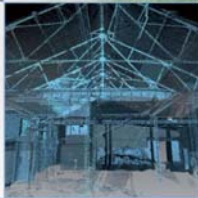
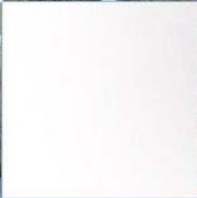


Blar Mhor, Banavie, Fort William: Watching Brief Basic Report

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AOC 22244

11th October 2012



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Blar Mhor, Banavie, Fort William: Watching Brief - Basic Report

On Behalf of: Northern Constabulary
C/o KLM Partnership
24 Union Street
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National Grid Reference (NGR): NN 2122 7764

AOC Project No: 22244

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Date of Fieldwork: 29th August 2012 to 10th October 2012

Date of Report: 11th October 2012

This document has been prepared in accordance with AOC standard operating procedures.

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Draft/Final Report Stage: Draft

Date: 17th October

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Non-technical Summary

This report represents the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by AOC Archaeology Group on behalf of Northern Constabulary during the site preparation works for a new police headquarters at Blar Mhor, Banavie, Fort William. The works involved the stripping of a large area of peat where the headquarters is due to be located as well as the stripping of a haul road and possible borrow pit locations to the north of the site.

Neither significant archaeological features nor artefacts were encountered during the watching brief.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning Background

- 1.1.1 A programme of archaeological works (watching brief) was required by Northern Constabulary with respect to a development (Planning Ref: 10/02634/PIIP) involving the preparation of land and the establishment of a landscape amenity bund (in part) on a land parcel at *Blàr Mòr* and Corpach Moss, Banavie, Fort William. The planning condition initiating the archaeological works stated:

“Archaeological monitoring of individual sites requires to be maintained when development commences within each development plot. Monitoring falls under the ‘programme of works’ required by the Planning in Principal consent (Ref 101026341P1P) and must adhere to the requirements as specified in the Highland Council Standards for Archaeological Work.”

- 1.1.2 The proposed development lies within the administrative area of Highland Council, which is advised on archaeological matters by Highland Council Historic Environment Team (HCHET). The programme of archaeological works has been specified by HCHET in keeping with the policies outlined in *Scottish Planning Policy* (Scottish Government, February 2010) and *Planning And Archaeology 2/2011* (Scottish Government 2011) in order to record the extent and significance of any archaeological remains which may be present within the development area.

1.2 Archaeological Background

- 1.2.1 The development area (centred NGR: NN 2122 7764) lies within a wide glacial valley to the north west of Ben Nevis and is currently covered by existing peat land containing some areas of peat cutting (Plate 1). It is situated to the immediate west of the A830 road and is contained within a curving minor road on the east, south and north. ‘Neptune’s Staircase’, part of the scheduled Caledonian Canal, lies beyond to the north.



Plate 1 - View of Ben Nevis from HQ area showing flat peat landscape

- 1.2.2 There are no known archaeological sites within the development area. Previous palaeoenvironmental studies (auguring and core retrieval across the peat sequence) in 2011 was assigned to assess the archaeological and palaeoenvironmental potential of the development area. Subsequent radiocarbon dating showed that peat initiation began in the Middle Bronze

Age (1530–1310 BC) continuing to the present. This early date suggests some potential for archaeological material underlying the peat as isolated finds in the wider landscape have included lithics and the premeditated deposition of Late Bronze Age artefacts, particularly axe heads (Headland Archaeology 2011).

2 OBJECTIVES

2.1 The objectives of the watching brief programme were set out in a *Written Scheme of Investigation* (AOC 2012) and were as follows:

- i) to safeguard the archaeological resource that may be disturbed by the proposed development works;
- ii) to liaise with HCHET and the client in the event of significant archaeological features and/or small finds being unearthed as to the most appropriate response in safeguarding these features either by preservation *in situ*, if at all feasible, or by archaeological recording.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 The ground breaking works (Figure 2) involved the stripping of peat from a 3.5 ha sub rectangular area, to be developed into the police headquarters, and a haul road and possible borrow pits to the north end of the site (approx 5.5 hectares). The area stripped for borrow pits was reduced during the works as there was less gravel required than previously thought. Additionally, the size of the haul road was reduced, as an existing access point on the adjacent site was used. All ground breaking works were conducted using a number of different 360° tracked mechanical excavators, utilising toothed buckets and toothless ditching buckets (Plate 2) All excavation was monitored by an experienced field archaeologist and all recording was carried out according to AOC Archaeology Group's standard practices.



Plate 2 - Working shot of long-reach excavator on haul road

4 RESULTS

- 4.1 The watching brief was carried out intermittently under generally moderate weather conditions between 29th August 2012 and 10th October 2012. Overall archaeological visibility was good throughout, although the weather and the use of toothed buckets did cause some issues.
- 4.2 The peat within the headquarters area measured between 2m to 3m in depth, and overlay a mid grey sandy clay soil, up to 0.5m in depth. Within the haul road and borrow pit area the peat was between 1m to 2m in depth, and overlay a darker band of organic rich silt (0.1-0.2m in depth). The natural subsoil throughout the development area was a mixture of orange and yellow sand as well as orange gravels with channels of pale bluish grey sandy silt in places [101].



Plate 3 - Variable peat depth on haul road



Plate 4 - View of eastern corner of HQ area

- 4.3 A palaeochannel [101] and modern machine excavated pit [103] were identified and investigated on site, but not recorded.

4.4 No significant archaeological features or artefacts were encountered during the watching brief.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 No archaeological features or artefacts of any significance were revealed during the archaeological watching brief. From the geological features noted, it appears that the development area had a number of alluvial features flowing through it prior to the initiation of peat layer formation in the Middle Bronze age. These features may be consistent with flood plain processes or a marshland environment and probably ill suited for habitation.

5.2 No further archaeological works are considered necessary within the development area. This recommendation will require confirmation by the Highland Council Historic Environment Team (HCHET).

6 BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

AOC 2012 *Blar Mhor, Banavie, Fort William: Written Scheme of Investigation*. Unpubl AOC Archaeology Project Design

Headland Archaeology 2011 *Blàr Mòr Moss, Fort William: The Stratigraphic Investigation of an Area of Peatland and Core Retrieval*. Unpubl Headland Archaeology Archive Report.

Scottish Government 2010 *Scottish Planning Policy*.

Scottish Government 2011 *PAN 2/2011 Planning & Archaeology*.

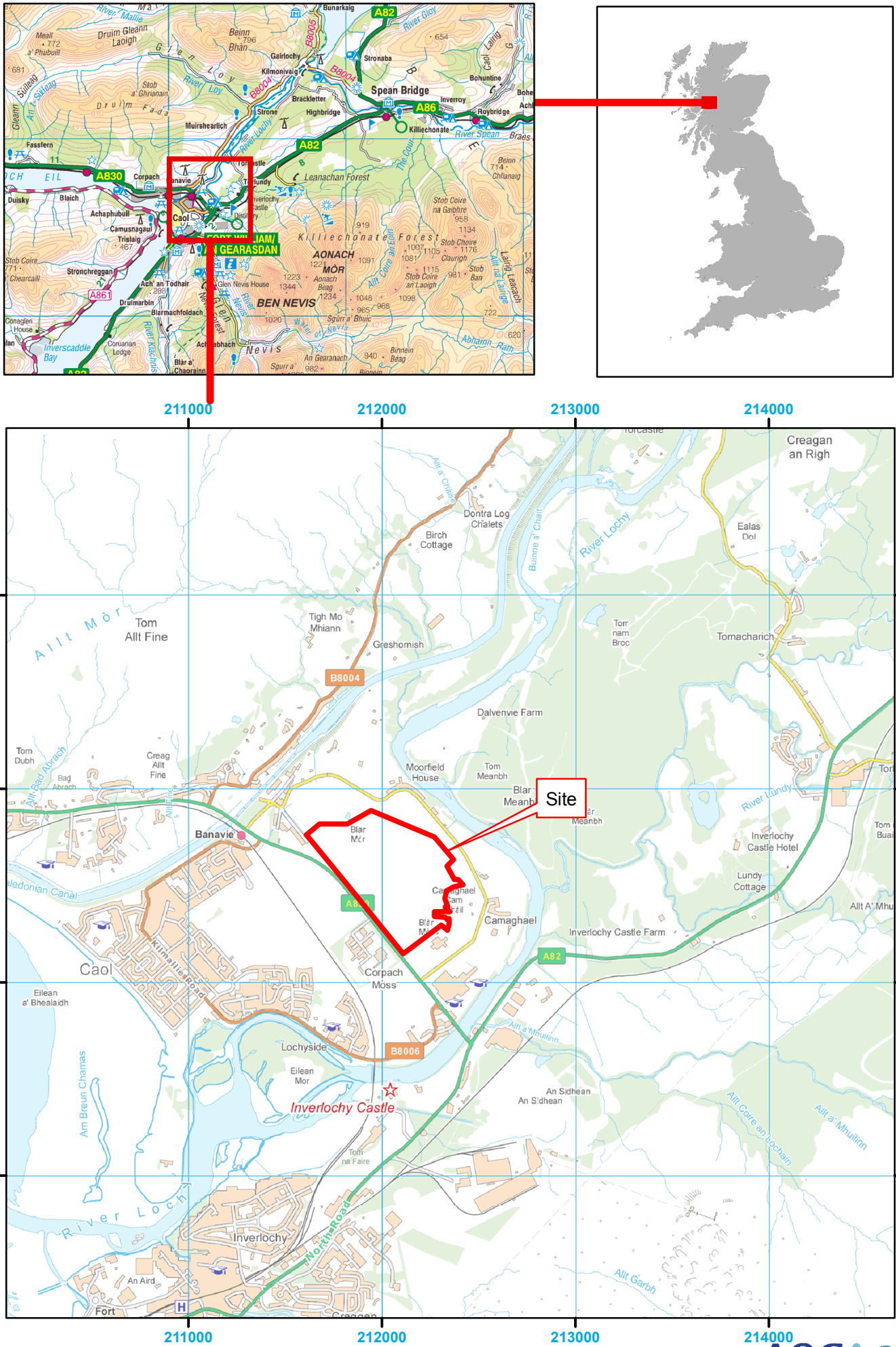
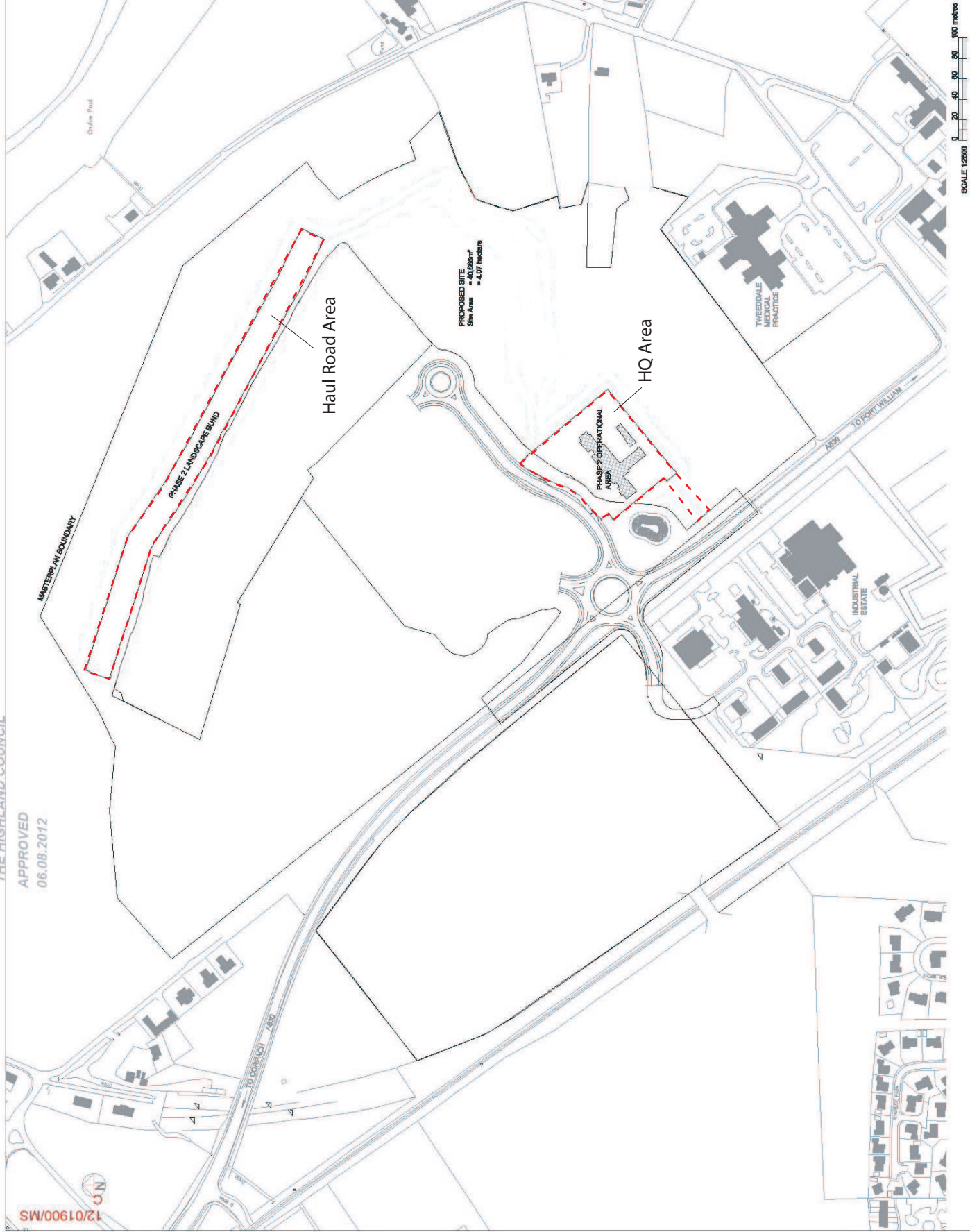


Figure 1: Site Location Plan

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NB. Graphic derived from client's original drawing

Figure 2: Watching Brief Areas



**Blar Mhor, Banavie, Fort William:
Watching Brief
Basic Report**

Section 2: Appendices

APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT REGISTER

Context No.	Description and Interpretation
101	Linear cut running NE-SW with shallow sides and a concave base. Measures 12m by 3.5m by 0.25m. Filled by deposit [102]. Palaeochannel
102	Mid brownish grey clayey sand 0.25m deep. Fill of palaeochannel [101]
103	Sub-circular pit with vertical sides with bucket marks visible within sand. 1.3m deep and filled by deposit [104]. Modern test pit cutting [102]
104	Moderately compacted peat with lenses of sand measuring 1.3m deep. Fill of test pit [103]

APPENDIX 2: PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER

Black and White Film 1

Frame	F. No	Description	From	Date
1-2	101	Section through [101] at bank	S	31/08/12
3-4	101	Terminal end of [101]	S	31/08/12
5	-	Registration	-	31/08/12

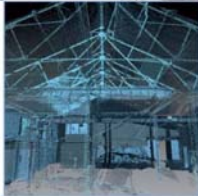
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Frame	Area	Description	From	Date
1-2	Haul	Working shots	N	29/08/12
3-4	Haul	Peat being excavated	Var	29/08/12
5	Haul	Peat excavation	-	29/08/12
6-8	Haul	Sample section	NE	30/08/12
9-10	Haul	Working shots	-	30/08/12
11-12	Haul	Peat excavation	-	30/08/12
13-14	Haul	Auger hole??	-	30/08/12
15	Haul	[101] in plan	N	31/08/12
16-17	Haul	SW facing section of [103]	SW	31/08/12
18-21	Haul	S facing section of [101]	S	31/08/12
22-24	Haul	Excavated terminal of [101]	S	31/08/12
25	HQ	Peat onto orange gravel	SE	17/09/12
26	HQ	Peat slumping	NE	17/09/12
27	HQ	Peat slumping and waterlogging	SW	17/09/12
28	HQ	Two machines working shot	NW	17/09/12
29	HQ	Orange gravel and greyish green sand and gravel	NW	17/09/12
30	Haul	Haul road working shot	NE	18/09/12
31	HQ	Paleochannel	NW	18/09/12
32	HQ	Paleochannel	NW	19/09/12
33	HQ	SE facing section in paleochannel	SE	19/09/12
34	HQ	Wood in paleochannel	SW	19/09/12
35	HQ	SE facing section in paleochannel	SE	19/09/12
36	HQ	Second paleochannel	SW	19/09/12
37	HQ	Paleochannel in gravel	NW	20/09/12
38	HQ	Paleochannel in gravel	NW	20/09/12
39	HQ	Area remaining of HQ on 20/09/12	NW	20/09/12
40	HQ	Area remaining of HQ and haul road	SW	20/09/12
41	HQ	Peat slumping at access road	W	05/10/12
42	HQ	Orange gravel under peat	NW	05/10/12
43	HQ	Access road complete	N	08/10/12
44	HQ	More of the same from other machine	NW	08/10/12
45	HQ	Working shot of machine 1 – HQ	NW	09/10/12

46	Haul	Natural in haul road	E	09/10/12
47	Haul	SW facing section of haul road peat	SW	09/10/12
48	Haul	Haul road complete	SE	10/10/12
49	HQ	View of corner of HQ	N	10/10/12
50	HQ	View of HQ area	NE	10/10/12
51		Ben Nevis from HQ	NW	10/10/12

APPENDIX 2: DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION IN SCOTLAND REPORT

LOCAL AUTHORITY:	Highland Council
PROJECT TITLE/SITE NAME:	Blar Mhor, Banavie, Fort William
PROJECT CODE:	22244
PARISH:	Ardgour
NAME OF CONTRIBUTOR:	Kevin Paton
NAME OF ORGANISATION:	AOC Archaeology Group
TYPE(S) OF PROJECT:	Watching Brief
NMRS NO(S):	None
SITE/MONUMENT TYPE(S):	None
SIGNIFICANT FINDS:	None
NGR (2 letters, 6 figures)	NN 2122 7764
START DATE (this season)	29 th August 2012
END DATE (this season)	10 th October 2012
PREVIOUS WORK (inc DES)	Headland Archaeology 2011 <i>Blàr Mòr Moss, Fort William: The Stratigraphic Investigation of an Area of Peatland and Core Retrieval</i> . Unpubl Headland Archaeology Archive Report.
MAIN (NARRATIVE) DESCRIPTION: (May include information from other fields)	<p>An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by AOC Archaeology Group on behalf of Northern Constabulary during the site preparation works for a new police headquarters at Blar Mhor, Banavie, Fort William. The works involved the stripping of a large area of peat where the headquarters is due to be located as well as the stripping of a haul road and possible borrow pit locations to the north of the site.</p> <p>Neither significant archaeological features nor artefacts were encountered during the watching brief.</p>
PROPOSED FUTURE WORK:	None
CAPTION(S) FOR ILLUSTRATIONS:	N/A
SPONSOR OR FUNDING BODY:	Northern Constabulary
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ARCHIVE LOCATION	Archive to be deposited in NMRS



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