

A POSSIBLE PROTOMEGALITH AT DUNAGOIL, IN BUTE

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A few years ago a visitor on holiday with his family in Bute noticed at Dunagoil a previously unrecorded megalithic structure, presumably a ruined burial chamber, lying at the foot of the north-east slope of Little Dunagoil.⁽¹⁾ The site overlooks Dunagoil Bay to the north-west, whilst to the south-east there is an extensive view over low-lying ground towards Garrochty and St. Blane's Hill.

In 1968 and 1969 Miss D. N. Marshall excavated the site, and I am indebted to her for the plan and elevation shown as Fig. 1. Four massive stone slabs seem to have formed the sides and end of a burial chamber which now lacks a capstone. The slab at the north end has fallen outwards. Beyond the east side is a recumbent slab which may once have been part of the structure. The present maximum length is about 4 ft. 6 in., but this might have been reduced to 4 ft. when the northern end stone stood upright. The width and height are each about 3 ft.

The reason why the northern end slab has fallen outwards is because it has not been embedded in a trench or hole, but has apparently been levelled up on boulders. Indeed all the upright slabs seem to have been set upright in this way, for the chamber is constructed on a rough boulder-strewn surface, perhaps rock fall or scree, so that the original floor level was difficult to determine. It was, however, noticeable that the angles between the sides and south end were carefully packed with small boulders (Fig. 1). The structure presumably had a supporting cairn of stones originally, and some of this may survive, especially to east and west of the sides, as shown on the plan. No finds were made during the excavation.

I have recently put forward the view that the earliest burial chamber in Scotland was a simple quadrangular structure of no great size, built overground, the first such

chambers appearing in south-west Scotland perhaps not long after 3000 B.C.⁽²⁾ Small though they were, they were intended for successive burials, and for these access might have been obtained either through an entrance at one end or, failing an entrance, then over the sides or over an end, if necessary after raising a capstone. For this type of structure the name **protomegalith** has been suggested, and it may be that Dunagoil is such a burial chamber.⁽³⁾ Miss Marshall points out that the northern end slab, if re-erected, would stand about 1 ft. higher than all the other slabs of the chamber. It is therefore conceivable that it might originally have been possible to squeeze one's way into the burial chamber at its northern end over a side slab and beneath the sloping capstone. It is still possible to enter the Early Neolithic Portal Dolmen at Dyffryn Ardudwy in this way, and in fact in no other fashion.⁽⁴⁾

It may, of course, be argued that this suggested protomegalith at Dunagoil is no more than a Bronze Age cist, erected in this instance above ground, instead of being set into a hole, because of the difficulty of excavating a hole in rocky ground. In the absence of finds it is impossible to be sure, but the massive construction of the Dunagoil chamber, and the likelihood that the capstone sloped from front to rear seem to argue that it is, in fact, a protomegalith of the Early Neolithic period.

FOOTNOTES

1. National Grid reference NS 086532; c. 50ft. OD.
2. *Megalithic Enquiries in the West of Britain*, ed. T. G. E. Powell (1969), 175ff.
3. *Ibid.*, 181.
4. *Antiquity* XXXVII (1963), 20.

THE STORY OF THE EXCAVATION OF THE NEOLITHIC BURIAL CAIRN AT GLENVOIDEAN NS 997705

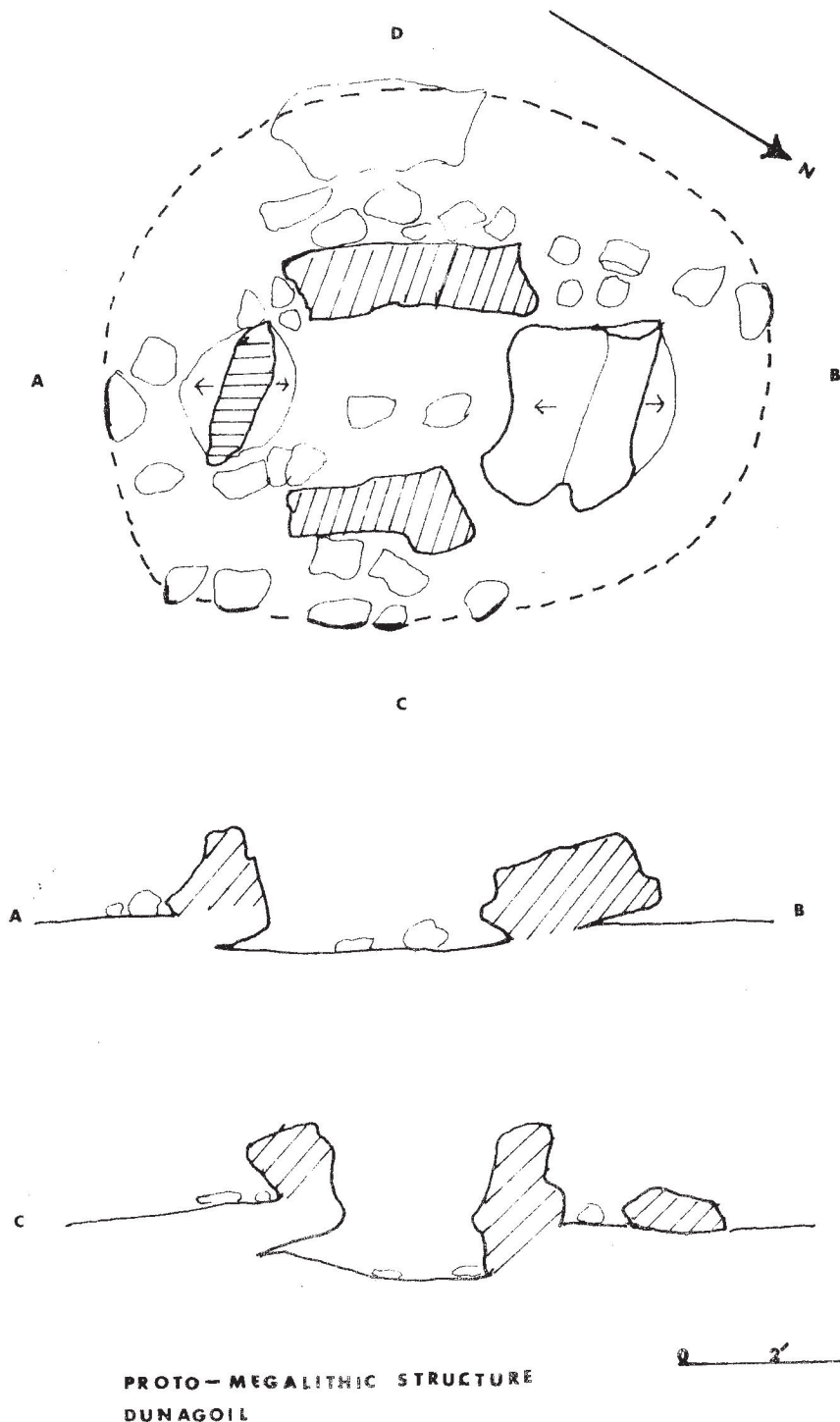
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It was in August 1962 that Mrs. D. B. Taylor (Isabel Milligan) first recognised that the two upright stones on the hill above the Kilmichael Chapel were part of a Neolithic Burial Cairn. When I visited it with her the two schistose stones stood 2'6" apart, there were stones between them and under the heathery tangle was a large flat stone. Behind was a green circular area about 30' in diameter, artificially flattened from the hillside.

The following Easter we started to excavate and excavation continued in a series of short campaigns. The final one should be at Easter 1970. The full report will appear after that. At least 90 people took part in the work, there were members of the Buteshire Natural History Society, members of the Cowal Archaeological Society, men of the Royal Navy, students from Dundee and Cambridge as well as interested friends who came for the odd day's work. The work could not have been accomplished without the help of the girls and boys of the Junior Naturalists who acted as bucket boys. One or two, who came back season after season, acquired a seeing eye for soil changes and a skill in trowelling, notably Sandra Strong and Hugh Doggart.

Work started on the Saturday before Easter, by Tuesday the outline of the burial chamber was defined, 7" below the modern surface. It took the rest of the week to clear it as we took out one half of the fill at a time to see if there was any layering in the soil. This left very little room to manoeuvre, so slowing down the work. The chamber was filled with earth and stones, a deliberate filling after the final burial. A long rectangular stone stood upright in one corner, it may have had some ritual significance or it may have slipped from its position as a lintel stone.

The great excitement came when the rim of a pot appeared. From then it was what Wheeler described as a



PROTO-MEGALITHIC STRUCTURE
DUNAGOIL

FIG. 1.