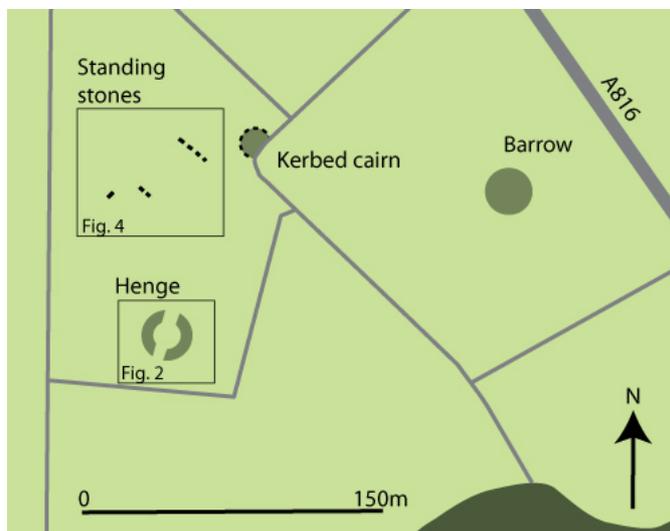


Signposts to Prehistory

Location: Ballymeanoch henge (NR 833 962), barrow (NR835 963), standing stones and kerbed cairn (both NR 833 964) all lie at the southern end of the Kilmartin Valley in Argyll, Scotland.

Main period: Neolithic and Bronze Age

Access & ownership: All the monuments can be accessed from a car park 2.6 km south of Kilmartin, signposted 'Dunchraigaig cairn'. A management agreement is in place between Historic Scotland and the landowner, enabling free public access. An interpretation panel can be found in the car park.



This group of monuments at **Ballymeanoch** (Fig. 1) is part of an extensive ritual prehistoric landscape in the Kilmartin Valley. This stretches from Ormaig in the N to Achnabreck in the S, and includes various types of cairns, henges, standing stones, a stone circle, and many examples of rock art.

Ballymeanoch henge is the only such monument in the west of Scotland. Built around 3000–2500 BC, it has an outer bank of 40 m diameter with an internal ditch, broken by entrance causeways at the N and S. The bank now rises to only 0.4 m; the flat-bottomed ditch is 4 m across and around 0.4 m deep.

Fig. 1. Plan showing henge, standing stones, kerbed cairn and barrow. Drawn by K. Sharpe

Canon Greenwell excavated the site in 1864, and found two burial cists in the centre, still visible. The largest had unusually long side slabs (up to 2.75 m) and is still covered with a massive capstone. The floor of the large cist was lined with small round pebbles but nothing was found inside. A second, smaller cist was still intact in 1864, and contained three inhumation burials along with a decorated Beaker pot.

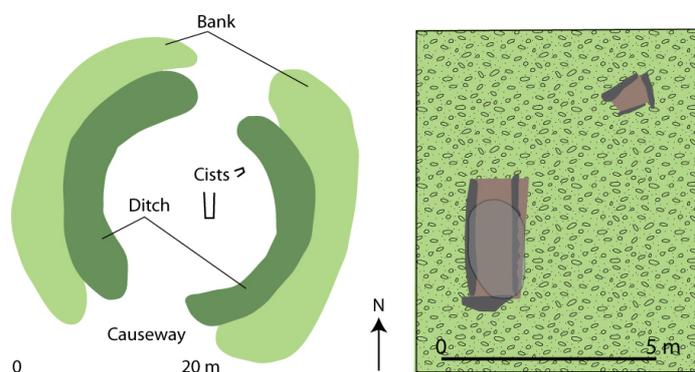


Fig 2. Plan of henge with detail of cists. Drawn by K Sharpe.

The **kerbed cairn** (Fig. 3) is thought to date from around 1300 BC. It has been significantly denuded, and a drainage ditch has removed part of the eastern side. The mound now measures about 6.9 m across and is just 0.7 m high. The 11 remaining kerbstones appear to be graded in height from the SW.

Between the A816 and the henge is a large, turf covered mound: a prehistoric **barrow**. It is 30 m across and stands to a height of 1.4 m. Excavations by Craw (1928) found a layer of charcoal over the old ground surface but no cists or burials were uncovered.



Fig. 3. Kerbed cairn by Otter [CC-BY-SA-3.0]

Approximately 30 m SW of the cairn are six **standing stones** forming two parallel lines running SE-NW (Fig. 4: one row of four (A–D; Fig. 5), and a second row 41 m to the S comprising just two (E & F; Fig. 6). A further stone (G) once stood 18 m from stone F; it now lies in a drain to the E, near the kerbed cairn. Geophysical survey in 1993 suggested that the stones once formed part of a much larger complex of monuments. Stones A–D are graded in height from A (4.1 m) to D (2.75 m). To the NW the alignment indicates the most northerly setting point of the midwinter full moon at the major standstill; to the SE the stones mark the rising point of the sun at the winter solstice.

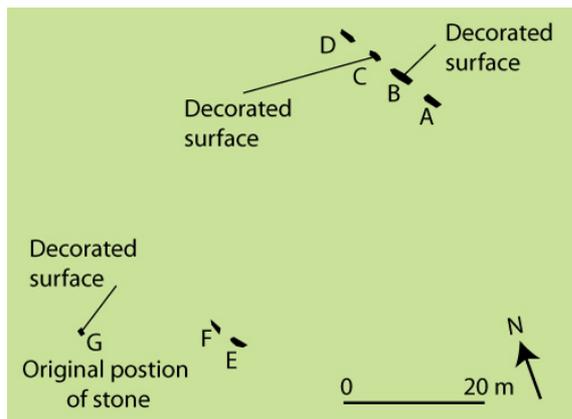


Fig. 4. Plan showing Ballymeanoch standing stones. Drawn by K. Sharpe

Two of the standing stones are decorated with rock art. The NE face of stone B (Fig. 7) has over 70 simple cup marks, five cups with single rings and radial grooves, and eight cups with complete or partial single rings. The SW face of stone C is decorated with 40 cup marks, one large cup and single ring, and one cup with a radial groove and a ring. Stone G had an unusual hour-glass perforation through its centre that was at least partially worked. It too, had cup and ring mark

decoration: on its NE face were two large and fifteen smaller cups, and a dumb-bell (two cups joined by a groove). Excavation of the stump of the stone, which remained in the ground after the stone fell, revealed three small patches of cremated bone – a foundation deposit when the stone was erected.



Fig. 5. Stones A–D. By K. Sharpe. Fig. 6. Stones E & F. By K. Sharpe. Fig. 7. Decorated face of stone B. By Patrick Mackie [CC BY-SA 2.0]

References and further information

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