



Case information

Case ID	300016725
File Reference	AMH/3145/2/1
Name of Site	Mulchaich, chambered cairn

Local Authority	Highland Council
National Grid Reference	NH 5766 5679
Designation No. (if any)	SM3145
Case Type	Amendment

Received/Start Date	06/05/2015
Decision Date	15/06/2016

1. Decision

The monument was first scheduled in 1971 and the documentation does not conform to current standards. The assessment against criteria demonstrates that the monument continues to be of national importance. The decision is to update to entry in the Schedule as **Mulchaich, chambered cairn 80m NE of Auchencairn**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

Monument first scheduled in 1971; with no later amendments.

2.2 Development Proposals

N/A.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The site was considered for amendment as part of the North 2015 Scheduling Enhancement Project.

The site was visited on 06/05/2015.

3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

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

The designation criteria are published in the Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 1, pp. 48-50.

<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/planning-and-guidance/legislation-and-guidance/historic-environment-scotland-policy-statement/>

3.3 Other considerations

N/A

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ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria

Mulchaich, chambered cairn 80m NE of Auchencairn

1 Description

The monument is a chambered cairn dating from the late Neolithic period to the early Bronze Age (between 3800 and 2500 BC). The cairn is visible as a mound with exposed kerbs and is located on a grassy knoll overlooking the Cromarty Firth. It lies around 75m above sea level.

The cairn consists of two kerbs; the outer kerb, marking the edge of the cairn, is sub-circular on plan and measures 50m northwest to southeast and 40m transversely. It follows the base of the knoll and consists of small boulders measuring 0.3m-0.5m in height. The inner kerb, centred on the cairn, is roughly circular and measures 17m in diameter. Surrounding the top of the knoll, the inner kerb is formed by larger boulders each measuring around 0.5m in height. On the south southwest edge of the inner kerb, one of the kerb stones is cup-marked with 15 cups. In the centre of the cairn, two large exposed stones may be uprights of a central chamber. A large flat slab within the inner kerb area could be the capstone, or formed part of the roof, of the chamber. The monument is located on a locally prominent rise of ground on a gradual northwest facing slope which runs to the coast and estuary some 1.5km northwest.

The scheduled area is sub-circular on plan and includes 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 post and wire fence to the east of the monument is excluded from the scheduling. The monument was first scheduled in 1971, but the documentation did not meet current standards: the present amendment rectifies this.

2 Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria (Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 1, pp. 48-50.)

2.1 Intrinsic Characteristics

The monument is a chambered burial cairn visible as a mound with exposed kerbs and cairn material, and dates from the late Neolithic to early Bronze Age, (around 3800 BC and 2500 BC). Its original function was as a burial or funerary site although it may also have had other ceremonial or ritual uses for the local community.

Overall the site is well preserved with good field characteristics and there are no records of excavation at the site. The cairn retains its plan form and architectural elements; it has two clear lines of kerb stones and central depression marked by large exposed stones indicating the presence of one or more chambers. The

inclusion of a cup-marked stone is a feature which adds to the significance of the site. These elements can help us understand more about ritual and funerary practice, the architecture of prehistoric burial and the construction, use and abandonment of these monuments. It is expected that archaeological deposits, including burial remains, artefacts such as pottery, and environmental remains such as charcoal or pollen, will also survive within, beneath and around the intact elements of the monument. These deposits can help us understand more about ritual and funerary practice, and the significance of materials, technology and craft in a burial context.

Scientific investigation of the site would allow us to develop a better understanding of its chronology, including its date of origin, state of completeness and any possible development sequence. The presence of two kerbs is unusual and adds to its significance; it could indicate the monument was expanded or altered with one of the kerbs being added at a later date. The cup-marked stone could also be a later addition to the site, or it could pre-date the cairn or may even have been created specifically for inclusion in this cairn at the time of the construction. Further investigation could help clarify the placing of the cup-marked stone within the development of the cairn.

2.2 Contextual Characteristics

There are eleven confirmed and possible burial cairns within a 5km radius of the monument. This monument is important as an upstanding and well-preserved example within this cluster of burial cairns. There may have been links between neighbouring burial cairns or they may indicate community catchments. There are also numerous broadly contemporary monuments in the vicinity of the monument including Cairn Irenan chambered cairn (scheduled monument reference SM3122, Canmore ID 12824) 4.5km south southwest and Culbokie henge (scheduled monument reference SM1668, Canmore ID 12776) 2km to the northeast. Cairn Irenan and Culbokie are also nationally important monuments, emphasising the interest and importance of this group of prehistoric sites. There is potential to study such sites to understand their functions within the local communities and possible chronological development in the area. The monument is within a small group of cairns in the Inner Cromarty Firth area and offers potential to study burial and ritual practices and draw comparisons with evidence from other cairns around the locality and more widely.

The cairn sits on the south side of the Cromarty Firth, overlooking the coastal plain, less than 2km from the coast. There would have been open views across the adjacent landscape and beyond the Firth to the surrounding hills. Set in a locally prominent position, the focus appears to be over the coastal plain and estuary below.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

N/A.

3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

The field investigation concluded that the site is in a stable condition and well preserved. There are no immediate threats to the preservation of the monument. This amended designation increases the size of the scheduled area to include remains that are believed to be related. Designation as a scheduled monument remains the most appropriate mechanism to secure the preservation of the monument, and ensure the recognition of its national importance.

4 Assessment of national importance

The monument is of national importance because of its potential to make a significant addition to our knowledge and understanding of the past, particularly the design and construction of burial monuments, and the nature of belief systems and burial practices during the late Neolithic period and early Bronze Age in northern Scotland. The cairn has good field characteristics, allowing us to interpret its form, function and position in the landscape and has potential for the presence of buried archaeological remains, including burials, artefacts and palaeoenvironmental evidence. Architectural features such as the inner and outer kerb and the likely remains of a central chamber are notable. The cup-marked stone forming part of the inner kerb is an unusual feature and adds to the importance of the cairn. There are other cairns in the vicinity of the monument, which together can contribute to our understanding of the form and nature of the prehistoric landscape. This is important for enhancing our understanding of late Neolithic and early Bronze Age society, its organisation, economy, religion and demography. The loss of the monument would significantly diminish our future ability to appreciate and understand funerary practice, death and burial in prehistoric times, and the placing of such monuments within the landscape.

5 References

Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> reference number CANMORE ID 12763 (accessed on 06/05/2015).

The Highland Council Historic Environment Record reference MHG41549 (accessed on 06/05/2015).

Childe, V G. (1944). 'An unrecognised group of chambered cairns', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquities of Scotland*, vol. 78. Page: 34.

Henshall, A S. (1963). *The chambered tombs of Scotland*, vol. 1. Edinburgh.

Malone, B. (2008). 'Mulchaich Farm, Alcaig, Highland (Urquhart and Logie Wester parish), evaluation', *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*, vol. 9. Cathedral Communications Limited, Wiltshire, England. Page: 118.

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