

## Case information

---

Case ID	300016716		
File Reference	AMH/2396/2/1		
Name of Site	Balnacrae, chambered cairn 150m SW of		
Local Authority	Highland Council		
National Grid Reference	NH 533 646		
Designation No. (if any)	SM2396		
Designation Type	Scheduled monument	Current Category of Listing	N/A
Case Type	Amendment		
Received/Start Date	04/05/2015		
Decision Date	10/05/2016		

## 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 **Balnacrae, chambered cairn 230m WSW of**.

## 2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

---

### 2.1 Designation Background

The monument was scheduled in 1964 and no previous amendments to the entry in the Schedule 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 project and visited on 04 May 2015.

### 3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

The monument was assessed for scheduling against the criteria for determining national importance and found to meet the criteria (see **Annex A**).

*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

Designation as a scheduled monument remains an appropriate mechanism to secure the preservation of the monument. The existing documents from 1964 do not support accurate definition of the scheduled area or capture the full potential of the monument.

---

### Elizabeth McCrone

Head of Designations  
Heritage Management  
Historic Environment Scotland

<b>Contact</b>	Richard Heawood, Senior Designations Officer; <a href="mailto:richard.heawood@hes.scot">richard.heawood@hes.scot</a> ; 0131 668 8624
----------------	---

## ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria\*

**SM 2396 Balnacrae, chambered cairn 230m WSW of**

### 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 large upstanding stones defining a chamber and an entrance passage, and is surrounded by a slight scarp that probably indicates the original extent of the cairn. The cairn lies 245m above sea level, part way up the northwest side of Strath Sgitheach. The River Sgitheach is about 600m to the south southeast and there are long views up the strath to the south southwest.

The monument is an Orkney-Cromarty type chambered cairn with the chamber aligned northeast by southwest and is defined by several large stones, some upright or leaning, others slumped. The chamber measures about 7m long by 4m wide. At the northeast end there are two low, transverse portal stones that give access to the chamber from a passage about 5.5m long and 1.5m wide. The remains of a low scarp surrounding the stones of the chamber and passage suggest the original cairn measured about 27m in diameter.

The scheduled area is circular on plan, measuring 40m in diameter, centred on the north corner of the chamber, 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, 71-73\*\*)

\* 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
<b>Intrinsic</b>	
Condition in which monument survives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The monument has been denuded of most of its cairn material exposing the key structural features of the chamber and passage.</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The extent of the surrounding cairn is defined by an inconspicuous shallow scarp measuring approximately 27m in diameter.</li> <li>• The large, exposed stones of the chamber form a visually impressive monument.</li> <li>• Although the monument has lost much of its cairn material, the monument is in good, stable condition at present.</li> </ul>
Archaeological, scientific, technological or other interest or research potential of the monument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although the chamber and passage are 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.</li> <li>• Excavations of chambered cairns elsewhere show continuing potential for undisturbed deposits, evidence of earlier structures, and artefacts and ecofacts such as pottery, flints and human and animal bone (Davidson and Henshall 1989).</li> <li>• This cairn has potential to add to our understanding of ritual and funerary practices during the Neolithic period, and to provide information about contemporary agriculture, economy and environment.</li> </ul>
Apparent developmental sequence of monument (either long or short may provide insights of importance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few radiocarbon dates have been obtained for Orkney-Cromarty chambered cairns because many of them were excavated before the advent of modern scientific techniques. 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.</li> <li>• At Balnacrae, there is no clear indication of whether the cairn remains derive from an extended development sequence. However, it is likely that this tomb was in use through several or many generations.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
Original or subsequent functions of the monument and its parts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The monument was a place of burial and ritual during the Neolithic.</li> <li>• It is likely to have had a prominent place within a group's territory and to have been a focal point in the landscape.</li> </ul>

<b>Contextual</b>	
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"> <li>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 Knap of Howar, Orkney. It is likely that this was deliberate, with the tombs representing 'houses for the dead'.</li> <li>Balnacrae is an interesting and impressive example with massive stones delineating a large chamber, accessed via an entrance passage that retains a large, slightly displaced lintel.</li> </ul>
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"> <li>Balnacrae 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 important insights into the nature of the Neolithic landscape and add to our understanding of social organisation, land division and land-use.</li> <li>There are nine other known or possible chambered cairns within 10km of Balnacrae. They include the complex Orkney-Cromarty chambered cairn at Heights of Brae 3.5 km to the southwest, which is inter-visible with this cairn and stands at the same height (Canmore ID 12930).</li> <li>There is high potential to carry out spatial and landscape analysis of this cairn in comparison to 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.</li> </ul>
Relationship of the monument and its parts with its wider landscape and setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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. Balnacrae is located part way up the valley side, overlooking the lower ground, with long views up the strath to the southwest.</li> </ul>
<b>Associative</b>	
Historical, cultural and social influences that have affected the form and fabric of the monument, and vice versa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> </ul>
Aesthetic attributes of the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The stones of the chamber are a prominent and</li> </ul>

monument	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"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>
Associations the monument has with historical, traditional or artistic characters or events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>

### 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 the potential to enhance understanding of the past, in particular the design and construction of burial monuments and the nature of burial practices and belief systems. 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 chamber are visually impressive and the form of the monument can contribute to our understanding of the development and architecture of chambered cairns. Chambered cairns are an important surviving component of the wider prehistoric landscape of land-use, settlement and ritual and the position of Balnacrae 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 prehistoric times and the placing of cairns within the landscape.</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 12919 (accessed on 27/04/2016).

The Highland Council Historic Environment Record reference is MHG8930(accessed on 27/04/2016).

Henshall, A S 1963, The chambered tombs of Scotland. Vol 1. Edinburgh. P.334-335

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

---