

## Case information

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|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Case ID        | 300009941                                                 |
| File Reference | AMH/898/2/1                                               |
| Name of Site   | Easter Delfour, chambered cairn & stone circle 180m SE of |

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|--------------------------|------------------|
| Local Authority          | Highland Council |
| National Grid Reference  | NH 8442 0858     |
| Designation No. (if any) | SM898            |
| Case Type                | Designation      |

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|---------------------|------------|
| Received/Start Date | 06/05/2014 |
| Decision Date       | 10/11/2016 |

## 1. Decision

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The monument was first scheduled in 1933, but an inadequate area was included to protect all of the archaeological remains. 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 **Easter Delfour, ring cairn 220m SSW of**.

## 2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

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### 2.1 Designation Background

The monument was first scheduled in 1933; no subsequent amendment.

### 2.2 Development Proposals

There are currently no known development proposals which may affect the scheduling.

## 3. Assessment

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### 3.1 Assessment information

The site was visited on 06/05/2014.

### 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

The monument is located within the Cairngorms National Park.

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#### **Elizabeth McCrone**

Head of Designations  
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## **ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria**

### **Easter Delfour, ring cairn 220m SSW of**

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## **1 Description**

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The monument is a chambered cairn surrounded by the remains of a stone circle, dating from the Bronze Age (2500BC to 800BC). It is visible as a subcircular outer kerb, measuring approximately 18m in diameter, enclosing a well-defined inner ring of smaller stones. A single standing stone around 16m south west from the cairn's centre marks what remains of the external ring of standing stones. The monument is situated at around 250m above sea level, close to the edge of a natural south east facing terrace with open views across the flood plain of the River Spey and beyond to the surrounding hills.

The burial cairn is a Clava cairn, a type only found in the Inverness-shire area. These are circular chambered cairns, sometimes with a surrounding stone circle, named after a collection of cairns at Balnuaran of Clava near Inverness. The cairn has a largely complete outer kerb constructed with generally rectangular slabs on edge and revetted on the outside by a turf-covered bank. The slabs measure up to 1.2m in height. The inner kerb, centred on the cairn and forming the chamber, is a slightly irregular circle and measures 6.4m by 7m. It is mostly complete except for three gaps on the south and west. This kerb is well constructed, and is formed by boulders measuring between 0.45m-0.9m tall. The single standing stone is 2.65m high by 1.55m wide and indicates that the surrounding stone circle would have had a diameter of 32m. There are fragments of slabs at the monument which are likely to be parts of other standing stones from the circle.

The scheduled area is circular on plan, centred on the monument with a diameter of 50m and includes the remains described above and an area around them within which evidence relating to the monuments 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 the post-and-wire fences to allow for maintenance. The monument was originally scheduled in 1933 but the documentation does not meet current standards; the present amendment rectifies this.

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

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### **2.1 Intrinsic Characteristics**

The monument has been denuded of most of its cairn material exposing some key structural features, in particular the inner and outer kerbs. Records indicate that most of the overlying cairn material was removed before 1870, although the monument may have reached its present condition as early as 1835. The monument was

[www.historicenvironment.scot](http://www.historicenvironment.scot)

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covered by field clearance stones for a time, and these were partially removed by 1957. The site is currently in a stable condition and no later excavations have been recorded.

The large, exposed stones of the inner and outer kerbs, together with the standing stone, form a visually impressive monument. The exposed kerbs are expertly constructed and demonstrate the high degree of craft skills involved in constructing such a burial monument. The extent of the surrounding cairn is defined by a turf covered stoney bank which is best preserved on the south east side of the cairn. These elements can help us understand more about the architecture of prehistoric burial and the construction, use and abandonment of these monuments.

Although the cairn material has been mostly removed, excavation at chambered cairns elsewhere show that there remains a high potential for undisturbed deposits. There is, therefore, good potential for the survival of a wide range of archaeological deposits, including human burials, artefacts and environmental remains such as charcoal and pollen within, beneath and around the upstanding structure of the cairn. The archaeological deposits have the potential to provide information about the date and detailed form of the monument and the ritual and funerary practices conducted, while any artefacts and ecofacts would enhance understanding of contemporary economy, land-use and environment.

Excavations elsewhere indicate that Clava-type cairns were constructed and in use during the Bronze Age, and that such monuments were used for ritual and burial. However, questions remain regarding the exact phasing and dating of Clava cairns in general. Scientific study of the monument's form and construction compared with other cairns would enhance our understanding of the development sequence of this site and of Clava Cairns and of other Bronze Age ritual and funerary monuments in general.

## 2.2 Contextual Characteristics

The monument at Easter Delfour is part of a well-defined regional group of 50 or more stone-built monuments found around the Moray Firth and central Highlands, the so-called 'Clava cairns'. These combine a number of similar elements: a circular cairn with a platform on the outside, bounded by a ring of monoliths. This monument is located near the centre of their distribution area and is part of a linear concentration along the banks of the River Spey close to Aviemore. Their distribution offers potential to study burial and ritual practices and draw comparisons with evidence from other Clava-type cairns around the Highlands.

There are three other recorded ring cairns located on the north side of the River Spey; Ballinluig (Canmore ID 14891), Aviemore (scheduled monument reference SM889, Canmore ID14927), and Loch nan Carraigeon (scheduled monument reference SM899, Canmore ID 15398), 2.5km, 7km and 9km to the NE respectively. The proximity of these monuments can give important insights into the placing of such sites in the landscape.

Clava-type cairns are often positioned close to water courses, in locations that were not dominant in the landscape. This ring-cairn is situated close to the leading edge of a natural south east facing terrace with open views across the flood plain of the River Spey and beyond to the surrounding hills and the Cairngorm range of mountains. The valley of the Spey is likely to have been an important routeway during prehistory.

### 2.3 Associative Characteristics

At this time there are no known associative characteristics which contribute to the site's cultural significance.

## 3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

The monument is in a stable condition and has few management issues apart from potential soil disturbance by rabbits and livestock. 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, construction and use of burial monuments in the northeast of Scotland.

Although much of the cairn material has been removed, the monument still retains its field characteristics to a marked degree in the form of well-defined outer and inner kerbs and a single surviving standing stone of a surrounding stone circle. In addition there is the potential for the survival of buried archaeological evidence. The cairn is an example of a regionally distinctive class of Bronze Age monuments, and the significance of Easter Delfour is enhanced by its close proximity to other ring cairns situated on the north side of Strathspey; together, these monuments are an important source of evidence of the nature of Bronze Age belief systems, ceremonial and funerary practices, as well as society and economy. The loss of the monument would diminish our ability to appreciate the related monuments in the vicinity and, more widely, understand the meaning and importance of ceremony and ritual, death and burial in the Bronze Age. Our understating of the placement of funerary and ceremonial monuments within the landscape during prehistory would also be diminished.

## References

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Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> reference number Canmore ID 14894 (accessed 28/07/2016).

The Highland Council records the site as *Clava-type ring cairn, Delfour* in the Highland Historic Environment Record (Reference MHG4428) (accessed 28/07/2016).

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