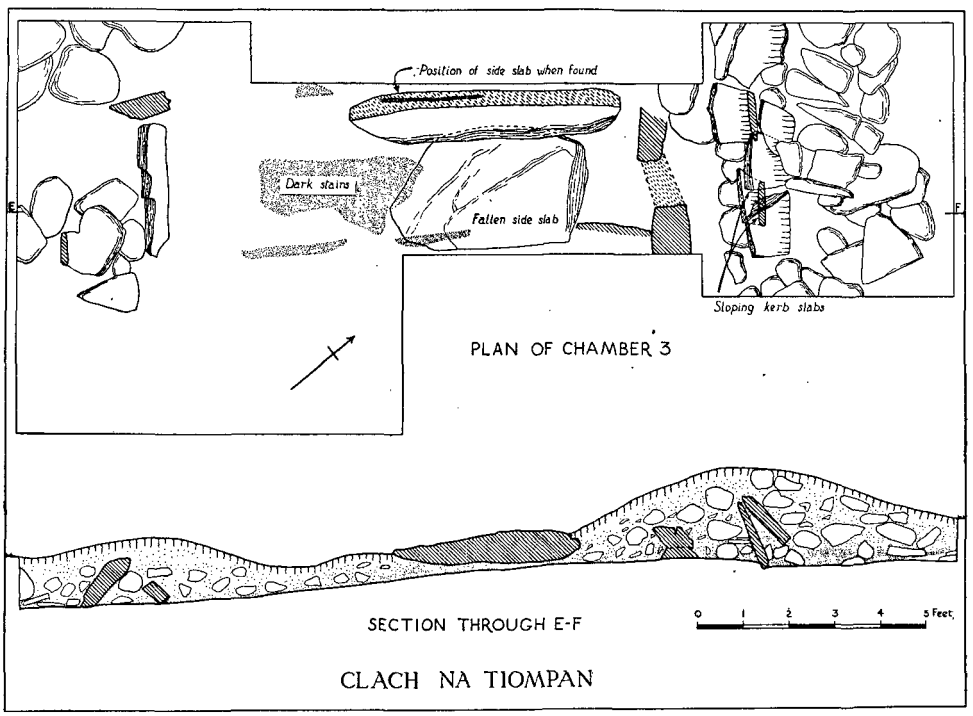


Fig. 6.

W.–E. penetration farther N. along Loch Tay. The first interpretation is unlikely for two reasons. In plan, Clach na Tiompan is not particularly linked to Kindrochat. At Clach na Tiompan there was a multiplicity of side chambers and the only concession to the traditional layout was to make the eastern end higher and wider. If the usually accepted theory of degeneration is applied, it will be classed as more degenerate than Kindrochat. Secondly, in the transverse slabs of chamber 2 there is perhaps a feature not hitherto associated with Clyde–Carlingford tombs. Finally, it is unlikely that the long cairn builders in Strath Earn would cross the relatively difficult country of the intervening watershed between the valleys of the Earn and

the Almond. From its siting Clach na Tiompan has been built by people entering Wester Glen Almond from the N. or W. If this is so, then we can accept Sir Lindsay Scott's route from the head of Loch Fyne or Loch Long by Crianlarich and Killin and the shores of Loch Tay.[1] Copper at Ardtalnaig on the southern shore may have been the magnet.

In two features Clach na Tiompan can be related to cairns in Wigtownshire and Ayrshire. In his discussion of the structure of the chambers in the Cairnholy excavations,[2] Professor Piggott drew attention to the fact that the burial chamber was a massive closed cist to which access could never have been gained from the outer segment and portal of the chamber. In fact, the traditional tomb had become two distinct elements. The eastern chamber at Clach na Tiompan exhibits similar though less fully developed features. The middle and outer compartments do not give the impression of forming a single unit along with the larger inner compartment. The tendency, unlike the traditional gallery grave lay-out, is to regard the burial chamber as distinct from the portal and antechamber. The difference in floor-level is one of the facts which tends to dissociate the burial chamber from the rest of the structure. The floor of the two outer compartments was made up to a considerably higher level than the floor of the main burial chamber. The double septal is another indication of the same division. This feature was also found in a similar position in the chamber at Hailes, Largs, Ayrshire,[3] the plan of which appears to be closely comparable to the Clach na Tiompan chambers.

It has been suggested that the façade in front of the chamber was meant to be seen as when it fell there was no loose cairn material under it. At the time of excavation the cairn material was flush with the tops of the façade and side stones of the chamber. If the outermost capstone had been covered originally the slope of the cairn material would have been too great and the stones of the façade would not have been enough to hold it in check. Yet the stone material on the slope outside the façade, besides an unknown quantity which has been totally removed from the site originally, must have been piled on the cairn, and the presence of these fallen stones on the slope below the façade indicates that the angle of the cairn behind the façade must have been quite steep. If so, the capstone of the main compartment was in all probability covered.

The structure of the façade at Clach na Tiompan is comparable to those at Unival and Clettraval, North Uist.[4] In both monuments the orthostats stand on, and not in, the natural subsoil. Moreover, at Unival the stones were supported at the back by massive stone abutments built into the cairn face.

[1] *P.P.S.*, XVII (1951), 35.
[2] *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXIII (1948–9), 116–7.
[3] Forthcoming, *Coll. Ayrs. A.S.*
[4] *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXII (1947–8), 9; *ibid.*, LXIX (1934–5), 488–9.

Excavation of the Stone Circle and Small Cairn.

The large standing-stone, 4 ft. 3 ins. high, to the SE. of the E. end of the long cairn is traditionally the site of a circle of standing-stones. The stump

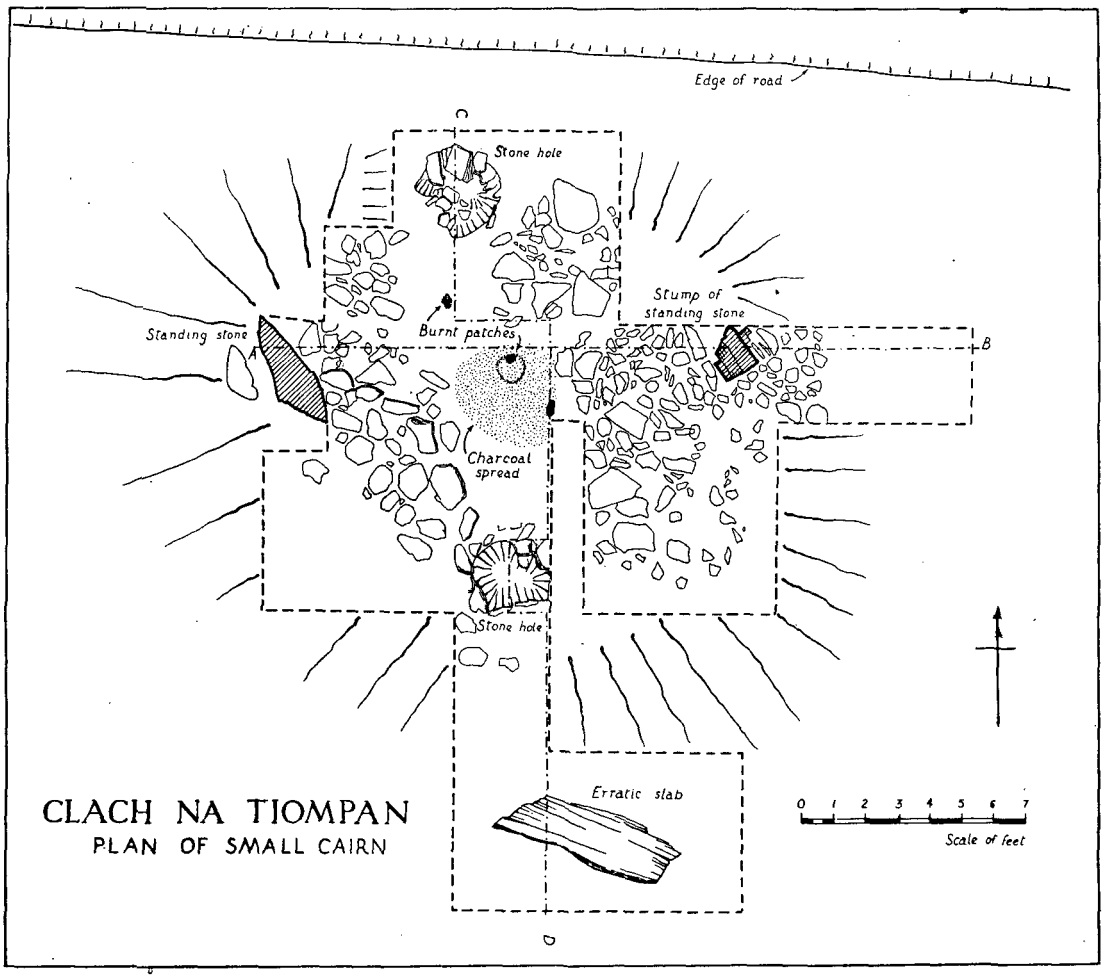


Fig. 7.

of a second stone shows through the turf to the E. Being immediately adjacent to the road the circle has been an obvious quarry, and the area shows signs of considerable interference.

A trench 3 ft. wide and extending 20 ft. E. of the large standing-stone was opened. At the base of the standing-stone and immediately below the turf there was an area of stone packing consisting of water-worn boulders

8 ins. to 1 ft. in diameter extending inwards for 2 ft. from the face of the standing-stone. The packing material was left *in situ*, as it was impracticable to shore up the big stone.

Five ft. E. of the edge of the stone packing, typical water-worn cairn material was found immediately below the turf extending up to and around the stump of a standing-stone. In the section beyond this stone the cairn material thinned out over a distance of 5 ft., and was found to be lying on a slightly rising mound of natural gravel.

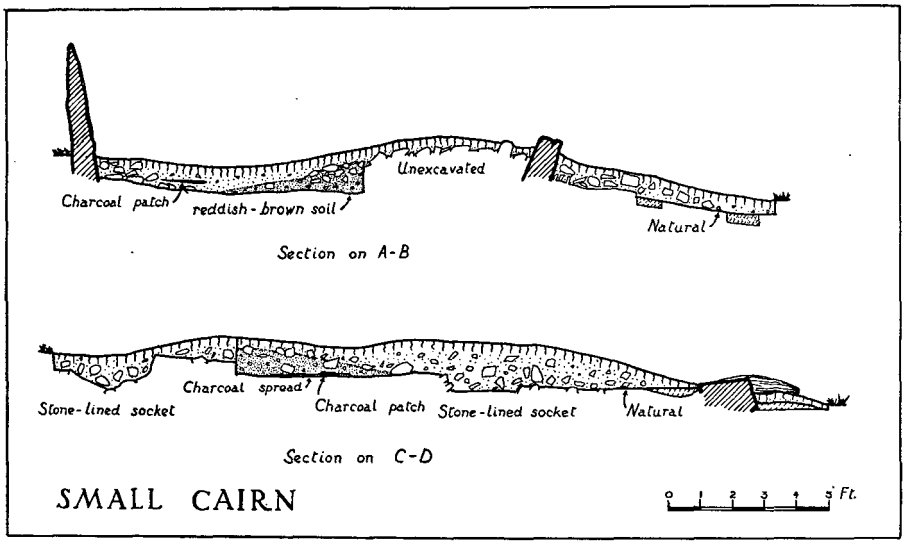


Fig. 8.

The south-eastern quadrant of the circle was deturfed and the cairn material was again found immediately below turf-level. The edge of this cairn material formed an arc together with that already excavated.

A second trench, 14 ft. 6 ins. long and 3 ft. wide, was laid out to the S. of the first. At 3 ft. 5 ins. from the southern edge of trench 1 a roughly circular patch of darker soil, 2 ft. 8 ins. by 1 ft. 11 ins., appeared on the surface of the natural gravel. The rim had been packed with six large boulders and smaller stones. When the dark soil had been cleared a shallow socket was exposed, which may mark the position of one of the missing stones from the circle.

The south-western quadrant of the circle was deturfed and cairn material mixed with dark friable earth was found immediately below the surface. The outer edge of this cairn material was delimited by a setting of five large boulders set in a shallow arc from the southern edge of the large standing-stone to the SW. tip of the socket in the southern section.

A cutting to the N. of the first trench exposed to the E. the mound of cairn material and to the W. a very disturbed area in which was found the shallow broken-down socket of another missing stone. A 3-foot square was excavated in approximately the centre of the circle. Under the cairn material and overlying the natural gravel was a low mound of loose reddish loam at the base of which was a scatter of tiny fragments of carbonised wood. Within this area were two patches of more compacted earth with a higher proportion of carbonised material. Both patches were only skin deep and were found to rest on natural gravel.

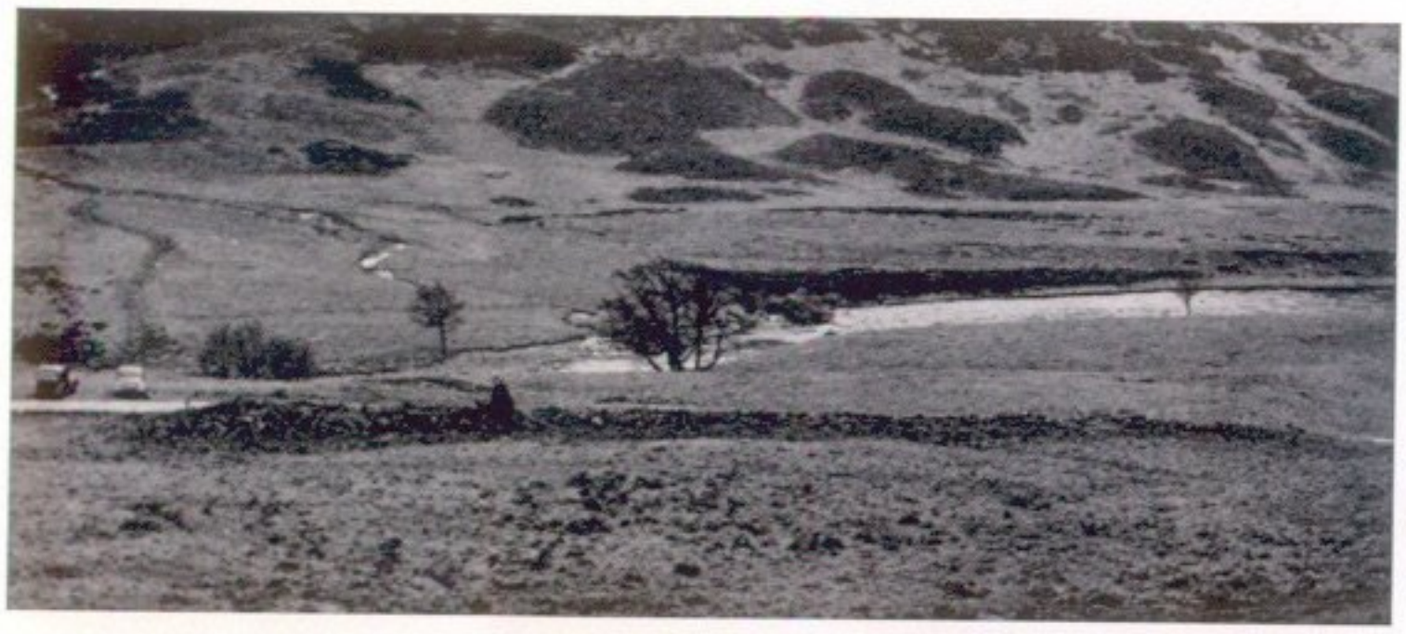
In the course of examining the stone circle over 100 quartzite pebbles were recovered.

The small circle of standing-stones and the cairn within it can be exactly paralleled barely a mile to the westward. In meadowland beside the Almond a small circle of standing-stones, hitherto unrecorded, protrude through the water-worn material of a low cairn. This is a similar type of monument to the ruined site at Clach na Tiompan. The conjunction of circle and cairn is not unknown elsewhere in Perthshire. In 1942 Mrs Alison Young excavated allied structures on the Moor of Ardoch near Fowlis Wester,[1] and among the many small stone circles of eastern Perthshire it is possible that on excavation several would show a denuded central cairn.

There is one feature of Perthshire stone circles which may be frequently noted and which is well exemplified at Clach na Tiompan. One stone of the circle is often disproportionately large. The remaining stones fall away from it in size so that the smallest stone is found opposite the largest. The situation of the large stone in the circle is not constant.

It is disappointing that neither in Wester Glen Almond nor on the Moor or Ardoch was anything found which would indicate the date of these structures. They have a degenerate and composite appearance, and if in the Bronze Age give the impression of being late in that period.

[1] *P.S.A.S.*, LXXVII (1942–3), 174–84.



1. General view of long cairn from north.

2. Sloping kerb slabs behind Chamber 3 from the east. The cairn material in the near half of the cutting has been removed.

3. View along the façade of Chamber 3 from the east.

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1. Blocking of entrance to Chamber 1 from the south.

2. Blocking of entrance to Chamber 1 with the outer slabs removed.

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1. Chamber 1 from the north, showing both septal slabs and one paving slab of the middle compartment *in situ*.

2. Chamber 1 looking through the entrance towards back slab.

The small cairn from the NE., before excavation.