



## Case information

---

Case ID	300016704
File Reference	AMH/419/2/1
Name of Site	Achkinloch, chambered cairn 800m SW of, Loch Stemster

Local Authority	Highland Council
National Grid Reference	ND 18862 41713
Designation No. (if any)	SM419
Case Type	Amendment

Received/Start Date	21/04/2015
Decision Date	07/10/2016

## 1. Decision

---

The monument was first scheduled in 1933 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 the entry in the schedule as **Achkinloch, chambered cairn 755m SW of, Loch Stemster**.

## 2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

---

### 2.1 Designation Background

Monument first scheduled on 9 November 1933; no subsequent amendment.

### 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 Highland scheduling project and visited on 21/04/2015.

[www.historicenvironment.scot](http://www.historicenvironment.scot)

Historic Environment Scotland, Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh, EH9 1SH

Historic Environment Scotland  
Scottish Charity No. SC045925  
VAT Number: GB 221 8680 15

### 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

---

#### Elizabeth McCrone

Head of Designations  
Heritage Management  
Historic Environment Scotland

<b>Contact</b>	Dr James Bruhn, Senior Designations Officer Email: <a href="mailto:james.bruhn@gov.scot">james.bruhn@gov.scot</a> , Telephone: 0131 668 0316
----------------	---

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

### **Achkinloch, chambered cairn 755m SW of, Loch Stemster**

---

## **1 Description**

---

The monument is the remains of a chambered cairn dating from the Neolithic period (between 3800 and 2500 BC) and is visible as a stone and turf covered oval mound from which large edge set slabs protrude. The cairn lies 160m above sea level on a small knoll overlooking Loch Stemster with good views in all directions.

The monument is an Orkney-Cromarty type chambered cairn, which are typically made up of a single long chamber, divided into stall-like "compartments" by stone uprights. The cairn is approximately 24m in diameter and survives to 1.7m in height. There are three large edge set slabs visible near the centre of the cairn, and they likely represent the remains of the multiple compartments which would have been set off the main east-west aligned chamber.

The scheduled area is circular on plan, 35m in diameter and centred on the monument, to include the remains described and an area around 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 1933, but the documentation does 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 has been denuded of most of its cairn material exposing the key structural features of the chamber and passage. However, the monument is in a stable condition at present. The extent of the surrounding cairn is defined by a well-defined turf covered mound of stones measuring approximately 24m in diameter. The large, exposed stones of the chamber form a visually impressive monument. Although the chamber and passage are exposed, excavations of chambered cairns elsewhere show that there is potential for undisturbed deposits, including human burials, artefacts and environmental remains such as charcoal or pollen, within, beneath and around the upstanding structure of the cairn.

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. Few radiocarbon dates have been obtained for Orkney-Cromarty chambered cairns because many of them were excavated before the advent of modern scientific techniques. However, from the dates available, and on the basis of typological study of the pottery found at such sites, it

[www.historicenvironment.scot](http://www.historicenvironment.scot)

Historic Environment Scotland, Longmore House,  
Salisbury Place, Edinburgh, EH9 1SH

Historic Environment Scotland  
Scottish Charity **No. SC045925**  
VAT Number: **GB 221 8680 15**

appears that chambered cairns were constructed and in use between around 3800 and 2500 BC.

At Achkinloch, there is no clear visible evidence of an extended development sequence. However, it is likely that this tomb was in use through several or many generations. 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. The monument was a place of burial and ritual during the Neolithic and is likely to have been a prominent place within a group's territory as well as a focal point in the landscape.

## 2.2 Contextual Characteristics

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'. Achkinloch is an interesting and impressive example with massive stones delineating a large chamber.

While there are few other cairns in the vicinity of Achkinloch cairn, it is located around 50m to the southeast of an impressive horseshoe shaped stone setting which is likely to be related to the cairn (scheduled monument reference number SM420, Canmore ID 8271). Spatial and landscape analysis of this cairn in comparison to other prehistoric monuments in the vicinity could enhance our understanding of the placing of such sites in the landscape and the organisation, division and use of land in the Neolithic.

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. Achkinloch is located on a small knoll overlooking an important north-south route way in Caithness. The cairn overlooks the Loch of Stemster and of more significance has a relationship with the large horseshoe shaped stone setting to the northwest.

## 2.3 Associative Characteristics

There are no known associative characteristics which contribute to the site's cultural significance.

# 3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

Designation as a scheduled monument is 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 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 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. The orientation and position of Achkinloch cairn within the landscape and its close spatial relationship with the nearby stone setting 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.

## 5 References

---

Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> reference number CANMORE ID 8269 (accessed on 27/05/2016).

The Highland Council Historic Environment Record reference: MHG1313

Davidson, J L and Henshall, A S. (1991) The chambered cairns of Caithness: an inventory of the structures and their contents. Edinburgh: 89.

Henshall, A S. (1963) The chambered tombs of Scotland, vol. 1. Edinburgh: 257.

RCAHMS. (1911) The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions of Scotland. Third report and inventory of monuments and constructions in the county of Caithness. London: 76, No. 278.

---