

A NOTE ON MESOLITHIC SITES IN BUTE

by W. F. Cormack

Hitherto, evidence of mesolithic occupation of Bute has been scanty, but the discovery of a small chipping site, with one or two microliths in agate, near St. Blanes in 1984, increased the probability that pre-neolithic sites existed. Accordingly the writer, with his wife Sheila, and Jack Scott, all familiar with coastal mesolithic sites in Galloway, spent a day or two in April 1986, walking over ploughed fields on the suggestion of Miss D. Marshall.

During the mesolithic period the land was some 40 feet lower than at present and the sea cut an erosion scarp which now appears as a low bluff at the inland edge of the raised beach. In Galloway, the favoured occupation sites were on the top of this bluff adjacent to a small stream cutting through the bluff and allowing access to the shore.

Such a site, was found on Little Kilchattan at about NS 105565 on the 50 foot contour. A discoloured patch extending perhaps 75m. along the top of the bluff yielded about 180 flints and one piece of blue green chert. The flints, from small nodules, have generally a white or blue patination often stained with dark blotches. The industry consists of scrapers, cores, and the usual flakes and blades, some utilized. Two geometric microliths were also recovered.

At Ardnahoe, a field with a similar relationship to the bluff and a stream was unploughed but a small worked-out core, patinated and stained, was found in the adjoining field at about NS 070575. This is likely to be a stray from a mesolithic site about 070574, again on the 50 foot contour.

At Glecknabae, in the north west of the island, the neolithic chambered cairn at NS 008682 is built on a shell midden long suspected to be mesolithic. During a visit to the cairn, a flint core was picked up from among the shells eroding from the midden. About 35mm high it has the chalky white patina and bladelet scars characteristic of mesolithic cores. Such a continuity between mesolithic and neolithic occupation of a site is quite consistent with evidence elsewhere, particularly in Denmark.

The date of these new sites in Bute should perhaps be about 5000 B.C. in calendar years. The finds, which are in Rothesay Museum, may form the subject of a fuller paper in a future number. In the meantime, it is hoped that field walking on Bute by Society members and others will yield more mesolithic sites, some of which may be suitable for excavation in future.

THE ENIGMATIC CUP MARK CARVINGS ON BUTE

Dorothy N. Marshall

Cup marks are small shallow hollows on average 38mm (1½") across, made on stones, earth fast boulders or rock outcrops. They were made by Bronze Age men around 1800-1500 BC. When the cups are surrounded by one, two or three rings and when several of these symbols are on one stone they can be impressive and well earn the term of Rock Carvings or Petroglyphs. They are more common in the S.W. of Scotland than in the N.E. and in the North of England than in the South. Cup and ring carvings are found all over the world right South to Australia and New Zealand. The greatest concentration however is in North Britain. As yet no-one knows their meaning.

Twenty three years ago I would have said that we had no cup and ring marks on Bute and no cup marks apart from those long known on the standing stones at Craigberoch and Dunagoil and one cup mark recognised by Ludovic Mann about 1918 on Dunagoil Fort. Then, when digging the Neolithic Burial Cairn at Glenvoidean (Henshall But 1) a stone with 9 cups was recognised beside the track leading up to the Cairn. Another stone with 8 cups was found higher up the hill above the Cairn. Once members of the Society became "cup conscious" other carved stones were found. Ian Hopkins while out bird watching found two big stones beyond the Bull Loch. Two farmers' wives, Elisabeth Johnston and Irene Speirs, spotted stones with cup and ring marks when out looking for sheep. Jessica Middleton found a cup and ring stone on Inchmarnock and more stones on Kilmichael farm. Dan Boag, retired farmer from Inchmarnock, ranging the hills of Bute has brought the total so far known to 59 carved stones, 11 of them with cup and rings.

We have no great spreads of these carvings — nothing like the 100 cups with 3 or 4 rings each as at Auchnabreck near Lochgilphead or at Cairnbaan near the Crinan Canal.

R. B. W. Morris in his book 'Prehistoric Rock Art of Argyll' puts the carvings somewhere between 1800 and 1500 B.C. No artefacts have been found beside the stones to date them but in Argyll 1 in every 20 Bronze Age Burial Cists have the symbols cut on the inside of one of the slabs. The stone in the Bute Museum is a splendid example of this.

At one time it seemed as if they were connected in some way with metal working, but as more and more stones were found in areas outwith metal bearing rocks that theory was abandoned. There is no workable copper on Bute.

What they mean and why they were carved is a mystery. I heard Mr Morris give a lecture on these enigmatic petroglyphs. He showed

two slides, side by side, one of a Red Cross Flag and the other a group of cup and ring carvings. "We all know what the Red Cross stands for" he said "So did Bronze Age Man know what these symbols meant but we do not." Just as the cross has different meanings for us, so these symbols may have had different interpretations for those who carved them. Nearly a hundred solutions to this problem have been offered to Mr Morris but he does not accept any of them. It is assumed that the great spreads of the elaborate carvings had some ritual significance. Still more intriguing is the meaning of those stones with only simple cup marks on them.

It seems worthwhile to look at the 59 stones so far found on Bute. The Highland Boundary Fault runs through the island from Rothesay Bay through Loch Fad to Scalpsie Bay. Schist is to the North of it and it is in this area that 55 of the stones lie. Is it of any significance that of the 13 Bronze Age cist burials, those stone coffins sunk in the ground without a cairn above them, so far only 2 are South of the fault in the more easily cultivated land? Also, is it of any significance that of the 13 recorded Bronze Age Burial Cairns, 4 are to the North of the fault, 2 at Scalpsie and the other 7 are South?

There is no discernable pattern in the way the cups are placed. Sometimes 3 seem to be in line. They vary in number from 1 to 25 on a stone. On one very large stone at the Ettrick Burn there are only 3 cups while not more than 25m away is a small stone with 15 cups crowded on to it. One of the most interesting groups is that of 3 cups on the inside face of the North slab of the top chamber of the Cairn Baan Neolithic Cairn, Lenihuline Wood (Henshall But 3). Without a torch to light the chamber one can hardly see them, but they can be felt, unweathered, clean cut and deep. They give one an idea of how they must have looked to Bronze Age Man, freshly cut on the schist stones out on the open moorland. Sandstone weathers even more quickly than schist which is perhaps why only one group of cups has been found on sandstone. There are 18 cups cut on the vertical face of a cliff outside the cave near Ardnahoe Farm. Basalt type stone is very hard but at the foot of a cave in a dyke below Ardscalpsie are 3 well defined fairly deep cups.

Of the 59 stones so far found 18 are on arable land, 8 with cup and rings. The other 41 of them are up on moorland on ground where one would not expect settlement although near the Bull Loch are settings of stones indicating a hut circle and two oval huts (D and E 1972) and nearby at Muclich Hill one can see a platform, a possible hut circle and a rectangular setting of large stones (D and E 1981). Without

excavation it is not possible to date these structures. At Kilphedir, up Strath Gillie from Helmsdale, Dr Horace Fairhurst excavated a Bronze Age hut circle on high inhospitable land. It is known that the climate was better then than it is now. Pollen analysis has helped to determine that. The weather deteriorated about 1000 BC and peat blanketed the moors of Sutherland. Not very many Bronze Age houses are known but the stone foundations of one were excavated on sand dunes at Ardnave, Islay (Ritchie P.S.A.S. 1983) and another near Machrie Moor, Arran (Barber J. W. 1979).

Some of the cup marked stones appear to occur in groups. The most closely knit of these is on the steep side of the Ettrick Glen where, between two burns 1 Km apart and within approximately the 150 and 200m contours, 12 stones were recorded. Dan Boag had found others which he was unable to locate on the day we recorded the stones. The hillside is so steep that any dwellings would have been on platforms, of these there was no trace, so we assumed that the cup marks were not near any settlement. The cup marks on the stones varied from 1 to 25 with no obvious pattern to their placing. One stone had 3 cup and ring markings, 1 of which, having been protected by a dense clump of heather, seems as fresh and clear cut as the day it was made. It has a small cup touching the ring. The same design — like a penny farthing bicycle — was found at Mecknoch.

The rings around the cups vary in size from the 2 ringed one on Inchmarnock of 360mm to the Mecknoch 2 of 0.81mm. Those North of Ettrick Bay vary from 150mm to 240mm while those South of the bay are smaller, 0.81 to 11mm.

After walking up and down the glen I wondered if they could have been some kind of clan record noting perhaps the births and deaths or special events of the families on the different stones. But when the scatter of stones widely distributed over the North West moorland of Bute was plotted that did not seem quite the answer to the question. What did they mean? There are other questions. Were they professionally carved by cup carvers who travelled around executing them to order, or had each settlement their own carver? Were they carved secretly or were they done with celebrations?

I would like to thank the members of the Bute Society and those of the Cowal Archaeological Club who came out on the hills with me to record and plan the stones. To Dan Boag my special thanks for his persistence in walking the hills and finding so many of the stones and guiding me to them. I am also grateful to Mr Morris for reading this paper before publication and for allowing me to quote him.

CUP MARK CARVINGS ON BUTE

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CUP MARKS ON BUTE

Lenihulin (Cairn Baan). Chambered Cairn NS/006692. Dan Boag June 1985.

3 cups on inside face of SW side slab of NE chamber at end of the long Neo Burial cairn (Henshall BUT 3).

2 cups 50mm diameter 1 cup 100mm diameter clearly cut. 480mm in from end slab.

Little Dunagoil. Standing Stone NS/087533 T.B.N.H.S. 1963.

2 cups on standing stone which was incorporated in wall of longhouse.

Cups size of tea cup.

Dunagoil Fort. NS/085532. Ludovic Mann circa 1918. Dan Boag 1985.

1 cup rather larger and deeper than usual.

On schist outcrop on NE side of Vitified Fort beside domestic occupation.

Craigberoch. Standing Stone. NS/075636. Scheduled Monument.

2 cups. Stone stands near Craigberoch Farm. Cups larger than the usual ones on outcrops.

Ettrick Burn NS/03896828 Area. Dan Boag 1981. Discovery and Excavations 1981.

Group of 12 cup marked stones scattered on the E side of the steep sided Ettrick Glen. They lie between 2 burns running downhill about 1 km apart and approximately within the 150 and 200m contours.

These were found by Dan Boag who found one or two more which he has not located again.

Ettrick Burn 1. Dan Boag October 1981. D and E 1981.

6 cups small and shallow. On hump backed stone with cups on SW face only. Cups in a group.

Ettrick Burn 2. Dan Boag October 1981. D and E 1981.

9 cups. Large fairly flat stone with 7 small cups at N end and 2 close together at S end, one of which is particularly well formed.

- Ettrick Burn 3. Dan Boag October 1981. D and E 1981.
5 cups. Thick upright stone with rounded top. Probably more underground.
0.6m high 0.6m broad 0.2m thick.
The cups are set in an arc near the ground on one side. Well defined cups.
- Ettrick Burn 4. Dan Boag 23rd October 1981. D and E 1981.
25 cups. 2 flat stones lying close together just above the turf. Near top of hill perhaps 200m contour. Kilbride Cairn lies roughly E across the glen. N stone 20 small fairly faint cups, S stone 5 cups 3 larger than usual 55mm diameter other 2 small and faint.
- Ettrick Burn 5. Dan Boag 23rd October, 1981. D and E 1981.
5 faint shallow cups. Flat stone 1.68 x 1.10m lying close to ground.
- Ettrick Burn 6. Cup and Ring. Dan Boag 1981. D and E 1981.
3 cup and ring. 1 clear cut with small cup touching ring 'Penny farthing' of Mecknoch, 2 faint with channels. Rings 15cm diameter.
7 cups. On high boulder roughly rectangular 1.48 x 0.60m flat top sloping NW. Partly covered with heather.
- Ettrick Burn 7. Dan Boag 25th October 1981. D and E 1981.
4 cups. Flat oval stone 1.35 x 0.51m. One cup deeper and better made.
- Ettrick Burn 8. Dan Boag 1982. D and E 1982.
4 cups. On flat boulder just S Ardgoyle Burn partly turf covered.
- Ettrick Burn 9. Dan Boag October 1982. D and E 1982.
1 cup on erratic boulder 1.5 x 0.9m
- Ettrick Burn 10. Dan Boag October 1982. D and E 1982.
4 cups. Flat slab ice smoothed schist 1.67 x 1.06m.
- Ettrick Burn 11. Dan Boag October 1982. D and E 1982.
15 cups. On small diamond shaped stone 0.63 x 0.50m.
- Ettrick Burn 12. Dan Boag October 1982. D and E 1982.
1 cup. Flat rectangular slab with 1 cup in NW corner 0.96 x 0.50m.

- Drumachloy Area NS/02286727
Scatter of 11 cup marked stones lying between contour 70m - 200m. Lower ones in arable land, others on moorland and reclaimed moorland.
1 cup and ring on arable land.
- Drumachloy 1. Dan Boag 1983.
1 cup another possible. On earth-fast boulder 0.970 x 0.60m.
- Drumachloy 2. Dan Boag 1983.
6 cups, 3 of them faint 5 cm diameter.
On boulder with ice scratches, roughly rectangular 1.60 x 1.40m.
- Drumachloy 3. Dan Boag 1983.
5 cups. On flat-topped boulder that slopes gently, egg shaped stone.
Cups set along a groove.
- Drumachloy 4. Dan Boag 1983.
3 cups. On roughly round earth fast boulder 0.90 x 0.97m.
- Drumachloy 5. Dan Boag 1983.
5 cups. On the flat sloping top of a boulder almost square on top, each side 1m, 4 cups in line, 1 cup above the line. All faint.
- Drumachloy 6. Dan Boag 1983.
1 cup. On small flat stone at present under fence. Could have been carried from original position. Could have been a pivot hole.
Cup 6cm diameter 2cm deep.
- Drumachloy 7. Dan Boag 1983.
17 cups. On large bare stretch of outcrop 4.5m. long on a ridge. Only part of outcrop used. Cups scattered along a band about 50cm wide.
- Drumachloy 8. Dan Boag 1983.
1 cup. On partially exposed outcrop. Cup 5cm diameter.
- Drumachloy 9. Dan Boag 1985.
6 cups. On partially cleared outcrop. Cups in 2 lines of 3.
- Drumachloy 10. Dan Boag 1983.
5 cups. On ice carried boulder with flat top.

Drumachloy 11. Dan Boag

1 cup and ring, 4 cups. On small outcrop, flat, in field.
Cup 4cm diameter ring 18cm diameter.

Inchmarnock. Cup and Ring. NS/018609 North Park. Jessica Middleton 1976.

D and E 1977.

5 cup marks 3 of which are ringed.

On light grey schist slab of stone 3.10m x 3.30m. It might have been detached from live rock by the blast of a shell, shell hole close to it.

(Inchmarnock was used for practice firing during Hitler's War).
Slab lies tilted, stone very much weathered.

Ettrick Burn W Side 1. NS/035685 D. Marshall 1981.

5 cups on small stone 0.60 x 0.38m roughly pear shaped, cups at broader end. Stone lying against fence beside track leading up to Kilbride Cairn. probably not in its original position.

Ettrick Burn W Side 2. NS/035686. Dan Boag 1981.

3? cups. On stone in the marsh to the N of Kilbride Cairn. It was seen in passing and not examined.

Scarrel Area NS/023667 - 670 - 017 - 021 - 675 - 6 Dan Boag 1984.

8 cup marked stones scattered widely on hilly ground. 1 with 2 faint cup and rings.

1 and 2 are near Scarrel Farm House, others on rough ground and moor up to about 150m towards Eanass Hill.

Scarrel 1. Dan Boag 1984.

3 small cups. On boulder across the road from the old farm house.

Probably not the original position.

Scarrel 2. Dan Boag 1984.

20 cups, 2 small, 6 deeper and bigger, others 5cm circumference. In a scatter, no pattern. On earth-fast boulder 1.10m x 0.7m behind deserted farm house before burn.

Scarrel 3. Cup and Ring. Dan Boag 1984.

2 cup and ring, 5 cups possibly more. On earth-fast boulder, flat topped, surface much eroded so cups faint.

Scarrel 4. Dan Boag 1984.

13 cups. On flat topped roughly rectangular earth fast boulder.
Cups in 2 groups.

Scarrel 5. Dan Boag 1984.

8 cups. On square flat topped stone.

Scarrel 6. Dan Boag 1984.

11 cups. On high moor beside fence. Large rough boulder split.

Scarrel 7. Dan Boag 1984.

3 cups. On flat topped boulder roughly 1m square. High on moor.

Scarrel 8. 1984.

4 cups. On boulder to seaward side of fence over-looking Ettrick Bay.

Glenvoidean 1. NS 997706 1963 T.B.N.H.S. XVII Vol 49.

9 cups. On earth fast boulder with flat upper surface. Cups shallow, scattered over surface. Mica schist, much weathered. Stone is some 100m below Glenvoidean Cairn.

Glenvoidean 2. NS 998706 1963 D. Marshall. T.B.N.H.S. Vol. XVII 49.

8 cups. On ledge of earth fast boulder schist. Cups small 50mm, shallow worn make no pattern. 1 possible cup on upper surface of boulder.

Kilmichael Area.

Scatter of 8 cup marked stones on moorland.

2 stones have cup and ring one of which has 2 rings round the cup. Another stone has a possible ring. Four of the stones are all fairly near Glenvoidean Cairn.

Kilmichael 1. NS 008701 Torran Turach Jessica Middleton. D and E 1981.

7 cups 3 with 1 ring. On the S slope of a schist outcrop 3m x 2m x 0.5m high at SE. On its level surface are at least 7 cups at least 3 of which have 1 ring up to 20cm diameter.

- Kilmichael 2. NS012704 Torran Turach. Jessica Middleton. D and E 1981.
8 cups 1 with possible ring. On SE slope is a schist boulder 2m x 3m x 1m high on the SE side. On its level top are 9 cup marks 1 with a possible ring.
- Kilmichael 3. NS 012704 Torran Turach. Jessica Middleton. D and E 1981.
1 cup. 2m E of Kilmichael 2 is another single cup on a partially covered boulder of schist approximately 1m x 1.5m.
- Kilmichael 4. NS 012704 Torran Turach. Jessica Middleton. D and E 1981.
1 cup mark. 26m SE of boulder K2 is a small schist boulder partially uncovered. On its horizontal surface is a single cup mark.
- Kilmichael 5. Cup and 2 Rings. NS006709 Jessica Middleton. D and E 1981.
22 cups several of which have traces of rings round them one with 2 rings.
0.24m diameter.
NE side of Torran Chapple is a schist boulder 1.5m x 1m at ground level sloping 5°E. On its smooth top surface are at least 22 cup marks.
- Kilmichael 6. NS 005708. Jessica Middleton 1981. D and E 1981.
7 cups. On SE slope of Torran Chapple is a schist boulder. On its horizontal S facing slope there are 7 cups.
- Kilmichael 7. NR 997707. Jessica Middleton. D and E 1981.
22 cups some with traces of rings. On a schist boulder approximately 150m NE of Glenvoidean Chambered Cairn. At ground level it slopes approximately 25°SW. 22 cups some with traces of rings up to 0.24m diameter.
- Kilmichael 8. NR 996706. Jessica Middleton. D and E 1981.
1 cup. On a small boulder 1m x 1.5m (approx.)
- Bull Loch 1. NS 003726. Ian Hopkins. 1972. D and E 1972.
13 cups 3 distinct others rather faint. On flat topped earth-fast boulder.
2m x 1.25m x 0.75m high.

- Bull Loch 2. NS 003726. Ian Hopkins 1972. D and E 1972.
8 cups not very well defined. On smaller boulder 12m NE of Bull Loch. 1.
- Ballicaul NS 045636. Dan Boag 1982.
3 cups. On rock beside fence to N of Ballicaul farm house. It is now covered with cement obliterating the cup marks.
- Kilwhinlick NS 056625. Irene Speirs 1985.
4 cup and rings. Cups 38mm rings 100mm.
9 cups, 3-30mm diameter 1-50mm diameter 3-25mm diameter 2-62mm diameter.
On smooth schist rock jutting out from the bank 250m (approx.) below farm house.
3 of cup and rings close together.
- Mecknoch 1. Cup and ring. NS 048593. Elisabeth Johnston 1981. D and E 1982.
1 cup and ring with small cup touching ring. Near the edge of a schist boulder rather worn cup and ring with a cup touching the N side of the ring. Diameter of cup 43mm, diameter of ring 111mm. Diameter of other cup 37mm. Mecknoch 2, 4.63m to NW.
- Mecknoch 2. Cup and ring. NS 048593. Elisabeth Johnston 1981. D and E 1982. Pg 23.
1 Cup and ring with another cup touching ring.
On outcrop of schist slightly smaller and fainter than Mecknoch 1, 4.63m to SE. Diameter cup 31mm, diameter ring 81mm.
- Ardscalpsie 1. NS 049379. Dan Boag 2nd March, 1985.
3 cups. 3 deep well-made cups in a row near the floor of a cave. The cave is a cleft in basalt which slopes. The cups are cut on a slight flattening of the rock.
- Ardscalpsie 2. NS 050582. Dan Boag 1985.
3 cups well defined. On large rock 1.5 x 1.5m (circa) near Ardschalpsie farm yard.

Ardnahoe 1. NS 071571. 2nd March, 1985. Dan Boag.

18 cups. Cups cut on vertical cliff of sandstone just outside the cave. Rock and cups very much weathered although somewhat protected by slight overhang of conglomerate. The one at base of cliff which was partly covered by turf larger and deeper. No pattern discernable.

Shalunt NS 048713. W. M. Boyd 1983.

1 large cup 0.20m diameter. On large flat-topped boulder 3.10m x 1.80m. tilting NW beside burn on steep hillside with many boulders ice carried (?). Wooded hillside.

Rhubodach 1. Cup and ring. NS 027734. 13th October, 1984 Boag.

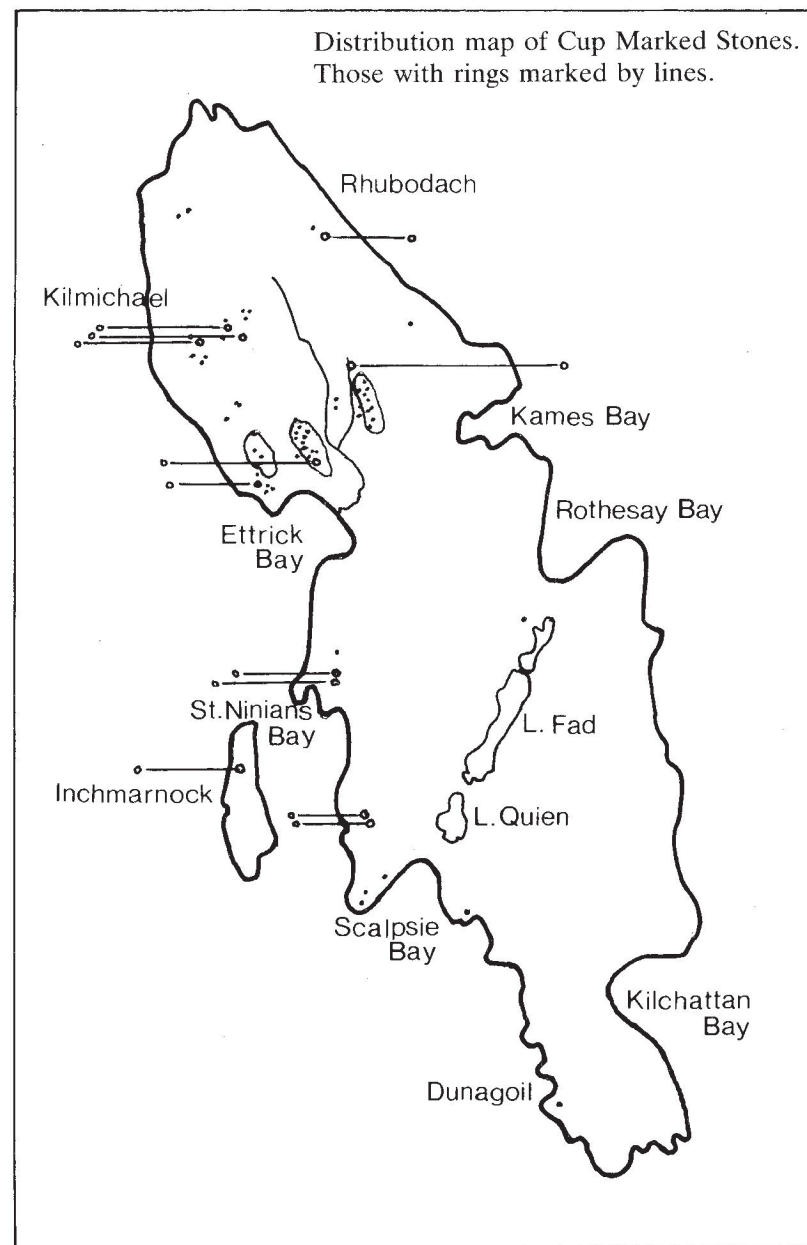
4 cup and ring, 12 cups. On large outcrop of schist about 15m above sea level 380m from road by shore in field. Surface of rock flat but rougher than usual. Cup marks concentrated in area 640mm E-W x 920mm N-S. 4 cup and rings faint, slightly larger and deeper than others. Ring diameter 150mm, much worn, 9 cups, also 1 or 2 possibly unfinished because of hard bit of rock. 1 cup at far edge of stone. Cups on average 5cm diameter.

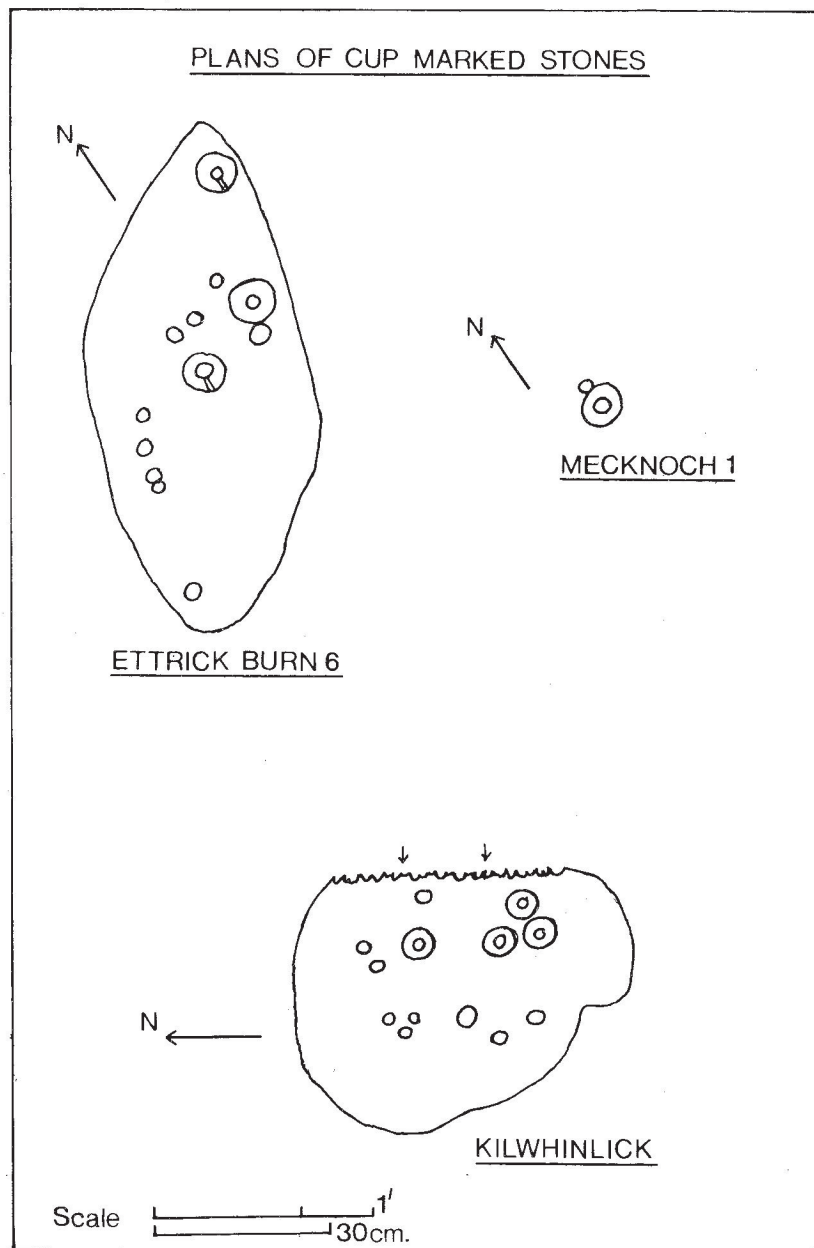
Rhubodach 2. NS 033734 13th October, 1984 Dan Boag.

3 cups. on steep face of outcrop lying about 250m inland from Rhubodach 1.
Small cups not very well made.

Note

Kilwhinlick 2 was found after going to press but is marked on the map.





THE INVESTIGATION OF KILBRIDE CAIRN

NS 045687

Dorothy N. Marshall

In 1981, Mr Dan Boag showed me a hitherto unrecorded Bronze Age cairn up the Ettrick Burn from Kilbride Farm. The Bute Estate gave willing permission for an investigation. Mr Crawford Currie, the farmer at Kilbride, was most interested and could not have been more helpful during the time we were working there. The investigation was carried out by members of the Buteshire Natural History Society under the direction of the writer. Members of the Cowal Archaeological Club also helped.

The Kilbride glen is very steep-sided rising from 100m at the burn to 200m about the level of the cairn. The slope is approximately 1 in 4. During the last Ice Age the glen was scoured by ice which left slabs of schist as it passed down. The soil is very thin.

The cairn has been much robbed in antiquity. An early track runs up the glen just below the cairn. This has an edging of stones on its upper side for 200m or so on each side of the cairn and stones have also been used in the bottoming of the track – these stones probably came from the cairn. As there are no walls or buildings on the hill where cairn material could have been used, it seems as though the cairn was never very high.

On first seeing Kilbride cairn two aspects strike one; first, the position on the steep side of the hill and second, the large roughly built cist. The cairn appears oval with an inner and an outer edge on the East. The North and South sides have practically disappeared making it difficult to see the original shape. The longer axis points down the slope. The outer edge to the East could well have been added to prevent cairn material from slipping down the hill. Some massive stones just further down the slope may have helped with this too. The inner cairn incorporated live rock to the South and used three large lumps of quartz and well chosen stones in its construction. The two edges came together at the West end where the cairn, now only one stone deep, merged with the hillside.

Two cists lie off centre in the inner cairn. One, running North to South is near the South edge. It is unusually large for a Bronze Age cist being 1.500m long. Mr Currie and his father before him knew of the cist but not of its significance – they thought of it as a lambing pen of some earlier shepherd. The side slabs are rough irregularly shaped schist. The South slab is wedge shaped 0.780m at the top and 0.430m at the foot. It now slopes outwards to the South. A packing of stones