

Cerrig Gron Forvie : Forvie Stone Circle
Discovery of a Coastal Bronze Age Recumbent Stone Circle – R. John Hughes B.Sc.

SUMMARY REPORT

It has long been known that there was a thriving Bronze Age coastal settlement on the Forvie Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Nature Reserve. A large hut circle can be seen from satellites, and many small hut circles are known about. Burial cairns are also present. Up until now no stone circle has been found and documented.

The sands of Forvie shift with time, both on land and offshore. In spring 2011, the sea swept a channel clear of a metre deep in sand. The circle came to light as shown below.

PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

Note all photographs © Lluniau Myrddin – Merlins Images –R J Hughes 2011



In addition other stone arrangements have appeared with the scouring of the sands along the beach to the north 1050 m away. When these were put in place is unclear. Neither is it clear what they may signify but one line of stones points to the stone circle, and another to 550-600m south of the Bronze Age settlement of huts easily visible to day.

There is what appears to be a recumbent stone missing at the circle site. Excavation may bring one to light, but this is unknown. What is known is that 1050 m north is a stone that is exactly the right size and shape for it to have been used as a recumbent.

To conclude the detailed report that follows an explanation of who built the recumbent stone circles peculiar to the North East of Scotland is put forward as a hypothesis. It may be possible by DNA analysis of human bone and analysing bronze artefacts found at sites to deduce where the apparent influx of people came from. The spread pattern of settlements (a stone circle per settlement) pictured on the following page would suggest a landing on the east coast, at or near Forvie, Aberdeen and Peterhead that gained a foothold and then spread inland to good farming country.

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CONTENTS INTRODUCTION

Discovered – A Bronze Age Stone Circle At Forvie.

They have lain mostly undisturbed for millennia. Situated in the North East of Scotland they bear all the hallmarks of once having been a recumbent stone circle.

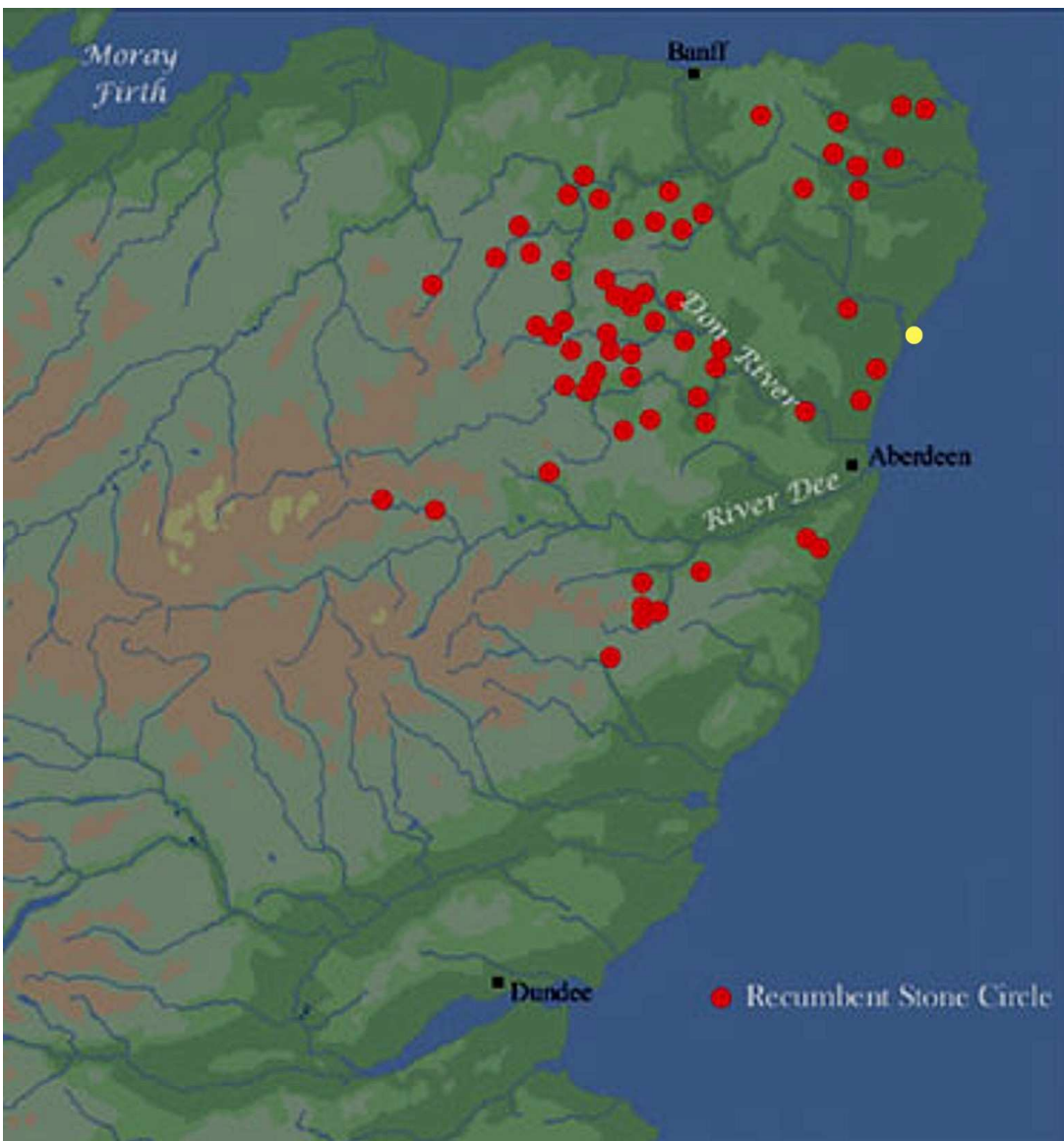
With sandy machar all around, the question is where did the collection of stones come from?

Where they all dragged 2,500 m along the beach from the nearest rocky outcrops?

Or like the blue stones of Stonehenge where they shipped to their present location?

A geological analysis of the stones can answer the question.

This is the first written documentation about Cerrig Gron Forvie (Forvie Stone Circle).



The Yellow Dot marks the position of Cerrig Gron Forvie.

GPS Co ordinates
+ - 5 mts.
Accuracy.

NK 00926 24383

Approximate diameter

20 mts.

Estimated number of stones

8 to 10

Arrangement

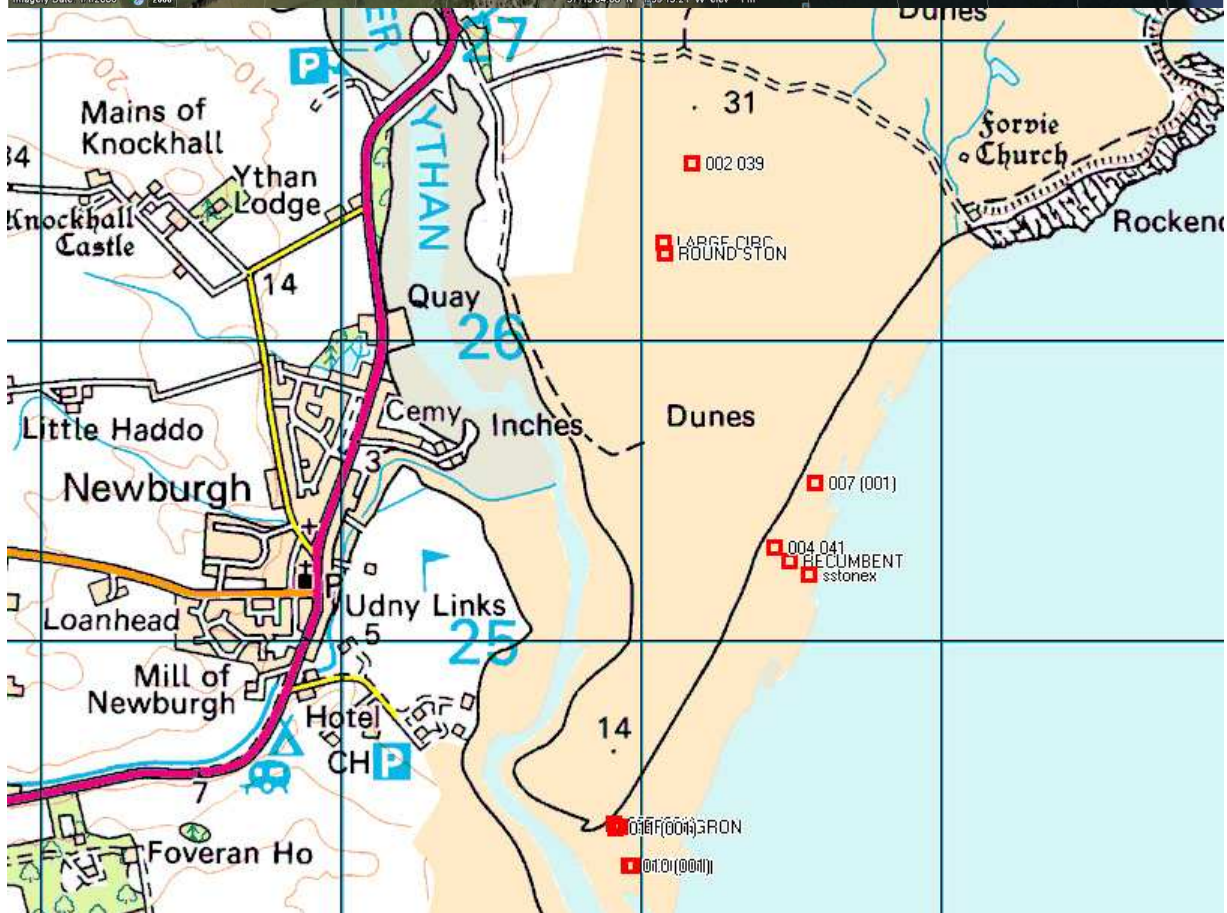
Roughly Circular distribution

Stone Size and Shape

As other stone circle stones

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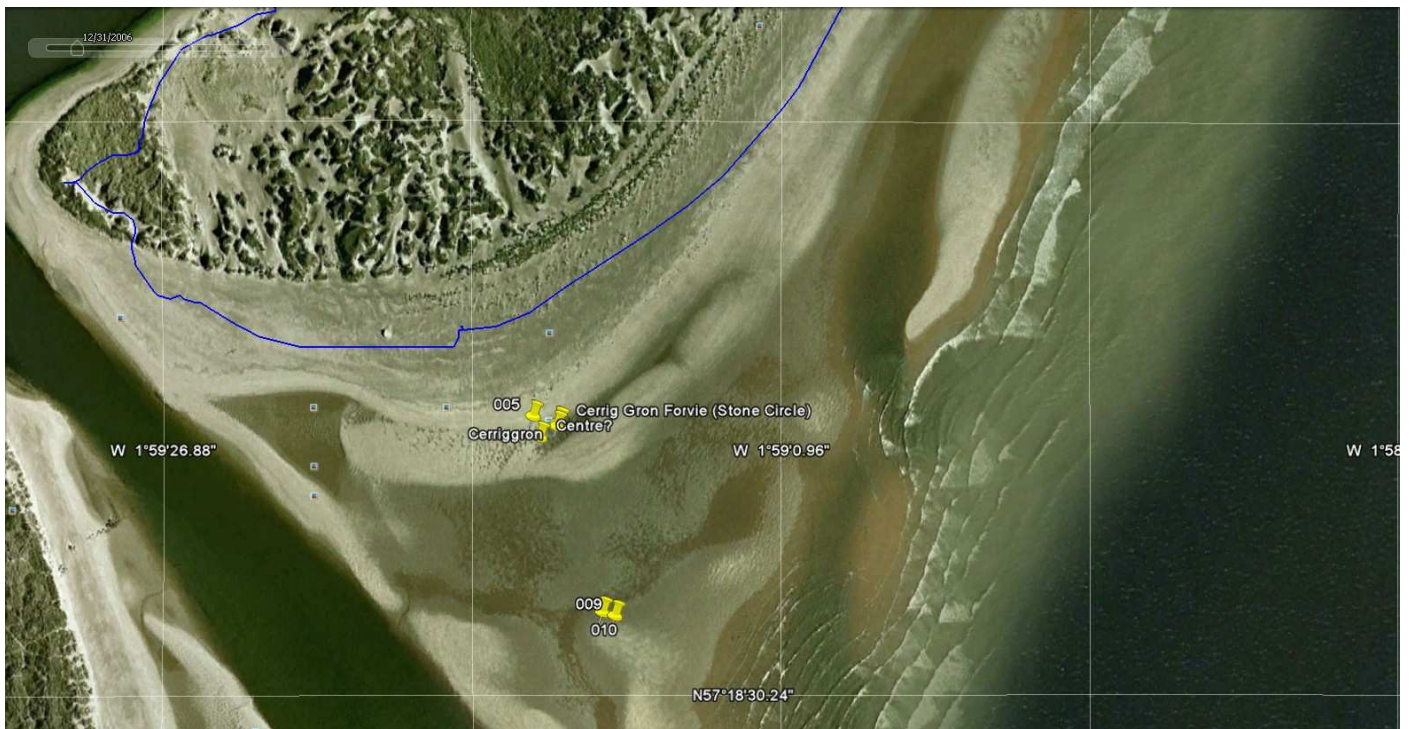
THE EVIDENCE



Google map and OS map of SNH Forvie Nature Reserve, with gps points marking the position of the stone circle, an arrangement of stones 1050 m to the north including a possible recumbent, hut circles and burial cairns.

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From a knowledge of how sand headlands behave along the east coast, and by looking at the satellite image, one realises that in the past the sea had not encroached inland to the extent it has today and what is shown as low tide sand on the OS map was dry ground to a large extent in bronze age time around 4,500 years ago.



Google Earth 31st Dec 2006 Satellite Image with gps marking stones.

From the above satellite photograph the stone circle collection of stones is hidden by sand, close to the high tide mark, so it would have been a safe place for it in Bronze Age times. Stones 009 and 010 are around 110m from the stone circle. In total on what would have been a headland 5 stones have been noted another unmarked 2 being about a further 40m or so SE of 009 and 010

Their purpose is unknown. Possibly they formed a cairn at the mouth of the estuary at one time.

The blue line is a walk track along the edge of the beach. The WW 2 pillbox can be made out to the NW of the stone circle.

A STUDY OF THE STONE CIRCLE - End March 2011 Very early April.

I will let the following photographs from different viewpoints speak for themselves. The stones have been labelled so you recognise which stone you are looking at in the photographs.

A ground plan has been included to better show the distribution of the stones to a rough scale.

Photographs of individual stones show that these stones constituting the stone circle were chosen for the shape they could be cut into. Some have obviously been shaped.

Their size is consistent with the size of the standing stones that constitute stone circles in the North East. In a sandy headland devoid of stones to have the right amount of stones, of the right size, and in the corresponding correct size layout of a near circle shows this is not a random collection. The position is a prominent one as well, which fits in well with it being a stone circle.

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Cerrig Gron Forvie : Forvie Stone Circle



End March – Above view looking SW at circle.

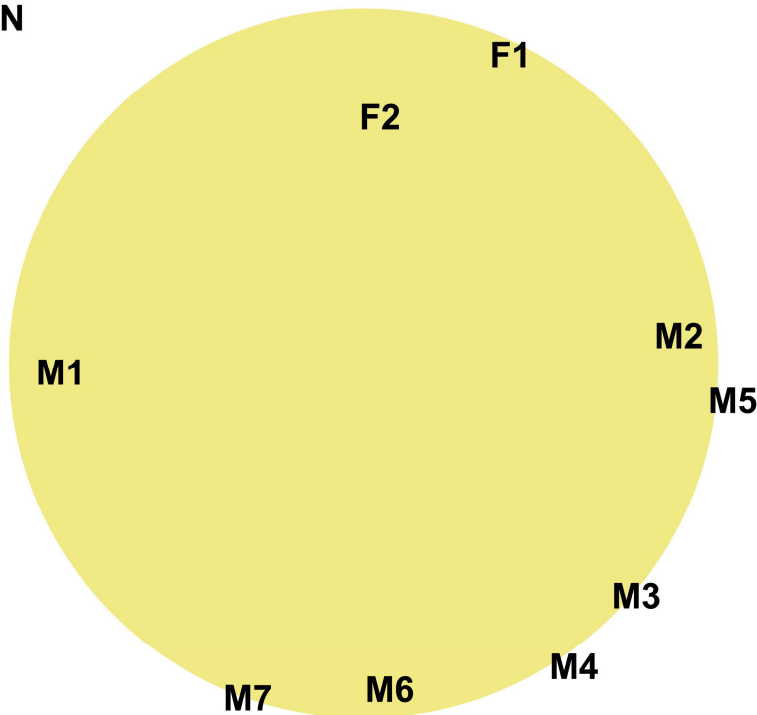
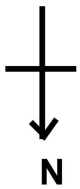
Below looking WSW at circle.



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Late March 2011 – View looking west towards Newburgh golf club.



20 m

BELOW LEFT.

A rough map of the layout of the site with the stones labelled as in the photographs.

The position of M6 is a guess as it is difficult to remember where it was exactly under the sand.

The striking fact here is that about the correct amount of stones for a circle are present and that the diameter of the circle, even after thousands of years of wet shifting sands under them remains at 20m.

This is the standard diameter of recumbent stone circles in Grampian.

Deep sand may well be concealing stones south of M1 and due north of M1. It may be they have been dragged elsewhere. Investigations may inform if there are stones present or not.

There was no sign of the recumbent in the 0.7 m deep water in the channel here.

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COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL VISIBLE CIRCLE STONES



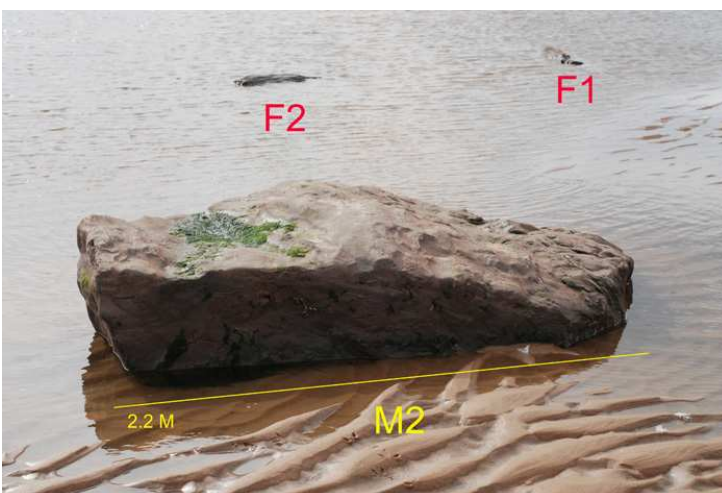
Right is a photograph taken 2,500m north of the stone circle, where outcrops of rock occur. These are the nearest visible rock formations to the site. It is to give the reader an idea of the type of rock structures inherent to the site.

By comparing individual stones to these rocks an idea can be gained as to whether the stone circle stones were local or shipped in.



Left – stone M1

This appears to have been crafted / carved and is not of the same stone as found on the beach. Origin unknown.



Left – Stone M2

Again this appears to have been crafted / carved and is not of the same stone as found on the beach. Origin unknown.

It is not possible to comment meaningfully on the suspected flanker stones seen in the 0.7 m deep water, other than to say they appear to be of a large enough size to qualify as standing stones. What depth of stone is concealed below the sand and whether there is a recumbent under here out of sight were questions that remain to be answered.

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Left – Stone M3

Appears to have been chosen for its shape and has been crafted. A break/fault line has been eroded away and this stone may well have originated from nearby rock strata. Not the best for a stone circle as one can see after 4000 years.



Left – Stone M4

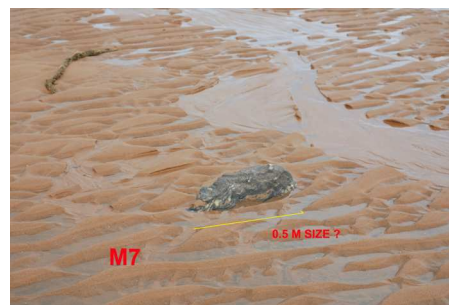
Close to M3 seen above it, this appears a harder stone it's full length and shape are unclear, but a similar size to the other large standing stones to be one of the main stones.



Left – M5

Not enough of this stone is visible to make a definite statement, but it is again a harder looking rock than that found along the beach to the north. Potentially it has a large enough size to be one of the main standing stones.

Below – M6 has potential to be a standing stone but M7 and M8 (W of M5) are of the local rock and may not be standing stones, but supporting stones.

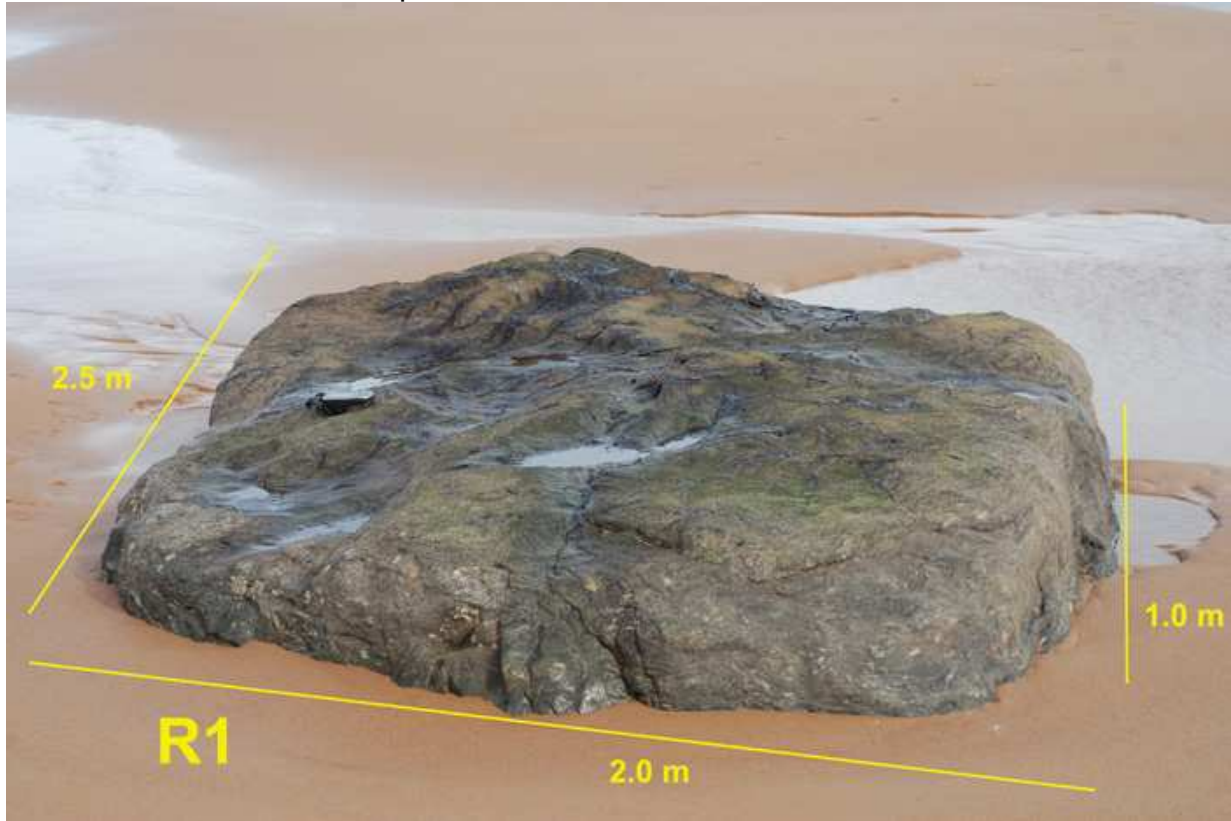


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THE RECUMBENT ? AND ASSOCIATED STONES

GPS CO-ORDINATES FOR possible RECUMBENT

NK 01496 25266



This lies 1050m north of the stone circle. A perfect size and shape of stone for it to be a recumbent.



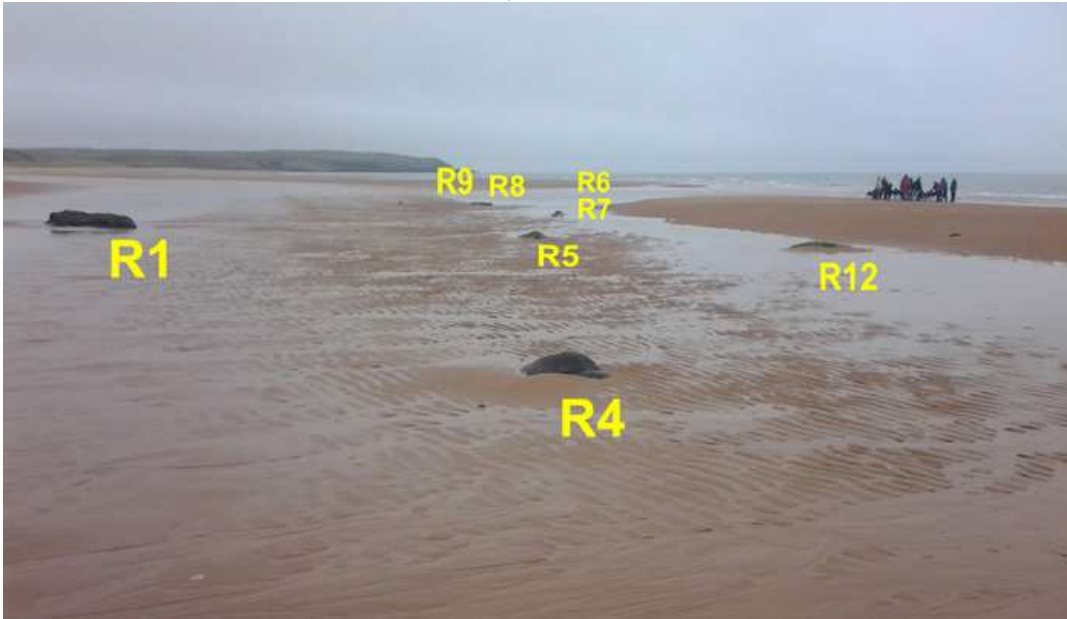
As sands shift an arrangement of stones sometimes comes into view near to the recumbent. Again on a sandy beach with few stones normally in view the following photographs illustrate that the distribution is far from random.

They appear to have been placed by man, but for what reason?

When were they so placed?

Left – Looking SSW

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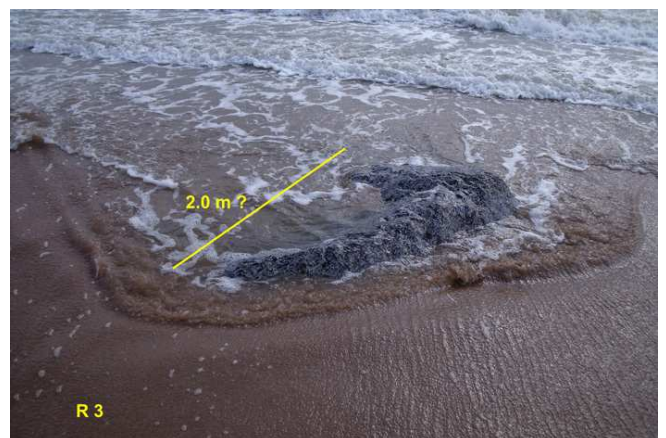
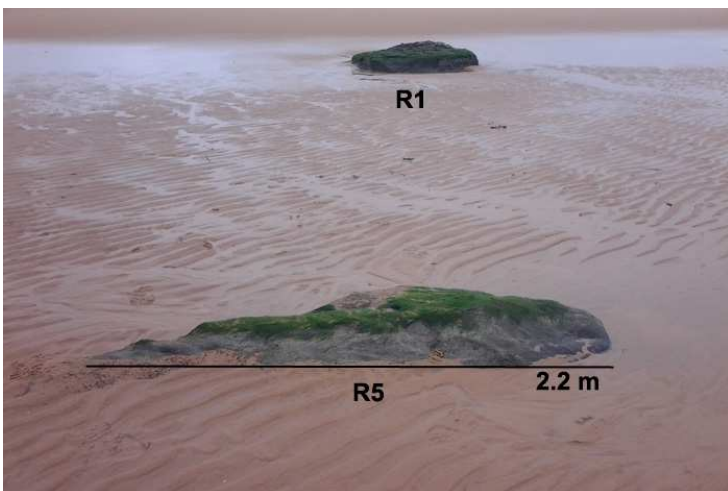


Left – Looking NNE

Retired Greyhound
outing in background.
With owners!.



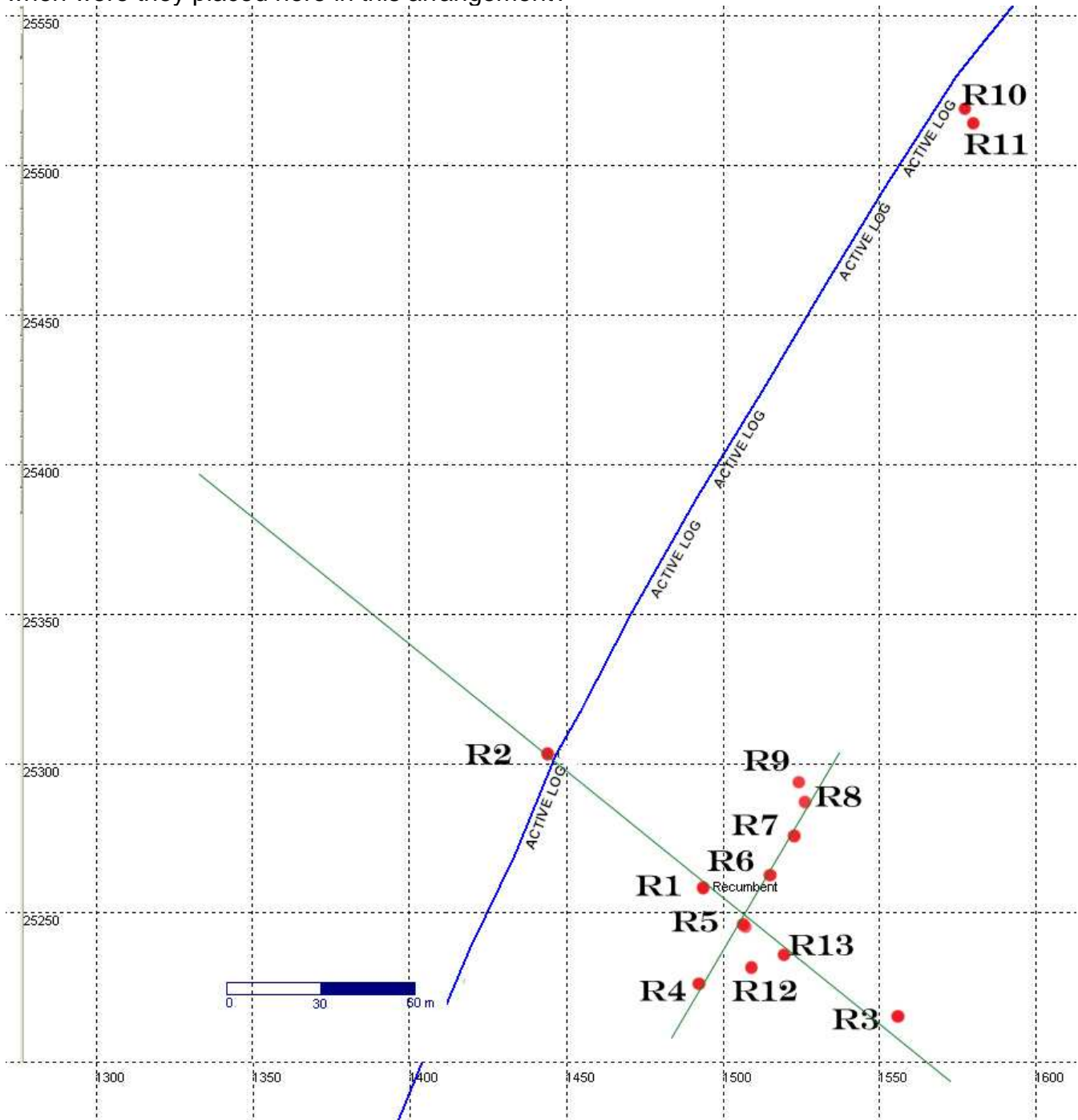
Left – looking WNW



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At a low tide R3 (GPS label SSTONEX) can sometimes be seen, it is a perfect shape and size for a standing stone. It lies 82 m from the recumbent, the recumbent being on a 320° (grid north) bearing from it.

In total there are 10 R stones grouped together here. However only two (R3 & R5) look as though they were/could be standing stones, and one a recumbent (R1). Where did they come from and when were they placed here in this arrangement?



Above plan of beach area where stones appeared in 2011. Blue line close to sand dune edge. Line of R8,7,6,5,4 points to the stone circle site, and along beach line. Line of R3,13,5,1,2 points to approx 600m south of the large stone hut circle which can be seen in satellite photographs.

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There is no clear connection between these stones and the stone circle other than R1, R5 and R3 could have been removed from the stone circle site to here, to serve a purpose. If however a settlement structure of significance is discovered around 550 to 600m south of the large hut circle, then one would have to review the importance of these stones.



Salmon nets have now disappeared from the sands, but have been a common sight for centuries.

Digging a hole deep enough to put in an anchor post in wet sand (which this beach has) is difficult.

Use of large steel anchors shaped for the job, and pressurised water jets to make holes deep enough were developed but not until quite recently.

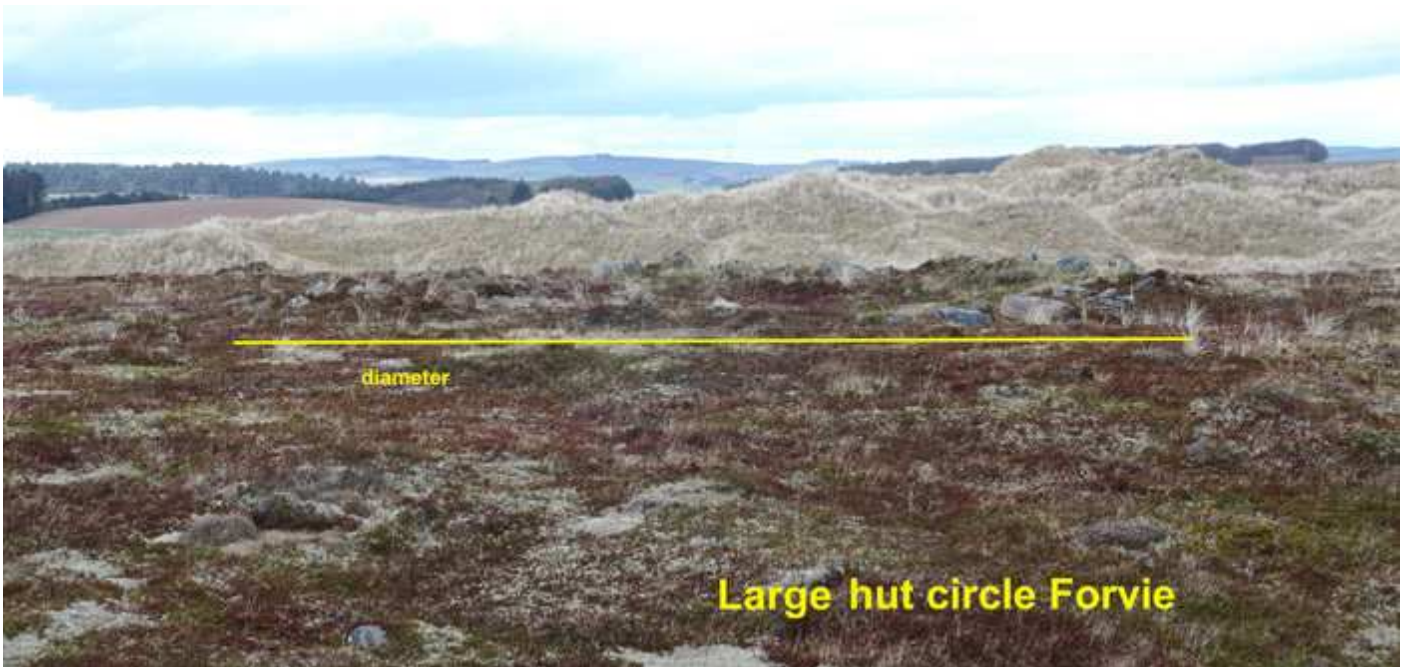
Could it be that the large R1, R5 and R3 in particular were moved here to be used as anchor stones to tension the nets?



The line of smaller stones may have been used to tension the bottom of the net(s) so that fish could not swim underneath easily.

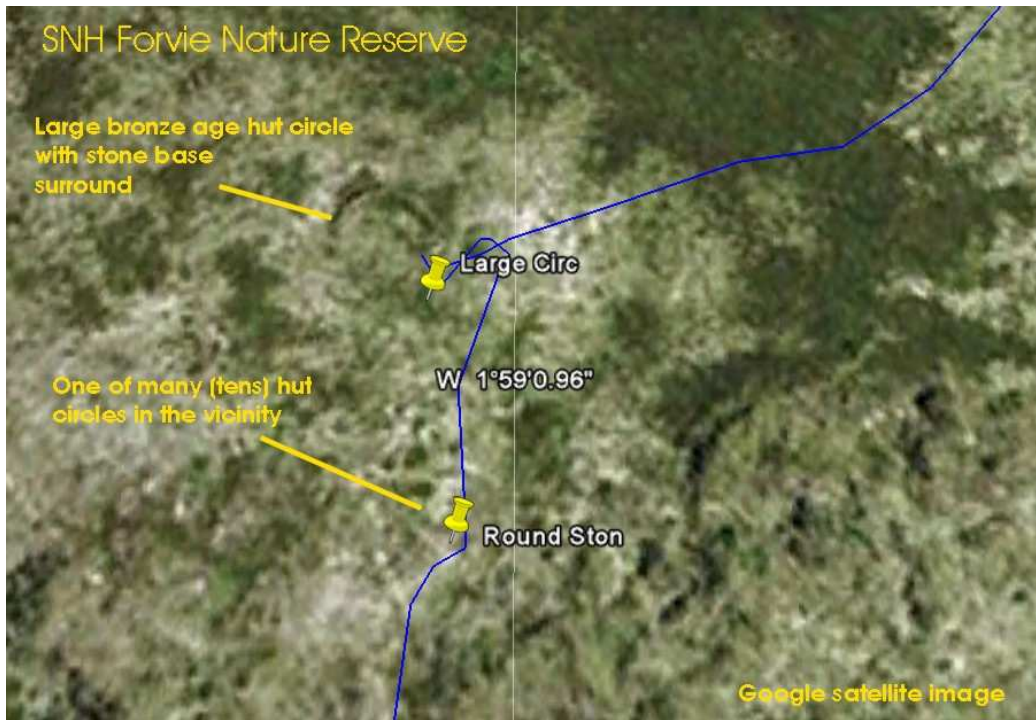
It is this type of activity that I believe is most likely to have been associated with this arrangement of stones. It was probably erected and used in the 17th 18th or early 19th century when stone circles were often destroyed for other uses.

OTHER BRONZE AGE STRUCTURES NEARBY



The large hut circle or animal pen, is seen from satellites see next page, and is marked on the OS and Google maps. Close by are many smaller hut circles, and to the north a short distance three burial cairns lie still partially excavated. Yes a thriving community lived here in bronze- age times.

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Left – Satellite view of the same large hut ? circle or animal pen.

The smaller hut circle see below is not so clear.

Forvie SNH rangers inform me that now around 20 to 30 hut circles have been discovered but not uncovered.

It would be interesting to see a distribution map of these to see if they extend predominantly south

from here.

If they do, then the R stones may well be deliberately pointing a way to the settlement for ship / boat arrivals in thick misty conditions which this area often suffers from.



Left – Small hut circle GPS marked in above satellite image.

The hut circles and the burial cairns have clear views to Bennachie to the west.

Far right – One of three excavated burial cairns with clear views of Bennachie.



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WHO BUILT THE RECUMBENT STONE CIRCLE(S)

It is well documented that the stone circles were a place of worship, much as churches are today. Their distribution across the North East of Scotland fits in with one to each locality /parish as we have today. They all have a distinctive structure that distinguishes them from all other stone circles in the British Isles and Ireland.

That distinction is that they all have a bulls head at the south of the circle. The flanker stones as they are called depict the horns of the bull and the recumbent stone as it is called, the top of the bulls head.



Cothiemuir RSC near Keig, recumbent and flankers. Depicting the horns and head of the sacred bull.

Yes it is known that the moon was associated with the bull head structure. So was the case in Minoan civilisation and others before in the middle-east. They were also community gathering places. I believe people worshipped the religious beliefs that the bull icon had stood for, for thousands of years.

Recent excavations on the bank of the Euphrates in northern Syria dating back to 8800 bce have discovered that the bull was revered as a religious icon. In Catal Hoyuk in Turkey from 6300 bce the bull was similarly revered as a religious emblem or icon. This transferred across to Crete and the Minoans from around 4000 bce or earlier until their demise in 1420 bce. During the height of their maritime prowess, in the middle Minoan age of 2,500 to 1,700 bce they traded widely nearby in the Mediterranean, and from their settlements in Spain, with places like the west coast of Wales. In Wales above Llandudno was the largest Bronze Age copper mine in the known world at the time.

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DNA evidence of human remains at the Llandudno mine site has identified the Y-DNA haplogroup tree markers found in communities from Spain and the Balkans which would seem to corroborate the above account.

In addition copper isotopes from the Great Orme copper ore can be found in copper artefacts that have appeared as far east as Mesopotamia dating back to the bronze age. This would again show that these were sailors that travelled widely. Did they travel to the North East coast of Scotland and settle as they had done in Spain? The major highways of the time were maritime and small populations of settlers could be transported from Crete to Spain in days. Then around the rock of Gibraltar and northwards, stopping at coastal settlements like the “Celtic” fortress of Castro de San Tegra by Galicia (Spain) before setting across the now “English” channel to Wales and sometimes the North East of Scotland.

I propose that genetic markers should be sought if any can be found in early bronze-age settlers remains associated with the earliest of the recumbent stone circles. Later descendants may have the genetic marker, but not necessarily.

The historical time scale matches with the establishment 4,500 to 4,000 years ago or so with the first of the recumbents. It would be expected that genetically the population could have been kept topped up with pure Spanish/Minoan settlers until the bulk of the Minoan fleet and civilisation was devastated by the Santorini explosion in 1540 bce. After this date the DNA markers would be diluted by surrounding tribes DNA. With later Germanic and Scandinavian invasions, the genetic marker would have been bred out eventually. Still, a DNA study of men who can trace their family line well back in the area may be able to identify more of the DNA haplogroup, marking a Spanish-Balkan origin, than other parts of Scotland.



Left – Temple of the Moon
Altar of Suen – NANNA
In Mesopotamian religions, the god of the moon.



Left –
Knossos
Palace
Horns
Crete

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CONCLUSION

A Bronze Age settlement established at Forvie and built a stone circle to worship the god(s) they were accustomed to worship. They used the same iconic stone structures as the Minoans and others before them associated with the bull and the moon.

They may well have been direct descendants shipped in as settlers around 4000 bce.

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FUTURE SUGGESTED RESEARCH

If DNA can be extracted from human remains of early “settlers” at Bronze Age sites like Forvie, a check for the Y-haplogroup denoting Spanish/Balkan characters should be made.

If bronze artefacts are found, an isotope analysis to determine the origin of the ore should be made if possible. If North Wales or Cyprus copper ore is found to be the source in any of the bronze artefacts, then the chances are we are dealing with Bronze Age Minoan, Minoan/Spanish settlers at Forvie.