

* NJ025W0004B

A Report of a field walk Survey of the

= h
= 4c

Standing Stones

on

1269\BAS

Tom nan Carragh,

by Ballintomb Farm.

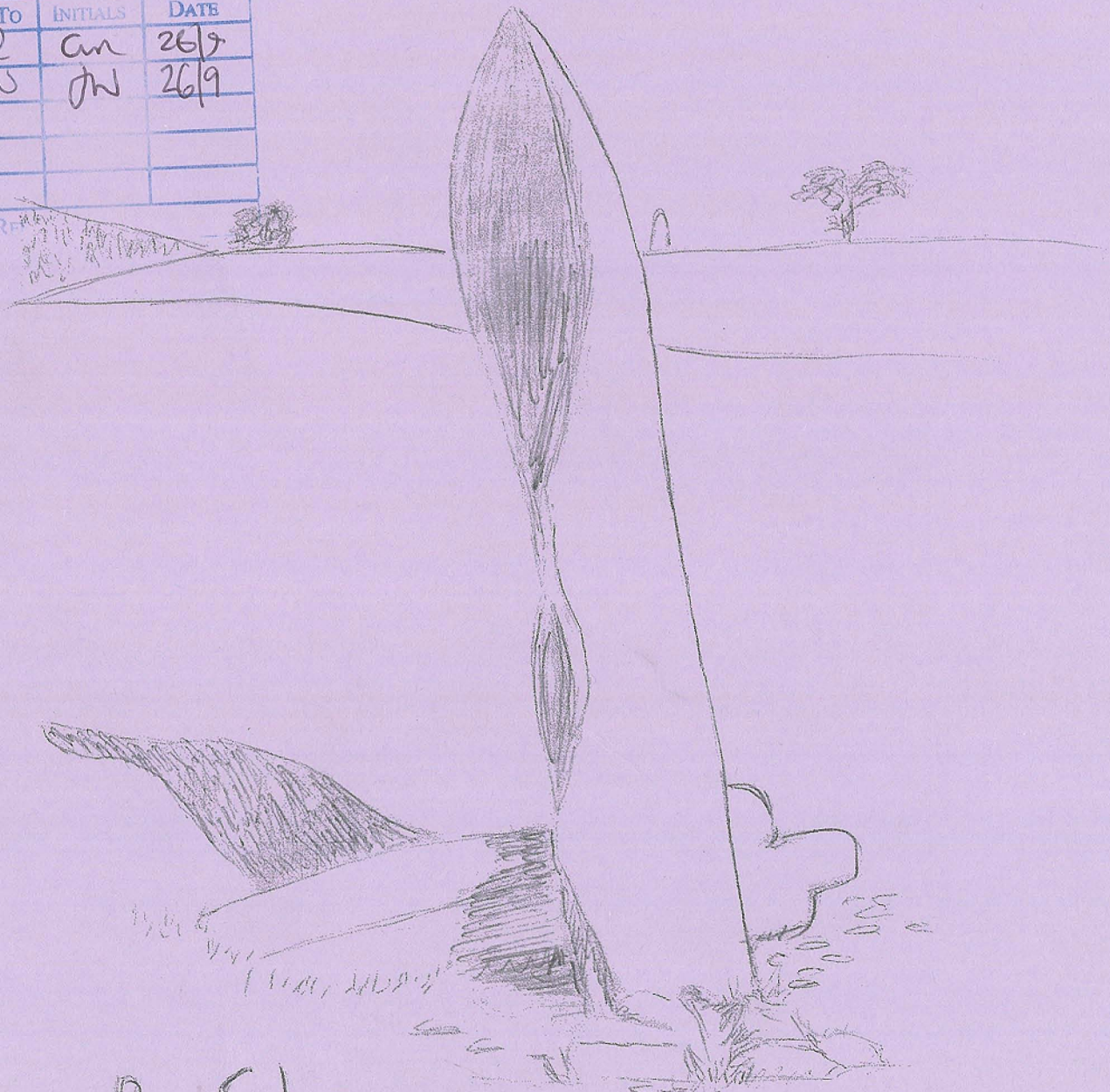
2002

H.C. PLANNING AND
DEVELOPMENT SERVICE

26 SEP 2003

PASS TO	INITIALS	DATE
GR	an	26/9
JW	JW	26/9

THE RE



By SLaw

STANDING STONES AT BALLINTOMB.

The stones that are recorded span an area of 210m but on closer inspection there are others that are hardly taken into account. Richard Oram in his *Historic Guide to Moray and Strathspey*, pg 32, says "This alignment of three stones runs NE to SW along the crest of a gravel ridge, between the former Aviemore to Grantown railway and the River Spey, 1 mile east of Dulnain Bridge. The Stones, which are irregular pillars, are positioned approximately 100m apart. In the late Middle Ages, this site formed the assembly place of the local courts, and the rallying place of the Grants of Freuchie."

Other references can be found in Dr W Forsyth's book "In the Shadow of Cairngorm" where mention is made of the Gallows on the moor of Bellintomb or Bellintome, but the courts seem to be held at Coulnakyle, Nethey Bridge, which can be seen from Tom nan Carragh. On page 53 there is a mention of the gathering of the Clan Grant by the aged Sir Ludovick Grant (1663-1716) at this place in 1710. But local tradition has it as the rallying place for the Grants.

First encounter

On a cold and windy day during Feb 2003 I made my way towards Ballintomb farm with the intention of recording some earthwork features running from the junction of the farm road and tunnel under the new road alignment at the Dulnain Bridge crossing. In my opinion there are four, possibly more, building foundations with platforms, abutting a trackway running in an easterly direction towards the railway and some marshy-ground. To reach this area, I walked along the old railway line from Lower Gaich farm, negotiating a few obstacles such as fencing across the track bed and water accumulation. When I got to Ballintomb land the track was clear and there was also access to the Standing Stones. As I was so near and had never visited the stones I deviated from my goal. The result of which is this report and the earthwork features have yet to be recorded. As I approached the hillock known as Tom nan Carragh I noticed that there are more features that could be the remains of other buildings. Investigation of these features proved difficult to ascertain whether they were house sites as they have been well ploughed over and some were of a rectangular shape while others seemed to be oval rather than round.

I later found that, in the next field to the south, the SMR NJ02SW0034 record states that, there were seven unroofed buildings and one enclosure being on the southwest side of the hillock at, NJ02SW34 0085 2455. Although these features appeared on the OS 6-inch map 1874 they are not shown on the current edition of 1:10000 or 1:25000. Because of my random walking I approached the hill from the NE (photo 1), a standing stone could clearly be seen on the skyline, this proved later to be the middle stone. Following what seem to be a trackway up the hillside seen in photo 2, I found that it was cut short by a gash in the hillside which indicated to me that the digging out of this area was done later. The SMR and local knowledge informed me that in 1836, because of continual flooding due to the excess water in the Spey and the Dulnain rivers, a channel was cut through the hill to relieve the situation. This flooding and the great flood of 1829, may be why the community of Ballintomb, or as some records

say Bellinstone, was abandoned. During the excavation work the labourers unearthed a skeleton, SMR NJ02SW0003, not much detail was recorded, but a search through the local papers archive may prove fruitful.

Stone 1 NJ 0118 - 2469

NJ02SW0004

Rather than dropping down into the gully I followed the fence line that surrounded a once afforested area, as I knew there was a stone just over the other side. Unfortunately the fence is fairly new and difficult to get through so I was content at that time to take my photos from a distance, (Photos 3+3a). Photo 3 looks towards the Cromdale hills and 3a along the hilltop towards Lower Gaich. Although I did go back a few weeks later to have a closer look as photos.4 + 4a show. As you can see it is around 2m tall and in parts half a meter wide and looking to the NW you can see its different planes. Photo 4. The stone is of a Granite type substance with a narrowing top, that when your back is to the south, points due North. There is a straight edge that indicates due East, when aligned with the Munro Creggan Chaise at 2367 feet and there may be other alignments yet to be discovered. The other side has just the one plane and its slightly curved left side may have some significance, note the nick on the skyline where the mid-winter sun may rise. Photo 4a. To the NNE, approximately 20m away there is an earth-bank that runs in a N/S direction and beyond the ground slopes down to the lower plain.

At the end of the excavated area is a large hole that unfortunately has been filled in with farm and household rubbish, by past farmers. When this was first occurred is unclear as there is so much. The feature is indicated on the OS maps and would be on the earlier ones although I have not confirmed this at the present time. Below a ridge, which crosses over to the south side of the gully, water issues out of the side of the hill, possible a drain, which connects to the hole.

Following a path of sorts I ascended the southern half of Tom nan Carrach until I encounter a fence, on the other side of which is a most curious feature. It was a hollowed out area with passage like entrances. At this point I could not make out much detail, and I decided first to look at the middle stone before finding a gate through the fence in order to examine it more closely.

Stone 2 NJ 0115 - 2463

The middle stone stands in a slight hollow with several humps and bumps surrounding it that may be of some significance. They cannot be the remnants of trees as there is no indication that this area of the hill has ever been afforested. Also it is higher than the area to the N + NE as the ground seems to be a step down like bailies around a castle. This can be seen in Photo5, which also shows its alignment with the north stone, that can just be seen to the left near to the top, albeit very faintly because of the background colour of the grass. Photo 6 gives an indication of the direction of due north in three different ways also the landfall towards the edge of the hill. Next is an overall view towards the west, Photo 7, again the photo brings out slight features that are not at first apparent. There seems to be a trackway leading southwards away from the stone, or too, whichever way you wish to interpret it. The stones makeup is of a similar substance as the north stone.

Next the curious feature, which is on the NE corner of the southern part of Tom nan Carragh., photo 8. NJ 0117 – 2459. A closer view, photo 9, shows the four outlets and the sunken centre with the ranging pole is indicating N. It looked to me like an over sized ashtray, that had been placed in the landscape by a passing giant. Photo 10 is taken from the south quadrant looking down into the hollow, showing all four outlets, and its relationship to the gully. The north Standing Stone is behind the tree. Moving onto the east quadrant, Photo 11, the view again is looking into the centre, this photo also shows a hollow on the north side. Photo 12 looks more towards the west and the last upright standing stone can be seen in the distance. In the same place but looking north west, photo 13 shows where the middle stone is placed in relationship to this feature. Turning again to look northwards, photo 14 shows the gully with the just the top of the tip heap showing, indicating where the deep hole is. Also in this picture the north standing stone can be seen just to the right of the tree. Having read the book "In the Shadow of Cairngorm " I have come to the conclusion that this is the foundation trench to the Ballintomb Gallows. Just across the river Spey at this point is the old ferry crossing from Balliefurth and according to Dr Forsyth's book, the Baron Ballies held court at Coulmakyle, Nethybridge.

Stones 3 + 4 NJ 0102 - 2456

Moving on to the southern stone from this feature you descend into an area that gives the impression that it is an amphitheatre with the stone standing on a stage. The backcloth is created by rising ground to the west, which forms a little hillock and a slightly smaller one towards the north, photo15. As you approach this stone you will note that there is another stone, which has fallen and its western end is partly buried. Looking from a southern aspect there is a distinct point to the top of the upright stone, which as photo 16 shows points towards the north. The geological make up of these stones are similar to the other two. The view of the stones from the southwest not only shows the beautiful lines of the upright stone, but also highlights the contours of the surrounding area. In photo 17, an attempt was made to line up the stone with the middle one but because of the distance and the colouring of the stone it is very hard to make out. However it is there, to the right of the stone, looking as if it is part of the fence line.

If the fallen stone was re-erected the notch that can be seen better in photo 18 may well prove to be of some significance. Records show that an attempt was made to re-erect the stone, " The base of the megalith had been packed with stones up to 0.3m in diameter. Only the northern two thirds of the socket was excavated, as the base of the megalith overlaid the rest. There were no finds. Re-erection of the stone was abandoned after it was observed that the megalith had broken along both axes when it fell. The socket was filled with builders sand and the area re-turfed." SMR NJ02SW0004B. As I stood at the side of the fallen stone and visualized it not fully upright but at a 55% angle leaning towards the other stone, I saw that the notch would then frame a view of the Munro to the east. Walking up the rise to the west I noticed two circular features. The one shown in photo 19 is 5m in diameter with what appears to be a ditch around it and the other Photo 20 is more like a letter C but again approximately 5m across. The Standing stone can be seen in the middle ground and the large pole in the background, indicated the position of the gallows feature. Also you can see the amphitheatre effect with a dip in that may be an entrance from the river. Following the slope down to the SE, I en-counted one or two hummocks which I will describe later. The hill starts to descend to the plain from here on, but there is a

scooped out area that contains discarded field-stones, and three others that are of interest. In the middle of this area there is a small stone partly buried in the ground and is very reminiscent of a tombstone. Photo 21. The photo is taken from the SW and as you can see it lines up with the other standing stone. In the west part of this area, there is a large stone laid on its side, which is approximately 2m long, and is supposed to have cup marks on it. Photo 22 I am afraid I did not see any but perhaps a more detail examination might reveal them, but I did notice that it did not have as much lichen on it compared to the stone on the east side of the scoop. Photo 23 This is partially buried in the ground and looks as if it has been undisturbed for some considerable time. Only a meter and a half is showing and it is very rugged looking but of a similar makeup to the three other standing stones unlike the west one, which is more layered with the top surface a smother grey. The hole to the above right can be attributed to the local rabbit population. In both pictures the outline of the circular features can be seen, or is it something else? Moving back on to the plateau just slightly to the left of the SW line is a small mound with a depression in the centre. Photo 24. Is this where one of the two stones just described stood. As the ranging pole shows the feature is over 2m in diameter, and to the extreme right is another less obvious mound that could be were the other one stood. Also in this picture there is another mound with a small cobble like stone on it, which will be described after looking at photo 25. This shows the interior with the ranging pole indicating mag. N. and is relationship to the southern standing stone.

Moving round to the mound on the eastern side near to the edge of the hill, there is nothing of significance other than the cobblestone partly buried on the north side of the mound. On the OS map though a spring or issue is shown to be in this area. Mid-way down the slope there is an area that may well be where the spring was. Photo 26 shows some interesting land formations, which may prove to be archaeology after further investigation. Photo 27 gives a view of this mound from the NE and how far the mound is of the edge of the plateau.

Before summarising I would like to mention two other features that may or may not be of the same time span. At the extreme SW corner of the Hill known as Tom nan Carragh, on the lower plane, there is a hollow full of stone debris, photo 28 that could be clearance from the seven buildings noted on the early OS maps. Next to this slightly higher and to the east is another area that has been cut out of the hillside for what purpose is not clear, although some dumping may have taken place. Photo 29.

Summary

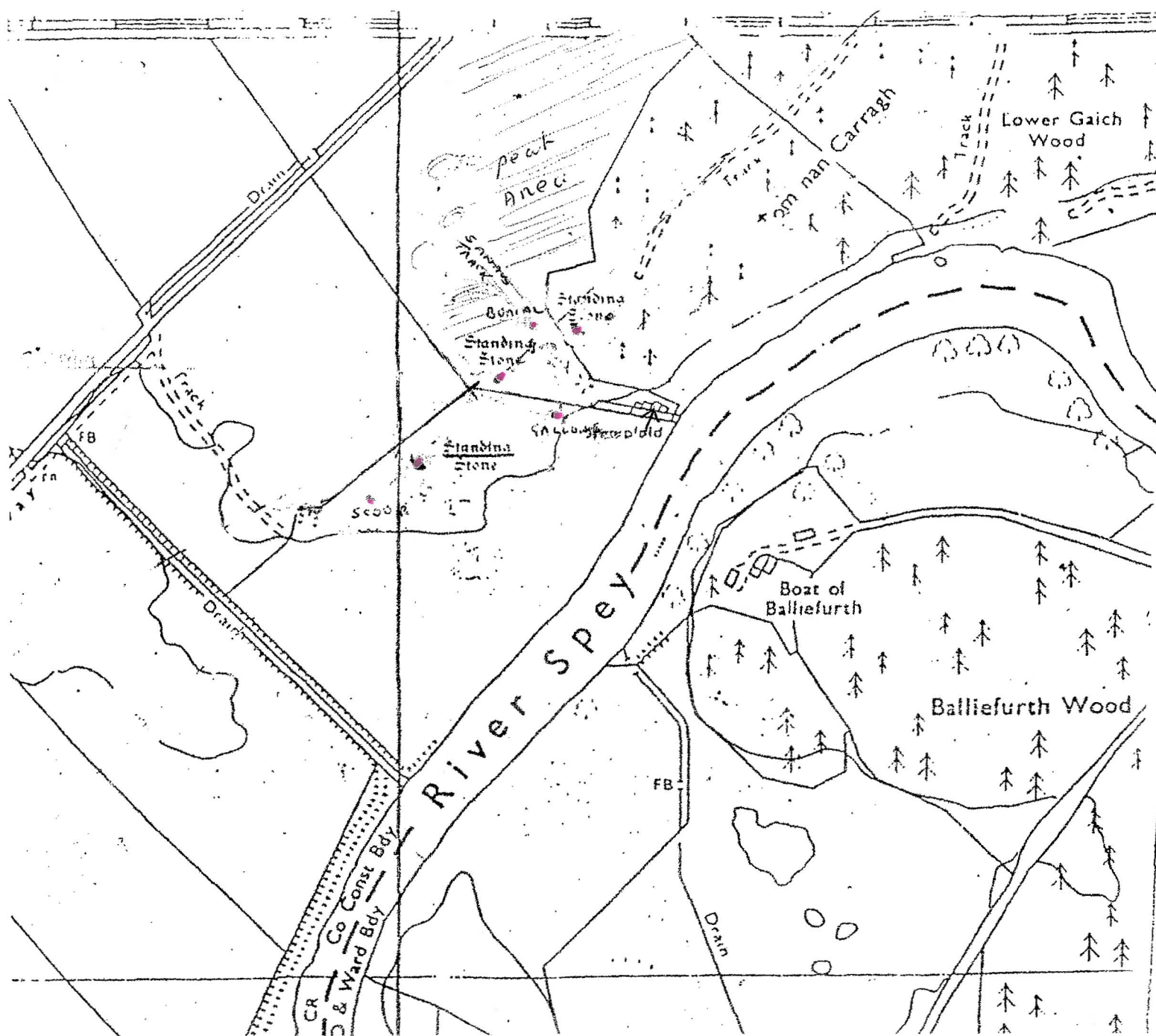
In July I visited the site once again and found that the farmer had ploughed the field just to the west of Tom nan Carragh, and was on that day scarifying the field. The mounds that I had noted in February were more pronounced with out the turf. The soil from the fence line that runs SE from the railway track to Tom nan Carragh, is quite stony and as you walk north-eastwards there are several large mounds that could have had turf houses on them although they are of irregular shape and have an increase of the stone density. To the east and northeast of this area the land dips down and becomes very peaty, and follows the base contours of Tom nan Carragh. In fact, the railway embankment cuts across the north-western part below the track line I had noted at the beginning of the report. The length of this peaty area runs right to the

edge of Ballintomb land, and possibly to the other side of the plantation. Looking down on the area from Tom nan Carragh the peat looks to have more depth in the north-eastern part. The most exciting feature that has come to light is the sandy track or ridge that crosses the peat in a straight line from the gully cut in 1836. As it reaches the higher ground to the west it stops short as if there was a connecting ditch with a bridge over it. Photo 30 + 31. While talking to the farmer he mentioned that, as he was ploughing this field, one area just fell away leaving a large hole that he had to fill in for safety reasons. Also in the middle where the peat was densest, he found it difficult to keep the tractor upright. Information past on to him about the digging out of the gully, relates to a deep seated drain put in many years ago, that ran N to S from the edge of the Lower Gaich plantation to the gully. This would mean that the gully was cut in order to put in the pipe, and not as local people would have it, to let the water out, although it does achieve this aim. Therefore the large hollow that has been filled with rubbish, could have been the site of the natural outlet for the water, which had permeated under the hill. With the disturbance of putting in the pipe the ground must have collapsed inward creating this large hollow. The outlet that now comes out of the hillside is probably the end of the deep -seated pipe draining the marshland. Exploring the edges of the ploughed field, I found that there were different soil textures depending on the density of the stone content. Near to the Tom it was firmer and the stones increased as it neared the steep side of the hill although there were spurs and alcoves unlike a sand dune, which has straight smooth sides. On the west side the density of the stones varied being more concentrated on the mounds. The peaty soil graded out from the middle of the area, as that is where it was deepest, over 30cm, the depth of the ploughing. In one corner, which can be seen in the centre of photo 31, there was a hard crust like layer of sandy soil slate grey in colour, which I took a small sample of. Talking to my neighbour latter on in the day I showed him the sample and he said it reminded him of a similar example he had seen on Dava Moor when digging peat's. A local farmer had told him that it was debris laid down by the Great Flood of 1829. This would fit in nicely with my theory that this area west of the Tom had always been marshy or even a lochan with a small land bridge at its southern end. Looking at the contours on the OS map this lochan may well have stretch northwards as far as Lower Gaich farm where the high ground of Tom nan Carragh, rejoins the main hillside. As we have read there was the remains of seven buildings on this southern land bridge that may have been the position of Ballintomb farm, pre 1830s. Looking at the delta plane of the Dulnain River, and the meandering of the Spey there is visual evidence that both have moved their positions over time. Therefore the possible trackway and house platforms that descend from the present Dulnain Bridge road towards the marshy ground could well have been part of the township of Ballinstone also mention in the local history books. Balintomb can definitely be seen on the maps pre 1700s, and one of the ways to the ferry at Balliefurth, the other coming from the NE by the way of Lower Gaich.

Future Work to be under taken.

A detailed mapping survey of Tom nan Carragh and the features to the SW, could prove beneficial and if possible a ground radar survey to see if there are any burials associated with the circular feature on the highest part of the Tom, or any where else on the whole of the Tom nan Carragh.

Sandra Law.



North Stone.

NS 0118-2469

BURIAL

NS 0113-2469

MIDDLE STONE

NS 0115-2463

SOUTH STONES

NS 0102-2456

GALLOWS BASE

NS 0117-2459



PHOTO 1



PHOTO 2



PHOTO 3



PHOTO 3A



PHOTO 4A



PHOTO 4



PHOTO 5



PHOTO 6



PHOTO 7



PHOTO 8



PHOTO 9



PHOTO 10



PHOTO 11



PHOTO 12



PHOTO 13



PHOTO 14



PHOTO 15



PHOTO 16



PHOTO 17



PHOTO 18



PHOTO 19



PHOTO 20

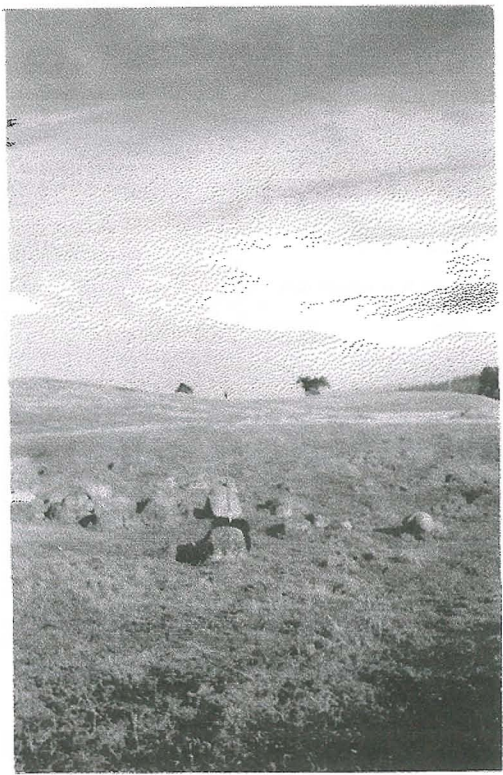


PHOTO 21



PHOTO 22



PHOTO 23



PHOTO 24



PHOTO 25



PHOTO 26



PHOTO 27



PHOTO 28



PHOTO 29



PHOTO 30



PHOTO 31