

INTRODUCTION

This report describes a watching brief undertaken during trenching along part of the route of a pipeline for a new hydro-electric scheme at Keltneyburn, near Aberfeldy, Perthshire. The Scottish Government Reporter had stipulated that planning consent for the scheme included the requirement to safeguard any archaeological sites and monuments that might be affected by this development. As a consequence, the Scottish Urban Archaeology Trust (SUAT) undertook a desk study of sites and monuments in the vicinity of the proposed route followed by walk-over surveys in 2001 and 2003 of a 50m-wide corridor along it (Cachart & Perry 2003). Several archaeological sites were identified, both in the desk study and the walk-over survey. Those sites included the remains of settlements and associated field systems of both prehistoric and post-medieval dates, many of them located in what is now quite inhospitable terrain.

Recommendations were made that, wherever possible, archaeological sites should be avoided during excavations for the pipeline. However, should that prove impossible, then ground disturbance should either be preceded by archaeological investigations or be monitored by watching briefs.

THE PIPELINE

The route of the pipeline starts on the Allt Mor on the west side of Dun Coillich, at approximately NN 7520 5336, continuing along the west side of the stream, past its junction with the Allt Glengoulandie from which point it becomes the Keltney Burn. From there it runs southwards, skirting the west side of Tom Liath, past Garth and Litigan, terminating at a new power station on the south side of the Keltneyburn to Fortingall road, at approximately NN 7736 4887. Its overall length is some 5km.

The general strategy was to remove vegetation and topsoil over a swathe, some 15-20m wide, before excavating the actual pipe trench which would be roughly half that width. The route was excavated from south to north and approximately half the length of the wider strip was removed before there was any archaeological presence on the site. Fortunately, nothing of archaeological significance was disturbed along this stretch of the route which was inspected by staff of the Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust (PKHT), archaeological advisors to Perth & Kinross Council.

The only remaining area where archaeological sites might have been at risk was around the north side of Tom Liath where hut circles, field systems and possible enclosures had been noted during the earlier walk-over survey. As a consequence, a watching brief was maintained during excavation in this area. All ground works for the project were undertaken by W B Grieve of Aberfeldy and the watching brief was kept by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology on 22nd January 2009 following a previous site visit with Alistair Henderson of Keltneyburn Hydro Limited who commissioned the project.

All grid references in this report have been reduced to eight figures.

THE SITE

Excavation work was monitored during trenching around the north side of Tom Liath, over a distance of some 120m between NN 7607 5177 and NN 7610 5191. The trench cut through

moorland covered mainly in bracken and coarse grass although most of the vegetation was covered with snow at the time of the excavation. The ground sloped gently upwards to the north, along the route of the pipeline, and to the west towards Na Craigean whose summit stands some 1km west of the trench.

Monitoring commenced where the trench cut through the remains of an early east/west field wall which was overlain by a later (presumably 19th-century) drystone field wall to the west of the trench. This earlier wall formed part of a pre-Improvement landscape of farming settlements and field systems although the remains of prehistoric settlements were also visible nearby. Indeed, the pipeline ran very close to the remains of a hut circle, located at NN 7610 5185, although the outline of this structure was almost totally obscured by snow. Several field clearance cairns had been identified during earlier surveys and were still evident during the watching brief despite the covering of snow.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

The trench measured 9-10m across, which was to be its maximum width along this part of the route. It was dug to a depth of 0.3-0.4m using a toothless ditching bucket attached to an 18-tonne 360° tracked excavator. Topsoil comprised mid-brown, clayey loam with frequent boulders which overlay glacial till of orange sand and clay containing many stones ranging in size from pebbles to massive boulders. Occasionally bedrock protruded through both the till and the topsoil. In places some of the till was removed to achieve the desired depth. Most of the spoil was deposited to the west of the trench although, in places, it was dropped on the opposite side to avoid possible archaeological features.

Only one feature (a clearance cairn) was cut by the trench itself although several other sites were noted in its near vicinity. Two of these were sufficiently close to warrant being fenced off to protect them during pipe-lying and associated activities.

Clearance cairn

Around NN 7608 5181 the trench cut through an extensive heap of field boulders covering an area at least 6m across. The stones had been deposited in a slight hollow where the topsoil and underlying glacial till were both particularly stony and where the ground would have been unsuitable for cultivation.

OTHER FEATURES

The identification of archaeological features was hampered somewhat by the dense covering of snow. Nevertheless, it did prove possible to recognize one element of an archaeological landscape listed by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) as NN75SE 14. This site was centred on NN 7614 5185 and comprised a farmstead, field system, hut circle and rig and furrow cultivation. The noted feature was the hut circle whose grid reference was recorded during the watching brief as NN 7610 5185 (see Photo 10). Another possible hut circle was noted at NN 7613 5184 (Photo 11) although its identification was not clear because of snow cover; furthermore, it was located some distance from the trench and well removed from any risk from trenching.

Evidence of field systems was hidden by the snow although the remains of several early field walls were visible, one of them marking the point at which the watching brief commenced.

This wall was traced for some distance both to the east and west of the trench and appeared to connect with other similar structures, forming part of a network of such boundaries.

Close to the north end of the area of the watching brief and to the immediate west of the trench at NN 7608 5187, was what appeared to be the remains of a rectangular structure measuring approximately 8m north/south by 4.5m wide and surviving as one or two courses of rubble masonry, now overlain by vegetation. Its form suggests that it is not prehistoric in date and is most probably contemporary with the presumed pre-Improvement system of field walls evident nearby. It is marked as Structure 1 on the accompanying plan.

As well as the clearance cairn cut by the trench, several others were noted nearby, many of them identified during earlier surveys. Most of these features are believed to be associated with post-medieval, rather than prehistoric, farming. Indeed one such mound had been built up against a tree which was still growing, giving some idea of its relatively recent origin.

CONCLUSIONS

Other than the clearance cairn of uncertain date recorded in the trench, little of archaeological significance appears to have been disturbed during the excavation of the entire pipe trench. As a precaution, the hut circle at NN 7610 5185 and Structure 1 at NN 7608 5187 were marked off to prevent damage during subsequent, related operations.

It is clear from the evidence of settlements surviving around the foot of Tom Liath that there was arable farming in this upland area during prehistory and in pre-Improvement times. Clearly, conditions in this upland area have deteriorated since then, bracken having encroached onto much of this area.

REFERENCE

Cachart, R & Perry, D 2003 *Desk-based assessment and walk-over survey of a proposed hydro-electric pipeline at Keltneyburn, Aberfeldy, Perthshire*, unpublished report to Shawater Ltd.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

- 1 Clearance cairn within the trench, at NN 7608 5181, viewed from the south
- 2-4 Excavation in progress at NN 7608 5181, viewed from the south.
- 5 Small clearance cairns to the east of the trench, adjacent to a hut circle at NN 7613 5184 (see Photo 11), viewed from the west
- 6 View to the south from the start of the trench, at NN 7607 5177
- 7 View to the north from the start of the trench, at NN 7607 5177
- 8 Remains of an early field boundary marking the start of the trench, viewed from the east
- 9 Possible rectangular structure at NN 7608 5187, viewed from the west
- 10 Possible hut circle at NN 7610 5185, viewed from the west
- 11 Hut circle and later clearance cairns at NN 7613 5185, viewed from the south-west
- 12 Hut circle and later clearance cairns at NN 7613 5185, viewed from the north-west
- 13 Possible rectangular structure at NN 7608 5187, viewed from the east
- 14 The trench, looking south from NN 7608 5184
- 15 The trench, looking north from NN 7608 5184
- 16 The trench, looking south from NN 7609 5187
- 17 View to the north from NN 7609 5187 near the end of the trench