



**CARNASSARIE CIST,  
ARGYLL**



**An Archaeological Excavation**

**January 2013**

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## Summary

Following the possible discovery of a cist cover on Carnassarie Farm the site was examined to quickly reveal that the stone was indeed the cover of an intact a cist structure. The excavation of the cist revealed it was well constructed and had been partially constructed within a pit cut into the natural rock. Apart from what are likely residual finds, the cist contained no evidence of a burial or associated grave goods, which had either been removed or completely degraded. Two of the three cover slabs had pecked cup marks, which is only the second such cist recorded within the Kilmartin Glen area.



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## Acknowledgements

Kilmartin House Museum would like to thank Rosemary Neagle for reporting the cist and her help in the excavation. The Museum would also like to thank the Craigend Trust for funding the excavation work and thanks also go to Sheila Clerk for proof reading the report.

# 1 Introduction

This report deals with the results of excavation work on a newly discovered cist site at Carnassarie Farm. The work took place over three days in June 2012 and the site code used was CRK 12.



Figure 1: Location of Carnassarie in Argyll

## 2 The Project Circumstances

Following a relatively dry period of weather Rosemary Neagle, proprietor of Carnassarie Farm, observed what appeared to be the shape of a large flat stone situated under the grass/topsoil cover. Thinking this might represent a cist or fallen standing stone Rosemary approached Kilmartin House Museum to investigate the site. During the ensuing visit topsoil was removed from around the stone, revealing two other horizontal slabs that appeared to form the cover of a cist structure, this borne out by the presence of what appeared to be the tops of side slabs. One of the cover stones also had a pecked cup-mark on its surface. Once drawn, the site was then covered and the topsoil reinstated. In June 2012 a team from Kilmartin House Museum returned to the site in order to more fully examine the site.

## 3 Archaeological Background

The area within and around Carnassarie Farm has been the subject of a series of archaeological studies. Many of the earlier studies, principally those conducted by Marion Campbell, subsequently appeared in the Royal Commissions Inventory of Mid-Argyll (Campbell and Sandeman 1964, RCHAMS 1988). More recently, work conducted by Alan Begg and Heather James has reported on sites within Carnassarie Farm (Begg 1998, James 2006) and several archaeological sites have been more sporadically reported within Discovery and Excavation in Scotland. As part of the Dalriada Project a systematic walkover survey of Carnassarie Farm was conducted by Kilmartin House Museum in the spring of 2007 which recorded over 240 sites (Regan 2007). Possibly dating to the prehistoric period were two probable burial monuments, which, along with several previously unrecorded cup-marked rock panels, added an upland dimension to the story of prehistoric activity in Kilmartin Glen. The presence of a saddle quern and the recovery of a worked piece of quartz also indicated possible early occupation of the slopes around Carnassarie. Aside from the Prehistoric period, this work has also highlighted the presence of fairly extensive, but dispersed, settlement on the eastern slopes of Sron an Tighe Dhuibh. It is not known when this settlement was last inhabited, although it was certainly abandoned prior to the compilation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey in 1873. The size and form of some of the larger rectangular structures perhaps indicates a Post Medieval date, although other structures may be earlier in origin. The survey has also shown that the head dyke to the west of the township of Carnassarie Mor strictly delineated activities on either side. The eastern and internal area was given over to rig and furrow cultivation. To the west on Cnoc Creach little settlement or cultivation evidence was found, thus this area has been interpreted as pasture. Although the north west of the survey area contained an occasional structure and field, it would appear to have been mainly exploited for peat – which would undoubtedly have supplied both Carnassarie Mor and the settlement/s on Cnoc Creach. While the survey provided a more comprehensive picture of settlement activity, large gaps remain in our knowledge about its chronology and function. To better understand the significance of the survey results several sites were highlighted for further work, including potential excavation.

In 2008 the site of what appeared to be an artificially levelled terrace was investigated. The site measured approximately 25m by 18m with upright stones forming a rough arc around the southern side. Several large stones appeared to delineate its southern periphery and were thought to perhaps be the remnants of a large kerb. A linear bank appeared to survive on its western side and some upright slabs of stone lay within its circuit, which were initially thought to be the remnants of a cist. The working hypothesis was that this feature was the robbed out remnants of a burial cairn or some form of enclosure (Ellis 2008). The finds included a few abraded and fairly undiagnostic sherds of prehistoric pottery and a single thumbnail scraper. There also appeared to be dumping of soil along the S edge of the platform, the dumped soils containing quantities of burnt bone and charcoal, the later including barley seeds. The seeds were sent for C14 dating and returned a date of 2210 ± 30 BP, this late Iron Age date along with what may be evidence of domestic dumping perhaps indicating a roundhouse site.

## 4 The Landscape Setting of the Cist

The cist (centred NM 83650 01728) lies approximately 700m N of the deserted settlement of Carnassarie Mor and is situated on a raised knoll located at the SE end of a natural terrace, now used as sheep pasture. The terrace affords magnificent views down Kilmartin Glen and overlooks the prehistoric monuments of Carnassarie Standing Stones (NMRS: NM80SW 22) and a burial cairn (NMRS: NM80SW 21) to the S and the impressive Carn Ban (NMRS: NM80SW28) to the E. In addition, roughly 500m to the SW is a mound that appears to comprise enhanced natural with a possible cist slab at its centre (Site 111 Regan 2007); this possible burial mound is not visible from the site.



Figure 2: Location of Carnassarie and Cist

## 5 Excavation Results

### The Cist Structure

The removal of soil [013] from around the N end of the cist revealed that the cist lay partially within a pit [012] that had been excavated into the underlying epidiorite bedrock, this forming the base of the cist. While not fully exposed, the upper edge of the pit on the N side was 10cm wider than the N end of the cist structure, this gap subsequently packed with water rounded cobbles and more angular fragments of schist [014], the later possibly the remnants of material from the

excavated pit. The packing lay within in a mid red brown soil matrix not dissimilar to the surrounding subsoil lying over the bedrock.

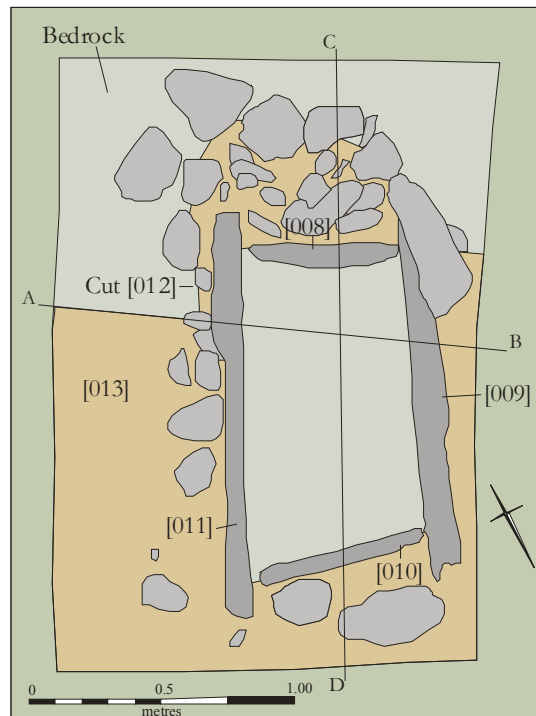


Figure 3: Cist construction



Cobble packing [014] within construction cut [012]

The cist chamber was constructed from four closely fitted epidiorite slabs and overall measured 1.0m-1.14m long, 0.58m-0.65m wide and 0.55m-0.58m deep. The NW end slab [008] measured 0.58m long by 0.58m high by 80mm thick. The NE side slab [009] measured 1.30m long by 0.53m high by 0.13m thick. The SE end slab [010] measured 0.57m long by 0.57m high by 60mm thick. The SW side slab [011] measured 1.50m long by 0.50m high by 0.14m thick.

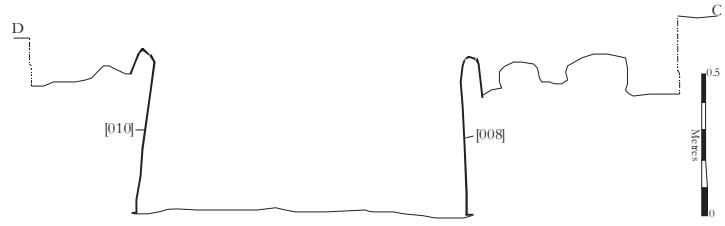


Figure 3: NE-SW Section

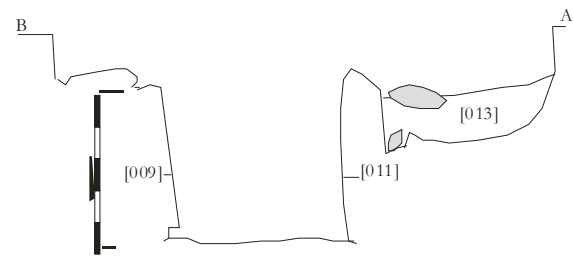


Figure 4: NW-SE Section



Cist structure



Cist structure SW end





Cist structure NE side



Cist structure NW end



Cist structure SW side

## The Cist Fill

The fill of the cist chamber was recorded in 3 spits [002]-[004] with [004] representing the basal fill. These recorded deposits were homogenous throughout, being a light yellow brown clayey silt which included occasional schist and quartz fragments along with small quantities of charcoal and burnt bone. The burnt bone and charcoal fragments were well scattered throughout the fill with no apparent concentrations of material, although their frequency slightly increased within the lower half of the cist fill. Remnants of degraded bracken roots were present along the edges of the cist and pockets of looser soil suggested disturbance by animal burrows. Two small worked flint fragments were recovered from approximately half way down the fill material.



Filled Cist Structure



Cup-mark on Cist cover [007]

## The Cist Cover

The main cist cover consisted of a large elongated slab of epidiorite schist [005] measuring 2.00m long, 0.64m wide and 0.11m thick. The underside of the slab bore three cup marks on its S end.

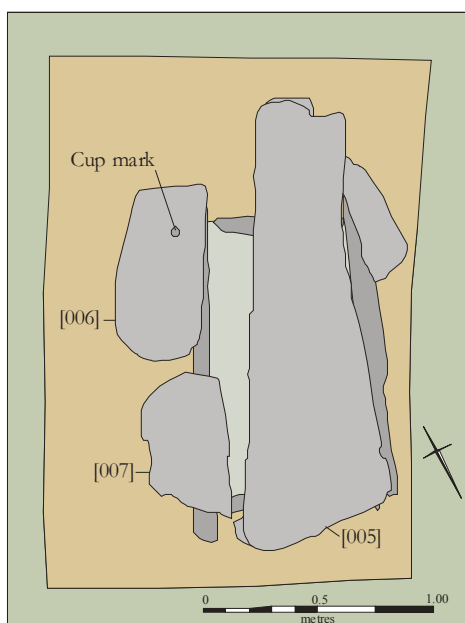


Figure 5: Cist covering stones



Covering stones

Two other epidiorite slabs that lay to the E of the main capstone also likely originally covered the cist chamber. The S stone [006] measured 0.63m long by 0.37m wide and 0.12m thick, while the N stone [007] measured 0.75m long by 0.38m wide by 60mm thick. The N stone also bore a single cup-mark on its upper side (35mm wide) and three aligned cup marks on its under side.

The cist was covered by grass turf that lay over a mid brown clayey silt [001] that included occasional schist and quartz fragments with rare small charcoal and bone fragments. The cover slabs of the cist lay up to 5cm below the grass cover.

The cist will be left in situ with the largest slab returned to its original position and left for people to visit.

## 6 Artefacts

### Flint

Two small flints were recovered from fill [002].

### Quartz

Fragments of quartz were present throughout the fill of the cist and the surrounding subsoil, only one fragment however might have possibly been utilized as a tool.

### Pot

One small sherd of yellow glazed post medieval pottery was recovered from [002].

### Lava stone

A smooth fragment of lava stone was recovered from fill and may be the end of a hone.

### Burnt Bone

Small quantities of fragmented burnt bone were recovered from all the cist fills and the surrounding subsoil.

## 7 Discussion

The cist contained no apparent burial or artefacts that might suggest grave goods. The two recovered flints came from relatively high up in the fill sequence and it is unlikely they represent original placed objects. The absence of an obvious burial or even organic staining within the lower cist fills possibly indicates the absence or disturbance of any primary burial, although any such burial may have completely degraded. The two smaller cist covering stones did appear to have been slightly displaced and this might suggest later disturbance, as does the presence of a post mediaeval pottery sherd within upper fill [002]. The upper disturbance however could be down to later agricultural activity (given the nearby rig and furrow) rather than deliberate robbing. The absence of any evidence of burial or grave goods within the cist is perhaps not that surprising given that over half of the recorded cists in Mid Argyll as listed by the RCHAMS Inventory for Mid Argyll and Cowal contained no obvious burial remains.

Two of the three cover slabs had evidence of pecked cup-marks so it can possibly be assumed that their choice for a covering was deliberate. Of the 136 recorded cists listed within the RCHAMS Inventory for Argyll, there are only 9 examples of cists with pecked decoration. Only two of these cists, those at Barsliosnach and the cist beneath the cairn at Nether Largie North have evidence of cup marks on the covering slab, all the others having decoration on side or end slabs. The cist at Nether Largie North is by far the most elaborate example with more than forty cups on the covering slab, although superimposed over the cups are pecked axe carvings, probably indicating the stone's reuse as a cist cover. Only two of the cists with examples of decoration had any evidence of human remains, a single tooth at Nether Largie North and a cremation at Kilbride. Similarly, few had any evidence of inserted grave goods, the exceptions being a flint knife at Kilbride and a small polished fragment of jet at Barsliosnach.

Despite the lack of body or grave goods the cist is an important discovery adding to the picture of prehistoric activity along the higher slopes N of Kilmartin Glen. The cist, along with the nearby burial cairns, cup marked rocks and saddle quern, suggest an important and settled landscape in the prehistoric period. The positioning of the cist appears to have been important to the family or group who constructed it, given the fact that it was cut into bedrock, suggesting the location was more important than ease of construction. The cist overlooks some of the more spectacular monuments in the Kilmartin Glen area, including Carn Ban, the Carnassarie standing stones and nearby cairn while also enjoying expansive views over Kilmartin Glen and its linear

cairn cemetery. That most of the above monuments are associated with the dead, or retain some form of ancestor memory tends to suggest the location for this burial cist was carefully chosen.

## 8 References

Begg, A. 1998 *Deserted Settlements of Kilmartin Parish*. Argyll & Bute Library Service.

Campbell, M and M. Sandeman, 1962 'Mid Argyll: an Archaeological Survey', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 95, 1961-2.

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James, H. F. 2006 *Mid Argyll Medieval Rural Settlement Project, Data Structure Report*. GUARD Report 2166. Glasgow University.

Regan, R, 2007 *Carnassarie Farm, Archaeological Walkover Survey*, Kilmartin House Museum Report No. 15.

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## Appendix 1: Contexts Descriptions

[001] Layer. Mid brown clayey silt with occasional schist and quartz fragments with rare small charcoal and burnt bone fragments.

[002] Fill. Light yellow brown clayey silt including occasional schist and quartz fragments along with small quantities of charcoal, burnt bone, flint and pot.

[003] Fill. Light yellow brown clayey silt including occasional schist and quartz fragments along with small quantities of charcoal and burnt bone.

[004] Fill. Light yellow brown clayey silt including occasional schist and quartz fragments along with small quantities of charcoal and burnt bone.

[005] Stone Cist Cover. Slab of epidiorite schist measuring 2.00m long, 0.64m wide and 0.11m thick. The underside of the slab bore three cup marks on its S end.

[006] Stone Cist Cover. Slab of epidiorite schist measuring 0.63m long by 0.37m wide and 0.12m thick

[007] Stone Cist Cover. Slab of epidiorite schist measuring 0.75m long by 0.38m wide by 60mm thick. The upper side of the slab bore one pecked cup-mark, the underside three cup-marks.

[008] NW end of cist. Slab of epidiorite schist measuring 0.58m long by 0.58m high by 80mm thick.

[009] NE side of cist. Slab of epidiorite schist measuring 1.30m long by 0.53m high by 0.13m thick.

[010] SE end of cist. Slab of epidiorite schist measuring 0.57m long by 0.57m high by 60mm thick. The

[011] SW side of cist. Slab of epidiorite schist measuring 1.50m long by 0.50m high by 0.14m thick.

[012] Cut. Oval construction cut for cist, not excavated.

[013] Layer. Subsoil mid brown clayey silt, with occasional schist fragment.

[014] Fill. Mid yellow brown silty clay with water rounded cobbles and more angular fragments of schist, maximum size of packing 0.25m x 0.18m x 0.16m. Not excavated.

## Appendix 2: Context List

Number	Description
001	Topsoil
002	Cist fill
003	Cist fill
004	Cist fill
005	Cist cover
006	Cist cover
007	Cist cover
008	NW end slab
009	NE side slab
010	SE end slab
011	SW side slab
012	Construction cut
013	Subsoil
014	Fill

### Appendix 3: Photo List

Photo No	Description
1	Cist cover
2	Cist cover
3	Cup-mark on cover
4	Cup-mark on cover
5	Cist cover
6	Cist cover
7	Cist cover
8	Cist cover
9	Cist cover
10	Cist cover
11	Cist cover
12	Cist cover
13	Cist cover
14	Cist cover
15	Cist cover
16	Cist cover
17	Cist cover
18	Cist cover
19	Cist cover
20	Cist in landscape
21	Cist in landscape
22	Cist in landscape
23	Cist in landscape
24	Cist cover
25	Cist cover
26	Cist cover
27	Cist cover
28	Cist cover
29	Cist cover
30	Cist cover
31	Cist cover
32	Cup-marks on underside of cover
33	Cup-marks on underside of cover
34	Cup-marks on underside of cover
35	Cup-marks on underside of cover
36	Cist infill
37	Cist infill
38	Cist infill
39	Cist infill
40	Cist infill
41	Cist infill
42	Cist infill
43	Cist infill
44	Cist infill
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69	Cist infill
70	Cist infill
71	Cist infill
72	Cist infill
73	Cist infill
74	Cist infill
75	Cist infill
76	Cist infill
77	Cist infill
78	Cist infill
79	Cist infill
80	Cist infill
81	Cup-marks on underside of cover
82	Cup-marks on underside of cover
83	Cup-marks on underside of cover
84	Cist structure
85	Cist structure
86	Cist structure
87	Cist structure
88	Cist structure
89	Cist structure
90	Cist structure
91	Cist structure
92	Cist structure
93	Cist structure
94	Cist structure
95	Cist structure
96	Cist structure
97	Cist structure
98	Cist structure
99	Cist structure
100	Cist structure
101	Cist structure



102	Cist structure
103	Cist structure
104	packing material
105	packing material
106	packing material
107	packing material

#### Appendix 4: DES Entry

<b>LOCAL AUTHORITY:</b>	Argyll and Bute
<b>PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:</b>	Carnassarie Cist
<b>PROJECT CODE:</b>	CRK 12
<b>PARISH:</b>	Kilmartin
<b>NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	Roddy Regan
<b>NAME OF ORGANISATION:</b>	Kilmartin Museum
<b>TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:</b>	Archaeological Excavation
<b>NMRS NO(S):</b>	
<b>SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):</b>	Burial cist
<b>SIGNIFICANT FINDS:</b>	Two (residual) worked flints
<b>NGR</b> (2 letters, 6 figures)	NM 83650 01728
<b>START DATE</b> (this season)	June 2012
<b>END DATE</b> (this season)	June 2012
<b>PREVIOUS WORK</b> (incl. <i>DES</i> ref.)	Survey of Carnassarie Farm by Kilmartin Museum in 2007
<b>MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION:</b> (May include information from other fields)	Following the discovery of a large flat stone on Carnassarie Farm the site was examined to reveal that the stone was one of three which originally covered of an intact a cist structure. The excavation of the cist revealed it was well constructed within a pit cut into the natural rock. The cist contained no apparent burial or artefacts that might suggest grave goods. The two recovered flints came from relatively high up in the fill sequence and it is unlikely they represent original placed objects. The absence of an obvious burial or even organic staining within the lower cist fills possibly indicates the absence or disturbance of any primary burial, although any such burial may have completely degraded. The two smaller cist covering stones did appear to have been slightly displaced and this might suggest later disturbance, as does the presence of a post mediaeval pottery sherd within upper fill. The upper disturbance however could be down to later agricultural activity (given the nearby rig and furrow) rather than deliberate

	<p>robbing.</p> <p>Despite the lack of body or grave goods the cist is an important discovery adding to the picture of prehistoric activity along the higher slopes north of Kilmartin Glen. The cist, along with the nearby burial cairns and cup-marked rocks, suggest an important landscape in the prehistoric period. The cist overlooks some of the more spectacular monuments in the Kilmartin Glen area, including Carn Ban, the Carnassarie standing stones and nearby cairn while also enjoying expansive views over Kilmartin Glen and its linear cairn cemetery. That most of the above monuments are associated with the dead, or retain some form of ancestor memory tends to suggest the location for this burial cist was carefully chosen.</p>
<b>PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:</b>	
<b>CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:</b>	
<b>SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:</b>	The Craigend Trust
<b>ADDRESS OF MAIN CONTRIBUTOR:</b>	Kilmartin Museum, Kilmartin, Argyll, PA31 8RQ
<b>EMAIL ADDRESS:</b>	museum@kilmartin.org
<b>ARCHIVE LOCATION</b> (intended/deposited)	The archive will be deposited with Kilmartin Museum and copies of the report lodged with WoSAS SMR, the NMRS and OASIS database