

Case information

Case ID	300016782		
File Reference	AMH/2312/2/1		
Name of Site	Heights of Brae, chambered cairn		
Local Authority	Highland Council		
National Grid Reference	NH 514 615		
Designation No. (if any)	SM2312		
Designation Type	Scheduled monument	Current Category of Listing	N/A
Case Type	Amendment		
Received/Start Date	04/05/2015		
Decision Date	27/04/2016		

1. Decision

The monument was first scheduled in 1964 and the documentation does not conform to current standards. The assessment against the scheduling criteria (Scottish Historic Environment Policy, Annex 1) demonstrates that the monument continues to be of national importance. The decision is to amend the entry in the Schedule as **Heights of Brae, chambered cairn 375m NNW of Firth View.**

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The monument was scheduled 11 August 1964.

No previous amendments to the scheduling have taken place.

2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The monument was assessed for amendment as part of the S18 Highland scheduling project and visited on 04 May 2015.

3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

An assessment against the Scheduling was carried out (see **Annex A**) and the monument was found to meet the criteria for scheduling.

The designation criteria are found in the Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP), pp. 71-85. <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/shep-dec2011.pdf>

3.3 Other considerations

The existing 1964 legal documents are not adequate to support definition of the extent of the scheduled area. There is a significant benefit in amending the existing scheduled monument designation. It will provide an updated legal document and map, allowing the monument to be defined accurately on the ground and shown on modern mapping.

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ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria*

SM2312 Heights of Brae, chambered cairn 375m NNW of Firth View

1. Description

The monument is the remains of a chambered cairn dating from the Neolithic period, probably built between 3800 and 2500 BC. It is visible as a group of upstanding stones surrounded by a slight bank that probably indicates the original extent of the cairn. The remains lie 245m above sea level on a prominent knoll that stands on the broad ridge separating Strathpeffer to the south and Strath Sgitheach to the north.

The cairn material is largely gone but the structural stones of the chamber survive. Four large stones form one burial chamber to the south and further stones to the north indicate a second chamber built on a parallel axis, sited closer to the summit of the knoll. The entrance to the cairn probably lies to the east of the south chamber, where three pairs of low, transverse slabs, recorded in the past, suggest a short passage and outer chamber. The subtle remains of a low bank or scarp surrounding the knoll suggest the original cairn measured about 23m in diameter.

The scheduled area is circular on plan, measuring 40m in diameter, to include the remains described above and an area around them within which evidence relating to the monument's construction, use and abandonment is expected to survive, as shown in red on the accompanying map. The monument was first scheduled in 1964, but the documentation did not meet current standards: the present amendment rectifies this.

2. Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria (SHEP, 2011) pp71-73**

* This assessment is based on our current state of knowledge. It will form the basis of any new or updated scheduled monument record.

** A monument may be found to meet the scheduling criteria but in some circumstances may not be added to the Schedule. The purpose and implications of scheduling are issues that require to be taken into account when assessing monuments for scheduling. Scheduling may not be the only, or the most appropriate mechanism, to secure the future of all sites, even those that may otherwise meet the criteria.

Cultural significance

Characteristic	Assessment
Intrinsic	
Condition in which monument survives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The large stones of the south chamber form a visually impressive monument.• The surrounding cairn is defined by an inconspicuous shallow scarp measuring approximately 23m in diameter.• The cairn is interpreted as an Orkney-Cromarty cairn. These are typically made up of a single long chamber, divided into stall-like "compartments" or

	chambers by stone uprights
Archaeological, scientific, technological or other interest or research potential of the monument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although at least one chamber is now exposed, there is good potential for the survival of further archaeological deposits, including human burials, artefacts and environmental remains such as charcoal or pollen, within, beneath and around the upstanding structure of the cairn. Excavations of chambered cairns elsewhere show continuing potential for undisturbed deposits, evidence of earlier structures, and artefacts and ecofacts (Davidson and Henshall 1989). This cairn can add to our understanding of ritual and funerary practices during the Neolithic period, and provide information about contemporary agriculture, economy and environment.
Apparent developmental sequence of monument (either long or short may provide insights of importance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few radiocarbon dates have been obtained for Orkney-Cromarty chambered cairns but from the dates available, and on the basis of typological study of the pottery found at such sites, it appears that chambered cairns were constructed and in use between around 3800 and 2500 BC. At Heights of Brae, the complex arrangement of entrance and chambers suggests multiple phases of construction. It is likely that this tomb was in use through several or many generations, although it is difficult at present to know if it was in use continuously or whether there were different phases of use and abandonment. Scientific study of the tomb's form and construction techniques compared with other tombs would enhance our understanding of the development sequence of this site and of chambered cairns in general.
Original or subsequent functions of the monument and its parts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The monument was a place of burial and ritual during the Neolithic. It is likely to have had a prominent place within a group's territory and to have been a focal point in the landscape.
Contextual	
Present rarity or representativeness of all or any part of the monument, assessed against knowledge of the archaeology of Scotland and of the region in which the monument occurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orkney-Cromarty cairns are found only in north and west Scotland, with the greatest concentration in Orkney. Their design is particularly interesting because the shape and form, with subdivisions formed by upright slabs, is comparable with contemporary house forms such as that at Knap of Howar, Orkney. It is likely that this was deliberate, with the tombs representing 'houses for the dead'.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heights of Brae is an interesting example because there appears to be evidence for two main chambers, one with a potential outer chamber and short entrance passage attached.
Relationship of the monument to other monuments of the same or related classes or period, or to features or monuments in the vicinity. (Particularly important for monuments forming part of a widespread but varied class)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heights of Brae is one of a group of well-preserved burial monuments lying relatively close to the coast between Brora and Beaully. Many lie close together, which can give insights into the nature of the Neolithic landscape and add to our understanding of social organisation, land division and land-use. There are 14 other known or possible chambered cairns within 10km of Heights of Brae. They include the well-preserved Orkney-Cromarty chambered cairn at Balnacrae 3.5km to the northeast (Canmore ID 12919). Other good examples of chambered cairns lie 6km to the south at Bealachnancorr (Canmore ID 12414) and 6.5km south at Brahan Wood (Canmore ID 12792). There is high potential to carry out spatial and landscape analysis of this cairn in comparison others nearby, and other prehistoric monuments in the vicinity, which could enhance our understanding of the placing of such sites in the landscape and the organisation, division and use of land in the Neolithic.
Relationship of the monument and its parts with its wider landscape and setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chambered cairns are often placed in conspicuous locations within the landscape, at the edge of arable land and overlooking or inter-visible with other ritual monuments. Heights of Brae is located on a prominent ridge top with long views in most directions, including south and southeast over Strathpeffer and the head of the Cromarty Firth. The passages of chambered cairns typically face towards the east or southeast and would have had wide views across the landscape. Both main chambers here appear to face east. The reason for the orientation of tombs and passages is thought to be astronomical. It has been suggested that the passage of the south chamber aligns with the equinox sunrise. The entrance to the north chamber is likely to have had a similar orientation.
Associative	
Historical, cultural and social influences that have affected the form and fabric of the monument, and vice versa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The form of the monument is influenced by attitudes to burial and commemoration of the dead in the Neolithic, but may also reflect the influence of Neolithic social structure.

Aesthetic attributes of the monument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The stones of the south chamber are a prominent and striking feature of the landscape.
Significance in the national consciousness or to people who use or have used the monument, or descendants of such people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chambered cairns have interested scholars and visitors from an early date, and they remain significant in the local and national consciousness today.
Associations the monument has with historical, traditional or artistic characters or events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A

Assessment of national importance

Criteria	Assessment
Its inherent capability or potential to make a significant addition to the understanding or appreciation of the past	<p>The monument has potential to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the past, in particular the design and construction of burial monuments and the nature of burial practices and belief systems in the Neolithic. Ritual and funerary monuments are often our main source of evidence for human activity during the Neolithic in Scotland. They are particularly important for enhancing our understanding of Neolithic society, its organisation, economy, religion and demography. This monument retains its field characteristics to a marked degree. The large upright stones of the south chamber are visually impressive and the form of the monument, with evidence for multiple chambers, can contribute to our understanding of the development and architecture of chambered cairns. Chambered cairns are an important component in understanding the prehistoric landscape of land-use, settlement and ritual. They are thought often to be positioned with reference to astronomical phenomena, and the orientation and position of Heights of Brae within the landscape is likely to be significant. The loss of the monument would diminish our ability to appreciate and understand the meaning and importance of death and burial in prehistory</p>
Its retention of the structural, decorative or field characteristics of its kind to a marked degree	
Its contribution, or the contribution of its class, to today's landscape and/or the historic landscape	
The quality and extent of any documentation or association that adds to the understanding of the monument or its context	
The diminution of the potential of a particular class or classes of monument to contribute to an understanding of the past, should the monument be lost or damaged	
Its place in the national consciousness [a factor that may be considered in support of other factors]	

References

Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> reference number CANMORE ID 12930 (accessed on 26/04/2016).

The Highland Council Historic Environment Record reference is MHG8919.

Davidson, J L and Henshall, A S 1989, The chambered cairns of Orkney: an inventory of the structures and their contents, Edinburgh.