# Case information

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| **Case ID** | 300016785 |
| **File Reference** | AMJ/9304/1/1 |
| **Name of Site** | Lettie's Grave, square cairns |

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| **Local Authority** | Highland Council | | |
| **National Grid Reference** | NC 69200 05290 | | |
| **Designation No. (if any)** | SM13619 | | |
| **Designation Type** | Scheduled Monument | **Current Category of Listing** | N/A |
| **Case Type** | Designation | | |

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| **Received/Start Date** | 25/04/2015 |
| **Decision Date** | 15/06/2016 |

## 1. Decision

The assessment against criteria demonstrates that the monument is of national importance. The decision is to add the monument to the schedule of nationally important monuments as **Lettie's Grave, square cairns.**

## 2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

### 2.1 Designation Background

The monument is currently undesignated.

### 2.2 Development Proposals

N/A

## 3. Assessment

### 3.1 Assessment information

The site was considered for designation as part of the S18 Highland scheduling project and visited on 25/04/2015.

### 3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

An assessment against the Scheduling criteria was carried out on 12/10/2015 (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

The monument has been assessed as nationally important, and scheduling is an appropriate mechanism to secure its future.

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## ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria*
**Lettie's Grave, square cairns**

## 1. Description

The monument comprises the remains of three square burial cairns, probably dating to between 500 AD and 800 AD. They are visible as three stone settings, arranged around 11m to 12m apart, and in a roughly equilateral triangle. The cairns lie at around 120m above sea level, on a level terrace overlooking the River Lettie.

The best preserved cairn is that to the southeast. It measures about 2.4m east-west by 2.2m transversely over a kerb of edge-set slabs, which remain in place only on the north and east sides. The cairn material within the kerb measures around 0.2m in height. Two large upright stones stand at the northeast and southeast corners, while two large fallen slabs probably represent the remaining corner stones. The second cairn stands around 11m to the northwest and measures around 2.7m square over a kerb which survives only on the northeast side. The cairn material measures around 0.3m in height and a single large stone stands at the east corner. Traces of a third cairn are visible to the south. It is poorly defined, but appears to have measured at least 1.7m square. The remains of a kerb survives on the west side.

The scheduled area is circular on plan, measuring 45m in diameter, 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.

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

* This assessment is based on our current state of knowledge. It will form the basis of any new or updated scheduled monument record.
** A monument may be found to meet the scheduling criteria but in some circumstances may not be added to the Schedule. The purpose and implications of scheduling are issues that require to be taken into account when assessing monuments for scheduling. Scheduling may not be the only, or the most appropriate, mechanism to secure the future of all sites, even those that may otherwise meet the criteria.

### Cultural significance

| Characteristic | Assessment |
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| **Intrinsic** | |
| Condition in which monument survives | • The square cairns are visible as three stone settings arranged in a roughly equilateral triangle.<br>• The best preserved cairn is defined by two large upright corner stones, two fallen corner stones and edge-set kerb stones surrounding a low mound, forming an impressive funerary monument. |

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| | • The two remaining cairns are less visually impressive, surviving as low mounds surrounded by the remains of encircling kerb stones.<br>• The cairns are in a relatively good, stable condition at present. |
| Archaeological, scientific, technological or other interest or research potential of the monument | • There has been some disturbance to all three cairns, but there is good potential for the survival of further archaeological deposits, including human burials, artefacts and environmental remains, within, beneath and around the upstanding structure of the cairns.<br>• Excavations of square cairns elsewhere have shown that they were often used to cover burials within long-cist settings.<br>• These cairns have potential to add to our understanding of ritual and funerary practices during the Early Historic period, and to provide information about the structure of contemporary society, economy and the environment. |
| Apparent developmental sequence of monument (either long or short may provide insights of importance) | • At Lettie's cairn there is no clear indication of whether the cairns derive from an extended development sequence.<br>However, excavations elsewhere have demonstrated that square cairns are normally Early Historic in origin, dating from about AD 400-1000 AD, and some cairns were re-used for secondary burial.<br>• Scientific study of the cairns' forms and construction would enhance our understanding of the development sequence of this site and square cairns in general. |
| Original or subsequent functions of the monument and its parts | • The cairns were a place of burial and ritual during the Early Historic period.<br>• They are likely to have had a prominent place within a group's territory and to have been a focal point in the landscape. |
| **Contextual** | |
| Present rarity or representativeness of all or any part of the monument, assessed against knowledge of the archaeology of Scotland and of the region in which the monument occurs | • Burials from the Early Historic period are relatively rare in the north of Scotland and more generally square cairns are a rare form of burial monument. |

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| Relationship of the monument to other monuments of the same or related classes or period, or to features or monuments in the vicinity. (Particularly important for monuments forming part of a widespread but varied class) | • There are few comparable monuments in this area: The cairns bear similarities to the square cairns in the cemetery at Ackergill, Caithness (Canmore ID 9243) and,<br>• closer to the site, a cemetery of square and round cairns has been recorded about 4.2km to the southeast (Canmore ID 124846).<br>• Given the relative lack of comparable sites in the area, the monument has the potential to further our understanding, not only of funerary site location and practice, but also of the structure of Early Historic society and economy.<br>• There is high potential for comparative study on a local and national scale to better understand the role of such monuments, their interrelationship and the significance of their placing within the landscape, in particular in relation to our understanding of Early Historic burial, ritual and belief |
| Relationship of the monument and its parts with its wider landscape and setting | • The cairns lie at about 120m above sea level, on a level terrace, part way up the hillside overlooking the Lettie River.<br>• The cairns are likely to have been deliberately placed as prominent features in the landscape, taking account of the surrounding landscape and possible view-sheds. The siting of the three cairns in such close proximity is unlikely to be a coincidence and their proximity would have increased their prominence in the landscape. |
| **Associative** | |
| Historical, cultural and social influences that have affected the form and fabric of the monument, and vice versa | • The form of the cairns are influenced by attitudes to burial and commemoration of the dead in the early historic period, but may also reflect the influence of early historic social structure. |
| Aesthetic attributes of the monument | • N/A |
| Significance in the national consciousness or to people who use or have used the monument, or descendants of such people | • N/A |
| Associations the monument has with | • N/A |

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| historical, traditional or artistic characters or events | |

**Assessment of national importance**

| Criteria | Assessment |
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| Its inherent capability or potential to make a significant addition to the understanding or appreciation of the past | This monument is of national importance because it can make a significant contribution to our understanding of the past, particularly the design and construction of burial monuments, and the nature of burial practices and their significance in Early Historic society. The best preserved cairn is an impressive monument that retains its field characteristics, and the three cairns form an integral group of burial monuments. Due to the relative rarity of this type of funerary site, the loss of the monument would significantly diminish our ability to appreciate and understand the placing of such monuments within the landscape and the meaning and importance of death and burial in the Early Historic period. |
| Its retention of the structural, decorative or field characteristics of its kind to a marked degree | |
| Its contribution, or the contribution of its class, to today's landscape and/or the historic landscape | |
| The quality and extent of any documentation or association that adds to the understanding of the monument or its context | |
| The diminution of the potential of a particular class or classes of monument to contribute to an understanding of the past, should the monument be lost or damaged | |
| Its place in the national consciousness [a factor that may be considered in support of other factors] | |

## References

Historic Environment Scotland http://www.canmore.org.uk reference number CANMORE ID 5412 (accessed on 10/05/2016).

The Highland Council Historic Environment Record reference is MHG12400.

Ashmore, P. 1980 Low cairns, long cists and symbol stones. Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 110, 345-55.

Ritchie, A. 2011 Cemeteries of platforms cairns and long cists around Sinclair's Bay, Caithness. Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 141, 125-143.