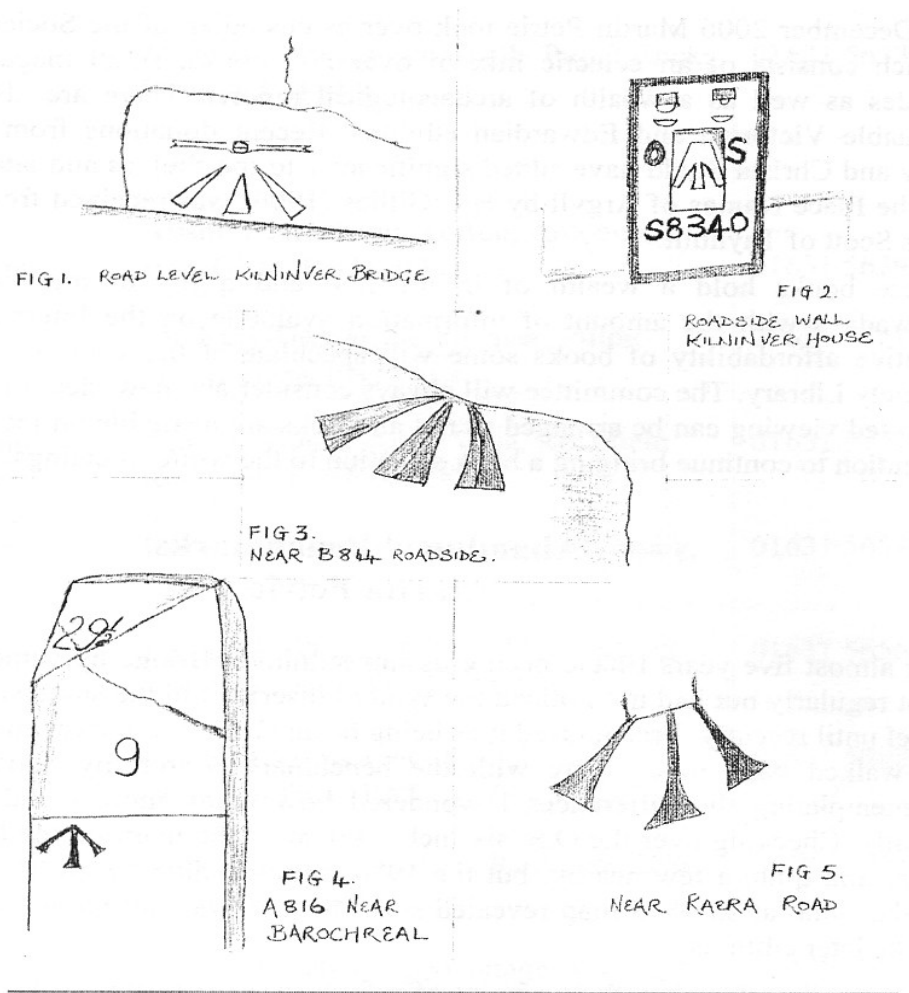


## **Abandoned Benchmarks**

### **Martin Petrie**

For almost five years I have been crossing Kilninver Bridge by vehicle and on foot regularly but had not noticed the symbol inscribed in the stonework at road level until recently. I recognised it as being an Ordnance Survey mark (fig 1), so walked back to compare with the benchmark nearer my house (fig 2). Contemplating the differences I wondered how many more could be found locally. Checking over the O.S. six inch 1901 map, the mark on the bridge was there and quite a few nearby, but the 1970's edition didn't record as many. A further look at an 1875 map revealed some benchmarks not recorded on either of the later editions.

Figuratively a benchmark is a point of reference, in surveying it is a mark cut into rock. This mark is the start point of a long line of levels or one of many as the levelling proceeds. So after a fair bit of grovelling in roadside ditches and soggy hillsides my searching produced mixed results. The first three on a hillside dyke remain undetected, possibly overgrown or due to wall collapse. It appeared others had already succumbed when dykes were removed for road improvements on the B844 and because of building extensions such as the local



***Details of Benchmarks***

school or as I found at Ardnahua when a derelict abandoned property collapses. Another may have been moved a short distance from its original position to accommodate a new gate strainer (fig 3), while one on a milestone (fig 4)

appeared not to be in the right place according to the map. Checking another benchmark on Scammadale Bridge I reckoned there were at least four different styles spanning about a hundred years. So the countryside is covered in various ages of benchmarks.

I presumed there was little interest in old Ordnance Survey marks, however the Internet turned up some useful information. The primary levelling of Great Britain took place between 1840 and 1860; this was followed in 1936 to 1952 by the second geodetic levelling. Scotland's third geodetic levelling was completed between 1956 and 1968, the area being on a levelling line from Lochgilphead to Connel. After 1980 levelling activities seem to have been given up in favour of GPS methods. Liverpool was the original site of mean sea level until 1921 when Newlyn, Cornwall took over as the national benchmark for sea level.

The Internet gave me a list of benchmarks nearest to Kilninver and they all seem to relate to the third levelling. Although it will be useful to check these out, I still enjoy finding the very simple deep cut or shallow marks (fig 5) attributed to the first levelling. Typically the Internet bombards you with information to such a point when there's too much to take in and I switch it off. So you can become a serial Benchmark or Trig point collector just like the Munro baggers and go on to tell the difference between flush brackets and pivots if it takes your fancy. Many of these Victorian marks may disappear through changes in the landscape, although no longer in use they await renewed interest!

Sources:

Oxford and Ogilvie's Imperial Dictionaries

[www.bench-marks.org.uk](http://www.bench-marks.org.uk), [www.trigpointinguk.com](http://www.trigpointinguk.com), [www.old-maps.co.uk](http://www.old-maps.co.uk)

[www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk)

## **Lochaline Sand Mine**

**Peter Davis**

Situated on the remote Morvern peninsula, approximately 40 miles from Fort William, Lochaline boasts Tarmac's only underground mine and the UK's purest deposit of silica sand. Despite its highly prized product, it is perhaps not surprising that few people know of the site's existence, as the mine workings and associated processing plant are naturally camouflaged by cliffs and forestry. The only evidence of the site is the ship-loading jetty extending into Loch Aline