

KINBEACHIE FARM

The following report is derived from a conversation held between Jonathan Wordsworth and John Fraser, 1 Kinbeachie Farm, Findon, Black Isle on the 8th March 1995. The purpose of this report is to make a record of the finds made on his farm as recorded by Mr Fraser.

The site was discovered in January 1993 when a trench was being dug for a new water supply parallel to the existing public road. The back-actor machine revealed a stone heap just below the plough soil and lying mostly to the N of the trench. The stones dug out of the trench were rounded and blackened.

Mr Fraser informed Mr Woodham of Dingwall Museum of his discovery and Mr Woodham visited the site. In Mr Woodham's opinion it was the site of a burnt mound on the evidence of blackening on the stones. Mr Fraser resolved to excavate further partly because he wished to lower the cairn to avoid his plough being damaged by the stones.

A low cairn was revealed about 5' long by 2' wide. The centre was about 1' high with 3 larger stones set amongst the smaller stones. The edge of the cairn was fringed by smaller stones of about 3-4" diameter. The stones extended at least 1' beyond the head of the later revealed 'cist' but ended almost precisely at the foot end. There was a distinct fall in the ground of about 4" from head to foot so that the stones at the foot lay almost directly above the cut of the 'cist'. There was about 1' of soil between the base of the ploughsoil and the yellow clay subsoil. This subsoil was about 4" thick lying directly over the sandstone bedrock.

The stones were heavily blackened by charcoal and Mr Fraser considers that the wet weather made this colouration more exaggerated than it would otherwise have been with the stones acting as a sump for the water-pipe trench.

Mr Fraser also had Bob Gourlay from HRC Archaeology Section visiting the site and Mr Gourlay advised him to backfill the site. Mr Fraser resolved to do this but decided to remove the stones first to prevent damage to his plough. While doing this he discovered that the ground was slightly softer in the middle and he was able to excavate a full spade depth. Further excavation revealed this as a pit cut in stone. The fill of the pit was not obviously different to the clay subsoil though it did contain pieces of sandstone, the largest being the size of a fist. One piece of sandstone chipping was found. Mr Fraser estimated the pit as being about 2' deep. At about 1' down there were brown stains. There was no obvious change in fill at the base.

One piece of pottery was found and it came from within the cairn about 6" down within the stones and it was discovered after the 'cist' had been largely dug out. It was excavated by trowel from underneath and lay within the black soil.

Mr Fraser then carefully excavated around the 'cist' to reveal it in plan. He did this carefully with his nephew, cleaning the stone around the edge by brush as the surface of the stone was quite fragile. The 'cist' had a squared end and a more rounded head. There were slight recesses at both ends which may have supported a lid. The head end was less deeply recessed and had a more irregular cut with 2 'horns' and a 'tongue'. It was aligned approximately NW/SW with the head end pointing towards Rosemarkie where the sun rose in midsummer. It was found in the third field E of the farmhouse, known as the 5 acre field, and is sited at NH 6273 6253.

Decorated neolithic pottery came from under a stone cairn revealed by Mr Fraser when ploughing a headland on the S side of his field. There had formerly been a bank here but this was removed by the council as part of a road widening scheme. Mr Fraser thought the cairn lay to the

N rather than under the bank. Mr Fraser described it as the best made cairn he had ever seen being beautifully rounded. It lay 2' down under the ploughsoil and was badly damaged by the plough.

The stones within the cairn were in a charcoal-rich soil. Mr Fraser dug up the disturbed stones and riddled the soil. 9" under the cairn was a squared block of red sandstone (size?). This was the only stone at the base of the cairn. It appeared to be water-worn which suggested to Mr Fraser it had been brought up from the beach. Beneath this stone was a large flint scraper and a piece of decorated pottery. They lay directly under the stone. The bottom the ground was not found and only half the cairn was excavated. The stone was returned to the cairn.

4' W of the cairn was a dump of clay, dark yellow/brown in colour and near this dump were several pieces of decomposed pottery that crumbled when they were lifted.

The cairn lies in the field immediately E of the farmhouse at NGR NH 6233 6217.

A trough quern was dug up c45 years ago in this field c45 years ago about 3/4 the way down the field when an earlier water supply was being put in.

Unidentified prehistoric pottery, including a fine rim sherd, has come from the surface this season in the second field E of the farmhouse known as the 15 acre field. This is associated with a small spread of charcoal and lies to the NE of a large rectangular hollow in the field. A distinct rounded sandstone was also found here. Between this area of burning and the fence to the NE a deposit of pink clay has been ploughed up. This is markedly different to the usual subsoil.

A flint scraper was found by Mr Fraser at the base of his middle field at cNH 6275 6280 and a further flint was found this year by Mr Wordsworth at NH 6270 6275.

A third cairn of stones has been found in the most easterly of Mr Fraser's fields at the top of the hill. It has not been excavated. It is oblong-shaped with stones on black soil on top of mixed soil. It lies at NH 6294 6275.

To the W of the ridge in the 5 and 15 acre fields discrete spreads of charcoal have been ploughed up. It is unclear how they relate in time and function to the other features. Mr Fraser believes them to be midden dumps and sees significance in their alignment to the NW of the cairns.

A deposit of winkle shells has been found in the first field E of the farmhouse. Examination of the first OS map edition of 1860 (?) shows this to be the position of a now removed croft-house. There is a slight rise in the ground and Mr Fraser has removed several large stones here over the years.

In the Forestry Commission wood to the NW of the farm Mr Fraser has discovered a roundhouse of c9m diameter at cNH 623 627. The remains of another structure badly damaged by forestry ploughing and also possibly also a roundhouse, lie at cNH 62225 6250.