

NOTICE OF CUP- AND RING-MARKED ROCKS ON THE STRONACH
RIDGE, NEAR BRODICK, IN ARRAN. BY REV. J. E. SOMERVILLE,
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The stone circles and monoliths of Arran are well known, and have been treated by various writers, notably Macarthur and Bryce, but hitherto no archaic sculpturings have been recorded as occurring in the island. I wish to call attention to an interesting group of cup- and ring-sculptures, the first, and so far as I am aware, the only one discovered there.

The markings were first observed by a shepherd some twelve years ago, who informed the late Mr Robert Hutchison of what he had seen. He visited the place along with Mr Adolf Ribbeck, Brodick, who photographed them, but apparently the discovery was not chronicled. Last summer Mr Ribbeck informed me of the markings, the last evening of my stay in the island. We visited the spot together, and though it was 9.30 p.m. I succeeded, with the long light at the end of June, in taking two photographs. This year I revisited the rock with Mr Ribbeck, and removed a good deal of the turf with a spade, and thus exposed a considerable surface. At the upper part the turf is thin, but at the lower part it is nearly 18 inches thick. The rock is on the slope of the Stronach ridge, Brodick, which separates Glen Sherrig from Glen Cloy, and which continues up to the Windmill Hill. It is reached by ascending through the Stronach wood to the highest part; a high stone,

dyke is then crossed, and on the moor, about 100 yards from the wall, the rock is to be seen.

It is a gray sandstone of the lower Old Red Sandstone series. The exposed surface lies nearly north and south, facing the east, inclined at an angle of 17° , and with the summit of Goatfell almost due north (fig. 1). There is exposed a large central portion $17\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide by 17 (E D B in plan, fig. 2). To the right of this, and at a distance of 5 feet, is another surface, 17 feet long, and with a width varying from 2 to 6 feet (A in plan), while on the left hand, about 10 feet away, and a little higher, is a small portion, with a few not very distinct marks (F in plan).

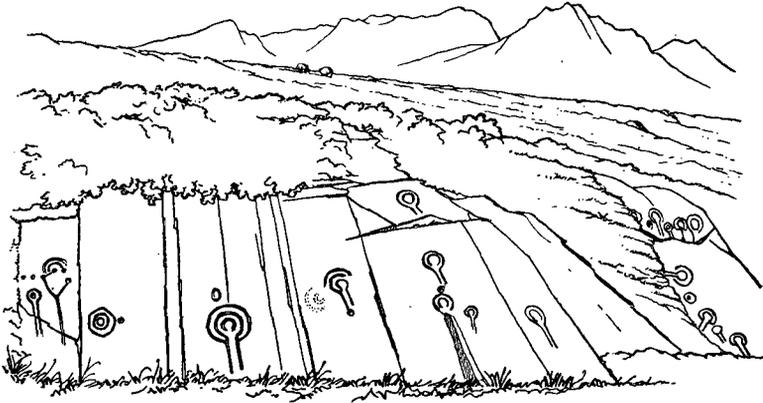


Fig. 1. View of the Rock on Stronach Ridge, with the Ben Nuish Range behind.

The large central part is the most interesting. It is divided by perpendicular lines of fracture into five distinct sections. The accompanying sketch (fig. 3) and photograph (fig. 4) will give some idea of the appearance and character of the sculpturing of the group at the right side of the central part (marked A on the plan, fig. 2). Upon it some eight groups of circles can be counted, besides other marks to be afterwards described. We removed a considerable amount of the turf at the upper part without discovering any new marks. At the lower part, where the turf was very thick, and beside the circles, are to be seen some deeply grooved

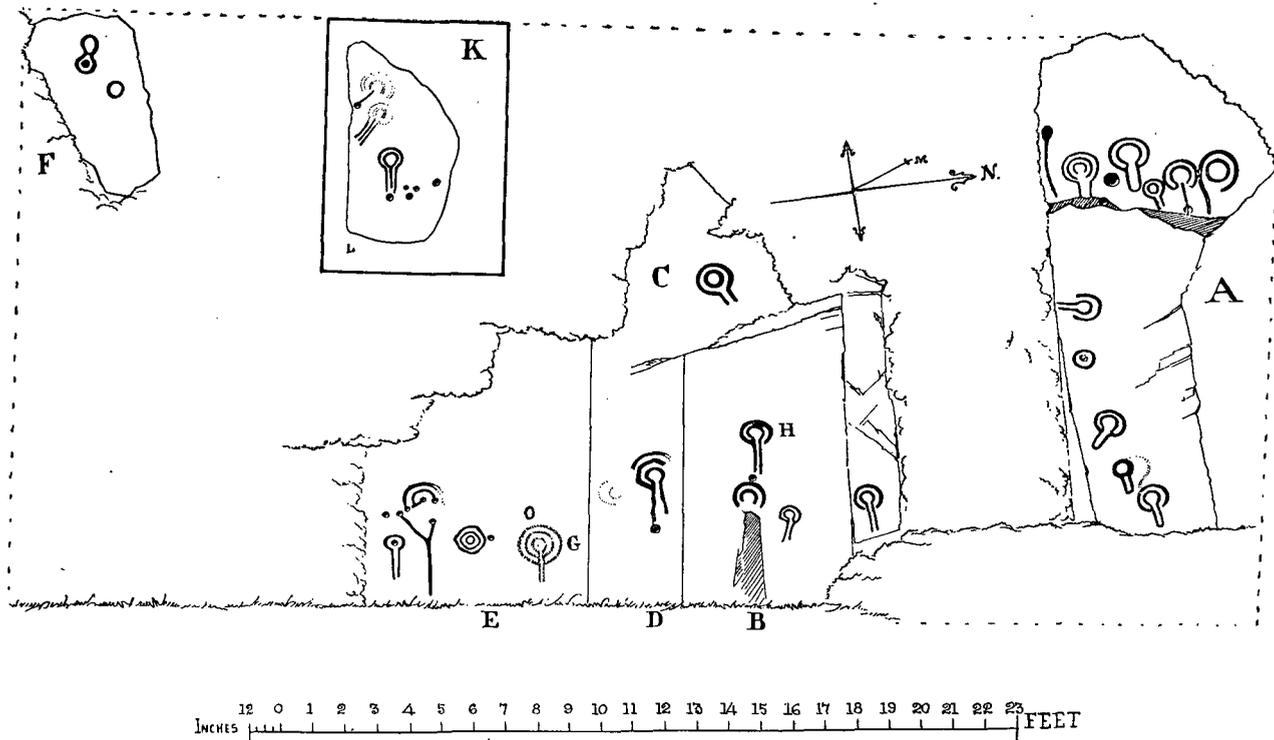


Fig. 2. General Plan of the Cup- and Ring-Marks on Stronach Ridge.

marks, running from left to right, which were perplexing, but they seem to be the result of weathering, or of running water.

Certain things in these Arran sculptures call for attention. They differ from what is commonly found elsewhere. The greatest number of rings in a group is three. This occurs twice, but two is the general number. They cannot be called cup- and ring-marks in the ordinary sense, for the cups and the rings seldom occur together. There are only three cups



Fig. 3. (From a Photograph by A. Ribbeck, Brodick.)

within rings. Instead of a cup at the centre of the rings, as is usual, there is a flat circular surface. Indeed, from the depth of the surrounding ring, the enclosed surface has sometimes the appearance of being elevated.

I have called these markings circles or rings, but they are often more like loops than circles. This is most noticeable on the long portion of rock on the right hand in the general plan, which is shown on a larger scale in figs. 3 and 4.

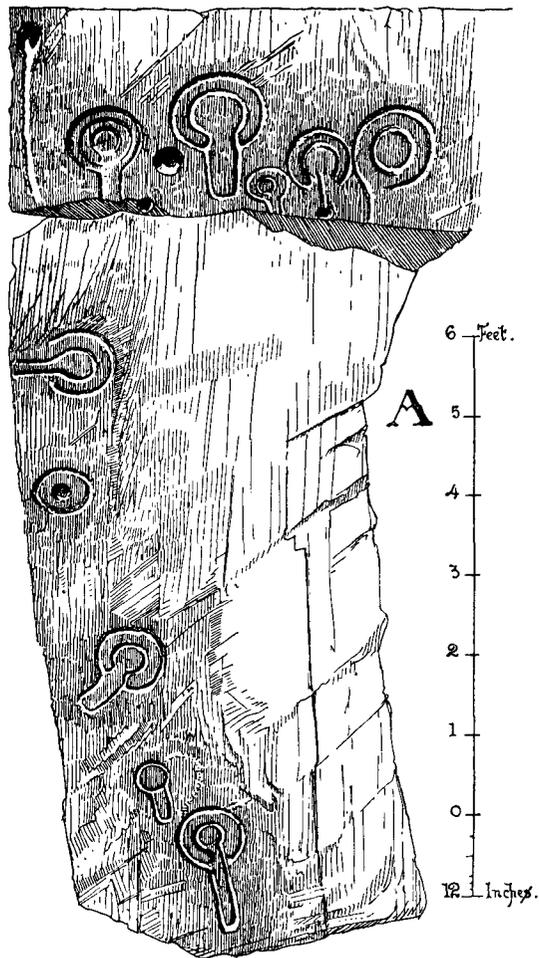


Fig. 4. Enlarged view of rock surface marked A on plan.

In the examples I have seen elsewhere the rings are concentric, generally with a channel proceeding from the cup to the outer circle or beyond; but in the Arran specimens the outer ring forms a loop, which may be 1 foot or 1 foot 3 inches in diameter, and the two sides are continued down in parallel channels for about 5 inches apart for a foot or more. The circles exhibit distinct marks of having been made with a pointed instrument, and are not in every instance smoothed.

In the left section of the central part is a curious set of marks shown in fig. 5. It contains parts of circles and six cups, some of which are connected by channels, and two of these meet in a general one at the base, the whole having somewhat the appearance of the Hebrew letter Tsaddi.

On the long narrow portion of rock to the right (A in fig. 4) containing nine sets of circles or loops, as previously described, two cups are found standing alone, one of them with a long groove or gutter.

No order or arrangement is discernible in these sculpturings, and their channels are inclined at different angles.

On the small bit of rock 10 feet to the left (F in plan, fig. 2) are some marks that have become indistinct through weathering; the best preserved resemble two small circles united like a figure of eight (F, fig. 5). Nearer the summit of the ridge, some 80 yards distant, and looking right north to the top of Goatfell, a piece of rock some 8 feet long projects from the turf (see K, fig. 6). On its sides are five cups, with some channels radiating from them, or perhaps I ought to say conducting to them. But here there are only vague remains of circles. Doubtless there are many more sculptures covered by the turf, for the rock of this neighbourhood lends itself better than that of most of the island to such a purpose.

This Arran series seems to constitute a special type of markings. The workmanship is not so good as in others I have seen, and perhaps may be a degraded form of the art or of the symbol.

Mr F. R. Coles, who went to Arran on the 4th of May in order to examine and draw these sculpturings, reports as follows :—

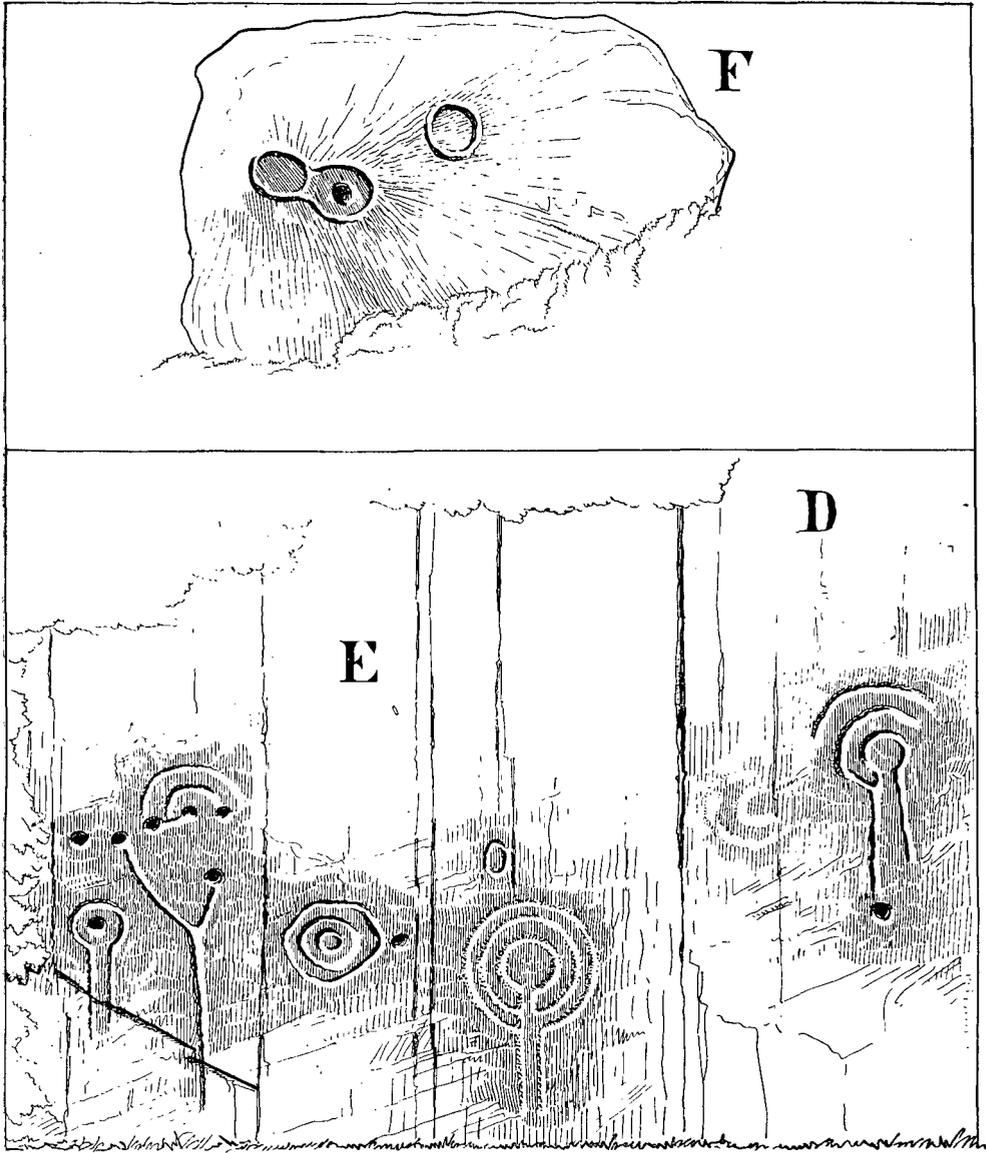


Fig. 5. Enlarged views of rock surfaces marked D, E, and F on the general plan.

Under the guidance of Mr A. Ribbeck, I reached the Stronach ridge on the morning of May 5th, and then laid off a general plan (see fig. 2) of this large rock-surface, with his ready assistance. We ensured accuracy by triangulating from almost every ring-centre; and this completed, we made notes of the varying conditions of the sculpturings, some



Fig. 6. Enlarged view of rock surface marked K on the general plan.
(From a photograph by Rev. J. E. Somerville.)

of them, notably those in the section marked A (fig. 4), being particularly deep, wide, and much smoothed. In one or two others, the tool-markings are distinct; but in the very exactly circular group in section E (fig. 5), the pick-marks are carried only so far as to sketch out, as it were, the line of the rings and grooves. The design next to this on the left is curiously irregular and rudely formed; and the design still further

west is rather an exception to the general type on this rock, consisting of seven cups and connecting grooves. Another group of simple cups, close

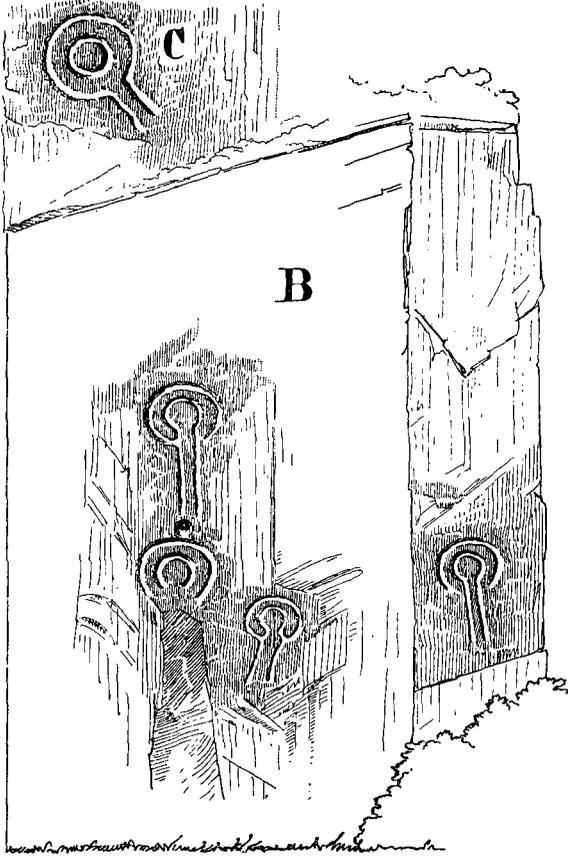


Fig. 7. Enlarged view of rock surface marked B, C on the general plan.

to one of the double-grooved 'boss' symbols, is found on the lower part of a small isolated rock 120 feet N.W. of the top of section A (see fig. 6, K). This was discovered by Mr Somerville. The rock being

sharply ridged, and therefore easily weathered, does not now show at all clearly the exact shape of the rings in which the grooves seen in my drawing terminate, but the beginnings of rings are traceable. There is in section A (fig. 4), close to the remarkable and large ring-groups, a large oval cup from which proceeds a well-picked out curving groove, over 2 feet long, the longest actual sculpturing here. The typical designs (see B and C, fig. 7) range in size from 10 inches to 1·7 inches. These designs, though never hitherto noticed in Scotland in anything like the same number, have their cognates elsewhere. For example, on a rock at Gilroannie, Stewartry of Kirkcudbright,¹ there occurs just such a plain oval 'boss' as is found here on Stronach ridge, a few inches above the right-hand group in section E. And in Yorkshire, on a stone near the Panorama Stone and on other surfaces in that neighbourhood, near Ilkley, Mr J. Romilly Allen has recorded² designs, somewhat similar to those double-grooved ring-groups of Arran, which have, in addition, cross-bars at right angles to the vertical grooves, giving them the appearance of ladders.

As regards the site of this rock it is some distance south and east of the actual crest of Stronach ridge. On what is the crest, there seemed to me the remains of a cairn, much overgrown with heather. There are several flat rock-surfaces in many directions at varying distances from the crest, but upon none could I trace any sculpturing whatever.

The deeply-grooved channels, noted by Mr Somerville, "running from right to left," amongst the designs shown on my sections B and D, are assuredly only weatherings and water-worn marks.

It may be of some interest to note that a line bisecting the two ring-groups G and H points direct to the summit of Goatfell, and this happens to be Magnetic North. The Polar North is also shown on my plan, and in the general view of the rock (fig. 1) its relation to the fine range of peaks on the north, culminating in Ben Nuish, may be seen.

¹ See *Proceedings*, vol. xxix. p. 76.

² *Arch. Assoc. Jour.*, vol. xxxv. p. 20.