

ARCHÆOLOGICAL NOTES FROM AVIEMORE.

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THE stretch of country between Aviemore and Boat of Garten seems to contain a considerable number of relics of antiquity, cairns, stone-circles, and hill-forts. In a previous

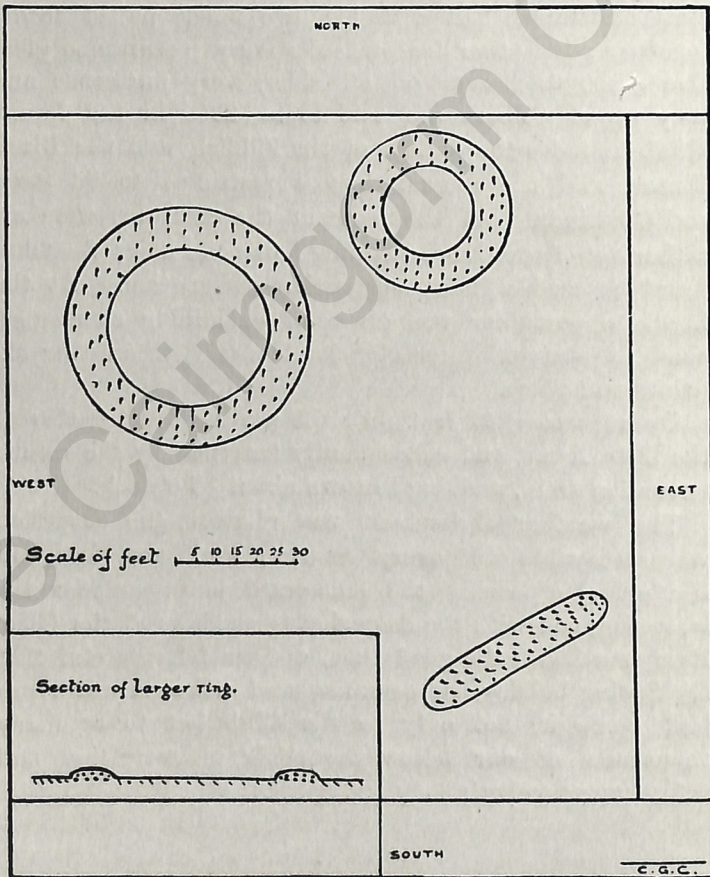


Fig. 1.—Cairns on Grenish Moor.

paper (Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot. XL. 245 and C. C. J., V. 151), I reported the survey of stone-circles at Aviemore and Grenish, as well as one at Delfour, and in this paper I wish to report on some cairns in the Grenish Moor, on the fort above Avielochan and that on Pityoulish Hill, and on the excavation of the Avielochan cairn.

Cairns on Grenish Moor.

The land along the east side of the highway running north from Aviemore is conveniently spoken of as Grenish Moor. Parts of it are under cultivation or grass, but much of it is heather-clad, and was till recently under timber. This moorland contains a large number of cairns, some separate and scattered, and some in groups.

In his history of the Province of Moray, Shaw gives an account of the Battle of Cromdale, fought in 1690, and says that some of the defeated clansmen were pursued up the valley of the Spey, and "on the Muir of Granish near Aviemore some were killed." Local tradition associates this incident with some of the cairns, and specially with a group in a hollow just south-west of Avielochan. This group (fig. 1.) can be seen from the highway, and consists of two ring mounds and a straight ridge. The ring mounds are sixty and forty feet in diameter respectively, the bank being about ten feet wide; the ridge is about forty feet long and eight feet wide. They are all quite obviously artificial, and seem to consist of a low piling of stones, now almost entirely hidden in turf and heather. There is no appearance of standing stones, nor, indeed, of any arrangement of the stones.

About a quarter of a mile to the N.E. of Loch-nan-Carraigean, and in a slight hollow about a hundred yards east of the old moorland road to Boat of Garten, I came across a number of cairns lying near together, and with the help of Mr. Robert Anderson, Editor of the *Aberdeen Daily*

Journal, I made a general survey of them (fig. 2). There are seventeen of them, fourteen circular, two long ridges,

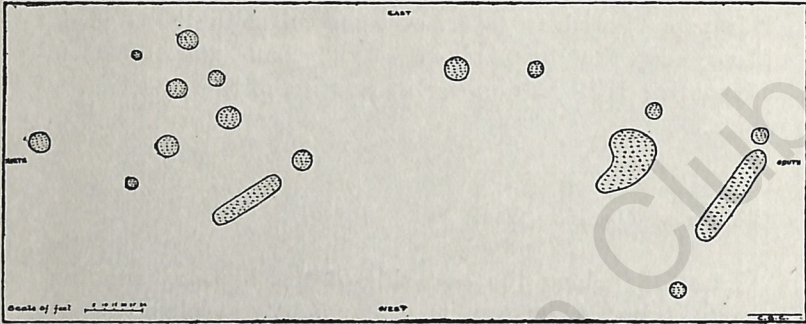


Fig. 2.—Cairns on Grenish Moor, N.E. of Lochnan Carraigeon.

and one "Africa" shaped in plan. The circular ones vary in diameter from five feet to twelve feet; the two long ones are forty and fifty-three feet long respectively, and seven and a half and nine feet wide. The "Africa" one is about thirty-eight feet long, and about twenty-five feet in greatest breadth. They rise but slightly above the surrounding surface, and are plainly made of piled stones, now largely overgrown with moorland plants. There is no appearance of any standing stones, nor any regular placing of stones.

Similar cairns occur scattered on the Tullochgrue, the partly cultivated hill in the Rothiemurchus Forest, usually in pairs. One of these was cut through by gillies quarrying for road material. Under the outside layer of turf and peaty earth, it showed a layer of largish pebbles laid close together and slightly domed, and then a layer some four inches thick of dark coloured earth resting on the pan earth. Examination of some of this dark earth revealed nothing of interest, nor did I see any appearance of charcoal in it. But examination of larger quantities might, of course, yield other results.

Another cairn attracted my attention. It lay in a wood on the west side of the highway, and very near a partly ruined little bridge on General Wade's military road, which

just here is very well defined. This cairn was more than twenty feet in diameter, was constructed of large stones, and had evidently been disturbed. Enquiry brought out an interesting bit of folk-lore. A man that dreams of finding money in a recognisable place will find money if he searches in that place. Accordingly someone having dreamed that he found money in this place searched the cairn—but did not find money, though he is said to have found human bones in a sort of cist constructed of slabby stones.

The notion of the existence of treasure in these cairns seems pretty general, and I rather wonder that so many of them remain undisturbed by searchers. When excavating at Avielochan I was several times asked, half jocularly, perhaps, whether I was searching for treasure; and on each occasion I took good care to explain that treasure in the sense of money or valuables was not to be expected in such places, but that their structure and arrangement gave interesting information, and that articles of archæological interest might be found, and should always be reported to competent authorities. It is pretty certain that interesting things are found at times, and that some of them fail to be reported. I had experience of such a case. On Mr. Mackintosh's farm at Avielochan there had long been an ancient cairn of very big stones, and this had gradually been covered by a pile of small stones cleared from the field. Mr. Alex. Sinclair, the county roadman, in whose cottage we were staying, a year or two ago removed all these small stones and used them as road-metal, thus revealing again the old cairn. Last year Mr. Mackintosh wanted to plough the part of the field occupied by the cairn, which seems to have been of considerable size, and he got Mr. Sinclair's help in breaking and removing the big stones. Under one of these stones Mr. Sinclair found a bronze pin, all thickly coated with verdigris. To see what metal it was made of, he beat out and spoiled the point of it. Finding it not gold he gave it to the farmer's son, Alec. When I heard of this matter, I asked to see the pin, and then to bring it to Edinburgh. It is figured here, and

seems to me to be slightly different in pattern from any previously shown in the Museum of the Society of Antiqu-

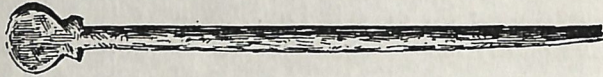


Fig. 3.—Bronze Pin found in a cairn at Avielochan.

aries of Scotland. It is four inches in length, and the head is round and flat, with projecting shoulders where it narrows to the pin. When first found the point was perfect. The metal is somewhat pitted and roughened by rusting. The pin is not unlike such as have been used for fastening a plaid or shawl when a brooch is not used.

At my request, Mr. Alexander Sinclair, the finder, and Mr. Alexander Macintosh, the owner, have consented to add the pin to the Museum collection.

On the Grenish Moor I saw and noted two other ring mounds. One was close to the west edge of Loch-nan-Carraigean. It had a diameter of about fifty feet, and was thickly covered with turf and heather. It was possible to imagine the existence of a small inner circle. The other ring mound was close to the main road-side, just opposite our cottage. Its diameter was about forty-eight feet, and the inside flat was not more than fourteen feet across. The western face seemed to show a few stones of large size bounding the lower part of the mound. The eastern part of the mound was broken by a gap about three feet wide, and at the northern side of this gap there seemed to be a low cairn about fourteen feet across. The whole is densely covered with turf and heather.

Fort on Pityoulish Hill.

Pityoulish Hill lies on the east side of the River Spey, nearly two miles in direct line and seven by the nearest road, from our quarters at Grenish. It is the most westerly part of the Nettin or Kincardine Hills, and its western face boldly overlooks Loch Pityoulish. The fort is situated on one of its small northerly knolls, at an elevation of about one thousand feet, that is some three hundred

feet above the low ground. The fort is circular, about twenty-eight feet wide inside. The walls seem to have been of dry stone masonry, and are now in almost complete ruin. No part remains standing more than about four feet high, but the quantity of stone scattered down the face of the knoll is enough for walls nine feet high. A curious feature of the site is that while it commands a wide stretch of open country *down* the Spey valley, past Boat of Garten, Nethy Bridge, and Grantown, its outlook in the opposite direction is entirely blocked by a neighbouring knoll. This next knoll, scarcely one hundred yards distant, while having the same northerly outlook, commands also the view across Loch Pityoulish and away beyond Aviemore. This seems to suggest that the fort was an outpost against invasion from the north and north-east. But I could not at all see what it was intended to defend, nor where the defenders were to obtain water.

Fort on Tor Beag of Ben Ghuilbnich.

This fort is on the west side of the River Spey, less than half a mile north-west of Avielochan, and overlooking the main road about half-way between Laggantygown and Avielochan farm-house. I was first told of it by Mr. Wm. Grant when I was visiting his cairn, and he pointed out to me the small hill on which it lay, though from below nothing can be seen of the fort, because of the dense growth of birch and juniper. When I went to see it I had the good fortune to meet with Mr. Mackintosh, on whose farm it is, and he accompanied me on my first visit.

The small Tor, or detached hill, is an outpost of Ben Ghuilbnich, from which it is separated by a deep and narrow ravine running down northwards. The hill-top is somewhat oval in plan, with a length of over two hundred feet. About twenty feet below the highest part, a terrace completely encircles the hill. The terrace is about six feet wide, and about seven hundred and thirty feet in circumference. It is entirely artificial, and in some parts towards the north-east the stones used in its construction can be

seen, but mostly it is plant covered. The access to the fort is from the south. Here a zigzag roadway, still fairly visible, leads up the most gently sloping part of the hill. In each of its two sharp angles is a massive block of granite, suggesting points of defence. At one section of the upper part of the road it is difficult to avoid thinking that the numerous rough stones lying on the hill-side below the road are the remains of a protecting wall, though there is certainly now no semblance of arrangement among them.

At the top of this access are the ruins of the defences of the entrance to the fort. Here the encircling terrace rises somewhat on each side, and narrows. In the plan (fig. 4)

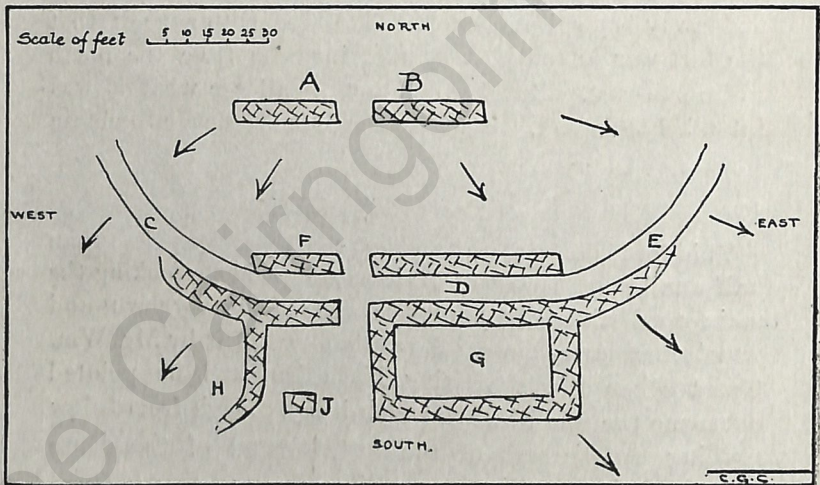


Fig. 4—Entrance to the Fort on Tor Beag.

C D E shows the run of the terrace. At A and B are the inner defence walls, that at A still showing stones built up wall-wise, all the others being in utter ruin. From A and B the ground falls sharply to the outer defence and beyond it, the fall being greatest on the east side. The arrows show the direction of the fall of the ground, which is least steep along the line of the entrance passage. At F the evidence of the existence of a wall is slight; all the other walls are quite well seen, though entirely ruined. At D the terrace becomes a narrow

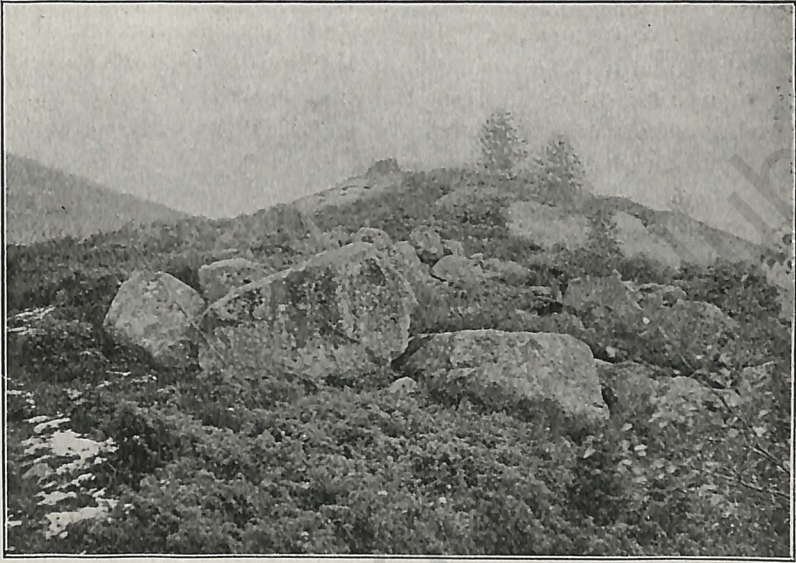


Fig. 5.—Entrance to the Fort on Tor Beag, looking inwards.



Fig. 6.—Entrance to the Fort on Tor Beag, looking outwards.

passage between walls, and outwards from it is the outline of a guard-room G. To the west of this the structure is less evident. The west wall at H seems to turn outward, though this may simply be the running down of the fallen stones. At J is an indefinite suggestion of wall, so that there may have been a defensive enclosure on this side of the entrance.

Many of the stones are of very great size, as will be seen from the views in figs. 5, 6, and 7. In the outer wall of the

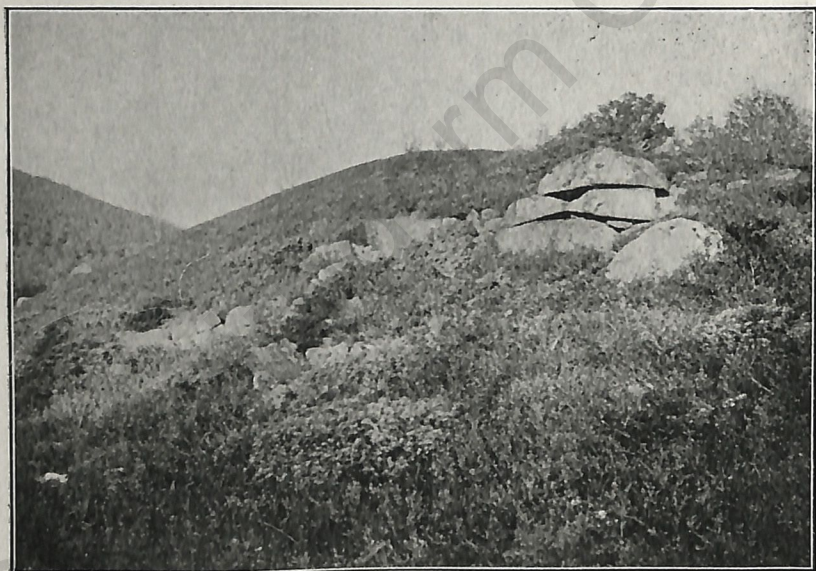


Fig. 7.—Inner Wall of Entrance to Fort on Tor Beag.

guard-chamber G, near the entrance passage, one stone probably measures eighty cubic feet, and would weigh about seven tons.

As far as I know, this fort has not previously been reported. But I was much interested to find in one of Sir Arthur Mitchell's diaries a note of it, and a very rough sketch of its entrance defences. Sir Arthur also had been struck with the large size of some of the stones.

Cairns at Avielochan.

The cairns are about three miles N. N. E. of Aviemore railway station, about a quarter of a mile east of the main road, and close to the west side of the Carr Bridge line of the Highland Railway. Hereabouts the land is largely under cultivation, and the cairns lie in the edge of a ploughed field, near the north-east corner of the Avielochan that gives them their name. They can be approached by a farm-road that leaves the highway just north of the

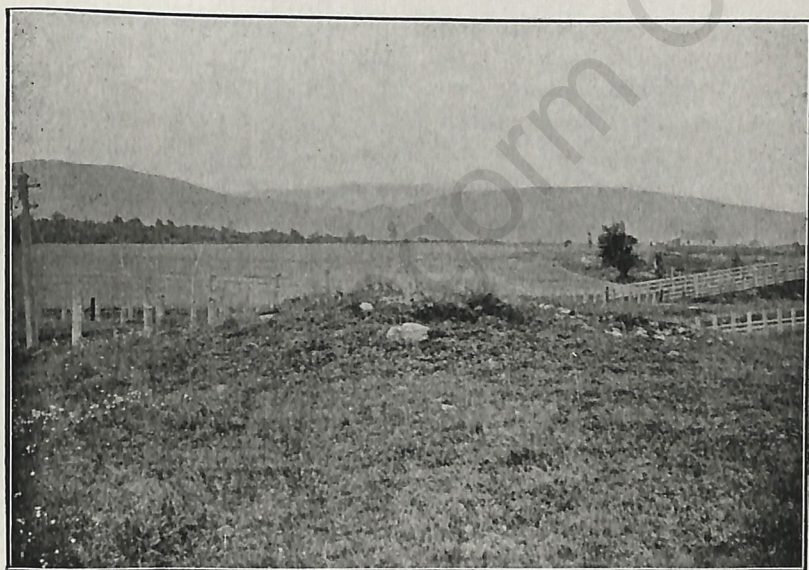


Fig. 8.—The East Cairn at Avielochan, unexcavated.

Lochan, and winds along its north shore to a bridge over the railway. The cairns lie about one hundred yards north of this bridge. The small knoll on which they are placed is mainly natural, but it has been added to by the stones gathered from the neighbouring fields, the soil of which is extremely stony.

The outlook from the cairns is in its main features like that from the Aviemore and the Grenish circles, except that to the north-east the distance is entirely blocked by neighbouring rising ground. There is one notable addition :

the fort on the hill behind Laggantygown, nearly half a mile to the north-west, can be seen ; but it is not obvious because of the surrounding birch and juniper. The view of the lower part of the central Cairngorms is blocked out by the nearer Pityoulish Hill, the little fort on which is easily picked out with a glass.

I first knew of these cairns in August, 1906, and then found them almost entirely hidden in grass and heather. The larger cairn, the west one, appeared to be about thirty-six feet in diameter, and showed the upper parts of eleven standing stones, in the south and west parts of the circumference. The smaller cairn, the east one, (fig. 8) about thirty-six feet away, was about twenty-four feet in diameter, and showed the tops of five stones, at about equal distances on the circumference. It is known that stones cleared from the fields have been piled near the cairns, and Mr. Wm. Grant, on whose farm they lie, has himself in his youth assisted in this piling ; whether any such stones have in this manner ever been piled on the cairns I do not for certain know, but I think not.

In April, 1909, when my wife and I were spending a holiday at Aviemore, we heard that a few days earlier the surfacemen of the Highland Railway had been removing many of the loose stones for railway ballast, and had thereby exposed much of the structure of the larger cairn. We visited the place, saw that this was so, and arranged to devote some days to the study of the exposed interior, in which there seemed to be some features distinguishing it from the circles we had previously examined. Together we made measurements and notes, and also I did not a little of labourer's work.

Mr. Grant, with whom I had previously talked about stone-circles, cairns, and such things, had himself been with the men removing the loose stones, and had secured, as far as he knew, that no placed stones had been interfered with. Hundreds of loose stones had been removed, almost entirely from the inner part of the cairn, thus exposing the inner faces of all the outer row of standing stones, and showing also the existence of an inner circle, and of a straight

passage connecting the inner circle with the outer. There is no appearance or tradition of there ever having been any outer separate megaliths. The surfacemen ceased their removal of stones when they had exposed the upper surfaces of the inner circle, recognising that these should not be interfered with. Unfortunately they have not exposed the upper and outer surfaces of some stones of the outer circle, and these still remain more or less hidden in a mat of turf, heather, and stones, so that their planning is incomplete.

As finally exposed (Fig. 9) the cairn shows the outer

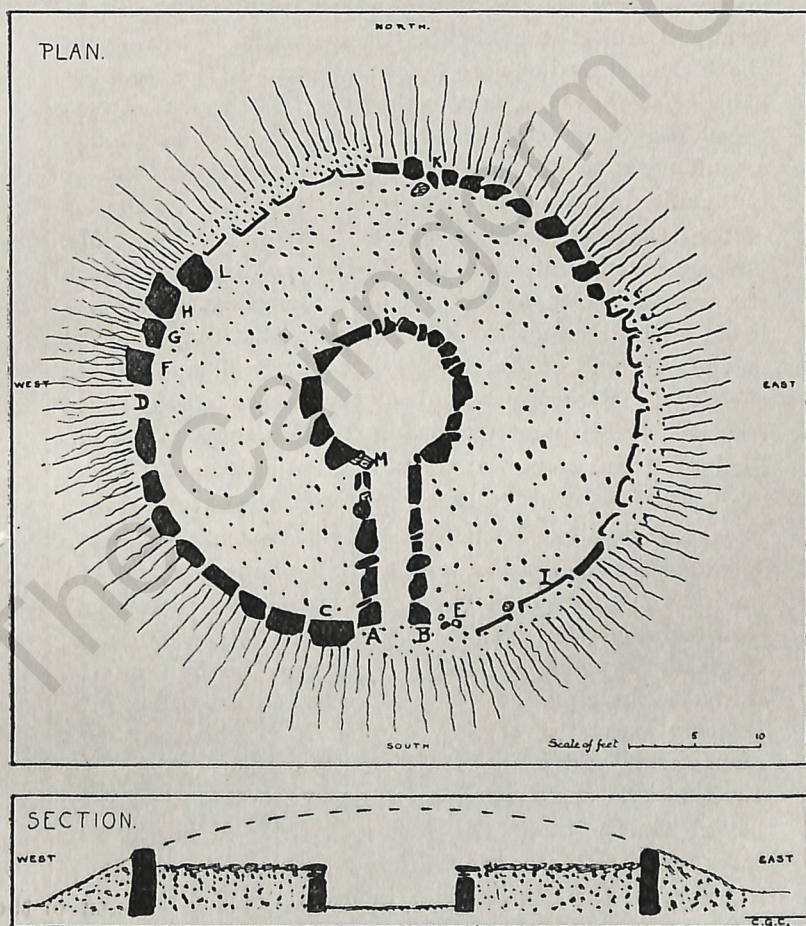


Fig. 9.—Ground Plan and Section of Chambered Cairn at Avelochan.

boundary of large stones set close together, from which a straight passage gives access to the circular chamber in the centre of the cairn. Measuring from inner face to inner face, the diameter of the outer bounding circle is about thirty-six feet, and that of the circular chamber about ten feet. The length of the passage is about thirteen feet, and its width rather less than three feet.

The outer bounding circle consists of about forty-four standing-stones. Two of these, A and B, at the outer end of the passage, looked in the spring like rounded bouldery masses of grey granite. They project well into the circle, forming the first stones of the passage walls. Their height above the exposed surface (about eighteen inches) was but half that of the stone next to the west. The space between them, the outer end of the passage, looked as though a bouldery stone had just been rolled out, and indeed a stone quite suited in shape and size to fill the gap lay on the top of the stones of the east wall of the passage. But Mr. Grant seemed quite sure that it had not been shifted in the excavation, though that looked to me extremely probable. Both he and the foreman said that they found it on the east wall of the passage, some little distance within the circle. For my own convenience in excavating I rolled it aside. Subsequent excavation made it seem rather unlikely that this stone was structural, but its size still leaves the matter doubtful. Other gaps are in the extreme west, D, where one stone is missing, and just east of the passage E, where the presence of a standing stone is doubtful. A small birch-tree grows there, and among its roots there seem to be only largish bouldery stones. The tallest stone, C, stands second west from the passage, the first west of the outer circle proper. It is three feet in height from the recently excavated surface of the ring, three feet eight inches wide, and about one foot eight inches thick. Its outer face is one foot nine inches above the top of the bank. On the whole the stones diminish in height both ways round to the north, but the diminution in height is not regular, and the variation in other dimensions is very irregular. Thus the stones immediately north of the gap

on the west side, F, G, H, are markedly larger than any others on the west side. The stone, I, in the south-east is horizontally the longest stone in the circle, and has been badly cracked longitudinally. A little to the east of the north point is a very small bouldery stone, K, much smaller than any other, and lying a little inwards from the line. In the north-west quadrant a stone, L, projects considerably into the circle, especially in its upper part, and markedly breaks the line. The stones to the south of it lean somewhat outwards, and this increases its apparent inward projection. In the east there is another break in the line of the curve, the inner faces of the stones of the south-east quadrant standing somewhat back.

The inner circular chamber at once attracted our special attention, because its appearance was different from that of the inner circles at Aviemore and Grenish. There the inner circles were of standing stones; here, before I began excavating, the appearance was of stones laid flat. Also there were the two lines of stones, also lying flat, connecting the inner circle with the outer. When I saw this circle in August, 1906, of course all these details were entirely hidden, being buried some feet deep in loose piled stones and earth. When we saw it in April, 1909, these loose stones had been so far removed as to expose the upper surfaces of the placed flat stones, but the loose stones and earth still filled the interior to a slightly greater height. In order to see what the structure and arrangement of this inner circle were, I asked and obtained leave to excavate as much as I wished.

Using a mason's trowel, for a spade was too unwieldy against such material, I began by making a trench across the inner mouth of the passage so as to ascertain whether it were in any way closed. The loose stones had to be lifted out singly, and were pitched into the ring between the circles; the peaty earth was similarly moved in a pail. In this manner I exposed the inner face of the north and east parts of the wall. The excavation was carried down through a most irregular and structureless pile of loose stones of very varied size. They seemed to have been

thrown in without earth, and the peaty earth had been added at the top, probably had partly formed there, for often I could see the earth running down into the inter-spaces of the stones, and very many of the stones were covered with yellowish mould, showing that they had not been earth-packed. We noticed that but few of the stones were at all flattish in shape. It was clear that there was not the material for the roof of a chamber, nor had the structure in any way the appearance of having been roofed, though I am told that the cairn is to be classed as a 'chambered cairn' of the Clava type. I continued my digging downwards till I reached the yellowish pan earth. The result was that I exposed the inner face of about half of a circular wall, which was made of rough dry stone masonry of stones on the whole flattish, but in some cases bouldery. The basal stones appeared to be set edgewise in the pan earth, and not merely to rest upon it, but I did not then dig any deeper. At the most northerly part, where I dug deepest, the inner face of the wall was exposed to a depth of three feet; just east of the passage I reached pan earth in two feet three inches.

In the very mouth of the passage, M, just above the pan earth, I found the appearance of charcoal, and carefully lifted the earth—nearly a double handful—showing this appearance. This earth I took away, dried, and sifted. From it I obtained about a quarter of an ounce of bits of charcoal, and half a dozen minute fragments of bone.

The stones shown in the plan are those of the upper surface. It will be seen from the photographs that the western half is in better condition than the eastern. In the western half the wall is well-set, and the top stones are so big and so well supported that the heaviest trampling failed to shake them. One or two top stones are obviously missing from the northerly place, and in the north-east the top layer is of smallish stones. The top stone in the east is cracked right through, but the cracks look old. On this stone there lay three small flattish stones, but it seemed doubtful whether they were structural, and I removed them.

The passage, three feet or less in width, runs due north and south between the southern points of the circles. The north-western corner stone of it is missing. The surface stones are varied in character, some being good straight-sided pieces, some large but bouldery, and some rather small. The west wall seems to have a series of supporting bouldery stones lying against the lower part of its outer side. I did not make a corresponding examination on the outer side of the east wall; there is, however, the suggestion there of a less complete backing. The space between the walls was all filled with loose stones and earth. I did not make any excavation there in the spring.

After returning to Edinburgh from the spring holiday, I reported what we had done to Sir Arthur Mitchell, Dr. Anderson, and Mr. Coles, of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and consulted with them as to what further should be done. They were of opinion that the inner circle and the passage should be entirely cleared out, but that the ring between the circles was much less likely to yield any information. The Council of the Society was good enough to promise payment for labour, as I felt that I did not care to face all the necessary digging.

Accordingly at the end of July we returned to Speyside, and resumed our investigations. I got the help of John Grant, the son of the farmer, a keen, intelligent, and active youth, and together we completed the excavation of the central circle, clearing out all the loose stones and earth down to the pan. A little above the pan, on the north-western part of the area, we found about a dozen of the stones flattish and lying somewhat like an irregular pavement. These we carefully cleared of loose earth before we lifted them, but neither above nor below them did we find anything of special character. In general we found that the layer of earth above the pan was what is usually described as 'black, unctuous earth,' and it contained fragments of charcoal, some large enough to be picked up, but much in tiny fragments. We gathered all the pieces large enough to be picked up. In the western part of the area, but well above the 'pavement,' John Grant found

two fragments of bone, the only two pieces of such relics that we saw. These I have submitted to the examination of a medical friend, who reports that there is not sufficient evidence in them to determine whether or not they are human.

At the west inner end of the passage I dug down into the pan earth at the base of the set stone, and found that its lower edge was about nine inches down in the pan. This seems to settle that the set stones were not merely placed on the pan, but that when the structure was being formed, the original excavation was carried through the soil and into the pan.

I excavated the passage completely down to the pan, but not breaking out through the surrounding banking. At about half the depth of the excavation and two-thirds of the length from the pit, I found a piece of a jet bracelet, flat on the inside, convex on the outer surface, and forming about a third of a circle of about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. This has been very well shaped and polished, but it is somewhat stained and roughened, presumably by exposure to damp and soil. It has a notch roughly cut in its outer surface near one end, as though a string had been tied to it. The 'black unctuous earth' was present in the passage, as in the inner circle, and fragments of charcoal were found there also.

In the walls both of the passage and of the inner circle the appearance of dry stone dyke turned out to be somewhat fallacious. Really, in the lower part of the structure, the stones seem to be mostly slabs set on edge, and only the top layer is of stones laid flatwise, something like a coping. Both sets of stones, however, vary much, from well shaped slabs to bouldery masses. The lower part of the inner circle consisted of thirteen stones. Of course only the inner faces of these could be seen. Most of them looked like fairly well-shaped slabs, but three were mere round boulders. The largest one, in the west, presented a face thirty-six inches across; the smallest one, in the north-west, a bouldery one, was half this length. The lower part of the passage walls consisted on each side of

four seemingly well-shaped slabs. The two outer end stones of the passage, A, B, which in the spring had looked like boulders, proved to be granite pillars some four and a half feet high, their tops being about eighteen inches above the tops of the passage walls.

The plan and section (fig. 9) are drawn from our own measurements, and both they and our notes were carefully made on the spot. The plan and section show the present condition of the circle, after excavation. The stones drawn in full black are those that are exposed. Where the stones of the outer circle are still partly hidden under the bank, only their inner faces are indicated. The presence of loose stones between the circles is indicated by dots. In the section I have indicated by a curved broken line the approximate section of the whole cairn before it had been at all disturbed. The section of the unexcavated part is of course conjectural.

The photographs I owe to the kindness of two friends, Mr. Walter Dempster, Schoolmaster of Inverdrue, and Mr. Alexander Campbell, Shoemaker and Postman, Aviemore.

I was interested to compare this cairn with the circles at Grenish and Delfour. At Delfour the whole structure within the outer circle is hidden under a pile of loose stones; but it is on record in the New Statistical Account that there is an inner circle. Therefore a considerable part, if not the whole, of the loose stones must have been added since about 1845. As I was assured that no such addition had been made since about 1870, the time of addition is narrowed to a period of about twenty-five years. At Grenish the inner circle is mostly visible, but the ring between the two circles is entirely filled with loose stones. I do not think that the ground near this circle has ever been under cultivation, and there is no record at all of the collecting of the loose stones. Certainly there has been no recent addition, for in 1866, when the circle was visited by Sir Arthur Mitchell, the whole thing was in its present condition; and as it was then in a wood, it seems evident that its condition must even then have remained unaltered for a very long time.

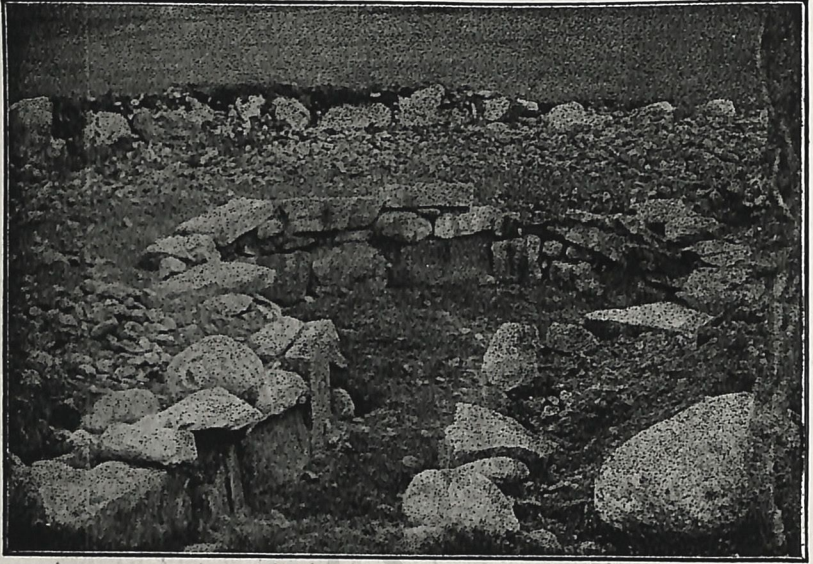


Fig. 10.—View, from the south, of the Chamber in the West Cairn at Avielochan, after excavation.



Fig. 11.—View, from the north, of the Chamber in the West Cairn at Avielochan, after excavation.

At Avielochan the whole structure has been for more than half a century in the buried condition. It seems quite unlikely that at any recent times loose stones have been piled *above* the cairns since their original construction, though stones cleared from the land have been piled in considerable quantities close to them, especially to the west and south-west.

These three structures seem to grade from the bare stone circle at Delfour, through the ring cairn stone circle at Grenish, to the entire cairn at Avielochan.