



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

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Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC059

Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM90051)

Taken into State care: 1962 (Guardianship)

Last Reviewed: 2020

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

CARN BAN LONG CAIRN



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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

CARN BAN LONG CAIRN

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I SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

Carn Ban Long Cairn is a substantial ritual and burial monument known as a 'Clyde cairn' dating to the Neolithic period (4000 BC to 2500 BC). It is situated on elevated ground on the southwest-facing slope of Tighvein, which is the largest hill in the area, just above the eastern bank of the *Allt an t'Sluice* and near the head of the Kilmory Water, Arran.

The cairn is made of rounded stones and is roughly rectangular in plan. At its north-east end is a semi-circular forecourt with square-ended horns, and some facing stones visible. Much of this area is now filled with earth and stones washed down from the hillside above.

The site was partially excavated by T. H. Bryce in 1902¹, who revealed a corbelled chamber behind the forecourt. Now filled, this was divided by upright slabs into four compartments. Bryce's excavations recovered worked stone artefacts and small fragments of bone from this north-east chamber², but several exposed stones suggest the presence of a second, unexcavated, chamber at the south-west end of the cairn.

Carn Ban long cairn was taken into State Guardianship in 1962 and was designated as a scheduled monument in 1994 (SM90051)³. Various flint and pitchstone artefacts were found in the vicinity of the cairn in 1969.

The site is open to the public all year round as an unstaffed property in care which is accessed via a lengthy, but well sign-posted, forestry track. Because it is an unstaffed site with no visitor counter facilities at present, the annual number of visitors is currently unknown.

1.2 Statement of Significance

Carn Ban long cairn is a well-preserved and representative example of a regionally distinctive group of Neolithic monuments called Clyde cairns. Largely unexcavated, the monument has the potential to provide information about Neolithic and potentially Bronze Age funerary and ritual practice, whilst contributing to a wider understanding of the development of prehistoric society in Arran in particular, and in Scotland as a whole. This

¹ Bryce 1903

² The National Museum of Scotland holds a flint scraper, flakes of flint and pitchstone, and charcoal from the site. The catalogue can be searched at: www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/search-our-collections/

³ <http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90051>

means that it has significant group value. It is also one of the most complete examples of a Clyde cairn.

Bryce's excavations only examined the north-east chamber of the cairn, and very few artefacts were recovered - probably due to acidic soils and its location near to a burn. Because large areas of the cairn remain unexcavated and due to its relatively good state of preservation, it has high intrinsic evidential value for the potential to shed light on past belief systems and ritual and funerary practices during the Neolithic and possibly also the Bronze Age. There is also potential to investigate the cairn in terms of its wider relationship with the immediate and wider landscape and skyline, and with other contemporary monuments in the vicinity.

The alignment of the cairn is north-east/south-west which is in common with many (although not all) other Clyde cairns⁴. We cannot be sure why this orientation was of significance, but it is thought that this was connected with celestial movements and annual cycles, and that these were marked by ritual and ceremonial activities. Carn Ban long cairn therefore has high potential to inform our understanding of prehistoric belief systems.



Figure 1: Carn Ban scheduled area and PIC boundary. For illustrative purposes only.

⁴ Burl 2005

The above paragraphs outline the key significance of Carn Ban long cairn. The following sections offer more detailed description and analysis of the site.

2 ASSESSMENT OF VALUES

2.1 Background

Carn Ban long cairn is a well-preserved and representative example of a group of Neolithic monuments known as Clyde cairns, which are predominantly found in the Firth of Clyde in southwestern Scotland. First identified by T.H. Bryce in the early 20th century based on sites on Arran, they were subsequently sub-divided by V. G. Childe into the Clyde and Solway groups, terming the phrase 'Clyde-Carlingford cairns'. Stuart Piggott⁵ refers to this culture and likened them to Cotswold-Severn tombs which are found in southwest England. Clyde cairns have also been compared to Irish Court tombs because of their long cairns, segmented compartments and a façade of standing stones⁶. The greatest concentration of the 100 or so Clyde cairns that exist are on the southern half of Arran, but their distribution extends along the southern part of the west coastal region of Scotland from the Solway Firth in the south to Loch Etive in the north⁷. Other types of burial monuments found in this region include the Bargrennan group, the Hebridean group and Long Cairns⁸.

The cairn material of Carn Ban is made of rounded grey stones and the cairn itself is roughly rectangular on plan, measuring approximately 30m by 18m. The cairn is aligned roughly north-east/south-west with the façade and forecourt located at the north-east (i.e. the uphill end). At its north-east end is a semi-circular forecourt which is 10.3m wide and 6m deep with square-ended horns. Some of the facing stones are visible. Much of this area is now filled with earth and stones washed down from the hillside above. The height of the cairn declines from 4.5m at the south-west (i.e. the downhill end) to being almost flush with the ground at the uphill end.

Bryce's excavations of 1902⁹ revealed an undisturbed chamber in the north-east, which is now covered, measuring 5.7m in length and 2.4m in height, which had been divided into four compartments by upright slabs. He described it as being made of schist, sandstone and granite and filled with loose earth and stones and a 2-inch thick charcoal layer. He noted that above the slabs was a corbelling of small flags to increase the interior height, and that the roofing stones were set on these corbels. The cairn

⁵ 1954

⁶ De Valera 1960

⁷ Scott 1969; Henshall 1972

⁸ Henshall 1972; Cummings and Fowler 2007

⁹ 1903

material is made from large, grey rounded water-worn stones with the chamber made of schist, sandstone and granite.

Several exposed stones at the south-west end of the cairn suggested the presence of a second chamber.

The architecture of Carn Ban long cairn is typical of other Clyde cairns. Many examples comprise a stone and earth cairn which tends to be rectangular, trapezoidal, oval or square, and which encloses a chamber or chambers which are made from large stone slabs of stone set on end. Many sites also include a V-shaped or concave forecourt which is situated at the entrance¹⁰. The forecourt area is believed to have been used as an arena for ceremonies and rituals¹¹. The main burial chamber is entered by way of a passage from the centre of the façade. Internally, the chamber is subdivided by cross slabs or septal stones into a number of compartments or stalls, such as at **Torrylin**¹². In some cases, the chamber features a corbelled roof, as can be seen at **Nether Largie South**. Some Clyde cairns include secondary chambers which open from the narrow end of the cairn or from its sides, for instance at East Bennan¹³.

Only the chamber of Carn Ban long cairn was excavated. It was filled with loose earth and stones and a 2-inch thick charcoal layer. The finds included a single flint flake, a single Arran pitchstone flake and some small fragments of burnt and unburnt bone¹⁴.

As an anatomist, Bryce's primary interest was the analysis of human remains. Carn Ban was one of several cairns he excavated in the hope of recovering and studying human skulls. In total he recorded 24 cairns and excavated 19 across south-west Scotland, but mostly on Arran and Bute¹⁵
¹⁶.

2.11 Guardianship

Carn Ban long cairn was taken into Guardianship in 1962.

¹⁰ Henshall 1972; Noble 2006

¹¹ Noble 2005;

¹² Throughout the text, site names in **bold** are managed by Historic Environment Scotland and are publicly accessible. Access information can be found at:
www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/

¹³ Canmore ID 39659: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/39659/arran-east-bennan>

¹⁴ Bryce 1903

¹⁵ Noble 2005

¹⁶ Cavers *et al* 2010

2.12 Designation

The site was scheduled on 28 June 1994 as Carn Ban, chambered cairn, Arran (SM 90052). The present scheduled area measures 70m from north-east to south-west by 45m transversely, to include the cairn and an area around it in which associated remains may survive¹⁷.



Figure 2: Detailed view of cairn material.

¹⁷ <http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90051>

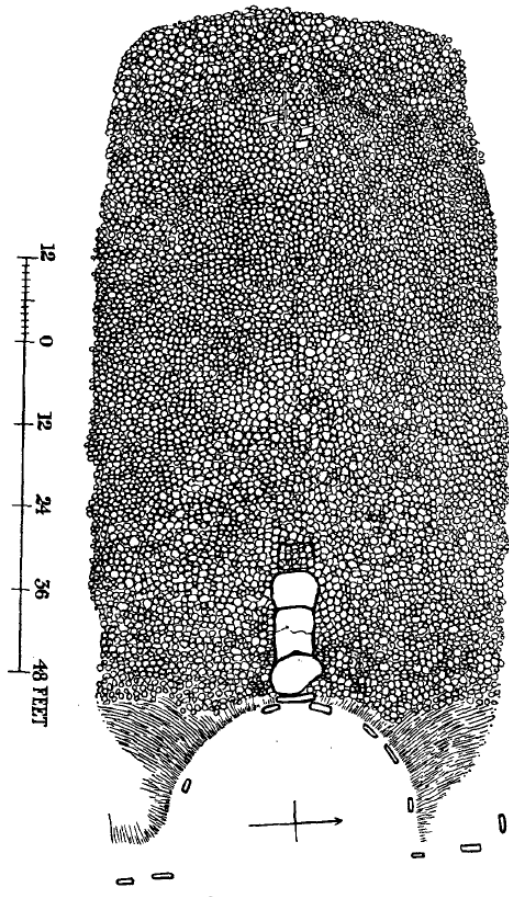


Fig. 2. Plan of Carn Ban, Kilmory Water.

Figure 3: Bryce's excavation plan from page 38 of Bryce 1903 © Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, reproduced with kind permission.

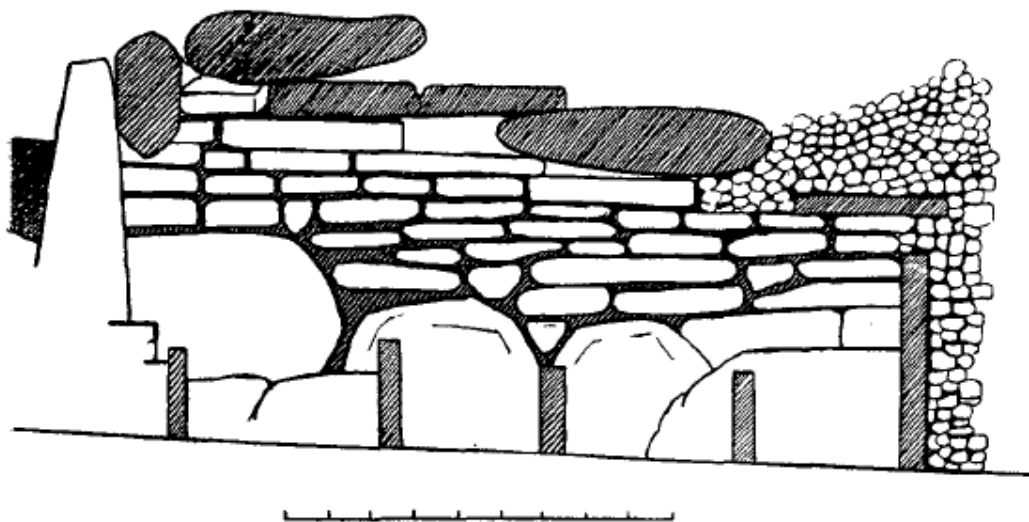


Fig. 3. Sectional Plan of Chamber, Carn Ban.

Figure 4: Bryce's section drawing of the chamber from page 41 of Bryce 1903 © Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, reproduced with kind permission.

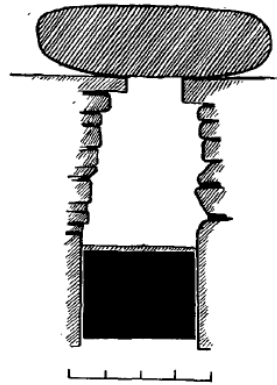


Fig. 4. Sectional Plan of Chamber, Carn Ban.

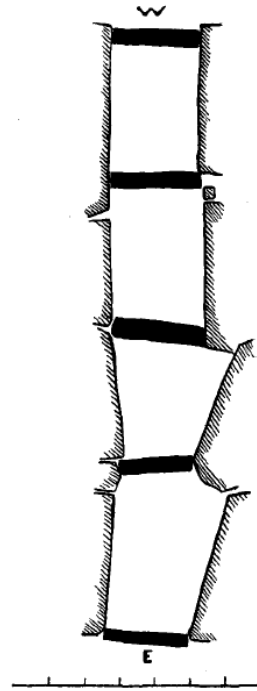


Fig. 5. Ground Plan of Chamber, Carn Ban.

Figure 5: Bryce's section and plan of the chamber from page 42 of Bryce 1903 © Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, reproduced with kind permission.

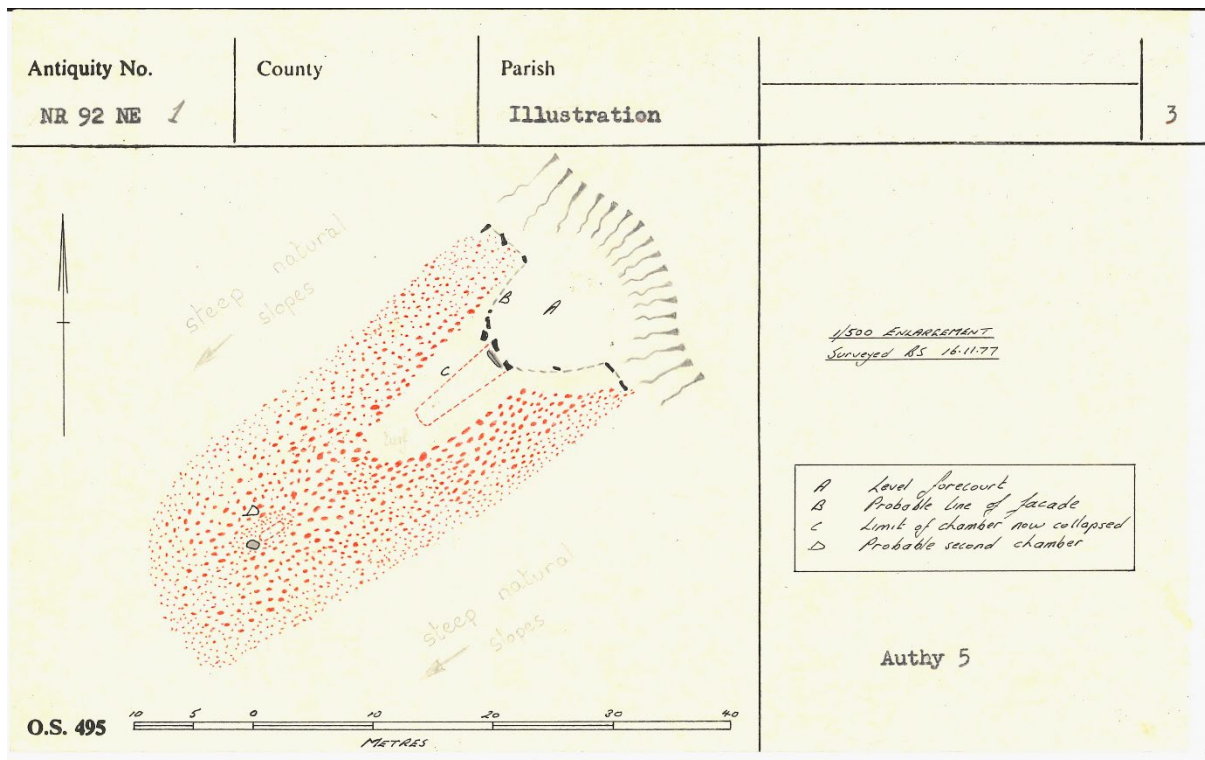


Figure 6: Ordnance Survey Plan, 1977 © Crown Copyright: HES (Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division).

2.2 Evidential Values

The only evidence we have for prehistoric society and culture comes from the physical remains that survive. Our understanding of millennia of prehistoric culture and society is based on solely on interpretation of these physical remains.

The primary evidential values of Carn Ban long cairn are:

- Its physical fabric: the cairn is comparatively well preserved and retains structural features such as internal chambers and the cairn material, which does not always survive elsewhere.
- The high potential that further archaeological study would yield more information, both from the Property in Care area and potentially in the surrounding landscape.
- The potential for the worked stone and bone fragments to be scientifically analysed and compared with other artefacts from other similar monuments.
- The quality of research available on which to base an understanding of Carn Ban long cairn is good, with high potential to improve with further research, particularly on the cairn's relationship with its surrounding landscape and topographic features within it, and possible celestial associations.
- Research to date indicates that in design, form and function the Clyde cairns are distinctly different to other types of chambered cairns; Carn Ban long cairn makes a key contribution to this understanding.

2.21 Physical fabric

Carn Ban long cairn is one of the best-preserved examples of a Clyde cairn, and as such, is particularly significant for the evidence it can provide for prehistoric society. It has high archaeological potential as it has only been partially excavated. It therefore has the potential to provide information about the construction and use of the cairn, the wider prehistoric landscape, Neolithic and Bronze Age funerary and ritual practice, as well as contributing to a wider understanding of the development of prehistoric society in Arran in particular and in Scotland as a whole.

Placing the evidence of Carn Ban within the expanding corpus of knowledge about Clyde cairns enables us to gain understanding about the function and meaning of such sites (see Section 2.3). In addition, Carn Ban's good state of preservation and completeness enables an

appreciation of the technical and design aspects of its construction (See Section 2.4).

2.22 Evidence revealed by archaeological investigation

The only recorded excavation of Carn Ban is that undertaken by T. H. Bryce in 1902¹⁸. This focussed on the chamber, which seems to have been previously undisturbed, and provided information about its construction and use. The artefacts recovered from Bryce's excavations (i.e. worked stone artefacts such as a single flint flake and a single flake of Arran pitchstone, together with small fragments of burnt and unburnt bone) are typical of artefactual material recovered from other Clyde cairns. Various flint and pitchstone artefacts were found in the vicinity of the cairn in 1969.

2.23 Further research potential

Although they are among one of the most studied class of monuments¹⁹, many Clyde cairns were excavated in the early part of the 20th century when the main focus was on the morphology of the monuments and the recovery of human remains, at a time when less advanced archaeological techniques were available. In addition, the acidic soils in this area mean that many of the artefacts are either fragmentary in nature or have not survived at all²⁰. It is still therefore rather unclear as to when the first Clyde cairns were built. The current range of radiocarbon dates places their construction at some time before 3700 cal BC^{21 22}. Port Charlotte²³ on Islay has preconstruction dates of 3980 to 3640 cal BC, 3950 to 3630 cal BC and 3650 to 3100 cal BC²⁴.

Typical finds at Clyde cairns include a range of material which reflects the multi-period nature of the sites, which appear to have been in use from about 4000 BC to at least 2500 BC. The earliest radiocarbon date comes from charcoal from a hearth under the forecourt blocking in layer 4 at Monamore on Arran²⁵, which is 3160 BC ±110 (Q-675), which indicates a date as early as 4000 BC²⁶. Artefacts at Clyde cairns which date to the

¹⁸ Bryce 1903

¹⁹ Ritchie 1997

²⁰ Henshall 1972; Schulting and Richards 2002

²¹ Schulting and Richards 2002; Noble 2006

²² Throughout the text, the 'cal' prefix indicates that the dates discussed are the result of radiocarbon calibration, i.e. they have been converted to calendar years and a correction has been applied, allowing for the variation of ¹⁴C in the atmosphere over time.

²³ Canmore ID 37313: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/37313/islay-port-charlotte>

²⁴ Harrington and Pierpoint, 1980

²⁵ Canmore ID 40086: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/40086/arran-monamore-meallachs-grave>

²⁶ Mackie 1963-4

Earlier Neolithic include a number of round-based bowls and leaf-shaped arrowheads. A wider variety of artefacts dating to the Middle and Later Neolithic include Peterborough and Grooved Ware, polished and plano-convex knives, petit-tranchet derivative arrowheads, fabricator type flints, stone maceheads and jet sliders. Beakers, Rusticated Wares, Food Vessels, Cinerary Urns, jet and barbed and tanged arrowheads are frequently associated with Early Bronze Age usage²⁷. Other objects found in Clyde cairns are not only more difficult to date but are typically less well acknowledged by archaeologists such as pitchstone, quartz and marine shells. An unfinished flint leaf-shaped arrowhead, probably dating to the Early Neolithic, was found in trench 5 located 20m to the south from the middle of the chamber at Slochd Measach²⁸, Giant's Grave, Islay²⁹.

A number of Clyde cairns have had their forecourt areas excavated. These are summarised as follows:

- Mackie³⁰ excavated Monamore³¹ on Arran identifying four phases of activity and recovering charcoal spreads and fragments, 128 pitchstone pieces (including four struck), Neolithic pottery sherds and two flint tools.
- **Cairnholy I** in Dumfries and Galloway. Piggott and Powell³² found evidence of burning activities and the deposition of Neolithic pottery sherds and marine shells.
- At Crarae³³ in Argyll and Bute, Scott³⁴ found 2500 shells deposited.
- Ardnacross II³⁵, Argyll and Bute. Charcoal, reddened earth and the remains of a wooden structure were found in the forecourt³⁶
- Clettraval³⁷, North Uist. A pottery sherd, several broken jasper pebbles and 2 quartz pebbles were recovered³⁸.
- Mid Gleniron I³⁹, Dumfries and Galloway. Corcoran⁴⁰ found three small hollows in the forecourt contained fragments of charcoal

²⁷ Henshall 1972

²⁸ Canmore ID 37335: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/37335/islay-nereabolls-giants-grave> ²⁹ Mariecevic, Sauders and Mithen, 2017

³⁰ 1964

³¹ Canmore ID 40086: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/40086/arran-monamore-meallachs-grave>

³² 1949

³³ Canmore ID 40024: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/40024/crarae-garden>

³⁴ Scott 1961

³⁵ Canmore ID 38757: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/38757/ardnacross-2-kintyre>

³⁶ Scott 1969

³⁷ Canmore ID 10106: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/10106/north-uist-south-clettraval>

³⁸ Scott 1935

³⁹ Canmore ID 61594: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/61594/mid-gleniron>

⁴⁰ 1969

suggestive of burning. Also, a 6-inch lump of quartz within a setting of stones was found just outside the chamber entrance.

- Glenvoidean⁴¹, Bute. Marshall and Taylor⁴². Quartz pebbles were found on forecourt floor.

In addition, some material may pre-date the construction of the cairns – for example at Cairnholy I and Monamore⁴³.

As Bryce's⁴⁴ excavations only focussed on the chamber of Carn Ban, the underlying features and deposits of the chamber, the cairn, the forecourt and potentially the wider vicinity of the site all retain high archaeological potential. Further information could be gained on the site through the use of a number of scientific techniques, including:

- C14 radiocarbon dating to date the site.
- Paleoenvironmental data to provide evidence of the landscape surrounding the site when it was constructed and in use.
- Stable isotope analysis to identify what the people were eating.
- Strontium isotope analysis and nDNA to determine where the people came from.
- Lipid analysis of artefacts to see what food and drink was being consumed.

The degree of completeness of the cairn would also provide further opportunities to investigate the precise design and construction of the site, and the geology of the stones used to form the chamber and cairn material.

There is also scope for further studies to be undertaken into any possible relationships with other monuments. For instance, one of the nearest archaeological sites to Carn Ban located approximately 1.7 km to the south-west is Aucheleffan stone setting⁴⁵ - a late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age 'Four Poster' type of stone circle. Other archaeological sites in the wider vicinity include Monamore/Meallach's Grave long cairn⁴⁶ in Monamore Glen

⁴¹ Canmore ID 39897: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/39897/bute-glenvoidean>

⁴² 1977

⁴³ Henshall 1972

⁴⁴ 1903

⁴⁵ Canmore ID 147309: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/147309/arran-aucheleffan>

⁴⁶ Canmore ID 40086: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/40086/arran-monamore-meallachs-grave>

to the north-east, and two Clyde cairns to the east: Torran Loisgte chambered cairn⁴⁷ and Giants' Graves long cairns^{48 49}.

There is also scope for further studies to be undertaken into the location of Carn Ban in relation to other Clyde cairns on Arran. For example, the majority of Clyde cairns on Arran are situated by the coast; by contrast, Carn Ban is located well inland in an elevated location at about 275 AOD and on sloping ground. What is the significance of this particular location?

Further studies could also be undertaken into any possible relationships with the wider landscape and topographic features within it, such as rivers, mountains and islands. For example, Aisla Craig, a distinctive island which was formed by a volcano and is located on the Firth of Clyde, is highly visible from Carn Ban long cairn. What is the significance of this relationship?

There is also considerable potential to investigate any important alignments and orientations towards celestial movements and cycles of the sun, moon and stars (see Section 2.3).

2.3 Historical values

The primary historical value of Carn Ban is its ability to demonstrate past ways of life and society especially in relation to the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods, specifically:

- Burial sites, funerary practices, ceremonies and belief systems
- Neolithic and Bronze Age society
- Antiquarian and later archaeological study

2.31 Burial sites, funerary practices, ceremonies and belief systems

Around 600 chambered cairns are known throughout Scotland. They date to between 4000 BC and 2500 BC and first appear in the archaeological record along with more widespread use of farming, new types of pottery and stone tools. In Scotland, the building and main use of chambered tombs took place across the country between 4000 BC and 3000 BC in the early part of the Neolithic which is the period when farming became more noticeable in the archaeological record.

⁴⁷ Canmore ID 40117: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/40117/arran-torr-an-loisgte>

⁴⁸ Canmore ID 40122: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/40122/arran-whiting-bay-giants-graves-north>

⁴⁹ Canmore ID 40127: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/40127/arran-whiting-bay-giants-graves-south>

Audrey Henshall's⁵⁰ study of Scotland's tombs notes that 'Architecturally the tombs form a distinct class of monument. Essentially they are rooms, which were normally closed, but to which access could be had for the insertion of bodies from time to time. In western Europe they were normally built above the ground and were covered by a mound.'

As with other Clyde cairns, one of the primary functions of Carn Ban is as a place of burial. Although the evidence from Carn Ban is limited, evidence from other similar sites suggests that it was likely to have been a focus of ritual activity over a long period of time. Excavations by Bryce⁵¹ at Torrylin chambered cairn in the Lagg area (about 6km south-west of Carn Ban) revealed the remains of at least six adults, one child and an infant from birth along with some animal bones, a flint scraper and a piece of round-based pottery. However, it is important to note that although the cairn has been excavated on at least three occasions, there is little known about the cairn as a whole as these works only focused on the chambers.

Analysis of other types of chambered tombs in Scotland by Burl⁵² indicates that there are certain regional differences in the orientation of particular features of chambered cairns, such as the entrance passage, in relation to movements of the sun and moon. The majority of azimuths (i.e. compass bearings taken clockwise from true north e.g. 90 degrees is due east) for Clyde cairns are oriented towards the north-east. It is worth noting however that such observations are general and that some sites have different alignments - for instance Torrylin where the chamber is oriented north-west/south-east. It is also worth noting that the alignments of monuments should not be just considered in one direction (i.e. north-east) but in both directions (i.e. north-east/south-west).

Further studies by Bradley⁵³ and Scott^{54 55} have added to our knowledge and understanding of the orientation of chambered cairns in the north of Scotland, such as the Clava cairns and Orkney-Cromarty cairns. One of the distinguishing features shared among many Clava cairn passage graves is the alignment of the entrance passage towards the south-west - perhaps to allow the setting mid-winter sun to enter the passage - and is particularly evident at Balnuaran of Clava. Further work about the role and importance of the sky in archaeology is also emerging⁵⁶.

As Noble⁵⁷ explains, the original form of Clyde cairns comprised single compartment chambers within relatively small cairns. These were later

⁵⁰ 1963 and 1972

⁵¹ 1903

⁵² 2005

⁵³ 2000

⁵⁴ 2015

⁵⁵ 2016

⁵⁶ 2015 & 2016

⁵⁷ 2005

enlarged - perhaps in order to facilitate greater public access - and forecourts were added as potential arenas for public display. These alterations may be able to tell us something about changing attitudes and beliefs systems towards the dead.

Jones⁵⁸ argues that while it is important to examine the internal architecture of monuments and their relationship with places in the landscape, the materiality of the stones used to create the monuments is worthy of investigation in itself. He contends, for example, that the use of coloured stones at chambered tombs on Arran reference the geology of the stone found on the island - white granite and schist in the north, outcrops of black pitchstone in the middle of the island and old red sandstone in the south.

Carn Ban is situated between an area of sandstone and schist and represents both of these in its construction: the chamber walls are made from a mixture of schist and granite with drystone walling made of sandstone above these; the façade is also made of schist with lengths of sandstone dry walling; an alternation of schists and sandstones form the capstones and the cairn material is made from a sandstone rubble⁵⁹. Given the recovery of pitchstone artefacts from Carn Ban, it could be argued that black is also represented at the monument - although pitchstone often looks quite greenish in hue rather than black⁶⁰.

Of course, what the use of these colour may represent is very much open to interpretation. Jones' paper⁶¹ is influenced by an anthropological study of a modern, non-western group by Victor Turner⁶² where the colours white, red and black symbolised parts of the human body. It is important to point out that this particular example may not be directly analogous to Neolithic and Bronze Age Scotland. That being said, the link between colour symbolism and the human body, and with chambered tombs incorporating coloured stones as containers of the dead is a fascinating prospect.

It is also important to note the observation by Trevarthen⁶³ that the colours red, white and black are found at a number of other ritual and burial monuments across Britain. The use of red, white and grey stones at Balnuaran of Clava for instance seems to have been used to emphasise certain seasonal events and that these key points of the year were significant to the people that used the site⁶⁴. The evidence suggests that the rising and setting sun, the changing of the seasons and the

⁵⁸ 1999

⁵⁹ 1999

⁶⁰ Brophy and MacGregor, 2018

⁶¹ 1999

⁶² 1967

⁶³ 2000

⁶⁴ Bradley 2000; Trevarthen 2000

arrangement of light and dark colours at chambered cairns may symbolise cycles of life and death, fertility and regeneration. MacGregor's study⁶⁵ of recumbent stone circles in north-east Scotland also found that different coloured stones were used in the construction of the monument.

2.32 Associative

As with many other prehistoric monuments, Carn Ban attracted antiquarian interest from an early date. These early accounts form a valuable archive and provide a useful record of the condition of the monument as it has been passed down to us.

Thomas Hastie Bryce was an interesting figure; as Regius Professor of Anatomy at the University of Glasgow from 1909 to 1935, his main focus was human anatomy. His primary interest in excavating Clyde cairns was the analysis of the human remains and comparing Neolithic people with Bronze Age people.

2.4 Architectural and artistic values

The architectural design and artistic value of Carn Ban is particularly high because of its state of preservation. Key aspects of its design are:

- Within its related group of Clyde cairns, it stands out in potentially preserving structural elements that are not found elsewhere.
- Unlike many other Clyde cairns, the cairn material is still present.
- Aspects such as the use of different types and colours of stones shows a sophisticated aesthetic appreciation which may represent the symbolic nature of the cairn.
- The siting of Carn Ban, including its orientation and relationship with its wider landscape and skyline is not wholly understood and there is huge potential to study this further.

2.41 Architectural

Carn Ban is one of the best-preserved examples of a Clyde cairn. As noted above, these types of cairn comprise a rectangular, trapezoidal, oval or square stone and earth cairn which encloses a chamber or chambers made from large stone slabs of stone set on end. Many examples also include a V-shaped or concave forecourt which is situated at the entrance⁶⁶. These

⁶⁵ 2002

⁶⁶ Henshall 1972; Noble 2006

characteristics make the Clyde cairns a distinct group and they share a number of characteristics with other funerary and ritual monuments.

The cairn material and the chambers at Carn Ban are remarkably well preserved and this allows the original form and layout of the monument to be appreciated. In particular, the original cairn material covering the chambers is present which is not the case at many other Clyde cairns. The architectural form of Carn Ban and other Clyde cairns demonstrate the considerable care that went into its construction. This includes the deliberate use of different types and colours of stones used.

2.42 Artistic

The apparent deliberate selection and inclusion of different types and colours of stones at Clyde cairns such as Carn Ban can be viewed as an artistic element.

Clearly the location and orientation of Carn Ban is key to understanding the monument and its function. This aspect includes its relationship with its immediate and wider surroundings, including towards Aisa Craig, and astronomical phenomena.

2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

The landscape and aesthetic values of Carn Ban encompass both its relationship with its landscape setting in prehistory, and how it is understood, experienced and appreciated in its modern-day landscape setting today. Key aspects include:

- The importance of its topographical location on elevated ground and its situation on sloping land.
- Its relationship with topographic features in the wider vicinity.
- The importance of its north-east/south-west orientation.
- The sense of place which can be gained at the site.

The name Carn Ban roughly translates in Gaelic as ‘a heap of white stones’. It is situated on elevated ground at 270m OD on the south-west-facing slope of Tighvein, which is the largest hill in the area, just above the eastern bank of the *Allt an t'Sluice* and near the head of the Kilmory Water. This location on elevated ground affords spectacular long-distance views over the surrounding landscape in all directions except to the north-east, which is restricted by the topography. These long-distance views extend outwards towards Aisla Craig (see Figure 9). Given its size, the cairn is also visible within its landscape from a distance. Although the cairn was enclosed with forestry plantations, these have been felled recently which has opened up the views.

The relationship of prehistoric sites to their wider setting is an emerging field, and Appendix 1 offers a more detailed discussion of issues and terms.



Figure 7: View looking towards Carn Ban from the footpath, with forestry in the background

2.6 Natural heritage values

At the time of writing (February 2020) the site was not protected by any natural heritage designations. Assessment of wider natural heritage values not completed.

2.7 Contemporary/use values

2.7.1 Visitors and visitor amenities

Carn Ban is an unstaffed site which is open all year round; it is therefore not known how many people visit the site over the course of a year. There is a visitor car park located at the start of a lengthy forestry track leading to the site, and it is signposted from this. Visitor interpretation is also available at the site.

There has been increasing interest in the historic environment of Arran in recent years. Fairhurst⁶⁷ provides a good overview of the archaeology and history of the island, however more recent engagement by archaeologists with the Island has taken place in recent times. This includes the 'Burn the Circle' event which has run since 2014 and is an experimental archaeology festival at the reconstructed Bronze Age roundhouse at Brodick Castle⁶⁸. Cavers et al⁶⁹ also surveyed seven chambered cairns and one four poster stone circle in 2014, specifically focussing on the topographical location and visibility of Clyde cairns.

In 2016 as part of the 'Views of Neolithic Arran' workshop on the integrated archaeological measured survey of chambered tombs on Scotland's national forest estate, digital laser surveys of Neolithic tombs were carried out to offer powerful and engaging ways to present the sites to visitors and enhance site visits⁷⁰

A comprehensive archaeological survey of Arran was undertaken by Historic Environment Scotland's Survey and Recording team in 2017-18⁷¹. The survey made extensive use of Airborne Laser Scanning (ALS) data to support a phase of desk-based mapping that preceded fieldwork.

Brophy and Macgregor's 2018 article about Arran, highlights its rich archaeological heritage and suggested that there is huge potential for more visitors to explore the island and for fresh research and fieldwork.

In February 2020, a new Boyne to Brodgar project entitled 'Awakening Sleeping Giants' seeks to combine archaeological research, creativity and learning in innovative new ways which are beneficial for the community of Arran. This includes site visits to three Clyde cairns - Giants Graves', Torran Loisgte and Carn Ban - and a workshop to discuss wider issues about archaeological research on Arran.

2.72 Astronomical associations

No formal studies have been carried out to date. However, this is an aspect that could be explored further.

⁶⁷ 1982

⁶⁸ <http://northlight-heritage.co.uk/conc5/index.php/whatwedo/burning-circle/>

⁶⁹ 2014

⁷⁰ <https://www.scottishheritagehub.com/category/scarf-tags/arran>

⁷¹ <https://canmore.org.uk/project/1036806>

2.73 Folklore

No formal studies have been carried out to date. However, this is an aspect that could be explored further.

2.74 Spiritual values

No formal studies have been carried out to date. However, prehistoric monuments such as Carn Ban appear to have been regarded with trepidation by the islanders. Writing in 1873, local antiquarian J. MacArthur who excavated several prehistoric monuments on Arran noted for example the ‘feelings of superstitious dread with which these monuments are generally regarded’ when discussing excavations at another Clyde cairn at Torrylin.

Generally speaking, prehistoric burial cairns are believed to be not just containers for the dead but can tell us much about the beliefs of people in the past, including the afterlife. Although these beliefs are still poorly understood, it is generally accepted that the builders of these tombs venerated ancestors and that various rituals and ceremonies were undertaken at the sites.

3. MAJOR GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

- Although Bryce’s excavations provided some insight into the construction of the tomb and its contents, no scientific dates currently exist for Carn Ban. The chronology of its construction and use could therefore be much better understood.
- The significance of the other areas of the tomb, such as beneath the chambers and the forecourt area, could also be much better understood to examine whether evidence of pre-cairn activity survives, and whether any ritual or other activities were undertaken within the forecourt area.
- Although we know the geology of the stones used to construct Carn Ban, further geological studies could identify the provenance of the stones.
- The relationship between Carn Ban and other monuments in the vicinity could be much better understood.
- There is potential for the significance of the relationship with natural topographic features, such as Aisla Craig, to be better understood.
- There has been no detailed study of the orientation of the monument and any possible relationships with celestial events.

4. ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

Torrylin chambered cairn⁷² is located approximately 6.2km southwest of Carn Ban. It is also a Clyde cairn measuring about 20m in diameter with an exposed chamber which is aligned northwest-southeast and on Aisla Craig. Other Clyde cairns which are not Properties in Care but are located in the vicinity of Carn Ban include Torran Loisgte, Giants' Graves and Mellach's Grave/Monamore.

5. KEYWORDS

Archaeoastronomy, Arran, Bronze Age, Bryce, Burial, Clyde, Cairn, Funerary, Landscape, Neolithic, Prehistoric, Ritual, Skyscape, Tomb

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⁷² <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/torrylin-cairn/>

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Further Resources

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE LOCATION OF CARN BAN

Chambered cairns are found in a variety of locations. Some are placed in conspicuous locations within the landscape, such as on the summits of hills or on the shoulders of hills – perhaps in order to be deliberately seen on a skyline or otherwise seen in profile. Their relationship to routeways across and between different terrestrial and marine landscapes, locations near to fertile ground and views over specific areas of land - perhaps relating to different communities - also seems to hold significance.

In terms of Clyde cairns on Arran, Renfrew⁷³ argues that the megalithic chambered tombs on Arran represent a territorial farming society which was divided into small communities, with 17 out of 18 located within 500m of land ‘probably suitable for agriculture in the Neolithic period’. While this interpretation is open to debate, it is certainly apparent from looking at the distribution of Clyde cairns on Arran⁷⁴ that the majority are located on flat ground by the coast.

The setting of Clyde cairns has not been extensively studied to date. Hughes⁷⁵ argues that locations for chambered cairns on Arran were chosen in places that were set apart from, and offer prospects over, the wider island setting. Fraser⁷⁶ examined Clyde cairns on Arran, exploring the way in which natural and built form interact through the medium of the human body, particularly focussing on East Bennan on the southern coast and its relationship with Ailsa Craig. However, Fraser also studied a number of other Clyde cairns including Clachaig, Torran Loisgte, Giants’ Graves and Mellach’s Grave/Monamore - the latter three sites are all located in the wider vicinity of Carn Ban.

Fraser⁷⁷ observes for instance that Torran Loisgte, which is located at the edge of a high terrace overlooking the coast and sea, mirrors East Bennan in that it ‘sets up an interplay between the embracing enclosing character of a crescentic façade and a limited area of level ground’. The two cairns at Giants’ Graves, located just 270m southeast of Torran Loisgte, are also located on the edge of a high terrace overlooking the coast and sea and in this case the forecourt of the cairn looks over an expanse of sloping ground. Like Torran Loisgte, good views towards Holy Island are possible.

⁷³ 1973, 148

⁷⁴ Fairhurst 1982 (Figure 2.8)

⁷⁵ 1988

⁷⁶ 2004

⁷⁷ 2004, 141

Cummings⁷⁸ has also undertaken some preliminary studies of Clyde cairns along the southwest coast of Galloway. She suggests that most of these tombs are situated in low-lying areas on fertile land with a restricted view in one direction and expansive views in other directions, and that a number of examples also have views of the sea or the Isle of Man. New excavations on Clyde cairns have been undertaken by Cummings and Robinson⁷⁹.

Cavers et al's recent survey⁸⁰ of seven chambered cairns and one four poster stone circle on Arran includes some preliminary work into the topographical location and visibility of the Clyde cairns. The authors suggest that the majority of the cairns are situated on elevated ground overlooking agricultural ground and affording good views, but that there are differences in altitude and slope gradient. They note that 18 of the 26 chambered cairns are located between the 50m and 280m contours, with 11 located above 100m OD. Many were built on slopes and the views commanded from the slope appears to have been more important than the orientation of the slope. In addition, those cairns that were built on steep gradients (e.g. Carn Ban, Mellach's Grave/Monamore and Allt Carn Bhain) tend to have the façade oriented uphill, suggesting that the view behind the cairn was important as a kind of backdrop. Overall, the study concludes that the chambered cairns were sited on Arran to take advantage of 'unique views', which may support the notion that territory and landholding were 'overriding factors in the selection of location and view'⁸¹.

Putting all of this into context, what can be said about the topographical location and setting of Carn Ban? It is situated on elevated ground on the south-west-facing slope of Tighvein, which is the largest hill in the area, just above the eastern bank of the *Allt an t'Sluice* and near the head of the Kilmory Water. Whereas most the Clyde cairns on Arran are located on fairly low-lying ground near to the coast, by contrast Carn Ban is located on elevated ground at 270m OD. It is situated on sloping ground and is oriented broadly north-east to south-west with the forecourt at the north-eastern end up the slope. Its location on elevated ground affords spectacular long-distance views over the surrounding landscape in all directions except to the northeast which is restricted by the topography. These long-distance views extend outwards towards Aisla Craig. Given its size, the cairn is also visible within its landscape from a distance.

Investigations were undertaken by Cummings and Whittle⁸² into the landscape setting of Neolithic monuments in Wales. Although the sites were not identical in every aspect, the authors did find that many were located in relation to natural topographic features including rocky outcrops, rivers, the sea, mountains etc. They found that while views from

⁷⁸ 2002

⁷⁹ 2015

⁸⁰ 2014

⁸¹ 2014, 25

⁸² 2004

the monument were significant, views towards them were equally so, with many placed on the side of hills - for example, close to but not on the summit. They also argued that the amount of woodland cover during the Neolithic period would probably have been more extensive than the present day, but that there was a large degree of variability, particularly due to seasonal variations, and that the woodland would have been part of the experience of monuments and places in the landscape.

Crucial to understanding setting in relation to archaeological monuments is landscape archaeology. Emerging during the 1970's and 1980's as a way of investigating the relationship between monuments and topographical landscape features, it tries to gain a greater understanding of why such monuments were erected, and how they were experienced by the people that built them. Modern theoretical approaches to landscape also take account of how people in the past would have regarded the landscape as a source of information and a record of past events - a 'sacred geography' - with every feature linked to a significant mythological event⁸³.

A number of leading archaeologists argue that the landscape in which Neolithic and Early Bronze Age monuments sit is crucial in determining their setting, form and appearance⁸⁴. They argue for instance that many Neolithic ritual monuments are positioned in relation to distinctive topographic features such as major rivers, hills and mountains, have relationships with routeways across and between different terrestrial and marine landscapes, are often located near to good land and have good views over specific areas of land.

Richard Bradley⁸⁵ argues that many stone circles appear to represent a 'microcosm of the local landscape' in that the high ground forms a topographical bowl around the monument. This is certainly true for some stone circles, but not those situated in elevated positions affording extensive views over the landscape below and which appear 'skylined' against the horizon. Phenomenological approaches - the study of how humans experience the world through their senses - have also been used by archaeologists such as Tilley⁸⁶ to study the relationships between monuments and natural landscape features.

Materiality has emerged in recent years as a way of understanding monuments with archaeologists arguing that their significance is enhanced by the incorporation of materials from the natural world with what Bradley calls 'pieces of places'⁸⁷. The varying colours and textures of megalithic architecture which are reminiscent of the hues and natural surfaces of the earth could help to explain why coloured and textured stones are found at

⁸³ See Sacred Geography papers 1996

⁸⁴ Scarre 2002

⁸⁵ 1998, 116

⁸⁶ 1994

⁸⁷ 2000, 81

a number of monuments including Clava cairns, recumbent stone circles and Clyde cairns.

More recently still, the role of the wider landscape in archaeology has extended the discussion of the role and importance of the sky – the ‘skyscape’. Building on previous research into the link between stone alignments and movements of the sun and moon, this approach attempts to reintegrate archaeoastronomical approaches into mainstream landscape archaeology ⁸⁸.

In summary, all of these approaches provide a useful background in understanding Carn Ban and other Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual and funerary monuments more widely.



Figure 8: Aerial photograph of Carn Ban, 2017 © Historic Environment Scotland.

⁸⁸ Silva and Campion 2015; Silva et al 2016



Figure 9: View from Carn Ban towards Aisla Craig