

INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological field evaluation undertaken to the east of Rustic Lodge, Keltneyburn, near Aberfeldy, Perthshire. The evaluation was a condition attached to a planning application (reference number 08/00596/FUL) imposed by Perth & Kinross Council on the advice of its archaeological advisers, Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust (PKHT), prior to the construction of two houses on the site.

The project was undertaken at the behest of the site's owners, Mr D & Mrs S Shearer, and was carried out in the context of National Planning Policy Guideline 5 (Archaeology and Planning) and in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) which had been agreed between the council, PKHT, Mr and Mrs Shearer and Scotia Archaeology beforehand. John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology undertook the evaluation on 10-11 November 2008.

The first stage of that investigation was to monitor topsoil stripping from the area of proposed development, following which it had been intended to excavate a series of small trenches to determine whether there were any features or deposits of archaeological significance within the area. Should there have been any such features or deposits, a further programme of investigation might have proved necessary before the planning condition was deemed satisfied.

THE SITE

The development site is located 6km west of Aberfeldy, on the east side of the road between Comrie Bridge and Kenmore and some 300m west of the Point of Lyon where the Rivers Tay and Lyon converge. It is centred at NGR: NN 791 479 and stands close to two recorded archaeological sites. These are listed below with their catalogue numbers ascribed by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) and by PKHT:

a stone circle (NN74NE 51; MPK402), identified and described in the early 20th century as being around NN 789 479 but whose precise location is now unknown (Coles 1910, 136); and

a cist containing a crouched inhumation, a possible cremation burial and a stone axe (collectively NN74NE 83; MPK6948) recorded at NN 791 479 although their exact locations remain unclear (DES 1955, 24).

Although few details are known of these two monuments, they do suggest that the remains of other prehistoric monuments may lie close by. This is supported by the evidence of aerial photographs which show cropmarks in fields to the south of Comrie Castle, roughly 500m to the north-west of the site, including what appear to be at least two enclosures as well as other, unidentified features.

The site sits on a gravel terrace, 60m from the River Tay and separated from it, at a lower level, by a field that is grassed over. A short time ago a trench was cut through that field, close to the river, to accommodate a new underground power cable. A watching brief undertaken by Scotia Archaeology during trenching there failed to reveal anything of archaeological significance, only topsoil and silt overlying glacial deposits of sand, gravel

and pebbles. These materials, which constitute the subsoil of the terrace, are now being quarried commercially to the south-west of the site.

A short distance north of the site stands the Enerfoil Magnum showroom, also the property of Mr & Mrs Shearer.

To the west, the ground rises steeply to the road, continuing up Drummond Hill whose slopes are now covered with commercial forestry plantation.

THE EVALUATION

The topsoil was stripped from a roughly rectangular area measuring 60m north-east/south-west by 10-30m north-west/south-east, the trench widening towards the south-west. It was carried out using a toothless ditching bucket attached to an 18-tonne tracked excavator. Some of the spoil was deposited on the south-east side of the site while the remainder was removed further afield. It varied greatly in composition and the term 'topsoil' is perhaps misleading. More accurately, it consisted of dumps of various materials including piles of sawdust resulting from this area having once been a timber yard, rubble and other debris together with patches of dark, humic loam, often only 0.1m deep.

Removal of these materials revealed a level area covered with gravel and pebbles with occasional lenses of coarse sand towards its south-west edge. The only features cutting through these glacial materials were modern ones whose fills included very recent artefacts, many of them plastic, and the debris from timber processing. Nothing of archaeological significance was evident at this level where, apart from modern intrusions, there were only geological features. As a consequence, it was agreed with PKHT that further investigation, such as trial trenching, would not be necessary.

CONCLUSIONS

The removal of topsoil and other modern materials exposed only materials of glacial origin with no features of archaeological significance present. There was clear evidence of ground disturbance in the recent past when the site was a timber yard. However, it is also believed that, previous to that, the area had been quarried for stone and gravel to construct forestry roads on nearby Drummond Hill. These two operations have probably accounted for the lack of true topsoil over the site, much of the excavated material having been deposited in recent times. In addition, it is almost inevitable that quarrying would have removed any archaeological features that may once have survived in this area.

The grid references given for the two monuments described above (NN74NE 51; MPK402 and NN74NE 83; MPK6948) place both around the west edge of the trench although no trace of either was visible during the excavation. However, whether this indicates that the locations of those monuments were beyond the trench or that they had been removed during earlier disturbances is not known.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

The photographs listed below form part of the site archive but are not printed in this report.

- 1-3 The site fully excavated, viewed from the south-west.
- 4-6 The site fully excavated, viewed from the north-east.
- 7-10 The site fully excavated, viewed from the north-west.
- 11-12 Views to the east from the site.
- 13 Modern disturbance on the site.