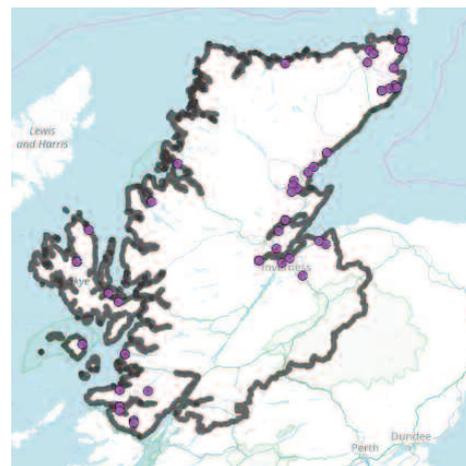


Carved Stone Ball

Period: Neolithic (c. 4000 – c. 2500 BC)
Material: stone (basalt, but other stone types also used)
Complete item (as far as we know)

Carved stone balls are some of the most mysterious artefacts of Neolithic Scotland. Whilst most artefacts of the period can be found across huge areas, the carved stone balls are almost exclusive to the area now known as Scotland, with just a few examples from surrounding countries.



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Although most carved stone balls have 6 knobs, there is great variety in depth of carving and decoration. This example with lightly etched knobs is from Benicheilt, near Latheron, and is now in the NMS, Edinburgh

Perhaps they were a way of expressing or understanding geometric principles, or maybe they had a symbolic significance.

Most carved stone balls have usually been found by chance in antiquity. Only a few examples have been discovered in context, but a recent example found at Ness of Brodgar confirms their Neolithic date, if not their function.

What do you think they were for?

They were made from a variety of stone types by grinding and pecking. This took several days of work and some practice. This form with six knobs is the most common style, but they vary quite widely.

There have been many theories as to what they may have been for, but none are entirely satisfactory. No balls display any wear or damage that suggests a particular use.



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Carved stone ball, decorated on one knob, found on Loch Lochy shore. Now in the NMS, Edinburgh



© British Museum

Carved stone ball from Novar near Evanton, now in the British Museum. It has over 100 small knobs.

See also:

CT Stone Pecking

When? Neolithic

Additional Images: Carved Stone Balls from the Highlands

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