

II.—CAIRNS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA AND WASHINGTON.

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION.

In the southeastern part of Vancouver Island in British Columbia, and on the San Juan Group and Whidbey Island in Washington, numerous stone cairns containing graves are found. All of these, so far as known, are of considerable age. They certainly antedate the period of the first advent of objects manufactured by whites. The Indians have no historic tradition as to their origin.

The cairns (Plate I) are from three to twenty feet in diameter, and generally consist of irregular piles of boulders. In some cases a more or less rectangular cyst is built around the body (Plate II), made by roughly placing together a number of boulders, the straightest sides of which are placed so as to form an oblong cyst, and by covering the opening thus formed with one, two, or more slab-shaped rocks, each extending from side to side. These we will call "cover-stones." No cairns were found where two or more stones were wedged over the cyst in the manner of an arch. In other cases there are slab-like stones over the grave, but the cyst is ill defined, if present at all. In still other cases the enclosure is well made, but the stones used to cover the top are so small that they do not reach across. Above the cyst a rough pile of stones is reared. Many cairns are bounded by single rows of large stones, while the space between this outer wall and the cyst is filled with small fragments of boulders, and in some cases largely with soil or with a mixture of these materials (Plates I, Fig. 1; III, Fig. 2). Several cairns have been found where the outer row of stones had been laid in a rectangle and carried up so as to form a retaining-wall, making the whole structure resemble a truncated pyramid (Plate IV, Fig. 1). Other cairns have been found in which the body rested at the side of a large boulder, and was covered with small boulders piled up against the large rock (Plates I, Fig. 2; V, Fig. 2). The stones forming the cyst and those in the outer row are often embedded deep in the soil around the grave. Probably they were not so placed, but sank to this position by reason of their large size and great weight. In some cases the stones of the cyst project above the rest of the cairn (Plate V, Fig. 2).

The position of the skeletons proves that the bodies were placed on the side, with the usual flexion (Plate III, Fig. 1). They were deposited either on the original surface of the soil, or in a shallow hole dug down into the surface soil or even into the gravel below. In some cases the skeletons are found sunk into the soil. Many of them are much decayed. This is especially the case in the cairns