



**CARNASSARIE CIST II,
ARGYLL**



An Archaeological Excavation

August 2015

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Summary

Following the report of the possible discovery of a second cist on Carnassarie Farm by the owner, the site was examined to reveal what appeared to be an intact cist structure situated on a prominent natural knoll. The subsequent excavation revealed a well made cist structure that had been constructed within a pit cut into the natural bedrock. The cist contained a complete tripartite food vessel that no doubt accompanied a burial, although no bones had survived the acidic soils. The relatively small size of the cist suggests the individual it contained was likely a child.



Looking east from the cist towards Carn Ban cairn

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This cist uncovered

Acknowledgements

Kilmartin Museum would like to thank Rosemary Neagle for reporting the cist and her help in the excavation. We would also like to thank Alison Sheridan and Rodger Anderton for their help and insights on the site and thanks also go to Sheila Clark 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 two days in early August 2015 and the site code used was CRC 15.



Figure 1: Location of Carnassarie in Argyll

2 The Project Circumstances

In August 2013 Rosemary Neagle the proprietor of Carnassarie Farm, observed what appeared to be the shape of a large flat stone situated under the grass/topsoil cover and thinking this might represent a cist she approached Kilmartin Museum to investigate the site. During the ensuing visit the topsoil was removed from around the possible cist which revealed a large capstone with the remains of a possible small stone cairn sealing what appeared to be an intact cist structure. The site was then covered with geotextile and the topsoil reinstated. In early August 2015 a team from Kilmartin Museum returned to the site in order to examine the site more fully.



Figure 2: Location of Cist II

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 Museum in the spring of 2007 which recorded over 240 sites (Regan 2007). The present cist site was recorded as Site 110 during the survey and described as

‘A natural rise that appears to have been artificially enhanced with a possible earthen mound. The mound is 13.5m in width N/S and stands c.4m tall on W and 1.5m tall on E. Upright stone slabs in the centre of the mound suggest a possibly disturbed cist.’

Possibly also 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 1st 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 indicates that the terrace was the site of a roundhouse.

In 2012 a burial cist was discovered by the owner of the farm and was subsequently excavated by Kilmartin Museum (Regan 2012). The cist was situated on the edge of an elevated terrace and although it appeared undisturbed contained no primary grave goods or evidence of a burial.

4 The Landscape Setting of the Cist

The cist lies approximately 700m N of the deserted settlement of Carnassarie Mor and is situated on a prominent raised knoll at a height of 175m AOD (centred NM 83442 01491, Figure 2). The surrounding ground is now used as sheep pasture. The mound of the knoll is a prominent feature in the landscape affording extensive views down Kilmartin Glen to the sea at Crinan and overlooks Ford Glen to the east. The knoll mound also overlooks the prehistoric monuments of the Carnassarie Standing Stones (NMRS: NM80SW 22) and a burial cairn (NMRS: NM80SW 21) to the south and the impressive burial cairn Carn Ban (NMRS: NM80SW28) to the east. In addition the knoll can be seen from the cist excavated in 2012, which lies approximately 500m to the north east.



The cist knoll and head dyke looking south down Kilmartin Glen

The prominent knoll or mound on which the cist is situated appears is roughly 14m in diameter stands to a height of 2-3m above the surrounding landscape. The knoll appears to be entirely natural with degraded bedrock for the most part lying under thin soil cover. The two upright slabs noticed during the survey work, that were thought might be part of a disturbed cist, are also natural features, these the remains of harder epidiorite bands lying between softer rock, their prominence the result of differential erosion, which has produced this unusual landscape feature. The landscape prominence of the knoll and its unusual appearance may also have been appreciated in later times as the head dyke of Carnassarie Mor skirts its western side and bifurcates just beyond the knoll to the north.

5 Excavation Results

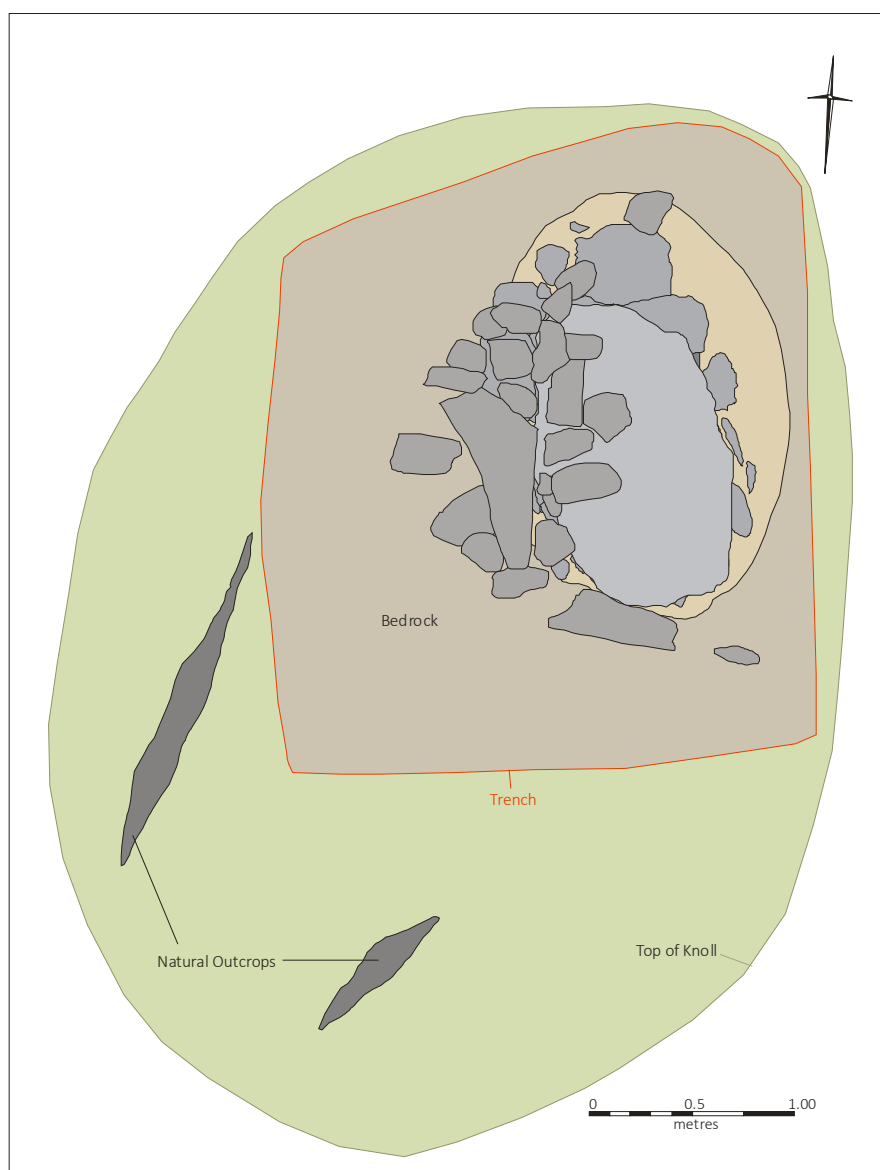


Figure 3: The cist location on the top of the knoll

5.1 The Cist Structure

The removal of topsoil cover [001] from around the north, west and south sides of the cist revealed that bedrock lay below to a depth of 0.11m. This also revealed the edge of the construction pit for the cist on these sides. While not fully excavated, the pit, [014], was an irregular oval measuring 2.10m by 1.50m. Apart from the function of containing the cist structure itself another aim of the individuals digging the pit would appear to have been to create a relatively flat base to the cist. In one place the base had been slightly over excavated and there are what appear to be pick or digging-stick marks cutting into the bedrock where it had been prised away. The next stage of construction was the insertion of the side slabs, these packed out and supported by fragments of schist and rounded cobbles [004] between the outer cist sides and the cut bedrock, this no doubt supporting the slabs prior to the insertion of the end slabs.

The cist chamber was constructed from four closely fitted epidiorite slabs, the longer side slabs oriented NNW-SSE (340°-160°). Overall the internal chamber measured 0.79m long, 0.42 wide and 0.40m-0.42m deep. The north end slab [010] measured 0.40m long by 0.39m high by 90mm thick. The east side slab [011] measured 1.06m long by 0.36m high by 0.91m thick and had been levelled at the north by a chock stone. This stone had split near its centre and this may have occurred during the construction of the cist. The south end slab [012] measured 0.40m long by 0.39m high by 90mm thick. A small chock stone had been inserted on its upper east side to fill a resultant gap. The west side slab [013] measured 0.85m long by 0.36m high by 0.12m thick. Both end slabs show signs of having been trimmed along their edges to create a neat tight fit against the side slabs. While there was no evidence of housing grooves in the side slabs for the end slabs, slight grooves or channels had been cut into the bedrock to house the base of the end slabs, effectively making the top of the slabs level with the top of the side slabs. The upper edges of the side slabs also showed evidence of having been trimmed to create a more level surface; whether this had been done pre or post insertion into the cist pit was difficult to ascertain. The side slabs at the south end of the cist were longer than the inner chamber which could easily have been enlarged at this end, suggesting the relatively small size of the cist chamber was intended.

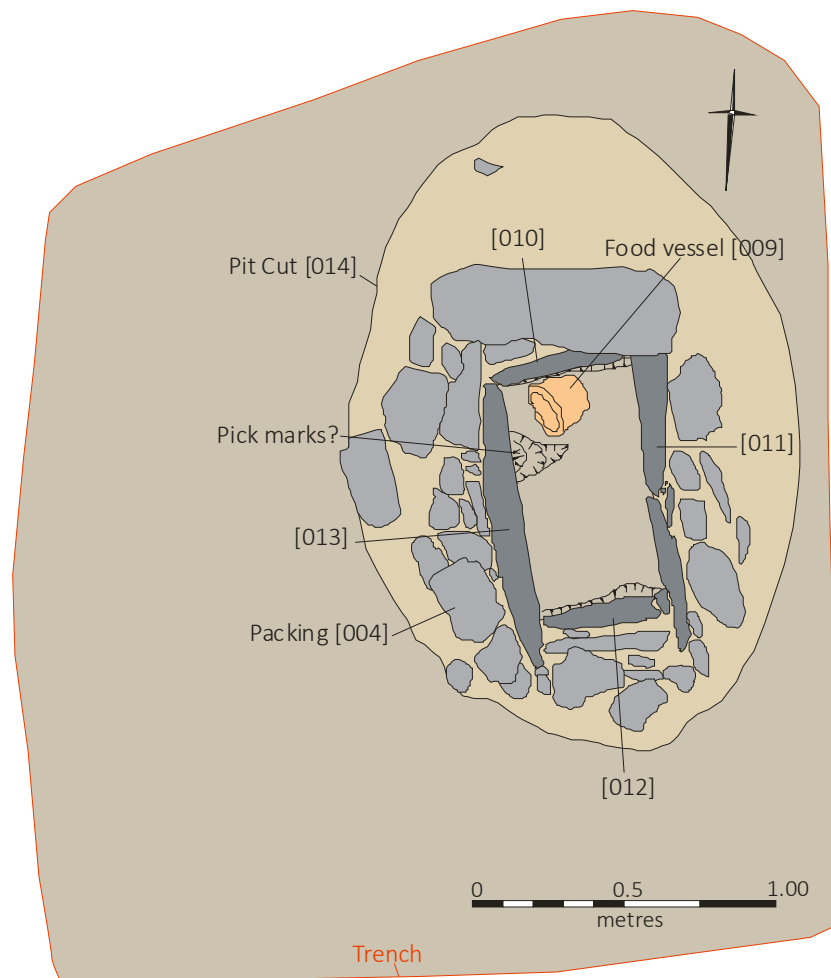


Figure 4: The Cist Structure

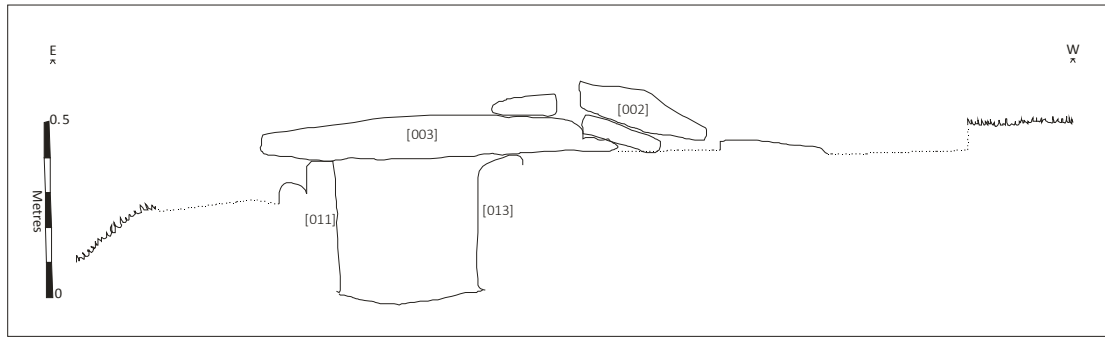


Figure 5: E-W Section

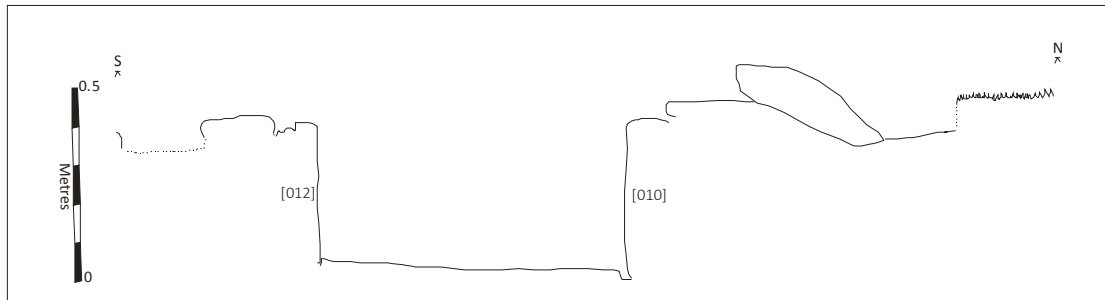


Figure 6: N-S Section



The cist structure from north



The cist structure from south



North end slab



East side slab



South end slab



West side slab



Pick-marks? in the bedrock at the base of cist

5.2 The Cist Fill

The cist contained a food vessel [009] lying on the base of the cist at its northern end and lying on its side its mouth, inclined to the west.



The food vessel



Position of the food vessel at the north end of cist

The fill of the cist chamber was recorded in four spits [005]-[008] with [008] representing the basal fill. These recorded deposits were homogenous throughout, being a light yellow brown sandy silt which included occasional schist and quartz fragments along with small quantities of charcoal and burnt bone. Several small fragments of post medieval pottery was also recovered from the fills, one from as low down as deposit [007] just above the basal fill of the cist . 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, the evidence of which was seen more clearly within the uppermost cist fill.



The infilled cist



Evidence of animal burrowing in the upper cist fill

5.3 The Cist Cover and 'Cairn'

The main cist cover consisted of a large sub oval slab of epidiorite schist [003] measuring 1.52m long, 1.00m wide and up to 0.11m thick. Packing/sealing stones were then closely fitted around the cist cover on its northern, western and southern sides.

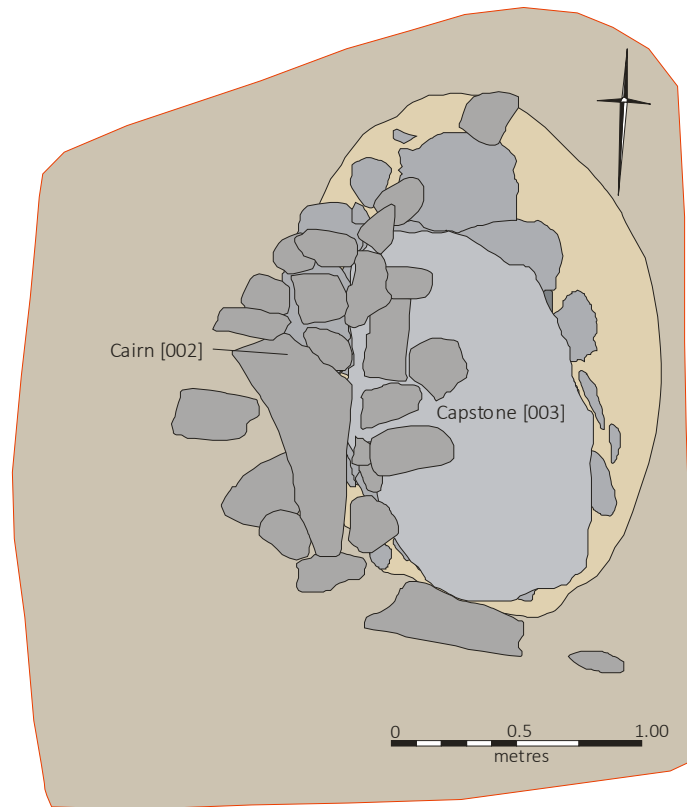


Figure 6: Capstone and cairn



Capstone from north west



Packing around north end of capstone

The absence similar packing on the eastern side might suggest it was never present or that this side had been subject to later erosion as this side coincides with the steeper edge of the knoll.

Over the north west extent of the capstone was what appeared to be the remains of a small stone cairn [002], this formed from slabs of epidiorite schist, red granite and lava stone, all of which can be sourced locally. The stones that made up this small heap directly overlaid the cist cover and each other, with no significant soil accumulation between; this suggests the cairn is contemporary with the cist structure. The cairn and cist were 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 cairn overlying the capstone from the north

6 Artefacts

A full list of the finds from the excavation appears in Appendix 3.

The food vessel

The burial was accompanied by a tripartite vase food vessel [009], highly decorated with rectangular-toothed combs arranged as bands of horizontal lines and herringbone decoration. The vessel also had a band of zig-zag false relief between the rim and the highest of two carinations. The typology of the pot suggests a probable date of between 2150-1950 BC (A. Sheridan pers. comm.).

Post medieval Pot

Post medieval pottery was recovered from three of the four cist fills, [005], [006] and [007].

Burnt Bone

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

Quartz

Small fragments of quartz were present throughout the fill of the cist and the surrounding subsoil, however only three fragments were large enough to have possibly been utilised as tools.

Charcoal

Charcoal was also present within all the cist fills although like the bone no concentrations were noted.

7 Discussion

Without the presence of the food vessel within the cist there would have been no apparent evidence that the cist contained a burial. While burnt bone was present within the cist there was no concentration that allows the interpretation of a cremation deposit that may have accompanied the food vessel. The most likely scenario was that the cist contained a body, the small size of the structure perhaps indicating that the structure was built for a child. The very fine silty infill of the cist indicates that the chamber silted up gradually over time and that the finds, particularly the small post medieval pot sherds, indicate that this process took some time. The difficulty with understanding this process is that the cist currently occupies the very top of the knoll and it is hard to see where the silt filling the cist derived from. One explanation may be that the knoll was originally higher, another being that an earthen mound covered the cists and cairn; in both scenarios the knoll or mound suffered from gradual erosion through weathering. The well sorted fine silty fill of the cist was very similar to that of Cist I excavated in 2012; this also contained a post mediaeval pottery sherd in its upper fill. At the time this led to the suggestion that the cist may have been disturbed, however the evidence from Cist II now suggests this may not have been the case.

Tripartite food vessels have been recovered from several other sites in the Kilmartin area. The nearest example was recovered from a cist within Carnassarie cairn excavated in 1930 by J. Hewat Craw (Craw 1931). This cist was similarly orientated NW-SE with the food vessel, now in the national Museum of Scotland, lying 'on its side a little to the north of the middle of the cist'. The cist however was much larger, measuring 3 feet 11 inches (c.1.2m) by 2 feet 1 inch (c.0.62m) and being 1 foot 6 inches deep (c.0.41m) although no body was in evidence.

Craw also recovered a similar vessel from a cist he excavated along with two others which had been revealed by quarrying at Bruach an Druimein on the Poltalloch Estate in 1928 (Craw 1929). Another tripartite vessel was recovered from the same estate earlier in the century, although its exact provenance remains unknown (Anderson 1905). The central cist within the Glebe cairn also contained a tripartite food vessel while another example came from a cist at Ford (Greenwell 1866, Strachan 1886). All the above mentioned cists occupied prominent features in the landscape. The cist at Ford was situated on a prominent natural knoll as were those at Bruach an Druimein, a second cist containing a jet necklace. The Glebe and Carnassarie cairns became prominent landscape features, although it is unclear whether the cists with the food vessels were primary inhumations under the cairns or later insertions into the cairns. Situated on a prominent knoll and containing a food vessel one can only surmise that the cist at Carnassarie contained an individual of some importance or perhaps a member of an important group or family within the wider community. Like the nearby cist excavated in 2012 the cist overlooks some of the more spectacular monuments in the Kilmartin Glen area, including the Glebe cairn, Carn Ban, the Carnassarie standing stones and cairn. Intervisibility between these monuments was also no doubt of some importance as at least two of these, the cairn at Carnassarie and the Glebe cairn, contained cists with food vessels, suggesting their near contemporary use as places of burial. Both these cists however were larger in size suggesting they contained adult burials while, as mentioned above, the small size of this second cist recently uncovered on Carnassarie farm indicates it contained the burial of an infant or child.



The Carnassarie cairn food vessel



Poltalloch food vessel, its provenance unknown



Glebe cairn food vessel

8 References

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Appendix 1: Context Descriptions

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

[002] Cairn. The cairn consisted of a small heap of stones located over the north and east of the capstone. The stones were of mixed petrology, the largest stone measuring 0.34m by 0.14m by 80mm. The cairn material stood up to 0.20m above the capstone [003]

[003] Capstone. Slab of epidiorite schist measuring 2.00m long, 0.64m wide and 0.11m thick

[004] Fill. Construction pit packing and fill around the outside of the cist. This comprised of rounded cobbles and angular fragments of schist, the largest stone measuring 0.36m by 0.14m by 70mm. The stones were in a mid to dark brown silty loam (not fully excavated).

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

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

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

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

[009] Food Vessel

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

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

[012] South end of cist. Slab of epidiorite schist measuring 0.57m long by 0.57m high by 60mm thick.

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

[014] Cut. Oval construction cut for cist measuring c. 2.10m by c.1.45m (not fully excavated).

Appendix 2: Context List

Number	Description
001	Topsoil
002	Cairn
003	Cap stone
004	Pit fill/packing
005	Cist Fill
006	Cist Fill
007	Cist Fill
008	Cist Fill
009	Food Vessel
010	N end slab
011	E side slab
012	S end slab
013	W side slab
014	Pit cut

Appendix 3: Finds List

Context	Type	Number	Description
001	BN	4	Burnt bone
005	PT	7	Small sherds of post medieval pot
005	ST	1	Small fragment of quartz
005	BN	19	Burnt bone
005	CH	2	Charcoal fragments
006	PT	2	Small sherds of post medieval pot
006	BN	46	Burnt bone
006	CH	3	Charcoal fragments
007	PT	1	Small sherd of post medieval pot
007	BN	50	Burnt bone
007	CH	7	Charcoal fragments
007	ST	1	Fragment of quartz
007	ST	1	Fragment of quartz
007			Phosphate samples 55-56
008	BN	3	Burnt bone
008	BN		Burnt bone 1mm retent
008	CH		Charcoal fragments 4mm retent
008	BN		Burnt bone 1mm retent
008			Phosphate samples 1-54
009	PT		Food vessel

Appendix 4: Photo List

Photo No.	Description	Direction from
1	Knoll from SE	SE
2	Knoll from SE	SE
3	Knoll from NW	NW
4	Knoll from NW	NW
5	Knoll from NW	NW
6	Cist from NE	NE
7	Knoll from NW	NW
8	Knoll from NW	NW
9	Knoll from NW	NW
10	Knoll from NW	NW
11	Knoll from NW	NW
12	Knoll from NW	NW
13	Knoll from NW	NW
14	Cist from NE	NE
15	Cist from NE and crew	NE
16	Cist and cairn	N
17	Cist and cairn	N
18	Cist and cairn	S
19	Cist and cairn	S
20	Cist and cairn	E
21	Cist and cairn	E
22	Cist and cairn	N
23	Cist and cairn	S
24	Cist and cairn	N
25	Cist and cairn	W
26	Cist and cairn	W
27	Cist and cairn	E
28	Cist and cairn	E
29	Natural outcrop on knoll	E
30	Natural outcrop on knoll	S
31	Natural outcrop on knoll	S
32	Cist and cairn	N
33	Cist and cairn	N
34	Cist and cairn	W
35	Cist and cairn	NE
36	Cist and cairn	S
37	Cist and cairn	S
38	Cist capstone	S
39	Cist and cairn	W
40	Cist and cairn	N
41	Cist and cairn	E

42	Cist and cairn	E
43	Cist and cairn	N
44	Cist and cairn	E
45	Cist and cairn	NE
46	Cist and cairn	N
47	Cist and cairn	NW
48	Cist and cairn	NW
49	Cist and cairn	SW
50	Cist and cairn	W
51	Cist and cairn	W
52	Cist and stone packing	N
53	Cist and stone packing	NW
54	Cist and stone packing	NW
55	Cist and stone packing	NW
56	Cist and stone packing	NW
57	Cist and stone packing	SW
58	Cist and stone packing	S
59	Capstone removed	
60	Upper disturbed soil in cist	NE
61	Upper disturbed soil in cist	N
62	Upper disturbed soil in cist	N
63	Cist and upper fill	N
64	Cist and upper fill	N
65	Cist and upper fill	S
66	Cist and upper fill	S
67	Rim of food vessel	
68	Rim of food vessel	
69	Rim of food vessel	
70	Excavation of food vessel	
71	Excavation of food vessel	
72	Excavation of food vessel	
73	Excavation of food vessel	
74	Excavation of food vessel	
75	Excavation of food vessel	
76	Excavation of food vessel	
77	Cist and food vessel	S
78	Cist and food vessel	S
79	Cist and food vessel	S
80	Cist and food vessel	E
81	Cist and food vessel	E
82	Cist and food vessel	E
83	Cist and food vessel	S
84	Cist and food vessel	S
85	Cist and food vessel	E
86	Cist and food vessel	E

87	Cist and food vessel	NW
88	Cist and food vessel	W
89	Cist and food vessel	W
90	Cist and food vessel	W
91	Cist and food vessel	W
92	Cist and food vessel	W
93	Cist and food vessel	NE
94	Cist and food vessel	NE
95	Cist and food vessel	NE
96	Cist and food vessel	NE
97	Cist and food vessel	E
98	Cist structure	N
99	Cist structure	S
100	Cist structure	S
101	Cist structure	S
102	Cist structure	S
103	Cist structure	N
104	Cist structure	N
105	Southern end slab	N
106	Eastern side slab	W
107	Western side slab	E
108	Northern end slab	S
109	Pick marks	E
110	Cist structure	S
111	Cist structure	S

Appendix 5: DES Entry

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Argyll and Bute
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Carnassarie Cist II
PROJECT CODE:	CRC 15
PARISH:	Kilmartin
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	Roddy Regan
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	Kilmartin Museum
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Archaeological Excavation
NMRS NO(S):	
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	Burial cist
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	Tripartite Food Vessel
NGR (2 letters, 6 figures)	NM 83442 01491
START DATE (this season)	August 2015
END DATE (this season)	August 2015
PREVIOUS WORK (incl. DES ref.)	<p>(Survey) James, H. F. 2003 Medieval and Later Landscape and Settlement in Mid Argyll and Knapdale, 2003. GUARD Projects 1416, 1446 & 1447, Glasgow University</p> <p>(Survey) Regan, R. 2007 Carnassarie Farm, Archaeological Walkover Survey. Kilmartin Museum Report.</p> <p>(Excavation) Regan, R. 2013 Carnassarie Cist, Argyll, An Archaeological Excavation. Kilmartin Museum Report.</p>
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (May include information from other fields)	<p>In August 2013 Rosemary Neagle the proprietor of Carnassarie Farm, observed what appeared to be the shape of a large flat stone situated under the grass/topsoil cover and thinking this might represent a cist she approached Kilmartin Museum to investigate the site. During the ensuing visit the topsoil was removed from around the possible cist which revealed a large capstone with the remains of a possible small stone cairn sealing what appeared to be an intact cist structure. The site was then covered with geotextile and the topsoil reinstated. In early August 2015 a team from Kilmartin Museum assisted by Dr Alison Sheridan from the NMS returned to the site in order to more fully examine the site. The cist is situated on the top of a prominent raised knoll (187m AOD) affording extensive views down Kilmartin Glen to the sea at Crinan and overlooks Ford Glen at the E. The knoll mound also overlooks the prehistoric monuments of the Carnassarie Standing Stones (NMRS: NM80SW 22) and a burial cairn (NMRS: NM80SW 21) to</p>

	<p>the S and the impressive burial cairn Carn Ban (NMRS: NM80SW28) to the E. In addition the knoll can be seen from the cist excavated in 2012 which lies approximately 500m to the NE. The pit that held the cist was cut into natural bedrock, the cist itself constructed from four closely fitting slabs forming the side,s these sealed by the large capstone. The cist contained a complete tripartite food vessel that no doubt accompanied a burial, although no skeletal remains had survived the acidic soils. The relatively small size of the cist suggests the individual it contained was likely a child.</p>
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRS:	
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Kilmartin Museum
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