

Case information

Case ID	300016772
File Reference	AMH/1770/2/1
Name of Site	Caen, two long cairns W of, Helmsdale

Local Authority	Highland Council
National Grid Reference	ND 0123 1776
Designation No. (if any)	SM1770
Case Type	Amendment

Received/Start Date	29/04/2015
Decision Date	16/08/2016

1. Decision

The monument was first scheduled in three separate designations in 1934 and 1973. An inadequate area was included to protect all of the archaeological remains and the documentation does not conform to current standards. The assessment against criteria demonstrates that the monuments continue to be of national importance. The decision is to combine the three separate monuments in a single entry and to update this entry in the Schedule as **Caen, long cairn and round cairn 470m and 490m W of**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The monument was first scheduled as three separate designations; Caen, two long cairns W of, Helmsdale (SM1770) Caen, hut circle 500m W of (SM3327) and Caen, cairn 500m W of, Helmsdale (SM3328), in 1934 and 1973; no subsequent amendments. The easternmost long cairn, the cairn and the hut circle are being amended to create a single entry. The westernmost long cairn is now subject of a separate scheduling proposal and will be scheduled as SM13647.

2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The site was considered for amendment as part of the 2015 Highland project and visited on 29/04/2015.

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

Caen, long cairn and round cairn 470m and 490m W of

1 Description

The monument is a chambered long cairn dating from the Neolithic period, probably built between 3800 BC and 2500 BC, a round cairn, probably Bronze Age in date (between 2500 BC and 800 BC), and a roundhouse, likely dating to the late Bronze Age or Iron Age (between 1500 BC and AD 400). The long cairn is visible as a substantial trapezoidal cairn of exposed stone. The round cairn visible as a small mound of earth and stone, the roundhouse as a small upstanding structure defined by a penanular bank of turf and stone. The monument is located on a level terrace on the hillside overlooking the Strath of Kildonan, about 38m above sea level.

The long cairn measures about 53m in length by 19.5m in width at the east end, narrowing to around 10m at the west end. It reaches a maximum height of about 3m near the eastern edge, reducing in height towards the west end which is parallel-sided and squared. The cairn has been robbed and disturbed in places, and the presence of a chamber is indicated by two large parallel slabs visible in the disturbance at the eastern end. The round cairn and roundhouse both lie about 10m south of the west end of the long cairn, set around 4m apart. The round cairn lies to the west and measures about 5m in diameter and about 0.6m in height, while the roundhouse is around 3m in diameter within low turf and stone walls with an entrance on the southwest.

The scheduled area is irregular on plan, 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.

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

2.1 Intrinsic Characteristics

The most obvious element of the monument is a long cairn, surviving as a substantial trapezoidal cairn. The remaining components comprise a round cairn and roundhouse visible as a small earthen mound and penanular bank of turf and stone respectively. The long cairn is a visually impressive monument built of exposed stone. Although some disturbance of the cairn is visible, it survives in good condition and the chamber is likely to be intact. There is good potential for the survival of archaeological deposits, including human burials, artefacts and environmental remains such as pollen and charcoal, within, beneath and around the upstanding structure of the cairn. The archaeological deposits have the potential to provide

information about the date of the monument, ritual and funerary practices, and the structure of Neolithic society, while any artefacts and ecofacts would enhance understanding of contemporary economy, land-use and environment.

Dating evidence demonstrates that long cairns were constructed and in use between around 3800 and 2500 BC. They were used for communal burial and ritual, and excavations have revealed complex development sequences. Some excavated examples from Caithness and Sutherland have shown that the 'tails' were constructed as separate elements and either joined to or extended to encapsulate the primary mound containing the chamber. At Caen, the form of the cairn provides evidence of such structural complexity deriving from an extended development sequence: the parallel-sided, square ended, west end is suggestive of a rectangular or square cairn constructed as a separate element, and joined to the chamber containing primary mound at the eastern end. The presence of a chamber cannot be confirmed in all long cairns, so the evidence for a chamber at Caen is significant. Scientific study of the cairn's form and construction techniques compared with other long cairns would enhance our understanding of the development sequence of this site and of long cairns in general.

A round cairn and roundhouse lie around ten metres south of the west end of the long cairn. The round cairn is likely Bronze Age in date, while the roundhouse probably dates to the late Bronze or Iron Age. There is good potential for the survival of archaeological deposits, including occupation and abandonment debris, artefacts and environmental remains such as charcoal and pollen within, beneath and around the roundhouse, and burial remains within the burial mound. The roundhouse has the potential to add to our understanding of settlement, land-use and environment during later prehistory and provide information about the structure of contemporary society and economy, while the burial cairn can add to our understanding of ritual and funerary practice.

2.2 Contextual Characteristics

Long cairns are found throughout Scotland, with a concentration upon the north and west. The example at Caen is of particular significance because of the good preservation of the long cairn and evidence for structural complexity. It is the best preserved example of a group of seven long cairns within the Strath of Kildonan, which include Caen Burn North (scheduled monument reference SM432, Canmore ID 7467) only about 260m north-northeast, Caen Burn West (scheduled monument reference SM13647, Canmore ID 7434) 460m west-northwest, Caen Burn (scheduled monument reference 1771, Canmore ID 7427) 470m northeast and Salscraggie (Canmore ID 7423) around 670m west-northwest. It is one of only four long cairns in the Strath at which the presence of a chamber can be confirmed. The concentration of long cairns in this area and their proximity can give important insights into the Neolithic landscape and add to our understanding of social organisation, land division and land-use during the Neolithic.

The round cairn and roundhouse are likely to have been positioned with reference to the earlier long cairn. They provide evidence of the continued and changing use of this location and form one part of extensive later prehistoric remains recorded in the

area. Together with the long cairn, they have the potential to enhance and broaden our understanding of prehistoric society, community and belief, as well as funerary site location and practice. There is potential to study such sites together to understand their functions within the local communities and possible chronological development in the area.

Long 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. The long cairn at Caen is positioned in a prominent location on a level terrace on the hillside above the Strath of Kildonan. The cairn is aligned east-west with the orientation of the terrace and overlooks a short section of the Strath of Kildonan to the south and an area of pasture at the foot of the Cairn Burn. It is inter-visible with the contemporary Caen Burn long cairn (scheduled monument reference 1771, Canmore ID 7427) located around 470m to the northeast.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

N/A

3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

The field investigation concluded the site is in a stable condition and well preserved. There are no immediate threats to the preservation of the monument. Designation as a scheduled monument is therefore 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 it has an inherent potential to make a significant addition to our understanding of the past, in particular the design and construction of burial monuments, and the nature of burial practices and their significance in Neolithic society, as well as Bronze Age and Iron Age society, agriculture and economy in the north of Scotland. The long cairn is a visually impressive monument that retains its field characteristics and demonstrates a complex development sequence. It can be compared with a varied group of other long cairns that survive in the vicinity. The burial cairn and roundhouse are good examples of a burial monument and later prehistoric settlement located with reference to an earlier ritual monument. Chambered cairns are often our main source of evidence for the Neolithic in Scotland, and can enhance our understanding of Neolithic society and economy, as well as the nature of burial practices and belief systems. They are an important component of the wider prehistoric landscape of settlement, agriculture and ritual. Round cairns and roundhouses can significantly expand our understanding of burial practices and belief systems, domestic buildings, agriculture and economy during later prehistory. The monument's importance is enhanced by its association with a wider cluster of later prehistoric remains. The loss of the monument would diminish our ability to appreciate and understand the

meaning and importance of death and burial in the Neolithic and Bronze Age and the placing of cairns within the landscape, as well as our understanding of Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements, society and economy and the influence of Neolithic ritual monuments on the siting of later prehistoric ritual and domestic sites.

5 References

Historic Environment Scotland: <http://canmore.org.uk/> CANMORE ID 7486, 7440, 7445 (accessed on 9/11/15)

The Highland Council HER references are MHG10161, MHG10292, MHG10132.

Fairhurst, H. and Taylor, D. B. (1974) *A hut-circle settlement at Kilphedir, Sutherland, Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, vol. 103, 1970-1.*

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