



Knockmany Chambered Cairn

Notes for ASGI/IoPI Spring Weekend Walk, 3 April 2004

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Getting There

Turn left outside the Armagh City Hotel and follow the main A28 Enniskillen Road leading out of Armagh. This takes you past the village of Killylea (about 5 miles from Armagh), and then across the River Blackwater past the entrance to the Caledon Estate and into the architecturally attractive village of Caledon, approximately nine miles from Armagh. Follow the main road through Caledon, turning sharp left near the middle of the village, and continue to Achnacloy, about sixteen miles from Armagh.

Soon after leaving Achnacloy the main road forks. Bear left at this junction, signposted to Enniskillen, and follow the main road (still the A28) past Favour Royal Forest to the next village of Augher. At this point, which is a cross-roads, the A28 meets the main Belfast-Dungannon-Enniskillen road (A4).

The minor road from Augher, which is signposted to Knockmany, leads straight across the cross-roads. After a couple of miles you come to another cross-roads, at which there is a gate and entrance (sharp right) to the forestry commission 'Lower' Knockmany car park. The walk begins and ends here, and rises through the forest to a height of approximately 230 m, beside the megalithic tomb at the top of the nearby hill.

General Description

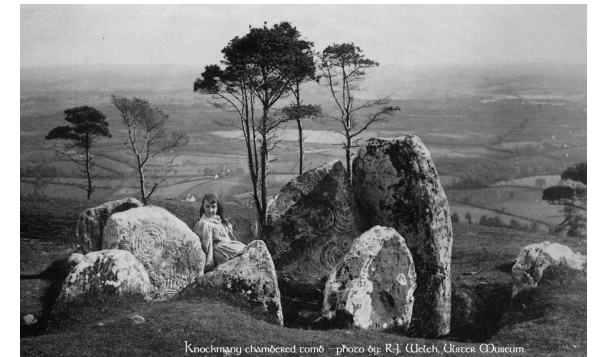
Knockmany (Cnoc mBaine = 'the Hill of Queen Baine', the wife of the first century King Tuathal Techtmar) is one of the better examples of megalithic monuments having stones showing the characteristic spirals, swirls, and 'cup-and-ring' markings associated with the Boyne Culture and Loughcrew. It is located at Grid Reference H547559 (Ordnance Survey Sheet 18), at the top of a steep-sided conical hill approximately two miles north-west of Augher, Co. Tyrone. The position commands extensive views of the surrounding countryside in all directions.



View of the Knockmany Chambered Cairn from the south, showing the modern enclosure. Image taken from <http://www.themodernantiquarian.com/post/24670>

The principal stones (orthostats) vary in height between approximately 1 and 2 metres, and are set in basin-shaped pits, or sockets, some 20–30 cm deep cut into the bed-rock. In its present state the cairn is an almost circular mound approximately 25 m in diameter. Until fairly recently (1959), the stones were openly exposed to the elements. However, in order to protect them from vandalism and damage by weathering, lichen and moss, a modern

concrete and glass housing was constructed around the stones, and this has recently been renewed by the Department of the Environment, Environment and Heritage Service, from whom permission to access the interior of the enclosure can be obtained.



Black and white photograph by R.J. Welch (Ulster Museum), showing the view of Knockmany Chambered Cairn before the monument's protective enclosure in 1959. Image taken from <http://www.shee-eire.com/Sites&Monuments/Passage-tombs/Tyrone/Knockmany/Photos/oldbw2.jpg>

Excavations of the site approximately 50 years ago, prior to its enclosure, seem to have uncovered very little in the way of new information beyond confirming the apparent absence of a passage into the grave, and the lack of ancient artefacts and bones. In fact, the principal finds seem to have been only some heavily burnt worked flint, some fragments of a heavily cremated human bone, and a single sherd of pottery.

The monument has never been accurately dated, but it is likely to have been built sometime in the Neolithic or early Bronze Age, c.3000–2000 BC, thousands of years before the eponymous Queen Baine is supposed to have lived.

Rock Art

The pecked designs and engravings on the stones (orthostats) are of exceptional interest. There is, of course, no generally accepted explanation as to what they mean nor why they were made, but some have suggested that the markings are stylised representations of the human face or eyes, while others have proposed simply that they have a religious connotation or that they represent objects seen in the sky around that time, such as fireballs (bright meteors), comets, or the Sun, Moon and stars. There is some astronomical evidence to suggest that, in general terms, the 'sky' might have been more active 5,000–10,000 years ago than now, perhaps supporting a celestial model.



Views of some of the principal stones in the Knockmany tomb from within the modern enclosure, showing a variety of rock art and spiral designs (M.E. Bailey).

Whatever the motivation for constructing the monument (and it is clear that a substantial effort would have been involved, and presumably the burial of a king or some other person of similarly high standing), it is perhaps worth noting that similar forms of rock-art are found at megalithic sites dispersed widely throughout the western fringes of the British Isles and across Europe. For example, in addition to the Loughcrew and Newgrange examples, broadly similar designs are found both on the nearby Sess Kilgreen stone (Kilgreen = 'Church

of the Sun') and as far away as Fuente de la Zarza, La Palma, in the Canary Islands.

Walk and Views

The walk leads from the lower car park past a lake, and then through the forest up a gently sloping path until finally reaching the cairn at the top of the hill. On a clear day, there are extensive views from this point in all directions, for example towards the Sperrins in the North, and Armagh and the Mourne towards the South-East.

Leaving the cairn, the path progresses downhill towards the upper car park, and then, after a short stretch along a country lane, leads back towards the starting point down a steep-sided river valley known as Lumford's Glen. This passes a hidden waterfall known as Mad Women's Leap.

The walk is along easily navigated forestry paths and country lanes, although it can sometimes be muddy in places if conditions are wet. It is about five miles in length and should last approximately two hours.