

New house site Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit



Archaeological Watching Brief

National Grid Reference	NH 4979 3221
Site Code	CLN10
RoCAS Report	2010-11/CLN10
Client	Graeme Young
Date	26-08-2010

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Summary

This report summarises the results of a watching brief on behalf of Graeme Young on the site of a proposed single house site development near Drumnadrochit, Inverness-shire. While there were no features identified, a possible quernstone or pivot stone was recovered from the topsoil.

1 Introduction

1.1 General information

An archaeological watching brief was conducted by Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services on 24 August 2010 at the proposed new house site situated approximately 1km north of Culnakirk Farm northwest of Drumnadrochit, Inverness-shire. The watching brief was a requirement of the Highland Council Planning Department prior to development of the site.

1.2 Project Background

As per Highland Council planning reference IN-08-556, the watching brief was required due to the situation of the proposed house site within an area containing extensive and significant prehistoric remains.

The purpose of the archaeological watching brief was to efficiently record the character, extent, condition, date and significance of any archaeologically significant remains on the site whilst minimising delays and disruption to the development¹. The *Scottish Planning Policy 2010* describes how archaeology should be managed when considering planning decisions and determining conditions for developments that have an impact on the historic environment².

2 Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Graeme Young for his assistance on site and for commissioning the work. Background site mapping, unless otherwise stated, is reproduced by Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services under ProMap License #LIG1044.

3 Site Location

The proposed house site is centred at Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference NH 49811 32128 approximately 1.7km north of Milton, Drumnadrochit in Inverness-shire on the north side of the Glen Urquhart, west of Loch Ness. The site, which forms part of Cnoc Beag croft, is located on a south-facing slope on the west side of the A833 road. The terrain slopes from 250m OD to 245m OD from east to west.

¹ HCAU, IN-08-556

² The Scottish Government. Scottish Planning Policy 2010.

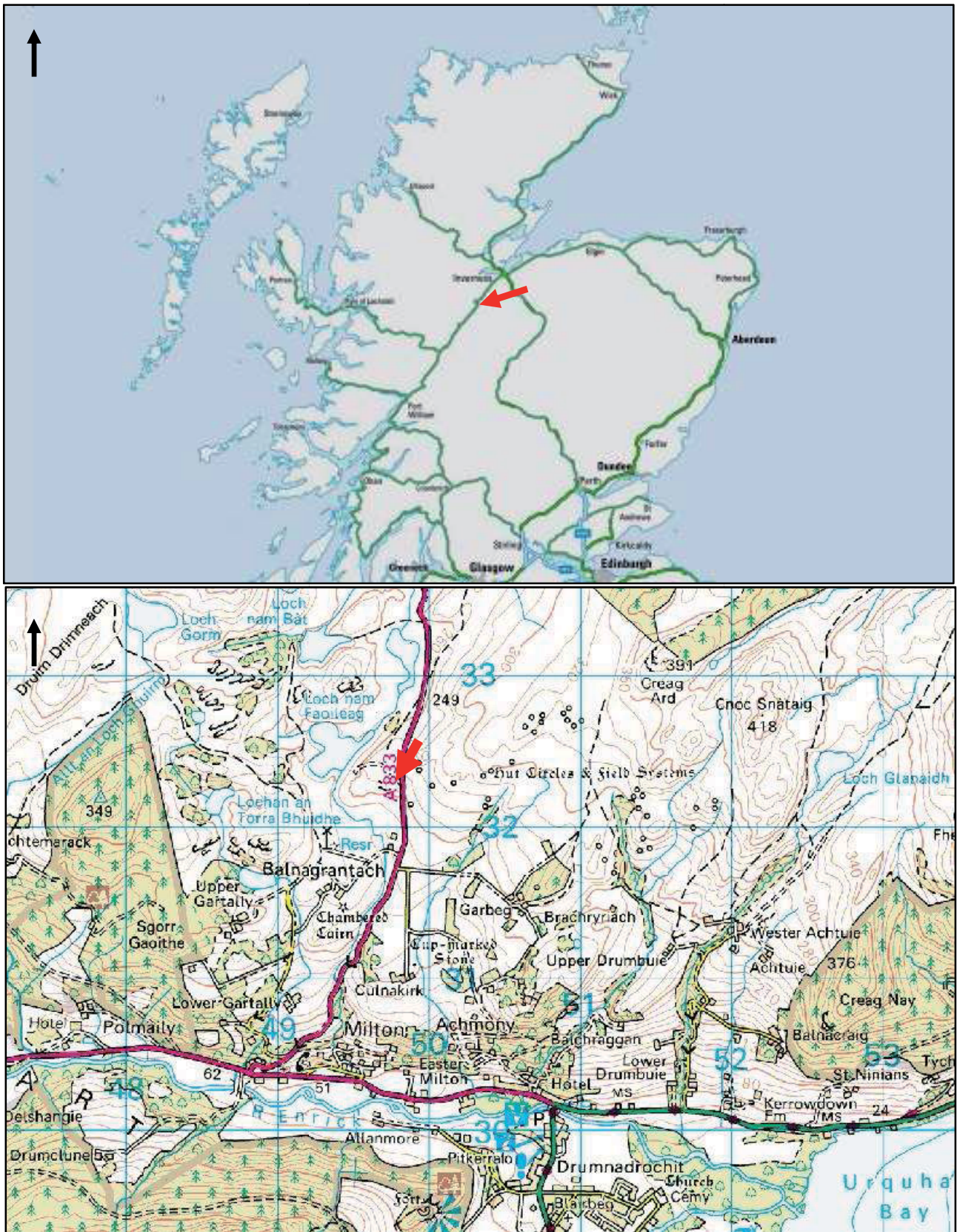


Figure 1 Site Location

4 Archaeological and Historical Background

The new house site is situated on the northern heights of Glen Urquhart within the former parish of Urquhart and Glenmoriston in the county of Inverness. Glen Urquhart can be characterised by the lower strath, which is situated along the burn known as River Enerick (from Polmailly to Drumnadrochit), and the upper braes, the higher ground of the glen of which mainly the south-facing slopes have been cultivated. During prehistory the uplands above the dense wooded areas were inhabited and cultivated³, and this is evident in the prehistoric clearance cairns and hut circles (remains of roundhouses) still visible within the landscape surrounding the site.

The *Old Statistical Account (OSA)* of the Parish of Urquhart and Glenmoriston describes life in Glen Urquhart at the end of the eighteenth century. The land, owned mostly by Sir James Grant, had been much improved by the use of lime and the *OSA* description notes that the laird gave his people ‘quarry-leave free’ but for the cost of quarrying for them. It also describes how life in the glen had improved drastically since the mid-eighteenth century, particularly the increased communication routes made possible by much-needed roads improvements and the successful self-governing and co-existence of the community⁴.

The development site, located approximately 1km north of Culnakirk Farm and 0.6km northeast of Balnagrantach farmstead, is situated on high ground at 250m OD. Dr. William MacKay refers to Culnakirk as “Cul na circe” or *back of the hen*⁵ in his publication “Urquhart and Glenmoriston”.

Although there is no record of previous settlement or structures on the site, three settlements were recorded on Roy’s *Military Survey of Scotland* south of the site in the mid-eighteenth century: *Achavonney*, *Kirkhill*, and *Koulikirk*⁶ (Culnakirk), the latter of which appears to mean ‘at the back of the kirk’. In fact, the local Free Church (or *kirk*) in Milton, is located at the base of the brae 0.9km to the south of *Koulikirk* and 1.8km southwest of the development site.

The proposed development site, located 370m east-southeast of Loch nam Faoileag, is situated amidst extensive prehistoric field systems and hut circles to the east and west. Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) status protects a grouping of hut circles located 700m west of the site south of the loch, and one hut circle has been recorded approximately 125m north of the site⁷. A Clava-type passage cairn, *Cairn Daley*⁸ is located less than 1km south of the site. Several walkover surveys and evaluations conducted within the surrounding landscape have recorded prehistoric and historic archaeological remains including the aforementioned sites in close proximity to the house site⁹. The survey for Culnakirk Native Woodlands (EHG1289) in 2005 specifically covered the development site and has shown that there are no recorded archaeological sites within the proposed development area.

³ English, P. *Glen Urquhart*, 1985.

⁴ <http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1791-99/Inverness/Urquhart>

⁵ English, 1985 (251).

⁶ National Library of Scotland (NLS). <http://nls.gov.uk>

⁷ HHER #MHG37785, SAM 11455

⁸ HHER #MHG2683

⁹ HHER# EHG 1289, EHG 1549 and EHG 2806

5 Methodology

5.1 Desk-based assessment

Prior to the fieldwork commencing, a full check was made of all available historical and archaeological records, aerial photographs and historical maps using the Highland Historic Environment Record (HHER), the Highland Council archives, the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS), Historic Scotland's databases, the National Library of Scotland and any other available records or online resources about the site. The Inverness Archive was visited on 17 August 2010.

5.2 Initial Site Visit

In order to inform the archaeologist about the nature of the site prior to undertaking the desk-based assessment and watching brief, the site was visited on 16 August 2010 in order to assess the potential for any visible features of interest. The wasted remains of one possible boundary wall were identified crossing the site from north to south.

5.3 Watching brief

The purpose of the archaeological watching brief was to efficiently 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 was conducted under constant archaeological supervision using a mechanical excavator with 4-ft wide flat-edged bucket. The site and any archaeological features or finds were plotted using DGPS technology and ArcPad software on a handheld Windows Mobile-based computer.

The development site was recorded using high resolution digital photography throughout the watching brief in order to record the evaluation as well as any features or finds of interest.

All fieldwork was conducted in accordance with *Institute for Archaeologists' Code of Conduct*¹⁰.

¹⁰ IfA, 2008.

6 Results

6.1 Desk-based assessment

Historical maps were consulted during a visit to the Inverness Archive and at the National Library of Scotland online¹¹.

William Roy's *Military Survey of Scotland*¹²

Three settlements are depicted in close proximity to the development site. *Koulikirk* (Culnakirk) is depicted as five structures with associated enclosure. *Achavonney*, located northeast of *Koulikirk*; is depicted as five structures with associated enclosure. *Kirk Hill*, located northeast of *Achavonney* is depicted as five structures and enclosure with cultivated fields around the farmstead.

The development site is shown within moorland in a hilly glen that joins Glen Convinth to the north.

First Edition OS Six-inch to the mile map

A corn threshing site and saw mill are depicted in Milton in Glen Urquhart on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (1870-71) and give some indication of local industry. To the south of the development site Balnagrants farmstead, which had two associated lime kilns and a prehistoric site Cairn Daley to the east, is shown approximately ½ mile from the site¹³.

The present-day road to the east of the site follows the line of the original road north of Milton. The early road, depicted on both the First Edition and Second Edition OS maps, branched off in two northerly directions at approximately the location of the proposed development.

Second Edition OS map

By the turn of the twentieth century, as shown on the Second Edition OS map, another single building farmstead had been built less than ¼ mile from the site¹⁴.

Highland Historic Environment Record (HHER)

The Highland Historic Environment Record was consulted online¹⁵ and the following sites or events were recorded within the landscape surrounding the new house site (locations shown on Figure 3):

1. EHG 1289 Culnakirk Woodlands Archaeological Evaluation NH 4986 3276

Walk-over survey in 2005 over an area of proposed woodland regeneration identified 14 sites of interest, including one hut circle and associated field system

2. MHG 37783 Loch nam Faeileag Hut circles NH 4912 3225

SAM 1145: Hut circles 730m NNW of Wester Balnagrants

Three hut circles measuring between 7.1m and 5.8m internal diameter with at least twenty associated clearance cairns and enclosure bank

¹¹ <http://nls.gov.uk>

¹² Roy, W. *The Military Survey of Scotland, 1747-55*.

¹³ NLS

¹⁴ NLS

¹⁵ Highland HER, <http://her.highland.gov.uk>

3. MHG37785 Loch nam Faoileag Hut circle NH 4973 3252

Hut circle 7.5m in diameter with stony bank spread of 1.2m in thickness and 0.4m in height; at least twenty clearance cairns found along ridge to either side of structure

4. EHG1549 Cairn Daley Chambered cairn NH 4944 3145

'Clava'-type passage grave, 40ft in diameter with part of enclosing kerb still *in situ*; heavily robbed and covered with field clearance stones; had been excavated in 1900 by *Inverness Scientific Society*, although no record of excavation exists

5. EHG2806 KDN08 Walkover survey NH 50526 34627

Walkover survey and desk-based assessment in advance of overhead line pole renewal between Ardendrain and Culnakirk; no new features within the site location were recorded

6. EHG230 Coul-na-kirk Walkover survey NH 5023 3295

Walkover survey conducted along the land E of the A833 north of Culnakirk; two roundhouse and three field systems were recorded by the survey

7. EHG1320 Culnakirk Watching brief NH 4966 3135

No archaeological features or finds were recorded

8. MHG2675 Clachmor Field system NH 4970 3130

Prehistoric field system marked by stone clearance heaps and field walls enclosing fields approximately 20m²

9. MHG47364 Culnakirk Burnt mound NH 50096 31623

W of Culnakirk Burn: Oval burnt mound 11.5m x 5.5m, and crescentic mound, 5.5m in diameter

10. MHG3314 Culnakirk Burn Burnt mound NH 5030 3190

SAM11441: Burnt mounds, 540m NNW of Garbeg Cottage
Two burnt mounds, horseshoe-shaped, situated at the E bank of a burn on the edge of a field system; trial excavation revealed content of small fire-cracked stones; Scheduled Monument status

11. MHG47352 Culnakirk Burn Kiln NH 50358 31921

Kiln, measuring 5.2m in diameter on E bank of tributary of Culnakirk Burn, bowl dug into slope measures 2.4m in diameter by 1m in depth within faced rubble bank 1.4m in thickness; flue to S side is collapsed

12. MHG2681 Culnakirk Cupmarked stone NH 4987 3107

Cupmarked stone with five cups, 2 ½ in diameter; not identified during survey in 2008

13. NMRS# NH43SE 2 Culnakirk Cupmarked stone NH 49921 31099

A triangular gneiss erratic with at least 90 cupmarks, some in conjoined pairs located by *Clachmor* house near Culnakirk Farm

14. MHG23373 Culnakirk Township NH 4980 3090

A township comprising five roofed and six unroofed buildings and three enclosures depicted on 1st Ed OS; four roofed and one partially roofed and five unroofed buildings and one enclosure shown on current OS map

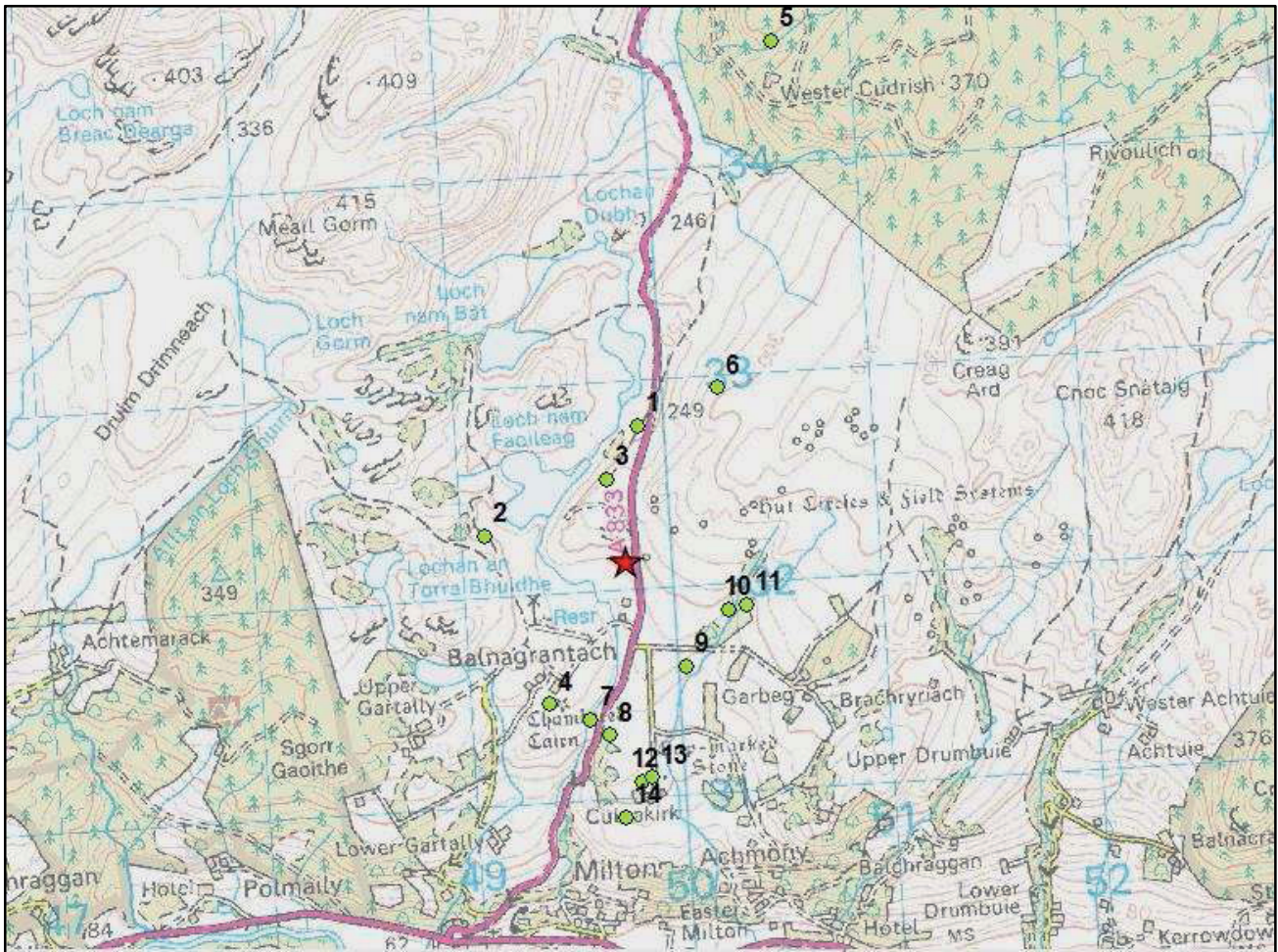


Figure 2 Location of archaeological sites/events recorded close to development site show by ★

6.2 Watching brief

Weather conditions

24 August 2010

Mostly cloudy with scattered rainshowers

Prior to clearance, the site was covered in low heather and moss with some grass. Gorse shrubs, juniper and mature and young birch trees were scattered across the site. The ground below the dark brown stony topsoil (Context 101) sloped downhill from east to west and consisted of ‘boulder clay’

material. This subsoil (Context 102) comprised of pale yellow-brown sandy clay with small cobbles scattered within varying concentrations of medium-large subangular stones and boulders, although the highest concentration of stone was found at the western end (lowest) of the site where the topsoil (which varied from 0.3m-0.7m in depth across the site) was also found to be thinnest.

There were no archaeological features or human remains uncovered during the evaluation.

A quernstone, or pivot stone, (SF01) was recovered from topsoil in the SW corner of the house site.

The only variance in the deposits was identified in a slightly raised ‘mound’ of material with visible stone that crossed the site from north-south (see Figure 3). During the pre-watching brief site visit, the amount of stone visible in the mound suggested it could have been the wasted remains of a boundary wall. However, the deposit consisted of light brown-orange sandy clay with boulders and stone mixed with soil (Context 103) and measured approximately 1.8-2.5 m wide by 0.34m deep. It overlay dark brown-dark grey wet soil 0.26m deep with some stone (Context 104). Three 20th century glass bottles and fragments from a fourth glass bottle, recorded as SF02, were recovered from Context 103. At the time of the watching brief, it was visibly apparent that the area east of Context 103 (mound) had been mostly stripped at some time in the recent past. The site owner had no recollection of this event.

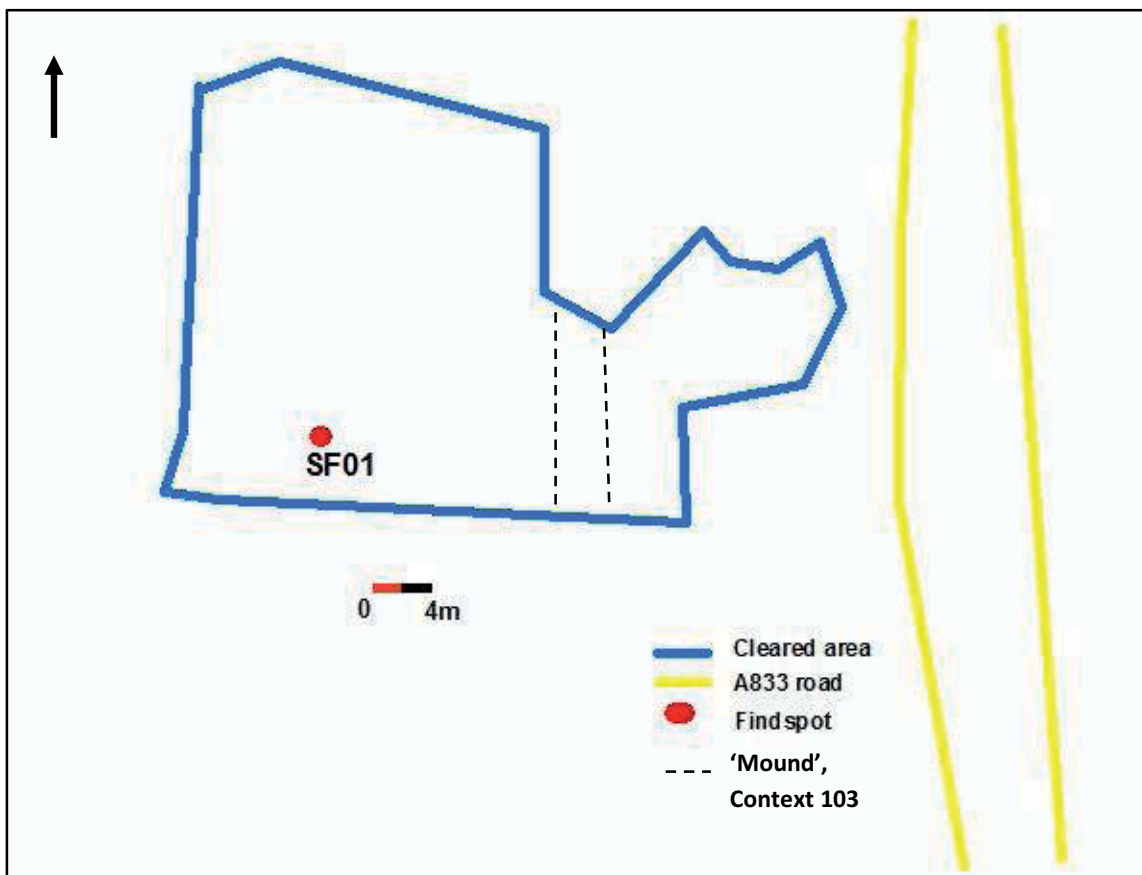


Figure 3 Watching brief area showing findspot location (SF01)

6.3 Archaeological finds

Glass bottles (SF02)

- 1) 1x clear glass bottle, 29cm high x 7cm wide

Diamond motif is embossed around top and bottom of the bottle and the words *Aberdeen Mineral Water Co. Ltd* are embossed on the base of the bottle; a black plastic stopper in contains the wording *Bon Accord*

- 2) 1x green glass bottle, 26cm high x 7cm wide

The embossed words *Younger* and *Alloa* are located on the base of the bottle

- 3) 1x clear glass bottle, a medicine or small liquor bottle, 11cm high by 5cm wide

- 4) 1x clear glass bottle fragment with remains of green lettering *Rau*___ (broken off) and *Buckie*

There were no further glass, ceramic or other scattered finds throughout the topsoil except the aforementioned SF01, a possible quernstone.

Quernstone (SF01)

Recovered from the topsoil during clearance, the schist stone was found at National Grid Reference NH 49806 32119. The current dimensions of the find are 40cm long by 35cm wide and 15cm high, although the stone has one broken section. Projecting the intact dimensions of the object shows it would have measured 40cm wide by 42cm long. There is one circular, central perforation on one side of the stone measuring 8cm in diameter. The perforation shows a raised circular rim 4cm wide around the top of the hole and a shallow ring of circumferential wear <1cm wide around the base of the perforation. The stone itself has high mica content with circular quartz intrusion lines encircling the shape of the stone.

7 Discussion

There were no archaeological features uncovered during the watching brief. The context change that was encountered across the slightly raised mound (Context 103) has been interpreted as redeposited mixed boulder clay subsoil with topsoil. This mound is adjacent to the eastern strip of the site which appeared to have already been mostly stripped of soil, thus suggesting Context 103 was spoil resulting from this clearance. The recovery of the glass bottles (SF02) from this spoil mound further corroborates this twentieth century episode of human presence of the site. Perhaps the discarded bottles came from workers involved in road construction of the A833 which borders the site to the east.

The schist stone (SF01) also implies an episode of human presence near the site, possibly prehistoric. It is interpreted as an unfinished rotary quernstone upper stone. The perforation is smoothed around the interior and its base is rough and flat. The perforation also has a slight circular groove around the edge of its base although the central area is not smoothed or worn by use. This suggests that work to completely perforate the stone for use as an upper rotary quern stone was in progress. The underside of the schist stone was also shaped flat for use as a quern and was also not worn by use. As well, there is also no evidence of a handle socket perforation on the upper side of the stone. However, one side of

the stone is broken and this could have taken place during construction of a side handle socket and would explain why the stone was discarded. Finally, the symmetrical raised lip around the perforation does resemble Iron Age bun-shaped quernstones¹⁶.

It is also possible that SF01 was a pivot stone, perhaps holding a door shaft or mill shaft although there is no use-wear to support this.



Plate 1 Unfinished rotary quernstone upper stone (SF01)

The recovery of the quernstone from the site does imply prehistoric presence in vicinity of the site. The prehistoric sites identified in the surrounding landscape supports this possibility. The fact that the stone was recovered from topsoil that apparently had not been disturbed suggests that the object had been discarded some considerable time ago and topsoil formation and deposition took place around it. However, it was not found in association with any archaeological features and so there is no contextual relationship to establish its significance.

8 Conclusions and recommendations

No archaeological features were uncovered during the watching brief and no further work is recommended. The possible quern stone, SF01, will be deposited with the Treasure Trove.

9 Reporting

This report will be disseminated to the contractor/developer, the Highland Council Planning and Buildings Standard Department, HCAU 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 (rosscrom1-81777).

¹⁶ MacKie, E. *Some new quernstones from brochs and duns*, PSAS 1971-72.

References

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Appendix 1 CLN10 Index of Contexts

No.	Type	Description	Over	Under	Finds	Interpretation
101	Deposit	Dark brown stony soil, 0.3-0.7m deep; shallowest at western end of site	102		SF01	Topsoil
102	Deposit	Pale yellow-brown sandy clay with small cobbles scattered within varying concentrations of medium-large subangular stones and boulders		101		Subsoil, natural
103	Deposit	Light brown-orange sandy clay with boulders and stone mixed with soil; approximately 1.8-2.5 m wide by 0.34m deep	104		SF02	Redeposited subsoil and topsoil mix
104	Deposit	Dark brown-dark grey wet soil with some stone; 0.26m deep		103		Former topsoil/turf surface

Appendix 2 CLN10 Index of Photographs

No.	Direction Facing	Notes	Taken By	Date
1	W	House site prior to watching brief	MKP	16/08/2010
2	N	Context 103 (spoil mound) overlying Context 104 overlying natural clay subsoil	MKP	23/08/2010
3	N	Context 103 (spoil mound) overlying Context 104 overlying natural clay subsoil	MKP	23/08/2010
4	WNW	Showing topsoil at quernstone findspot, SW corner of site	MKP	23/08/2010
5	SW	Facing SW corner of the site (SF01 quernstone findspot); site clearance in progress	MKP	23/08/2010
6	W	NW corner of the site showing nature of mixed boulder clay subsoil; site clearance in progress	MKP	23/08/2010
7	E	S half of site after site clearance	MKP	23/08/2010
8	W	N side of site during site clearance, showing nature of mixed boulder clay subsoil	MKP	23/08/2010
9	NNW	Centre N side of site during site clearance	MKP	23/08/2010
10	W	S half of site after site clearance	MKP	23/08/2010
11	N	NW corner of the site, site clearance in progress	MKP	23/08/2010
12	SW	Facing SW corner of the site, overlooking west side of site with spoil heap in centre	MKP	23/08/2010
13	-	Wet, depressed cocker spaniel	MKP	23/08/2010
14	NE	Eastern side of site during site clearance	MKP	23/08/2010
15	SW	Eastern side of site after site clearance	MKP	23/08/2010
16	NE	Centre N side of site after site clearance, spoil heap in background in front of west edge of site	MKP	23/08/2010
17	E	Eastern site of site after site clearance	MKP	23/08/2010
18	-	SF02: Glass bottles from Context 103	MKP	30/08/2010
19	-	SF02: Glass bottles from Context 103	MKP	30/08/2010
20	-	SF01: flat underside of unfinished rotary quernstone	MKP	30/08/2010
21	-	SF01: flat underside of unfinished rotary quernstone	MKP	30/08/2010
22	-	SF01: upper side of unfinished rotary quernstone	MKP	30/08/2010
23	-	SF01: upper side of unfinished rotary quernstone	MKP	30/08/2010
24	-	SF01: upper side of unfinished rotary quernstone, raised rim around perforation is visible	MKP	30/08/2010
25	-	SF01: upper side of unfinished rotary quernstone, close-up of raised rim around perforation	MKP	30/08/2010

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No.	Direction Facing	Notes	Taken By	Date
26	-	SF01: side views of unfinished schist rotary quernstone	MKP	30/08/2010
27	-	SF01: side views of unfinished schist rotary quernstone	MKP	30/08/2010
28	-	SF01: side views of unfinished schist rotary quernstone	MKP	30/08/2010