



ROSS & CROMARTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

New House Site at Land 140m NW of Ardvassar Youth Hostel Archaeological Watching Brief



National Grid Reference
HC Planning Reference
Site Code
RoCAS Report
OASIS Number
Client
Author
Date

NG 63753 04127
12/04502/FUL
ARD13
2013-19/ARD13
rosscrom1-1499370
Jim Cook
Lynn Fraser
30-04-2013

Ryefield Farm, Tore, Ross-shire, IV6 7SB, Scotland
Email: rossandcromarch@gmail.com
Mob: 07891 578998 Ph: 01463 811310

Contents

Cover page: Aerial image of the site location

Summary	2
1. Introduction	2
2. Planning background	2
3. Site location	4
4. Archaeological and historical background	4
5. Methodology	4
6. Results	6
7. Discussion	9
8. Conclusions and Recommendations	10
9. Reporting	10
10. References	11

Appendix

Index of Photographs

Figures

Figure 1: Site location	3
Figure 2: Site plan	5

Plates

Plate 1: Looking over house site 1 to the access for site 2	8
Plate 2: Section through the cut for the access track	8

Acknowledgements

Fieldwork was carried out by Steven Birch. We wish to thank Jim Cook for commissioning the work. All mapping and imagery, unless otherwise stated is reproduced under ESRI licensing and provided by Microsoft Bing Maps. This is an unpublished report.

Summary

A controlled strip archaeological watching brief was carried out on behalf of Jim Cook on 20th February 2013 on the site of a new house at land 140m NW of Ardvasar Youth Hostel. There were no archaeological features or finds identified.

1.0 Project Background

1.1 General

A controlled strip archaeological watching brief was conducted by Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services (RoCAS) on 20th February 2013 during the site clearance for the construction of a new house site about 140m NW of Ardvasar Youth Hostel, Armadale, Isle of Skye (centred on NGR NG 63753 04127; Figure 1).

A Written Scheme of Investigation was produced by RoCAS¹ based upon information supplied by the Highland Council Historic Environment Team² and Jim Cook.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The general aim of the archaeological watching brief is to identify and record any features or finds of archaeological importance during the initial site clearance that could be damaged or destroyed by this development, while minimising any delays or disruptions to the development project and to propose appropriate mitigation in the event that significant features of interest are uncovered³. The end result of the archaeological watching brief is to make available the records of any archaeological remains found on a site.

The specific objectives are:

- To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area
- To remove by hand any overburden in order to expose the archaeological deposits
- To record and excavate all features and recover any artefacts prior to their destruction
- To sample deposits for post-excavation work, including environmental analysis and dating
- To make recommendations for post-excavation work

2.0 Planning background

The controlled strip archaeological watching brief was conducted on 20th February 2013, as per Highland Council Planning Reference 12/04502/FUL.

The watching brief requirement has arisen due to the situation of the development site within an area of archaeological interest including prehistoric settlement and burial features. Its situation places the site in an area with very high archaeological potential⁴.

¹ Fraser 2013

² HET 2012

³ Highland Council 2012

⁴ HET 2012

ARD13 Controlled Strip: New House Site near Ardvasar Youth Hostel



Figure 1: Site location

3.0 Site location

The development site is centred at approximately Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference NG 63753 04127 and lies to the east of the A861 about 140m northwest of the Ardvasar Youth Hostel, near Armadale, Sleat, Isle of Skye (Figure 1). The site is located on wooded and scrub land between the A861 and the shoreline at approximately 20m OD.

The underlying geology is Lewisian Complex - Orthogneiss⁵.

4.0 Archaeological and historical background

The development site is situated to the north of Armadale where a Bronze Age burial site consisting of a central large cist and six satellite cists was discovered and excavated between late 2009 and early 2010⁶. Adjacent to the burial site is a large Neolithic cairn⁷.

During work to extend the Armadale Pier tearoom in 1961, a cist was discovered containing an incomplete skeleton. Local legend has it that a similar find was made nearby in the late 1800s and that it is believed more are scattered about the area, associated with the ubiquitous legend of a clan battle⁸.

5.0 Methodology

5.1 Desk-based assessment

A desk-based assessment was conducted prior to commencement of the evaluation in order to assess the archaeological potential of the area based on previously recorded sites and any historical documentation.

The drawings of the area, as supplied by the client, were checked in detail against the Ordnance Survey 1:25000 Map, the Highland Council's Historic Environment Record (HER), the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS), the Highland Council Archives and Historic Scotland's records of scheduled monuments and listed buildings. Online aerial photographs were checked and the map collections of the National Library of Scotland (NLS) were studied. Other literary sources were also consulted.

5.2 Controlled strip

The purpose of the controlled strip archaeological watching brief was to identify and record any features or finds of archaeological interest prior to development, in order to minimise any delays or disruptions to the project or to propose appropriate mitigation in the event that significant features of interest are uncovered.

The site topsoil clearance of the site was conducted under constant archaeological supervision and guidance using a mechanical excavator with a flat-edged bucket (Figure 2). Following machine excavation, the clearance area was cleaned back using a draw-hoe to allow for the identification of archaeological features. The site was plotted using a Trimble Geo-XR Rover capable of centimetre accuracy.

⁵ BGS 2013

⁶ HER 2013

⁷ HER 2013

⁸ HER 2013

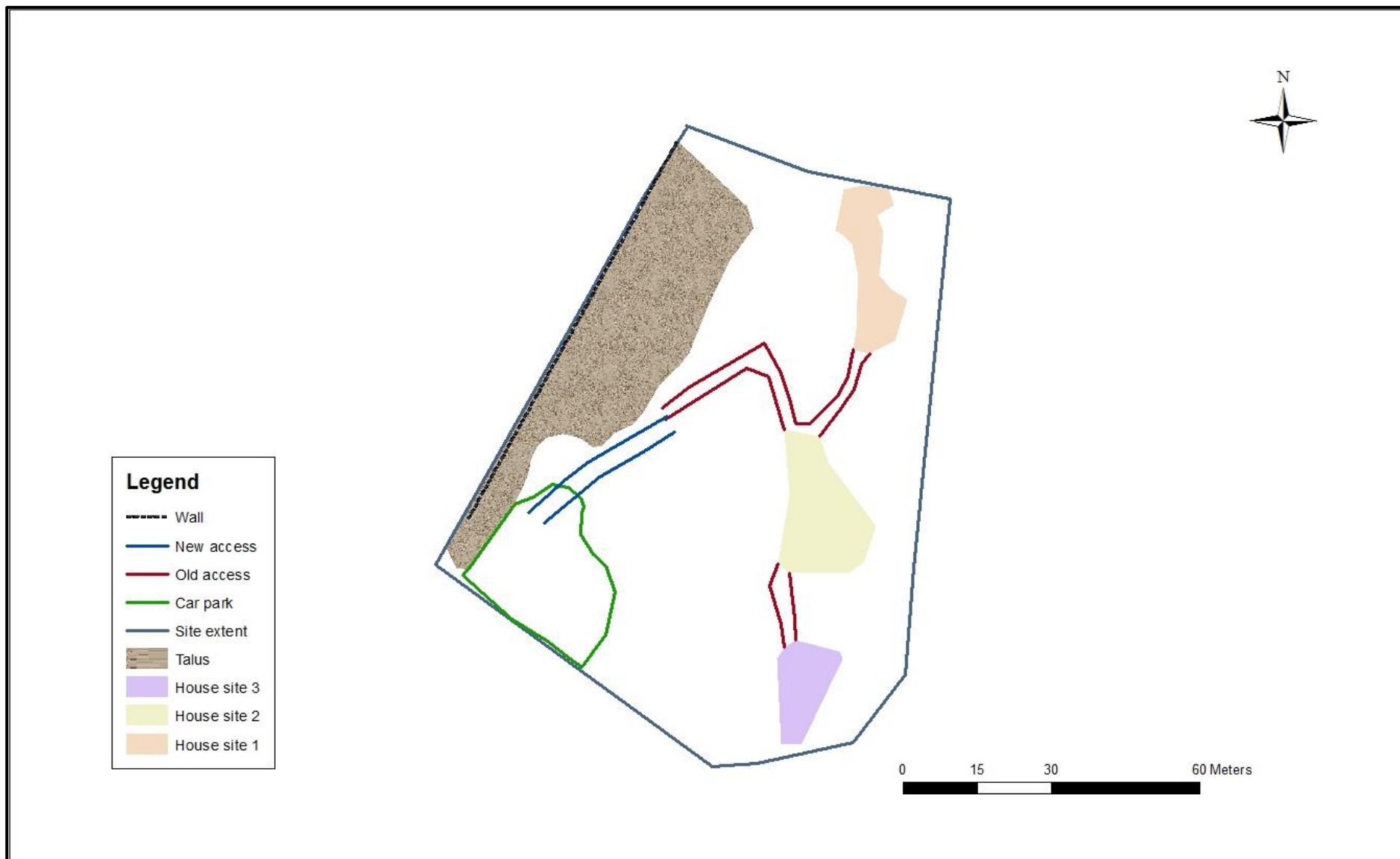


Figure 2: Site plan

The development site was recorded using high resolution digital photography throughout the watching brief in order to record the evaluation.

All fieldwork was conducted in accordance with *Institute for Archaeologists' Code of Conduct*⁹ and Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief¹⁰.

6.0 Results

6.1 Desk-based assessment

6.1.1 Historical mapping

The following historical maps were consulted online¹¹:

Blaeu Atlas of Scotland, 1654: Skia vel Skiana, [vulgo], The Yle of Skie / Auct. Timotheo Pont

The settlements of *Armadall Moir* and *Armadall Beg* are depicted on this early map.

Herman Moll: A Map of the North West part of the Western Islands published 1745

The settlement of *Armidia* is depicted.

John Thomson's Atlas of Scotland: Skye Island, &c. published 1820

This map depicts a large house at *Armidaal*.

OS 25 inch 1st Edition: Inverness Skye Sheets LXIII.3 and LXIII.4 (Sleat), surveyed 1876, published 1881

These maps show the development site as being covered in trees with tracks leading from the main road to a boat house and pier, which lie outwith the present site's boundary.

OS 25 inch 2nd Edition: Inverness-shire – Isle of Skye, Sheets 063.03 and 063.04, surveyed ca. 1901, published 1903

There is no change to the site shown on these maps.

6.1.2 Highland Historic Environment Record

The Highland Historic Environment Record¹² was consulted online. There were no sites or findspots identified within the development site, but the following entries are located nearby:

⁹ IfA 2008

¹⁰ IfA 2012

¹¹ NLS 2013

¹² HHER 2013

MHG5246 Armadale Bay Cairn NG 63680 03900

This large cairn sits on the west side of Armadale Bay approximately 280m west-northwest of the pier a short distance from and above the high water mark. It measures approximately 25m in diameter and stands 3.5m high with extensive robbing in the south and east quadrants.

MHG5244 Armadale Pier Long Cist NG 63740 03790

A stone cist was discovered in 1961 during ground preparation for an extension to the tearoom on Armadale Pier. The cist was approximately six feet long by one-two feet wide and contained an incomplete skeleton. A similar find is said to have been made in the late 1800s and it is believed locally that more are scattered about the area associated with a clan battle.

EHG3464 Excavation NG 63690 03824

An archaeological excavation was carried out at Pier Road, Armadale between late 2009 and early 2010. The excavation uncovered a Bronze Age burial site centred around one large cist encircled by a ring of interconnected pits and three standing stones. Six further cists containing inhumation and cremation burials and pits containing cremated remains were uncovered across the site. Three decorated food vessel pots, fragments from a fourth decorated pot, a fragment of a stone wrist guard and a group of five finely made flint tools were recovered from the cists. Possible earlier structures were also revealed below and beyond the main burial site. A variety of lithic materials were also found scattered across the site deposits. A kerbed cairn appeared to have been the final closure phase of the site.

EHG3465 Excavation NG 63725 03886

An additional watching brief was carried out at Pier Road, Armadale, during one day at the end of March 2010 for drainage trenches for the housing development. Five further small pit or posthole features were identified and excavated during this work.

6.2 Watching brief

Weather conditions: overnight frost, bright sunshine and clear skies, with no wind

The site was owned by Eilean Iarmain, which has been sold to the developer, with three plots within the site sold to prospective owners.

The ground slopes away from the main Armadale road into undulating and wet ground, which towards the shore comprises gullies and a stream course at the north end of the plots. The ground, which was covered with trees and ground-covering vegetation, gives way to the shoreline rocks comprising schist bedrock that has been cut through by volcanic dykes.

One year ago, tree surgeons came onto the site to undertake vegetation clearance, particularly to clear infestations of rhododendron, but also small trees and shrubs. During this work an access route was cut through the site into the lower development plots. Level platforms had already been cut, with inter-connecting tracks. The house plots, all of which are located immediately above the shoreline bedrock, have been revetted into the slope with minimal removal of overlying sediments; this being minimal at the seaward edge of the sites, but cutting between 0.3m to 0.9m in depth at the back, west side of the sites (Plate 1).



Plate 1: Looking over the narrow levelled platform of Plot 1 to the access cut leading up into Plot 2



Plate 2: SE-facing section through cut of access track showing upper brown soil with numerous tree roots and underlying grey clay

Where exposed, these sediments include shallow topsoil (mainly forest soils), some of which are peaty in nature, which overlies wet and sterile grey clay deposits (Plate 2). Some of the deposits contain numerous tree roots and old, decayed tree remains. The grey clay, in turn, directly overlies schist fragments and bedrock.

Due to the nature of the ground, drainage appears to be a problem. During the initial site clearance, heavy machinery became bogged-down in the wet sediments and extraction of the machinery was difficult. This will also make access to the three new house plots difficult and a significant amount of stone will have to be imported into the site to manufacture hard bases for the road. This work will take several weeks to complete, but will not disturb sediments in any significant way.

The current car parking area adjacent to the main road, which was originally levelled and built-up by RJ McLeod during the main Armadale road upgrade, forms a large apron of ground. This area will not be modified in any way during the proposed site works.

Running along the west side of the development site, a large sloping apron of made-up/re-deposited ground was identified. This relates to the widening of the main road by RJ McLeod. This has levelled, to some extent, what would have been steeply-sloping ground running from the road towards the house plots. This apron is covered in small trees, gorse and rushes.

During the watching brief, only a short section of the access track was cut from the present made-up car parking area and down into a previously cut access route. The exposed sediments in section in the track cut included redeposited material with small to large stone clasts, old tree remains and modern rubbish including polythene bags and rubber conveyor belting. Further to the northeast, sediments included a fine brown forest soil horizon overlying grey clay deposits. The grey clay also contains tree roots and a few large stone clasts, and is wet and poorly drained.

No ceramics or other types of small finds were recovered during the cutting of this access route. As stated above, most of the track will have to be made-up with imported materials (stone etc.), in order to create a track that will be accessible by vehicle.

No archaeological features were uncovered.

7.0 Discussion

The watching brief requirement arose due to the situation of the development within an area of high archaeological potential¹³.

The overall nature of the ground, which includes steep and undulating land falling away to the shoreline rocks, which, like the development site, is poorly drained, would not have provided suitable areas for settlement. In addition to this, the re-deposited material forming the aprons of ground at the south and west sides of the development site, cover this old ground surface. The proposed developments will not truncate this material in any significant way.

Where the ground has been disturbed in construction of the three levelled house platforms, which are located on the shoreline, the exposed sections show poor quality soils, with limited drainage, unsuitable for settlement.

¹³ HET 2012

8.0 Conclusions and recommendations

As no archaeological features were uncovered during the watching brief, it is recommended that no further work is necessary.

9.0 Reporting

This report will be disseminated to the contractor/developer, Highland Council Historic Environment Team and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

A digital report will be submitted with digital copies of the site photographs and georeferenced site plans in ESRI shapefile format. Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services will retain copyright of this report.

A summary of the watching brief will be submitted for publication in Archaeology Scotland's annual journal, *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*. An OASIS entry has been completed.

10.0 References

British Geology Survey 2013. Accessed on 18th February 2013 at <http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>

Fraser, L. 2013. *New House Site at Land 140m NW of Ardvasar Youth Hostel Controlled Strip: Written Scheme of Investigation*. Tore: Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services.

Highland Council 2012 *Standards for Archaeological Work*, v.1
<Http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/conservation/archaeology/developmentguidance.htm>

Highland Council Historic Environment Team (HET) 2012. *Specification for a controlled strip: Erection of house etc. at Land 140m NW of Ardvasar Youth Hostel, Ardvasar 12/04502/FUL*

HHER 2013. Highland Historic Environment Record accessed at <http://her.highland.gov.uk/home.html>

Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) 2008. *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*. Reading: Institute for Archaeologists.

Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) 2010. *By-laws of the Institute for Archaeologists: Code of Conduct*. Reading, Institute for Archaeologists.

NLS 2013. National Library of Scotland accessed at <http://maps.nls.uk/>

Scottish Government 2010. Scottish Planning Policy accessed at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/109640/0026470.pdf>

Appendix: Index of Photographs

No.	Direction Facing	Feature	Description	Taken By	Date
1	NNE	-	Showing south end of site and car parking area	SB	20/02/2013
2	NE	-	View looking over development site from edge of road	SB	20/02/2013
3	ENE	-	Image showing hollow between re-deposited material (left) and made-up ground of parking area	SB	20/02/2013
4	S	-	Looking from road edge towards parking area at south end of site	SB	20/02/2013
5	N	Plot 2	Plot number 2 showing levelled area for house	SB	20/02/2013
6	NNW	Plot2	Plot 2 showing levelled area, felled tree debris and exposed deposits within cut for platform	SB	20/02/2013
7	NE	Plot 2	Image showing seaward edge of Plot 2 above rocky foreshore	SB	20/02/2013
8	SW	Plot 2	Image showing SW corner of Plot 2 with minimal ground disturbance	SB	20/02/2013
9	N	Plots 1 & 2	Image showing N end of Plot 2 and access cut leading down to Plot 1	SB	20/02/2013
10	NNE	Plot 1	The wet seaward edge of Plot 1 and rocky foreshore below	SB	20/02/2013
11	SSW	Plots 1 & 2	Looking over the narrow levelled platform of Plot 1 to the access cut leading up into Plot 2	SB	20/02/2013
12	W	Plot 1	Image showing west edge of Plot 1 and exposed sediments	SB	20/02/2013
13	NNW	Plot 2	Image showing main access route to building plots - here shown entering Plot 2 in NNW corner	SB	20/02/2013
14	SSE	Plot 2	Main access route rising onto level platform of Plot 2	SB	20/02/2013
15	WSW	-	Looking WSW up the main access route from the parking area, with re-deposited material from the main road construction to the right	SB	20/02/2013
16	N	Plot 3	Levelled platform of Plot 3 showing shallow cut into sediments directly overlying bedrock	SB	20/02/2013
17	SW	Plot 3	Image showing the back SW edge of Plot 3 with exposed cut into sediments and overlying felled trees and scrub	SB	20/02/2013
18	NNE	-	Image showing sloping ground formed by re-deposited material from the widening of the main road	SB	20/02/2013
19	SSW	-	Rising ground at S end of development site formed by construction of parking area and standing for site cabins, relating to widening of main road by RJ McLeod	SB	20/02/2013
20	NNW	Plot 3	Northwest corner of Plot 3 showing exposed section at back edge of cut platform	SB	20/02/2013

ARD13 Controlled Strip: New House Site near Ardvasar Youth Hostel

No.	Direction Facing	Feature	Description	Taken By	Date
21	WNW	Plot 2	Exposed sediments in low section on west side of levelled platform for Plot 2	SB	20/02/2013
22	NNW	Plot 1	Image showing exposed sediments at back edge of cut platform for Plot 1	SB	20/02/2013
23	W	-	Exposed section in NW side of cut access road showing wet stratigraphy with iron pan/iron-rich staining	SB	20/02/2013
24	NW	-	SE-facing section through cut of access track showing upper brown soil with numerous tree roots and underlying grey clay	SB	20/02/2013
25	SW	-	View up the cut for the new access track from the made-up parking area to the lower house plots	SB	20/02/2013
26	SW	-	View up the cut for the new access track from the made-up parking area to the lower house plots	SB	20/02/2013