

Case information

Case ID	300009957
File Reference	AMH/90074/2/1
Name of Site	Clava Cairns, chambered cairns, ring cairn, stone circles and chapel

Local Authority	Highland
National Grid Reference	NH 7571 4443
Designation No. (if any)	SM90074
Case Type	Amendment

Received/Start Date	2014
Decision Date	21/09/2016

1. Decision

The monument was first scheduled in 1882 and amended in 1923, but the documentation does not conform to current standards and an inadequate area was included to protect all of the archaeological remains. The assessment against the scheduling criteria demonstrates that the monument continues to be of national importance. The decision is to update the entry in the schedule as **Clava Cairns, cairns 70m, 170m NE of and 210m, 460m ENE of, barrow 270m NE of, and standing stone 395m NE of Balnuarin.**

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The monument was first scheduled as Clava Cairns, chambered cairns, ring cairn, stone circles and chapel in 1882 and amended in 1923. The chapel and southwestern-most cairn are now subject of separate scheduling proposals and will be scheduled as SM13652 (chapel) and SM13650 (cairn).

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 North 2014 project and visited on 15/07/2014.

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

Clava Cairns, cairns 70m, 170m NE of and 210m, 460m ENE of, barrow 270m NE of, and standing stone 395m NE of Balnuarin

1 Description

The monument is the remains of two chambered cairns, three ring cairns, a barrow, kerb cairn and standing stone, constructed and in use during the Bronze Age (2500BC to 800BC). The chambered cairns and one of the ring cairns are visible as substantial cairns of exposed stone, open in the centre and surrounded by stone circles, the kerb cairn as a ring of kerbstones and the remaining two ring cairns as rings of low rubble banks with kerbs. The barrow survives as a low earthwork mound surmounted by a 19th stone wall and the standing stone as an upright monolith, interpreted as the surviving remnant of a stone circle surrounding a further cairn. The monument forms a coherent group of burial monuments, arranged in two rows along a gravel terrace overlooking the floodplain of the River Nairn, about 100m above sea level.

The best preserved of this group of monuments lie to the southwest and comprise a ring cairn set between two chambered cairns, each surrounded by stone circles, and a kerb cairn. The two chambered cairns are very similar in plan and construction, comprising sub-circular chambers entered along a passage through a sub-circular cairn around 15.5m in diameter, faced internally and externally with kerb stones. Stone platforms surround the cairns, extending as far as the ring of monoliths. The ring cairn comprises a circular wall of rubble with an inner and outer kerb, surrounded by a low platform. The interior is open with no indication of an entrance. The cairn is enclosed within a stone circle, and three rays of low stone bank link the standing stones and the outer kerb. Immediately west of this ring cairn is a kerb cairn, visible as a ring of 15 kerbstones around four metres in internal diameter. All four cairns incorporate cup-marked or cup-and-ring marked stones.

Two further ring-cairns, a standing stone and barrow lie to the southeast and northeast of this group. The first ring cairn lies about 135m southeast and is visible as an almost circular rubble bank with outer kerb, measuring around 18m in diameter. About 365m northeast is a second ring cairn, consisting of a low bank of rubble about 19m in diameter bounded on the inside by two arcs of upright stones, representing the remains of an inner kerb. There is no trace of an outer kerb. A single standing stone about 115m northwest of this cairn is likely the remains of a stone circle surrounding a further cairn, now removed, while an earthwork mound (the barrow) about 13m in diameter and around 0.4m in height lies about 125m southwest.

The scheduled area is in six parts, five of which are circular in plan, the sixth irregular, 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 modern structures, fittings and fixtures within and around the monument, the above ground elements of all post and wire fences, the top 100mm of all surfaced paths and top 300mm of the road surface. The monument was first scheduled in 1882 and amended in 1923, but the documentation does not conform to current standards and an inadequate area was included to protect all of the archaeological remains; 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 most visually impressive elements of the monument are two chambered cairns and a ring cairn, surviving as substantial cairns of exposed stone with external platforms and rings of standing stones. The remaining components comprise a kerb cairn incorporating a sandstone slab decorated with cup-marks, the remains of two further ring cairns, an earthwork mound interpreted as a barrow and a standing stone, likely the remains of a stone circle surrounding a further cairn. The visual impact of the first group is enhanced by the grading in height of the kerbstones and surrounding monoliths, creating an alignment extending from northeast to southwest, the incorporation of cup-marked stones and the use of stone of different colours and textures to build the cairns. Although the cairns have been subject to excavation, consolidation and reconstruction, all three survive as substantial monuments close to their original scale and appearance and have high potential to support future scientific research. Although the remaining components are less substantial, the excavations at Clava have established that there is good potential for the survival of archaeological deposits, including human burials, artefacts and environmental remains such as pollen and charcoal, within, beneath and around the unexcavated portions of all the elements of the monument. The archaeological deposits have the potential to provide information about the date of the monuments, ritual and funerary practices, the structure of Bronze Age society, and the contemporary economy, land-use and environment.

Archaeological excavations of both chambered cairns and two of the ring cairns indicate that they were constructed and used during the Bronze Age, though not all the cairns at Clava were built at the same time. The four large monuments forming the northern row of cairns were built around 2000BC along the line of the gravel terrace. The two small ring-cairns and kerb cairn were constructed about a thousand years later and new burials placed in some of the earlier cairns. Finally, a cremation was placed outside the central ring-cairn in the later 1st millennium AD. The cairns were therefore used for burial and ritual over an extended time period. Questions still remain regarding the exact phasing and dating of the individual cairns and the burial cemetery as a whole, so further scientific study of the form and structure of the cairns and their relationship to one another has the potential to enhance our understanding of the development sequence of this site and of other cairns in the region.

2.2 Contextual Characteristics

The cairns at Clava have given their name to a well-defined regional group of 50 or more stone-built monuments found around the Moray Firth, often called 'Clava Cairns'. These monuments combine a number of similar elements: a circular cairn, with a platform on the outside, bounded by a ring of monoliths. The examples at Clava are of particular significance as researchers have used them as the 'type-sites' (characteristic examples) for this regional group.

The cairns at Clava form a coherent group of burial monuments, arranged in two rows oriented roughly northeast-southwest along the line of a gravel terrace, overlooking the River Nairn and its flood plain to the north. The largest monuments, built during the early Bronze Age, occupy the centre of the terrace, while the kerb cairn and smaller ring cairns, constructed at a slightly later date, occupy more peripheral locations. The northeast and southwest alignments are further emphasised within the structure of the monuments themselves, in the southwest alignment of the entrances of the chambered cairns, the grading of the height of the kerbstones and standing stones and the colour and texture of the stones used to build the monuments. This has been connected with an alignment on the midwinter sunset and, less precisely, the midwinter sunrise. The monuments at Clava therefore have the potential to enhance and broaden our understanding of funerary site location and practice, as well as prehistoric society and community. They can give important insights into the nature of Bronze Age beliefs, ceremony and ritual, and the place of such monuments within contemporary society.

A second group of cairns, which includes Cludoich (scheduled monument reference number SM6091; Canmore ID14268), Ballagan (scheduled monument reference number SM11900; Canmore ID 14276) and the possible example at Milton of Clava (scheduled monument reference number SM13652; Canmore ID 14281) lie around 600m southwest. They are also arranged in a row on a northeast-southwest alignment and, together, both groups form an extensive Bronze Age cemetery. The proximity of these monuments can give important insights into the Bronze Age landscape, the placing of such sites in the landscape and the development of this ceremonial landscape as a whole. They can add to our understanding of social organisation, land-use and belief during the Bronze Age. More widely, the grading of stones within a circle can be recognised within the broadly contemporary recumbent stone circles in Aberdeenshire, while the linear orientation of the monuments can be compared with the linear cemetery at Kilmartin, Argyll, a row of five large stone burial monuments of Bronze Age date also constructed along the floor of a river valley. The monument, therefore, has the potential to enhance our understanding of important connections between regions during the Bronze Age.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

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

3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

Our field visit showed the site is in a stable condition and well preserved. 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 has an inherent potential to make a significant addition to our understanding of the past, in particular the design and construction of burial monuments, and the nature of ritual and burial practices and their significance in Bronze Age society and economy in the northeast of Scotland. The monument forms a coherent group of burial monuments of a regionally distinctive class, which retain their field characteristics and provide the type-site for this class of monument. It can significantly expand our understanding of the nature of Bronze Age belief systems and ceremonial practices, as well as society and economy. The monument's importance is enhanced by its association with a wider cluster of Clava-type cairns in the vicinity. The loss of the monument would diminish our ability to appreciate and understand the meaning and importance of ceremony and ritual, death and burial in the Bronze Age and the placing of funerary monuments within the landscape.

5 References

Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> reference numbers CANMORE ID 14279; 14258; 14277; 14257; 14259; 14280; 14264 (accessed on 27/04/2016).

The Highland Council HER References are MHG3002; MHG2961; MHG3012; MHG4366; MHG3013; MHG54933; MHG3010 (accessed on 27/04/2016).

Barclay, G J. (1991) The clearing and partial excavation of the cairns at Balnuaran of Clava, Inverness-shire, by Miss Kathleen Kennedy, 1930-31', Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, vol. 120, 1990.

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