

Prehistoric Cladich

- a preliminary glance



Observations and meandering
around this small Argyll hamlet

ABSTRACT

I visited the area South Loch Awe since childhood, usually spending several weeks each Summer in the area from the early 1950s until the mid-1980s.

During this time, I was introduced to the history, culture and prehistory of the area by my father, an amateur observer of the local area. Although we visited most of the local archaeological sites, I do not recall visiting Cladich Chambered Cairn.

On a recent return to the area, I decided to make up for this possible omission and take a look at this prehistoric site.

... and one thing led to another!

Simon Davies



Uist Community Archaeology Group
and ACFA – Field Archaeology for All -
Arc-eòlas do na h-uile.

Contact

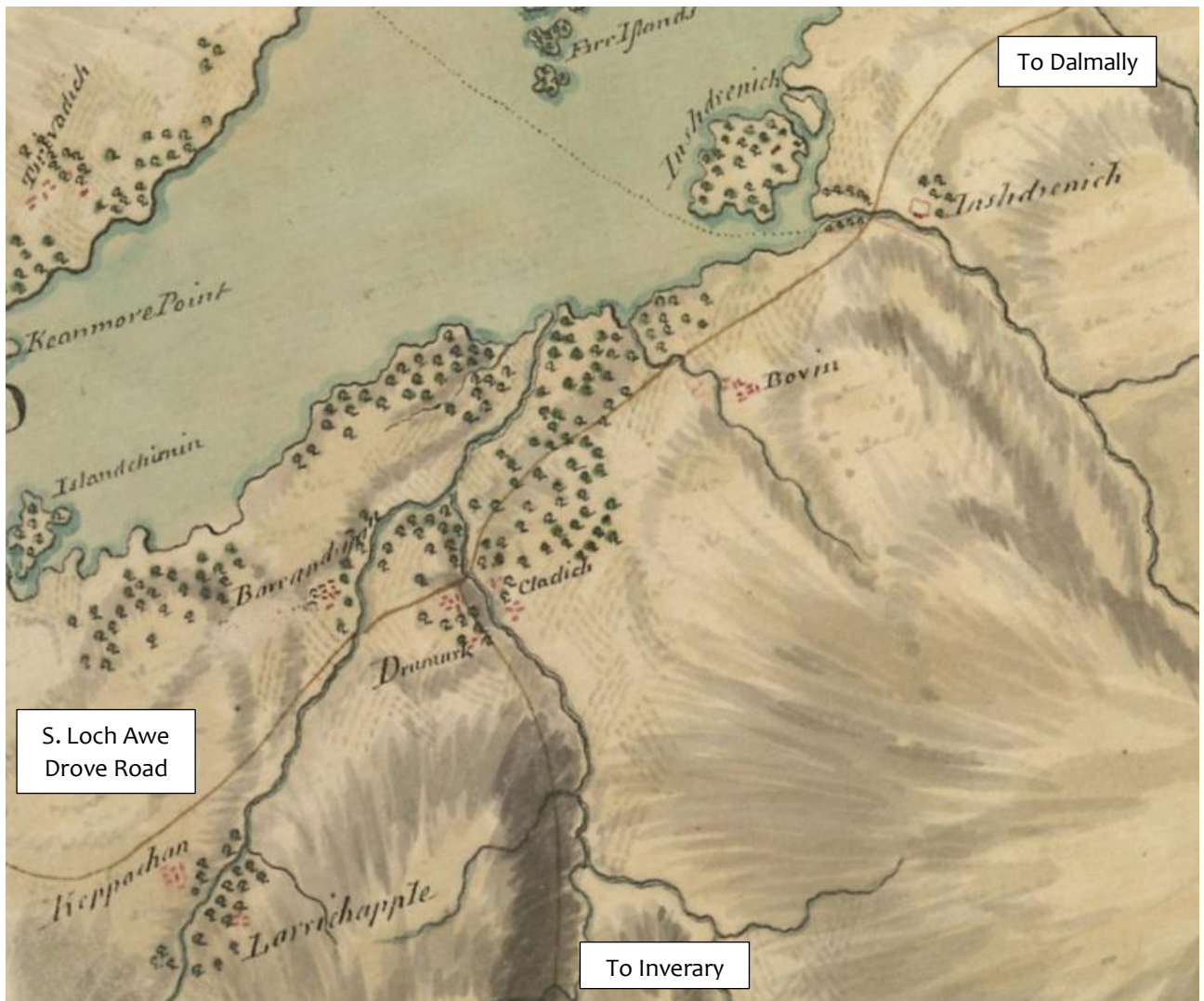
simonmdavies@hotmail.com

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Introduction

The small hamlet of Cladich was originally a 'junction settlement' where the B840, based on the former Drove Road serving South Loch Awe-side, branched off from the A819, the main road from Inverary to Dalmally, originally the 18th Century military road, as show on Roy's map.



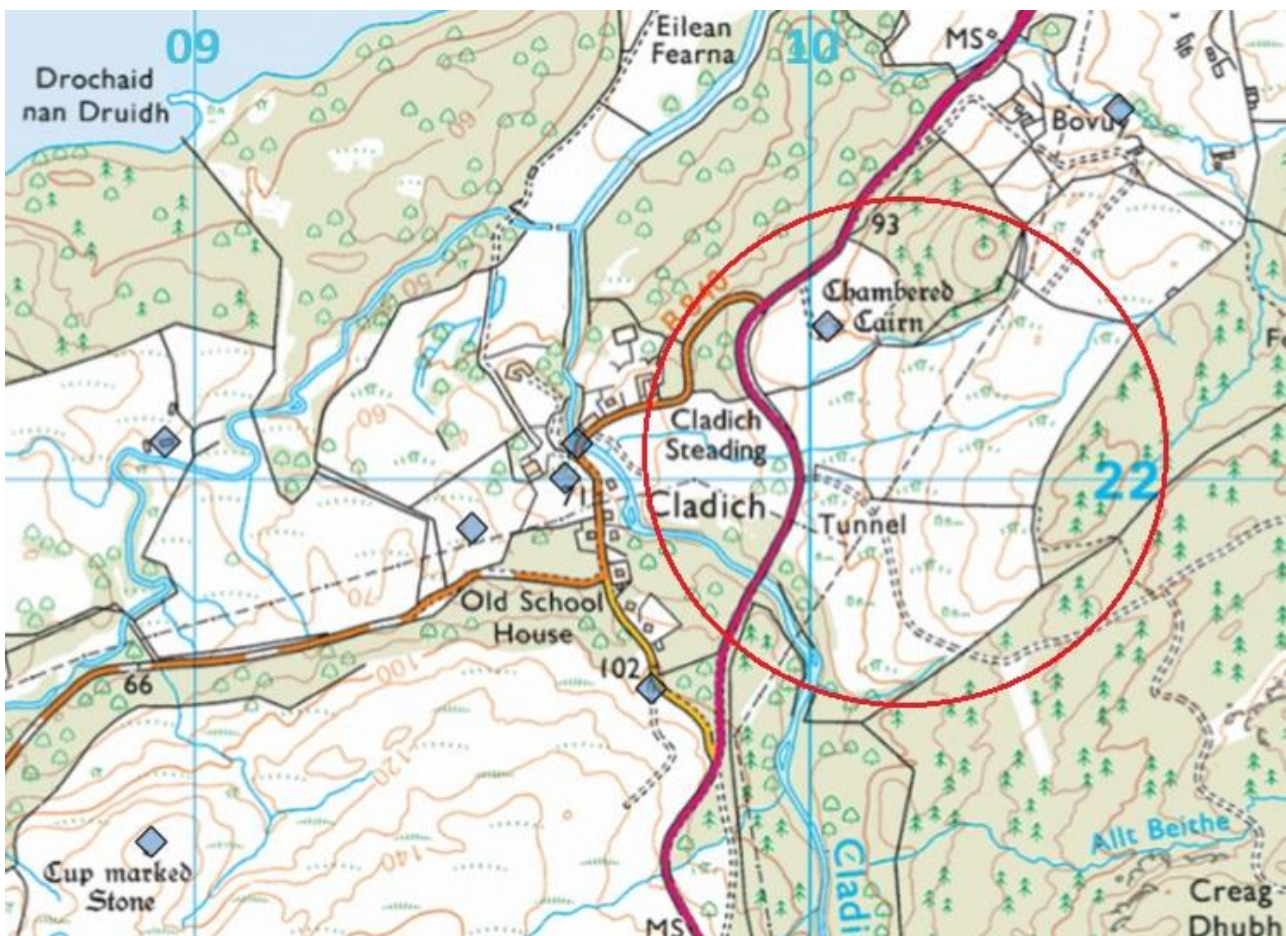
Roy's Military Survey map, 14/4d, annotated by SMD.

(© The British Library, Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland)

The route of the roads has changed little since the Roy map was surveyed (1747-1755) although they have been considerably upgraded to be more suited to modern traffic and vehicle requirements. The major change to Cladich was the 'bypass' created in about 1956 when the new bridge over the Cladich River was built. The main area of interest, briefly visited 20th February 2025, is the area of Bovuy Farm (Bovin on Roy's map) which contains the Cladich Chambered Cairn, Canmore 23679, which is in the field beside the main junction of the bypass.



The raised mound of Cladich Chambered Cairn, as seen from the A819 main road © SMD



Section of OS Map from Canmore showing local known Archaeology sites as small blue diamonds the red circle indicates the approximate 'area of interest' for further exploration

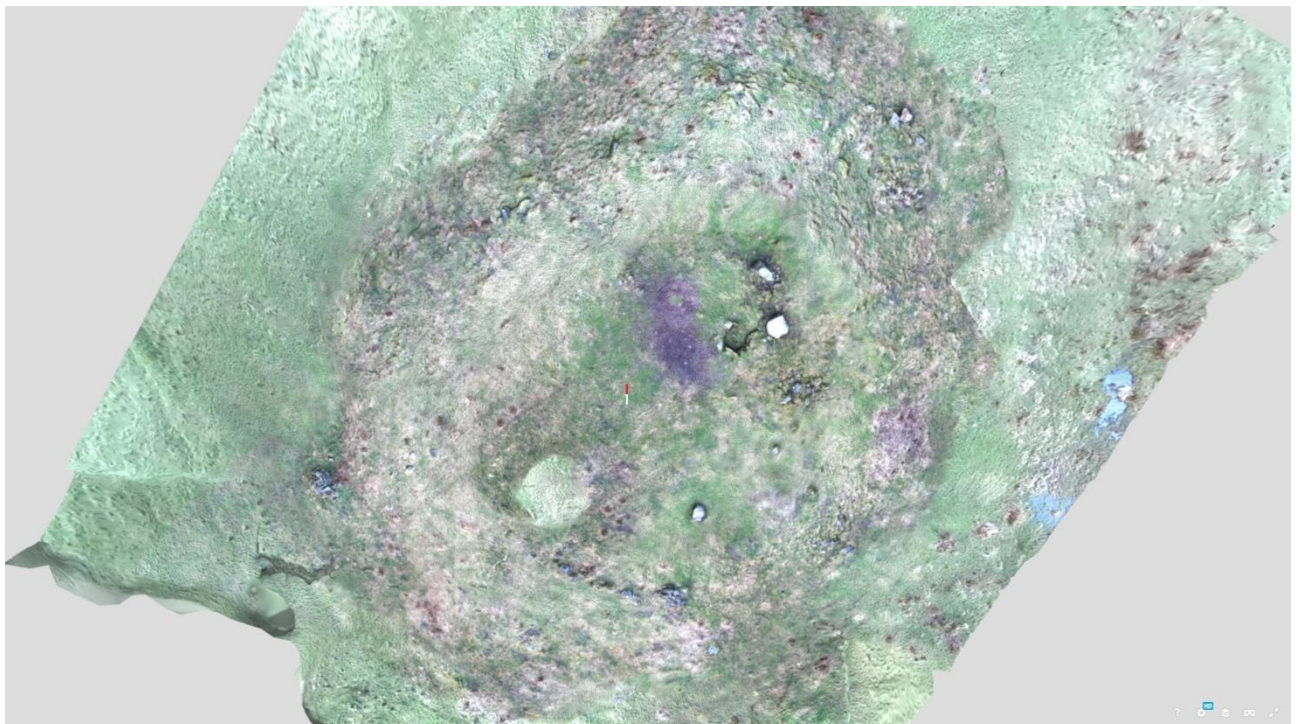
Cladich Chambered Cairn

The Cairn seems to have first been reported in DES, 1959 thus: –

ARGYLLSHIRE

CLADICH, MID ARGYLL - *From Mr and Mrs J. G. Scott*

NN/101223. In a field at Cladich about 100 yds. from the main Inveraray-Dalmally road stands an oval mound approximately 110 ft. long by 80 ft. broad which, though partly natural, undoubtedly represents a large cairn of Clyde-Carlingford type. About 40 ft. from the NE end of the mound is the entrance to a slab-built burial chamber, now roofless, approximately 13 ft. 6 ins. long by 3 ft. 6 ins. wide. The chamber appears to have been segmented at least once about 4 ft. 6 ins. from the terminal slab. No evidence of a facade was noted.



*Overhead view of Cladich Chambered Cairn -- from the authors photogrammetry model.
A 1-metre ranging pole is near the centre of the view, aligned North-South, red to North © SMD*

Audrey Henshall reviewed the Cairn (referenced as ARG 4) in her 1972 book, published after a visit during the 9 years of field work in the 1960s after the first volume was published. She noted that the field at that time was ploughed and cultivated, but the Cairn itself was heavily covered by bracken. In more recent times the field has been only used for pasture and the bracken appears to have been destroyed, probably using chemical herbicides making it much easier to see the features of the site. The long axis of the Cairn is approximately NE – SW, which (coincidentally?) approximates to the alignment of the northern segment of Loch Awe itself.

The Cairn's next 'official' visits were by RCAHMS in 1970, when a measured drawing of the site was created (see Canmore entry), and by O.S surveyors (1973)

Field Visit – 20th February 2025

My visit was late afternoon after a generally very wet day – the cessation of the earlier rain gave a chance for a first visit to the site. It was very much as described by the Scotts and Audrey Henshall, although the reported heavy bracken was no longer present, nor was there any evidence of bracken litter anywhere on the site. Access is by means of a gate and short track from the main road (A819) at NN 09982 22328. On the date of my visit no stock was present in this field, although some sheep were noticed in some of the fields to the West of the site.

The site was easily recognisable, and the stones of the burial cist easily identified. The Western



upstanding portal stone was of particular interest as it appeared to be a noticeably redder colouration, likely to be from increased iron content and probably specifically chosen for this characteristic.

There are a few other visible stones scattered across the site but most of the original cairn material seems to have been removed historically, no doubt for local buildings, tracks and boundary walls.

*The upstanding Portal Stone and the displaced capstone.
The open cist can be seen behind these two. © SMD*



The open cist chamber of the Cladich Cairn © SMD



Looking SW along the long axis of the Portal Stone on the edge of the far field is a noticeable grassy mound with an upstanding stone to the left © SMD

Whilst examining the site I noticed along the axis of the Portal Stone there were two noticeable features about 400 metres distant in an adjacent field. Almost exactly along the axis there was a grassy mound, apparently ungrazed and what appeared to be an upstanding stone with a very similar hue to the Portal Stone. It seemed unlikely that these features were natural and, although the light was fading with the setting sun, I felt compelled to take a look at these further features.

Before leaving, I recorded a sequence of photos to create a 3D photogrammetry model, now on Sketchfab.



Looking NW across the Cairn site towards Loch Awe and the cloud-cropped Ben Cruachan © SMD

Looking beyond the Cairn

From my initial sighting of the features, it seemed that access might be possible from the track which had been created to service the mobile phone mast at NN 10340 21947. The track to the mast left the main road at NN 09988 22007 where there is adequate parking for several vehicles without blocking access.

The mound and upstanding stone are less than 250 metres up the track, East of the parking area and accessible through two gates, both in excellent condition and easily opened. From the amount of residual exposed stones, it seems likely that the mound and upstanding stone represent the residual material from another, unrecorded, long type Chambered Cairn. Its alignment is similar to that of the adjacent Cladich Cairn just visited, about 240 degrees. It therefore seems likely they are contemporary structures, built by the same community.



The upstanding Stone - probably a marker for the NW end of the Long Cairn. The mobile phone mast can be seen in the background adjacent to the Sitka spruce plantation © SMD



Looking back to the Cladich Chambered Cairn over the upstanding stone at NN 10223 21935 © SMD

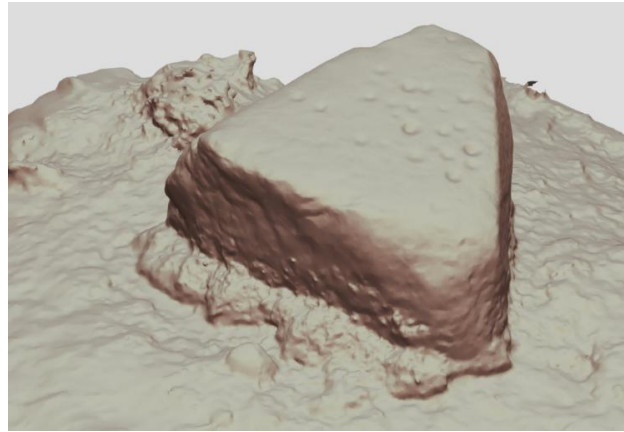


From the upstanding Stone or Long Cairn there were many large obvious earth-bound erratic boulders surrounding the site © SMD

Having taken a quick photo sequence for photogrammetry of the upstanding stone, my eye was drawn to the many large erratic boulders near to the site. My natural inquisitive nature made it essential to investigate these further!

On the Rocks

On this occasion, not a (bad) recipe for Scotch, but a surprise finding on the few boulders I was able to access before darkness intervened. The closest boulder, adjacent to the fence-line at NN 10284 21962, had a flat 'face' tilted to the West which appeared to have around 12 'cup' marks across its surface. I was able to get a photo sequence for Photogrammetry before the light failed. The model showed the features quite well, but an 'unshaded' version showed the surfaces better, revealing more than 25 'cup' marks across the surface



Unshaded photogrammetry models reveal considerably more surface details of 'Rock Art' © SMD

I only had time to look at one further boulder about 50metres away in the next field. This too had a flat surface with more cup markings, but lack of light deterred a photogrammetry sequence at this time. I had already resolved to revisit the site to complete a survey of all the earth-bound boulders in the locality!



More 'cup marks' on a nearby boulder © SMD

And finally



More anthropogenic boulders... © SMD

As I returned to the car I noticed another mound, surmounted by large stones. Curiosity overcame caution of the approaching darkness and I was able to find these stones were placed by man, not glaciers. The largest one (in the upper background) also has several 'cup marks' over its surface, but the detail will need to be revealed at my return visit...

Simon M. Davies, Feb. 2025

Bibliography and other sources

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