

Toum Bronze-age Cairn; NH92SE0007

Access Audit Site 101

Parish of Duthil & Rothiemurchus

Owner: Seafield Estates, Andrew Norval, Seafield Estates Office, York Place, Cullen, Buckie, AB56 4UW

Description

Toum, burial cairn (Bronze Age: 2000 - 1800 BC): This is a massive example of the stone burial cairns that are found in northern Scotland. Burial in stone cairns originated in the Neolithic period (4000 - 2300 BC), when chambered cairns were built and re-used for two thousand years by whole families or tribes. This changed at the beginning of the Bronze Age (2000 BC), as cairns, no longer chambered, were built up over a single, stone coffin, reflecting the importance of the individual. The Toum cairn commands good views out over Strathspey to the east and south, and it would have stood out as a visible landmark serving to glorify the dead and, perhaps more importantly, the living relatives.

OS sheet 36: turn off the A95 onto the track leading to Ouchnoire Farm; where the track branches, bear left and continue for 200 metres

The cairn consists of a large, rounded mound of stones. It is located on an upper break of slope overlooking the floodplain of the Spey, though now it is shielded from general view by a copse of birch trees. It appears to be complete, which is unusual for a monument of this size in B&S. It is possible that the site was "investigated" and rebuilt, but that would be unusual, as most cairns lie open. It is likely that this cairn covers a cist burial containing a crouched inhumation, possibly accompanied by grave goods; there is a possibility of more than one cist. The cairn is littered with rusting wire and other farm rubbish, but this could be cleared quite easily.

Pros

Good views

If the cairn is complete then this is relatively unique for B&S

The site is easy to reach

Cons

The fact that the cairn appears complete is not all good – the exposure of the central cist in other examples demonstrates the function of the monument very graphically. This looks like a big pile of stones – okay, we know it's more than that, but people visiting the site might be disappointed.

The cairn is littered with farm rubbish

Proposals

This site is imposing and impressive - if you know what it is you're looking at. Without underestimating the visitor, it is worth stating that most people do not understand the significance of these monuments, or have an idea that is completely at odds with the current wisdom. Information in libraries might not be easy to locate (if it exists), and at the moment there are no heritage centres in the area which expand on these sites. It seems to be significant that the earlier Clava-type cairns are located on the lower terraces of the river floodplain, in what would probably have been relatively open farmland, ie: central to a community. Whereas the later, Bronze-Age cairns such as Toun (other examples on Sluggan Hill, Delfour, and many more) tend to be on the upper break of slope dominating the lower lying ground, ie: superior to the community. It is information like this, adding to the visual evidence (ie: the cairn itself), that should be presented on an information sheet. Whether this should be a discretely placed panel or a leaflet is a matter for consideration. Information on a panel must be designed so that it complements the monument, rather than attempting to be the focus of attention (the place where all is explained) thus detracting from the monument. Panels should be a preparation for the visual appreciation of the monument, informative without being conclusive, ie: stimulating the imagination rather than dulling it with facts. A panel must not read: "We are the experts and these are the facts", or words to that effect. Content is essential; use of graphics, presenting information that is otherwise invisible / not available to the visitor, and textual information that doesn't simply describe the monument as it can be seen, but is additional, even provocative in a positive sense, stimulating the imagination of the visitor.

Access still needs to be confirmed with the owner (letter December 1999); vehicular access or pedestrian, or a combination of the two. Vehicular access would require a designated parking area - if a panel was erected then it could be located beside the parking area, reducing the visual interference at the site.

(See also proposals for Aviemore Ring Cairn, Site 70)

Costs

Parking for 2 vehicles = £1000

Interpretation panel - £2000

Bibliography

Oram, R. Moray & Badenoch: A Historical Guide p.20



The cairn is well preserved

TOUM, BRONZE-AGE CAIRN

...but littered with recent rubbish

