

Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH AND SOUTHERN ENERGY

11KV LINE REFURBISHMENT
LOCH FEOCHAN
OBAN**

**Archaeological watching briefs
February-July 2010**

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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological watching briefs undertaken during the refurbishment of 11kv power lines south of Oban, Argyll. There were two main elements to this part of the programme:

the replacement of seven wooden poles, most of which were either rotten or had split, together with the insertion of a stay for one of the poles and the excavation of a trench for a low voltage cable from that pole to a nearby house; and

the replacement of a stretch of overhead line with an underground cable, approximately 110m long.

Pole replacements were carried out by Scottish & Southern Energy and trenching for the underground cable by EDM Plant Hire of Oban. The watching briefs were undertaken by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology. The first element of this work was completed on 22 February and 9 and 11 March 2010 while trenching for the underground cable was carried out on 22, 23, 29 and 30 June and 2 and 5 July 2010.

AREAS OF INVESTIGATION

Most of the poles were situated on the edge of an area containing numerous prehistoric monuments, particularly burial cairns. The possibility of encountering archaeological remains within these trenches was considered high, thus prompting the watching briefs. This area is defined on Map 1, produced by the West of Scotland Archaeology Service (WoSAS). Other poles were located within a short distance of specific archaeological sites. This area of high archaeological potential is located between Loch Nell and Loch Feochan with a slender arm extending eastwards along Glen Feochan and centred on the village of Kilmore, some 4km south of Oban. It is shaded green on Map 1.

The trench for the underground cable was located at Ardentallen, near the north shore of Loch Feochan, towards the west end of this sea inlet. In 1992 what appears to have been a kerb cairn was discovered a short distance from this trench, prompting the watching brief in this area.

Maps 2, 3 and 4 show the locations of the poles covered by watching briefs. Map 5 shows the route of the new underground cable at Ardentallen. These maps were supplied by SSE.

Known archaeological sites and monuments are described according to the numbers given to them by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) (eg NM82NE 28). Scheduled Monuments are given their Scheduled Ancient Monument numbers (eg SAM 4161).

POLE REPLACEMENTS

The refurbishment programme involved replacing many more poles than the seven described here but only those where there was a perceived archaeological implication were covered by watching briefs.

The usual procedure for such watching briefs is for trenches to be excavated under archaeological supervision, new poles being inserted in the holes, the overhead line transferred and the old pole removed. However, for operational reasons, most of the trenches excavated during this part of the programme were backfilled and reopened at a later date.

WB1: Pole 16 Tullich Aux No 1 to Ariogan (Map 2)

The trench for new Pole 16 was located at NM 86210 27458, on a hillock among undulating ground covered with short grass and moss, some 300m south-west of the A816 Oban to Lochgilphead road. Midway between the pole and the road, at NM 86340 27530, are the sparse remains of what is believed to be a prehistoric cairn (NM82NE 28; SAM 4161) which survives as a low mound approximately 5m in diameter.

The trench was located to the immediate south-east of the existing pole and measured 1.7m south-east/north-west by 0.7m wide. Adjacent to the existing pole the ground had already been disturbed, probably by blasting for that pole. Elsewhere in the trench 0.25m of dark brown topsoil overlay shattered bedrock, probably the result of glacial activity, and more solid rock at a depth of 0.5m. Nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered in this trench.

WB2: Pole 38 Ariogan to Killiechoinich (Map 2)

Several cup-marked rocks have been identified near this pole which stands some 600m from the west end of Loch Nell, at NM 87711 27393. These rocks are: NN82NE 18 (at NM 8785 2747); NM82NE 19 (at NM 8808 2736); NM82NE 37 (at NM 8764 2740); and NM82NE 38 (at NM 8806 2745). The watching brief was carried out in case other, as yet unidentified, cup-marked rocks were exposed in the new pole trench.

The old pole, located at the base of a low mound, was to be replaced by a longer one to provide more ground clearance. The trench for the new pole was placed just upslope (west) of the old one and measured 1.5m east/west by 0.6m wide. It cut through grass, moss, bracken and heather and the underlying dark brown, peaty topsoil to a total depth of 0.3m where undisturbed bedrock was encountered. No features or deposits of archaeological interest were found in this trench.

WB3: LV pole at Dalnaneun (Map 2)

A pole carrying a low voltage overhead line to Dalnaneun Cottage, near the west end of Loch Nell, was replaced, a stay added and an underground cable taken from the pole to the house. The new pole was located at NM 88061 26987, 2m from the south-west bank of an unnamed burn which runs alongside the house and some 4m to the north-east of the existing overhead line.

Several prehistoric burial monuments have been identified in this area, three of them (all Scheduled Monuments) being quite close to these excavations. Only six-figure grid references are known for them. One (SAM 4156) is located at NM 879 269, another (SAM 4158) is at NM 880 268 while the third (also designated SAM 4158) is at NM 879 268.

The pole trench measured 1.8m north-west/south-east by only 0.3m wide and was excavated to a total depth of 1.7m. It cut through 1.1m of made up ground containing several modern

artefacts. These materials overlay grey silt, gravel and pebbles, deposited either by glacial action or the nearby loch.

The stay trench was located 5m south-east of the pole trench and measured 2m north-east/south-west by 0.6m wide. As in the pole trench, over 1m of made up ground gave onto naturally deposited materials.

The cable trench ran from the existing pole, across the made-up ground and through the garden of Dalnaneun Cottage to another pole located near the house, a total distance of some 19m. It was 0.3m wide, 0.6m deep and cut through only modern materials beyond the garden and 0.3m of topsoil and glacial or alluvial deposits within it.

Nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered in any of these trenches.

WB4: Pole 7 Kilmore to Glenfeochan and Craigentaggart (Map 3)

This pole was located at the top of the north bank of the Feochan Mhor burn at NM 88302 24777, on the edge of the area designated as archaeologically sensitive. The trench was positioned on the east side of the existing pole and measured 1m north/south by 0.7m wide, most of the excavated material comprising backfill from the original pole. Where it had not been disturbed, the topsoil consisted of dark, humic loam and gravel, 0.4m deep, which overlay fluvio-glacial deposits of gravel and pebbles.

Nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered in this trench.

WB5: Pole 1 Ferndale/Kilmore spur (Map 4)

Located just outside the area of archaeological sensitivity, at NM 89093 24659, this pole stood on rough pasture on the steep north side of Glen Feochan, some 1km south-east of Kilmore. The trench, located to the immediate west of the old pole, measured 1m east/west by 0.7m wide and was excavated through 0.4m of mid-brown, silty loam onto bedrock, no archaeological features being uncovered.

WB6: Pole 21 Craggentaggart (Map 4)

Pole 21 was located on the flood plain of the Feochan burn at NM 89315 24359, on the edge of the archaeologically sensitive zone. The trench, located to the immediate east of the existing pole, measured 1m east/west by 0.7m wide and 1m deep. Topsoil of mid-brown silty loam, 0.3m deep, overlay riverine deposits of grey-brown silty clay, the water table being reached at the base of the trench.

Nothing of archaeological interest was encountered in this trench.

WB7: Pole 3 Cologin/Kilbride spur (Map 3)

This pole stood at NM 85714 25710, at the base of a natural mound upon which stand the remains of the old parish church of Kilbride and its associated graveyard. The trench was excavated on the south (upslope) side of the existing pole and measured 1.1m east/west by 0.7m wide. It cut through some backfill from the insertion of the old pole and 0.4m of dark brown topsoil which overlay undisturbed orange clay and fractured bedrock.

No features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered in this trench.

UNDERGROUND CABLE TRENCH

WB8: Pole 12 to Pole 13 Lower Ardentallen spur (Map 5)

Between Poles 12 and 13 (at approximately NM 8301 2330 and NM 8297 2322, respectively) on the Lower Ardentallen spur, the overhead line passes through an extensive, mature garden which includes many large trees as well as areas of lawn and a driveway. The integrity of the line has been compromised in several places by tree branches that threaten to disrupt the service. However, it was not possible to prune those branches, the consequence being that the overhead line had to be replaced by one running underground between the two poles.

The trench, dug using a 3-tonne tracked excavator, ran roughly north to south from Pole 12 through partially maintained and partially semi-wild woodland together with areas of lawn before crossing a tarmac and gravel drive from where it ascended a rocky knoll as far as Pole 13. Its overall length was some 110m. The gardens and the house associated with it are located towards the south end of a private road that runs along the north-west shore of Loch Feochan, 8km south of Oban. To the north and west the land rises steeply to a series of rocky crags, the unstable slopes being covered mainly in deciduous trees.

During the clearance of bracken in 1992 a kerb cairn (NM82SW 33) was in the vicinity of Pole 12. Charcoal and bone were retrieved from the site and submitted for carbon-dating although no information concerning the result of this analysis has come to light. The grid reference given for the cairn (NM 829 233) is somewhat imprecise, placing it anywhere within a wide area including the cable trench. As a consequence, a watching brief was maintained throughout the excavation of the trench.

The intended width of the trench was 0.3-0.4m but in places, particularly where large quantities of loose rubble were exposed, the trench edges collapsed readily, resulting in a much wider trench. It was a uniform 0.7m deep. Topsoil varied in depth, from a mere 0.1m where the ground had rarely if ever been disturbed, to 0.4m where it had been cultivated regularly. Along most of the trench, the topsoil sat on naturally deposited materials, such as scree from the adjacent hillside and glacial till of boulder clay, sand and gravel. In several places, however, it gave directly onto bedrock which had to be removed mechanically in order to achieve the required depth.

Towards the south end of the trench, to the immediate west of the house and below the drive, there were large quantities of rubble and some domestic refuse, probably dating from the construction of the house, these materials being reused to level the undulating ground. A few ceramic field drains were encountered towards the north end of the trench, probably to improve grazing during the 19th and 20th centuries, the topsoil being too shallow to support arable farming.

No structures, features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered in any part of the trench and no artefacts predating the 20th century were retrieved from it.

CONCLUSIONS

No features or deposits of archaeological significance were found in any of the pole trenches. However, these trenches were all relatively small and it is difficult to assess the archaeological potential of those areas from such results.

Even in the case of the cable trench at Ardentallan, archaeological features could be easily by-passed by such a narrow trench. Furthermore, it is suggested that the kerb cairn (NM82SW 33) was most likely on the higher ground to the west of this low-lying area.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

Pole trenches

- 1-2 Trench at WB1, viewed from the south-east
- 3 Trench at WB2, viewed from the south
- 4-5 Trench and pole at WB2, viewed from the west
- 6 Trench at WB4, viewed from the west
- 7-8 Trench at WB4, viewed from the north
- 9-10 Trench at WB6, viewed from the east
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- 14-15 Kilbride parish church, viewed from the north-west
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- 23 Cable trench at Dalnaneun Cottage, viewed from the north-west

Trench for underground cable Lower Ardentallan spur

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- 28 View to the north from NM 82991 23263
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- 33 Trench cutting drainage ditch at NM 82991 23263, viewed from the south
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 - 49 South terminal of trench meeting Pole 13, viewed from the east
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