

3. THE TORRAN HOARD

P.S.A.S., xviii, records that in 1885 two youths digging out a ferret at 'Craig Beoch on the farm of Torranbeg' found two bronze spearheads and a socketed gouge, which were subsequently exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.⁴ One spearhead and the gouge were acquired for the National Museum but the other spearhead has been lost; it is believed to have been retained by a nearby land-owner, Mr Bruce of Eredine, but there is also evidence of correspondence about the finds between the finders and the Factor for the Poltalloch Estate, which at that date stretched to Loch Awe. The spearheads in the Poltalloch Collection, now on loan in the National Museum, do not however include any resembling the missing one from Torran.

¹ 'On Ancient Sculpturing of Cups and Concentric Rings, &c.', *P.S.A.S.*, vi (1864-5) [published 1867], Appendix, pp. 1-148.

² 'Notice of three Cup-Marked Stones, and the Discovery of an Urn in Perthshire', *ibid.*, xv (1880-1), 82-92; 'Notes on some Undescribed Stones with Cup-Markings in Scotland', in *ibid.*, xvi (1881-2), 79-143.

³ 'On Cup-Marked Stones in the Neighbourhood of Inverness; with an Appendix on Cup-Marked Stones in the Western Islands', *ibid.*, 300-401.

⁴ References to the find: *P.S.A.S.*, xviii (1883-4), 207; xix (1884-5), 53; xciii (1959-60), 76, 87; xciv (1961-2), 39, 122; *Discovery and Excavation Scotland* (1962), 18.

In 1962 while working on a Field Survey of Mid Argyll the writer approached Mr Logan Richmond, the tenant of Torran Farm, to enquire whether he could locate the find spot of the hoard, as the name 'Craig Beoch' does not appear on the Ordnance Survey map. Mr Richmond (then aged eighty-five) could not only identify the site, but also supplied details of the find, one of the finders having been his elder brother. Mr Richmond put me in touch with Mr A. Carmichael, Torranbeg, to whom he had pointed out the findspot some forty years ago. Mr Carmichael guided us to the site, a very steep slope under a rocky scarp Creag Beathach (crag of bears, or of wild beasts), now afforested by the Forestry Commission and rendered very confused by mature and fallen timber.¹ Here, among tumbled boulders, some very large, which had fallen from the cliff above, he pointed out what he thought to be the site, under a very big rock insecurely perched on two others. The slope at this point is about 1:2, and examination seemed almost useless.

While we were examining other falls of rock nearby, in the faint hope of discovering some rock-shelter or cave which might account for the presence of the hoard, Mr Carmichael picked up from the surface of the pine-needles below the rock a bronze ring. Very slight brushing aside of pine-needles immediately disclosed two socketed axes (one worn and one apparently unused), a second ring with a small wire loop attached to it, a fragment of bronze, and behind these and resting on a stone under the rock, the socketed knife. Further examination next day produced the third axehead from the humus-layer below the needles but above the soil. Excavation under the boulder to the limit of safety yielded no other finds and no indication of any staining or other trace of further objects.

In view of the steepness of the hillside and the obviously recent rock-movements, it seems that the original hoard may have been deposited in some rock-shelter, now collapsed, under the crag, and rolled downhill with the fallen rocks to its eventual findspot. If there were other objects in the hoard, it is unfortunately probable that these lie further downhill among a mass of enormous unstable boulders and fallen trees. When the timber is eventually cleared, it might be possible to make some further search at this point, but at present this is impossible. The name 'crag of the wild beasts' seems to suggest that some sort of cave or den may have existed in the crags in the past.

The site overlooks, from about 100 ft. up the slope, the lagoon at the S. end of Loch Awe known as the Lodan, where several ancient trackways meet at the sheltered anchorage.

The Torran hoard (Pl. LVIII) consists of three socketed axes, two spearheads, a socketed gouge, a socketed knife and two rings, one of which has a small piece of wire attached. All of these forms have other representatives in the Scottish Late Bronze Age, and must date to a developed phase of this period, from the later eighth century B.C. down to the closing centuries B.C., in other words, to the Duddingston phase of the Scottish Late Bronze Age.²

The three socketed axes are of three distinct types, three-ribbed, collared and faceted, and bag-shaped.³ The last however is also a member of the Dungiven class of axe, of presumed Irish inspiration if not manufacture.⁴ The Torran example fits in well with the SW. Scottish distribution of this type. It is worth noting that the faceted axe is in mint condition, the three-ribbed looks ready to be scrapped.

The spearheads are of two types, one with a beading on each side of the socket, the other with a plain leaf-shaped blade.⁵ The socketed gouge, with collared mouth, belongs to a group found in Scotland only in the N. and W.,⁶ while the socketed knife is of Thorndon type.⁷ The two rings are comparable to annular rods of bronze found in other Scottish

¹ Nat. Grid. Ref. NM 874045.

² *ibid.*, 58-60 (maps 3-5).

³ *P.S.A.S.*, xciii (1959-60), 61 (map 6).

⁴ *P.S.A.S.*, xciii (1959-60), 54.

⁵ *ibid.*, 44, 64 (map 9); *Palaeohistoria*, ix (1963).

⁶ *ibid.*, 51. ⁷ *ibid.*, 46.

hoards such as Poolewe, Ross, Balmashanner, Angus, and the Braes of Gight, Aberdeenshire. One from Tinwald, Dumfriesshire, may have been associated with a spearhead, while rings of a comparable size were found with swords at Kelton, Kirkcudbright, and Grosvenor Crescent, Edinburgh.¹

The group of objects taken together is best considered as a personal hoard of tools and weapons, perhaps a woodworker's set, although this is not certain. By some definitions, the presence of three similar objects (here, the axes) would suggest a merchant's hoard, but the axes are of such distinct types, that if a merchant's hoard, it must have been in the nature of a travelling salesman carrying a sample of his wares. All of the socketed bronzes, axes, spearheads, knife and gouge, and the rings, could well be of Irish manufacture.² The Torran hoard is closely comparable to the group of bronzes from Monmore, Killin, Perthshire, which were apparently tied together with twine before being deposited in the ground. This hoard consists of two socketed axes, a spearhead, socketed gouge and tanged knife, nine annular rings and two other objects not matched at Torran, a bracelet and a semi-tubular ring.

Our thanks are extended to Miss Audrey Henshall of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland for assistance in examining the Torran find.

MARION CAMPBELL and J. M. COLES



The Torran Hoard

Photo. Nat. Mus. of Antiquities