## 3 Archaeological notes

The Boreal and Atlantic phases of (Table 2) (page 68) fall within the Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age of the Archaeological records. The first definite evidence of the presence of prehistoric man in Central Scotland may be assigned to the latter part of the Boreal phase. At a site near Perth a canoe of Scots pine, hollowed out by fire, was discovered under three metres of carse clays—a relic of Mesolithic fisher folk who used harpoons of bone. The evidence for early man during the Atlantic phase takes the form mainly of heaps of discarded shells of edible molluscs, known as "kitchen-middens". These are found at various localities along the south shore of the Forth estuary, on Inchkeith, and elsewhere, resting on the Main Postglacial Shoreline. The people who left them were nomadic hunter-fisher folk, using implements of stone, bone, and deer antlers and migrating in small bands from one temporary settlement to another.

There is no extant evidence in Arran for the presence of these people, but a large kitchen-midden occurring at Glecknabae on the western shores of the island of Bute suggests that they may well have reached Arran also. So far as Arran is concerned, however, the earliest inhabitants who have left clear evidence of their presence were the Neolithic or New Stone Age people who constructed the great chambered, megalithic burial cairns distributed mainly throughout the southern part of the island. Our story now leaves the domain of geology for that of pre-history, but one point should first be emphasised. If one of these early inhabitants were to revisit the island today he would find that it showed the same broad topographic features as it did in his time. He would remember his old Arran as a land of widespread peat-mosses and marshes, with extensive woodland and scrub areas where the wild animals he hunted — deer, wild ox, wolf, etc. — found shelter. In the intervening centuries continued frost action has splintered and rent the high tops and rock screes and landslips have altered their shapes. Large quantities of rock debris have been washed down the gullies on to the valley floors and carried finally to the sea. Here and there the coastline has been slightly altered. Yet despite all the many changes that nature has wrought the essential features in the configuration of the island remain the same.

**Neolithic age**: (*circa* 2500–1750 B.c.). Some seventeen megalithic cairns, in a more or less ruinous condition, are still extant in Arran. A description of fourteen of the cairns has been given by Bryce in *The Book of Arran* published by the Arran Society of Glasgow in 1910. The essential elements in these structures were a forecourt and a portal or entrance leading into an elongated chamber divided transversely into compartments for the dead. Portal and compartments alike were lined and roofed with stone flags and the whole structure covered by stones and earth. Sometimes two or even three chambers were present. The cairns also had an edging of incurved stones round their margins. Good examples are the Cam Ban cairn at the head of the Kilmory Water, the East Bennan cairn and the cairn at Whiting Bay known as the "Giants' Graves", all three with a length of about 30m and a width of about 18m. All the implements obtained at the various sites were of stone — knives, acrapers and arrowheads of flint, polished stone hammers and axes, and at least three arrowheads of Corriegills pitchstone. Pottery remains consisted of rough bowl-shaped vessels made of dark clay, with a rounded base and either unornamented or simply ornamented with lines.

The people who built these cairns, or long cists as they have been termed, were immigrants from the south who appear to have made their way northwards via the Irish Sea and North Channel to establish small settlements in Northern Ireland and along the southwestern Scottish coast. They brought with them some knowledge of agriculture and of domestic animals (bones of ox, pig and sheep have been found in the cairns); they could fashion rough hand-moulded vessels of clay; they were skilled makers of stone implements and weapons and must have had some acquaintance with carpentry. A clue regarding the dates at which they lived in Arran has been provided by the Monamore chambered cairn, southwest of Lamlash. Re-excavation in 1961 yielded charcoal from a small fire lit in the forecourt area.. This has been dated at 3160±110 B.C. by $C^{14}$ and another similar hearth, lit not long before the tomb ceased to he used, was dated at 2240±110 B.c. The Neolithic cairn builders thus seem to have reached Arran before 3000 B.C. in radiocarbon years, which is probably nearer 4000 B.C. in real years according to the tree-ring calibration of $C^{14}$ dates.

**Early Bronze age**. The builders of the chambered cairns were followed by a fresh influx of invaders belonging to a different race, who brought with them their own customs and traditions and their own material culture. These newcomers were members of a mainly nomadic people, the Beaker folk (so named from the type of pottery associated with them—a beaker or drinking vessel with a tall, straight-sided neck and a globular base), who made their adventuresome way

across the North Sea and English Channel to occupy much of Britain, penetrating in course of time as far north as Caithness and the Orkney Islands. They introduced the practice of burying their dead singly in what are known as short cists, consisting typically of four rock slabs set up vertically to enclose a space roughly 1m long, 0.6m wide and 0.6m deep and covered by a heavy stone lid. There are a number of such short cists in Arran. Sometimes they occur in the middle of rounded tumuli or cairns built of earth and stones, their outer margins defined by an edging of large rock slabs. Examples are the cairn known as "Ossian's Mound" at Clachaig (10.6m by 8.2m in diameter) and the cairn at Brown Head (7.9m in diameter). Sometimes the cists occur in the centre of the areas marked out by the great stone circles of Machrie Moor and other localities. Often, however, there is no structure above ground to mark their site. While still using implements of flint (knives, scrapers and arrow-heads) and stone (hammers and axes) these people brought with them a knowledge of bronze. An ornamental bronze dagger, 23 cm long and 7.6 cm wide at the base, was recovered from a short cist interment at South Feorline, Blackwaterfoot, together with a gold band or fillet ornamented with parallel flutings; while a bronze pin 64 mm long, probably part of a brooch, was found in a cist in the centre of one of the stone circles on Machrie Moor. At a number of localities oval beads, perforated discs, and plates of jet were recovered, representing portions of necklaces. All the pottery remains found in the short cists in Arran are of the "food-vessel" type, flat-bottomed urns, 12 to 15 cm high with circular raised mouldings and an irregular, often rich pattern of ornamentation. The "food-vessel" is a somewhat later type of urn than the beaker type. The occurrence of bronze weapons and of bronze, gold and jet ornaments implies the development of trade routes and some system of commerce. The bronze and gold probably came from Ireland, while the jet, a compact, black resinous material derived mainly from fossilised coniferous wood, originated near Whitby in North Yorkshire, England, where nodules strewn on the shore are derived from a 9m bed of Upper Lias shale in which the jet occurs as irregular lenticular masses.

Further evidence of the age of the Beaker folk in Arran was found in 1959 when a short stone cist grave was discovered on Broombrae Farm near Blackwaterfoot. It had apparently contained a crouched skeleton but most of the bones had disintegrated. Also in the cist were three flakes of flint and pitchstone and a Food Vessel. The latter dates the grave in the early Bronze Age, approximately in the middle of the second millennium B.C.

While the late-Neolithic and early Bronze Age cultures were in many ways distinctive, they possessed in common one striking characteristic, the building of megalithic (or big stone) structures. The great stone tombs of the Neolithic people (the long cairns), and the round cairns, the monumental stone circles and monoliths of the early Bronze Age folk would seem to represent successive phases of a transitional and compelling urge to honour their dead. In this respect the two cultures may be regarded as continuous. There is also evidence of a period of transition during which there was a blending of the two. The people of the chambered cairns appear to have gradually adopted some of the burial customs of the round cairn folk. The transition is exemplified in the Dunan Beag and Dunan Mar cairns above Lamlash (Excursion 3, locality 10). Here and at other localities there is a marked simplification of the structural features of the chambered cairns, associated with the presence of ornaments and pottery characteristic of the short-cist culture—jet beads and urns of both beaker and food-vessel types.

The houses of these early peoples were probably free-standing circular structures with timber frames. Some of the "hut circles" around Machrie Moor date from about this time although others may be later, having perhaps been built during the Iron Age. Of the language spoken by the Beaker folk we have no knowledge.

There follows now a long gap, covering many centuries, in the story of Arran. Doubtless also there was a slow advance in culture with improvements in methods of metal-working, in the manufacture of implements and weapons, in husbandry and in pottery-making. Perhaps weaving, not known in Britain before the Bronze Age, may be added. But there are no remains to guide us in these "dark ages". We do not know when the first Gaelic speakers colonised the country. These were Celtic peoples, driven by population pressures from the Continent, who began to invade Britain, probably about 1000 B.C. and in increasing numbers from about 750 B. c. It was these Celts who introduced the art of iron forging. In course of time they spread northwards to occupy and dominate Scotland and Ireland. When this happened we can only surmise. There would appear, however, to be no certain evidence of the use of iron in Scotland much before the first century B. c. Up to that time the inhabitants were still in the Bronze Age.

To conclude this synopsis reference must be made to two events which bring the story of Arran down to well within historical times. These are (i) the establishment of religious centres by missionaries from Northern Ireland, and (ii) the

Norse Settlements.

1. During the latter part of the 5th century and the first decades of the 6th century colonists from Ireland had settled in considerable numbers in western Scotland and about A.D. 575 they founded the loosely-knit kingdom of Dalriada, which included much of Argyllshire and the neighbouring islands. Missionaries from Irish monasteries accompanied and followed their countrymen to establish outposts of the Irish church and several of these visited and lived for a time in Arran. St. Brendan, whose voyages among the western isles in search of the earthly paradise was a favourite theme in medieval legends, gave his name to Kilbrannan Sound and would seem to have founded a small cashel or church settlement in the hillside above Kilpatrick, probably about the middle of the 6th century. Little but the circular foundations can now be seen. About A.D. 680 St. Molios settled on Holy Island, Eilean Molaisi, as it was formerly called (Excursion 11b).
2. The period of the Norse invasions and settlements in Scotland lasted from about A.D. 800 to 1263, the date of the Battle of Largs. In Arran the Norse invaders have left evidence of their presence in the form of two burial cairns. One of these, at Kingscross Point, yielded, in addition to some calcined human bones, nails and rivets such as were used in the making of the Viking galleys, pieces of bronze and a bronze coin. The last-mentioned item placed the date of the burial as probably in the latter half of the 9th century. The second burial site which lies on the south side of the Blairmore Burn, above Lamlash, yielded the remains of an iron sword and shield resembling types found in graves in Norway dating from the later 8th or early 9th centuries. Many of the place-names also bear witness to the Norse occupation and are noted in the glossary.

**References**

| GEOLOGICAL EVENTS | | CLIMATIC PHASES | APPROXIMATE TIME-RANGE B.C. | POLLEN ZONES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Period of Maximum Glaciation** | ..... | ..... | Ending at 23,000 | |
| **Lateglacial Period:**[1] | | | | |
| Confluent Glacier Stage | | Arctic | | |
| Valley Glacier Stage | High Lateglacial Raised Beach | to | 23,000 to 9,000 | I to III |
| Corrie Glacier Stage | | Sub-Arctic | | |
| **Final Disappearance of the Ice** | ..... | ..... | 8,300 | |
| **Postglacial Period:** | | | | |
| | | Pre-Boreal Phase | 8,300 to 7,000 | IV–V |
| Submerged Peat and Forest Bed | Main Postglacial Shoreline | Boreal Phase[2] | 7,000 to 5,500 | VI |
| | | Atlantic Phase | 5,500 to 3,000 | VII |
| | | Sub-Boreal Phase | 3,000 to 1,000 | VII |
| Present-day Conditions | | Sub-Atlantic Phase | 1,000 to 0 | VIII |

[1]During this period there were two re-advances of the glacier ice, their limits marked by prominent moraines: these are the Perth and Loch Lomond Re-advances. The latter took place after an interval between 14,000 and 11,000 years ago when ice disappeared from Arran only to be followed by a deterioration in climate again before the final retreat of the ice at about 8,300 years ago.

[2]Material from a bed of peat underlying the carse clays of the Main Postglacial Shoreline (25 foot Raised Beach) at Airth Colliery, southeast of Stirling has been assigned by carbon dating to 6,461±157 B.C. (Godwin 1961).

TABLE 2. Lateglacial and Postglacial events.

*(Table 2) Quaternary geological events and climate phases*