HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

FIELD MONUMENTS

4 DISTRICT
CAITHNESS

8 PARISH
WICK

9 REGIONAL STATUS
GUARDIANSHIP

10 CONCORDANCE
05 ND 24 SE 1

11 FORM
STANDING STRUCTURE

12 DIMENSIONS
59.62m LONG

13 CONDITION
RESTORED

14 RELATIONSHIP OF ELEMENTS

15 SHAPE
TRAPEZOIDAL

16 THREAD AND DATE

17 LAND USE
HEATH

18 GEOLOGY

19 VEGETATION

20 HYDROLOGY/DRAINAGE

21 RELIEF
GENTLY SLOPING RIDGE

22 ASPECT
WSW

23 ALTITUDE
110 = 120m OD

24 EXCAVATION (EXCAVATOR: DATE: EXTENT: QUALITY)
1. ANDERSON & SHEARER: 1886: PARTIAL: UNSCIENTIC.
2. RITCHIE, P.R. 1967: PARTIAL: SCIENTIFIC.
4. MASTERS, L.J.: FULL: SCIENTIFIC.

25 BIBLIOGRAPHY (AUTHOR: DATE: TITLE: JOURNAL OR PUBLISHER: VOLUME: PAGE)
1. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1976: 1/10 000 MAP

26 DIGITAL PHOTO NO.

27 GROUND PLAN NO.

28 SLIDES NO.

29 DIGITAL PHOTO NO.

30 HARAP NO.

31 ARCHIVE AND LOCATION

32 MUSEUM/LIBRARY

33 FIELDWORK DATE

34 DIGITAL PHOTO NO.

35 DIGITAL PHOTO NO.

36 DIGITAL PHOTO NO.

37 DIGITAL PHOTO NO.

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41 DIGITAL PHOTO NO.

42 DIGITAL PHOTO NO.

43 DIGITAL PHOTO NO.

44 NAME & ADDRESS OF OWNER

45 ATTITUDE OF OWNER

46 NAME & ADDRESS OF TENANT

47 ATTITUDE OF TENANT

48 ACCESS & RESTRICTIONS

49 NAME & ADDRESS OF FINDS/RECORDER: RECORD DATE

50 RECORD DATE
AM: 24.9.1985

51 CHECK DATE

52 TEXT
"See continuation cards for text."
"See also HND 24 SE 002 and HND 24 SE 003."

"HND 260441 CAIRNS OF CAISTER" (11)
8. PEACHEM, R.W. 1963: GUIDE TO PREHISTORIC SCOTLAND: Batsford: p43
11. HMR (SDD): 1985: LIST OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS
Three cairns, two of which, 'A' and 'B', are chambered and have none of their particular type of tripartite chamber.

'A': On first appearance a long, horned, Orkney-Grosmont type cairn, 195 ft long with two lateral chambers, this cairn has been shown by Dr. Corcoran's excavations in 1971 to be comparable with the Glenron 1 (NM 16 33 14) in that it has originated as two chambered round cairns, which have been incorporated in the existing structure. A third chamber, probably intact, has been located in the 'tail' at the SW end, probably in the position suggested by Miss Henshall, on the evidence of displaced slabs, 10 ft within the edge.

Excavation by Anderson and Shearer in 1986 revealed a 6 ft high double-faced wall bounding the long cairn. Further excavation, aimed at consolidating the structure, was carried out by P. A. Ritchie in 1967 (7). "When Corcoran's excavation is complete, the cairn will be restored and will take the form of two 'domes' over the more northerly chambers, and a 'tail' on the SW.

The name 'Grey Cairns of Gunston' formerly applied to the three cairns, but judging from the Old Say sign which does not mention cairn 'C', the name seems now to apply to the round cairn, now restored and protected, and the long cairn, currently undergoing restoration. (OSPI:AA:11.4.1972)

Further excavation on the long cairn, 'A', first by Masters, has shown that it contains only two chambers, that suspected to the SW being an internal coating wall protecting the facade.

Corcoran's work demonstrated that the more northerly of the two chambers was enclosed by a wall within the long cairn, and the later excavations indicated that the second chamber was similarly enclosed, as Anderson believed, but which with Corcoran's work in the 1960's appeared to disagree. Unfortunately, work on this problem had to be abandoned because of possible damage to the already conserved chamber roof.

The pre-cairn land surface yielded numerous undecorated Neolithic sherds and several flints, both worked and unworked, but the only indications of structures were post- and stake-holes, some of which appeared to be directly related to the laying-out of the centre line along the main axis of the cairn.

Reconstruction work on the cairn wall and S facade is complete and it was expected that the cairn material would be replaced in 1984. (OSPI:SS:8.8.1982)
The chamber is entered through a lintel of stone, and a number of stone blocks are arranged in rows to support the lintel. The chamber is rectangular in shape, with dimensions of approximately 18 feet by 12 feet. The walls are constructed of large stone slabs, and the floor is level with the surrounding ground. The ceiling is flat, and a small opening is present at the north end of the chamber, which may have served as an air vent or a light source. The chamber is approached by a narrow passage, which leads from the north side of the pyramid.

At the rear end of the chamber, there is a small annex, which appears to have served as a storage or utility room. This annex is separated from the main chamber by a wall, and it contains a number of stone blocks and a small opening in the north wall.

The chamber is lined with stone slabs, and there are a number of stone blocks and artifacts scattered throughout the chamber. There is a small opening in the south wall, which may have served as a ventilation shaft or a means of access to the underground passages. The chamber is approached by a narrow passage, which leads from the north side of the pyramid. The passage is lined with stone slabs, and there are a number of stone blocks and artifacts scattered throughout the passage.
"Grey Cairns of Camster." Camster.

Situated about \(\frac{1}{4}\) m. N. of Camster Lodge, on the W. side of the road from Lybster to Watten, are two remarkable cairns.

563. Chambered Cairn (horned, long).—The most northerly is a horned long cairn, lying NNE. and SSW. (fig. 51 and pl. LIXIII.). Its extreme length is 195'; its breadth at the wider end, which looks to the NNE., is 64', and at the narrow or SSW. end 32'. The horns are short but well defined. It was excavated by Dr Joseph Anderson in 1865–66, and from his description the following particulars are for the most part taken:—

On the E. side of the cairn was a passage leading into a small chamber directly under the apex of the cairn. This passage was little more than about 2' high at the entrance, and about the same in width. It went nearly straight inwards for about 17', when it turned a little to the right, and entered the chamber by an irregularly arched doorway. The chamber was a small cell, the lower part of its sides walls composed of five slabs set on edge. These slabs were irregular in shape and unequal in height, and the space above them was levelled up and built upon with smaller stones. The walls thus carried up were gradually brought to an approximately circular form, and converged to a bee-hive roof, covered in by a single stone of about 9' square, at a height of about 6' from the floor. The floor was formed of two large flagstones, which roughly fitted the interior space. The chamber contained no trace of any sepulchral deposit. Its principal interest was that its constructional features were complete from floor to roof. At 50' along the E. side of the cairn was an opening of another passage, 10' in length, leading into a tripartite chamber. This passage was remarkable for its unusual height and width, and also because it was rudeley arched across with overlapping stones for a few feet at the outer end, while further in it was lintelled over with stones laid flat from side to side. The lintelled portion was 4' high and 2' wide, and where the roof of the passage merged into that of the first compartment of the chamber, the lintels rose successively like the under side of a stair from front to back of the roof of the compartment. The walls of the chamber remained entire to a height of 5' to 6', and at that height showed signs of convergence all round. The first pair of divisional stones were 6' to 7' in height, the second pair only 5'. It seemed as if the second and third compartments had been covered by one bee-hive roof, the first being lintelled over as has already been described. The main part of the back was occupied by one large slab. The floor of the chamber was a compacted layer of clay and ashes, of varying thickness, intermixed with quantities of burnt bones, human and animal. In the loose soil which lay on the surface of this compacted mass there were found a few fragments of skulls and other bones of the human skeleton, unburnt, and mingled with splintered bones of the horse, ox, deer, and swine. No fragments of pottery, nor chips nor implements of flint were found.
Beyond the exploration of the two chambers no further examination of the cairn was made by Dr. Anderson, and it is possible, therefore, that additional chambers still exist in it.

The entrance to the small chamber on the north is still open, and the passage clear of debris for 10 yards, but the chamber itself appears to be now filled up. The entrance to the second chamber is blocked, but the chamber is still remarkably perfect. Only on the S has a small portion of the wall fallen. The elevation of the cairn is some 8' or 9' at the N. end, and 5 to 6' at the S. The constructional wall around the exterior is still visible at the N. end.

See Mom. Antiquity, Scot., iii, p. 221; Anderson, The Bronze and Stone Age, p. 240 (plan and illus.).
Camster
LONG CARN

ND 264H2. (D.O.E.) Work was resumed at the Camster long cairn in the area of the SW forecourt and adjacent 12m length of cairn. A limited amount of excavation had previously taken place in this area, directed by the late Dr John X. W. E. Cooney, *Discovery and Excavation*, 1971, p. 52-53).

The SW forecourt was found to measure 8.5m between the short stubby horns. The edges of both forecourt and horns were formed of large sandstone blocks, nowhere more than two courses high. Within the forecourt area and extending for some 2m beyond the horns was a layer of slabs, mainly laid horizontally, but with some pitched slabs adjacent to the forecourt blocks and horns. Beneath this forecourt blocking, and resting on the old ground surface, were small heavily abraded sherds of Neolithic pottery and a single flint scraper. A small pit and a burnt area were also found beneath the blocking.

In his excavation of the NE forecourt, Dr Cooney demonstrated that there had originally been a straight dry-stone facade across the end of the cairn. A substantial platform had been built in front of the facade, which diverged at either end to form two horns with steps leading up to the platform. Although the SW forecourt had been considerably disturbed by stone robbing for the adjacent sheep enclosure, enough survived to suggest that the large forecourt blocks could have served as a platform, particularly as there was evidence of paving with flagstones above the large blocks. However, there was no evidence for steps connected with the horns of the SW forecourt. Immediately behind the platform are the remains of an unbroken dry-stone wall some 5m in length and less than 1m in height, which might be interpreted as a facade. It is noticeable however, that the line of this wall diverges from that of the platform, particularly at the NW end, where it appears to turn almost at right-angles to form an internal cairn wall, well within the line of the inner revetment.

CATHERON
Camster — Chambered Long Cairn

ND 264H2. (D & E. 1971, p. 52-53; 1976, p. 25-26). Immediately behind the SW facade, an orthostat projected through the cairn material roughly on the centre line of the cairn. Excavation has shown that the orthostat was the only intact survivor of an irregular line of orthostats behind the facade, the rest most probably robbed to build the nearby sheep enclosure. The purpose of these orthostats seems to have been to retain the cairn mass from the dry-stone walled facade. An area of the cairn extending for 10m NE from the SW facade has been removed to the pre-cairn land surface. From this surface two flint knives, and a few sherds of Neolithic pottery were recovered.

Excavation of the cairn edge on the NW and SE sides for a distance of 28m from the horns of the SW forecourt has revealed that the double revetment of inner wall and outer kerb is not a continuous feature. On the SE side the kerb merges with the wall at a point just over 20m from the tip of the SE horn. It is clear that the kerb does not exist for a similar distance on the NW side. The wall and, where it existed, the kerb, were found to be in a very collapsed state. Throughout the 50m or so of cairn edge investigated, in most places only two or three courses of walling survived in situ. At several points on the NW side even the foundation blocks of the wall had tilted outwards from their original positions. A detailed examination of the wall collapse has led to the conclusion that the wall was certainly 0.5m high, but was most probably around 1.10 to 1.20m high. There seems to have been no deliberately placed extra revetment material. Where the wall had simply tilted forwards, the faces of the wall stones were found to be in direct contact with the old ground surface. It seems possible that the wall at the SW end of the cairn had started to collapse not long after its construction.
Chambered Long Cairn

ND 260442 The removal of cairn material in the SW half of the long cairn
allowed investigation of further areas of the pre-cairn land surface. The
pattern remains much the same as that previously reported, with more finds
of mainly undecorated Neolithic pottery and worked and unworked flints.
Positive indications of pre-cairn land use still remain elusive. A full
programme of soil analysis was carried out, both on the pre-cairn land sur-
face and on the soils surrounding the site.

A detailed investigation of the collapsed long cairn wall and kerb on the
SE side suggests that the kerb gradually increased in height and formed a
single revetment around most of the SW half of the cairn. At the point of
junction on the SE side, the wall is very poorly built and appears to de-
crease in height before stopping completely some 12m from the SW end of
the cairn. To date, no trace of a double revetment has been found on the
NW side for a distance of 28m from the SW end.

Two finds of interest from the basal layer of the cairn are a saddle quern
made on a granite boulder 360mm by 310mm by 160mm, and a smaller granite
boulder with small ground surface on one face.