

KP 358+555 btc dig-up

GPS: 8572642 4535038

Introduction: A human skeleton was disturbed at this location on 19th October 2005 during pipe coating repairs required after DCVG testing. The site was visited the following morning by BTC archaeologist. The skeleton was excavated, recorded and re-buried.

Description: The skeleton was supine and oriented roughly east-to-west with the head at the west end. The skull was 83cm below the surface of the working area, and would have been about 95cm deep from pre-construction ground level. It was lying slightly tipped to its right, with the left arm and left side of the ribcage higher than the right side.

The DCVG dig-up pit had truncated the skeleton across its femurs, and the lower legs and feet were missing. Otherwise, the skeleton was fairly complete. It was fairly large and robust.

The skull was resting on its right side, facing to the south. It was well preserved, though the cranium was cracked in several places. The cranial sutures were fully fused. The teeth, at least on the visible left side, were all present though quite heavily worn.

The vertebrae were all present, though in a poor state of preservation. The ribs were also poorly preserved. The sternum was visible, displaced to the right of the centreline of the ribcage. The right scapula was present, but the left scapula was not exposed.

The proximal end of the right humerus, and both ends of the left humerus had decayed, but the shafts of both bones were still quite hard and solid, as were the radius and ulna on both sides. The right arm was extended and pronated, with the hand resting on the upper part of the right femur. At least four metacarpals were present, along with some of the phalanges. The left arm was flexed at the elbow and supinated, the hand resting medial to the left iliac crest.

The bones of the pelvic girdle were in a poor condition, and were not fully exposed. The body was flexed slightly to the right at the hip joints. The heads of both femurs were decayed, but the remaining parts of their shafts were hard and dense. The right femur shaft was bent and flattened, with extra bone growth forming a flat wing up to 1cm wide and 7cm long along its linea aspera.

No grave cut could be seen in the section revealed by the dig-up pit, but differences in soil texture gave some indication of its extents, the material around the skeleton being noticeably softer and easier to excavate than the surrounding substrate.

Discussion: There was no dating evidence from the grave fill, but the position of the body, with the skull turned to face south, was typical of Muslim burials, and it is unlikely that this grave was of an earlier date than the eighth century AD.

The general robustness and the shape of the skull suggest it was a male skeleton, but no systematic observation of diagnostic sexing features was attempted. The individual was fully mature, but showed no obvious signs of old age, suggesting an age at death of perhaps 30 to 60 years.

The unusual bone growth of the right femur may have been the result of a poorly healed greenstick fracture or a nutritional deficiency.

There were no other burials showing elsewhere in the excavated pit, suggesting that this was either an isolated grave, or an outlier of a cemetery area centred beyond the southern limit of the pipeline easement. In the absence of any firm dating evidence, it is difficult to assess its archaeological significance.

As it appeared to have been buried according to Muslim rites, the skeleton was not lifted, and the grave was immediately backfilled. The construction work is complete at this location, but the area should be treated as potentially archaeologically sensitive should any future work be planned in the immediate vicinity.