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Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM90059)

Taken into State care: 1953 (Guardianship)

Last reviewed: 2004

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

CARLUNGIE EARTH HOUSE



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CARLUNGIE EARTH HOUSE

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Carlungie is a complex Iron Age souterrain approximately 2km south of Monifieth. The monument lies within a fenced enclosure situated in arable farmland near Carlungie farmstead.

Accidentally discovered during ploughing in 1949, it was excavated by F T Wainwright in 1950-51, revealing the remains of an associated above ground settlement of eight huts. Another souterrain, Carlungie II, was discovered nearby and partially excavated but the site was reburied afterwards.

The adjacent settlement comprised eight structures, all but one of these being stone built and entered from a paved courtyard area while the eighth was evidently constructed of timber. These were determined to be contemporary with the souterrain, but occupation appears to have continued after the souterrain was abandoned.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

1949: Carlungie I is accidentally discovered during ploughing. A second souterrain, Carlungie II, is also unearthed in 1949 through ploughing.

1950-1: F T Wainwright excavates Carlungie I during the summers of 1950-51 and also partially excavates Carlungie II.

1953: Ministry of Works take Carlungie into Guardianship following reinstatement works to allow it to be publicly displayed.

1998: Carlungie I and II become Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Archaeological Overview

Souterrains are a feature of Iron Age settlements in many parts of Scotland, although marked clusters occur in Fife, Perthshire and Angus (Wainwright's 'Southern Pictland'), Aberdeenshire, the Moray Firth estuary, the Western Isles, Caithness and Sutherland, and the Northern Isles. While the majority of sites are known through aerial photography, an increasing number of sites have been excavated in recent times, and evidence appears to suggest that the more northerly examples are amongst the earliest, dating to the late centuries BC, while those in Fife, Angus and Perthshire are later dating to the early centuries AD. Various uses for souterrains have been suggested, ranging from places of defence or shelter in times of strife, winter accommodation for farm stock such as cattle or sheep, and stores for agricultural produce. As souterrains vary considerably in size and form throughout Scotland, it is unlikely they had a single and identical purpose. However, it is generally accepted that one of their functions was as

stores for agricultural produce, which may have included grain, meat and dairy goods.

Carlungie is one of the largest known souterrains in Scotland, measuring almost 39m in length. Like many of the souterrains in the Fife, Perthshire and Angus group it lies on good quality arable land today, lending credence to the theory these served as stores agricultural produce, such as grain, as well as meat and dairy goods. However, soil samples taken from the floor of the Carlungie souterrain tested positive for high levels of phosphor that is consistent with the presence of domesticated animals such as cattle. Although it is highly unlikely that most souterrains served as accommodation for animals during the winter months, this may have been the case at Carlungie.

Recent theories suggest the souterrains of Fife, Perthshire and Angus were linked to the Roman military occupation of central and eastern Scotland in the early centuries AD, perhaps being used to meet the increased demand for agricultural produce. The withdrawal of Roman forces in the late second century AD appears to coincide with a period when many souterrains were dismantled and decommissioned and none appears to have remained in use beyond the early 3rd century AD. In the case of Carlungie, evidence from the excavation suggests that the souterrain was probably constructed around 50AD and continued in use until the 3rd century, when it was systematically dismantled around. Settlement at Carlungie probably continued to around 400-450AD, with at least three successive and uninterrupted phases of building at the site.

Finds from the excavation included sherds of a Roman amphora, native pottery, metal objects, stone lamps, a fire-making stone and a stone mould for metal working. There is evidence that one part of the settlement was being used as a workshop for working stone or metal.

Artistic/Architectural Overview

The souterrain is a broad, L-shaped subterranean passage about 39m in length. The structure is of drystone construction, its walls composed of small boulders and split flagstones resting on foundations of massive boulders. The surviving walling suggests an internal height of at least 2m. Wainwright describes finding a number of large flat slabs on the floor of the souterrain that were so heavy they had to be broken up before they could be moved. Also found within the main chamber of the souterrain was a cup and ring marked stone, although it is unclear whether it was simply used as infill when the souterrain was abandoned.

Carlungie had four separate entrances, the main entrance sloping down from the paved courtyard with a flagstone-built doorway, similar to that at Ardestie, marking the beginning of the main chamber. The secondary entrances are generally smaller. A second door joins the souterrain from the east, while a third takes the form of a narrow passageway which wound 13.2m before joining the souterrain and a fourth appeared to lead through a comma shaped, semi-underground structure interpreted as a workshop. The third entrance is different to the others in

that its walls were not corbelled but perpendicular and were composed of small stones as opposed to the boulders and split flagstones of the others.

The adjacent settlement comprised several phases of occupation, recent ploughing having greatly reduced the remaining stonework. A group of eight structures with paved floors were identified as contemporary with the souterrain. All but one of these structures stood around a paved courtyard, and about half were destroyed when later buildings were erected on top of them following the abandonment of the souterrain. One of these was built in the boulder and slab style of the souterrain period, suggesting that these building techniques were adapted to other domestic purposes.

Social Overview

There is no evidence to base a formal assessment of how this site is perceived by the local community today. In antiquity, the souterrain would have been an important part of the settlement. Constructing a souterrain of this size would have required considerable labour and organisation on the part of the builders.

Spiritual Overview

It is unknown whether the souterrain has any spiritual or ritual significance today. However, it is likely that such a structure would have been part of the local community's rituals throughout the year, particularly if it served as a byre for animals or as a store for agricultural produce. The incorporation of a cup and ring marked stone into the stonework of the souterrain may be accidental, but could be re-use of an object regarded as ritually significant by the builders.

Aesthetic Overview

Carlungie lies within an enclosure in an arable field, helping visitors place it within the earlier agricultural landscape of which it was originally a part.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

The full extent of the settlement is not fully understood. It is likely that the whole of the PIC area and its immediate surrounding contain further evidence.

Carlungie II was only briefly excavated and may contain further information about the development and nature of the adjacent settlement.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

At 39m in length, Carlungie I is the largest excavated souterrain in Scotland.

The adjacent settlement shows evidence for industrial activities and that the community continued to occupy the site long after the souterrain was abandoned.

While it is generally accepted that most souterrains served as agricultural stores, there is some indication that Carlungie I was used as a byre for cattle or sheep.

Associated Properties

PICs: The souterrain at **Ardestie** is smaller and less complex, but the remains of the adjacent settlement are displayed. The souterrain at **Tealing** is considerably smaller and less complex than either **Ardestie** or **Carlungie** but displays many of the architectural features of this group.

Non-PICs: **Barns of Airlie** is a near complete example of the Fife, Perthshire and Angus group. Similarly, the site at **Pitcur** offers the visitor the opportunity to experience a partially-roofed souterrain. All four sites feature cupmarked/cup and ring marked stones built into the structure of the chamber.

Keywords souterrain; corbelling; cup and ring marked stone; Iron Age