

## STONE CIRCLES NEAR AVIEMORE.

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Of these circles no adequate account has yet been printed, nor any account in this Journal. During recent holidays, my wife and I have spent delightful days making the notes, measurements, and drawings from which this paper has developed.

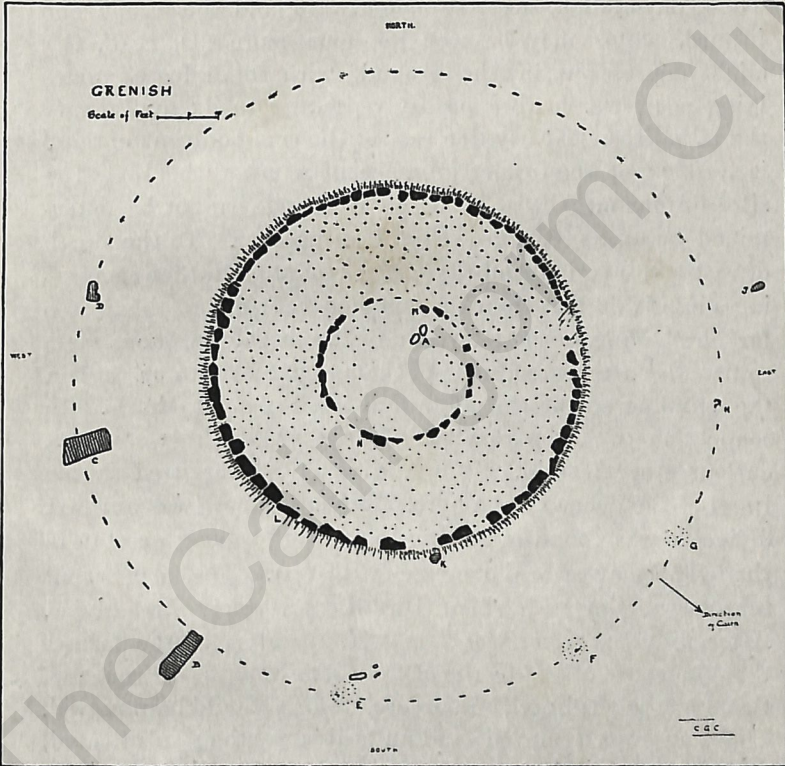
This circle stands about  $2\frac{1}{4}$  miles E.N.E. of Aviemore station, and about 350 yards east of the main road. Between the east side of the Monadhliath Carn Avie and the River Spey, there lies a stretch of uneven moorland a mile and a half wide. This is now mostly covered with heather and its associate plants, but was a pine wood some years ago, and there are still a few pines scattered over it. In one of the numerous hollows of this moorland, by no means its deepest hollow, lies a tiny lochan, Loch nan Carraigan, getting its name, The Loch of the Standing Stones, from the stone circle close to its southern shore. The Carr Bridge line of the Highland Railway passes within a few yards to the west of the circle, and crosses the lochan on an embankment; the old moorland path between Aviemore and Boat-of-Garten passes the circle at about the same distance on the east. At the side of the high road stands a cottage, where simple refreshments may be obtained. Looked at from this distance, the stone circle does not suggest its real character; it looks like a mere pile of stones cleared from the field, such a pile as may often be seen where the rougher ground is brought under cultivation. There is a slight foot-track leading across the moor towards the circle, and on a nearer approach the larger stones of the southern part of the circle give evidence of structure, but in the northern part the set stones are mostly hidden by loose piled stones and by heather.

The site of the circle seems destitute of any decided features; it is not the highest point of the moorland, nor indeed is it notably an elevation at all, though the ground to the south-east of it is at a lower level. It commands a less good view to the north-east, i.e., *down* the Spey, than some other standpoints quite near it, and its view to the south-west, i.e., *up* the Spey valley, is less extensive than that from a point not half-a-mile in that direction. Indeed, *down* the Spey valley, the main view is limited to less than a quarter of a mile of the featureless moor, over which appear the Cromdale hills. To the east the Kincardine hills bulk largely, Pityoulish Rock standing in the front with its little stone fort in full view. To the south-east is a fine panorama of the north face of the Cairngorms, including Ben Macdhu, Braeriach, and Cairngorm, with a notable view far into the Larig Ghru. Southwards, the northern aspect of the Sgoran Dubh ridge and the bold rock of Craigellachie bound on east and west respectively the narrow view *up* the Spey, which view is terminated some ten miles off by the rounded masses of the hills between the Feshie and the Tromie; but of this intervening ten miles of country, very little can be seen from the circle. Westward lies the somewhat tame ridge of the Monadhliaths. The most impressive part of the outlook, therefore, is undoubtedly that towards the Cairngorms. We are somewhat detailed as to this matter of outlook, because it has been stated that such circles as a rule command a specially wide outlook to the south-west, and this is certainly not the case here.

To the south-east of the stone circle, at a distance of 140 feet, centre to centre, is a low, almost structureless cairn. This is about three feet in height above the surrounding ground, has a diameter of about 22 feet, and looks as though it had been disturbed, for the middle part of it is sunk a little, and the stones there are much less covered with growth of heather and whortleberry than the rest of the mound. On the north side of the lochan is another cairn, showing even less structure, and indeed, not very easy to discover.

The stone circle consisted originally of three concentric circles; the outer one, of eleven or perhaps twelve megaliths,

had a diameter of about 103 feet; the middle one, of stones somewhat closely set, a diameter of about 56 feet; and the inner one, also of stones closely set, a diameter of about 24 feet. The ring enclosed between the second and third circles, a ring about 16 feet wide, was entirely filled with loose stones, to the level of the tops of all the set stones except perhaps the few tallest ones of the second circle, thus forming a sort



of low circular wall, or "ring cairn." The space within the third circle was probably originally left free from loose stones, but now there are many lying in it, but not to any depth. A twin-stemmed pine tree (A) grows in this inner space, and affords a guiding landmark when one is looking from the road for the circle. Round the outside of the second circle there is a slight embankment of earth and stones.

The outer circle, as already said, consisted originally of either eleven or twelve megaliths. Of these but two remain, and they are prostrate. The south-westerly one (B) is just over nine feet long, and has a trapezoidal section with a major diameter of over three feet. The more westerly one (C) is seven feet long, and in section is an oblique parallelogram with a major diameter of three feet seven inches. These have fallen, the first one outward, and the second one inward. Sites may be seen for four more (D, E, F, G.), slight depressions in the ground, with small loose stones lying near, which were probably packing to fix and steady the megaliths. Nearly due east of the common centre there is no sign of the former presence of a megalith (H). The sites of four megaliths on the northern side cannot be determined because of the growth of long heather. To the north of east a site is doubtful (J), a block of stone rather suggesting a site is 60 feet from the common centre, and this is too far out. Nine, or possibly ten, of the megaliths, then, seem to have been removed, some of them apparently to be used in the building of the threshing mill at Aviemore House. In connection with the removal of another of these stones a curious story is told. It was carried off to be used as the lintel of the doorway of a byre. When the byre was finished, difficulty was found in getting the cattle to enter or stay in the byre; they seemed overcome with fear. The farmer sent for one of the "Men" of Duthil, and asked his advice. After religious "exercises," the "Man" informed the farmer that the cause of the terror of the cattle was the presence of this stone as the lintel, and ordered that it should be removed. The stone was removed, and an ordinary stone substituted, and thenceforward the cattle occupied the byre in peace!

The second ring consisted of about 70 stones, of which 66 are visible in their places, one (K) has slightly fallen from its place, and a few are hidden in the growth of turf. There are three well-marked gaps in the circle; one on each side of the south stone, and one a little to the east. The tallest and most regularly shaped stone of this circle (L) is the fifth one to the west of the south stone. This stone is a good, substantial slab of greyish granite, 3 feet 5 inches high, 4 feet 1

inch wide, 1 foot thick, and very regular in shape. No other stone of its circle quite equals it in appearance, but the stone next west from it is not much inferior to it, being 3 feet 3 inches high, 3 feet 4 inches wide, and 2 feet 4 inches thick, but less regularly shaped. In general, the stones diminish in size and shapeliness each way from these two largest ones. This decrease is not regular, but is sufficiently so to be obviously intentional.

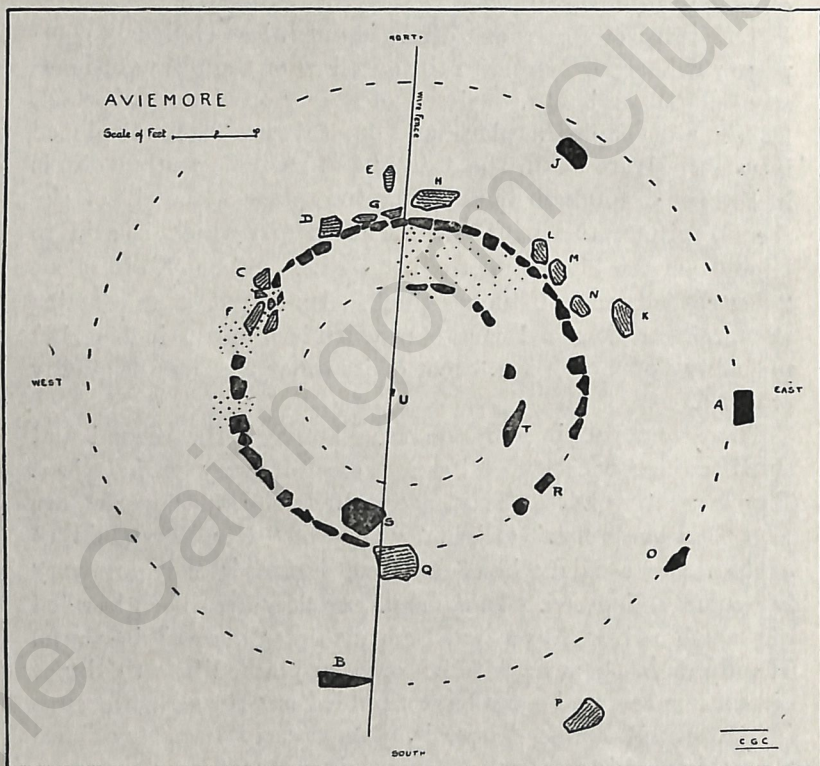
The third or innermost circle is much less obviously complete; this is partly due to the overflow of the piling of loose stones. It probably consisted of nearly 40 stones, of which 22 remain visible in place, and one (M) has been displaced inwards. Here again the tallest and shapeliest stone (N) is in the same common radius with the tallest stone (L) of the second circle, and with the megalith (B) which is said to have been the biggest of the megaliths. Stone (N) is about 2 feet broad, and 10 inches thick. Its height is uncertain; the greatest height I could measure is 3 feet 6 inches, but probably not more than 3 feet of its inner face was originally exposed.

The stone packing in the ring between the second and third circles consists of loose stones of very varied sizes. The largest weigh at least a hundredweight; the least are less than one's fist. Originally they may have been laid so as to make a fairly level surface, but now they are very irregularly disposed. In some places they have been howked out as though children had been making "houses" in them. Hundreds of them have fallen or been pitched into the inner circular space, and some have tumbled out through the gaps in the second circle. There is, of course, no actual evidence that this packing is part of the original structure.

The Aviemore stone circle stands about half-a-mile north of Aviemore railway station, and therefore rather more than  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles south of the Grenish Stone Circle, THE AVIEMORE on the same stretch of moorland, which is STONE CIRCLE. here considerably narrower. The circle is not more than 60 yards from the high road, and is just behind the recently erected iron United Free

Church. It is easily seen from the high road, and can be approached through a gateway just south of the church.

As in the case of the Grenish circle, the site is not possessed of any notable features. It is certainly on higher ground than its immediate neighbourhood to the east and south-east, but the difference of level is unimportant. The view from this site is in the main the same as that from



the Grenish circle; but the fort on Pityoulish cannot be seen, and to the south-west the Craigellachie Rock on the west just overlaps the Creag Mhigeachaidh on the east, and so prevents any view up the Spey except that of the mere tops of the hills also seen from Grenish. Here, again, then, the widest and most striking outlook is to the south-east, to the Cairngorms, the view of which is perhaps slightly better than that from Grenish.

The circle is in some respects less complete than that at Grenish. Like that one, it consisted originally of three concentric circles; the outer one, of detached megaliths, had a diameter of about 75 feet; the second, of close set stones, a diameter of about 42 feet; and the inner, as to which the evidence is imperfect, a diameter of about 26 feet.

The outer circle probably consisted of twelve stones, as against the probable eleven in the Grenish circle; for in this case there was and still is a megalith (A) in the eastward place. The south stone (B), a massive granite block, stands 4 feet 10 inches high, and has a shape roughly suggestive of a cloaked human figure, for which it might be mistaken in the gloaming. Perhaps we have here a factor of the ghost stories and superstitious fears so generally associated with these so-called "Druid Stones." The rest of the southwest quadrant has no stone, nor any evidence of the former presence of one. The north-west quadrant has no megaliths now standing in their proper places; but there are some largish bouldery stones lying against the outside of the second circle, and it is easy to suppose that three of these (C, D, E) may be the somewhat shapeless megaliths rolled in upon the second circle for the convenience of the farmer. A farm steading was at one time close to the west side of the circle, between it and the road, and this displacement is almost sure to have taken place. There are also some other largish blocks of stone similarly placed, (F,G), which probably did not belong to the circle; their surfaces are not much weathered, and they may have been placed here when they were turned up by the plough, as have been also many smaller pebbles. In the north-east quadrant there are three stones that may have been megaliths (H, J, K), and three others that are probably intruders (L, M, N). The most northerly of the megaliths (H) lies close in to the second circle, and was moved into its present position recently. The second one (J) does not look as though it had been moved, though it does not stand as upright as it might; but it is only 13 feet from the second circle, whereas the south stone is 16 feet 8 inches, and the two easterly ones are 17 feet 3 inches. The third stone of this quadrant (K), a low flattish block, is

only 5 feet from the second circle, and has almost certainly been moved. In the south-east quadrant there are three stones, two (A, O) standing, and one (P) fallen. These are well-shaped, somewhat pyramidal blocks, 3 feet 10 inches, 4 feet 9 inches, and 4 feet 9 inches respectively in height, and the fallen one seems to have been shifted some distance outward, as its nearest point is 23 feet from the second circle.

The second or middle circle is fairly complete. It consists of probably 36 stones. There is a considerable gap to the east of the south stone (Q), for which no stones appear, and there is another gap still further round on that side. It may be noted that the stone to the south of this latter gap (R) is the handsomest of this circle, being 3 feet 3 inches high, fairly regular in shape, and light grey in colour. The tallest stone of this circle is the prostrate south stone (Q). This would be 4 feet high, if standing on its base, which is upon the line of the circle. The stones next west from it are also large stones, standing each 3 feet high, the one 3 feet 7 inches, and the other 3 feet 10 inches wide. No other stone equals either of these four in size, but it can scarcely be said that there is any grading of size round towards the north. Just behind the south stone, or rather behind its neighbour, is a large shapeless stone nearly a yard high. This suggests the "recumbent" stone that is normal in the stone-circles of the north-east of Scotland; but I believe "recumbent" stones do not commonly occur in triple circles. There is a slight and irregular embankment round the outer base of the middle circle.

The third circle, the innermost one, is extremely imperfect. Indeed, but five, or possibly six stones indicate its position, and only one of these (T) is at all elevated. It stands about two feet high, but the others barely show above the ground. It is not easy to suppose the former existence of a complete third circle, still less to suppose that there was a packing of stones here like that at Grenish. Indeed, loose stones are scarcely more numerous between these circles than in some neighbouring areas of the moorland; only in the north part of the ring are loose stones present in any notable quantity.



We searched the stones, and found what we took to be a veritable cupmark, in a loose stone (U), which had been used as a prop for one of the posts of a wire fence that cuts the circle; the cup is  $3 \times 1\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{4}$  inches.

It is evident that this circle has suffered considerable disturbance. It is not easy to account for the removal of stones from the inner circle—if they ever were there—for anyone needing stones would scarcely lift those of the inner circle over those of the outer. The megaliths have in several cases obviously been moved, and some of those on the west side have been taken away. It may be noted, however, that while three stones are missing from the south-west quadrant, there are three intruders (L, M, N) in the north-east quadrant; it seems too much to suggest that they have been transferred.

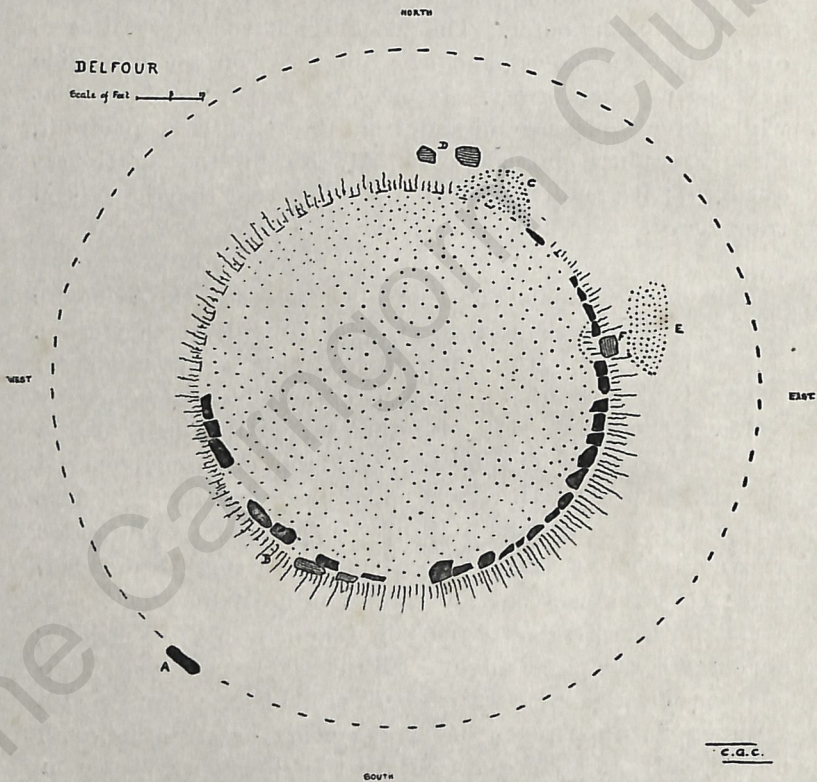
This circle stands about 4 miles south-west from Aviemore station, and 2 miles north-north-east from Kincaig station.

It is about half a mile westwards from THE DELFOUR the high road, and may be approached by STONE CIRCLE. a side road that leaves the high road a furlong south of the milestone marked "12 miles from Carrbridge, 8 miles from Kingussie." This side road passes through a plantation, and then leads across grazing fields to a small white house near some farm steadings; the circle is about 150 yards south of the cottage.

But for the presence of one standing stone (A) of striking appearance, the circle might easily be supposed a mere heap of stones cleared by the farmer from his fields; there is at a distance no appearance of arrangement or structure, and, indeed, only at close quarters are the set stones visible on the outer edge of the seeming heap. And a little examination shows there is much truth in this first impression. The grazing land around has quite obviously been cleared of loose stones, which are gathered into many old dykes and miscellaneous heaps. The "New Statistical Account" definitely speaks of an inner circle 25 feet in diameter, and there can be no doubt, therefore, that the clearings of the surrounding land have largely been piled on the site of the circle, and so

much of its characteristic appearance has been obliterated. On the other hand, for at least thirty-five years there has been neither addition to nor subtraction from the heap, and no interference in any way with what is there is permitted.

Before examining the circle in detail, let us look around, and notice the general character of its site. This is at once recognised as being a singularly fine one, beautiful in itself,



and commanding a wide and interesting view. Between the eastern base of the Creag a' Mhuilinn of An Sguabach and the River Spey, a breadth of about a mile and a half, there lie five parallel strips of country running north and south; first, the narrow glen of the Allt a' Fhearna, the stream supplying most of the water of Loch Alvie; second, a range of irregular mounds, doubtless old moraine heaps, some of them the sitheans or fairy hillocks of local folk-lore, prettily

topped with clumps of birch and rowan, and carrying the ruins and larachs of several small houses and steadings; third, a flattish gravel terrace, on which stands our stone circle; fourth, a wide hollow, marshy in its depths, and otherwise partly pasture and partly cropped; and fifth, the ridge running southward from Tor Alvie, carrying the high road and the railway, and varied with natural birch on its higher parts, and plantations of pine on its lower.

The stone circle, then, stands on the gravel terrace, close up to the fairy hillocks. From it the outlook to north-east and south-east is wide and free. To the north-east, down the Spey valley, the view extends across Loch Alvie to the Kincardine Hills, a beautiful, picturesque, and attractive landscape, Craigellachie closing in upon it to the left. More directly across the Spey, Tor Alvie rears its tree-clad heights, topped by the monument to the last Duke of Gordon. Further round still, Cairngorm lifts its cairn-crowned dome into the blue sky or into the clouds swept up by the rising south-west wind. Then all along the east tower up the varied irregularities of the Sgoran Dubh ridge, the Argyll Stone, Sgoran Dubh Beag, Sgoran Dubh Mor, the mere tip of Sgor Gaoith, and the water-torn gullies of Creag Mhigeachaidh, with the westerly steeps of Braeriach showing over the lower depressions. Up the Spey valley the gravel terrace itself hides the nearer parts, but over it rise the hills between Feshie and Tromie, dominated yet a little further west by the Meall na Cuaich. All along the west there is of course the ridge of the Monadhliath close in, but here well varied with tree and bare crag.

It is not possible to give of this circle so detailed an account as of the other two, because on the one hand, as has already been said, it is most likely that much of the original structure has been buried under a great pile of stones collected from the surrounding land and formed into a sort of cairn, and, on the other hand, of the outer circle of megaliths, if it ever existed, only one (A) remains. This stands at a distance of  $22\frac{1}{2}$  feet to the south-west of the "middle circle." It is a singularly fine slab of quartzite, 9 feet 6 inches high, 1 foot 6 inches thick, 5 feet 6 inches wide at the base, and

tapering irregularly upwards, so as to present a rough resemblance to a cloaked human figure. We had made just exactly this description of it while sitting at its base writing our notes, and afterwards we strolled southwards along the "sitheans" gathering wild berries as we went. Nearly a quarter of a mile to the south we halted to look back at the circle and the standing stone, and we experienced an illusion that was almost startling. There stood, not a rough standing stone, but a fine statue group in dark grey, of a majestic, elderly man, with staff hand advanced, and by his near side a youth, who seemed to hold somewhat back; the old man's head was raised with firm and dignified gesture, as though his gaze were lifted to the high crag he faced; the suggestion was irresistible of Abraham and Isaac, as the father "lifted up his eyes and beheld the place afar off." We have never seen any other natural stone presenting so amazing an instance of mimic statuary.

The main or "middle" circle is 60 feet in diameter. Of its set stones only 29 or 30 are visible, constituting about five-eighths of the circumference. The entire north-west quadrant and about half of the north-east quadrant show no set stones, these being hidden by the loose stones, which in many places have been piled right over the retaining wall of set stones. Outside the stones there is a banking of earth, stones, and turf, at its widest about 9 feet wide. The highest part of the cairn reaches about 6 feet above the lowest outer base of this bank. As is usually the case, the largest stones of the circle are towards its south-west part, and there is a diminution each way around the circle. The tallest stone, the south-west one (B), stands scarcely  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet above the bank, and the diminution is carried so far that at about the north-east point the set stones actually disappear into the upper surface of the bank, which itself is here much less built up.

Further, the whole surface of the stone pile drops towards this point, and it is easy to suppose that this was a place of entry for barrows loaded with the collected stones. It would be natural that such entry should be at the previously lowest point of the circle, and stones so carried and thrown down would make a mound gradually rising from the point

of entry towards the remoter parts of the circle. Certainly the present appearance of the cairn almost irresistibly suggests such a procedure. Of course this would imply the complete burial of the third or inner circle mentioned in the *New Statistical Account*.

Outside the circle, on the west side of this "entrance," there is a considerable pile of loose stones (C), looking as old, weathered, and lichen-covered as those of the main pile, and against this there are two large blocks (D), whose relation to the general structure is not apparent. Near the east side of the "entrance" there is a pile of fresh-looking stones, (E). Just here one stone of the circle (F) has been forced outwards from its place, and lies on its side, and the loose stones behind it have been much disturbed as though some one had been howking.