

# A Cist Cemetery at Glenreadell Mains, Kintyre, Argyll

by A. MacLaren

Between 1958 and 1964 five cists, all situated within 275 m of one another, were discovered near Glenreadell Mains, Skipness, by Mr G. E. S. Dunlop, Manager of the Skipness Estate.<sup>1</sup>

Cist 1 (NR 859584; fig. 1, no. 1) became visible in 1958 in the W. face of a low natural knoll called Cnocan Tigh Searmonaiche, situated 400 m W. of Glenreadell Mains, immediately S. of Abhainn Leum nan Meann. The knoll is in process of erosion by the stream, and fragments of calcined bone which became exposed led to the discovery of a roughly-built cist, measuring at least 1 m in length and 0.5 m in both width and depth internally; the outer end-slab had already fallen away into the burn. When the site was first seen by the writer in 1961, the side slabs had also fallen, but a pocket of discoloured soil, about 0.5 m deep and containing traces of charcoal, could still be distinguished in the face of the knoll. The lower limit of this discolouration lay some 0.76 m below the surface of the ground, and nearby there was a flat slab which may have formed part of the original cover-slab. Examination of the discoloured soil and the adjacent area yielded no further burial remains or grave goods. All traces of the cist have since disappeared.

In the spring of 1963 two more cists (fig. 1, nos. 2 and 3) were uncovered by ploughing in the adjacent arable field to the E., about 135 m SSE. of cist 1, and later the same year a fourth cist (No. 4) was found close by. Finally, in the spring of 1964 a fifth cist (No. 5) was discovered in rough ground 275 m to the N. of cists 2-4, overlooking the W. bank of Abhainn Leum nan Meann.

Permission to excavate was readily granted by the late Mr C. A. M. Oakes, owner of the estate, and the excavations were carried out during April 1963 and March 1964.

Cist 2 (NR 859582), which measured 1.40 m by 0.76 m internally with the long axis running N. and S., was let into the natural sand and gravel to a depth of 0.9 m so that the top of the cover slab lay about 0.3 m below ground. Any irregularities in the shape of the side- and end-slabs had been taken up with small stones, and all four corners had been sealed carefully with clay. At the time of its discovery the massive cover-slab, measuring 2 m by 1.30 m and up to 0.13 m in thickness, was removed to the W. edge of the field and later taken to Glenreadell Mains for safe-keeping. The filling of the cist came right up to the underside of the cover slab and consisted of fine sand and gravel which incorporated scattered fragments of cremated bone, charcoal and ash at all levels. Placed approximately in the centre of the unpaved floor was the main concentration of cremated bone, forming a deposit about 0.20 m in diameter and 0.05 m in depth; a broken flint knife lay near the NW. corner of the cist. There were no other grave goods. For a report on the cremated bone, see Appendix A.<sup>2</sup>

Cist 3 (NR 859582). Situated 50 m SW. of cist 2, this cist had almost completely been

<sup>1</sup> I should like to acknowledge my gratitude to Mr and Mrs Dunlop for all their help and hospitality.

<sup>2</sup> I am much indebted to Mr T. F. Spence, of the Department of Anatomy, University of Birmingham, for his report.

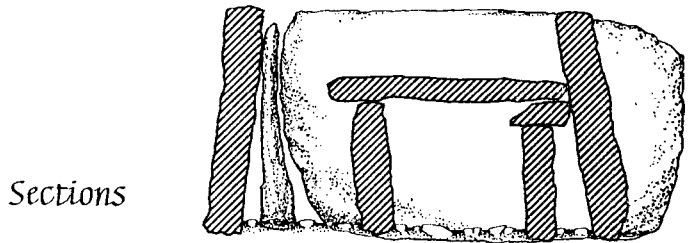
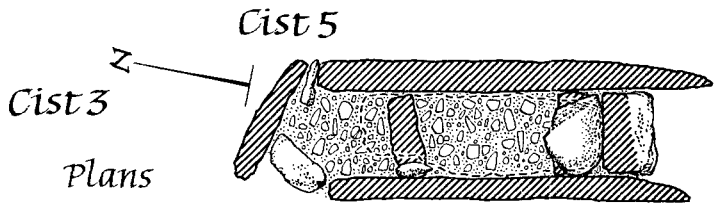
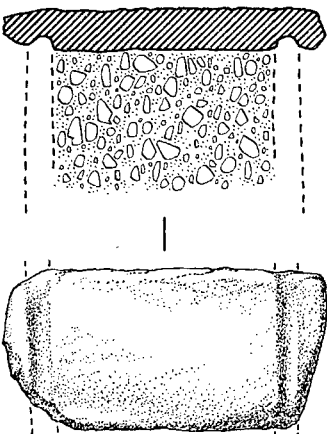
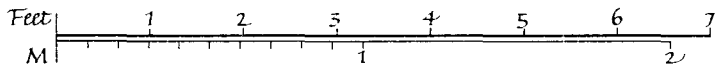
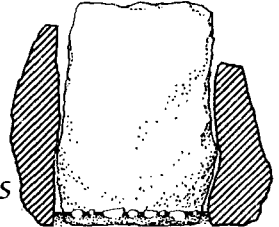
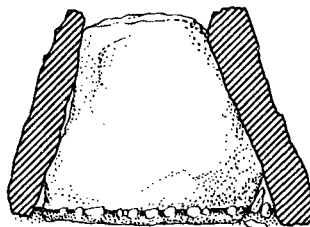
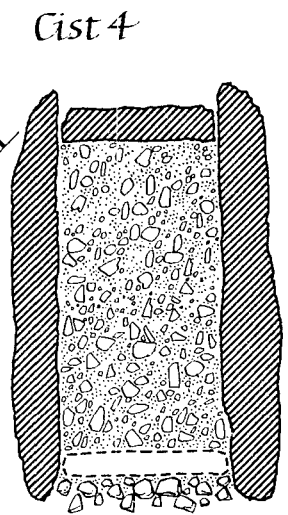
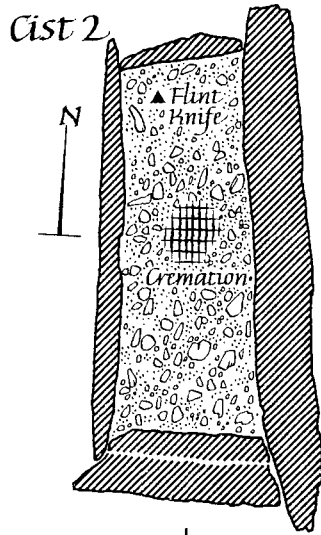
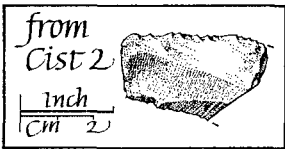
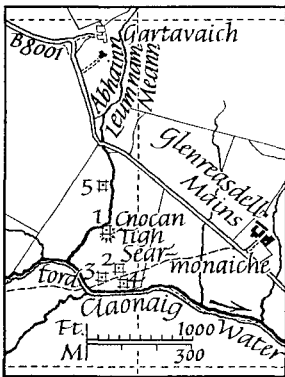
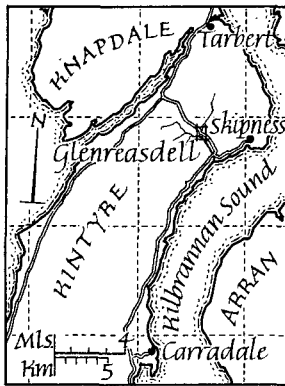


FIG. 1. Glenreadell Mains: cists.

destroyed by the construction of a corn-drying kiln adjacent to it. Its position, however, was marked by a pit, measuring 1.8 m by 1.0 m and dug into the subsoil to a depth of 0.6 m. Its long axis was aligned NW. and SE., and it contained a mixture of plough-soil, sand and gravel, which yielded a few scraps of cremated bone and charcoal. Lying partly embedded in the pit was a flat slab (Pl. 6), measuring 1.02 m by 0.51 m and 0.14 m in thickness, evidently one of the original end-slabs. This slab is of particular interest since at each end of one face a groove has been cut to receive the side-slabs – a translation into stone of a jointing technique normally associated with wood-working. The grooves measure up to 0.08 m in width and 0.036 m in depth. The slab is now preserved at the front door of Glenreasdell Mains.

Cist 4 (NR 859582). Situated 45 m SSE. of cist 2 and 60 m ESE. of cist 3, this cist had also been disturbed previously. When found in 1963, the cover slab and one of the end slabs were already missing and the remaining end-slab had fallen inwards. The cist measured 1.02 by 0.53 m and 0.6 m in depth internally, with the long axis aligned NE. and SW. The interior was filled with a mixture of earth, sand and gravel together with a large number of stone fragments, probably representing the smashed remains of the cover slab and end slab. No burial remains survived.

Cist 5 (NR 859585). Situated 90 m S. of the bridge that carries the public road over Abhainn Leum nan Meann, and 13.5 m W. of the stream, this was a most unusual structure as it comprised two elements, a long narrow outer cist, aligned almost N. and S., with a smaller cist placed inside it. The larger cist measured about 1.0 m by 0.3 m and 0.6 m in depth internally, and the smaller cist 0.5 m by 0.3 m and 0.5 m in depth. While sharing the side slabs of the outer cist, the smaller cist was provided with its own separate end-slabs and cover slab. The cover slab of the larger cist was missing and its N. end-slab had been dislodged; it is uncertain whether or not this disturbance had taken place in antiquity, since the soil and gravel filling of both cists had clearly been removed and replaced in comparatively modern times. Fragments of cremated bone were recovered both from the interior of the smaller cist and from the spaces between its end slabs and those of the larger cist. Analysis of the two separate deposits of bone suggested that all the cremated remains belonged to one young female. For a report on the bone, see Appendix B.<sup>1</sup>

The close grouping of cists into small cemeteries of three or more cists is not uncommon, and has been recorded elsewhere in Kintyre, e.g. at Campbeltown<sup>2</sup> (six cists) and at Kilmaho<sup>3</sup> (three cists), and it is unfortunate that at Glenreasdell, apart from evidence of cremation burial in four of the cists, the only small find was the ridge-backed flint knife in cist 2. Of buff grey flint, measuring 0.04 m in length by 0.025 m in greatest breadth and 0.008 m in maximum thickness, it is made on a flake with primary flaking scars visible on the convex face; the other face, which is untouched, shows the bulb of percussion and the striking-platform at one end. Each of the longer edges of the flake has been trimmed by pressure flaking. This type of knife is distinguished from the plano-convex class by the fact that the upper convex side bears only primary longitudinal flaking scars, the secondary flaking being confined to the edges, whereas the plano-convex knife practically always has secondary flaking all over the convex surface. While in single grave contexts the plano-convex knife appears to be exclusively associated with Food Vessels, the ridge-backed type cannot be regarded as typical of any one culture; in Scotland such knives have been found in association not only with Food Vessels,<sup>4</sup> but with a Beaker at Balnabraid<sup>5</sup>, Kintyre with a jet necklace at Inchmarnock, Bute<sup>6</sup> and also with neolithic pottery.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I am much indebted to Mr C. B. Denston, of the Duckworth Laboratory of Physical Anthropology, University of Cambridge, for his report.

<sup>2</sup> *Argyllshire Herald*, 16th June and 15th August 1868.

<sup>3</sup> *Discovery and Excavation Scotland 1959*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Brackley, Kintyre, Argyll, *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.* LXXXIX (1955-6), 42; Ballimenach, Kintyre, Argyll,

*ibid.*, xcv (1961-2), 131; Sprouston, Roxburghshire, *ibid.*, LXXXIII (1948-9), 220.

<sup>5</sup> *Trans. Dumfriesshire Galloway Natur. Hist. Antiq. Soc.* XLIV (1967), 90.

<sup>6</sup> *Trans. Buteshire Natur. Hist. Soc.* xv (1963), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Knappers, Dunbartonshire, *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.* LXXXII (1947-8), 234.

Cist 3 affords a further example to be added to the fourteen cists having grooved or rebated slabs which recently have been listed and discussed.<sup>1</sup> A sixteenth has since been discovered in Angus.<sup>2</sup> The Glenreadell slab differs, however, in that the grooves occur on an end slab and not on a side slab as is the case with the Kilmartin group. It may be noted that the Inchmarnock cist, which yielded a flint knife similar to that from Glenreadell, also had a rebated side-slab and cover-slab, and is situated less than 15 km to the E., across the Sound of Bute.

Cist 5, the cist within a cist, is without direct parallel, but mention may be made of a somewhat analogous arrangement at Poltalloch, Argyll,<sup>3</sup> where on the floor of a cist measuring 1.37 m long, a shallow box-like structure had been constructed of three slabs, two set transversely and the third longitudinally to the main cist. Within this smaller compartment stood a Food Vessel. At Quandale, Rousay, Orkney,<sup>4</sup> under a mound of earth and stones a cist, measuring 1.07 m by 1 m and 0.51 m deep, was found to have a smaller cist measuring about 0.38 m square and the same in depth inserted against its NE. side. There are, also, a few instances where a cist has been divided into two compartments by a transverse slab, as e.g. West Mains of Auchterhouse, Angus (cremation and riveted bronze dagger),<sup>5</sup> Barnhill Links, Angus (cremation and Food Vessel)<sup>6</sup> and Kintraw, Argyll (?cremation)<sup>7</sup> have been recorded. At Succoth Place, Edinburgh<sup>8</sup> and at Backakelday, Holm, Orkney,<sup>9</sup> two cists were disposed side by side so as to share one side-slab, and there is a small group of two-storeyed cists in Orkney and Shetland<sup>10</sup> and one in Caithness.<sup>11</sup>

The evidence from the group of grooved and rebated cists in the Kilmartin area points *inter alia* to associations with Food Vessels and a date in the first half of the second millennium B.C. It is probable that the Glenreadell cemetery belongs to the same general cultural and chronological horizon; certainly so far as Kintyre and adjacent regions are concerned, where pottery is present in association with cist burials, the Food Vessel is the predominant type of vessel found.

## APPENDIX A

### The Cremated Bones from Cist 2, Glenreadell Mains

by *T. F. Spence*, B.Sc., F.R.I.A., F.I.S.T.  
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#### *General*

These cremated fragments were examined by the methods outlined by Lisowski and Spence in previous reports. The total weight of the fragmented bones is 485 gm, and of this total 123 gm can be identified – though some of the latter must be designated as ‘unidentified long bones’. Colour varies from grey or grey/white to grey/blue. Many fragments have elliptical cracks. The bones are brittle, but not very hard.

It is considered unlikely that the number cremated exceeded one person, although this is rather an incomplete cremation since no fragments of the pelvis or lower extremity appear to be present.

There is a little evidence that these bones are male, the subject was above twenty-two years old and may have been well built.

#### *Skull*

The vault fragments are few – all have serrated sutural edges which are clearly defined. The facial

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.* xciv (1960-1), 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Discovery and Excavation Scotland 1964*, 1; *NCR Factory Post*, 19 (April/May 1967), No. 3, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Discovery and Excavation Scotland 1961*, 12.

<sup>4</sup> RCAM, *Inventory of Orkney*, 202, No. 560(5); *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.* lxxi (1936-7), 72.

<sup>5</sup> *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.* xxxii (1897-8), 205.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, xi (1874-6), 310.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, xcix (1966-7), 56.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, xxxvi (1901-2), 670.

<sup>9</sup> RCAM, *Inventory of Orkney*, 108, No. 377; *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.* lxxii (1927-8), 263.

<sup>10</sup> RCAM, *Inventory of Orkney*, Nos. 433, 434 and 951; *Shetland*, No. 1510.

<sup>11</sup> *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.* lxi (1926-7), 199.

elements consist of some maxillary pieces associated with root cavities. There is also a fragment of the right orbit at about the level of the zygomatic bones. The orbital margin is well rounded. The right coronoid process is also present, relatively undamaged.

#### *Teeth*

The tooth roots are thought to be those of the lower incisors (2), lower canines (2), lower molars (2) – both 8's, upper molars (2), upper premolars (2), and several other root fragments that cannot be identified.

#### *Vertebral column and thorax*

Several fragments of cervical vertebrae have been identified. Another may be part of the body of either a thoracic or lumbar. There are many pieces of broken ribs.

#### *Upper limb*

Several fragments of the head of the humerus together with ? two pieces of the right epicondyle. There are some broken middle and proximal phalanges – one of the latter is nearly complete. The curvature on this bone is unusual, was it caused by heat? Is it anatomical? The head only of the second right metacarpal is fairly intact.

#### *Pathology*

There is no evidence of any pathology associated with the osseous remains.

## APPENDIX B

### The Cremated Remains from Glenreaddell Mains, Skipness, Argyllshire

by C. B. Denston

Duckworth Laboratory of Physical Anthropology, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge

#### *Introduction*

The examination of the material follows the technique used on previous occasions by the writer (1962, 1965), and is based on procedures in cremation reports by Lisowski (1956, 1959, 1962), and by Gejvall (1947, 1948). The primary aim in a study of this type is to try to determine the age, sex and number of individuals cremated.

#### *Material and methods*

*Preparation and methods.* The usual procedure is for the cremated material to be first washed with water in a sieve of 2 mm mesh, so as to get rid of the soil and float off any other light material. Next the material is allowed to dry and then fragments of the various bones and teeth are sorted into groups. The remaining material is then sieved again to get rid of dust, and picked free of small stones and other foreign material. The residue of small bone fragments is classified after a further inspection as unidentifiable. The various groups of identifiable material are then examined in detail in order to establish as far as possible the number of individuals cremated, their sex and age.

In the case of this cremation the bone fragments were fairly clean with no soil attached to them, so the procedure of washing was not necessary, but the sieving was carried out in the usual manner.

#### *Estimation of number, sex and age*

The number of individuals identified from material of a cremation is usually established by the presence of certain definite duplicated skeletal parts, or a great dissimilarity in the thickness of certain bones, or the fact that epiphyseal union had taken place in some bones, while in other similar bones epiphyseal union had not taken place at all. Assessment of the sex of an individual from cremated remains is a very precarious procedure unless there are preserved definite diagnostic portions of bones from which the sex can be ascertained. The possible sex can be diagnosed from the robustness of certain bones, but the conclusion is only a tentative one. A possible age at death can be suggested by an examination of the state of the endocranial and extocranial suture closure, by noting that epiphyseal union was completed or had not started, by an examination of the vertebrae, state of pubic symphysis, and the eruption and wear of the teeth. All these features however may not have survived the combustion.

In this case, two lots of cremated material were involved, and the particularly interesting job was to try to find any possible evidence to suggest that the two lots of material indicated two separate individuals. The results were negative where this was concerned, as the pieces of bone were small and it was not possible to identify any duplicate portions. On the other hand there was possible evidence that the two lots of material belonged to the same individual. Firstly, the remains had been subjected to an equal amount of combustion, and secondly and the most important, a fragment of long bone from both lots of material fitted together almost perfectly. The remains did not contain any fragments which would have revealed the definite sex of the individual. The fragments of bone were not in any way robust, on the contrary they were quite delicate, so a male individual can be ruled out. The evidence suggested a female and the individual was either an adolescent or a young adult at the time of death.

## RESULTS

### *General description of the material*

Total weights of the two separate lots of bone fragments 551.6 gm and 39.7 gm. The fragments of bone were irregular and varied in overall length from 2 mm to 65 mm. Their colour was predominantly light brown. Of the larger fragments some were twisted and distorted, and displayed elliptical cracks. Some of the skull fragments had the outer table split away from the inner one.

### *Details of material*

*Skull.* The total amount of possible skull fragments was 118, ranging in length from 10 mm to 45 mm, the recognisable pieces being very few. Three pieces were possibly of the frontal bone, one fragment displaying the superior orbital margin. Another fragment was a portion of a sphenoid bone, while two other fragments were of the occipital bone, one piece displaying the internal protuberance. Seven fragments were of temporal bone, one being a right petrous portion. A small fragment of maxilla had a tooth socket, and twenty other fragments of skull displayed sutural edges and could have come from areas of the coronal, sagittal or lambdoid sutures.

*Tibia.* Three possible fragments of the shaft ranging in length from 34 mm to 62 mm.

*Humerus.* Four possible fragments, all of the shaft, two of the pieces coming from the distal third of the shaft. Length 31 mm to 65 mm.

*Clavicle.* One fragment of the sternal extremity measuring 38 mm in length.

*Fibula, radius, ulna.* As the shafts of these bones, especially when having been cremated and in fragments, look very similar, they have been classified together. There were twenty-one possible fragments of these bones, all of the shaft, with one other fragment which came from the proximal extremity of an ulna displaying the greater sigmoid cavity. These fragments ranged in length from 18 mm to 50 mm.

*Innominate bone.* One fragment of the rim of the acetabulum measuring 38 mm in length.

*Vertebrae.* Thirteen possible fragments; six from the body, and seven which were either superior or inferior articular facets.

*Ribs.* Eleven possible fragments ranging in length from 6 mm to 36 mm.

*Miscellaneous long bone.* One hundred and thirty-five possible fragments, the smallest being 12 mm and the largest 57 mm.

*Miscellaneous cancellous bone.* Ninety-two fragments ranging in length from 5 mm to 43 mm, which could have come from any bone where cancellous bone occurred.

*Miscellaneous bone (other than cancellous).* Numerous fragments varying in length from 2 mm to 45 mm.

*Cremated Remains No. 2.* Fifteen fragments varying in length from 13 mm to 33 mm.

*Miscellaneous long bone.* Eleven fragments ranging in length from 15 mm to 32 mm.

*Miscellaneous cancellous bone.* Eight fragments, the smallest being 10 mm and the largest 23 mm.

*Miscellaneous bone (other than cancellous).* Forty-two fragments varying in length from 2 mm to 27 mm.

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TABLE 1

THE WEIGHT AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE TOTAL IDENTIFIED AND UNIDENTIFIED CREMATED REMAINS

<i>Skeletal material</i>	<i>gm</i>	<i>% total</i>
Identified total	414.4	75.1
Unidentified total	137.2	24.9
Total	551.6	100.0

TABLE 2

THE WEIGHT AND PERCENTAGES OF THE MISCELLANEOUS CANCELLOUS AND OTHER MISCELLANEOUS BONE

<i>Skeletal material</i>	<i>gm</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>% total</i>
Miscellaneous cancellous	43.6	31.8	7.9
Other miscellaneous bone	93.6	68.2	17.0
Total	137.2	100.0	24.9

TABLE 3

THE WEIGHT AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE IDENTIFIED REMAINS

<i>Skeletal remains</i>	<i>gm</i>	<i>% identified</i>	<i>% total</i>
Skull	135.9	32.8	24.6
Tibia	19.4	4.7	3.5
Humerus	17.8	4.3	3.2
Clavicle	3.5	0.9	0.6
Fibula, radius, ulna	35.1	8.5	6.4
Innominate bone	4.3	1.0	0.8
Vertebrae	10.4	2.5	1.9
Metacarpal and metatarsal bones	11.6	2.8	2.1
Ribs	6.4	1.5	1.2
Miscellaneous long bone	170.0	41.0	30.8
Identified total	414.4	100.0	75.1

No. 2

TABLE 4

THE WEIGHT AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE TOTAL IDENTIFIED AND UNIDENTIFIED CREMATED REMAINS

<i>Skeletal material</i>	<i>gm</i>	<i>% total</i>
Identified total	26.0	65.5
Unidentified total	13.7	34.5
Total	39.7	100.0

TABLE 5

## THE WEIGHT AND PERCENTAGES OF THE MISCELLANEOUS CANCELLOUS, AND OTHER MISCELLANEOUS BONE

<i>Skeletal material</i>	<i>gm</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>% total</i>
Miscellaneous cancellous	4.7	34.3	11.8
Other miscellaneous bone	9.0	65.7	22.7
Total	13.7	100.0	34.5

TABLE 6

## THE WEIGHT AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE IDENTIFIED REMAINS

<i>Skeletal material</i>	<i>gm</i>	<i>% identified</i>	<i>% total</i>
Skull	15.5	59.6	39.0
Miscellaneous long bone	10.5	40.4	26.5
Identified total	26.0	100.0	65.5

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Grooved side-slab from Cist 3. Scale in feet