



HAYLIE CAIRN. Flint Scraper Knife.

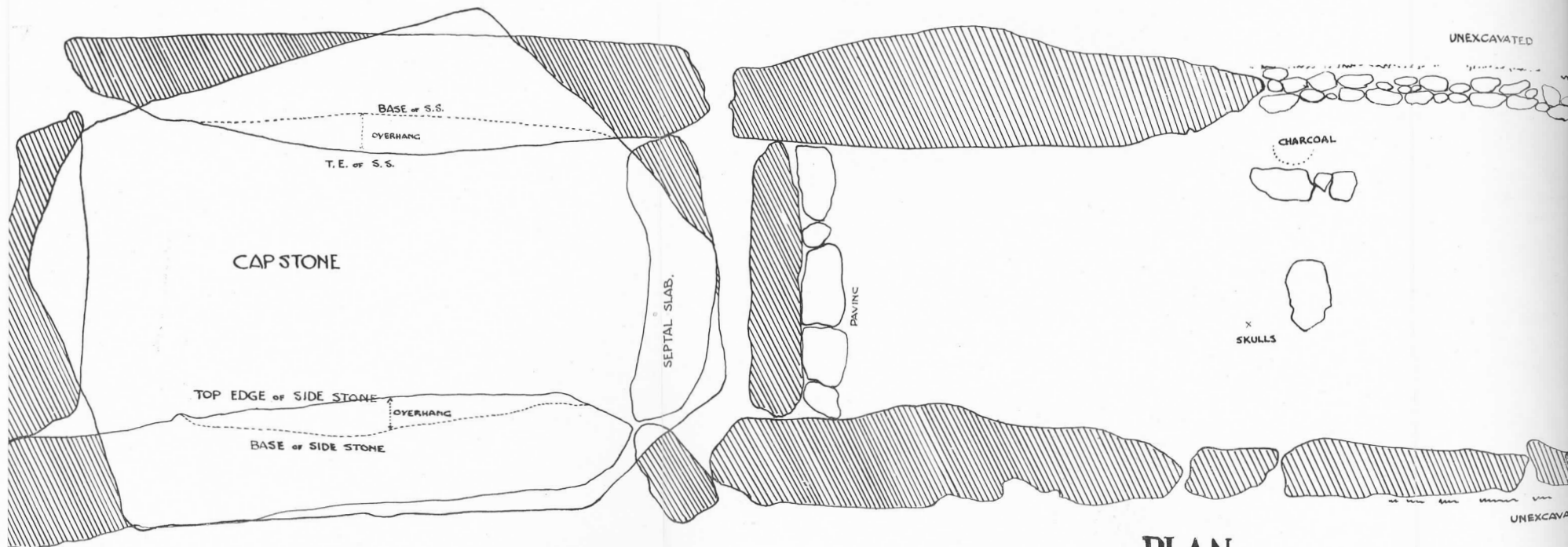


HAYLIE CAIRN. Looking east. W. blocking stone, capstone and ends of N. and S. side stones (before excavation).



HAYLIE CAIRN. Looking west. Main chamber with capstone. E. ends of N. and S. side stones, septal stone and N. and S. sidestones of 2nd chamber "passage" excavated.

# HAYLIE, LARGS, CHAMBERED



PLAN



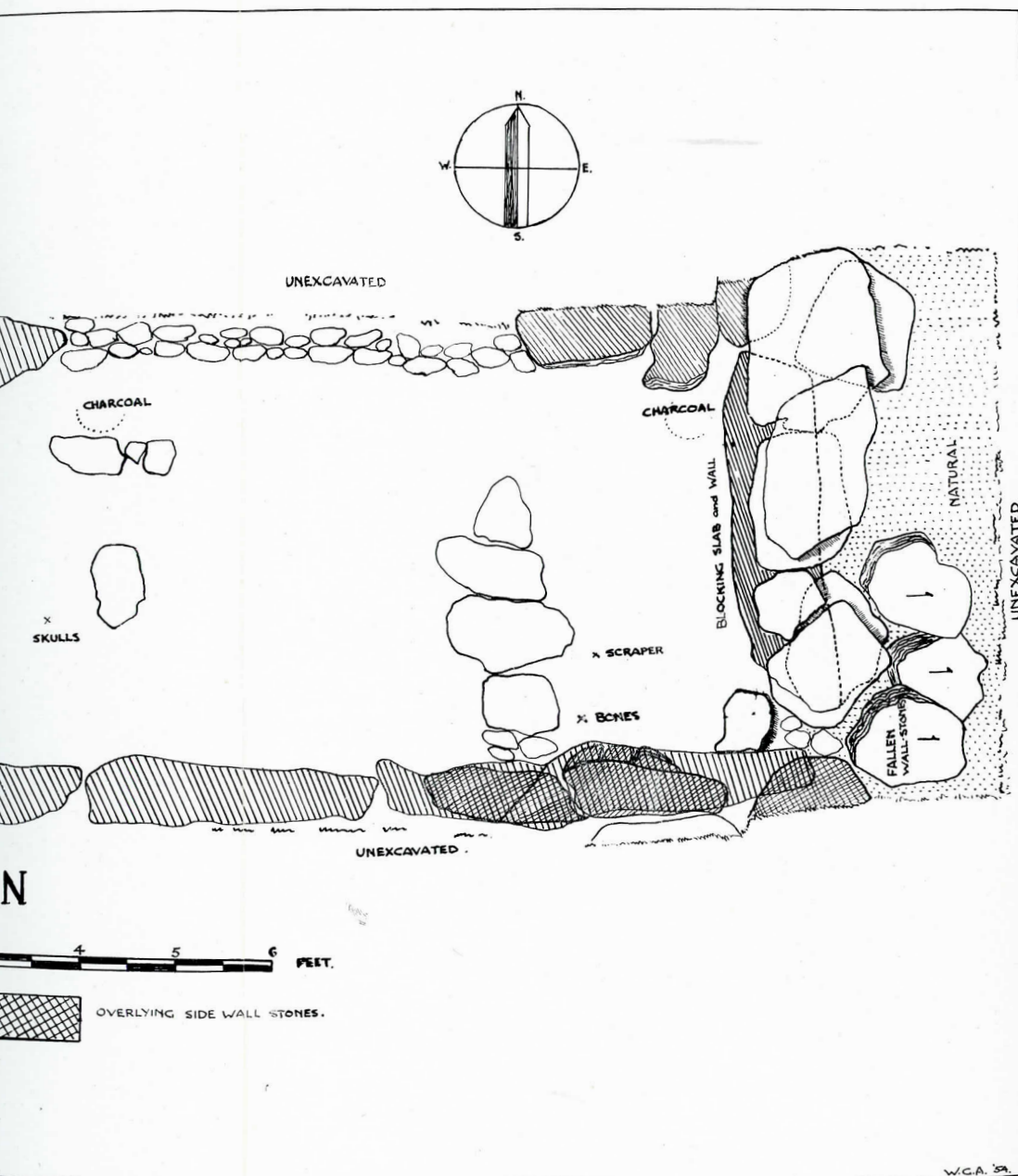
MAIN STRUCTURE.



OVERLYING SIDE WALL STONES.



# CHAMBERED CAIRN.



## Excavation of Burial Chamber at Haylie, Largs, Ayrshire, in 1954

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### HISTORY OF THE SITE

The remains of a burial chamber, evidently belonging to the group of neolithic Clyde-Carlingford chambered cairns of S.W. Scotland and N. Ireland, was recognised at Haylie and described by Childe and Graham in 1943.<sup>1</sup> The cairn which had formerly covered it, was removed in 1772, and the description in the *Statistical Account* of 1796<sup>2</sup> tells how the proprietor "opened a small hill, called Margaret's Law, supposed to be natural, but found to be a collection of stones, containing upwards of 15,000 cartloads; in the centre of which were discovered five stone coffins, two of them containing five skulls each, with other human bones, and several earthen jars." The original *Statistical Account*, published four years earlier, records that in moving the cairn "they came at length to three long, broad flat unhewn stones which were covers of three deep stone coffins."<sup>3</sup>

The shape and size of the cairn is not noted, and it was so completely removed that no indications of its extent are visible at the site. It was evidently of considerable size and an analogy would presumably be long rather than round. Neither do these 18th Century descriptions indicate the number or form of the chambers, the three mentioned in the earlier account probably tallying with the remains found during excavation; the five of the later account perhaps implying a second chamber, or that originally there were two more segments of the extant chamber, or there may be inaccuracy on the part of the author.

### THE SITE BEFORE EXCAVATION

The site lies in a meadow on the outskirts of the town, to the rear of Haylie House. It is on a narrow terrace, overshadowed to the E. by the rising scarps of Haylie Hill, and with the land falling away to the sea on the W., allowing a magnificent view of Arran, Bute and the Cumbraes.<sup>4</sup> The chamber lies

1. *P.S.A.S.*, lxxvii (1942-43), 33-34; see also J. Smith, *Prehistoric Man in Ayrshire*, 1895, 5-6.
2. *O.S.A.*, xvii (1796), 516-7.
3. *Ibid.*, ii (1792), 365.
4. Map Ref. 209586.



across the terrace, with the entrance facing E. towards the rising ground. The visible remains, representing the inner compartment of the chamber, consisted of two side stones, and the end stone supporting the large flat capstone. Across the E. side there was a septal stone with a space of 1 ft. 8 ins. between its upper edge and the roof. The compartment measures internally about 6 ft. E.-W., 4 ft. 2 ins. N.S., and 4 ft. 1 in. in height.

The stones forming the sides, end and septal slabs, have been identified as quartz conglomerate, and the capstone as pebbly sandstone. Both are certainly derived from the hillside above the site, where there are numerous fallen blocks from the prominent conglomerate scarp.<sup>5</sup>

#### EXCAVATION, 1954

The chamber was cleared of debris for 19 ft. to the E. of the septal slab, and although extremely ruined its plan became evident. The sides of the chamber were continued to the E. of the septal stone by two large lower side stones set 3 ft. 5 ins. apart, the N. stone being 6 ft. 7 ins. long, 3 ft. 6 ins. high, and 1 ft. 6 ins. thick, the S. stone being 5 ft. 11½ ins. long, 2 ft. 10 ins. high and up to 1 ft. 3 ins. thick. Beyond this point the N. wall had been destroyed, but the S. wall was continued for a further 9 ft. by a still lower slab and a short stretch of built wall of large slabs still three courses high. Across the E. end of the chamber there was a low transverse slab which stretched almost the whole width and supported a wall built of large stones; beyond this point the ground had been recently disturbed by the laying of a water main. The workmen had not met any large stones, which suggests that the transverse slab with walling above represents the outer end of the chamber.

The projecting septal slab was found to be the inner and taller of a pair set across the chamber at the junction of the two extant pairs of side slabs. No septal slab remained at the E. end of the smaller pair of side slabs where another division of the chamber would be expected, but it may well have been removed when the adjacent E. end of the N. wall was destroyed. Two skulls and other human bones, in a very fragile condition, were found in the centre of the chamber between the E. ends of the eastern pair of side slabs. More human bones and a flint scraper were found near the S. wall about 1 ft. 3 ins. to the W. of the chamber. Signs of burning and some fragments of charcoal were noticed to the N. of the first group of bones and at the N.E. corner of the chamber.

5. Our thanks are due to W. Glen Caldwell, Department of Geology, Glasgow University, for his comments on the stones.

The flint was examined by Mr. R. B. K. Stevenson, who describes it as "a stout blade of grey flint trimmed at the tip to form a scraper, and also retouched right along one side and part of the other to form a side scraper or knife."

The bones were submitted to Dr. Laurence Wells who reports that "there are portions of two skulls, both middle aged, one a good deal thicker than the other; among the other portions of bones there are portions of the shafts of two thigh bones, one much more slender than the other, although both show strong muscular markings. It seems logical to suppose that these go with the skulls. The more slender thigh bone most probably belongs to a woman, while the thicker might well be that of a man."

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our thanks are especially due to the Provost, Town Clerk and the Town Council of Largs, owners of the site, who most willingly granted permission for the site to be examined; to Mr. Campbell, Parks Superintendent, whose interest and practical assistance was invaluable; and to his workmen who so cheerfully supplied us with very necessary material.

We also acknowledge with pleasure the help of Mr. Simpson of the *Largs and Millport Advertiser*, who was kind enough to take photographs of the site.