

Report on the Restoration of Carn Glas, a Neolithic Chambered Cairn, 2014-2015.

Location: On the Mulbuie Ridge, north of Kilcoy, Ross-shire. NH 5784 5206

Scheduled Monument index number: 3213

Grid Ref: NH578520

Canmore ID: 12837

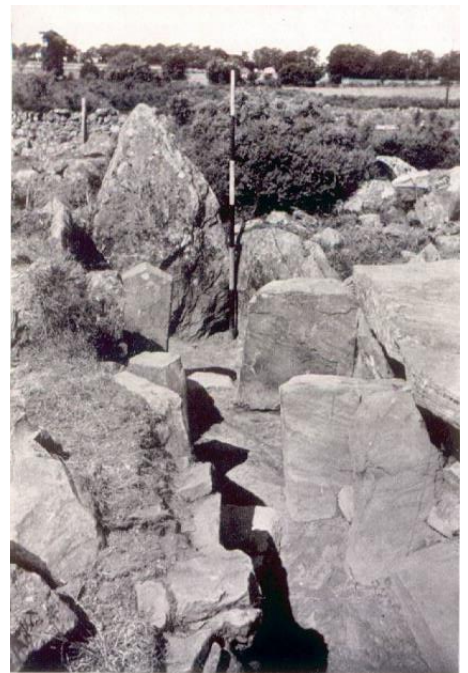
Highland HER ID: MHG9014

Carn Glas is a chambered cairn of the Camster type of the Orkney-Cromarty group. It is located on the south-facing side of a ridge, overlooking the inner end of the Beaully Firth. It is one of a number of cairns in the vicinity, two of which, Kilcoy I and II, are in the adjacent field to the east.

Records show that in 1881 Carn Glas stood 21ft high, but by the time of the first excavation by Lord Abercromby in 1906 it has much reduced in size. He found a fine leaf-shaped Neolithic arrowhead during his excavation. A second excavation by Dr Tony Woodham was carried out in two seasons in 1955 and 1956. By then it had reduced to no more than 4ft in height (Woodham 1957: 106). Once the chamber was cleared there was a layer of clean sand, with several pieces of white quartz amongst it. There was a second layer of sand below this, which yielded a number of finds, comprising: a barbed and tanged arrowhead, several pieces of animal bone, charcoal, white quartz and pottery.

Unusually, the chamber was left open after the 1956 excavation had finished, and not back-filled. This meant that in the succeeding 60 years it had gradually become filled with stone, soil and vegetation. A visit by a Historic Scotland representative in December 2013 described the cairn as,

"... c.22m in diameter, the S edge may have had field stone dumped on it in the past but the edges are also confused by excavation spoil. The excavation exposed the bi-partite chamber which is c.3m long overall and c 1.8m wide, and consist of massive upright slabs with a large pointed stone at the W end, c1.8m high. There is a flat stone at the entrance to each of the chambers. The walls of the entrance passage, c3m long, comprise upright and flat stones." (Anne C 2013).



Carn Glas Chambers at end of Tony Woodham's excavation 1956



Carn Glas in 2008



Carn Glas at the end of cairn clearing, February 2014

In October 2013, a field trip during the Highland Archaeology Festival organised by Susan Kruse of Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands (ARCH) led a group of people round the five Kilcoy Cairns. Three members of that group happened to be representatives of three local organisations (Graham Clark of ARCH, Alasdair Cameron of North Kessock & District Local History Society, & Roland Spencer-Jones of North of Scotland Archaeological Society). They were concerned at the vegetated and neglected state of the cairn, and they decided to try to restore the cairn to how it was when left by Tony Woodham.

They approached the Adopt-a-Monument project, a part of Archaeology Scotland, to guide them in the restoration process. The resultant joint proposal to Historic Scotland intended:

- to clear the accumulation of debris in the chamber to reveal the sand layer once more
- to return it to the state in which it was left by Woodham.
- to ensure that the clearance / excavation will not only improve the monument visually, but will also provide a rare insight inside a chambered cairn for visitors.
- to install interpretation at the site, in the form of a board and leaflets, which will increase understanding and encourage increased visitor numbers. The area as a whole benefits from tourism and it is hoped that, if publicised well, Carn Glas will add to the attractiveness of the locality.

The three local organisations coordinated work on the site:

- 15th February 2014 – a group of approximately 20 members of the three organisations cleared the remaining vegetation on the surface of the mound, leaving the chambers of the cairn for later. Alasdair Cameron has subsequently contributed to keeping the cairn weed-free over the subsequent growing seasons.
- 10th March 2014 – confirmation that the Carn Glas project has been accepted on Archaeology Scotland's Adopt-a-Monument scheme
- 1st May 2014 – Kate Philips of Adopt-a-Monument does a site visit, in order to prepare a report on the site for inclusion as an AaM project.
- 5th-7th September 2014 – Phil Richardson and Fiona Watson of the Adopt-a-Monument team came to clean the interior chambers of the cairn, helped by 3-4 local volunteers. No new artefacts identified. Numerous photographs. All aspects of the chambers, including each constituent stone measured and recorded.



**A NOSAS Volunteer within the inner chamber,
November 2014**



Phil Richardson & Fiona Watson of the Adopt-a-Monument Team, November 2014

- April-May 2015 – contact with both an artist and a designer to design a display signboard for the cairn. Also contact with Alison Sheridan, principal curator of National Museums of Scotland, to advise the project team on the wording of the text on the signboard.
- 23rd–25th June 2015 – further work on the inner chambers, including preparing the floor to receive chips for eventual display. Detailed contour mapping of the cairn surface, with Phil Richardson and Fiona Watson of AaM.
- 22nd–23rd September 2015 - Several fallen stones within the chamber were repositioned, and the floor of the chamber layered with chips. Two post holes on the periphery of the cairn were created, under archaeological supervision, in order to receive the feet of the signboard. Signboard positioned, the feet being cemented in. See Appendix 1 for further details.



Carn Glas at the end of the November 2014 cleaning. Compare to 1956 photo



The official "opening" 12th October 2015

- 12th October 2015 – As part of Highland Council's Archaeology Festival, the official "opening" of the cairn as a preliminary stage for a walk round the other four Kilcoy Neolithic cairns. Key personnel taking roles in that ceremony were:

- **Colin Woodham**, the son of the 1950's excavator, Dr Tony Woodham. He described his father, and his

memories of spending time on this site as a boy, whilst his father was digging. He cut the ribbon that surrounded the cairn, thereby "opening" it.

- **Alison Sheridan**, Principal Curator of Early Prehistory at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. Her contribution to the wording on the signboard was appreciated and acknowledged. She described the setting of the cairn within its landscape, and how it would have been used at the time.
- **Eric Allan**, a local artist, whose painting of a Neolithic cairn forms a central component of the signboard
- **Susan Kruse** of ARCH, whose walk round the five Kilcoy Cairns in October 2013 brought three people together and germinated the idea to restore the cairn.
- **Fiona Watson**, representing the Adopt-a-Monument team, in recognition of the key role played by Archaeology Scotland in advising the local initiative and providing archaeological expertise.
- **Graham Clark**, Chairman of ARCH, one of the key three organisers.
- **Alasdair Cameron**, a local crofter, and chairman on North Kessock & District Local History Society
- **Roland Spencer-Jones**, a NOSAS committee member, and lead for the co-ordinating local team.
- Approximately 50 members of the public, including from the three constituent organisations.
- 18th October 2015 – Graham Clark released a press statement, see Appendix 2.

Archaeological Reflections:

- Working inside the chambers of the cairn over several days I became aware of the stones from which it was constructed, and the use of colour in the cairn. The massive side stones of the chambers were of Old Red Sandstone, the bedrock of the locality. The transverse stones were of beautifully dressed grey/white limestone. The contrast of red sides, grey transverse stones was striking. A quern found in the chamber was of muscovite psammite, a sort of sandstone.
- Once the fallen stones within the cairn had been recorded and drawn, it seemed appropriate to return them to how they appeared in the 1956 photographs of the cairn, recognising that this is a recreation of sorts.
- Working on site I noticed that my gaze returned frequently to the view to the south – across two other Neolithic cairns (Kilcoy I & II) and across the firth to the hills behind the Aird – rather than the slightly higher ground to the north.

Roland Spencer-Jones
17th November 2015

Susan Kruse, ARCH



Graham Clark, ARCH



**Roland Spencer-Jones NOSAS &
Alasdair Cameron NK&DLHS**

Appendix One

The Carn Glas Signboard

- Text by Roland Spencer-Jones with considerable input and advice from – Graham Clark, Lachlan & Lynne McKeggie, Susan Kruse, Alison Sheridan.
- Artist's impression of the cairn set in its landscape by Eric Allan – <http://www.helenericallanart.co.uk/index.asp>
- Signboard design and layout by Iain Sarjeant, a local photographer and designer - <http://www.iainsarjeant.com/>
- Signboard produced by Donald Gillanders of Service Graphics, Glasgow - <http://www.servicegraphics.co.uk/>
- Note the accreditation for the photographs, on the signboard itself.

Carn Glas

This site is the remains of a burial cairn, one of several in the immediate vicinity. It was built by Neolithic farmers around 3600BC, with reuse around 2300-2000BC during the Copper Age (Early Bronze Age).

Carn Glas

Life and death in the Neolithic and early Bronze Age

Farming spread throughout the UK from 4000BC, reaching the Beaulieu Firth by at least 3700BC, replacing the previous hunter-gatherer life-style. As farming became more widespread, people lived in permanent settlements for the first time, growing crops and keeping a variety of domestic animals, including cows, goats and pigs.

These first farmers built large monuments associated with their dead ancestors, known as cairns (built of stone) and barrows (built of earth). Different types of stone burial cairns are found in Scotland. Carn Glas is an Orkney-Cromarty passage tomb, found from the Black Isle to Orkney. This type of cairn typically contains one or more inner compartments, with a sloping corbelled roof and a passageway leading usually to the east or south-east. This inner structure is then covered by a large mound of smaller stones.

Rarely have whole skeletons been identified in these cairns. Although we don't know for certain what happened to the skeletons, it may be that only special bones were housed in the cairn, handled at intervals, and replaced by others. Adults and children are often found in the same cairn.

History of Carn Glas

In 1882, Carn Glas was reported to be approximately 35 metres diameter and 6.4 metres high. This large impressive cairn, however, had been much reduced in size by the time of the first excavation in 1906 by Lord Abercromby. Further excavations were then undertaken by Dr Anthony Woodham in two seasons of excavation, 1955 and 1956.

The artefacts found in the cairn from these excavations suggest two phases of use. A fine leaf-shaped arrowhead and some pieces of coarse pot date from the earlier Neolithic period (circa 3600-2500BC). Whereas, a "tanged and barbed" flint arrowhead and pottery beaker sherds date from the later Copper Age (around 2300BC-2000BC).

At the end of 1956 the chambers and passage were left exposed, not back-filled and covered up as would be the usual custom now. This however gives us the opportunity to see a typical and well-preserved Orkney-Cromarty cairn in great detail.

By 2014 the cairn had become overgrown and almost impenetrable. Three local heritage organisations in 2014 adopted the monument and cleared the vegetation from the surface of the cairn. Working with Archaeology Scotland's Adopt-a-Monument team they then cleaned the inner chambers to restore them to the 1956 appearance. This work was completed in 2015.

The three local community organisations are: **Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands (ARCH)**, **North Kessock & District Local History Society**, and **North of Scotland Archaeological Society (NOSAS)**.



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Fragment of Beaker found in chamber.



Barbed and tanged arrowhead, discovered 1906



Leaf shaped Neolithic arrowhead, discovered 1955-56



Quern for grinding grain found in the upper filling of the cairn, 1956



Illustration © Eric Allan
Thanks to Alison Sheridan of the National Museums of Scotland for assistance with the text

Arrowheads, beaker & quern photographs © National Museums of Scotland

*Adopt-a-Monument
ALBA ACHDUNN

ARCHAEOLOGY SCOTLAND

SSE

LETTER FUNDING

Appendix Two

Press Release, 18.10.15, composed by Graham Clark

"The restoration of Carn Glas, a Neolithic chambered burial cairn at the Heights of Kilcoy and one of the oldest known structures on the Black Isle, was recently celebrated as part of the 2015 Highland Archaeological Festival. Over 50 people ventured to the site, high on the Millbuie ridge, to attend a ceremony marking the completion of a community project between three local heritage organisations – Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands (ARCH), the North of Scotland Archaeological Society (NoSAS) and the North Kessock & District Local History Society (NK&DLHS).

The cairn has long been regarded as one of the finest archaeological monuments in the Moray Firth area. It was first excavated by Lord Abercromby in 1906 who discovered a flint barbed and tanged arrowhead and sherds of beaker pottery, and was last excavated in 1955-56 by amateur archaeologist Dr Anthony Woodham who found a fine leaf-shaped arrowhead and a superb saddle quern, now in the possession of the National Museum of Scotland (NMS) in Edinburgh.

After 1956 Carn Glas was neglected and by the new millennium it had become so extensively covered in gorse and accreted vegetation that the chamber was almost impossible to reach. Two years ago, the invading overgrowth prompted members of ARCH, NoSAS and NK&DLHS to take action to halt further deterioration and dilapidation of the structure.

Funds were obtained from Archaeology Scotland's Adopt-a-Monument scheme for the joint community project that has now re-instated the burial chamber as an outstanding Neolithic monument and as a visitor attraction. A new information board has also been erected on the site. It features text written by Dr Alison Sheridan, Senior Neolithic Curator at the NMS, and a commissioned sketch by Eric Allan, President of Inverness Art Society, of how the cairn might have looked after it was built about 3600 BC."



The photo below shows an article in the Inverness Press & Journal of 20th October:

4 NEWS INVERNESS

THE PRESS AND JOURNAL
Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Gathering to celebrate oldest cairn on Black Isle

CEREMONY
BY CALUM ROSS

The restoration of one of the oldest known structures on the Black Isle has been celebrated.

More than 50 people attended a ceremony at Carn Glas, a Neolithic chambered burial cairn at the Heights of Kilcoy, on Millbuie Ridge.

The cairn is regarded as one of the finest archaeological monuments in the Moray Firth area, dating back to about 3600 BC.

It was first excavated in 1906 by Lord Abercromby, who discovered a flint arrowhead and pottery.

The site was last excavated in 1955-56 by amateur archaeologist Anthony Woodham, who found a fine leaf-shaped arrowhead and a saddle quern – an ancient device for grinding grain which is at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh.

Mr Woodham's son, Colin Woodham, of Muir of Ord, recently cut the tape at the cairn as local enthusiasts marked the 60th anniversary of the second excavation as part of the 2015 Highland Archaeological Festival.

After 1956, Carn Glas was neglected and by the new century it had become so

"Funding was secured from the Adopt-a-Monument scheme"

Two years ago, members of Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands, the North of Scotland Archaeological Society, and the North Kessock and District Local History Society decided to take action.

Funding was secured from Archaeology Scotland's Adopt-a-Monument scheme for the joint community project that has now re-instated the burial chamber as a Neolithic monument and as a visitor attraction.

A new information board erected on the site features text written by Alison Sheridan, senior Neolithic curator at the National Museum of Scotland, and a commissioned sketch by Inverness Art Society president Eric Allan of how the cairn might have looked when it was built.



FAMILY TIES: Colin Woodham, son of Anthony Woodham who excavated the site, cuts the ceremonial tape to open the restored burial chamber at Carn Glas