

## Case information

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Case ID	300018710
File Reference	AMH/537/2/1
Name of Site	Camster, broch S of
Local Authority	The Highland Council
National Grid Reference	ND 2520 4508
Designation No. (if any)	SM537
Case Type	Amendment
Received/Start Date	16/11/2016
Decision Date	03/02/2017

## 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 **Camster, broch 500m S of Lower Camster**.

## 2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

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### 2.1 Designation Background

The monument was first scheduled in 1939 and the designation included this broch, another nearby broch and a group of stone rows, the second broch and stone rows located approximately 600m northeast and 1.6km southeast of this broch respectively. Subsequently, the three distinct archaeological features were allocated separate scheduled monument numbers: SM537, SM536 and SM463. This amendment case updates the designation of SM537 only. The designation of SM536 and SM463 will be updated using separate amendment proposals.

### 2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals affecting this monument.

## 3. Assessment

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### 3.1 Assessment information

The site was visited on 23/11/2016.

### 3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

An assessment against the criteria for determining national importance for scheduling has been carried out (see Annex A).

The monument was found to meet the criteria for national importance.

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**

### **Camster, broch 500m S of Lower Camster**

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## **1 Description**

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The monument is a broch, a complex stone-built substantial roundhouse, dating to the Iron Age (between 600 BC and AD 400). The monument is visible as a sub-circular turf-covered mound set on a flat-topped hillock. To its east and south are the remains of a ditch. The monument is located approximately 110m above sea level and about 200m south of Camster Burn. It is surrounded by gently sloping moorland and forestry.

The flat-topped, grassy hillock, on which the broch is set rises around 1.5m above the surrounding marshy moorland. The broch mound measures up to 1.5m high. The external diameter of the broch is around 28m and it has an estimated internal diameter of around 10.7m. Exposed stones and evidence of a line of stones along the base of the broch mound could be the remains of an outer wall. About 23m from the centre of the broch, to the east and south, are the slight remains of a ditch. The ditch is up to 13.4m wide and around 1m deep in places.

The scheduled area, centred on the broch, is circular on plan with a diameter of 80m and 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.

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## **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 broch, visible as a grass-covered mound sitting on a flat-topped hillock. The mound appears to preserve the base of the broch walls. The flat-topped hillock, while not wholly artificial, may have evidence of alteration by scarping or levelling to accommodate and defend the broch. There is evidence for the remains of an outerwall along the base of the broch mound. To its east and south are the remains of a ditch which originally surrounded the mound, as noted by a RCAHMS survey in 1910, but it has been reduced through historic agricultural activity.

There is no record of an excavation at the site and the monument has high potential to support future archaeological research. The scale of the mound indicates that the buried broch walls survive and there is potential for architectural features such as an entrance passage, intramural cells, stairs, scarcement ledges and even a well. By analogy with other excavated brochs, the broch mound and surrounding ditch are likely to contain deposits rich in occupation debris, artefacts and

palaeoenvironmental evidence that can tell us about how people lived, their trade and exchange contacts, and their social status.

Brochs in Caithness are typically thought to date from the mid first millennium BC to the early part of the first millennium AD although there are few precise scientific dates and our understanding of their dating has traditionally been based on typological studies of artefacts recovered from broch sites. The remains of a surrounding outerwall and ditch indicates this site may have had a complex development sequence. Scientific investigation would allow us to develop a better understanding of the chronology of the site, its date of origin, state of completeness, survival of outerworks or related structures, and any development sequence.

Broch towers are primarily seen as a specific specialised development of complex Atlantic roundhouses. They were large complex structures that could have accommodated either an extended family or a small community. While there would have been a social hierarchy within this community, the construction of these elaborate towers is often understood in terms of elite settlement. Other interpretations have stressed their likely role as fortified or defensive sites, possibly serving a community across a wider area. Brochs are complex structures likely to have had numerous purposes and a complex role in prehistoric society.

## 2.2 Contextual Characteristics

Brochs are a widespread class of monument across northern Scotland. This example is one of a larger local/regional group in Caithness. It is similar to the typical Caithness and North of Scotland broch pattern of 'mound on mound', where the upper mound is an accumulation of collapsed building material over the lower levels of the broch structure and its flooring, while the lower area of the site may retain evidence of subsidiary buildings and/or defences.

Location is a significant factor in understanding brochs and so too is intervisibility and relative position with other examples. This monument is within a closely spaced group of brochs in the Camster area and offers potential to study their connections. Of particular contextual interest is the close proximity of Lower Camster broch (Canmore ID 8675 and scheduled monument reference SM536) only 600m to the northeast. Today, forestry obscures the view between the two brochs but it is most likely the sites were intervisible in prehistory. Other nearby brochs include Scorricket broch (Canmore ID 8806) approximately 5.7km north northwest and Toftgun broch (Canmore ID 8715) around 4.1km southeast. There is also potential to draw comparisons with evidence from the many other brochs elsewhere in Caithness. This broch can therefore support comparative study to better understand the function of such monuments, their interrelationship and the significance of their placing within the landscape, in particular in relation to our understanding of Iron Age social hierarchy, changing settlement patterns and systems of inheritance.

## 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 this monument, and to ensure the recognition of its national importance.

### 4 Assessment of national importance

The monument is of national importance because it has inherent potential to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the past, in particular the function, use and development of brochs in Caithness and the development of Iron Age society in the region. It has good field characteristics, the visible remains including the substantial mound and surrounding outer wall and to the east and south. There is also high potential for buried remains, including the lower parts of the broch structure and outbuildings. The broch is a prominent feature in the landscape and would have been so when constructed and in use. In particular, its very close proximity to another broch can add to our understanding of the siting of these monuments in the landscape, enhancing understanding of settlement patterns and social structure during the Iron Age in Caithness. The loss of the monument would diminish our future ability to appreciate and understand the development, use and re-use of brochs, and the nature of Iron Age society, economy and social hierarchy in the north of Scotland.

### 5 References

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Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> reference number CANMORE ID 8674 (accessed on 01/12/2016).

The Highland Council HER <http://her.highland.gov.uk/> reference is MHG 1800 (accessed on 01/12/2016).

Feachem, R, 1963, *A guide to prehistoric Scotland*. London.

MacKie, E W, 2007, *The Roundhouses, Brochs and Wheelhouses of Atlantic Scotland c. 700 BC - AD 500: architecture and material culture. Part 2 The Mainland and the Western Islands*. BAR, vol 444. Oxford.

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.

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