

CAITHNESS.

PARISH OF REAY.

FORT, CNOC NA RATHA. This structure occupies the NE. extremity of an inconspicuous flat-topped ridge which is situated in the open moorland immediately N. of Ben Shurrery, at a point distant one and a quarter miles NNW. of Beinn Freiceadain. The fort is irregular on plan, the enclosing drystone wall following the contour of the tip of the ridge to take in an area measuring about 300 feet along the ridge by about 230 feet across it, and then continuing as a cross wall to cut off this area from the rest of the ridge. The site is not a particularly strong one as the adjacent part of the ridge immediately SW. of the fort continues to rise slightly for some distance. Considerable stretches of the outer face of the wall are visible through the heather and peat covering the site. At three points in the stretch where the wall crosses the ridge and at one in the NE. sector short lengths of the inner face opposite or near to lengths of the outer face indicate that the wall was originally about 8 feet in thickness. Both faces were constructed of thin slabs of stone laid on bed, while the rest of the wall was probably filled with rubble. While the outer face appears frequently along the S., SW., W., NW. and N. sectors of the wall, there are hardly any traces of it to the NE., E. and SE. The only indication of an entrance is in the NE. sector, where the broken stump of a slab 5 feet in length and about 9 inches in thickness protrudes through the earth on the course of but at right angles to the wall. This probably formed part of one side of an entrance passage.

The ruinous drystone structure measuring 26 feet in external diameter is situated within the W. quarter of the fort about 15 feet in from the wall. The stones which are covered with heather, seem to form a thick-walled structure with an entrance to the SE. Stinging nettles grew in the interior on the date of visit. No opinion could be formed about the structure as it stood, but nothing was seen to upset the description of it written in 1910.^{I.} The interior of the fort is otherwise featureless.

I. Inventory, No. 355. In other respects however, the accounts differ.

A circular/

A circular structure lies mostly outside, but probably partly upon, the ruin of the SE. sector of the fort wall. It measures about 30 feet in diameter within a grass-covered stony mound which probably represents a ruined drystone wall. The entrance, in the NE., gives on to the E. flank of the ridge which here slopes down from the fort at an angle of about 13° . The floor of the circular structure has been scooped to give a level surface. This structure recalls the pair reported at Garywhin. A large earth-fast slab protrudes through the heather at a point a few feet outside the W. angle of the fort wall. There is nothing to show whether this occurs naturally or not.

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22nd October 1955.

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I

FORT, BEINN FREICEADAIN. Beinn Freiceadain (781 feet O. D.) situated at a

- I. Spelling as on O. S. 6" map Caithness xvii, 2nd Edition, 1907.

distance of one mile WNW. by N. of Dorrery Lodge, bears a name which occurs frequently in NE. Scotland, Orkney and Shetland, usually in the form Ward or Wart Hill, a place from which watch was kept. With its neighbours Ben Dorrery and Ben Shurrery it forms a ridge orientated NW. and SE., which stands near the NW. extremity of the plain that occupies one third of the county. The view from the summit is extensive in all directions, with the exception of a narrow sector to the SSE, which is obscured by Ben Dorrery (810 feet O. D.). Conspicuous features within sight are, to the NE., the Ward Hill, South Ronaldsay (33 miles); to the W. Ben Hope (36 miles); and to the S., Morven (17 miles). The ridge is flanked on the N. and E. by arable land, on the W. by Loch Shurrery, and on the S. by peat bog.

Ben Freiceadain forms the central part of the ridge and is cut off from the heights at either end by broad cols. It is oval in shape, the summit plateau measuring about 900 feet in length from NW. to SE. by about 470 feet transversely. More than half of the surface of this is level and covered with peat bog, but to the N. and NW. where it is clothed with coarse grass and shows signs of having been drained, it slopes gently down without interruption to continue for a quarter of a mile to the head of the Burn of Achanaon and the foot of Ben Shurrery. To NE. and E. the whole is flanked by a cliff some 40 feet high, below which the land slopes gently down to Brawlbin; To SE. and S. by a steep rocky slope some 30 feet in height which leads to the col between Beinn Freiceadain and Ben Dorrery; and to SW. and W. by a steep slope some 25 feet high which gives way to the gentler descent to Loch Shurrery.

I

The fort, which is named Buaile Oscar on the O. S. map, consists

- I. Inventory No. 354.

of a ruinous wall enclosing both the main level area and the sloping NW. part of the summit plateau, to the shape and size of which it thus conforms. Starting/

Starting at the point where the cliff flanking the hill on the NE. becomes less steep as it merges into the N. slope of the hill, the wall now appears as a denuded, low stony mound about 5 feet in width. As this runs NW. and then W. across the face of the hill, the outward-facing scarp increases in size to a maximum width of 15 feet and a height of 3 feet at a point distant 150 feet from the start. Thereafter small quarry-ditches appear intermittently at its foot. Meanwhile the inward-facing scarp either persists as a very slight feature or disappears altogether. The occasional appearance in the outward-facing scarp of stones laid on bed and rubble suggests that it was originally a stone-faced rubble-filled wall, the lowest courses of the outer face of which were bedded near the level of the bottom of the scarp. The form of the existing remains indicates that, built as it was across the slope of the hill, the outer face of the wall must have stood to a considerably greater height than the inner.

After a distance of 200 feet the remains are broken by a gap 15 feet in width. This might have been an original feature, but the presence of this face of the hill of modern drainage channels, one of which runs through the gap, and the existence a short distance away of an undoubtedly contemporary entrance, suggests that it may be merely a breakthrough. Beyond the gap the remains continue westwards in much the same form for a further 150 feet at which point distorted but continuous layers of stones which formed part of the outer face of the wall protrude through the vegetation on the outward-facing scarp. One stretch of stones is 65 feet in length. No reliable examples of inner face were found but the appearance of the ruined wall suggested that much of it might originally have been about 10 feet in thickness. At a point in the WNW. sector of the wall are the remains of what may be the only original entrance to the fort. These consist first of an upright inner facing stone measuring 3 feet 6 inches in width and standing to a height of 3 feet which forms part of the NE. inner corner of the entrance. Two similar slabs, flanking the N. side of the passage, remain broken in situ, while the others which form part of the S. side can also be seen. These show that the passage was originally about 5 feet in width and about 15 feet in length. The use of slabs of stone placed on edge in the structure of an entrance in a wall of which the rest of the stones are laid on bed has a parallel at the nearby fort/

CAITHNESS.

PARISH OF WICK

FORT, SKITTEN. This structure lies on a low eminence close to the N. side of highway B 876 five miles NW. of Wick at a height of 70 feet O. D. Most if not all of it has been under cultivation and the remains are very slight, but it may be estimated that originally it was oval on plan, measuring about 230 feet from NW. to SE. by about 200 feet transversely within an earthen rampart with an external ditch. The remains of the rampart are best preserved in the SE. sector where they measure about 20 feet in width and stand to a maximum height of one foot from the interior and three feet from the bottom of the ditch. The latter appears as a shallow depression about 15 feet in width. The entrance was probably in the SE. Hearths, charcoal and burnt bones have been found in and close to the fort and fragments of a Cinerary Urn and another pottery vessel have been recorded in addition to great numbers of worked and unworked flints. ^I

I. P.S.A.S. lxxix (1934/5). 108-117.

It is probable that these, as others in the vicinity ² represent the remains

2. Ibid. 112.

of an earlier occupation and that the fort was built at a considerably later date.

fort of Garrywhin, while the occurrence of the use of a different method of constructing an entrance from that used in building the rest of a wall is not uncommon in Iron Age structures .^{2.}

2. Castle Law, Midlothian; Castlehill Wood, Stirlingshire.

From its starting point at the N. extreme of the hill as far as the entrance the wall runs across the slope on a scarcely definable natural crest line. The entrance is so situated that it leads into the fort at the point where these conditions cease and a rock-faced scarp starts on the NW. slope of the hill at a point 75 feet E. of and some 15 feet above the entrance. This feature continues, to develop into the steep slope which flanks the hill to W., SW., S. and SE. The wall, however, remains at its existing level, resting for the next 1,200 feet on the lip of a narrow ledge about halfway down the steep flank of the hill. No traces of any line of defence can be distinguished along the crestline which borders the summit plateau above these steep flanks, nor is there any accumulation of any debris below.

The narrow ledge the outer lip of which supports the wall may have existed at least in part when construction was begun. Similar ledges, backed by outcropping laminated rock faces and undoubtedly of natural formation, appear on the flanks of Ben Dorrery. However, the rock face at the back of the ledge behind the wall has certainly been quarried for building material along almost the whole distance. The width of the ledge varies from 20 feet to 4 feet. A small landslide has obscured a stretch of wall 40 feet in length at a point 320 feet SE. of the entrance. At a distance of 55 feet the point where the wall can again be seen after the interruption, a gully 74 feet in length runs NNE. up to the plateau. The wall seems to be breached at a point where it crosses the bottom of the gully, and it is impossible to say whether there was an entrance here or, as seems more likely, the gap was caused by water running down the channel.

The wall continues beyond this point for a further 360 feet and then rises to hold to a natural rocky crestline which runs up almost to the level of the rim of the SSE. sector of the plateau, but at a distance of 30 feet outside it. From the point where the wall starts to rise an abortive off-shoot runs off below it, keeping to the original level. For a distance of 100 feet this appears in exactly the same form as the main wall and ledge NNW. /

NNW. of it, but then it ceases. It is resumed again after a gap of 25 feet to run only for a similar distance. After a second gap of 28 feet, it starts again, running for 75 feet. The NE. half of this final portion shows signs of being incomplete, the ledge being narrow and the rock-face barely quarried. It might be thought that this offshoot represents an uncompleted horn-work, to strengthen the defences above the col, but it is also possible that it was given up because the line of the wall was found to be following too low a course, and that the rise in the main wall alluded to above was engineered instead.

The main wall, ascending gradually, reaches the SE. extreme of the hill and all traces of wall or mound die out as the line runs on to the lip of the precipitous ESE. flank of the hill. The cliffs which run NW. from this point are broken about halfway along by a short section of steep but climbable rocky slope. On the lip of this the wall appears again as a low stony mound backed by a quarried rock-face. A very large stone planted on edge at one end of this sector may represent part of a special measure for holding up the wall on such a steep situation. The final stretch along the top of the vertical rock faces bears no signs of defences.

The level part of the summit plateau is bordered to NW. and W. by a low rocky scarp, but this, like the rest of the high level crestline, bears no traces of fortification. It must be observed, that the borders and the summit plateau seem to form a distinctive inner line of defence, and that the absence of visible remains need not rule out the possibility of some defensive structure having once existed at this level.

The highest part of the summit plateau lies in the N. quarter, and here there is a ruinous chambered cairn³, on the SW. sector of which

3. Inventory No. 361.

stands a modern cairn. The remains of a small shepherd's cairn lie on the crest of the summit plateau 30 yards SW. of the chambered cairn. The interior is otherwise featureless.

CAITHNESS.

PARISH OF WICK.

FORT, GARRYWHIN. This structure, which is distant one third of a mile W. to Watenan farmhouse, occupies the entire summit area of a ridge about 50 feet in height that is separated by a gorge about 150 feet in width from the precipitous NE. face of Warehouse Hill from which the site can be overlooked. The surface of the ridge falls gently to N. and S. but much of the W. flank and part of the E. are steep and rocky. The long axis of the ridge, and so of the fort, lies a little E. of N. and W. of S., but for convenience of description is being regarded as lying N. and S.

The fort is oval on plan, measuring 590 feet in length from N. to S. by 200 feet transversely within the ruin of a drystone wall. Considerable stretches of the outer face of the wall can be seen at intervals protruding through the heather which clothes the site. They consist of flat-sided slabs of rock neatly set to form a smooth face, and stand in places to a height of as much as 2 feet. Some of the stretches of outer face have slipped forward out of position; at the kink in the SW. sector of the wall, for example, the ruin is so acute that for a distance of some yards it is not possible to trace the course of the wall with certainty. At other places, however, the wall though ruinous is secure, and one of the rare stretches of exposed inner-face occurs in the SE. arc nearly opposite a section of such reliable outer facing. The thickness of 8 feet at this point may represent an average figure for most of the entire perimeter of 450 yards.

There is an entrance at either end of the fort. That to the end is formed by a gap in the wall about 6 feet in width. Three earthenfast upright slabs which stand in the vicinity of this entrance probably formed parts of the structure of the gateway. They are all about 5 feet in height and 8 inches in thickness and vary in breadth from 5 feet (NW. slab) to 4 feet 2 inches (SE.) and three feet 5 inches (NE.) It is possible that the gateway was faced with such slabs both along the whole of the actual passage and also along short distances of the immediately adjacent stretches of the inner and outer faces of the wall. If so, then the NE. stone represents the outer face immediately E. of the entrance, /

entrance, and the NW. stone that on the W. side, slightly misplaced. If the SE. stone represents the inner face E. of the entrance. then the wall on this side of the gateway was 13 feet thick^I. One stone, broken off but

1. Compare the gateway at Beinn Freiceadain. still visible, is embedded beside the N. end of the W. side of the entrance passage. This slab, which is 3 feet in length, lies with its N. end in contact with the E. end of the upright NW. slab.

The other entrance, at the S. extreme of the fort, is marked by a gap in the wall 11 feet in width. The truncated remains of an embedded slab which once formed part of the W. side of the entrance passage can be seen, and one slab two feet in height stands on the line of the inner face of the wall immediately W. of the entrance. No traces of the E. side were visible at the date of visit.

The fragmentary remains of a structure situated immediately outside the E. arc of the wall could be distinguished as a mere accretion of stones. These were said in 1851² to be "two small chambers, built in the

2. P.S.A.S. vii (1866-68), 295.

thickness of the wall of stones perhaps larger than those used throughout the rest of the building. They had been lately interfered with, and almost entirely deformed, but it is still possible to perceive that the entrance to them must have been from the outside." The situation of this structure at the head of the comparatively gentle SE. slope of the ridge tends to confirm the supposition that they were hut circles built in the ruined wall and of its larger stones at a time when the fort was disused³. The quotation

3. Cf. Cnoc na Ratha.

given above was derived from a Common-place Book kept by A. H. Rhind in which the name of the fort is given as "Garry Whuine or Foyne."⁴ A later record gives it as "Garrywhoine", and this later account also mentions that the

4. Scotland in Pagan Times, The Iron Age.
J. Anderson (1883) 273.

dilapidated state of the remains of the fort was due to the construction of a mill dam in the valley below, the stones having been rolled down the hill to form an embankment. At the date of visit the dam was disused and in a tottering condition.

In/

In the vicinity of the fort are the remains of various monuments of varying age and purpose, among them hut circles. A gathering of large stones which may represent a group of ruined buildings of this sort lies outside the fort a short distance W. of the S. entrance. The name "Garry" may relate to the Gaelic "Garadh", a fence or dyke⁵.

5. Cf. Buaille Oscar, from "Buaille", a fort or pen.