



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD
EACHDRAIDHEIL
ALBA

Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC298

Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM90162)

Taken into State care: 1961 (Guardianship)

Last reviewed: 2004

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

HILL O' MANY STANES



We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.



© Historic Environment Scotland 2019

You may re-use this information (excluding logos and images) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated.

To view this licence, visit <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Any enquiries regarding this document should be sent to us at:

Historic Environment Scotland

Longmore House

Salisbury Place

Edinburgh

EH9 1SH

+44 (0) 131 668 8600

www.historicenvironment.scot

You can download this publication from our website at

www.historicenvironment.scot

HILL O' MANY STANES

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Hill o' Many Stanes is situated in NE Caithness. It comprises about 200 stones which are arranged in at least 22 rows running down the southern slope of a low hill. The rows run from N to S, radiating from a rocky knoll to the N. To the S is a feature of unknown date and function, possibly a building. The standing stones are generally thin slabs set with their faces looking across the rows and packed at the base with smaller stones. To the E, small hollows packed with stones indicate that there were further rows here.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

- Over the last 100 years, 50 stones have apparently been lost: in 1871 Dryden noted 250, of which 192 remained erect in 1910. In 1978, the monument was surveyed by Ashmore and Livingstone, and in 1985 by Mercer. Different conventions and numbering systems were employed. Both plans seem to be accurate, although Ashmore's plan is likely to have the most consistent conventions, and Mercer discovered a further 15 possible stones. Comparison of the plans led to the observation that some stone deterioration was taking place and that some were leaning further than when previously observed.
- 1961 monument passed into State care.
- Archaeologists from Cardiff University and Glasgow University have been undertaking recent fieldwork in the Yarrows area, and this includes looking at related stone rows. This is not yet published.

Archaeological Overview

- The monument comprises the largest and best-preserved of the multiple rows of small stones which were erected by the inhabitants of Caithness and eastern Sutherland about 4000 years ago. Such multiple stone rows are only paralleled in Caithness, Sutherland, southern Brittany and Dartmoor. They are difficult to date. This monument is undated and its chronology can only be inferred from dates elsewhere: artefact associations and some radiocarbon dates suggest such monuments were mostly erected in the Bronze Age.
- There has been little work on the archaeology of Caithness in general since the 19th century, and as a result the archaeology of this area is not as well-known or as well-understood as it deserves to be.

Artistic/Architectural Overview

- Nothing definitive is known of how this monument was laid out, or why this particular place was chosen.

Social Overview

- Whatever the function of the stone rows (perhaps it was used to organise the farming cycle), considerable time, effort and organisation must have been expended by the community to create them.

Spiritual Overview

- It has been suggested that stone rows, like stone circles, were used for gatherings and religious ceremonies. It is also possible that these monuments were used to follow the solar and lunar cycles. There are also those who believe that the monuments were laid out on the basis of consistent measurements (the so-called megalithic yard, etc) and this monument has been studied in this context.

Aesthetic Overview

- Although heather and gorse can obscure the low stones if not managed, there is a fascination in being able to walk along and between the radiating rows.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- No scientific dates exist; in fact nothing is known of the sub-surface archaeology of the site.
- Scientific geological examination of the stones may provide clues as to where they were sourced from.
- The wider landscape context of this monument is not well understood: where was contemporary settlement, what did the contemporary environment look like at the time of construction, etc. The publication of recent fieldwork by Cardiff and Glasgow Universities is therefore awaited with interest.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

- An example of a rare monument type paralleled only in Caithness, Sutherland, southern Brittany and Dartmoor. Such monuments are presumed to be Bronze Age in date.
- Largest and best-preserved example of multiple rows of small stones which were erected by the inhabitants of Caithness and eastern Sutherland about 4000 years ago.
- Provides insight into prehistoric technologies and beliefs, probably a particular interest in astronomy.

- The relationship of the monument to the people who built it, where and how they lived is poorly understood.

Associated Properties

This is the only example of stone rows in the care of Historic Environment Scotland; related monuments are promoted further to the north at Yarrows, as part of an archaeological trail that embraces an extensive and well-preserved, multi-period archaeological landscape (includes **Cairn o'Get**). Relates, in more general terms, to the Estate's late Neolithic/Bronze-Age ritual monuments, such as stone circles, henges, etc. Prehistoric interest in astronomy witnessed at other monuments such as **Maeshowe**, etc.

Keywords Stone rows, Bronze Age, Caithness, Sutherland, ritual, astronomy.