



Case information

Case ID	300016799
File Reference	AMJ/9308/1/1
Name of Site	Bail a' Chairn, broch

Local Authority	The Highland Council
National Grid Reference	ND 3511 4719
Designation No. (if any)	SM13634
Case Type	Designation

Received/Start Date	21/04/2015
Decision Date	06/02/2017

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 **Bail a' Chairn, broch**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The monument is currently undesignated.

2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals affecting this monument.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The site was visited on 21/04/2015.

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

Bail a' Chairn, broch

1 Description

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 an oval mound up to 5.5m high with a terrace approximately 4m wide running round it. To its north are the remains of a slight ditch and bank. It is located approximately 60m above sea level and is surrounded by level, open ground approximately 190m west of the Burn of Acharole.

The mound on which the broch is located is artificial or, if natural, has been significantly altered. The terrace rises from ground level by around 3m as it circles the mound from the southwest to the southeast in a clockwise direction. The broch is visible as a smaller turf-covered mound but excavation in 1904 has shown that the broch was 17.5m in diameter with the wall approximately 4m thick at the entrance located on the east side. Excavation also revealed internal details such as doorways, internal upright flagstone partitions, recesses and intramural stairways. The broch entrance has an extended passage way, a secondary feature.

The scheduled area is circular in shape, with the exception of a small segment to the southeast, 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. The following are excluded from the scheduling; the top 30cm of the track to the southeast and east and any post and wire fences.

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 larger mounded feature with a terrace approximately 4m wide running around its circumference. The upper mound is an accumulation of collapsed building material over the lower levels of the broch structure and its flooring, while the lower mound, if not wholly artificial, has been significantly altered. This lower mound is likely to retain evidence of subsidiary buildings. To its north are the remains of a slight ditch and bank which would have surrounded the mound but has been reduced through agricultural activity.

The site was excavated by Sir Francis Tress Barry in 1904. This revealed the walls of the broch and internal features. An extended entrance passage running 6.7m east

from the broch entrance was also discovered. This passage contains evidence of two doorways and an intramural cell on its north, indicating the presence of other structures on the lower mound. The site was backfilled in 1904 but a series of contemporary watercolours and sketches by John Nicholson of Lybster recorded the results of the excavation and show that the interior of the broch was only partially excavated and the exterior mound not at all. The drawings also demonstrate that the broch structure is well-preserved within the mound with its walls surviving to around first floor level, and that it was surrounded by a bank and ditch, of which only slight remains survive. The extended entrance passage and the potential presence of outbuildings on the lower mound 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 and outbuildings or related structures, and any development sequence.

By analogy with other excavated brochs, the broch mound, the lower mound and surrounding bank and 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, as well as provide information about broch architecture and construction methods. A drawing by John Nicholson of Lybster shows finds from the excavation of the broch. These include a stone spindle whorl for textile making, a piece of pottery, a piece of antler which may have been a handle, a tooth from a wolf or dog, and two other bone objects of unknown function, demonstrating the survival of artefacts, including those made from bone.

Brochs in Caithness are typically thought to date from the mid first millennium BC to the early part of the first millennium AD. They are a specific development of complex Atlantic roundhouses and were large complex structures that would have had numerous purposes and a multifaceted role in prehistoric society. They could have accommodated either an extended family or a small community and the construction of broch towers is often understood in terms of elite settlement. Some interpretations have stressed a role as fortified or defensive sites, possibly serving a community across a wider area.

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 follows the typical Caithness 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, while the lower mound may retain evidence of subsidiary buildings and/or defences. The extended entrance passage is a feature found at other Caithness brochs such as at Achvarasdal House broch (scheduled monument reference SM514, Canmore ID 7373).

Location is a significant factor in understanding brochs, as too is intervisibility and relative position with other examples. This monument is within a small group of brochs in the Watten area, mostly located along the burns that feed Loch Watten.

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These include Carn A' Chladha (scheduled monument reference SM13632, Canmore ID 8805), Achingale broch (Canmore ID 8783) and Nether Banks broch (scheduled monument reference SM609, Canmore ID 8782) located 700m, 2.3km and 2.6km respectively north northeast of Bail a' Chairn. Together they offer the potential to study a group of brochs within a distinct geographic area (along the course of the Scouthal Burn) and draw comparisons with evidence from other brochs around the locality and in Caithness more widely.

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 contributes to our understanding of the past, in particular of Iron Age society in Caithness and the function, use and development of brochs. It is a well-preserved example of a broch with surviving elements of the structure, occupation material and associated remains indicated by the substantial mound and surrounding bank and ditch. Excavation has demonstrated that the broch structure survives within the upper mound to a marked degree and that there is potential for remains of associated buildings on the lower mound. The broch is a prominent feature in the landscape and adds to our understanding of the siting of such monuments in the landscape. This in turn can help our understanding of settlement patterns and social structure during the Iron Age in Caithness. This potential is enhanced by the proximity of other brochs. The informative and significant early archaeological drawings of the excavation of the monument by John Nicholson of Lybster adds to the understanding of the monument. The loss of the monument would significantly 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

Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> reference number CANMORE ID 8805 (accessed on 27/06/2016).

The Highland Council Historic Environment Record reference is MHG 1981 (accessed on 27/06/2016).

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.
