

CULCHARRON CAIRN, BENDERLOCH, ARGYLL

E.J. Peltenburg, University of Glasgow

This previously unrecorded cairn, 96 cm in maximum height, is located on the eastern edge of a moss at the foot of a ridge of hills connecting Beinn Lora and Sgurr Mor in the district of Benderloch (NM 913396). Prior to excavation it appeared as a slightly hollowed area of small stones inside a semi-circle of protruding larger granite erratics, c. 8 m in diameter, with a sloping mass of more small stones of indeterminate extent beyond this semi-circle. Excavation confirmed that the cairn was truncated by a railway cutting beside which it now stands; originally it may have been a regular circle.

What is preserved of the site appears to belong to one period, and, although phases of its history could be ascertained, it seems unlikely that there was any great lapse of time between these phases. Some initial clearance of the flat area may have preceded the erection of the granite erratics, since the potash levels in the fill of a pit under two of these were unusually high and may be accounted for by organic debris or ash. The semi-circle presents a smooth external façade composed of 14 contiguous uprights graded in height and interrupted by a gap, a thick rectangular andesite block and a greenish quartz schist slab set on its side (Fig. 1). This slab forms part of what may be a 'false-portal' in which the 'entry' is flanked by rounded uprights and is preceded by a recumbent slab, also of greenish quartz schist and decorated with 12 or 13 cup-marks. A small upright with an associated pit situated 2 m to the south of the semi-circle also belongs to this phase in which white quartz chips were wedged around the uprights.

More quartz was added during this open phase of the site or during the enclosing or covering phase, thus providing a continuous apron of quartz on the ground outside the uprights, c. 50 cm wide and 15 cm deep. This was brought to the site in nodules from local sources and broken. In the enclosing phase, large irregular stones with a covering of small fractured stones were placed inside the circle of uprights and a disturbed revetment of small rounded granite boulders was placed outside the circle more or less simultaneously, the whole being strewn with quartz. Apart from railway construction damage, there is no evidence to suggest that the site has altered much after this enclosing phase.

Since no dating evidence was obtained and since the complete original nature of the site is lost to us, little can be said with confidence in conclusion.

Culcharron seems to belong to a group of distinctive, but undated cairns such as Strontoiller, Achacha and Clachadow found on the eastern periphery of Loch Linnhe, and it bears a close resemblance to Monzie and the Clava Stone Circle where evidence for burial was found (Ritchie, J.N.G., 1971). It confirms the association of the use of quartz and cup-marked stones with such cairns. It may be noted that the Culcharron stone occurs in an area with few cup-marked stones.

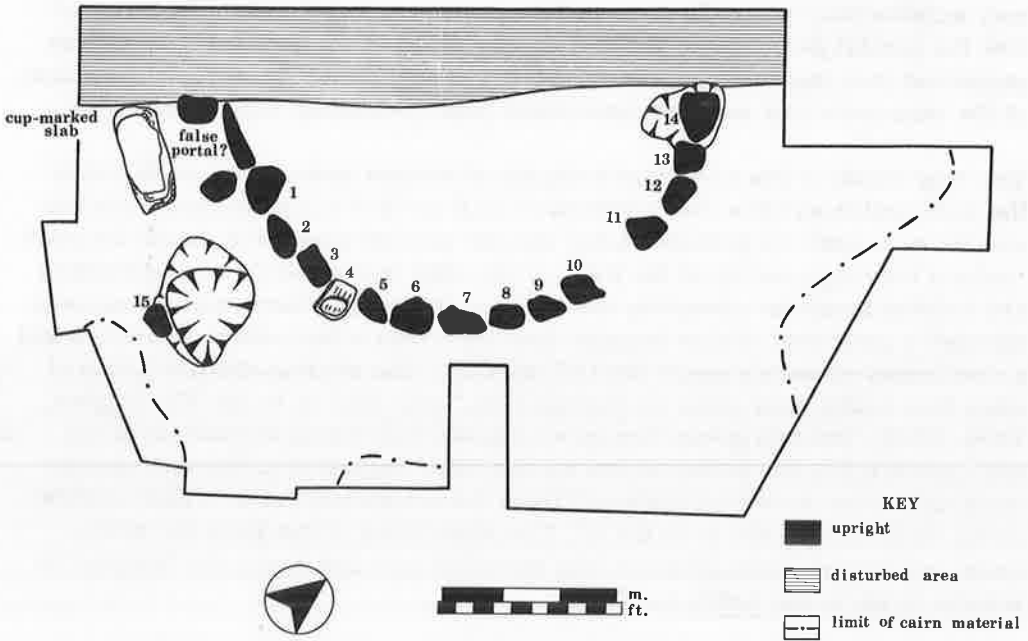


Figure 1. Culcharron Cairn, Lorn, Argyll.