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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

RI CRUIN CAIRN



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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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I. SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

Ri Cruin Cairn is an Early Bronze Age burial cairn, located in Kilmartin Glen in Argyll. Kilmartin Glen is a world-class archaeological landscape and one of Scotland's most important. It contains a wealth of upstanding prehistoric monuments¹ including an Early Bronze Age 'Linear Cemetery' consisting of massive monuments, of which Ri Cruin is one. There are also the remains of other burial cairns, stone circles, a timber circle, a cursus monument, a henge, standing stones, stone rows, and numerous rock art sites within the Glen.

Ri Cruin has been excavated by Mapleton in 1870, by Craw in 1929 (1930), and by Childe in 1936, at which time the site was prepared for public access. Reports suggest the cairn may have been disturbed prior to the first excavation. Three empty cists were found as a result of this work, one of which has representations of copper or bronze flat axes carved on the inner face of a stone used in its construction. A second slab was found at this cist which was carved with an unusual design that has been interpreted as a boat or halberd. While the latter stone does not survive, a cast survives in the National Museum of Scotland, and recent re-examination of this cast suggests that the carving was undertaken at different times and that its latest form may have indeed been a halberd.²

The site is not staffed, there is no entry charge, and it is freely accessible throughout the year. Precise visitor numbers are not recorded, however annual visitor figures for Kilmartin Museum, which acts as a hub for the Glen, are 25,000 annually³ which gives an indication of visitor numbers and interest.

1.2 Statement of Significance

- Ri Cruin Cairn is a rare example of a large and complex Early Bronze Age Burial cairn, albeit now much disturbed.
- The cairn has unusual structural elements in the form of grooved cist slabs within two of the three cists.
- A cist slab found at the site had been carved on the inner face with the representations of copper or bronze flat axes. Such carvings are rare.

¹ RCAHMS 1988

² Needham and Cowie 2012: 104

³ This figure relates to people visiting Kilmartin Museum to get information etc., as opposed to c.13,000 ticket-buying visitors. (Sharon Webb, pers.comm.)

- Another stone at Ri Cruin was found to be carved with a design possibly representing a decorated halberd, which was later added to. This carving is unique within Scotland.
- Ri Cruin Cairn is part of the Linear Cemetery, a larger monument of a form that is rare in Scotland.
- Ri Cruin Cairn is one of a number of funerary and ritual monuments that make up the highly significant ritual archaeological landscape in Kilmartin Glen.
- Ri Cruin Cairn has inherent potential to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the past.

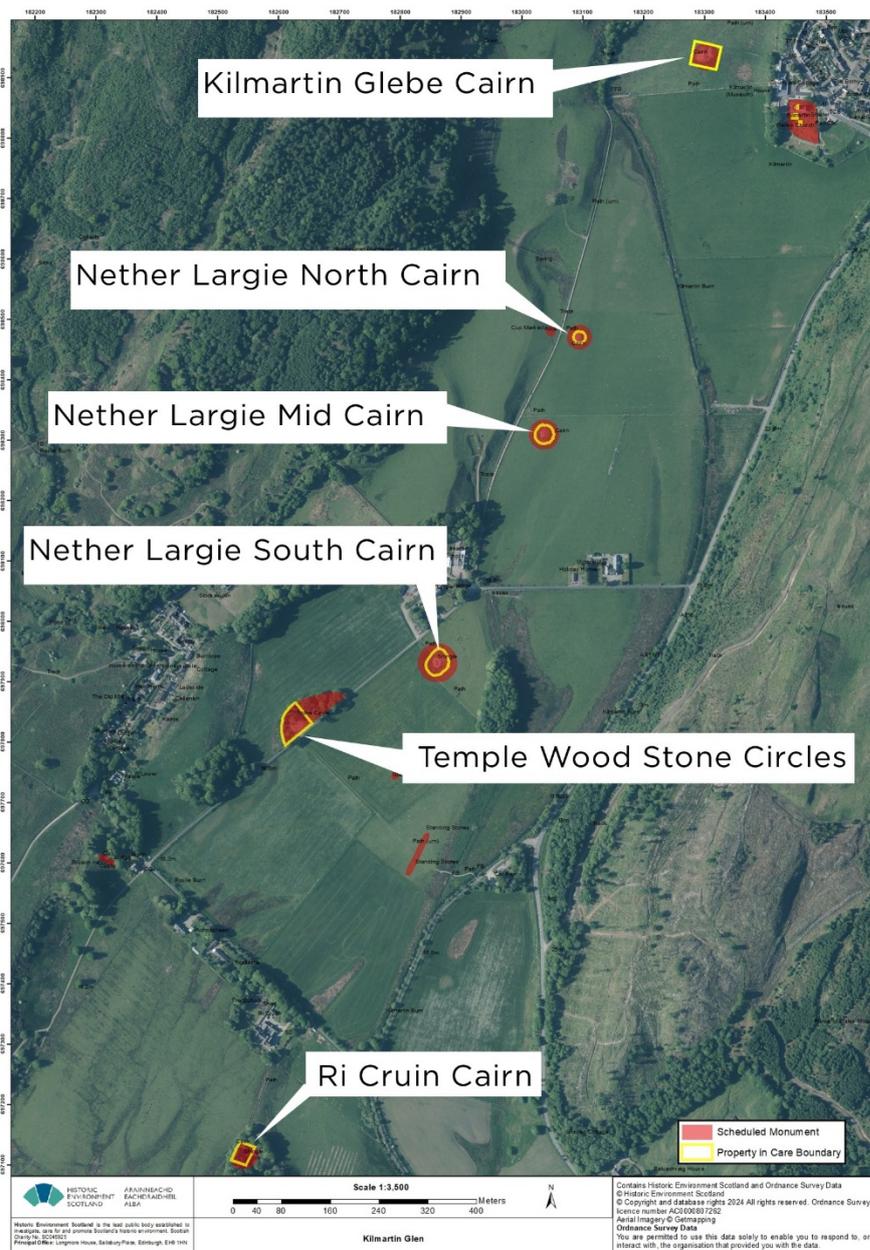


Figure 1: Location of cairns within Linear Cemetery, and neighbouring Temple Wood Stone Circles. For illustrative purposes only.

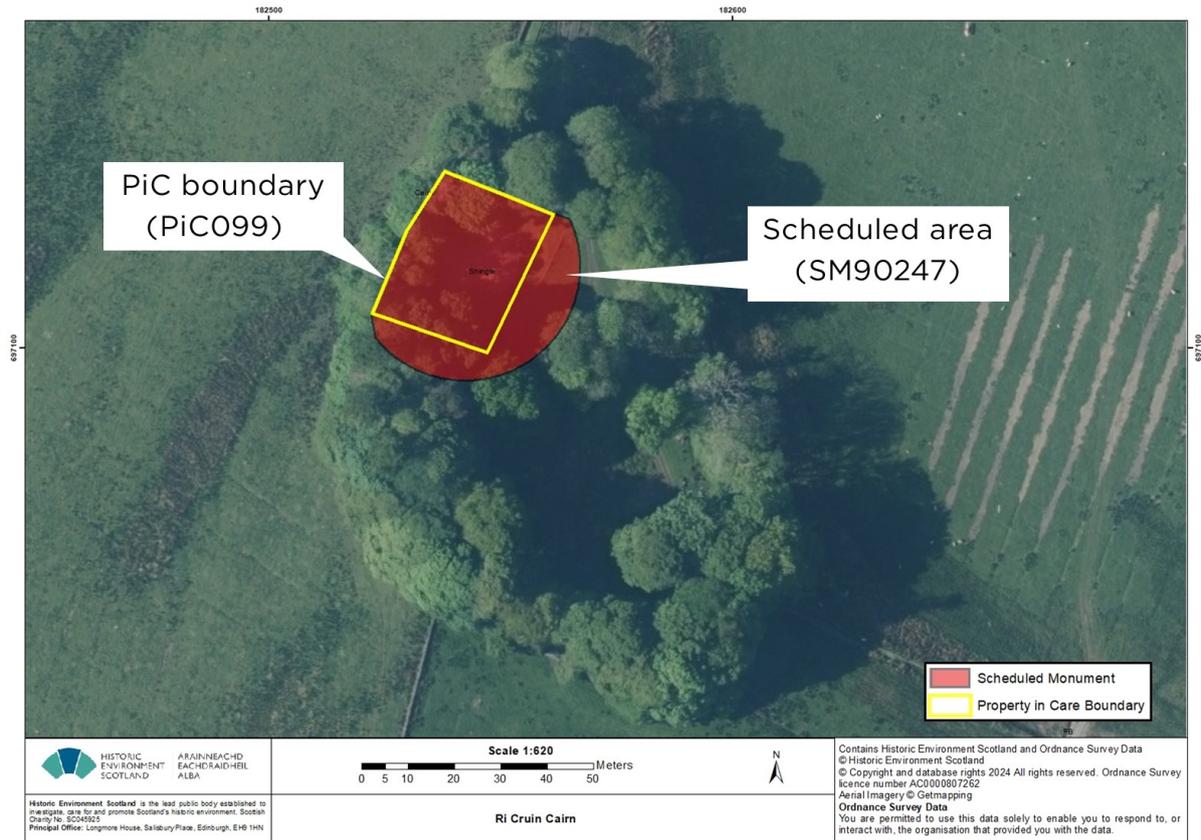


Figure 2: Scheduled area and Property in Care boundary, Ri Cruin Cairn. For illustrative purposes only.

2. ASSESSMENT OF VALUES

2.1 Background

Ri Cruin Cairn came into State care / Guardianship in 1932, along with a number of other prehistoric sites on the Poltalloch Estate.

The cairn is located in pasture, surrounded by a stone wall and mature trees, and accessed by a path that runs between the garden of Ri Cruin (house) and a field.

Ri Cruin is a burial cairn, which, along with the **Glebe Cairn**, **Nether Largie North Cairn**, **Nether Largie Mid Cairn**, and **Nether Largie South Cairn**, form a larger monument known as the 'Linear Cemetery'. This line of Early Bronze Age burial cairns, along the floor of Kilmartin Glen, were designed to be an imposing feature in a landscape that had already been marked as a significant place for ritual and funerary activity.

The cairn was excavated by Mapleton in 1870, by Craw in 1929, and then again by Childe in 1936, after which the site was prepared for public access.

The results of these excavations are presented below. Today, the cairn is much reduced in size from its original form as constructed. The site has suffered disturbance by the construction (and subsequent removal) of a later lime kiln, as well as tree planting. Intermittent traces of a kerb and three cists are visible. The northernmost cist has grooved side slabs and was found to contain cremated bone during the 1870 excavations, however this does not appear to have been retained. The second cist, now partially collapsed and out of alignment, also had grooved side slabs. The third cist has a side slab at the western end which has been decorated with the carved representations of a copper or bronze flat axe. A second decorated stone from the site was taken to Poltalloch House and subsequently lost in a fire reported by Craw as having happened in c.1900.⁴ A plaster cast taken at the time of the first excavation survives in the National Museum of Scotland, and the design has been interpreted as a representation of a hafted halberd which was later added to.

No artefacts were recovered from the excavations.

Ri Cruin Cairn was scheduled in 1994 as a monument of national importance because it forms part of the rare Linear Cemetery, within the wider ritual landscape of Kilmartin Glen. It therefore has potential to inform our understanding of Bronze Age ritual and funerary practices, and to contribute to a wider understanding of Neolithic and Bronze Age social practice.

See Appendix 1 for an archaeological overview of Ri Cruin Cairn in context (including an overview of Kilmartin Glen's Prehistoric Monuments, and the Early Bronze Age in Kilmartin Glen and the Linear Cemetery).

Archaeological overview of Ri Cruin

Ri Cruin Cairn is situated in mature deciduous trees, some 200m south of Ri Cruin house, and is accessible from the public road along a signposted path. The cairn was excavated by Mapleton in 1870, by Craw in 1929, and by Childe in 1936, after which the site was partially reconstructed and prepared to facilitate public access. The following description is based on the published account by Mapleton (1870, 1871), Craw (1930), Childe (unpublished field notes), Campbell and Sandeman (1962) which are summarised in the following description given in RCAHMS (1988).

As it appears today, the cairn is largely reconstructed, but it probably measured between 18.3m and 19.5m in diameter with intermittent traces of kerbstones, visible or recorded in excavation, on the S and E arcs. The cairn may originally have been intended to cover the most northerly cist visible at present, which was set in a pit at the centre of a mound. Aligned NNE and SSW and covered by a massive slab (3m by 1.05m and 0.18m thick), (The W edge of the cover slab bears faint chevron or lozenge markings, but these appear to be

⁴ Craw 1930: 132

natural, a view confirmed by Morris (1977:117)) the cist measures 1.25m by 0.62m and 0.65m deep internally; the floor was formed by a carefully inserted slab, with the space at the side 'filled up very neatly with a border of small boulders'. The side-slabs were grooved to receive the N end-slab. Mapleton discovered cremated bone on the basal slab, but, as the cist had been investigated some forty years previously, it is possible that any accompanying grave-goods had been rifled.

Set within the cairn material about 7m to the SSE, and just inside the kerb of the cairn (here represented by four massive stones), there are the side-slabs of a second cist, now collapsed; the slabs are grooved at the W end to receive an end-slab, and in Mapleton's day one end-slab remained in position. Aligned roughly ENE and WSW, this cist measured about 1.1m by 0.3m internally. There were no finds.

Lying just outside the line of the kerb and set into a pit, there is a third cist, now partly covered by a large capstone; aligned approximately E and W, it is formed of a series of upright slabs and measures 2m in length, 1m in breadth at the W end, 0.6m in breadth at the E end, and 0.8m in depth. Each side consists of a pair of slabs, those on the N forming a straight line, while those on the S now bow inwards. The W end-slab is decorated with seven pecked axes. There was formerly a narrow vertical slab at the E end of the cist decorated with a vertical groove with shorter strokes at right angles to it, and the end stroke rather more bulbous; this has been variously interpreted as a boat or a halberd with a beribboned haft. The slab was later destroyed in a fire at Poltalloch House, but a cast is preserved in the Royal Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

The cairn had been seriously disturbed by the building of a lime-kiln in its SW quadrant, but in the course of restoration all trace of this intrusive feature has been removed.⁵

Needham and Cowie noted some potential inconsistencies in the earlier published descriptions of the site,⁶ and that it had suffered from disturbance in the course of tree planting, the construction of the lime kiln, and poorly or completely unrecorded excavations.⁷

The careful analysis by Needham and Cowie of the carved elements in the cist uncovered some discrepancies in the number of flat axe representations. "*The Royal Commission (1988, 73) refer to only seven carvings while Malcolm includes an inaccurate woodcut showing as many as nine (1870, fig. 2). Six of the Ri Cruin axe depictions are fairly well defined,*

⁵ RCAHMS 1988

⁶ Needham and Cowie 2015: 94

⁷ Needham and Cowie 2015: 96

but two others we can recognise are extremely diffuse (Figure 7.6). It is possible that a ninth existed in a defaced area towards the top of the slab.”⁸

Interpretation and dating

Ri Cruin Cairn is a rare example of a large and complex Early Bronze Age burial cairn. It has unusual structural elements including the grooved cist slabs and carved representations of flat axes, as well as a stone which is carved with a unique design. It is part of a larger monument, the Linear Cemetery, a type of monument that is rare in Scotland.

Sheridan dates the Linear Cemetery to the earliest Bronze Age (c.2200-1900 BC).⁹ Although this is based on stylistic elements, it is widely accepted.

Carved representations of flat axe-head markings are very rare. They occur at Nether Largie North and Mid Cairns, (both also part of the Linear Cemetery) as well as at Ri Cruin. No other examples have yet been found in Scotland and they have been described by Jones as “remarkable”.¹⁰ Geographically, beyond Kilmartin Glen, the nearest known monument bearing Bronze Age representations of axes is Stonehenge in Wiltshire.

The carved stone found at the site during the 19th century excavations is now only represented by drawings and a cast in the National Museum of Scotland which has a very unusual design. This was also re-examined by Needham and Cowie. They suggest that not only had it been re-used, but that the cist may well have been oriented around it.¹¹ Needham and Cowie go on to describe the carving on the stone itself as multiphased: *“In sum, although we cannot be confident of the fine detail from the cast alone, there is the distinct possibility that the rake-like design is a palimpsest in which a representation of a hafted halberd (0.40m overall length) has been overlaid upon an original ‘rake’, which itself may have replaced earlier motifs.”¹²*

The remodelling of ancient sites and re-use of structural elements in Bronze Age monuments has been suggested to have occurred at a number of other sites in Kilmartin.¹³ For example, the **Nether Largie South Chambered Cairn**, built possibly some 1500 to 1800 years before the Linear Cemetery, was later re-modelled to take on the appearance of a round cairn. Ritchie regards the Early Bronze Age cairns in the Glen as one of the best demonstrations of sequence, reuse and veneration in Scotland.¹⁴

⁸ Needham and Cowie 2012: 97

⁹ Sheridan 2012:175-176

¹⁰ Jones 2015: 78

¹¹ Needham and Cowie 2012: 96

¹² Ibid: 104

¹³ Stevenson, 1997; Sheridan 2012:177; Sheridan 2017 RARFA

¹⁴ Ritchie 1997:82

2.2 Evidential values

Ri Cruin Cairn is important as it is one of the key sites in the Glen and is an integral element in much larger monument (the Linear Cemetery). For these reasons, the cairn would be a strong candidate for inclusion in any future research programme aiming to further explore the Bronze Age in Kilmartin Glen. The site has been excavated, however, there is potential for undisturbed remains, both within the site and in the surrounding area.

The site has evidential potential to significantly inform our understanding of the past, in terms of:

- the design and construction of burial monuments
- the nature and meaning of ritual and burial practices and their significance in prehistoric society
- its relationship to other contemporary monuments and burials
- the continued use and re-use of rock art¹⁵
- potentially undisturbed ancient botanical remains, which may elucidate the nature of the climate, vegetation and agricultural practices in the Glen when the cairn was in use
- the distribution of similar sites in the landscape
- how sites of a similar age related to one another in the Early Bronze Age and in later periods.

2.3 Historical values

Archaeological features such as the Linear Cemetery and other prominent monuments in Kilmartin Glen, including the nearby **Temple Wood Stone Circles**, were integrated into the designed landscape of the Poltalloch Estate. It is possible that the track known as the 'coach road' was deliberately designed so that the cairns and other monuments could be viewed when passing along this route. As an example of a landscape in which features have been re-used, respected and incorporated into a palimpsest spanning thousands of years, the whole of Kilmartin Glen and all the monuments it contains, including Ri Cruin Cairn, has great historical value. The incorporation of prehistoric monuments into the designed landscape has, undoubtedly, contributed to their survival.

Recent research into the relationships between the Properties in Care of Scottish Ministers and the British Empire¹⁶ has highlighted that Ri Cruin

¹⁵ For more information on prehistoric rock art in Kilmartin Glen and elsewhere in Scotland, see Scotland's Rock Art Project at: www.rockart.scot/

¹⁶ Full report can be downloaded from HES website: [Surveying and Analysing Connections between Properties in Care and the British Empire, c. 1600-1997 \(historicenvironment.scot\)](https://www.historicenvironment.scot/publications-and-reports/surveying-and-analysing-connections-between-properties-in-care-and-the-british-empire-c-1600-1997/)

Cairn has ‘property’ empire connection¹⁷ as it was owned by the Malcolms of Poltalloch. The Malcolms of Poltalloch acquired significant slavery-derived wealth during the colonial era in Jamaica. This included acting as merchants, holding shares in companies trading in the region, and owning enslaved people. Considerable monies came through compensation given when slavery was abolished in Britain. Neil Malcolm collected almost £40,000 compensation in 1835. The family used this wealth to become major landowners in Scotland, with the acquired estates containing many sites that would become Properties in Care. The estates were cleared to create aesthetically pleasing landscapes, with funds also being directed to the excavation of some of the archaeological sites.¹⁸

2.4 Architectural and artistic values

Ri Cruin is a rare example of what would once have been a massive cairn with complex structural elements. Grooved cists are rare, possibly only occurring in Kilmartin.¹⁹ Jones suggests this feature not only allows for closer fitting joints, but also allow the cist to be architecturally stable – therefore possibly free standing – but also more easily dismantled, suggesting that these type of cists may have been used and reworked prior to their burial underneath cairns.²⁰

Carvings, representing flat axes, are also rare in Scotland, only appearing in Kilmartin Glen (here, at **Nether Largie North Cairn** and **Nether Largie Mid Cairn**). In terms of an interpretation of what carvings of flat axes might mean, Jones, in an article examining Bronze Age memorial systems and the place of image production within these, suggests “...*images of flat bronze axes stand for flat bronze axes in a very active way; they presence and signify the memory associated with the production of axes and they incorporate the properties of axes. In this instance, then, the production of art is closely allied with the production of memory.*”²¹

These elements equate to high artistic, architectural and aesthetic values.

2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

Across Scotland, burial cairns are often inter-visible, and apparently positioned to maximise their visual impact; this is certainly true of the cairns which comprise the Linear Cemetery. Collectively, they form a

¹⁷ ‘Property’ connection describes land or buildings owned by either an established propertied family which participated in the Empire, or a recently enriched family which, through involvement in colonial activities, acquired the means to secure property. See Mullen *et al* 2024, 30-31 for a full definition of typology.

¹⁸ Mullen *et al* 2024, 50-55.

¹⁹ Campbell and Sandeman, 1960

²⁰ Jones 2001: 222

²¹ Jones 2001: 224

dominant feature in the landscape, deliberately positioned in a striking location and, in its current form, stretching nearly two kilometres along Kilmartin Glen. It is probable that the Kilmartin Burn meandered around the cairns, and the traces of old river channels can be seen, but it is not known to when these date. The Kilmartin Burn was canalised in the 19th century as part of the farm improvements undertaken by the Poltalloch Estate. **Nether Largie South Cairn and Temple Wood Stone Circles** can be seen from Ri Cruin Cairn. Ri Cruin is largely surrounded with mature trees and is accessible via a track between two stone walls. It is a very pleasant place to visit.

As such, it has very high landscape values.

2.6 Natural heritage values

To be assessed.

2.7 Contemporary/use values

Social values

The social values of Ri Cruin lie – together with the other Kilmartin Glen sites – as a visitor attraction, education and learning resource, and the atmosphere and special qualities of the place, all of which are highlighted in online social media reviews.

Ri Cruin Cairn, like many of the Kilmartin Glen sites, is relatively easily accessible and the site is interpreted and presented in order to aid understanding and access. The cairn material comprised of water-rolled cobbles appears today as a horseshoe-shaped spread at Ri Cruin, with all three cists visible. The capstones of two of the cists have been re-positioned just off centre so that the cist interiors are visible. The third collapsed cist is represented by side slabs which are off-line – the top slab is not present.

The site is not staffed, there is no entry charge, and it is freely accessible year round. Precise visitor numbers are not recorded, however annual visitor figures for Kilmartin Museum, which acts as a hub for the Glen, are 25,000 annually²² which gives an indication of visitor numbers and interest.

The site has an interpretation board installed by Historic Environment Scotland and another in the nearby vicinity was installed by the Dalriada Project (a Heritage Lottery Fund funded landscape partnership scheme), both of which provide visitor information on the site and other monuments in the area.

²² This figure relates to people visiting Kilmartin Museum to get information etc., as opposed to c.13,000 ticket-buying visitors (Sharon Webb, pers.comm.).

Kilmartin Museum was founded in 1997 and its mission is to inspire and educate people by interpreting, explaining and conserving the internationally important archaeological landscape, artefacts and natural heritage of Kilmartin Glen. A large percentage of tourists to the area cite the archaeological monuments and Kilmartin Museum as a reason for visiting. Cultural tourism is one of the region's largest economic drivers.

Kilmartin Museum's education team regularly use Ri Cruin, and the other sites in the Linear Cemetery, in its education programmes. The teachers and pupils of Kilmartin School, in particular, feel a deep connection to the monument due to its close proximity. Kilmartin Museum organises a weekly volunteer-led guided walk along the Glen visiting all the cairns in the Linear Cemetery, and Temple Wood Stone Circles. Kilmartin Museum and the education service are part funded by Historic Environment Scotland.

In 2007, Kilmartin Glen was the setting for 'Half Life', a cultural event spread over several weeks which involved landscape art installations and a performance created by the Scottish theatre company [NVA](#) in collaboration with the National Theatre of Scotland.

All these activities render Ri Cruin as having a very high social value.

It should be noted, however, that the tourism generated by the national and international importance of the archaeological monuments, is not necessarily seen as positive by everyone in the local community, since this presents certain challenges for farming, and restrictions related to other forms of land use.

Spiritual values

It is clear that the monument had great spiritual significance as a burial monument and part of the Linear Cemetery in prehistory. The re-use of these monuments, which is evidenced through excavation, demonstrates that they remained a spiritual focal point for a long period of time. The carvings on the inner side of the cist were likely to have been deliberately oriented to face the dead – perhaps suggesting spiritual significance.

There is anecdotal evidence that these sites are special for people today and this is evidenced by 'offerings' of flowers and other items.²³

Cultural values

Ri Cruin is situated in one of Scotland's richest archaeological landscapes. It has great significance as part of the Kilmartin Glen ritual and funerary landscape and is also part of a multi-monumental feature (the Linear Cemetery), designed in prehistory to be imposing and awe inspiring. It has remained so to this day. It therefore has great multi-generational cultural significance.

²³ Such actions can inadvertently harm archaeological sites, and visitors are reminded that the use of candles or naked flames are not permitted at any HES properties.

3. MAJOR GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

There are some major gaps in our understanding of the site.

Although the site was excavated, this work was undertaken at a time when modern, scientific dating techniques were not available. Therefore, no scientifically-determined date for the site is available, and the postulated date is based on stylistic evidence from other sites.

There are also major gaps relating to the period to which this monument belongs. These have been recently summarised as key research questions:

- Where did the people who were buried in the ostentatious graves live? Was Kilmartin Glen used only as a place of burial and ceremony?
- Was there a hierarchy of settlement, reflecting an inegalitarian society?
- Was there regional variability in subsistence activities during this time? How typical is the evidence from Kilellan and Ardnave?
- Was control over the flow of metal the only source of wealth and power in this part of Scotland at that time?
- Was the incoming metal just Irish copper or were bronze items or ingots also coming in? Was there any local exploitation of copper?²⁴

Added to these research questions is also a lack of understanding about the relationship of monuments such as the Linear Cemetery to other contemporary ritual and funerary monuments as well as those of later periods. In addition, the nature of the contemporary climate, vegetation and agricultural practices in the Glen as a whole remains relatively unexplored.

4. ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

- Achnabreck Cup and Ring Marked Rocks
- Ballygowan Cup and Ring Marked Rocks
- Baluachraig Cup and Ring Marked Rocks
- Cairnbaan Cup and Ring Marked Rocks
- Carnassarie Castle
- Dunadd Fort

²⁴ Sheridan, 2017

- Dunchraigaig Cairn
- Kilmartin Crosses
- Kilmichael Glassary Prehistoric Rock Carvings
- Kilmartin Glebe Cairn
- Kilmartin Sculptured Stones and Neil Campbell Tomb
- Nether Largie Mid Cairn
- Nether Largie North Cairn
- Nether Largie South Cairn
- Temple Wood Stone Circles

5. KEYWORDS

Neolithic; Bronze Age; round cairn; 'linear cemetery'; cist, cup mark; flat axe; Kilmartin Glen; Argyll

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: ARCHAEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW: RI CRUIN CAIRN IN CONTEXT

Kilmartin Glen's Prehistoric Monuments

Kilmartin Glen is located in Argyll and Bute, on the west coast of Scotland. The landscape of the west coast of Scotland is typified by rocky hills and relatively deep Glens. The undulations of the land and the underlying rock formations generally follow a north-west to south-east axis. Kilmartin Glen follows that pattern, being narrower at its northern end, with steep-sided hills and gravel terraces, broadening out to the south into a flatter, wide area which intersects with the south-west end of the adjacent Kilmichael Glen. The south is bordered by the Knapdale Hills, and the flatter area to the south-west is now the Mòine Mhòr – an expanse of peat bog which gradually changes to salt marsh towards the Crinan Estuary and the open sea. The Kilmartin Burn flows down the Glen, joining the River Add as it emerges from Kilmichael Glen, before meandering through the Mòine Mhòr to the sea. Both watercourses have been extensively altered by canalisation and straightening as part of the 19th century land improvements by the Poltalloch Estate.

The wider area of Mid Argyll and Kilmichael Glen, which intersects Kilmartin Glen, contains a number of important sites. There is, however, an extraordinarily dense concentration of monuments in Kilmartin Glen itself. Many of these are upstanding, highly visible prehistoric monuments,²⁵ including burial cairns within a Linear Cemetery, of which Ri Cruin Cairn is one. There are also the remains of stone circles, a timber circle, a cursus monument, a henge, standing stones, stone rows, and numerous rock art

²⁵ RCAHMS 1988

sites. It is a world class archaeological landscape and one of Scotland's most important.

The dramatic topography of the Glen and surrounding landscape almost certainly lent itself to the creation of a highly significant prehistoric ritual, funerary and ceremonial landscape. Belief, social status and particularly the relationship between the living and the dead have been expressed by generations of people through cultural practices relating to the use and disposal of high-status artefacts and the construction of complex and powerful monuments in an already naturally striking landscape. The dense concentration of artefacts in the Glen is also outstanding: "Many individual finds such as jet necklaces or Food Vessels have been found in other parts of Argyll, but the dense distribution around Kilmartin is unique."²⁶ Evidence for the earliest activity around these themes dates to the earliest Neolithic (3800-3700 BC)²⁷ and accumulates through to the Late Bronze Age (1500-1100 BC), a timespan of some 2300 years.²⁸

Mid Argyll's rock art stands out as one of Europe's finest groups of prehistoric monuments. The concentration is unparalleled in Britain. Rock art in the area appears both on earth-fast bedrock and also on monuments. Recent work on dating rock art sites points to those created on earth-fast bedrock as being Late Neolithic, between 3000 - 2500 BC,²⁹ although it should be noted that only relatively few radiocarbon dates are available. In common with some of the other cairns in the Linear Cemetery, (**Nether Largie North Cairn** and **Nether Largie Mid Cairn**), Ri Cruin has a number of structural features which have been carved with rock art. Some of these may be reused elements from other monuments, or earth-fast rock art sites. The carved features found at Ri Cruin are described above.

Kilmartin Glen's prominent monuments attracted antiquarian and archaeological interest from the early 1900's, and a wealth of important artefacts have been found as a result of that work. Survey and recording of much of the Mid Argyll landscape was undertaken by local antiquarian Marion Campbell of Kilberry and Mary Sandeman in the 1960's.³⁰ In more recent decades, the work of Kilmartin Museum, academics, and developer-funded archaeologists have discovered many other monuments, subsoil features and artefacts. In addition, members of the public have also found artefacts by chance. All this knowledge has significantly contributed to the understanding of Kilmartin Glen and the surrounding areas, firmly establishing the Glen as one of Britain's most significant archaeological landscapes.

²⁶ RCAHMS 1988: 14

²⁷ Sheridan 2012: 166

²⁸ Sheridan 2012: 166

²⁹ Sheridan, 2012: 171; Jones and Riggott 2011: 253

³⁰ Campbell and Sandeman 1962

As noted above, most of the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Early and Middle Bronze Age monuments are of a ceremonial or funerary nature. Currently, the earliest evidence of domestic occupation in the Glen dates to the later Bronze Age, leading some to speculate that the area was used solely for ritual purposes. No systematic survey or excavation programme has been undertaken across the whole Glen landscape, however. Therefore, the archaeological record is likely to be biased towards large and upstanding monuments than more ephemeral subsoil features and it is entirely possible that people were living in the Glen in earlier prehistoric periods as well as utilising it as a ritual landscape but the evidence for this has not yet been found.

Dingwall and McGowan noted that many of the archaeological monuments in the Glen lie within areas developed as designed landscapes in the 18th and 19th centuries in particular.³¹ It is very likely that the most conspicuous monuments, including the Linear Cemetery, **Dunchraigaig Cairn**, **Baluachraig** Rock Art site, **Temple Wood Stone Circles**, Nether Largie and Ballymeanoch Standing Stones were deliberately incorporated as significant points of interest in these landscape designs.

The Early Bronze Age in Kilmartin Glen and the Linear Cemetery

The use of copper appeared in Argyll in the 25th century BC and, by the 22nd century BC this was alloyed with tin to produce bronze across Britain and Ireland.³² Other changes also occurred, including the construction of cairns containing just one or two individual burials. This is markedly different from the earlier Neolithic practice of communal burial.³³ It is widely accepted that social stratification is visible in the archaeological record at this time, and in Kilmartin this is expressed by the construction of striking and conspicuous funerary monuments, as well as the acquisition of prestigious objects and ornaments.³⁴ Although this is seen elsewhere in Britain, the intensity of finds in Kilmartin is remarkable. Sheridan has suggested that Early Bronze Age elites in Kilmartin were able to control the flow of copper and also possibly bronze from Ireland to the north-east of Scotland, which was expressed in terms of conspicuous consumption and large scale monument building as the elites visibly demonstrated their wealth and power.³⁵ It is possible that mining was also taking place in, and around, the Glen as there are copper deposits which were certainly exploited in the early modern period.³⁶ Whether copper was acquired locally, or from further afield or both, the connections of the people living in Kilmartin were clearly wide ranging. Evidence in the form of materials or

³¹ Dingwall and McGowan, 1996: 43

³² Sheridan 2017, RARFA

³³ RCAHMS 1988: 14

³⁴ RCAHMS 1988; Sheridan 2017, RARFA

³⁵ Sheridan 2012:175; Sheridan 2017 RARFA

³⁶ Steiniger 2012

stylistic affinities suggest these extend to Ireland the North East of Scotland and Yorkshire.³⁷

The Early Bronze Age, described by Sheridan as a 'golden age' in Kilmartin,³⁸ saw the construction of a highly visible, deliberately imposing Linear Cemetery of cairns, of which Ri Cruin Cairn is one. Taken as a single entity, the Linear Cemetery is the grandest of all the prestigious monuments in the Glen.

Today, the Linear Cemetery consists of five large cairns – the **Glebe Cairn, Nether Largie North Cairn, Nether Largie Mid Cairn, Nether Largie South Cairn** and **Ri Cruin Cairn**. The cairns were constructed on gently raised areas of ground on the flat valley floor of Kilmartin Glen – these raised areas are most likely to be areas of sand and/or, gravel – deposited by melt water following the end of the last glaciation. The Kilmartin Burn would have followed a more sinuous course past the cairn cemetery in prehistory prior to it being straightened and canalised in the 19th century. Flowing water may have been significant to the builders of the cairns and this might have been an influencing factor in their construction. As well as potentially referencing running water, the cairns are carefully sited in a line. Although not evenly spaced, they are roughly central to the valley bottom and form a very prominent complex of monuments. Even though all of the cairns have been denuded to a greater or lesser extent they still have great impact in the valley today. Many of the other prominent monuments are visible from the Linear Cemetery, including Temple Wood Stone Circles and Nether Largie Standing Stones (from Ri Cruin and Nether Largie South Cairns).

It has been suggested that the Linear Cemetery once comprised of more cairns. Two possible other sites are represented only by cists today with any cairn material having been removed.³⁹ Speculation that there may also have been a further cairn in between Nether Largie Mid and Nether Largie South has never been investigated.

The builders of the Linear Cemetery incorporated the earlier Neolithic Nether Largie South Chambered Cairn into the alignment and this may have been its initial focus.⁴⁰ The original trapezoidal linear shape of Nether Largie South was substantially altered to appear circular.⁴¹ Linear Cemeteries are known in other parts of Britain however they are rare in Scotland. A clear parallel with a similar chronological range is the line of cairns at Balnuaran of Clava near Inverness which also has other similarities including associations with rock art.⁴²

³⁷ Sheridan 2012: 177

³⁸ Sheridan 2012: 175

³⁹ RCAHMS 1988: 14

⁴⁰ RCAHMS 1988: 14

⁴¹ RCAHMS 1988: 14; Sheridan 2017 RARFA

⁴² A. Watson, pers. com.