



Case information

Case ID	300016706
File Reference	AMH/435/2/1
Name of Site	Cairn Reain, chambered cairn, North Yarrows, Thrumster

Local Authority	Highland Council
National Grid Reference	ND 31100 44200
Designation No. (if any)	SM435
Case Type	Amendment

Received/Start Date	28/04/2015
Decision Date	16/01/2017

1. Decision

The monument was first scheduled in 1939 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 amend the entry in the Schedule as **Cairn Reain, chambered cairn**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The monument was first scheduled in 1939; no subsequent amendments.

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 2015 Highland project and visited on 28/04/2015.

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

Cairn Reain, chambered cairn

1 Description

The monument is the remains of a chambered cairn dating from the Neolithic period, probably built and used between 3800 and 2500 BC. It is visible as an irregular, low grass-covered mound measuring at least 31m east-northeast to west-southwest by 22m transversely and between one metre and 1.5m in height. The monument lies on a ridge overlooking the Loch of Yarrows, at about 100m above sea level.

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. The scheduling specifically excludes the above-ground elements of all post-and-wire fences.

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

2.1 Intrinsic Characteristics

The monument survives as a low mound with distinctly different eastern and western parts. The eastern part is grass-covered and stands about 1m in height with scattered stones visible on the surface. Small-scale excavation has confirmed the presence of cairn material and a possible central chamber along with evidence of disturbance, probably relating to earlier excavation of the monument. The western part, at around 1.5m in height, stands slightly higher than the eastern part. Some surface stones are visible and it appears relatively undisturbed. It is unclear if this is the continuation of the cairn lying to the east or a second separate cairn. Scientific study of the monument's form and character would enhance our understanding of this cairn, and clarify the nature of the western part.

The small-scale excavation of the eastern part has demonstrated that there is good potential for the survival of a wide range of archaeological remains, 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 and ritual and funerary practices, while any artefacts and ecofacts would enhance understanding of contemporary economy, land-use and environment.

Dating evidence demonstrates that chambered cairns were constructed and in use between around 3800 and 2500 BC. They were used for communal burial and ritual, and excavations often reveal evidence of complex development sequences. The monument at Cairn Reain may therefore have been in use for several or many

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generations. Scientific study of the cairn's form and construction techniques compared with other chambered cairns would enhance our understanding of the character and development sequence of this site, and of chambered cairns in general.

2.2 Contextual Characteristics

Chambered cairns are found throughout Scotland, with a concentration on the north and west. The example at Cairn Reain is of significance because of its potentially unusual structure and proximity to a wider complex of broadly contemporary monuments around the Loch of Yarrows. These include the South Yarrows long cairns about 1km and 1.3km southwest (scheduled monument references SM507 and SM508, Canmore ID 9068 and 9057) and McCole's Castle chambered cairn about 1km south-southeast (scheduled monument reference SM467, Canmore ID 9047). The proximity of these monuments can give important insights into the Neolithic landscape and the placing of cairns in the landscape, and add to our understanding of social organisation, land division and land-use during 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. This cairn is a visible feature in the landscape, located on a ridge overlooking the Loch of Yarrows with good views in all directions.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

The cairn was first investigated by the archaeologist Joseph Anderson in 1865, a key figure in the development of archaeology as a discipline in Scotland. He excavated many prehistoric monuments in the Caithness area and undertook the first systematic study of a group of Scottish chambered cairns, of which the cairn at Cairn Reain was a part.

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

This monument is of national importance because it makes a significant addition to our understanding of the past, in particular the design and construction of burial monuments. The cairn is a distinctive monument with proven potential for the survival of archaeological remains, and can be compared with the varied group of chambered cairns that survives in the vicinity. 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. The loss of the monument would diminish our ability to appreciate and understand the meaning and importance of death, burial and ritual in the Neolithic and the placing of cairns within the landscape.

5 References

Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> reference number 9038 (accessed on 21/06/2016).

Highland Council HER Reference MHG2203 (accessed on 21/06/2016).

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