

Scotia Archaeology

REPORT TO SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY

A'CRUACH WINDFARM GRID SUB-STATION

**Exploratory excavations
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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of excavations undertaken near the site of a proposed new electricity sub-station which will connect with a windfarm on A'Cruach, some 5km north-west of Minard, Argyll. The sub-station will be located approximately 2.5km north of Minard, a village on the north-west shore of Loch Fyne. To ensure that no archaeological sites or monuments are damaged during its construction, Scottish & Southern Energy plc (SSE) commissioned a walk-over survey of the area. This was undertaken by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology on 10th February 2012.

The sub-station will cover an overall area of approximately 200m square centred on or near NR 97150 98150 although it is inevitable that the movement of machinery during construction work will disturb a much wider area. As a consequence, the walk-over survey covered an area measuring approximately 500m square.

Following the results of the survey, the West of Scotland Archaeology Service, archaeological advisors to Argyll & Bute Council, recommended that a structure identified during the survey should be investigated further by means of exploratory excavations. These investigations were undertaken by John Lewis on 12th March 2012.

THE RESULTS OF THE WALK-OVER SURVEY

The survey area is located on hilly ground of very rough sheep pasture most of which is waterlogged. Its south half is covered with heather and coarse grass and is very boggy while, although almost entirely blanketed with reeds, the north half is somewhat better drained. The new sub-station will sit astride the Port Ann to Inveraray overhead tower line which bisects the survey area, Towers 91 and 92 being within or close to it (see accompanying plan).

The most significant feature encountered during the walk-over survey was a low earth and stone boundary bank which runs to the north-west from approximately NR 97187 98260, as far as NR 97107 98358 where it is cut by a modern farm track. It cannot be traced beyond that point. The bank survives to a maximum of 600mm high and 1.0m wide and is mostly covered with coarse grass although in places the feature has been almost completely eroded away. From NR 97187 98260 it returns to the south-west and can be distinguished as far as NR 97060 98135. Beyond that point it is visible only as a narrow drainage gully with a very low bank of upcast beside it, providing little more than a barely visible boundary between the bog and the better drained ground to its north.

There are two openings through the bank, both 2.4m wide, one each side of the corner at NR 97187 98260. Against the inside face of the south arm of the bank, at NR 97086 98146, is a pit, 2.2m square and 700mm deep, which does not seem to be of recent origin although its function is unclear.

On the higher ground a short distance from the east arm of the bank are two small quarries. The larger one, located at NR 97124 98307, is roughly circular in plan and measures 10m in diameter and 3m deep. To its immediate north is a smaller quarry of irregular shape.

THE RESULTS OF THE EXCAVATIONS

Three trenches were cut across the bank, using a 3-tonne mechanical excavator and cleaned by hand thereafter. They were each 800mm wide. Their locations are shown on the plan.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was opened on the east arm of the bank, at NR 97156 98314. The bank was 400mm high at this point and was built of boulders and smaller stones intermixed with redeposited topsoil of dark grey-brown, silty loam (F001). These materials had been set directly on topsoil (F002) of similar composition although it was somewhat leached at this point.

Below the undisturbed topsoil, which was approximately 200mm deep, was glacial till of orange sand, gravel and small stones (F003).

Trench 2

This trench was also located on the east arm of the bank, approximately 25m south-east of Trench 1 and a short distance from Tower 91, at NR 97170 98297. It was excavated as far as the glacial till (F003) which was identical to that in Trench 1. At this point the bank survived to a height of 600mm and was built of the same materials as those uncovered in Trench 1.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was opened on the south arm of the bank, at NR 97150 98165, where the ground was extremely wet, resulting in the trench flooding rapidly. At this location, the bank consisted of only 100mm of redeposited grey-brown, silty soil (F004) which was difficult to distinguish from the topsoil (F005) below it. Below these materials, at the base of the trench, was glacial till of yellow and grey clay (F006).

DISCUSSION

Excavation confirmed that the boundary bank was constructed of earth and stone. To be effective as a boundary, it must have stood to a greater height than its surviving maximum of 600mm although there was little evidence of eroded materials adjacent to it. It is also curious that entire stretches of this feature appear to have disappeared altogether, leaving only the east and south sides of what was probably an enclosure of pre-Improvement age. On the evidence of its surviving remains, the enclosure measured some 200m across and appears to have described a relatively well-drained area, contrasting with the boggy ground that now surrounds it.

The enclosure is not shown on any Ordnance Survey maps, including the first edition 6-inch map of 1873 (Argyllshire, sheet cli). However, an estate map of 1839 (Sang 1839) depicts what might well be this feature as a triangular structure in roughly the same location as the enclosure. The map also shows quarries within and around the survey area as well as extensive tracts of rig cultivation stretching to the north and west of Minard but not extending as far as the enclosure.

In all probability, the enclosure was a pen, used either for cattle or sheep or perhaps both. Map evidence suggests that it was in use in the early 19th century but had become redundant later in the century.

REFERENCE

Sang, J 1839 Plan of the Estate of Minard, Argyleshire, RHP/ 1194/3. National Archive of Scotland.

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

Walk-over survey

- 1 View along the bank from the north, at NR 97179 98295
- 2 View along the bank from the south, at NR 97179 98295
- 3 The north limit of the bank where it is cut by a farm track, at NR 97107 98358, viewed from the north-west
- 4-5 Views of the bank showing its construction
- 6 Circular quarry at NR 97124 98307, viewed from the west
- 7 Circular quarry at NR 97124 98307, viewed from the north-west
- 8 Smaller quarry, viewed from the north-west
- 9 Opening in the east arm of the bank, viewed from the north-west
- 10 Opening in the east arm of the bank with a farm track nearby, viewed from the north-west
- 11 The south arm of the bank with an opening in the foreground, viewed from the east
- 12 Opening in the south arm of the bank, viewed from the north
- 13 View from the east along the south arm of the bank at NR 97060 98135
- 14 View from the west along the south arm of the bank at NR 97060 98135
- 15 Pit against the south arm of the bank, viewed from the west
- 16 Pit against the south arm of the bank, viewed from the north
- 17 Pit against the south arm of the bank, viewed from the east

Excavation

- 1-2 North section of Trench 1, viewed from the south
- 3-4 Trench 2, viewed from the east
- 5-6 North section of Trench 2, viewed from the south
- 7-8 West section of Trench 3, viewed from the east