



Some Archaeological Studies
of
Cairns and Standing Stones
on
Raasay
by
Anne and Scott Wood



Published by
Association of Certificated Field Archaeologists
(Glasgow University)

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2004

The Association of Certificated Field Archaeologists, Glasgow University (ACFA) was formed in 1987. The membership comprises holders of the University of Glasgow's Certificate in Field Archaeology, awarded by the Department of Adult and Continuing Education. This three year, part time course, aims to teach adult students the basic principles of archaeological field survey and the importance of recording our cultural heritage of all periods. ACFA seeks to continue this work by undertaking field surveys within Scotland.

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All drawings including the cover drawing of Eyre Cairn are by J S. Wood.



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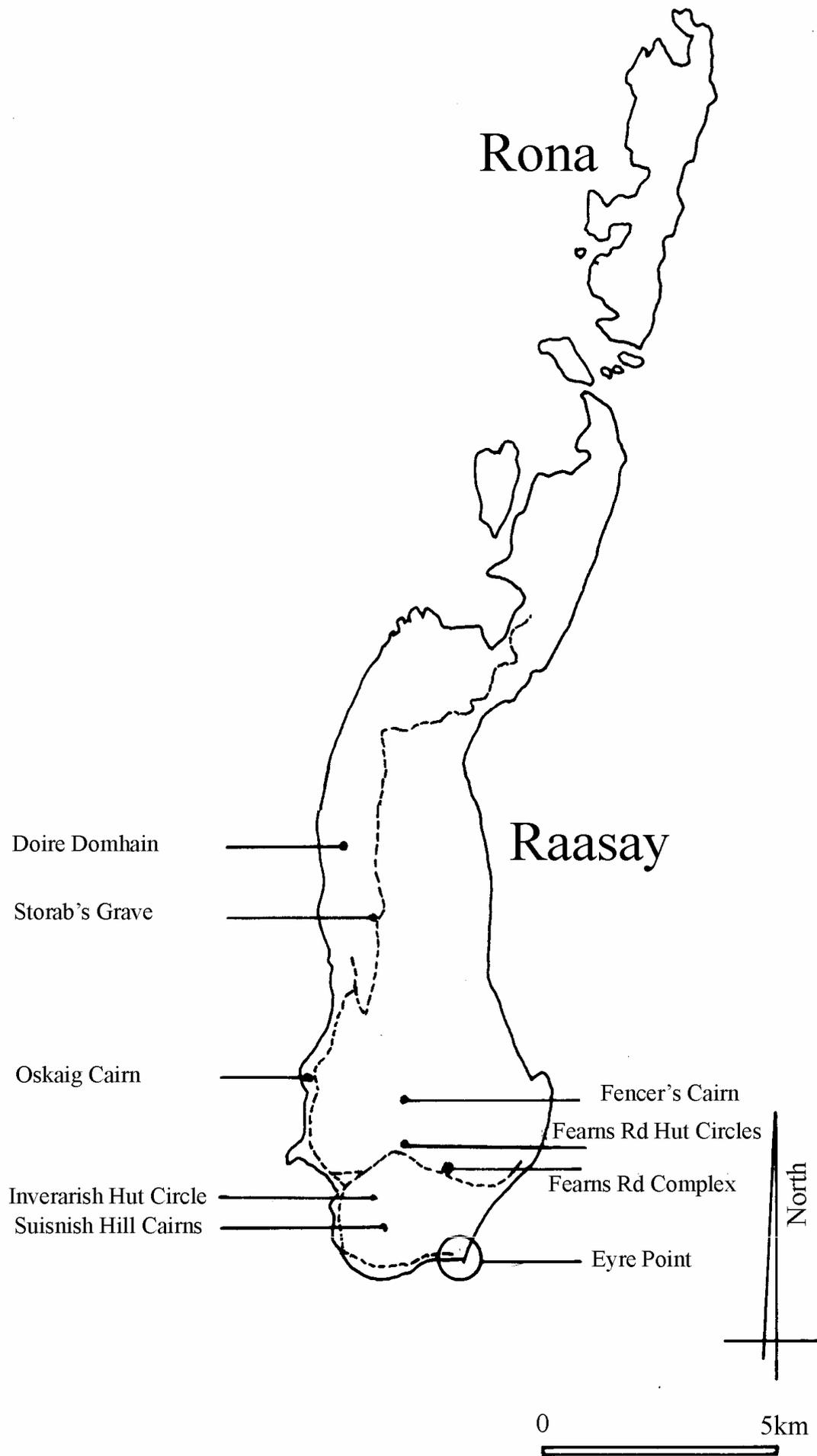
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Isle of Raasay



Location Map





Abstract: The surveys and reappraisal of some of the features contained in this paper form part of ACFA's continuing interest in the physical remains of human activity on the Island of Raasay

Introduction.

This work is a continuation of the 1995, 96, 97, 98, 99, 2000, 2002, 2003 and 2004 surveys of the physical remains of human activity on the Island of Raasay.

In 1995 the townships of Oskaig and Holoman were surveyed along with the surrounding area. In 1996 the townships of Balachuirn, Balmeanach, Inver and Brae with their surrounds were surveyed. In 1997 the survey covered the townships of Glame, Manish More, Brochel and Doire Domhain with their environs. In 1998 the twin townships of North and South Screapadal and the surrounding area including the forest between Brochel and Screapadal were surveyed. In 1999 we surveyed the township of Manish Beg and the encompassing land. In 2000 the survey was of the townships of Arnish and Torran with their hinterlands. In 2002 the survey was of part of North Fearn in the south of the island and of the Fladda to Umachan path in the north. In 1993 the survey of North Fearn was completed together with the township at Umachan in the north. In 2004 the townships of Hallaig and An Leac were surveyed along with their surrounding lands.

Inevitably, as time has passed, some features have been reassessed while others required amplification. Information had amassed regarding an area where difficulties of access exist and other features had been noted or reported to us. All required to be recorded and the results now follow.

Acknowledgements.

ACFA has been systematically surveying the Island of Raasay since 1995. People return year upon year to this task and their enthusiasm and dedication is acknowledged. The directors, John Macdonald and Scott Wood, thank them and specifically those who in some way contributed to the contents of this paper. They are to the best of my memory and my apologies to anyone overlooked, Jim Anderson, Margaret Gill, Bruce Henry, Frances Hood, Ian Marshall, Helen Maxwell, Anne and John Macdonald, the late Ron Rochford and the late Dennis Topen.

Thanks again to Lionel Masters for his good judgement and guidance and to Rebecca and Calum Don Mackay for their friendship and local expertise.

We are grateful for help from the Glasgow Archaeological Society and The Council for British Archaeology Challenge Fund for their generous grants without which it would have been a struggle to publish this and the previous Raasay Papers.

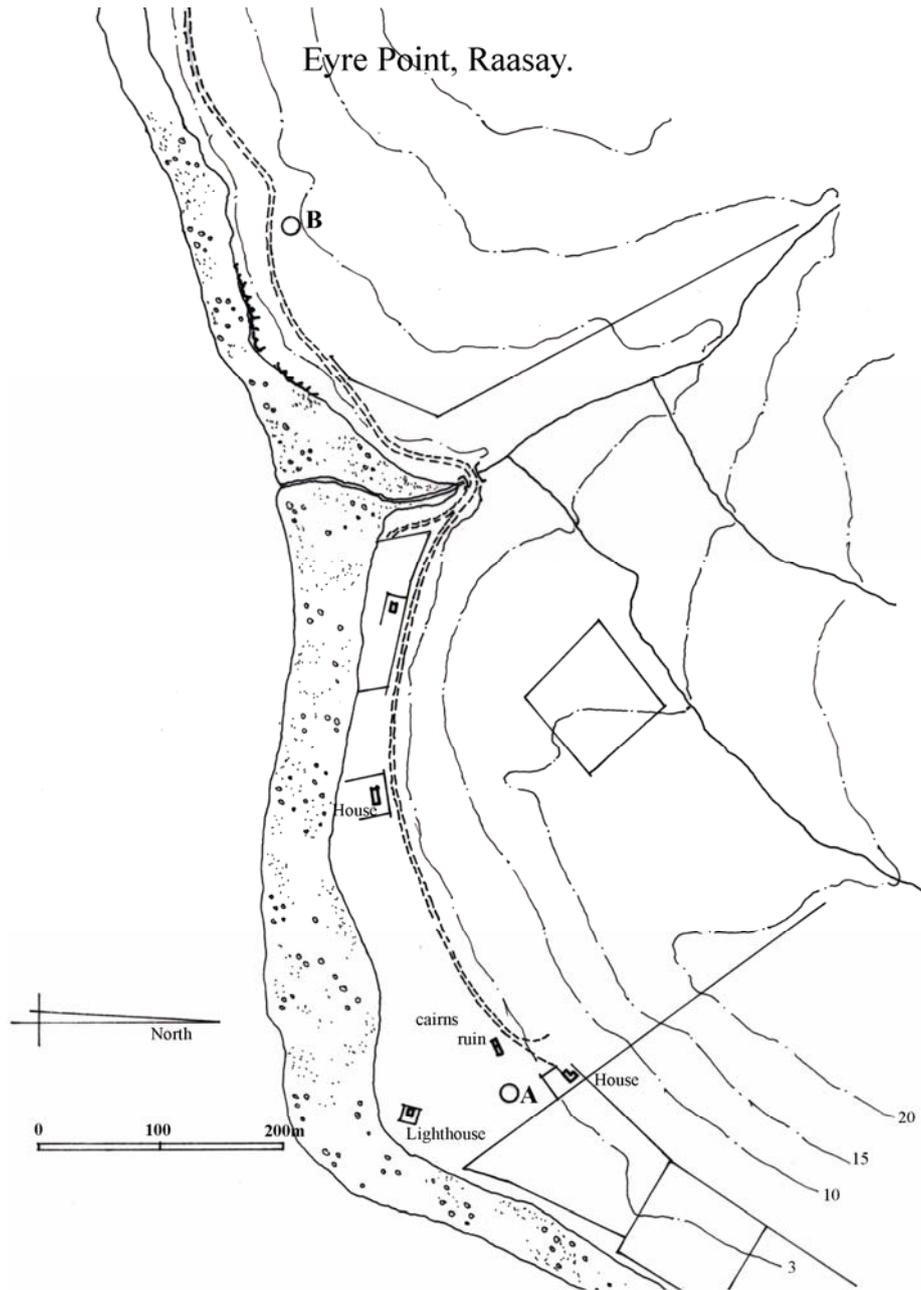
Eyre Point, Raasay.



Eyre Point from the west.

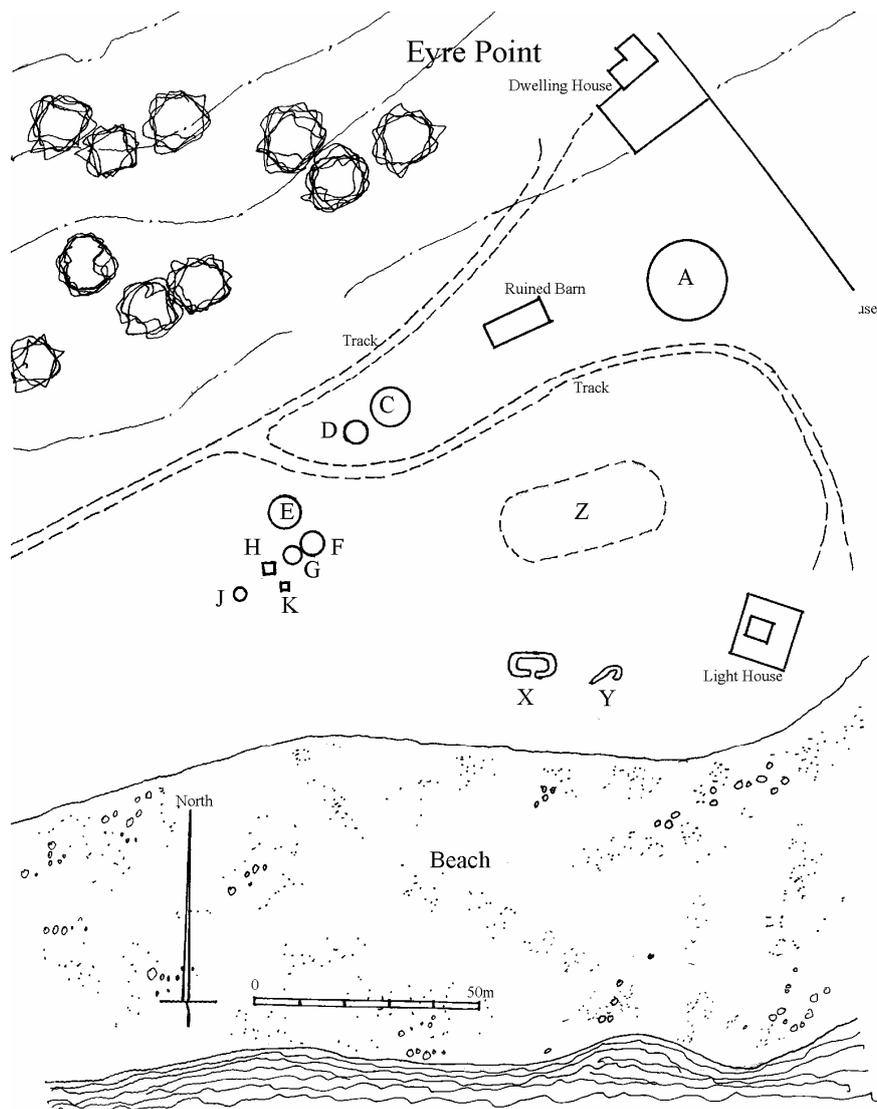
Eyre point, the southeast extremity of the isle of Raasay, has been visited on numerous occasions by members of ACFA while working on the island and much of archaeological interest has been noted. Acting on the recommendation of the directors of the Raasay Survey Programme, the students of the Certificate in Field Archaeology course from the Department of Adult and Continuing Education at the University of Glasgow carried out a detailed survey of part of the Eyre lands at Easter 1998. Regrettably, despite permission having been readily granted by the Scottish Office as landowners, the crofter renting the land containing Eyre point, alone, refused access to his grazings. This was, and continues to be a grave disappointment, \not least, as it is completely contrary to the help, enthusiasm and friendship received from his neighbours and all the other islanders. It is known that this land contains many significant features. Unfortunately, it may be that the whole island will have been surveyed in detail with the exception of a mere fourteen hectares at Eyre.

This paper is an attempt to draw together the various notes made from time to time and record the details which have been observed on the strand between the sea and the raised beach. Much remains unrecorded on the higher ground inland. The fencing, which now encloses the land, was erected in 2001 and is regarded with mixed feelings by the writer. Access is now denied but protection from vehicles straying beyond the end of the public road has been afforded



Location.

Eyre Point is the south-eastern corner of Raasay where the narrows of Caol Mor open out into the Inner Sound with the Isle of Scalpay opposite and Applecross with the mainland beyond to the east. The point is a strip of grass-covered shingle between the beach and the steep rough slopes inland. An automatic lighthouse at the eastern end of the strand dominates the Point, with a dwelling house tucked in hard against the steep slopes 150m inland from the shore. The strip of strand narrows towards the west and runs out where the Eyre Burn flows into the sea 600m from the Point. The public road bends sharply over the burn on a bridge and rises steeply 20m above the water as it moves westwards. From this higher ground there is a fine vista back towards the east across the strand to the Point and the lighthouse.



Feature A.

Eyre Cairn.

NG 5805 3426

Without survey this appears to have changed little since the Ordnance Survey reports of the 8th June 1961 and 22nd September 1971. The “cist” as reported is 2.40m long on an east – west axis, 1.10m wide and there is a head height of 1.0m under the large capstone. This latter rests at a slight angle on three orthostats with a fourth not quite touching the cap, the whole giving the impression of an Irish or Breton dolman but set in the midst of a denuded cairn which has evidence of kerbing on the north side. On the flattish raised beach of Eyre Point the “cist” and cairn remains make a prominent feature.

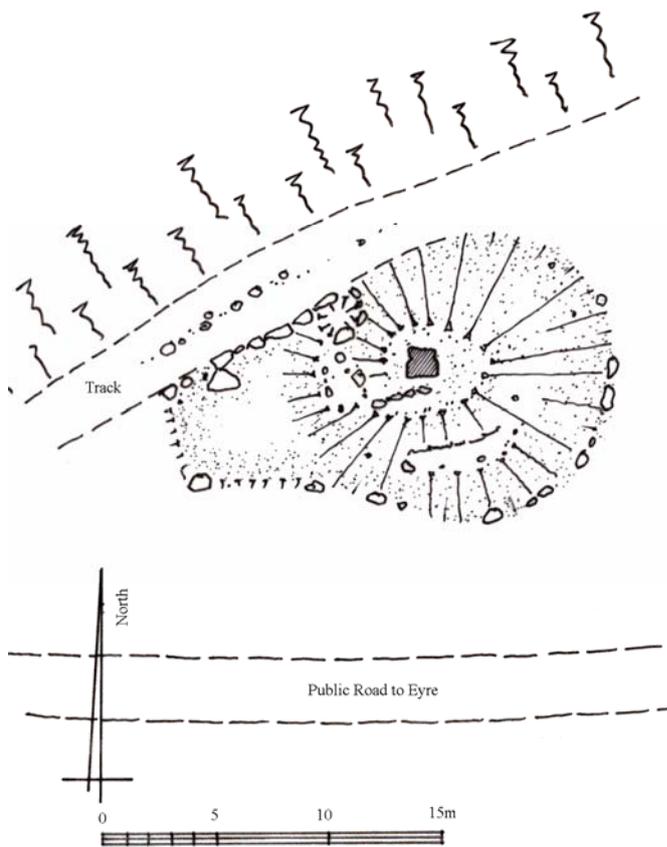
There is little doubt that this is the remains of a Hebridean type chambered cairn and as such requires to be surveyed in detail with drawings made at an appropriate scale. The cairn has been much used as a source of building material for the adjacent stone wall and dwelling house.

Feature B**Carn a' Pairc nan Each****NG 5728 3405**

The cairn overlooks Eyre Point, from the west, and lies a mere 8.0m off the public road at the foot of a steep slope. The surrounding ground surface is covered with grass, moss and reeds. Much stone has tumbled from the slope above, but within this, the cairn stands as a prominent feature. The terrace on which the cairn stands faces south towards Scalpay and its edge falls away steeply to the sea some 30.0m below. It is possible that this is the cairn noted by Roger Miket on 15th April 1988 (Horse Park Raasay NG 53 SE 6) but the location is given as some 400m to the west where nothing could be found.

The cairn is constructed of randomly placed irregular stones largely covered with grass, moss and notably bracken. Some stones appear on the surface. It lies on an almost east to west axis, measuring 14.0m by 12.0m. From the eastern approach it appears as a large mound but there is evidence for a long tail extending to the west some 8.0m.

Carn a Pairc nan Each



Feature B.

The cairn stands to a height of 2.0m above the ground level on the east, 2.50m on the south and 1.50m on the north. There is evidence of 'howking' for road material in several places on the south side of the cairn.

On top of the mound a large almost rectangular capstone lies amid the grass and heather, measuring 1.25m from east to west by 1.10m north to south. The stone is 0.20m thick with a cavity evident beneath. A 0.15m thick layer of peaty soil was carefully stripped from over the capstone to ascertain the stone dimensions and replaced on completion.

A line of stones about 1.0m wide runs along the north side of the cairn, parallel to it, defining a track which pushes past the cairn up the slope towards then northeast. Evidence of this track continues to the west, disappearing under the modern road.



Feature A viewed from the east.



Feature B viewed from the west



Feature E viewed from the northwest

0.80m long lies out of line, turning inwards. The cairn is no more than 0.35m high with a flat interior covered with grass and heather.

Feature J. Round Cairn

A few metres to the southwest of Feature H is a small circular cairn 2.20m in diameter with a stone edging. This cairn has a mounded interior 0.35m high and it is grass and heather covered.

Feature K. Pictish Cairn.

This is a small almost square cairn with little stature and having stone visible in the grassy cover.

Feature X. Fisherman's Bothy.

This feature is the foundations of what may have been a small bothy lying on an east to west axis 10.0m long overall. In width it measures 6.0m overall and 3.50m internally. The walls show as grass covered stony banks 0.60m high. There may have been an entrance in the south wall facing the sea. The ends of the building are rounded. Outwith the building there are several shallow pits to the north and the northeast. The vestigial remains of another smaller oval structure can be seen 2.50m to the south.

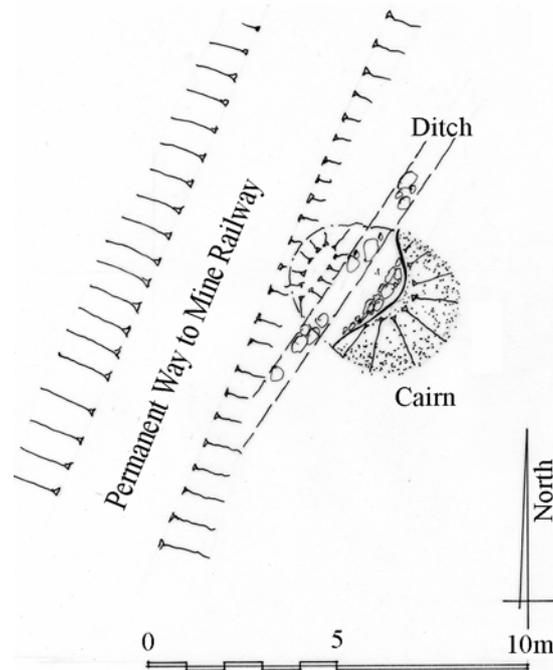
Feature Y. Mound.

This feature is an 8.0m long grassy mound lying east to west with a hooked curve at the east end having an overall width of 4.0m at this point. The maximum height of the mound is 0.60m. There may have been an entrance in the south wall facing the sea. The ends of the building are rounded.

Feature Z Disturbed Area.

This is an area approximately 36m from east to west and some 15m north to south with considerable stone visible. Within the area lie several features. An oval mound lying northeast to southwest on its long axis measures 4.5m by 3.4m and is 1.0m high. There is a well defined stone edging at the southwest, south and east sides and may be the Viking boat burial reported by Martin Wildgoose. The area is confused and merits detailed planning and study.

There are probably five further kerbed cairns in this zone, two further boat burials and two more Pictish cairns but due to the disturbance and juxtaposition of features a detailed examination is necessary.



A group of heather covered cairns has been noted to the east of the old track way of the Raasay Iron Mine Railway on the moor land between the remains of the pier installation and the mines to the north. The cairns occur in an area yet to be surveyed by ACFA at an elevation of about 60m OD on the gently rising western flank of Suisnish Hill. One is notable for having been cut through by the builders of the railway between 1913 and '14. It uniquely shows its composition and covering blanket of peaty soil.

The cairn is sub circular being 3.50m across from north to south and is some 4.50m long east to west. The structure stands to a height of 1.50m and is fully heather covered on its eastern side. The cairn has been cut through giving a section face parallel to the railway that shows the composition of rounded boulders up to 0.30m and 0.40m in diameter. The cairn is covered over by a blanket of dark brown peaty soil 0.35m thick.

A number of other similar mounds occur in the vicinity also soil and heather covered. No chamber, cist or large orthostatic stones are apparent and there is no evidence amongst the stones or on the surrounding surface of disturbance or of artefacts.

Consultations regarding the rate of growth for peat on an exposed hillside have produced varying timescales and little agreement. No conclusion as to a possible date for the cairn building has been made using this method.



View of Suisnish Hill cairn field from the north

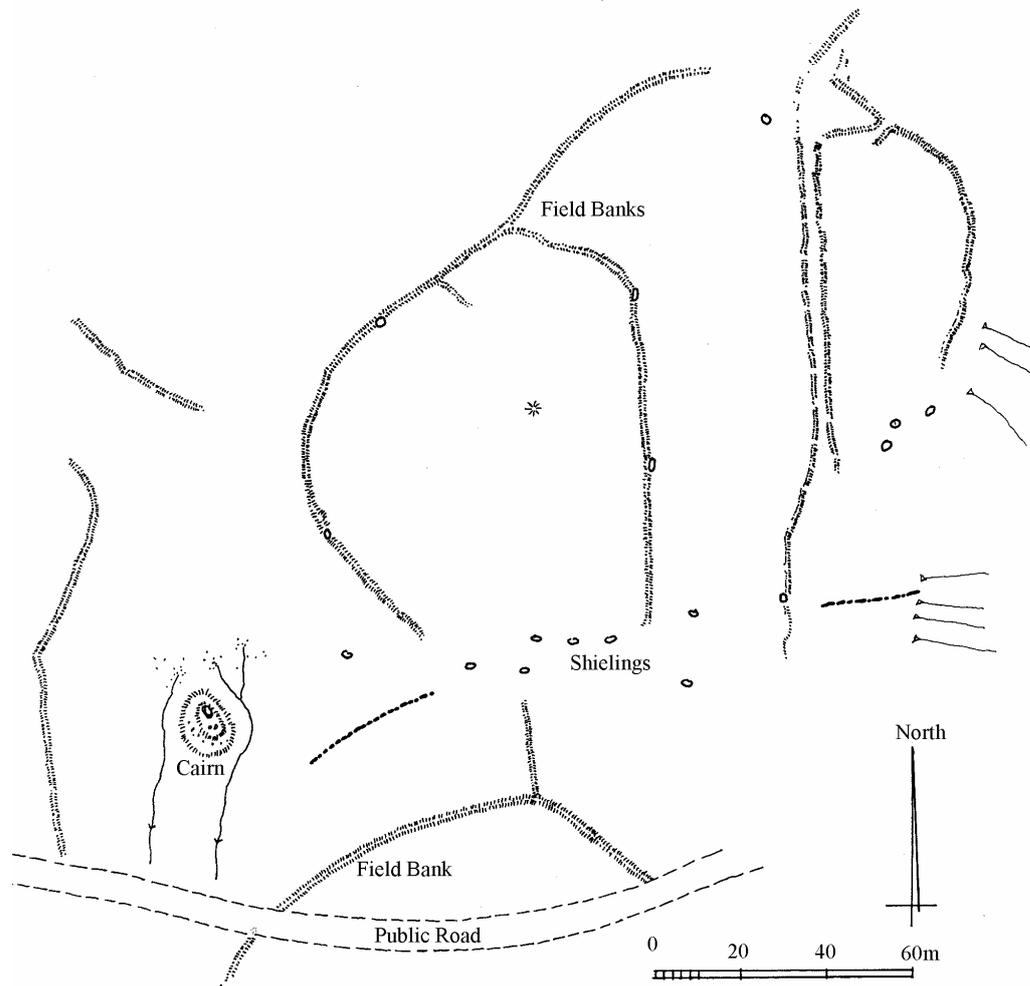


View of the Cairn section from the south



View of the Cairn section from the west

Fearns Road Complex



Fearns Road Cairn.

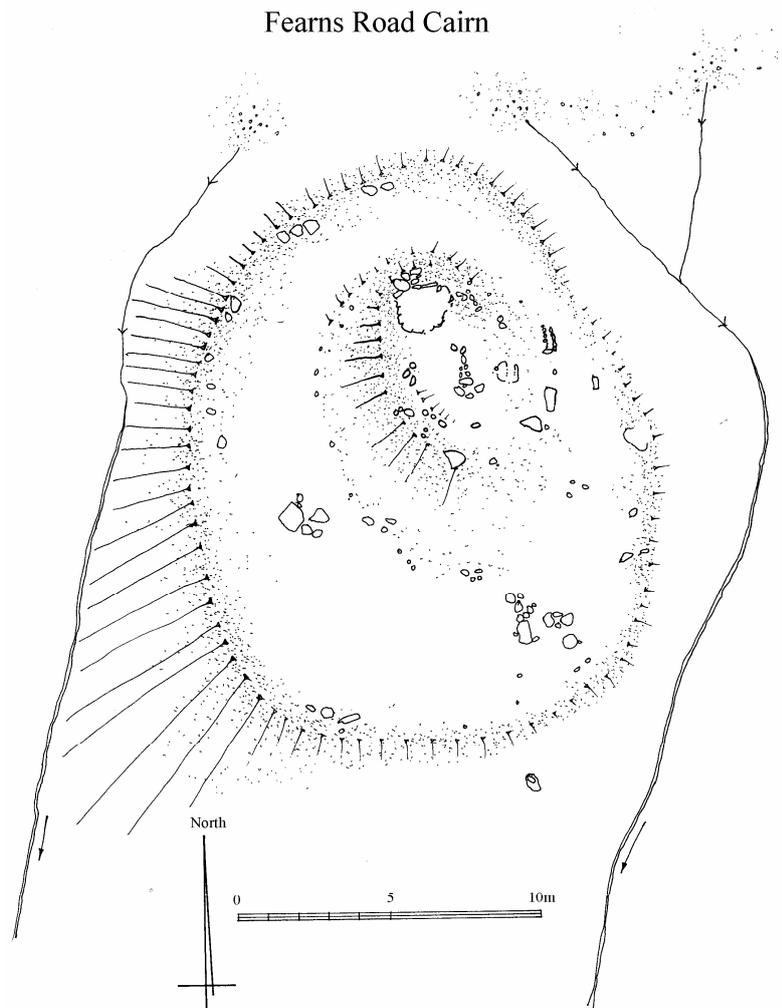
NG 5785 3598

On a south facing slope at approximately 170m above sea level, on a mound between two small burns, is a cairn, not more than 25m to the north of the Inverarish to Fearns road. An outer mound is oval in shape and measures 19.5m from north to south by 15m east to west. The limits of this mound are clearly defined in most parts, sometimes with stone edging but occasionally simply as a change of slope in the grass. Several large stones and boulders lie within the mound while beneath the grassy turf cover stone can be felt. On top of this outer cairn a further mound, 10.5m by 8.0m, has been built with the edging to this mound also defined by stones and a change of slope. Within this inner mound a shieling has been built.

The shieling appears to have a “figure of eight” shape lying northwest to southeast on its long axis and measuring overall 6.5m by 4m externally. The smaller, north section is clearly defined by dry-stone walling up to three courses high and 0.35m tall at the highest point. This section measures 3.5m by 3.0m externally and an entrance may exist on the southeast side. The limits of the larger south section are less clear with

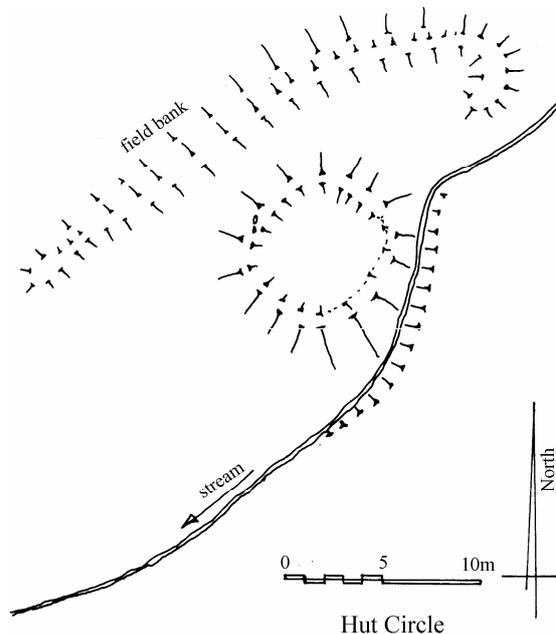
some stone edging in the southwest and considerable tumbled stone lying in the interior and scattered about the structure.

Immediately to the northeast and northwest spreads of small stone show where two small burns rise out of the hillside and run down either side of the cairn towards the road.



Discussion.

It is considered that this is a multi-period site. An oval prehistoric cairn has been re-used as a base for perhaps a second cairn and finally as the base for a shieling.



The feature is situated on a gentle south facing grassy slope to the west of a small stream some 25m to the north of the Inverarish to Fearn road. The remains lie in a sheltered valley among a series of turf and stone banks marking out an old field system in the area. The modern field containing the monument is well fenced from the road and is still in use for grazing and might well not have been examined but for a suspicion raised by an aerial photograph held by the RCAHMS.

The interior has a diameter of 8m with walls spreading to a width of over a metre and standing up to 0.45m in height. The northeast to southeast quadrant of the wall has been eroded on the exterior by the encroaching stream when in spate. There may have been an entrance in the south. The interior is grass covered with no visible signs of internal features.

A turf and stone field bank passes to the west and north of the circle at only a few metres distance.



View of circle looking to the northwest

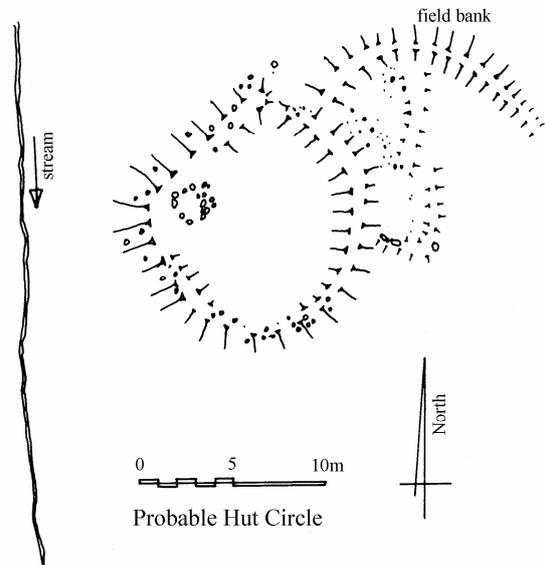
Fearns Road

Possible Hut Circle.

NG 5713 3612

The feature lies to the east of a stream on a south facing slope around 80m to the north of a modern sheep fank and the Inverarish to Fearns road. The remains show as a sub-circular structure with pronounced stone and turf banks. It is 10m in diameter internally with walls having a spread of over a metre and between 0.60m and 1.40m high. In the western sector a 3m setting of stones is all but lost in the grass.

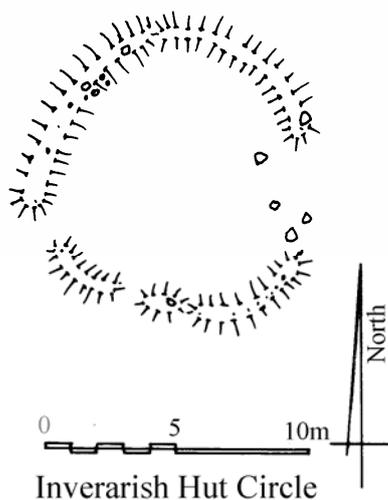
To the northeast of the circle, the slight remains of a turf walling abut at a break in the wall which may be an entrance. This walling creates a small pen between the circle and a turf and stone field bank which curves to the east from the circle.



It is suggested that this is the remains of a hut circle which has been re-used for the working of sheep.

Inverarish Hut Circle

NG 5924 3595

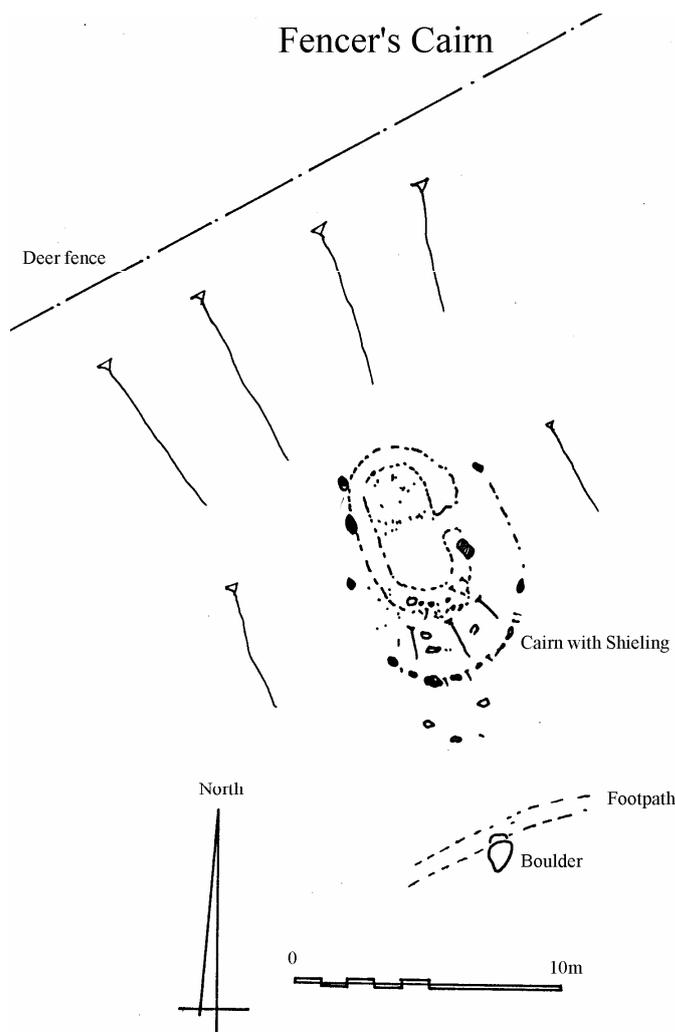


This circle is located on the grass covered lower slopes of Suisnish Hill, to the northwest of the line of the mine tramline and to the south of Inverarish. It lies in an area of extensive field banks and clearance cairns. The structure is sub-annular in shape, bounded by a turf bank 0.30m high, 1.0m thick and has an internal diameter of 10m. There is a probable entrance on the west side but no indication of any internal features.

In 2000 workmen working on the island erecting fences reported a feature at the above reference point. The position, so far not included in an ACFA survey area, was visited where an obvious shieling was found set upon a mound of tumbled stones. The following report was compiled.

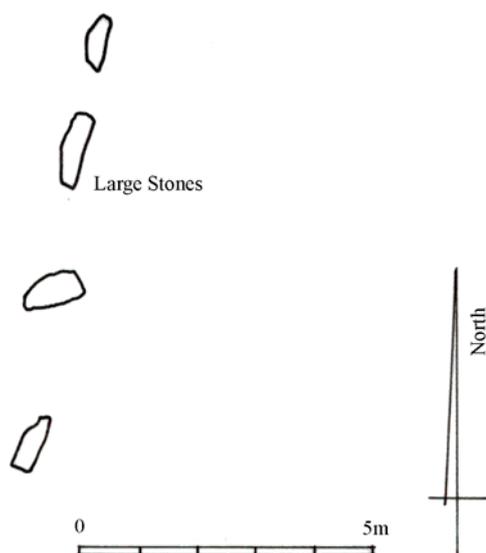
The cairn is set on a steep south facing, heather covered slope and is an oval shaped spread of stones 8m long from north to south and 6m wide. It lies 6m from a foot path that runs in the valley floor above the head waters of the Inverarish Burn and 10m to the south of the recently erected deer fence. An edging of stones rising to a maximum height of 0.30m delineates the southern arc of the stony spread, whilst the end of a shieling structure masks the northern edge.

There is little doubt that this was a small kerbed cairn into which a shieling was inserted many millennia later taking advantage of the dry raised base and abundant supply of building materials it afforded.



The shieling is 5m long from north to south by 2m wide internally while the walls reach a height of 1.30m on the west side. The northern end of the shieling coincides with the up slope edge of the cairn. An entrance 0.80m wide occurs in the centre of the east wall. Internally the structure is rubble filled with a possible partition wall that may have formed a small cell at the north end. The back of the north wall of the cell shows four or five courses of reasonably well built stonework reaching a height of 1.0m internally.

Some 40m to 50m to the west is a two compartment shieling lying sheltered from the prevailing wind under a large rocky outcrop.



long lying from north to south by 0.30m at its thickest standing 0.80m high. Parallel to this a distance of 0.90m to the west is a large boulder with a flat vertical face 1.20m long by 0.55m wide and 0.70m high. Between the two vertical faces of the stones at the south end is a slightly curved kerb formed by placed stones. There is no sign of a cap or cap stones, nor any indication of closure at the north end. To the south of the cairn are four large stones in a line. After a gap of some 30m this linear arrangement of large stones begins again and continues to the south for a considerable distance. The stones are not part of the cairn but rather mark the line of an ancient boundary that respects or includes the cairn.

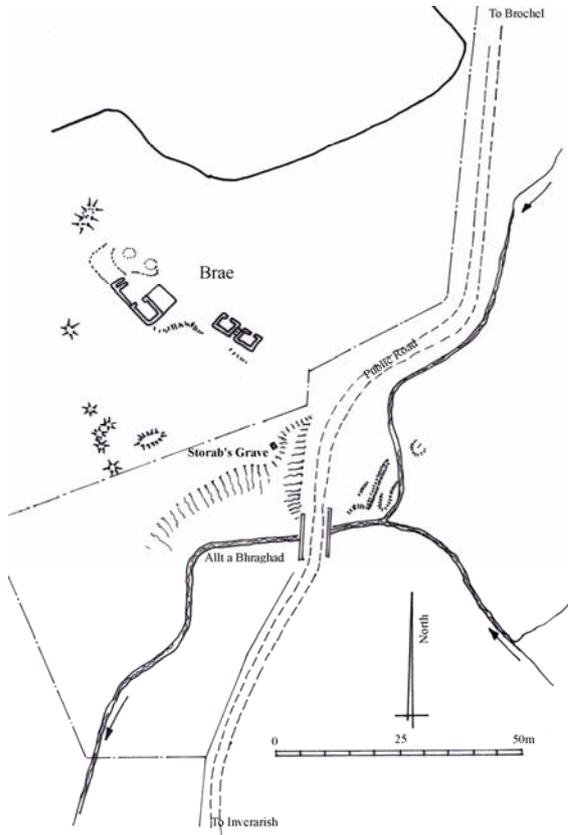
It is very probable that the feature is the remains of a small round cairn of the Bronze Age. It was about 6m in diameter containing a stone built chamber 1.20m long by 0.90m wide and had a height of about 0.75m. Only the two large stones forming the sides remain, all the rest of the chamber stones and the cairn material having almost certainly been extracted when the adjacent Manitoba was built in the late 19th century.

The feature is set on ground falling gently to the north and 50m to the south of the ruinous (now rehabilitated as a single house) building known as Manitoba. It lies on the open ground to the west of the road north from Inverarish through Oskaig and opposite Oskaig Lodge. The ground is grass, heather and reed covered. The feature shows as two large orthostats 0.70m and 0.80m high lying parallel to each other 0.90m apart on a north to south axis. The feature was noted by ACFA during the survey of Oskaig and Holoman in April 1995 and was recorded as a cist in ACFA Occasional Paper No.13 (p4, Feature 18).

Between the orthostats and close around them is a scatter of stones on the surface of a distinct grassy circle. Probing of the grass revealed a low stony mound scarcely 0.15m high, but with a definable edge some 5.50m in diameter. The two large orthostats are at the centre of this little mound.

The eastern orthostat is a large rectangular slab measuring 1.30m

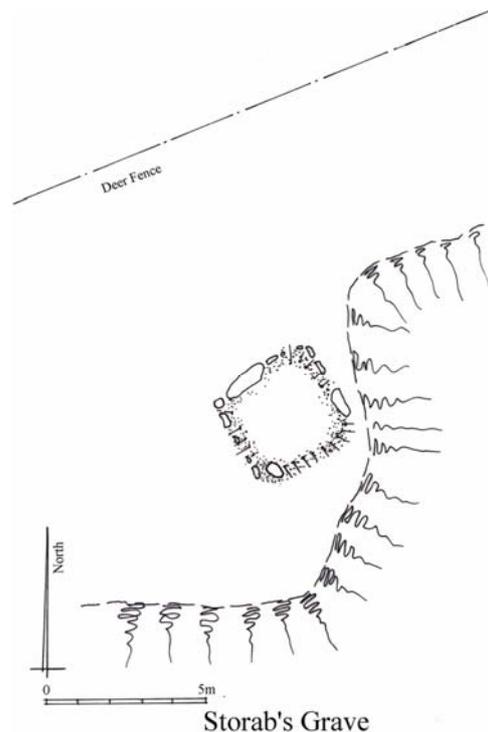
Storab's Grave. NG 562 417



The remains are located 25m west of the public road from Inverarish to Brochel on the rim of the plateau on which the ruins of the settlement of Brae lie. The cairn is very degraded and is outwith the modern enclosing fence and overlooking the Allt Bhraghaid as it passes under the road. The cairn has been reported as being circular but is, in fact, almost square, being 3.40m from north to south by 3.70m from east to west. The edge of the cairn is well defined by a kerb of stones on the north, east and west sides but shows only as a grassy slope on the south side. A single stone 1.10m long lies along the north side, a large stone can be seen on the east side and there are stones edging the west side. The cairn is not high being only 0.35m in

height and is turf covered with some heather. Cultivation rigs can be traced all around the ruins of the settlement of Brae and these continue under the modern fence to surround the cairn. There is some evidence that an old turf and stone bank existed around the edge of the plateau, much of which has eroded away and slipped down the slope in the immediate vicinity of the cairn. The cairn itself is now very close to the edge of the slope and may well disappear in the future.

The cairn is most probably a square Pictish burial cairn.





Oskaig Cairn from the north

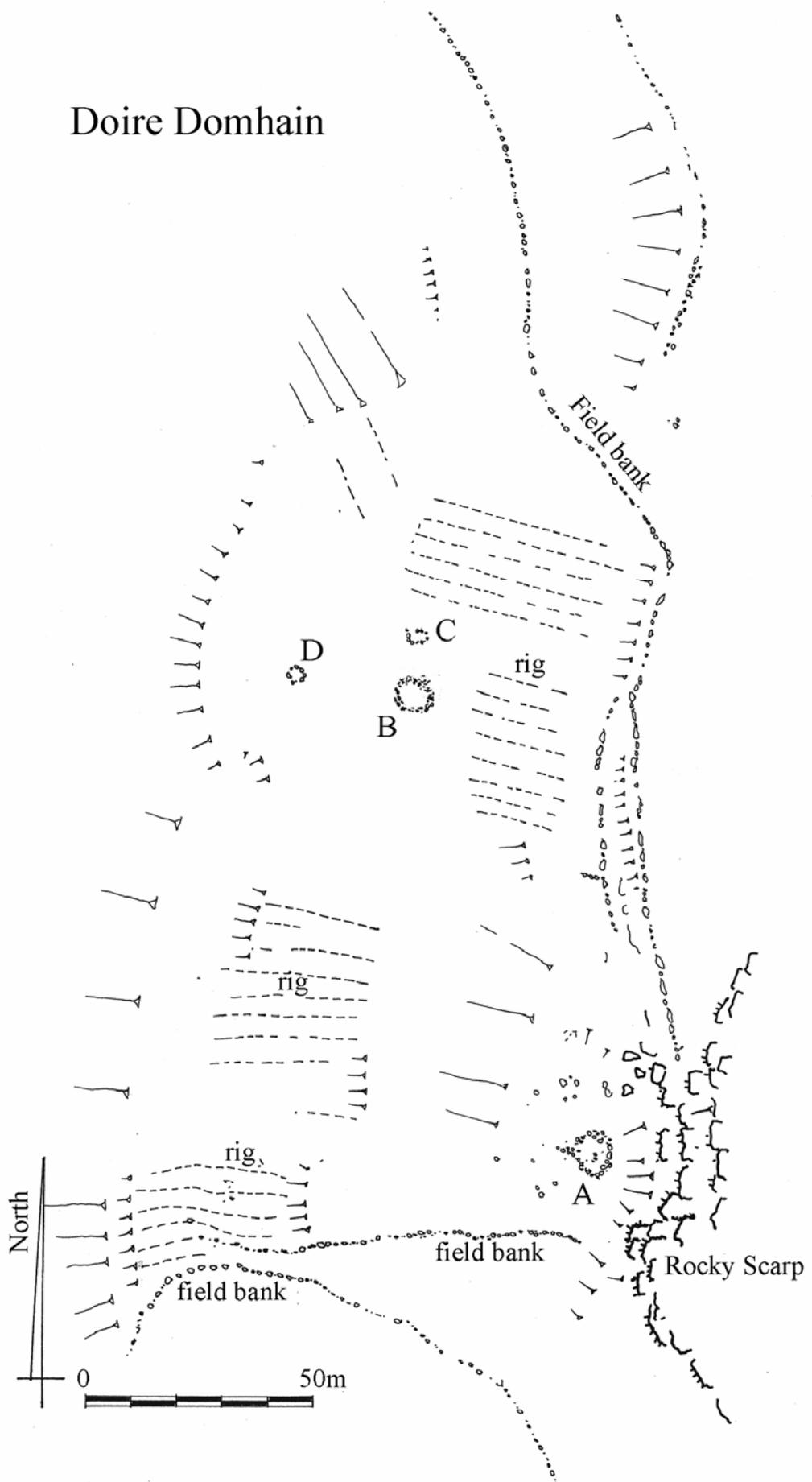


Oskaig Cairn from the northeast



Storab's grave from the road

Doire Domhain



Doire Domhain

In 1997, features under the crags to the north of Doire Domhain were observed and briefly noted. (Occasional Paper 26, Features 55A and B, p 92.) Discovered on the last day of an arduous survey in poor weather and with still much ground to cover, no drawings were made. The site nevertheless made an impact and created a curiosity which has prompted a number of return visits over the years.

In 1997 the main feature (55A) is described as a “possible kerb cairn” at NG 5559 4452. Feature 55B is reported as a “possible hut Circle” at NG 5559 4462 with mention being made of agricultural remains and land boundaries in the area. The subsequent visits have shown that the area merits a much fuller description which follows here.

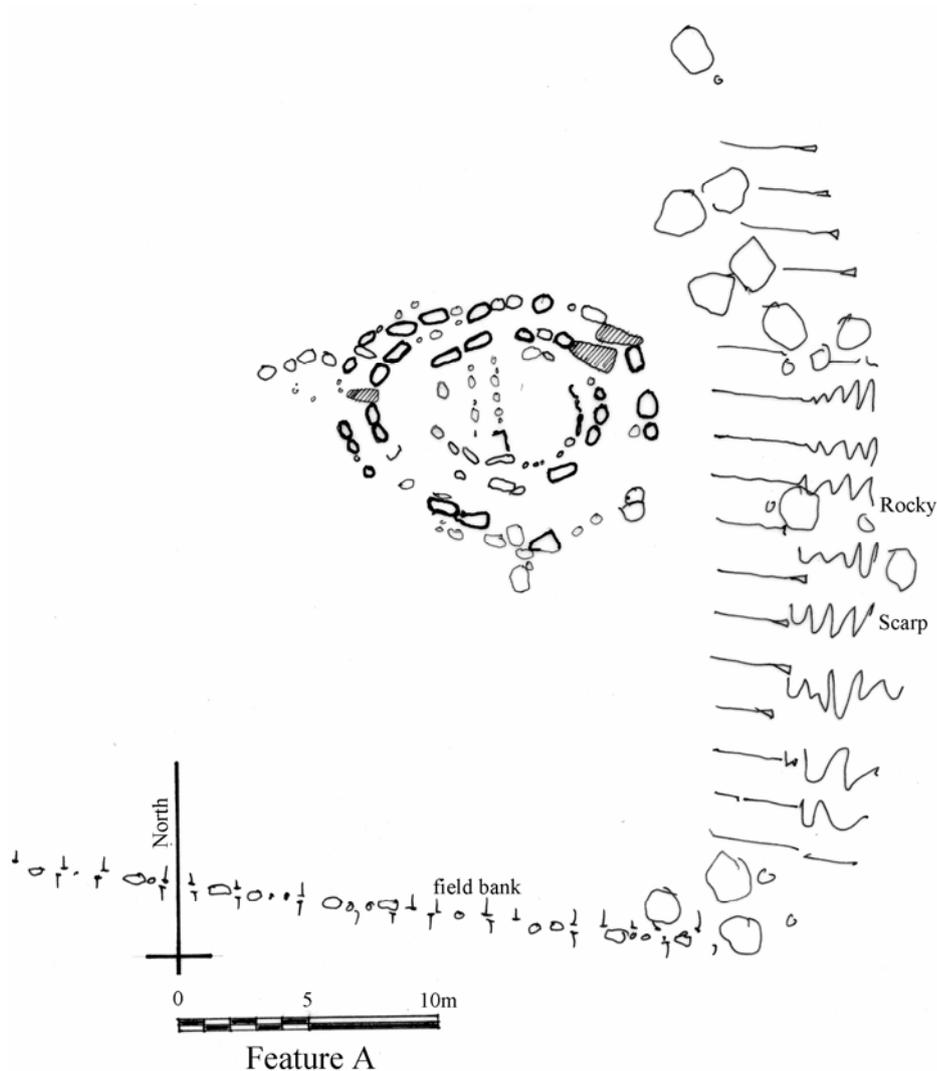
Doire Domhain.

NG 555 445 to NG 556 448

To the north of the settlement of Doire Domhain is a flattish terrace of land 250m long from north to south and up to 100m at its widest in the south. The terrace lies at an elevation between 120m and 130m OD and is dominated by a 30m high rocky scarp along its eastern side. On the west the land falls away steeply towards the shore half a kilometre away. The whole area has a grand panorama from southwest through to northwest over the Sound of Raasay and the Isle of Skye with a fine view straight into Portree Bay. The area contains four roughly circular features set among extensive rig and furrow with two field banks on the south side with a third running north to south on each side of the precipitous scarp. The whole area is grass covered with much heather and is nearly always wet.



Feature A from the top of the rocky scarp.



Feature A

Probable Kerb Cairn

NG 5557 4454

The oval shaped feature is situated at 130m OD on sloping ground that drops 1.50m over the 12m length of the remains on an east to west axis. It measures 10m from north to south with the rocky scarp immediately to the east. This is crumbling and large boulders and fragments lie along its base including some on the feature adding further confusion. An outer oval of stones is 10m in diameter from east to west but narrower at 8m from north to south. This oval is more defined on the north and west sides where for a short length it appears as a double row. Within the oval is an inner ring of stones, again more apparent on the north side where the two rings are 0.90m apart. The inner oval measures 7m from east to west and 5m from north to south. Within this there is the suggestion of a north to south division defined in lines of stone and there are two stones suggestive of two sides of a small cist or box. The interior surface is rocky and bare. The structure is devoid of cairn material either in or around the feature.

After reflection for several years it is suggested that the feature is the remains of a kerb cairn that has, as is common with many such remains on Raasay, had a shieling built on it at a later date. Additionally, some 20m to the south and stretching for over 100m are two earth and stone field banks, while a third bank runs southwards from the point where the rocky scarp peters out. A cairn in close proximity must have been providential to the builders of the field banks.

Feature B.

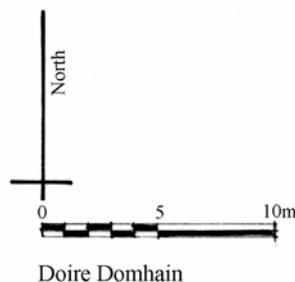
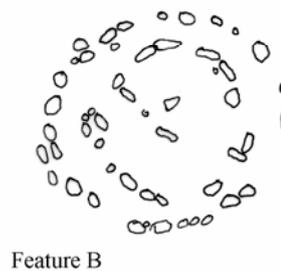
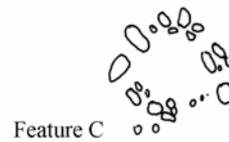
Concentric Stone Circles

Possible Ring Cairn

This feature appears as a pair of concentric stone circles protruding through the heather and grass 110m to the northwest of Feature A. It lies some 5m below the elevation of Feature A with the land sloping from east to west. The outer circle of stones has a diameter of 10m from east to west and is 9.0m from north to south. Internally, the ring of stones has a diameter of 6m and the rings are 0.90m apart. No stones are greater than 0.50m in height. A couple of stones show in the interior towards the northwest with nothing else apparent. Probing the ground with a steel spike indicated a stony surface just below the turf. The area is grass covered with much rough heather and is usually waterlogged. Rigs with furrows occur just to the east on an east to west axis.

In October 1999 an area 8m by 6m in the northeast quadrant was stripped of turf. The stony interior was confirmed with nothing lying outside the circles. The stones in the interior were mostly angular fragments of Torridonian sandstone and were revealed all packed about by black soil material. No attempt was made to clear the interior or to find a basal layer as the flooding and water logging of the site was unmanageable.

It is thought that the feature is a small ring cairn onto which clearance has been dumped from the agriculture which took place immediately to the east.



Feature C**Small Circle of Stones.**

A small circle of stones occurs 8m to the north of Feature B. It is 5m in diameter overall with an internal diameter of 3m. Its northeast and southwest sides appear briefly as a double ring of stones set together. All other parts of the circle are a single curve of larger stones. The interior is grass and heather covered and again probing indicated a stony layer beneath the turf.

Feature D**Small Circle of Stones.**

This small circle of stones has a diameter of 4.50m maximum overall and has a 2.50m minimum internally. It lies as a single circle of stones, 20m due east from Feature B, among heather and grass. It has the merest suggestion of a double row of stones in its southwest quadrant. Probing in and around it indicated some stones beneath the turf in the interior.

Agricultural Remains.

From the north, a field bank runs south for some 180m at the bottom of the slope in the east, before rising and ending near to top of the rocky scarp. From the south of the scarp the bank restarts and continues on in that direction, to close off the higher land to the centre of the island. The bank is substantial and contains much stone especially to the north of the scarp. In the south, running east to west, are a pair of field banks each about 100m long. At their beginnings in the west they are 5m apart. The northern bank merges with the south end of the scarp 20m south of Feature A while the southern bank bends towards the south leaving a gap of about 30m between it and the south end of the scarp.

The area enclosed contains the cairn and circles of stones (Features A to D) and four main patches of old agriculture characterised by rig and furrow remains. These lie on an east to west axis, are up to 35m long with the rigs about 4m apart. None of the agricultural remains encroaches on the stone monuments.

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