Stoneyfield / Raigmore Neolithic Building and Bronze Age Cairn

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When the A9 was being upgraded in the 1970s, a cairn (MHG3723) was excavated, and then moved to behind Raigmore Community Centre. The first phase of the site is represented by some pits with grooved ware pottery, a rectangular post built structure with a hearth and a post built linear setting going northeast from the structure. Whether the building was domestic or ritual is unclear, but it is important evidence for our knowledge of Neolithic structures. The grooved ware pottery also provides evidence of Late Neolithic contacts.

The kerb cairn was built respecting this building, and later had four cist burials associated with it. Antiquarian reports mention two stone circles, and the site is often cited as a clava-type cairn. However, it is atypical in several ways. No stone circle or traces of one were uncovered. The interior of the kerbs was not filled with rubble. Burials appear to have been placed beneath individual cairns, the large cairn in the centre (overlaying the timber structure) and five smaller examples. However, it does have the classic grading in height towards the southwest. The earliest burial connected with the new cairn was a cist with a food vessel, with a C-14 date of 2290-1979 cal BC.

Richard Bradley (2000) has noted that there are two possible interpretations of the site. In the first, the timber building was demolished or decayed and was replaced by the central cairn, and covered a pit with cremations and grooved ware. A later phase of activity saw the monument enlarged and a boulder wall constructed to enclose the first cairn and the position of the house. Thereafter the cairn was used for burials for some time.

In the second interpretation, the structure may have been enclosed by a circular wall when it was standing or while it decayed. The outer kerb may have defined an open area outside the building. The central cairn would then have been added later once the structure had disappeared.

Regardless of interpretation, the fact remains that the Bronze Age structure respected the earlier building, and shows respect for earlier occupation. Richard Bradley also notes the importance of the cairn focussing to the southwest, while the earlier setting for the structure was to the northeast.

The excavation was noteworthy in having 19 radiocarbon dates, although these were undertaken at an early date when bulk samples were often needed. The phasing is difficult to determine, and the National ScARF Neolithic panel recommended that further work be undertaken.

The site also has limited evidence of later use: a Roman brooch found in the top soil, and a pit with Medieval glass and iron fragments, which yielded the latest C-14 date for the site of cal AD 1280-1460 (at one sigma). This provides further evidence of Roman imports to the Highlands, and then for Medieval activity in the Inverness area.

Public feeling for the monument led to it being re-assembled behind Raigmore Community Centre (MHG24979). Projects by the Workers’ Educational Association and Adopt-a-Monument researched details of this move. The Adopt-a-Monument project also excavated the current position of the re-erected cairn.

Further information:

Simpson1996

Bradley 2000, 168-170