



Case information

Case ID	300016743
File Reference	AMH/4338/2/1
Name of Site	Groat's Loch, cairn 200m W of Watenan

Local Authority	Highland Council
National Grid Reference	ND 31171 40763
Designation No. (if any)	SM4338
Case Type	Amendment

Received/Start Date	30/04/2015
Decision Date	16/08/2016

1. Decision

The monument was first scheduled in 1981 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 **Groat's Loch, cairn 225m WSW of**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

Monument first scheduled in 1981; 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 30/04/2015.

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

Groat's Loch, cairn 225m WSW of.

1 Description

The monument is a burial cairn, of circular platform type, which is likely to date from the late Iron Age or Early Historic period (200 to 900 AD). The cairn is visible as a mound of exposed stone with coursed edging in places. It is located on the crest of a terrace at around 110m above sea level, on gently sloping moorland which runs east southeast to the coast some 1.5km distant.

The cairn is circular on plan and measures approximately 3.5m in diameter and 0.5m in height. It is partly obscured by heather and peat but previous records show that the edging of the cairn survives, with up to three courses of stonework visible in places. The cairn, like other platform cairns, was constructed by building a low level band of coursed stonework which was then infilled with rubble or further stonework. A large stone, approximately 1m long, lying close to the centre of the cairn could be a fallen central standing stone – a common feature of barrows and cairns from this period. In 1977, a Pictish symbol stone was found, in two pieces, at the cairn. The larger section of the symbol stone was found close to the cairn with the smaller section lying directly on top of the cairn.

The scheduled area is circular on plan, centred on the monument and measures 13.5m in diameter. The scheduled area 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 monument was first scheduled in 1981, 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 burial cairn, of circular platform type, visible as a mound of exposed stone with coursed edging evident in places. The site is well preserved with no record of an excavation at the site. In 1981, a heather fire allowed a detailed survey of the cairn which recorded a circular band of coursed stonework along the perimeter. The probable fallen central standing stone is a significant feature as they are typical of many Pictish cairns and barrows but often do not survive. The recovery of a Pictish symbol stone with an incised crescent and V-rod at the cairn is an important aspect of the site's significance and raises questions about the relationship between the cairn and the symbol stone, and more generally about ritual and funerary practice in the late Iron Age and Early Historic period.

Platform cairns normally contain a burial, often within a stone-lined cist. There is therefore good potential for the survival of archaeological deposits, including burial remains, artefacts such as pottery, and environmental remains such as charcoal or pollen, within, beneath and around the intact elements of the monument. These elements can help us understand more about ritual and funerary practice, and the significance of materials, technology and craft in a burial context.

The form of the cairn and the find of the Pictish symbol stone indicated that the cairn dates from the late Iron Age to Early Historic period (200-900AD). The broken symbol stone may indicate that it had an extensive period of use before undergoing a specific process of abandonment. Scientific study of the site would allow us to develop a better understanding of the chronology of the site, including its date of origin, state of completeness and any possible development sequence. Excavation of similar cairns has shown that they were often re-used with later burials added or additional cists built on or within the cairn.

2.2 Contextual Characteristics

Platform cairns are relatively rare and are mainly distributed across northern Scotland and the Northern Isles. This cairn is similar in size to the round mounds at Garbeg (scheduled monument ref SM4635, Canmore ID 12633) and Lundin Links (Canmore ID 32691), and in its method of construction to those at Ackergill (Canmore ID 9243) and Keiss (Canmore ID 9131). These examples are also believed to date to the late Iron Age/Early Historic period. Fragments of Pictish symbol stones have been found in association with mounds at Garbeg, Keiss and Ackergill, although as with this cairn, there is no stratigraphical evidence that any symbol stone was originally associated with a cairn. However, this co-occurrence of symbol stones and cairns cannot be coincidental, and the cairns are likely to have had a significance for those that used the symbol stones. The monument can therefore contribute to our understanding of Pictish society including burial practices and the commemoration of the dead.

There are numerous broadly contemporary monuments in the landscape surrounding the monument including Cairn of Get, chambered cairn, cairns and cists (scheduled monument reference SM90048, Canmore ID 9046) only 400m north northeast and Garrywhin fort (scheduled monument reference SM548, Canmore ID 9034) located 700m north. There is potential to study this dense collection of sites to understand their functions within the local communities and possible chronological development in the area. More specifically, the monument is one of a small group of potentially contemporary cairns in the Wattenan area and offers potential to study burial and ritual practices in the late Iron Age/Early Historic period drawing on comparisons with evidence from the other cairns in the locality and more widely in Caithness.

The cairn sits on the crest of a narrow terrace, overlooking the gently sloping moorland, around 1.5km from the coast to the east southeast. The site has open

views across the adjacent landscape and numerous archaeological sites, some could be contemporary, are visible from the monument such as Garrywhin fort.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

N/A.

3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

The field investigation concluded the site is in a stable condition and very well preserved. There are no immediate threats to the preservation of the monument. 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 Iron Age and Early Historic periods. The monument is a circular platform cairn which is an uncommon type of cairn, and it demonstrates very good field characteristics, including what may be a fallen central standing stone. This evidence enables us to interpret the cairn's form, function and position in the landscape. The monument is likely to have buried archaeological remains, including burials, artefacts and palaeoenvironmental evidence. The cairn is one of a small number of similar cairns in Scotland where Pictish symbol stones have been found. This co-occurrence of a symbol stone and cairn means that this monument is important for our understanding of Pictish society and culture, including the use of symbol stones. There are numerous other cairns in the vicinity of the monument, which together can contribute to our understanding of late Iron Age and early Historic 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 and Early Historic times, and the placing of such monuments within the landscape.

5 References

Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> reference number CANMORE ID 9065 (accessed on 18/03/2016).

Highland Council <http://her.highland.gov.uk/> reference number MHG 2227 (accessed on 18/03/2016).

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