Excavations at Bargrennan White Cairn chambered tomb, Dumfries and Galloway 2004

By Vicki Cummings and Chris Fowler

(With contributions by Amelia Pannett)

University of Central Lancashire: Studies in Archaeology

Specialist Report Number 2

Excavations at Bargrennan White Cairn chambered tomb, Dumfries and Galloway 2004.

ISBN: 0-9549671-1-9

Published by:

Department of Environmental Management,
University of Central Lancashire,
Preston,
PR1 2HE

Tel: (01772) 893492
Fax: (01772) 892926

Contents

Introduction: the background to the project

Two different types of Neolithic chambered tomb have been identified in western Dumfries and Galloway. The first group have been described as 'Clyde' monuments and are characterised by multiple chambers set within a long cairn with a stone-built façade (Henshall 1972). Four of the seven Clyde monuments in Dumfries and Galloway (Cairnholy I and II (Piggott and Powell 1949) and Mid Gleniron I and II (Corcoran 1969)) have been excavated and these sites seem to originate from the early Neolithic, consisting of several discrete phases (as shown at Mid Gleniron by Corcoran 1969). The second group of monuments are the 'Bargrennan' sites, of which 14 have been identified (Henshall 1972; Murray 1992). These sites have a small chamber or chambers often with thin (often impassable) passages and are set within round cairns (Henshall 1972; Murray 1992). Until recently, the only recorded excavation of a Bargrennan monument was at Bargrennan White Cairn in 1949 (Piggott and Powell 1949). However, the chamber had been robbed out and it has not possible to suggest a construction date for this site. Fragments of cremated bone and incised late Neolithic pottery were recovered from above the slabs lining the passageway, and cremated bone, charcoalised remains of oak and a flint 'fabricator' were found in a pit at the entrance of the passage (Piggott and Powell 1949, 150-1). It is not possible to tell if the later Neolithic finds date from an early or late use of the chamber and passage. Henshall produced a survey of all the monuments in 1972, and in 1992 Murray reconsidered the Bargrennan sites. Most recently Vicki Cummings examined the landscape settings of the chambered tombs of south-west Scotland as part of her doctoral research and demonstrated that the Bargrennan monuments are not only structurally quite different to the Clyde sites but they are also located in radically different parts of the landscape (see Cummings 2001). The Clyde monuments are located in the lowlands on fertile land, while the Bargrennan sites are located in the marginal uplands of western Galloway (for further details see Cummings 2002). It is possible to interpret the differences between the Clyde and Bargrennan sites in two ways. First, the different distributions of these two monument types may suggest that the Bargrennan monuments were later in date than the Clyde monuments (this suggestion is favoured by Murray 1992). If this was the case it may suggest that people lived in the coastal regions in the early Neolithic and gradually moved inland over time. This model has implications for the origins of the Neolithic in this area and also for the economic use of the region throughout this period. Alternatively, the two monument types may be contemporary. There are several ways of interpreting this suggestion.

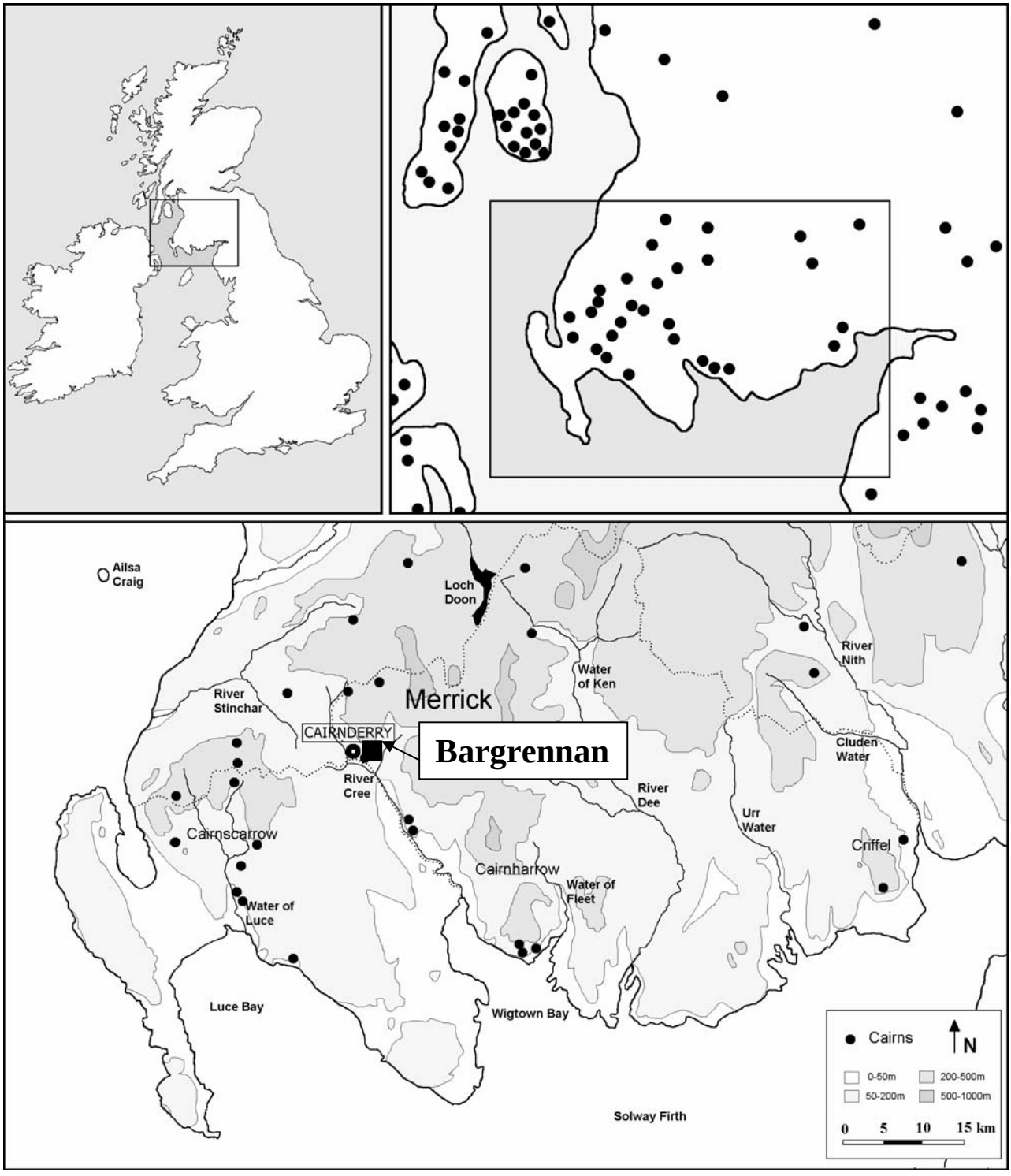

Figure 1. Location of Bargrennan chambered cairn in south-west Scotland (after Cummings 2002)

While it is possible to imagine two different communities living in Dumfries and Galloway and constructing different kinds of monument, it might also suggest that different parts of the landscape were directly related to different forms of monument. This may imply the uses of different locales in a seasonal round (people may have been moving inland over the summer months to follow game or to feed stock) or other connections between practices and places. A thorough programme of excavation of Bargrennan and Clyde monuments could allow some comparisons between Neolithic patterns of land use and those suggested by the robust evidence for seasonal use of the landscape by Mesolithic people (Cherry and Cherry 1997; Cole 1963; Cormack and Coles 1968; Edwards 1996).

Over the past three years we have been trying to answer the question as to the date of the Bargrennan monuments at the site of Cairnderry (see Cummings and Fowler 2002; 2003; 2004). However, the site had been robbed out and we have not been able to ascertain the construction date of Cairnderry. Nonetheless, we did find an early Neolithic assemblage underneath the monument, as well as a series of early Bronze Age cremation deposits which show that the monument was reused at this time.

The overall research programme

The dating of the Bargrennan monuments remains a crucial goal in developing our understanding of the origins and development of the Neolithic in this area. Therefore, the re-investigation of Bargrennan White Cairn was proposed in order to attempt to get material for radiocarbon dating. However, due to the results of the work at Cairnderry, which produced evidence for substantial early Bronze Age reuse of the site, the research programme now also includes the aim of attempting to understand the history of use and reuse of these sites. Therefore, we also looked for Bronze Age reuse at Bargrennan. It seemed likely that Piggott and Powell's pit at the entrance to Bargrennan may well be a similar deposit to those found at Cairnderry. The overall research aims at Bargrennan, then, were to look for pre-cairn material, to try to get a date for the construction of the site and to look for reuse of the monument. It is anticipated that the results of these excavations would themselves form a new set of questions for further investigations into both sets of monuments and other Neolithic sites in the region.

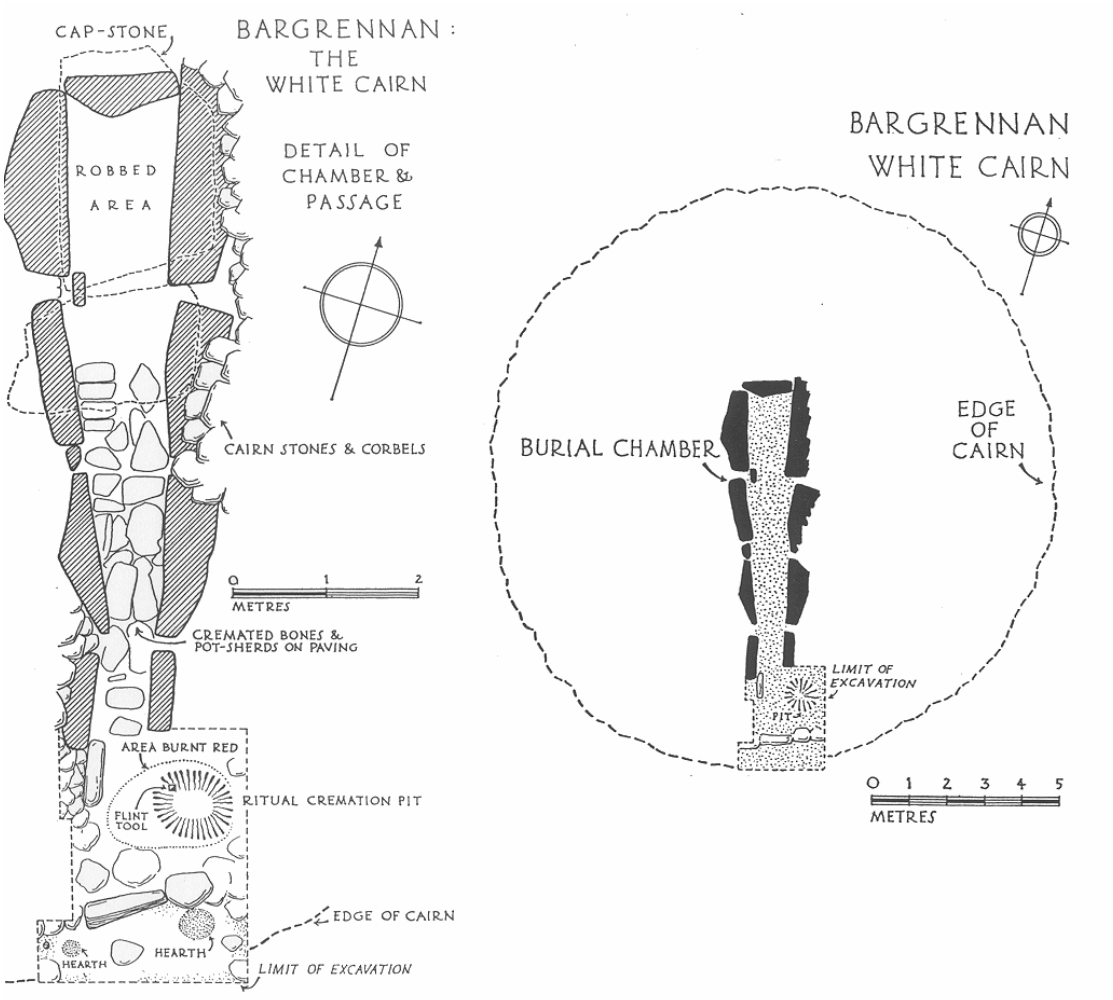

Figure 2. The plan of Bargrennan White Cairn by Piggott and Powell (1949)

The location of the site

Bargrennan White Cairn is located only a few miles from Cairnderry, which is found 4km to the north-west. The site consists of a single chamber and passage, set within a round cairn. The site is presently in land owned by Forestry Enterprise. It is surrounded by trees in all directions, although there is an area of clearance immediately around the monument itself. The site can be reached by a short path from a nearby forestry track. The site is located in between two streams, Lochspraig Burn to the north and Black Burn to the south. The cairn itself is carefully positioned on a natural rise in the local topography.

Although the site is surrounded by dense mature forestry in all directions, it is clear that this site would look up to Glencaird Hill (see Fig. 3). There would also be very impressive views of the Merrick Mountains to the SSE, which are clearly visible just

a short distance from the site itself. It also seems likely that distant hills would also be visible to the west.

Figure 3. Photo taken by Piggott and Powell showing the landscape setting of the site

Description of the monument

Prior to our excavations, the site was a grass-covered mound with the chamber and passage clearly visible. Heaps of cairn material were piled either side of the chamber. The chamber and passage contained a quantity of gravel, which local people thought had been put there in the 1970s or 1980s. Prior to this, the paving slabs found by Piggott and Powell had been visible. However, it is obvious that the current state of the monument is a result of the condition that Piggott and Powell left the site after they had completed their excavations in 1949. They left the site open after their short excavation season (information from RCAHMS). Piggott and Powell found that the

chamber and passage had already been exposed prior to their excavations, with two large capstones in place. They recorded the cairn as approximately 15m wide and no kerb was identified at the site. Piggott and Powell noted that the site had been 'much-robbed' and a large trench can also be seen on the top of the mound, which may be antiquarian activity, possibly in order to locate the chamber. Henshall (1972, 445) reports that the cairn had been reduced sometime prior to a visit by Cole in 1896, and the chamber and passage already exposed.

Summary of results from Piggott and Powell's season

Piggott and Powell only examined a very small area of the site, incorporating the chamber and passage, and a small part of the cairn in front of the passage (see Fig. 2). They found that the chamber had been robbed out. However, fragments of cremated bone and incised late Neolithic pottery were recovered from above the slabs lining the passageway (Piggott and Powell 1949, 150-1). They did not investigate under the paving slabs. In a pit at the entrance of the passage a human cremation was found along with charcoalised oak and a flint tool. They also found what they described as hearths in the area in front of the passage. They noted what we would now describe as scratch art on some of the stones in the chamber (Piggott and Powell 1949, 148).

Aims and objectives of the season

The aims of this season at White Cairn Bargrennan were threefold. Our first aim was to examine underneath the paving stones in order to look for pre-cairn activity, and we hoped, in order to obtain primary material for radiocarbon dating which could suggest a construction date for the site. This would involve reopening the excavation trench of Piggott and Powell in the passage in order to look for evidence underneath the paving slabs. When Piggott and Powell were digging in the 1940s, they were not as familiar as we are today with the idea of pre-cairn activity, or the possibility that there may have been a wooden precursor to the megalithic phase of construction. Our second aim was to examine a larger portion of the cairn, to look for pre-cairn activity underneath the body of the cairn itself. Our final aim was to examine the outside perimeter of the cairn, in order to look for early Bronze Age activity similar to that found at Cairnderry. Finally, we hoped that the examination of this monument would also provide a good comparison with Cairnderry, in particular with regards construction techniques.

Methodology

We opened a single trench at Bargrennan White Cairn which included the passage, and an area which incorporated the southern part of the cairn, the area beyond the passage and the area outside the southern part of the cairn.

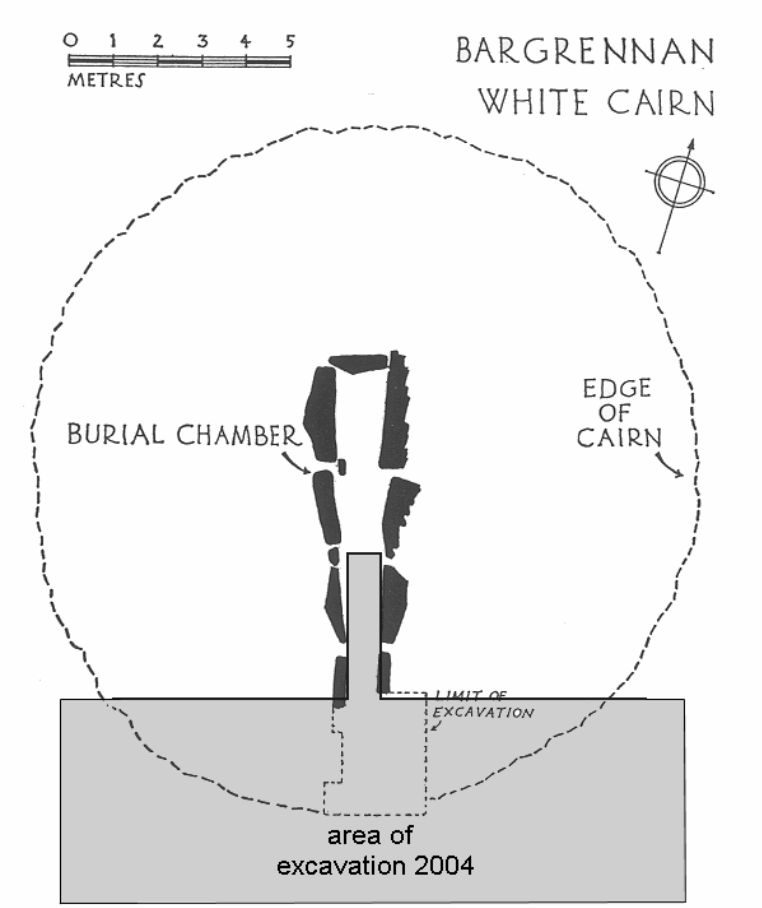

Figure 4. Area of excavation in 2004

Excavation results

In the passage we removed the covering of gravel (002) and exposed the paving slabs (009) left *in situ* by Piggott and Powell. We found that the plan of these slabs made by Piggott and Powell did not exactly match what was on the ground: we assume that since their excavation was so brief, they had perhaps produced a schematic representation of the slabs due to a shortage of time. We must also accept the possibility that Piggott and Powell did remove some of the slabs and replaced them differently. However, from the remains we suggest the former is the case. We then removed the slabs and found an orange-yellow subsoil beneath (018). No features were found under the paving. This yellow layer contained patches of darker material as well as a few flints. It was remarkably similar to the soil underneath the slabs in the

chamber at Cairnderry. We did not completely undercut the orthostats, but just as at Cairnderry, there was no evidence of any sockets for the stones.

Fig. 5. The slabs in the passage, and the top layer of the cairn (SE of cairn)

We also examined the south-east part of the cairn. We exposed the cairn directly beneath the turf and topsoil layer (001). At this top level, which may be considerably disturbed, the stones which made up the cairn were quite small (017). Once this upper layer was removed we found the cairn stones were larger – comparable with those that made up the cairn at Cairnderry (043). Within these stones we found a late Neolithic flint scraper. Once these stones were removed we came down onto the lowest layer of stones. Some of these stones (020) were extremely large. We did not have the chance to remove these substantial stones, and we remain unsure whether these stones were imported onto the site or were outcrops that simply had a cairn built around them. This element of the cairn was not found at Cairnderry.

Underneath the cairn we found a series of soils. 004 was a reddy-brown layer found all over the site. The interface between this and 012 (see below) produced a series of lithics (see below). Under 004 was a layer of grey ashy material 006, which is remarkably similar to a grey layer at Cairnderry, which is an eluvial podzol. We suggest this soil is also an eluvial podzol. In some areas there was a layer of charcoal-loam (019) over 006: in places it was a few centimetres thick, in other areas this was thin or non-existant. Underneath the grey was 012, the bright orange natural subsoil. Cut into this to the SE of the cairn was a possible stakehole (042) with charcoal fill (039).

Fig. 6. The flint scraper from within the cairn and the large base cairn stones (right)

We also found placed within the cairn to the west of the passage a stone cist. This cist had clearly been inserted into the cairn at a later date (cut 031). A large section of the cairn around the cist was visible and this was filled with smaller cairn material than the surrounding cairn. Once exposed, the top of the cist consisted of one large slab and a smaller thin slab broken into two (016). Another vertical thin slab could be seen to the south of the cist and it seems to have toppled inwards. Upon removing the horizontal covering slabs a large pot with cremated bone was visible surrounded by a series of rounded stones (023). These packing stones were removed and a large cordoned urn was exposed (see below). The urn had pieces around the base detached from the pot and pushed outwards and a spread of cremated bone was found around the outside of the pot. This may be due to presence of a small rodent whose skull along with recent humic matter was found inside the pot, and who may have been nesting in the pot. The pot itself had been placed upside down onto a thin slab. This meant we were able to take the pot out whole. The contents of the urn were left in the pot and excavated in the lab. There were no distinctive layers in the pot, just a mass of cremated bone set within a soil matrix (see below). Once the pot and the slab had been removed a small patch of small stones and gravel was exposed (035), tightly packed down to create an even surface on which to place the slab and pot.

Fig. 7. The stone cist (left) and with the top slabs removed (right)

In the SSE section of the cairn the top of another pot was exposed. This deposit was very different from the cist. No cut within the cairn was discernable above or around the pot. The pot itself was very difficult to define, being of a thin and friable fabric. Furthermore, the pot appeared to be surrounded by and filled with soil which was identical to the soil that forms at the base of the cairn (020). Very small smears of cremated bone and charcoal were found around the pot. This deposit was only exposed at the very end of the excavation and therefore there was not sufficient time to excavate it. It has been left *in situ*, covered up and will be excavated next season.

Fig. 8. Pit 1 (Piggott and Powell's pit), post-ex

The final area examined in these excavations was the area outside the passage but where there is no cairn. This area was examined by Piggott and Powell in 1949 where they uncovered a large cremation pit and some features they described as ‘hearths’. We decided to take the backfill out of the cremation pit so it could be re-planned. Towards the east side of the pit we discovered a number of fills, some containing cremated bone, which had been left unexcavated by Piggott and Powell. The main fill left intact was 027, a reddy loam containing some sizeable pieces of cremated bone and charcoal. The last remains of the main cremation fill (030) was also found.

We also examined the area to the south of this pit which contained patches of earth which Piggott and Powell described as hearths. Some of these features turned out to be very superficial spreads of soil. However one feature (cut 049) contained a fill with large chunks of pottery (047). These sherds were either pink or an unusual blue in colour. The feature was rather amorphous and had no clear cut. We also exposed a large smooth earth-fast boulder to the SE of the cairn which was completely covered with soil prior to excavation. We excavated the grey layer (006) around the stone and exposed what appears to be a man-made hollow of some sort in the stone. This contains areas which have been pecked, but is different to rock art in the area. It is relevant to note that Piggott and Powell found scratch art in the chamber and there are natural cupmarks on the passage orthostats.

Fig. 9. The hollow in the large slab to the SE of the cairn

Finds

The lithic assemblage from Bargrennan chambered cairn

Dr Amelia Pannett

The assemblage comprised 53 lithic pieces, derived primarily from context 004, the pre-cairn surface. A further piece was collected from the spoil heap.

Context number	*Number of lithics*
001	4
004	26
006	4
012	6
018	8
021	2
030	2
043	1

Table. 1. Distribution of lithics by context

Primary Technology

The assemblage comprises predominantly flint, with only a single piece of quartz recovered. The majority of the flint is fresh and unpatinated, although 16 pieces showed signs of having been burnt. Cortex is present on around half of the lithic pieces; this is abraded and characteristic of a pebble source, deriving either from the beach or river gravels. There are no recorded flint sources in the Bargrennan area, and it is probable that nodules originated at the coast, perhaps around Wigtown Bay, 20km to the SE

	Total number of lithics	*% of assemblage*
Primary	10	19
Secondary	17	32

Tertiary/Inner	26	49

Table. 2. Primary technology

The presence of primary pieces (retaining cortex across the dorsal surface) demonstrates that unprepared nodules were brought to the site to knap. Only a single piece retained a cortical platform however, indicating perhaps that testing of nodules was occurring to some extent at source. The flint is of generally good quality and unflawed. There appears to have been no preference for the colour of the materials used, as at Cairnderry, with quality evidently dictating the choice of raw materials.

The assemblage is dominated by flakes, predominantly irregular, although four blades were also identified. Complete pieces are small, on average 21.2mm long and 17.9mm thick, although there are two pieces considerably larger than the average, one a regular flake (140) and the second a scraper (155; see fig. 4). Dorsal scar patterns and the presence of identifiable platforms on the majority of complete pieces demonstrate that single and opposed platform flaking were the predominant reduction techniques; there was no evidence of bipolar flaking. Platform preparation was noted on two flakes, in the form of light edge trimming. Despite the predominance of flakes in the assemblage, the dorsal scars on one irregular flake indicate that the production of blades formed part of the technology. This piece evidently derived from a core where blade removal had been undertaken during the previous reduction sequence. Six pieces had hinged or stepped terminations, demonstrating the effects of a flawed lithic resource on the knapping technology, or, alternatively the use of a low-powered knapping technique. Angular shatter and burnt chunks were also identified in the assemblage; these pieces are generally small, on average less than 15mm in length, and appear to represent waste from general knapping activities.

	Total number	*% of assemblage*
Flakes	35	66
Blades	4	7
Cores	2	4
Angular	12	23

shatter/burnt chunk		

Table. 3. Morphology of assemblage

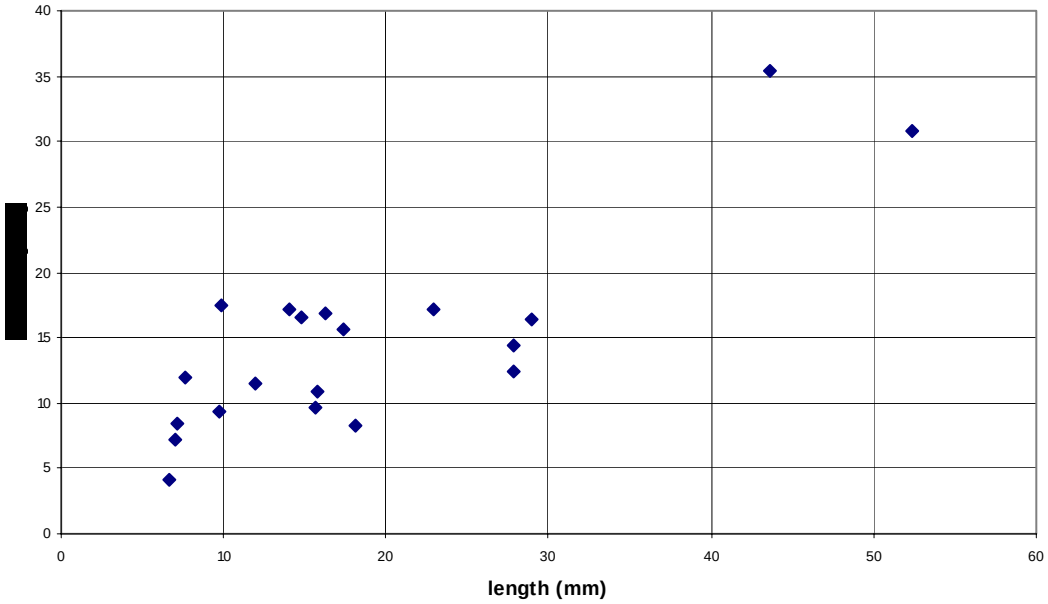

Table. 4. Size of complete pieces

Two cores were identified: one opposed platform blade core (131), and a fragment from an indeterminate core type (138). The blade core had numerous hinge fracture scars across its worked faces, probably the reason for its discard. The core had not been worked all around its circumference, retaining cortex on one face. It is small, 38.8mm in length, 23.2mm in breadth and 13.2mm thick, reflecting the small size of the available resource. Only the proximal end of the second core survives, the distal end having broken, perhaps as the result of a mis-hit. The platform edge is crushed, and the nature of the removals is indeterminable. No core trimming or rejuvenation flakes were identified amongst the assemblage.

Secondary Technology

Seven pieces had been retouched, and a further two showed signs of edge damage, possibly resulting from use. The majority of retouched pieces derived from contexts 004 and 012, and included pieces diagnostic of the late Mesolithic period.

Context	*Tools*
001	Broken flake with invasive retouch
004	Microburin, microlith, flake with non-invasive retouch/possible microburin
012	Piercer, broken flake with invasive retouch
021	End scraper

Table. 5. Tools by context

The broken flake from context 001 (102) had been burnt, with crazing evident on the surface of the piece – it is possible that the breakage resulted from exposure to heat. Invasive, pressure flaking retouch was identified along one edge, forming a slightly convex edge. A second broken, burnt flake with invasive retouch was identified in context 012 (116). It is morphologically very similar to 100, with retouch forming a convex edge, crazing apparent on the surface and a comparable breakage pattern. It is likely that these originated from the same piece, although attempts to find conjoining edges failed. Together these pieces appear to have formed a unifacial knife.

The microlith from context 004 is of classic late Mesolithic, geometric, form: it is a scalene triangle formed on a narrow blade, 13.6mm in length, 4.4mm in breadth and 2.3mm thick. Abrupt retouch had been used to trim the left-hand edge (when viewed from the dorsal surface), with the proximal end retouched at an oblique angle. The distal end of the original blank remained intact, and had a light hinge fracture termination. The microburin was notched at the distal end of the blank, although it had snapped above the notch and can therefore be classified as 'failed'. The blank terminated in a light hinge fracture. A second possible microburin was identified in context 004, with a small patch of abrupt retouch identified on the edge of a fragmented piece. Adjacent to this retouch was a possible microburin fracture facet, although the piece was too fragmented to enable a positive identification.

The piercer identified from context 012 had been formed on a small, regular flake. It was 9.7mm in length, 9.3mm in breadth and 4.1mm thick. Abrupt retouch had been

used along the distal edge and adjoining left-hand edge to form a point. This showed signs of abrasion, probably resulting from use.

The end scraper from context 021 was manufactured on a heavy, cortical, quartz flake. It was notably larger than the majority of the pieces in the assemblage, measuring 43.6mm in length, 35.4mm in breadth and 16.2mm thick. The distal end had been retouched using invasive pressure flaking to form a steep, convex edge. The scraper is roughly triangular in shape, with a narrow proximal end (platform missing), widening towards the distal end. The retouched scraper edge is heavily abraded, undoubtedly the result of use.

A second scraper was recovered from the spoil heap. It was flint and had been burnt. This piece was considerably smaller than the quartz scraper at 22.9mm in length, 17.2mm in breadth and 7.4mm thick. It had been manufactured on a primary flake, retaining cortex across its dorsal surface and platform. The distal end had been retouched to form a steep, slightly convex edge.

Interpretation

The predominance of debitage in the assemblage demonstrates that knapping was occurring on site. The presence of a high proportion of primary and secondary flakes suggests that nodules were brought from the source in untested pebble form, although the lack of cortical platforms may indicate a degree of testing at source. Platform reduction appears to have been the primary technology, with no evidence for bipolar flaking. It would appear that precision was required in the knapping technology, as the preparation of platforms on some pieces also attests.

The occurrence of the majority of the assemblage in context 004, the pre-cairn surface, indicates that knapping activities took place on the site prior to the construction of the cairn. The presence of isolated lithics throughout the matrix of the cairn would indicate their accidental inclusion during cairn construction, probably as a result of the disturbance of the pre-cairn land surface. Indeed, the pieces within the cairn are morphologically similar to those found under the cairn. The exception to this is the large quartz end scraper found in context 021.

While much of the assemblage is undiagnostic, the presence of a microlith and microburin demonstrate that at least some of the pre-cairn activities date to the Mesolithic period. The small size of the assemblage, the lack of cores and the limited range of tool types indicates that this may have been the focus for transient occupation activities during the Mesolithic period, perhaps even a single event. Cores, tools and perhaps even freshly struck pieces are likely to have been removed from site for use elsewhere.

The presence of two fragments of the same burnt knife in different areas of the cairn is interesting. This tool is diagnostic of the Neolithic period, and may represent a second phase of pre-cairn activity, or deliberate inclusion. The quartz scraper is diagnostically later Neolithic, perhaps contemporary with the construction of the cairn.

The lithic material suggests that comparable activities were occurring at both Bargrennan and Cairnderry, with the sites providing the focus for transient occupation and tool production prior to the construction of the monuments.

Pottery

The cordoned urn This pot was removed whole and is being professionally conserved by Phil Parkes at Cardiff University Conservation Services. It was extremely well-preserved when discovered, and it was possible to remove it whole as it was sitting on a stone slab. It has two carinations, each roughly a third of the way down the pot. The top section of the pot is decorated with whipped cord impressions. The base was found in the pot itself along with the cremated bone, which suggests that the base was knocked off on site and carefully added into the pot as the cremation was going it. Phil Parkes has been able to reconstruct the whole of the base from the fragments in the pot, although the base will not be added back onto the pot so it can be displayed as it was found in the ground. The pot will be consolidated for display, and some fragments will be untreated for future lipid analysis. This pot will be returned to Scotland upon conservation, and will be examined by Dr Alison Sheridan.

Fig. 10. The cordoned urn and with detail of the whipped cord impressions

Other pottery The other single pot found *in situ* remains on site and will be excavated next year. Our initial investigations gave no indication of the type/style of pot. The pot sherds found in the amorphous feature in the forecourt will be examined shortly by Dr Alison Sheridan.

Bone

The cremated bone has yet to be analysed but will be examined by Vicki Cummings and Mick Wysocki both at the University of Central Lancashire. However, during excavation a number of identifiable pieces were noted including at least 6 teeth including a molar, cranial fragments, a rib, vertebra, finger and toe bones and long bone fragments. A number of these bones are quite sizeable (over 10cm in length), and many have the characteristic cracking and fracturing marks from the cremation process. These pieces will enable to us to age and possibly even sex the individual(s). Green stains have also been noted on some of the bones which may indicate that the body was cremated with copper (Mick Wysocki *pers. comm.*)

Fig.11. Cremated bone in the pot (note tooth)

Discussion

The excavations at Bargrennan have been extremely informative, offering us not only a comparison with the results of the excavations at Cairnderry, but also additional insights into the biography of this particular monument. The examination of the passage suggests that there was no major pre-cairn activity in that area or that this was cleared away. There is no indication of any structures pre-existing the monument in this area; for example, that there was a wooden phase prior to the construction of a stone monument. Instead, it seems that the chamber and cairn was built in a single phase. We suggest that the fill underneath the slabs in the passage was soil churned up during the construction of the monument. The monument was then built directly on top of this churned up soil layer, with no other activity represented. It is interesting, however, that the site was built on top of late Mesolithic activity. Did people in the Neolithic realise that there had been activity here prior to the monumental phase? Was there perhaps a clearing here, or did people have knowledge of this place? It seems unlikely that the lithics would still have been visible on the surface, but they may have been encountered when people were building the site. It is worth noting that Cairnderry was also constructed over previous activity.

With regards the construction of the monument, these excavations at Bargrennan have also shown similarities with Cairnderry. Both sites seem to have been constructed in

very similar ways, with no stone holes cut for the main orthostats. Both sites were constructed on natural knolls which has the effect of enhancing the size of the monument. Bargrennan differs from Cairnderry in the size of stones used for the cairn. Although Cairnderry had been heavily robbed, the base layer of the cairn appeared to be made up of medium-sized rounded boulders (30-70cm wide). At Bargrennan, on the east side of the cairn in particular the base layer of stones were enormous stones, often over 1m. We also found a layer of small stones over the top of the cairn at Bargrennan that we had not encountered on the cairn at Cairnderry. However, we did find smaller material around the edges of the kerb at Cairnderry. These smaller stones may have been removed from the top of the cairn as part of the destruction of Cairnderry, and survived around the edge of the monument as the robbers had taken only larger stones.

Another interesting element thrown up by the excavations of Bargrennan was that we rebuilt the cairn at the end of the excavations. This was a lesson in the construction of a sizeable cairn. We laid the largest stones at the base of the monument, and then infilled these with smaller stones to make the cairn stable. Medium-sized stones were placed on top of the large stones, and finally we bedded these with the small stones. We managed to rebuild the southern portion of the cairn excavated in one afternoon with a team of about 10-15 people. Obviously we had the cairn stones close by, but it demonstrated that this size of cairn may not actually have taken that long to build or required an exceptionally large labour-force.

Another unique element of Bargrennan was the presence of a small ‘forecourt’ area. Cairnderry was so badly robbed we had never been able to identify an area where the passage met the cairn, and created a small area perhaps for the gathering of people. At Bargrennan, however, with the passage so well-preserved and the cairn also roughly intact, there was a small area from the passage to the outer extent of the cairn that may well have been a form of forecourt. It was a surprise to find Piggott and Powell’s ‘hearths’ still *in situ*, and even more surprising that one of these was a small feature which contained pottery.

The discovery of a pot within the lower layers of the cairn was also quite a surprise. The poorly defined nature of the deposit and the fact that it remains unexcavated

makes interpretation difficult. However, our initial thoughts were that this may be a foundation deposit, placed into the body of the cairn while it was being constructed. This may explain why there is no evidence of a cut into the cairn, and it appears to be surrounded by the orange layer that formed at the base of the cairn. We hope to resolve this next year. However, it is important to note that a 'cut' through the cairn could simply have involved removing stones, cutting into subsoil and making a deposit, and then replacing the stones in relatively similar positions. Given that soil formation within the cairn is bound to have occurred later, there could be little difference between in situ cairn and disturbed cairn. However, the cairn around Piggott and Powell's pit was visibly fragmented and could be discerned as a distinct fill, whereas no such distinct fill was spotted in the area above the pot in the southern extent of the cairn, and we currently therefore interpret it as foundational. If the pot can be identified it may assist in giving us a construction and initial use date.

The remaining deposits in the cremation pit at Bargrennan also came as quite a surprise as we assumed that Piggott and Powell had removed all fills. Our investigation of this feature was restricted by the fact that it had been examined previously. However, we suggest that the formation of this pit deposit was very similar in nature to Pit 1 excavated at Cairnderry. The bottom layer appears to be a burnt red soil containing some bone and charcoal: a similar fill to this was found at the base of the pit at Cairnderry. On top of this the main cremation deposit was placed. We suggest then, that this deposit was made in a very similar manner to Pit 1 at Cairnderry. A radiocarbon date for the bone will confirm whether they were also made around the same time (EBA). Further comparisons could be made if the pits at Cairnderry and Bargrennan turn out to be contemporary.

One question that remains with regards this cremation pit is whether or not it was cut and used before or during the construction of the cairn, or after the cairn had been constructed. Its location to one side of the passage suggests that unless the cairn had an extremely 'flat' front, some of the cairn would have had to have been removed if the pit was later than the cairn. We interpreted that this pit *was* later than the cairn and had been placed to one side of the forecourt by cutting away a portion of the cairn. As outlined above, the cairn around and above the eastern extent of the pit was heavily

disturbed in an inverted cone shape. When we remove the cairn around this pit next year we may be able to further clarify this.

It is clear that, just like at Cairnderry, there is unequivocal evidence of Bronze Age reuse. The cremation pit discussed above may be evidence of reuse. The cist inserted into the cairn at Bargrennan was definitely inserted into the cairn at a later date, however, as evidenced by the cut into the cairn. Its location to the west of the chamber and passage suggests that the people may still have known about the location of these architectural features, and wished to make reference to them in their own deposit.

Fig. 12. The cordoned urn under excavation

Finally, the hollow in the large natural slab to the SSE of the cairn remains a mystery. A preliminary assessment by a geologist suggests it is man-made (Alan Rosier *pers. comm*.) but several rock art specialists consulted can think of no parallels in the archaeological record. It is possible that it may relate to the construction of the cairn. A fuller geological assessment is planned for next year.

Implications for future work

The re-examination of the cairn at Bargrennan has produced some very exciting results. However, due to the sheer quantity of material uncovered this season, we did not have time to complete our investigations. We must return to complete the excavation of the pot left *in situ*, and also to remove the remainder of the cairn to look

for pre-cairn activity. We hope to be able to resolve the issue of whether the cremation pit excavated by Piggott and Powell was cut into the cairn or was contemporary with the construction of the cairn. We are also interested in the possibility of opening additional trenches at Bargrennan to try and get a fuller understanding of the monument, as opposed to just focussing on the 'business end'. Any further work would require additional SMC and would only be considered in close collaboration with Historic Scotland.

Money has been set aside for radiocarbon dates, and we have selected material with the intention of obtaining dates on the cremated bone from Piggott and Powell's cremation pit, the cremated bone in the cordoned urn from the cist as well as the charcoal fragment found under the orthostat in the passage.

Acknowledgements

These excavations were kindly funded by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, the British Academy, the Prehistoric Society, the University of Manchester and Cardiff University. Many people helped with the organisation and running of this project, and we would particularly like to thank: Andrew Burke, Aled Cooke, Liz Faulds, Oli Harris, Bob Jones, John Morgan, Phil Richardson, Geoff Shaw of the Forestry Enterprise and Chris Moore at Glentrool Holiday Park. Thanks also to the students and volunteers who worked so hard to make this excavation a success.

Bibliography

Cherry, P. and Cherry, J. 1997. Two late Mesolithic sites in the Luce Bay area. *Transactions of the Dumfries and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society* 72, 109.

Coles, J. 1963. New aspects of the Mesolithic settlement of south-west Scotland. *Transactions of the Dumfries and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society* 41, 67-97.

Cormack, W. and Coles, J. 1968. A Mesolithic site at Low Clone, Wigtownshire. *Transactions of the Dumfries and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society* 45, 44-72.

Corcoran, J.X.W.P. 1969. Excavation of two chambered tombs at Mid Gleniron Farm, Glenluce. *Transactions of the Dumfries and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society* 46, 29-90.

Cummings, V. 2001. *Landscapes in transition? Exploring the origins of monumentality in south-west Wales and south-west Scotland*. Cardiff University: Unpublished PhD thesis.

Cummings, V. 2002. Between mountains and sea: a reconsideration of the monuments of south-west Scotland. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 68, 125-46.

Cummings, V. 2003. Monuments and landscape: encounters at Cairnholy. *Transactions of the Dumfries and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society* 77, 23-36.

Cummings, V. and Fowler, C. 2002. *Cairnderry chambered cairn, Dumfries and Galloway: survey and excavations 2002. Interim Report*. Cardiff: Cardiff Studies in Archaeology.

Cummings, V. and Fowler, C. 2003. *Cairnderry chambered cairn, Dumfries and Galloway: excavations 2003. Interim Report*. Cardiff: Cardiff Studies in Archaeology.

Cummings, V. and Fowler, C. 2004. *Cairnderry chambered cairn, Dumfries and Galloway: excavations 2004. Interim Report*. Preston: University of Central Lancashire Studies in Archaeology.

Edwards, K. 1996. The contribution of Tom Affleck to the study of the Mesolithic of southwest Scotland. In T. Pollard and A. Morrison (eds), *The early prehistory of Scotland*, 108-22. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Henshall, A. 1972. *The chambered tombs of Scotland volume two*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Murray, J. 1992. The Bargrennan group of chambered cairns: circumstance and context. In N. Sharples and A. Sheridan (eds), *Vessels for the ancestors*, 33-48. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Piggott, S. and Powell, T.G.E. 1949. The excavation of three Neolithic chambered tombs in Galloway. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 83, 103-61.

Scott, J. 1969. The Clyde cairns of Scotland. In T.G.E. Powell, J.X.W.P. Corcoran, F. Lynch and J.G. Scott, *Megalithic enquiries in the west of Britain*, 175-222. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Appendix

Context relevant to the interim report

Contexts for the cairn

001 Vegetation and top soil. Very thin layer on top of monument, thicker around the edges of the site.

002 Gravel layer placed around the edge of the monument and in the passage and chamber. Recent.

003 Cairn stones on cairn. This context was allocated during pre-excavation planning: further contexts were allocated to different 'layers'. Now refers to upper spreads of stones that cannot be assigned to a more distinctive layer.

004 Reddish brown soil layer found all over the site onto 006 or natural. Produced quantities of flint

006 Grey layer found all over site. Has small lenses of charcoal in places. Very similar to podzol layer at Cairnderry.

009 Paving slabs in passage, exposed by Piggott and Powell in 1949

012 Natural subsoil which occurs all over the site. It is primarily bright orange, but does have darker mottled patches within it.

017 Small loose stones found on top of cairn. These stones are notably smaller than cairn stones lower down. May be a relatively recent addition.

018 Yellow soil found underneath paving slabs in passage only. This layer also contained mottled patches varying in colour from bright orange to bleached yellow, with a few grey patches. Produced a few flint finds. Seems to be a churned up layer created during construction of the monument, and is virtually identical to the layer found underneath the paving slabs at Cairnderry.

019 Charcoal-loam layer found over 006 grey layer. In some places it is a thin smear, in other places a thicker layer.

020 The large stones at the base of the cairn. They may be *in situ* boulders or moved large stones, or a combination of the two. They are surrounded by a bright orange clean layer of soil.

026 Orthostats of chamber and passage

039 Charcoal fill of possible posthole found to SE of cairn

040 The area in front of the passage (the forecourt) has a series of slipped stones and a surrounding soil matrix which is neither the grey layer 006 or the underlying orange 012. It seems to represent a slip event, probably not blocking as suggested by Piggott and Powell.
041 Fill of posthole, dark browny-grey silt found at base of possible posthole
042 Cut of possible posthole
043 Medium sized cairn stones in cairn
045 Unexcavated fill, given to soil around the pot left on site in situ. Orange in colour, very similar to 012
046 Cut of possible feature containing pot (unexcavated)
047 Fill of possible 'hearth' feature as identified by Piggott and Powell. Mid-brown silty-loam containing large pieces of charcoal and sherds of pottery.
049 Cut of feature described as 'hearth' by Piggott and Powell. Cut is hard to define, may be a natural hollow used for deposition of material. Has very uneven profile and no clean distinct edge.
050 Fill of Piggott and Powell's hearth feature (cut 049), a yellowy soil which is found around the edges of the cut and may be a silting layer. Contains a few flecks of charcoal.

Cist contexts

016 Stones of cist feature, the largest top slab measuring 77x53x4cm
021 Medium-sized stones of cairn found directly over and around the cist feature. May represent the filling of a cut made for the insertion of the cist
023 Packing stones within cist. These stones were found immediately around the EBA pot in the cist. They varied in shape from small and angular stones which seem to have been broken into pieces, to larger rounded stones. These larger stones were located primarily to the north of the pot.
024 EBA pot and pot contents. Pot contents were excavated in the lab and consisted of cremated human bone within a medium brown soil matrix.
028 Small stones that packed the hole cut by cist structure and which help cist in place.
031 Cut in cairn for insertion of cist
035 Thin layer of small stones found immediately under the slab on which the pot was placed. Layer was quite compact in places where the stones seem to have been packed

down to make a flat surface. A small quantity of cremated bone was found on and in this layer.

036 Large slab on which the pot was placed

Piggott and Powell's Pit contexts

025 The backfill of the pit laid down after Piggott and Powell's excavation.

027 Red fill (burnt) in pit left by Piggott and Powell. Found at the base and sides of the pit, it contained chunks of charcoal and cremated bone

030 Dark black charcoal-rich soil above 027. This layer seems to have been largely removed by Piggott and Powell.

037 Brown soil and medium stones (some with angular breaks) which slipped into area following the fills of the pit feature cut into the subsoil below the cairn. Effectively the 'backfilled' cairn.

038 Pit cut through cairn

List of finds

This is a brief summary of all the finds from Bargrennan.

Find no	Context	Description
100	001	Flint
101	001	Quartz
102	001	Flint
103	004	Flint
104	004	Flint
105	004	Flint
106	004	Metal
107	004	Flint
108	004	Flint
109	002	Crem bone
110	004	Flint
111	004	Flint
112	004	Flint
113	012	Quartz
114	004	Flint
115	004	Flint
116	004	Flint
117	004	Flint
118	001	Flint
119	004	Flint
120	004	Flint
121	002	Quartz
122	004	Flint
123	001	Crem bone
124	004	Flint
125	004	Quartz
126	004	Flint

Find no	Context	Description
127	017	Quartz
128	004	Chert ?
129	004	Metal
130	004	Flint
131	004	Flint core
132	006	Quartz
133	012	Flint
134	004	Quartz
135	004	Quartz
136	011	Hammer stone ?
137	006	Flint
138	018	Flint
139	006	Quartz
140	004	Flint
141	004	Glass
142	006	Flint
143	018	Flint
144	018	Charcoal
145	004	Flint
146	017	Quartz
147	004	Quartz
148	021	Bone
150	018	Stone*
151	004	Quartz
152	018	Flint
153	021	Crem bone
154	021	Crem bone

Find no	Context	Description
155	021	Quartz scraper
156	004	Flint
157	001	Flint
158	004	Flint
159	021	Glass
160	004	Flint
161	004	Quartz
162	021	Tooth
163	023	Crem bone
164	018	Charcoal
165	021	Glass
166	004	Quartz
167	016	Bone
168	006	Charcoal
169	012	Quartz
170	025	Crem bone
171	019	Charcoal
172	025	Bone
173	012	Flint
174	025	Bone
175	012	Flint
176	025	Bone
177	021	Plastic
178	021	Bone
179	012	Flint
180	017	Bone
181	025	Bone
182	025	Bone
183	025	Bone
184	025	Bone
185	027	Charcoal

Find no	Context	Description
186	027	Bone
187	025	Bone
188	025	Bone
189	025	Bone
190	023	Bone
191	023	Bone
192	023	Bone
193	027	Charcoal
194	023	Bone
195	024	Pot sherd
196	024	Pot sherd
197	025	Charcoal
198	024	Pot
199	023	Bone
200	027	Bone
201	021	Bone
202	021	Quartz
203	021	Crem bone
204	021	Bone
205	021	Bone
206	020	Bone
207	018	Flint
208	021	Flint
209	018	Flint
210	021	Metal
211	021	Bone
212	012	Flint
213	023	Bone
214	018	Flint
215	029	Charcoal
216	018	Flint

Find no	Context	Description
217	028	Bone
218	028	Bone
219	023	Bone
220	023	Bone
221	023	Bone
222	023	Bone
223	029	Charcoal
224	029	Charcoal
225	030	Charcoal
226	028	Pot
227	028	Pot
228	028	Charcoal
229	023	Pot
230	023	Bone
231	029	Charcoal
232	029	Charcoal
233	023	Bone
234	023	Pot
235	021	Quartz
236	029	Charcoal
237	029	Quartz
238	030	Charcoal
239	018	Charcoal
240	029	Charcoal
241	030	Flint
242	023	Bone
243	023	Bone
244	023	Pot
245	034	Bone
246	021	Charcoal
247	021	Charcoal

Find no	Context	Description
248	029	Charcoal
249	006	Charcoal
250	027	Crem bone
251	006	Flint
252	021	Bone
253	017	Quartz
254	040	Charcoal
255	021	Pot
256	040	Pot
257	017	Charcoal
258	017	Charcoal
259	043	Pot
260	048	Charcoal
261	029	Charcoal
262	035	Bone
263	044	Bone
264	044	Charcoal
265	018	Bone
266	??	Charcoal
267	045	Charcoal
268	045	Pot
269	045	Pot
270	045	Charcoal
271	044	Bone
272	047	Charcoal
273	043	Urn
274	035	Pot
275	047	Pot
276	018	Quartz
277	043	Charcoal
278	020	Charcoal

Find no	Context	Description
279	043	Quartz
280	020	Charcoal
281	027	Crem bone
282	030	Charcoal
283	043	Quartz
284	043	Flint
285	045	Pot
286	030	Charcoal
287	027	Crem bone
288	027	Crem bone
289	020	Bone
290	045	Bone
291	027	Crem bone
292	027	Charcoal
293	030	Charcoal
294	047	Pot
295	047	Pot
296	047	Pot
297	047	Stone
298	047	Burnt stone
299	047	Pot
300	047	Pot
301	043	Pot

*discarded in post-ex

Drawing register

Drawing no	**Details**
001	Pre-ex plan of trench
002	Pre-ex plan of trench
003	Pre-ex plan of trench
004	Pre-ex plan of trench
005	Pre-ex plan of trench

006	Pre-ex plan of trench
007	Pre-ex of passage
008	Plan of cist structure
009	Plan of 003 cairn
010	Plan of 003 cairn
011	Section through cairn
012	Projected elevation of cist
013	Section of sondage
014	Plan of pot and cist
015	Elevation of orthostats
016	Plan of cist
017	Plan of cist
018	Section of 'hearth' feature
019	Section of P&P pit
020	Post-ex of cairn
021	S facing section of cairn
022	Post-ex of cairn
023	Post-ex of cairn
024	Section of P&Ps possible hearth

Photographic register

Relates to both colour 35mm and slide (digital photos also taken)

Film 1

Frame no	**Description**
1-6	Pre-ex shots to SE
7-10	Pre-ex 001
11-12	004 to SE of cairn
13-21	009 paving in passage
22-23	004 to SE of cairn
24-27	009 paving in passage – pre-ex
28-33	003 and 004 in SW of trench

34	003 and 004 in SE of trench
35-36	Passage and forecourt pre-ex

Film 2

Frame no	**Description**
1-3	Passage pre-ex
4-5	009 passage slabs
6-7	004 in front of passage
8-9	012 in front of cairn
10	015 possible feature
11-15	016 cist pre-ex
16-17	018 orange soil in passage
18-19	006 grey soil and 019 black soil to SE of cairn
20-21	003 cairn to E of passage
22-23	012 cleaned to SW of cairn
24-26	003 cairn cleaned
27-28	S facing section of cairn
29	006 and 019 to SE of cairn
30-31	S facing section of cairn
32-33	018 in passage
34-36	Cist 016 fully exposed

Film 3

Frame no	**Description**
1-8	Cist 016 fully exposed
9-10	018 in passage
11-23	023 and 024 cist contents
24	019 black layer to SE
25	012 post-ex to SE
26-28	018 post-ex in passage
29	012 cairn removed
30-36	024 urn under excavation

Film 4

Frame no	Description
1-10	024 urn under excavation
11-16	020 and 021 cairn
17-19	P&P pit under excavation
20-21	Natural boulder with ‘cupmark’
22	028 small stones around cist
23-32	024 urn under excavation
33-34	035 small stones under pot
35-36	006 and 012 in front of passage

Film 5

Frame no	Description
1-3	035 and area
4-5	039 charcoal lens to SE
6	038 pit in section showing 020
7	018 in passage
8-9	040 in forecourt
10-11	042 in section
12-13	Natural rock and ‘cupmark’ post-ex
14-15	046 and pot under excavation
16-19	027 fill in P&P pit
22-23	049 cut of P&P hearth
24-25	Section SE
26-27	049 hearth feature and pot
28-30	Post-ex of P&P pit
31-33	049 post-ex of section
34-36	Post-ex of trenches

Film 6

Frame no	Description
1-6	Post-ex of trenches

7-9	Post-ex of in situ pot

Sample register

Sample no	Description	Context	Bags
001	Reddy-brown soil	011	1
002	Burnt soil and charcoal	019	1
003	Grey soil layer	006	5
004	Soil from cist packing	023	1
005	Dark soil and charcoal		2
006	Soil sample from E of pot	023	1
007	Soil sample W of pot with bone	023	1
008	Charcoal from fill of posthole	039	1
009	Soil from base of posthole	041	1
010	Fill from pit (P&P pit)	030	1
011	Fill from pit (P&P pit)	044	1
012	Fill from under cist	035	1
013	Lower fill from around pot	048	1
014	Fill around edge of pot	045	2
015	Charcoal layer	019	1
016	Fill of possible hearth feature	047	4