Dun Mac Sniachan, Benderloch, Argyll

Posted on October 4, 2008 by megalithix

Hillfort: OS Grid Reference – **NM 9032 3822**

Also Known as:
- Dun mac Uisneachan
- Dun Uisnach
- Beregonium

Archaeology & History

This is a fine-looking monument amidst a fine piece of landscape! The site was constructed over various centuries, beginning in the Iron Age, with the earliest parts being the traces of walling on the outer edges. This first section of the fort “measures about 245m in length by a maximum of 50m in width internally,” and much of it can still be traced all along the full length and breath of the geological ridge upon which it sits. However, the timber-laced walls that stood all round the edges have, obviously, all but disintegrated. This earlier part of the fort, wrote Richard Feacham (1977),

“was superceded by a small subrectangular, now vitrified fort, about 170 feet long by 60 feet wide, and by a circular and probably vitrified dun measuring about 60 feet in diameter.”

There was ample water supply for the people who may have lived on this ridged fortress, as there is still a fresh water spring on the southeast edge of the hill. And it seems pretty obvious that this fort was occupied for some considerable time into the Common Era, as material remains found amidst excavation work here at the end of the 19th century, “including metalwork of Roman date…suggests an
Folklore

The folklore and legends of this site (as well as the surrounding district) are considerable, and for now I must refrain from writing all there is (it’d take me ages!). Needless to say, R. Angus Smith’s (1885) fine old history and folklore work is the source of much material. Smith told us that,

“There are many stories about it. It has been called the beginning of the kingdom of Scotland, the palace of a long race of kings; also the Halls of Selma, in which Fingal lived; the stately capital of of a Queen Hynde, having towers and halls and much civilization, with a Christianity before Ireland; whilst it has also been considered to be that which the native name implies, simply the fort of the sons of Uisnach, who came from Ireland, and whose names are found all over the district, and who in the legend are reported to have come to a wild part of Alban.”

References:


Links:

1. PSAS: Dun mac Sniachan & other Local Antiquities

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Dun Gallain, Colonsay, Argyll
Posted on October 3, 2008 by megalithix

Hillfort: OS Grid Reference – NR 348 931

Getting Here

Bittova trek this one. Once on Colonsay, head out onto the B8086 road west of Scalasaig until you, past Machrins, and onto the gold course. Take the footpath across it (south), until you hit the little airstrip where you need to veer right (west) right onto the spur of the coast about 800 yards away. Your damn close!

Archaeology & History

This site occupies a prominent position. Its summit is surrounded by a line of oval walling enclosing an area of about 90 square yards. There are also remains of outer walling to the eastern and southern sides. The ‘cairn’ on the highest spot in the middle of the hillfort is a modern construction.

Folklore

The great Scottish folklorist A.A. MacGregor (1947) narrated the tale behind this denuded fort on the western edge of the island. According to the islanders who told him the tale, they alleged it Norwegian in origin, though the fortress is much older than that. MacGregor told that, “in this fort there once lived an elderly and voluptuous tyrant named Grey Somerled, who is said to have been related to the first of the Lords of the Isles.

“Grey Somerled came to Colonsay, they say, in the capacity of factor. But he neglected his duties, imposed penalties and hardships on the innocent and defenceless tenants, and generally made himself so disagreeable that at last it was decided to take revenge upon him, previous warnings having been no deterrent.

“Like Rory Mor of Dunvegan, who slept best when he was within hearing of his ‘nurse’, the waterfall, Grey Somerled was wont to be lulled to sleep by the grinding noise of a quern placed near his head. When he retired for the night, one of the servants had to turn the quern-stone by his pillow, and keep on turning it, lest he woke.

“It was recognised that any attempt to surprise Grey Somerled during daylight was foredoomed to failure. So, a plot was laid to circumvent him during the night-time. His enemies entered into a conspiracy with one of the servants that she should allow them to invade Dun Gallain after he had fallen asleep. When they arrived, one of their number relieved the woman at the quern, and proceeded to turn the stone without intermission. But he was not too skilful at the turning; and his harsh and irregular grinding soon woke the sleeper. Ere Gey Somerled had had time to consider the matter of resistance, his foes were upon him. They carried him away from Dun Gallain; and tradition in the islands of Argyll has it that, in great privation, he spent the remainder of his days in a bee-hive house of stone, situated on the farmlands of Machrins.

“One night – so the story concludes – a huge boulder from the roof of the bee-hive fell in, killing its unhappy inmate. So as to identify the spot where this tragedy happened, the islanders raised on it the cairn now indicated on the Ordnance Survey Map as Carn Shomhairle Liath – that is to say, Grey Somerled’s Cairn.”

Interestingly, there is a long-cist burial at Machrins (plus small settlement) a few hundred
yards east of the fort, and excavations here found them to date from the Viking period; though the Scottish Royal Commission thought that although the “small finds associated with the burial suggest that it is Viking, the plan-form of the houses is perhaps more likely to indicate a native tradition.”

References:


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Getting Here

There's two real ways to get up here: one from the Oban-Kilmartin roadside; the other from Ford village. I'd go for the latter as it avoids the traffic. Walk up the track to Salachary from the village centre, heading west. It's a gradual uphill climb and after about half-a-mile (past six or seven cup-marked rocks) the great hill rises to your left. Dun Dubh is to your right. Climb over the fence and head for the hilltop.

Archaeology & History

It's my opinion that this fort, above all others in the region apart from Dunadd, was of paramount importance to our prehistoric ancestors. The reason being that it's the great pyramidal hill to which the line of tombs in the Kilmartin Valley align, three miles to the south. This prehistoric alignment was quite intentional (if you've got your doubts, gerrup there & have a look for y'self — you'll soon change yer mind).

The main part of the structure is an irregularly-shaped construction with walling on all sides, measuring about 40 yards by 20 yards. Much of it is pretty well defined – though has been vandalized by various doods in the past: one bunch being a film-crew who used the site in the early 1980s! Inside the main walled fortress are several ruins. The Royal Commission (1988) report told:

"Much of the interior is occupied by a rock spine which is surmounted by a modern cairn, but the NW half is relatively level and it contains, in addition to the modern round-house...and an S-shaped structure associated with burial."
with film-making, a number of ruined stone foundations. On the north side there is a rectilinear building, and between the modern round-house and this rectilinear building, there is a further structure...an arc of walling, but its precise shape cannot now be determined without excavation.”

Dun Chonallaich means “the fort of King Connal’s people,” and although much denuded, is well worth the clamber for a short archaeological day out. A curious “gaming-board” was found here (see photo). A portable cup-marked stone in the fort’s southern wall is a modern artifact.

It’s a lovely view from up here too. This is one of many places I’ve sat during a raging thunderstorm. One helluva buzz, believe me!

References:


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Druimyeonbeg, Isle of Gigha, Argyll

Posted on October 3, 2008 by megalithix

Cairn (destroyed): OS Grid Reference – **NR 648 495**

Archaeology & History

An old tomb could once be seen where now we have yet another one of those environmentally damaging golf courses! (I get many emails from people who are very upset at finding the destruction of our archaeological heritage because of golf courses) The tomb was reported in 1953 to have been, “discovered in the southwest corner of a field south of Druimyeonbeg farmhouse.” Any relics that may have been there were destroyed and there’s now no trace of anything.

References:


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Druid’s Stone, Bungay, Suffolk

Posted on October 3, 2008 by megalithix

Legendary Rock: OS Grid Reference – **TM 337 898**

Folklore

Described in 1926 by local antiquarian and early ley-hunter, W.A. (1926), as “a fallen monolith” — this old stone is probably just a glacial erratic. Found in the churchyard of St. Mary’s, tradition tells that in ages past young girls danced twelve times around this old stone, then placed their ears upon it to hear the answers to their questions and wishes. A similar legend tells how children danced around the stone seven times on a certain day of the year to conjure up the devil. Mr Dutt thought the great rock may have been “a ley or direction stone.”

References:


© Paul Bennett, The Northern Antiquarian
Druid’s Altar, Bingley, West Yorkshire
Posted on October 3, 2008 by megalithix

Legendary Rocks: OS Grid Reference – SE 0924 3994

Getting There

Pretty easy to get to. Best thing to do really, is ask a local and they'll send you in the right direction. From Bingley, take the Harden road (B6429) across the river. As it bends sharply left, note there's a track going up into the woods to the right. Walk up it! Keep going and, unless you take a detour, you'll end up at the rock outcrop eventually (where the woods come to an end, Druid's Altar appears before you with the track running along its top-side).

Archaeology & History

Mentioned in the Tithe Awards of 1849, this lovely outcrop of rocks looking down the Aire Valley on the southern edge of Bingley has “an immemorial tradition” of druidic worship, said Harry Speight in 1898 – though quite when it first acquired such repute is outside of any literary record. In Sidney Greenbank's (1929) rare book on this place, he could find little by way of archaeological data to affirm the old tradition, save the odd prehistoric find of flints here and there; though it is said that Beltane fires were burned upon the crags here in bygone centuries.

There was a 19th century account from the Ilkley Scientific Club where a member described there being a cup-and-ring carving “near the so-called Druid's Altar, at Bingley,” but I'm unaware of the whereabouts of this carving and Boughey & Vickerman's (2003) said nothing about it in their survey; though a possible cup-marking can be seen on one rock less than 100 yards west, which might account for the report. (a bit dodgy though!)

Folklore

Harry Speight (1898) makes what sounds like a rare flight of fancy when he described faerie being seen atop of the many oaks beneath the Druid's Altar. In Clive Hardy's (2002) work (from whence the old photo of the Altar is taken), he tells how “local antiquarians say that the cobbled way running from the Brown Cow Inn towards the site, is an old processional route walked by the druids.”

One, possibly two wells, each beneath the Altar rocks, are also reputed to have been associated with the old pagan priests, as their names tell: the Altar Well and the Druid’s Well – though the Altar Well has seemingly fallen back to Earth in recent years.

References:
Machuim, Lawers, Loch Tay, Perthshire

Stone Circle: OS Grid Reference – **NN 682 402**

Also Known as:

- **Lawer’s Mill**

Getting Here

From the north-end of Loch Tay at Kenmore, follow the road (A827) round down the lochside, through the village of Fearnan and then another 4 miles down. If you park up at the pub at Lawers, walk back up the road for ½-mile, keeping your eyes peeled up the slope on the left where you'll see the circle visible from the road.

Archaeology & History

Much has been said of this fine old place – also known as Lawer’s Mill – which seems to have been first described by Thomas Pennant in his rambling *Tour in Scotland* (1772). The local writer William A. Gillies (1938) told that after

> “a recent examination of the ground around the circle...suggests that at one time there was an outer circle of stones concentric with the existing one. Most of the stones were removed in order to make more of the field available for cultivation, but there are still large stones buried within a few inches of the surface.”

Folklore

In J. McDiarmid’s *Folklore of Breadalbane* (1910) he tells of a man from Killin who, on passing by this old circle, heard haunting fairy music. Being inquisitive, he walked up to see what was going on and walked into the circle where the little people were playing. He was obviously lucky and the faerie-folk enjoyed his company, for when he left he was given the gift of a strong, fast, white steed.

Solar folklore may be...?
Drayton Cursus, Abingdon, Oxfordshire

Cursus Monument: OS Grid Reference – SU 490 941 – SU 492 950

Archaeology & History

This minor cursus monument was etched into the landscape in neolithic times. Found to the south of Abingdon and close to the River Thames, one report showed finds from the site dating from 2900 BC. There is also a neolithic henge monument very close to its northern terminus and a plethora of other Bronze Age remains all round. Paul Devereux (1989) described how crop marks revealed,

“a substantial former cursus immediately to the east of Drayton: its crop marks extend southwest to northeast for a little over a mile, and are 225 feet (68 metres) wide. The cursus has a squared south end, but the northern terminus has not been found. The crop marks are not evident in the middle portion of the cursus, as it was formerly overlaid by a Saxon village. There is a plethora of other crop marks within and around the cursus… The northern section…which has a slightly different orientation to the southern segment, points squarely to the ancient heart of Abingdon.”

References:

Dove Stones, Thornton Rust Moor, North Yorkshire

Cup-Marked Stone: OS Grid Reference – SD 96634 87493

Also Known as:

- DS3 Carving (Brown & Brown, 2008)

Getting Here

Takes a bitta finding and aint too accessible for those of you who need footpaths! Below the eastern slopes of Addlebrough Hill, by the present source of the Gill Beck right beneath the Dove Stones (the water tastes gorgeous), are the ruinous remains of an old sheepfold. In the field immediately behind (south) of here are a number of small rocks. Look around and you'll find the stone in question!

Archaeology & History

Unless you're a real rock-art-freak, I can't imagine too many of you checking this one out! When Richard Stroud and I visited this spot a few years back (2006), it was a mixture of love and madness that brought us here!

Amidst the many stones scattered hereabouts, one of them possesses two clear cup-marks on a stone measuring roughly 3ft by 2ft, along the line of a much ruined ancient wall. This might be the one that Beckensall and Laurie (1998) described in their Prehistoric Rock Art of County Durham, Swaledale and Wensleydale, as “a rock with several cups (which) has recently been noticed on Thornton Rust Moor, near the Dovestones” — though it seemed blatantly apparent to us that there were only two cups here, not “several”. However, Brown (2008) appears to list the site, citing it as having “two cups”, just like the one we found, and being “found in prehistoric low field settlement wall,” which fits the picture perfectly — although Brown gives a slight difference in grid-reference to the one Richard Stroud took. It looks a good area to scout around and, I reckon, find previously unrecorded sites.

References:

Beckensall, Stan & Laurie, T., The Prehistoric Rock Art of County Durham, Swaledale and Wensleydale.
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