

An archaeological watching brief  
at  
Curriestanes cursus monument,  
Troqueer,  
Dumfries and Galloway

August 2014

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## **1 Introduction**

This Data Structure Report presents the findings of an archaeological watching brief undertaken for CIET (UK) Ltd during replacement work on an overhead power line (Route 55 a) at Curriestanes, Troqueer, Dumfries and Galloway (NX 9599 7517). Part of this work required the replacement of a pole and pole stay within the southern section of the scheduled area of the Curriestanes cursus monument. Following discussion with Historic Scotland and the preparation of a Written Statement of Investigation, scheduled monument consent was granted on the condition that an archaeological watching brief was maintained during the groundworks.

The main objective of the watching brief was to record and recover any archaeological evidence impacted by the development works.

## **2 Background**

Curriestanes cursus (Scheduled Ancient Monument ID 5738; NMR NX 97 NE 85; Dumfries and Galloway HER MDG 6082) has been identified from the air as a series of cropmarks. The parallel ditches which form the cursus enclose an area of approximately 220m E-W by 80-90m N-S, and are irregular in width up to a maximum of approximately 4m. An entrance is apparent in the middle of the eastern end. The western terminus of the cursus is not, however, visible and the monument extends under modern housing at the limits of its visibility to the west. No internal features are visible. Curriestanes cursus is one of a number of Neolithic ritual monuments in the Dumfries area.

A pipeline watching brief in 2002 revealed the N and S boundary ditches of the cursus. The southern ditch was 5m wide and 0.6m deep and the northern ditch 2.5-3.m wide and 0.65m deep. A small pit in the interior of the cursus contained a Beaker-type vessel and a radiocarbon date of 3875±45 years BP (2470-220 cal BC) was obtained from oak charcoal from the fill of the feature (Brann 2003:51). An evaluation in 2007 close to the northern section of the cursus failed to identify any significant features (Shaw 2007:66).

The First Edition six-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1854 (Kirkcudbrightshire, sheet 27) shows the southern part of the scheduled area – the section crossed by the power line – as farmland divided by a single boundary aligned SSW-NNE. Subsequent Ordnance Survey maps continue to show the area as farmland. Today the ground is divided into a number of arable fields.

## **3 Project Works**

The watching brief took place on 19 August 2014. Two machine trenches were excavated and all ground breaking works were observed. The first trench (pole 10792267) was excavated to allow the removal and replacement of a pole stay. The second trench (pole 10826542) was excavated to allow the existing pole to be removed and replaced with a new pole.

Both trenches were monitored during machine excavation and the spoil was examined for archaeological material.

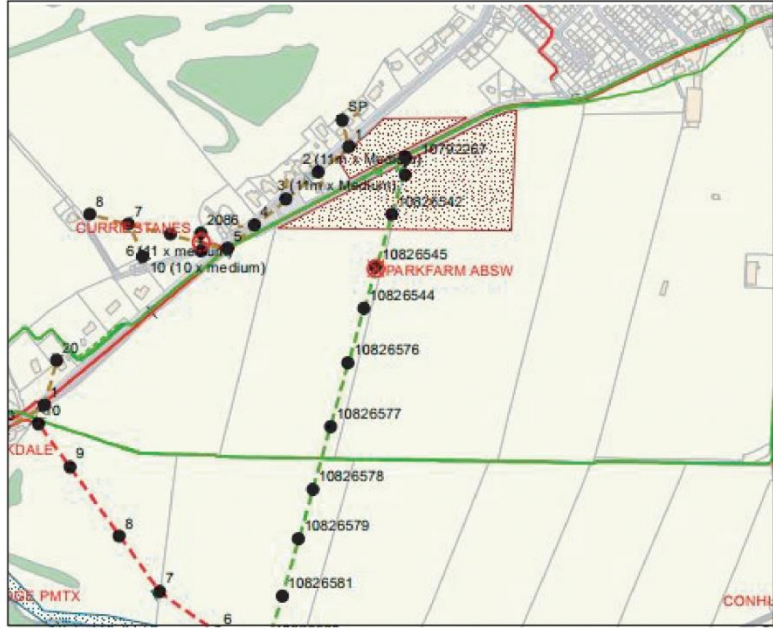


Fig 1. Location of Route 55 A powerline. The Curriestanes cursus scheduled area is shown in red.

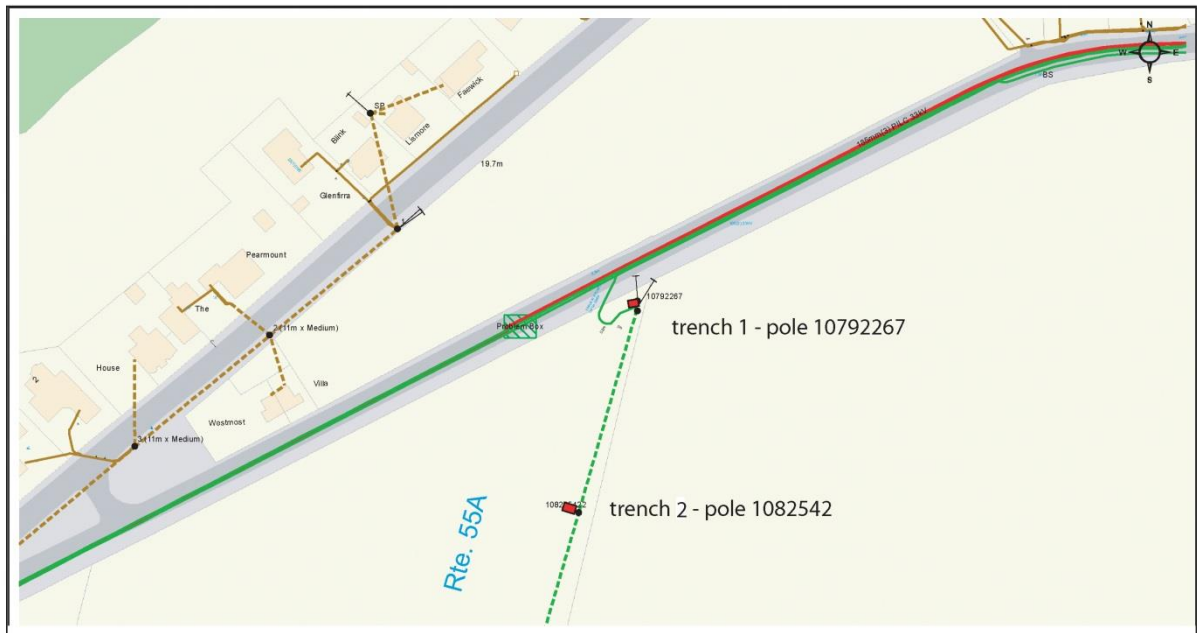


Fig 2. Location of watching brief trenches 1 and 2.

## 4 Findings

### Trench 1 (NX 96005 75202)

Trench 1, which is located within the area defined and enclosed by the cursus, was excavated in the NE corner of the field immediately W of the field gate. The machine trench was 2.20m x 0.70m and taken down to a depth of approximately 1.80m. The N face was recorded in section (Fig.3). Below a thin topsoil (1) was an c. 0.85 m deep layer of black-grey soil (2) with some small, rounded pebbles and occasional lenses of compact clay. Below this was a deposit of grey soil with cobbles (3); this deposit appeared to continue to the base of the trench and the frequency of cobbles increased with depth. The trench was archaeologically sterile.

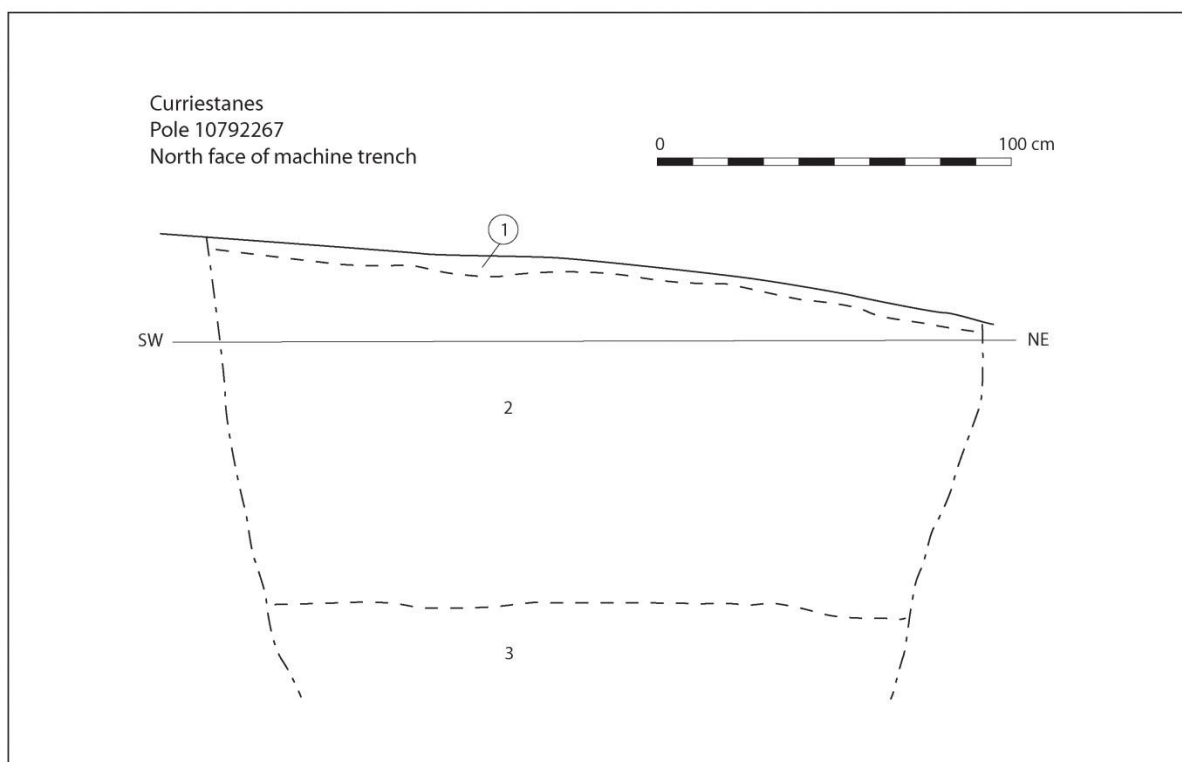


Fig. 3. Section of north face of Trench 1.

### Trench 2 (NX 95985 75121)

Trench 2, which appears from the aerial photographs (RCAHMS SC741991, SC587116, SC503751) to lie immediately outwith the western ditch of the cursus, was located close to the W side of the fence line. The trench was 1.70m x 0.70m and taken down to a depth of approximately 1.80m. The N face was recorded in section (Fig. 4.) A thin, loose top-soil (1) overlay a 0.30m thick deposit of grey-brown soil with occasional pebbles (2) which sealed a thin layer of compact, orange clay (3). To the SE a deposit composed of compact brown soil (4) and containing the wooden block of the original pole appeared – but could not be proved - to cut into layer 2. Layer 3 overlay a deposit (5) of orange-brown clay and sand with rounded pebbles and cobbles and occasional patches of dark brown soil

which continued to the base of the trench. To the SE the top of layer 5 had been cut to take the layer 4 pole block. The trench was archaeologically sterile.

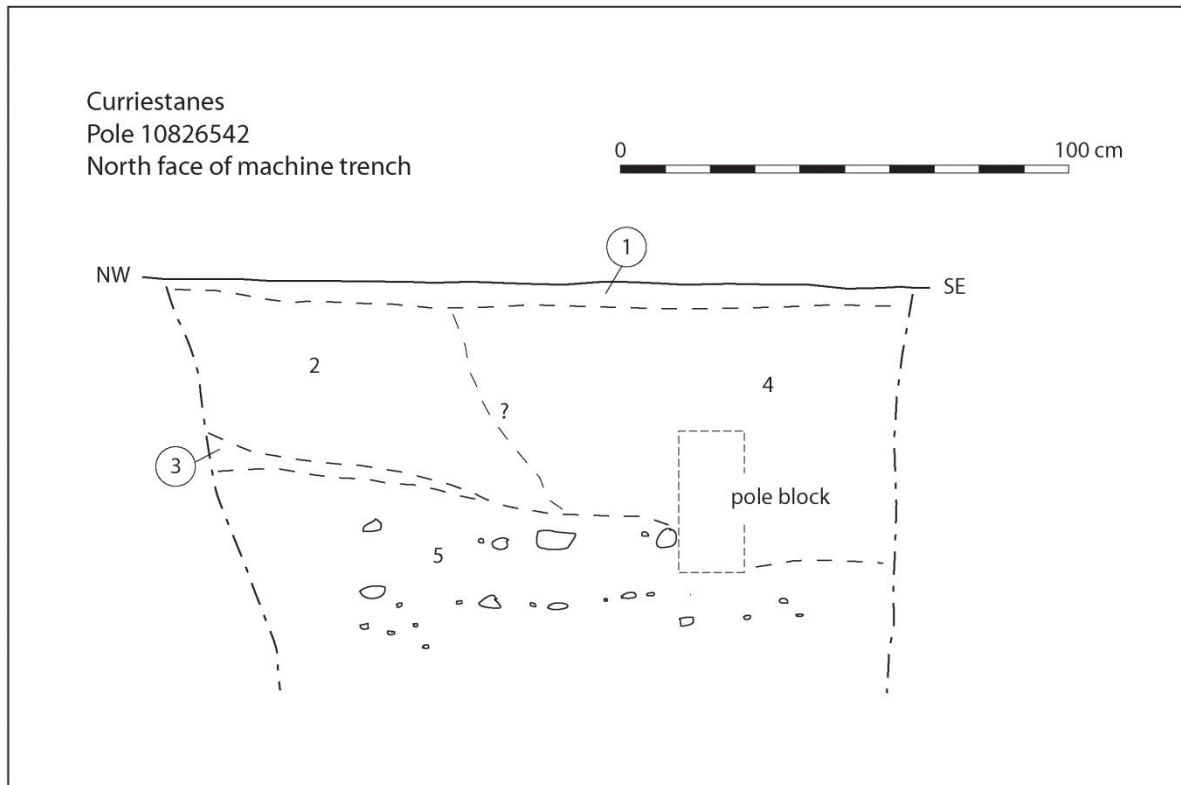


Fig. 4. Section of north face of Trench 2.

## 5 Discussion

The archaeological watching brief failed to find any archaeological deposits in Trench 1. The two layers below the top soil are best interpreted as backfill deposits from the excavations for the original stay block and pole in the 1990s. This pole is at the N end of the overhead power line and it can be assumed that a considerable amount of ground was disturbed here during the installation of the underground power supply.

Trench 2 was also archaeologically sterile. Layer 4 can be interpreted as part of the backfilled excavation trench for the original pole and its stay block. Layer 2 may be backfill from this same event but could also be an older ploughsoil (?) deposit cut by layer 4. Layer 5 has the appearance of a natural glacial clay deposit and layer 3 may be the remnant of an old ground surface above 5. It is interesting that a similar stratigraphic sequence was observed in the four evaluation trenches excavated in the N part of the monument in 2007 (Shaw 2007: 66).



*Fig.5. Pole 10792267 – view from east*



*Fig.6. Trench 1 – view from south*



*Fig. 7 Pole 1082542 – view from south*



*Fig.8. Trench 2 – view from south*



## 6 Conclusion

The watching brief failed to locate any archaeological deposits in either Trench 1 or Trench 2. The ground in both trenches had been partially or wholly disturbed during the construction in the 1990s of the original overhead powerline.

## 7 References

Brann, M L. 2003. Curriestanes Cursus (Troqueer parish), watching brief, *Discovery + Excavation Scotland*, 4. Archaeology Scotland: Edinburgh.

Shaw, C. 2007. Pearmont House, Dumfries and Galloway (Troqueer parish), evaluation, *Discovery and Excavation Scotland*, 8. Archaeology Scotland: Edinburgh.

## 8 Appendix 1 - Record Summaries

### Context summaries

#### Trench 1

Number	Interpretation	Description
001	Top soil	Black-brown humic soil
002	Modern backfill deposit	Black-grey soil with some small, rounded pebbles and occasional lenses of compact clay.
003	Modern backfill deposit	Grey soil with cobbles

#### Trench 2

Number	Interpretation	Description
001	Top soil	Black-brown humic soil
002	Plough soil /modern backfill deposit	Grey-brown soil with occasional pebbles
003	Old ground surface?	Compact orange clay
004	Modern backfill deposit	Compact grey-brown soil
005	Natural boulder clay	Orange-brown clay and sand with rounded pebbles and cobbles and occasional patches of dark brown soil

### Site photographs

Photo no.	Colour /B+W	Description	From	Date
1	Col	Pole 10792267	E	19.08.14
2	Col	Trench 1	W	"
3	Col	Trench 1	S	"
4	Col	Trench 1	N	"

5	Col	Pole 1082542	N	“
6	Col	Trench 2	S	“
7	Col	Trench 2	SW	“
8	B+W	Trench 1	S	“
9	B+W	Trench 1	W	“
10	B+W	Pole 1082542	S	“
11	B+W	Trench 2	S	“

## 9 Appendix 2 - Discovery & Excavation in Scotland report

Local authority: Dumfries and Galloway

Parish: Troqueer

Site name: Curriestanes cursus

Name of contributor: John Pickin

Type of project: watching brief

Name of organisation:

NGR: NX 9599 7517

Report:

A watching brief was undertaken for CIET (UK) Ltd in advance of replacement work on two electricity poles within the area of the scheduled monument. Trench 1 (NX 96005 75202) was excavated through recent backfill deposits and was archaeologically sterile. In Trench 2 (NX 95985 75121) a natural boulder clay surface, sealed by plough zone and modern backfill deposits, was recorded at a depth of c.0.35m; no archaeological deposits were observed.

Location of report: HS; DGC HER; RCAHMS

Funder: CIET (UK) Ltd

Contact details of organisation: High Weirston House, Leswalt, Stranraer DG9 0RQ

## 9 Contact Details

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