

Case information

Case ID	300016710
File Reference	AMH/472/1
Name of Site	Osle, chambered cairn S of Lynegar House

Local Authority	Highland Council
National Grid Reference	ND 2271 5679
Designation No. (if any)	SM472
Case Type	Amendment

Received/Start Date	22/04/2015
Decision Date	03/02/2017

1. Decision

The monument was first scheduled in 1934 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 **Osle, chambered cairn 250m S of Lynegar House**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The monument was first scheduled in 1934. There have been no subsequent amendments.

2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals affecting this assessment.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The site was considered for amendment as part of the S18 Highland scheduling project and visited on 22/04/2015.

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

Osle, chambered cairn 250m S of Lynegar House

1 Description

The monument is the remains of a chambered cairn dating from the Neolithic period to early Bronze Age (between 3800 and 2500 BC) and is visible as an oval mound from which large slabs and stones protrude. The cairn lies 25m above sea level on ground gently sloping down towards Loch Watten with good views in all directions.

The monument is an Orkney-Cromarty type chambered cairn, a diverse group of cairns distributed across northern Scotland and the Orkney Isles which are characterised by a single long chamber, divided into stall-like "compartments" by stone uprights. Near the centre of this cairn two large slabs are visible and a third was noted in 1910. They represent the end compartment of a chamber, oriented east southeast-west southwest. The northeast slab is 0.5m long and 0.15m thick. The southwest slab, which leans slightly to the southwest, is 1.5m in length and 0.3m thick.

The scheduled area is oval on plan, 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.

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

2.1 Intrinsic Characteristics

The cairn appears substantially intact, although at present the surface is devoid of turf. The chamber itself appears largely complete and as there is no record of excavation at this site, archaeological deposits are expected to survive. Excavations of chambered cairns elsewhere show the continuing potential for undisturbed deposits including evidence of earlier structures, human burials, artefacts and ecofacts such as pottery, flints and bone, within, beneath and around the upstanding structure of such cairns. Scientific study would allow further understanding of the chronology of the site, including its date of origin, state of completeness and any possible development sequence.

The cairn dates from the late Neolithic to early Bronze Age (around 3800 to 2500 BC) and 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. It is likely to have been a prominent place for the local community and would have been a focal point in the landscape. This example helps us understand more about ritual and funerary practice, the architecture of prehistoric burial and the construction, use and abandonment of these monuments.

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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 e.g. Knap of Howar, Orkney. It is likely that this was deliberate, with the tombs representing 'houses for the dead'. Oslie is an interesting example as it has never been excavated and the chamber appears substantially intact. This contrasts with several other chambered cairns in Caithness, which were excavated at an early date or otherwise disturbed.

Oslie is one of a group of inland burial monuments lying between Wick and Thurso. The proximity of these burial monuments can give important insights into the Neolithic landscape and add to our understanding of social organisation, land division and land-use. There are nine other chambered cairns within 10km of Oslie. They comprise five cairns on high ground above Loch Scarmclate and the River Thurso (e.g. Mill of Knockdee, scheduled monument reference SM468, Canmore ID 8525), two cairns close to the summit of low hills north of Loch Watten (scheduled monument reference SM439 and Canmore ID 8855, scheduled monument reference SM434 and Canmore ID 8851), a cairn on the south bank of the Wick River (Bilbster chambered cairn, scheduled monument reference SM43, Canmore ID 8759) and a cairn at Spittal (Fairy Hillock chambered cairn, scheduled monument reference SM528, Canmore ID 8337). This group of nearby monuments encompasses a range of landscape positions and chamber arrangements, giving high potential to carry out typological and landscape analysis, enhancing our understanding of the placing of such sites in the landscape and the organisation, division and use of land in the Neolithic and Bronze Age.

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 located on ground gently sloping down to Loch Watten, with good views in all directions. It is a visible feature in the landscape.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

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

3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

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 as it makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the design and construction of prehistoric burial monuments, and the nature of belief systems and burial practices during the Late Neolithic and Bronze Age within northern Scotland. The monument retains its field characteristics and can be compared with a varied group of other chambered cairns that survive in the vicinity. Chambered cairns are often our main source of evidence for the Neolithic in Scotland, and are important for our understanding of Neolithic society and economy, and 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 and burial in Neolithic times and the placing of cairns within the landscape.

5 References

Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> reference number CANMORE ID 8740 (accessed on 31/05/2016).

Highland Council HER/SMR reference is MHG2313.

Davidson, J L and Henshall, A S 1989, The chambered cairns of Orkney: an inventory of the structures and their contents, Edinburgh.

Henshall, A S 1963, The chambered tombs of Scotland, vol. 1. Edinburgh. Page 285.

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. Page 132, No. 478.