
WLGS 20 Cairnpapple Hill (Proposed RIGS) [NS 9872 7174] (Figure 65), (Figure 66), (Figure 67), (Figure 68)

[WLC site description](#)

[Part of the Bathgate Group sites](#)

Other designations: SAM (Cairnpapple Hill); AGLV; HPWG (unimproved acid grassland)

Cairnpapple Hill is one of the best known and most important pre-historic sites on the mainland of Scotland. The site consists of both ceremonial and burial monuments. Human activity on Cairnpapple dates back 5,500 years to the Neolithic period. During the Bronze Age the site was used as a burial site. Burials were placed under cairns, in shallow graves and in unlined pits. The site builders used the local rock types — basalt from the Bathgate Hills Volcanic Formation and quartz-dolerite from the dyke to the north or the sill to the east of the site.

The site offers one of the best viewpoints in central Scotland — on a clear day it stretches from Arran in the west to the Bass Rock in the east. Between the Rifle Range Quarries (WLGS 27) and the 312 m Trig point 600 m south of Cairnpapple Hill several low scarp features trending north-north-east pick out fresh, fine-grained basalt are interpreted as the central parts of lava flows.

(Figure 65) Stone circle and burial cairn on Cairnpapple Hill, viewed from the south-west. Rock types used are mainly local — basalt from the Bathgate Hills Volcanic Formation and quartz-dolerite from nearby intrusions [NS 9872 7174] (WLGS 20).

(Figure 66) Stone circle and burial cairn on Cairnpapple Hill, viewed from the south-east. The cairn is a reconstruction representing the original Bronze Age cairn. [NS 9872 7174] (WLGS 20).

(Figure 67) Stone circle and and satellite burial chambers on Cairnpapple Hill. Rock types used are mainly local — basalt from the Bathgate Hills Volcanic Formation and quartz-dolerite from nearby intrusions [NS 9872 7174] (WLGS 20).

(Figure 68) Historic Scotland interpretation board at Cairnpapple (WLGS 20).



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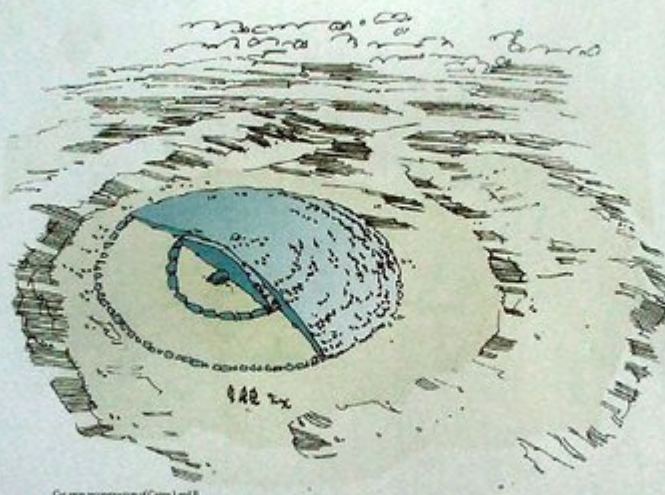
CAIRNPAPPLE

THE CAIRNS

About 4,000 years ago the focus of use at Cairnpapple shifted away from ceremony with the henge and began to be used as a place of burial. No less than three separate phases of cairn building and several burial techniques have been detected by archaeologists, making this a very complex site.

Probably the first burial was what is now known as the North Grave. Built within the henge, the grave was marked by an upright stone at the foot with smaller stones lining the sides. The body was buried with a wooden club and two beaker pots, then the grave was covered with a small cairn of stones (Cairn I).

Near the North Grave, and perhaps with it, other graves have been found. It may be that at this time the henge was used as a cremation cemetery.

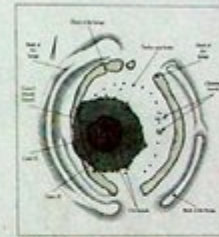


Cut away reconstruction of Cairns I and II



The henge from the North Grave

A site burial with the earlier North Grave beyond



Plan of the site

Sometime later two cist burials were placed near the North Grave, both covered with large capstones. These were then covered with an impressive stone cairn measuring 15 metres in diameter and edged with 21 kerb stones (Cairn II). The modern concrete dome covers the area of Cairn II, but is probably much higher than the original cairn it copies.

The largest and final cairn measured 30 metres in diameter (Cairn III). The grave which this cairn must have covered when it was built has never been found. It is possible that it was built into the top of Cairn II.

The last burials at Cairnpapple are the rock-out graves in the eastern half of the henge. They are aligned roughly east-west and they do not appear to have contained any grave goods. They date to sometime in the 1st millennium AD and are likely to be Christian.

HISTORIC SCOTLAND

(Figure 68) Historic Scotland interpretation board at Cairnpapple (WLGS 20).