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# **Ackron Sand and Rock Quarries**

**Melvich, Sutherland, Highland**



## **Archaeological Walk-over Survey**

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# Ackron Sand and Rock Quarries

## Melvich, Sutherland, Highland

<b>Report No.</b>	HAS120508
<b>Site Code</b>	HAS-MEL12
<b>Client</b>	Alastair Campbell Foggo / Design Associates
<b>Planning Ref</b>	(a) 11/03443/FUL (b) 11/03434/FUL
<b>Grid Refs</b>	(a) NC8991 6273 (b) NC 9004 6237
<b>Date/ revision</b>	29/06/2012
<b>Authors</b>	Paul Humphreys and John Wood

## Summary

*An archaeological desk-based assessment and walk-over survey were undertaken in response to a planning condition for quarrying of sand and rock at Ackron, Melvick, Sutherland. Nothing of archaeological significance was found within the areas of consent.*

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## Acknowledgements

The archaeologist on site was Paul Humphreys. Background mapping has been reproduced by permission of the Ordnance Survey under Licence 100043217. Historic maps are courtesy of the National Library of Scotland. Plans showing the proposed quarry areas and other details have been kindly supplied by the client. The report's author(s) and Highland Archaeology Services Ltd jointly retain copyright in all reports produced but will allow the client and other recipients to make the report available for reference and research (but not commercial) purposes, either on paper, or electronically, without charge, provided this copyright is acknowledged.

## Aims and objectives

- To minimise any possible delay or cost to the development by anticipating archaeological requirements as far as possible, timetabling and integrating archaeological recording work with the project, and dealing with any issues arising quickly and efficiently.
- To determine as far as possible the character, extent, condition, date and significance of any archaeologically significant remains; and to recommend mitigation where appropriate so that they can be preserved where possible and recorded where necessary in line with national and local policies and standards.

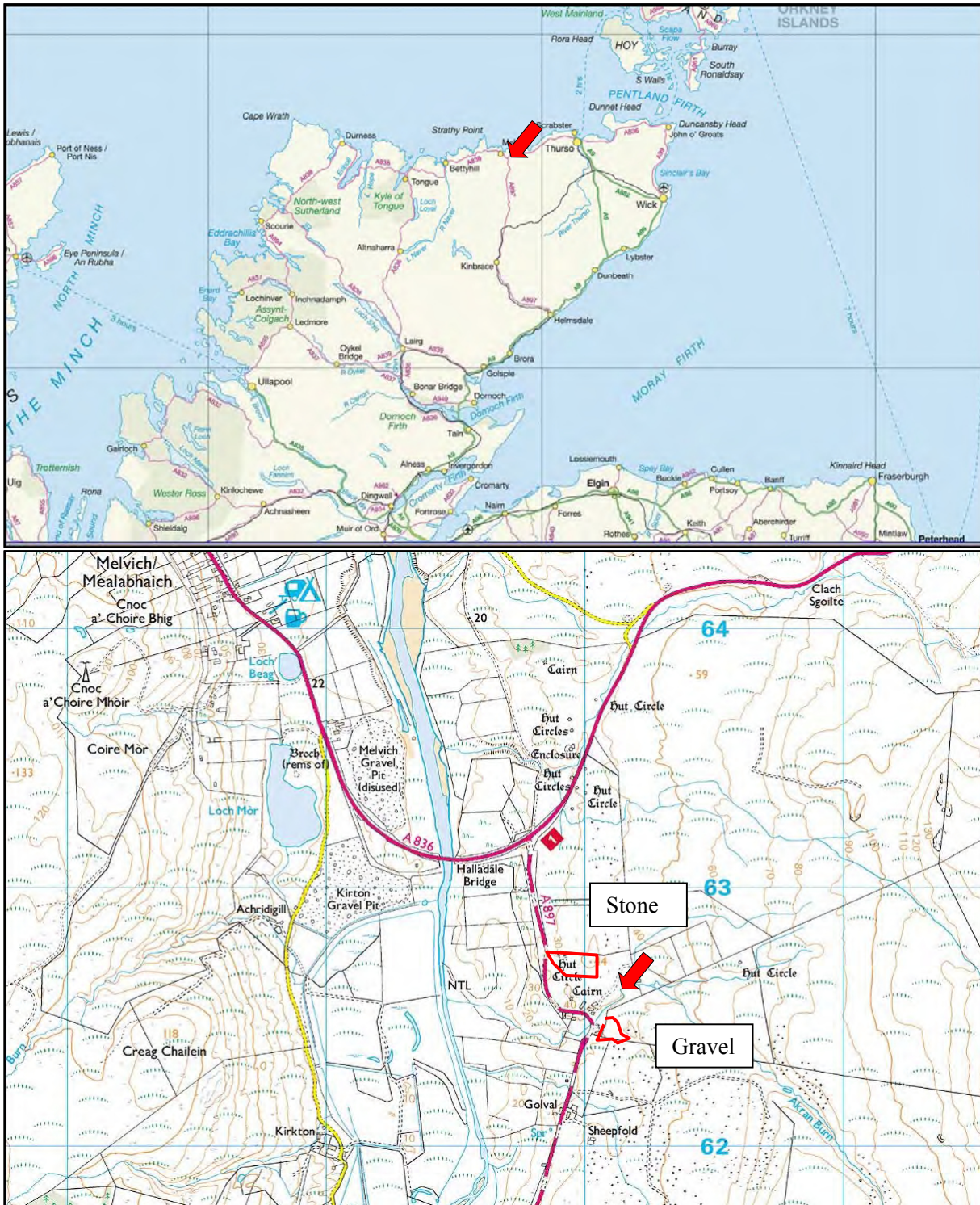
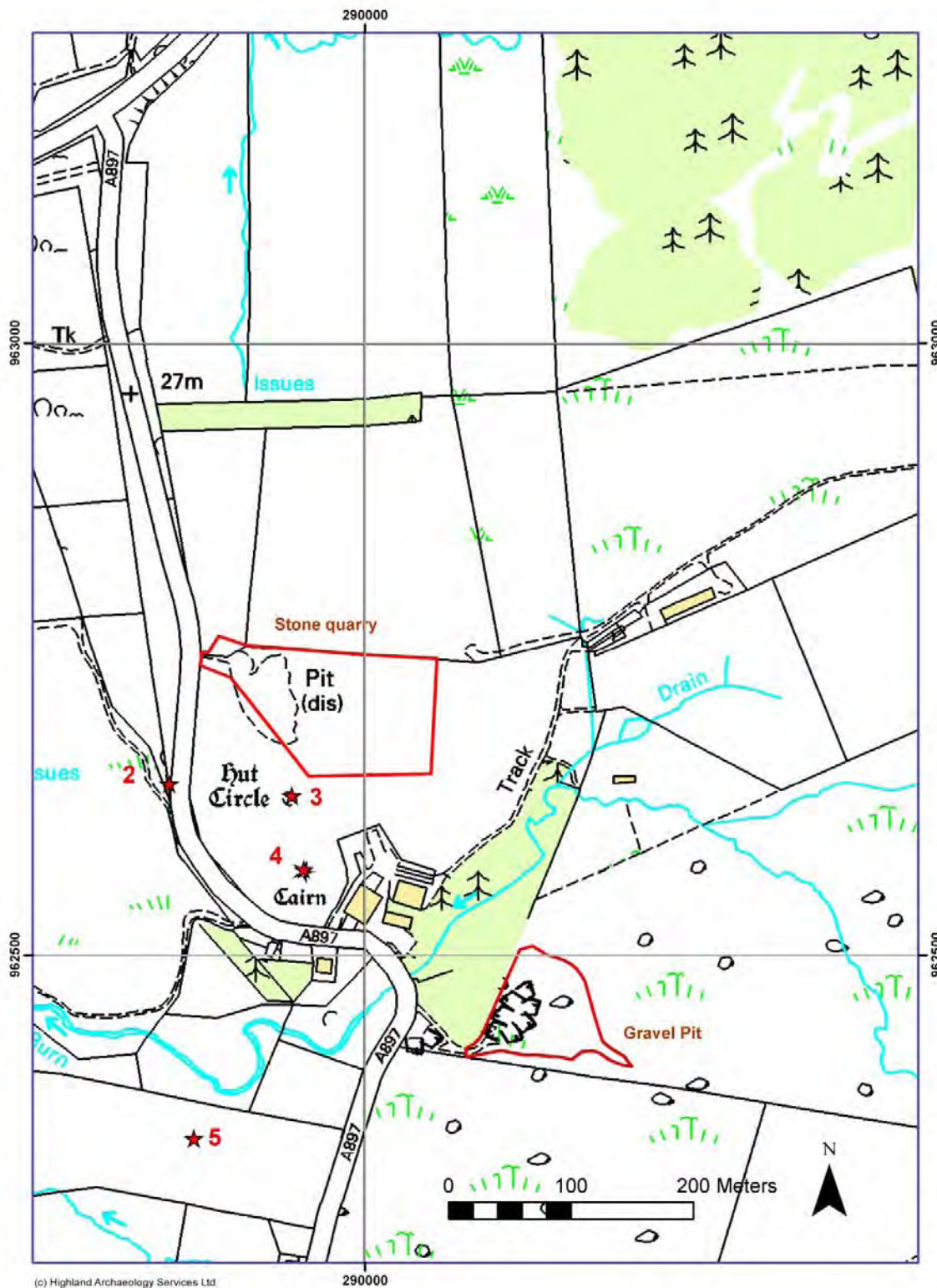


Figure 1 Site location



**Figure 2 Quarry sites and recorded archaeology**  
*(Numbers refer to survey by C Dagg 2002)*

## Introduction

The re-opening of two small quarries, at Ackron Farm, Melvich, Sutherland, required an archaeological walk-over survey of both sites. No archaeology has been recorded within the area of the planning consent; however a previous archaeological survey conducted by Cathy Dagg had recorded archaeology in the vicinity<sup>1</sup>.

## Location and Setting

The two sites are at Ackron Farm, Melvich, Sutherland adjacent to the A897 (Figures 1,2). Ackron overlooks the Halladale River and the village of Melvich which lies to the North West. The sites lie approximately 440m apart at between 34 and 37m above sea level and comprise

- Reopening a stone quarry at NC8991 6273 (Planning Application 11/03443/FUL)
- Resumption of operations to extract gravel from an existing gravel pit at NC 9004 6237 (Planning Application 11/03434/FUL )

The sand and gravel pit comprises a Kame, part of a small lobe of recessional moraine material (NC 9004 6237) on the southern flank of an old meltwater channel. The Kame had already been quarried to some extent in the past.

The stone quarry site is located NW of the meltwater channel and farm buildings and appears to extend from the existing quarry face east towards the junction between the igneous biotite granodiorite intrusion of the quarry and the moinian psammite and semipelite rocks to the east.

## Policy and Legislation

Archaeology has been recognised as a material consideration to be taken into account in the planning process since 1994. Relevant legislation includes the *Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006*<sup>2</sup>

The policy framework includes the Highland Council's *Structure Plan*<sup>3</sup>, and Scottish Government's *Scottish Planning Policy* (SPP), issued in February 2010, which consolidates and supersedes the previous SPP and NPPG series. The fundamental principles underpinning all the above legislation and policies are set out in *Passed to the Future: Historic Scotland's Policy for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* (2002)<sup>4</sup> and the *Burra Charter* (Australia ICOMOS 1999).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dagg, C 2002, *Archaeological Assessment of the Route of a Proposed Water Main between Halladale Bridge and Connagill, Strath Halladale, Sutherland*, HHER EHG637

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/17/contents>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/planning/developmentplans/structureplan/thehighlandstructureplan.htm>

<sup>4</sup> [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pasttofuture.pdf](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pasttofuture.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.icomos.org/australia/burra.html>

The Codes of Conduct and Approved Practice and Standards of the Institute for Archaeologists<sup>6</sup> were applicable to this work.

## Archaeology background

The two proposals involved re-opening previously worked areas and extending them. Neither quarry is shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS 6 inch map (Figure 3); nor do they appear on the revision of 1904 (not included here). They seem likely therefore to be of 20<sup>th</sup> c. date.

However there are significant archaeological sites nearby. At NC 8994 6262 a Bronze / Iron Age round house was recorded by the Ordnance Survey in 1960 (Site 3 on Figure 2). They described it as

An oval hut circle discovered during field investigation in 1960, measures 10m NW-SE by 7m within a denuded wall, spread to 2.5m, which has outcrop rock incorporated in N arc. An ill-defined entrance is in SE. The hut is sited within a contemporary minor field system marked solely by stone clearance heaps.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 3** Extract from OS 1<sup>st</sup> Edition 6 inch (1:10560) map Sutherland, Sheet XI, surveyed 1873. Not reproduced to scale.

A disturbed cairn, recorded as Neolithic but possibly one of these heaps, was separately recorded by the Ordnance Survey in 1972 at NC 8995 6257 (Site 4 on Figure 2)<sup>8</sup>. This is described as

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.archaeologists.net/>

<sup>7</sup> The hut circle is HHER: MHG9684; the field clearance cairns are HHER: MHG41334

At NC 8995 6257, on SE edge of field system (NC86SE 5), a turf-covered cairn measuring about 10m in diameter and 1m high, was discovered during field investigation. It has been partially quarried into on SE. though the centre seems to be undisturbed<sup>9</sup>.

A walk-over survey in advance of a new water main by Cathy Dagg in 2002<sup>10</sup> found

**Site 2.** Enclosure at NC 8984 6264, not previously recorded. A roughly square enclosure of which the western edge is a natural rock outcrop, the other three sides being turf dykes. The eastern edge of this feature is only approximately 3m from the road edge ... South of the enclosure, to the west of the track which cuts through it, are the possible faint grassy footings of a building.

**Site 3.** Akran Burn, Hut Circle at NC 8994 6263 ... This site was visited and deemed to be far enough from the pipeline route to be unaffected. [This is HHER MHG9684; see above]

**Site 4.** Akran Burn, Cairn at NC 8995 6257 ... This site was visited and deemed to be far enough from the pipeline route to be unaffected. [HHER MHG41334]

**Site 5.** Golval, Building at NC8986 6235 ... This site was not located [HHER: MHG19696]

Of the above, sites 2, 4 and 5 are highly unlikely to be affected by the quarrying. There was however some concern regarding the recorded field system associated with the hut circle (3). This was checked by the walk-over survey. The site numbers used by Dagg 2002 have been retained for the present work and the site locations are shown in Figure 2 above.

## Method

### ***Desk Based Assessment***

Relevant archaeological / historical records, maps and aerial photographs were checked for recorded sites and background information, as specified in the Highland Council's Standards for Archaeological Work<sup>11</sup>.

### ***Walk-over survey***

The desk-based assessment was followed by a walk-over survey of both the proposed sand and rock quarries in accordance with a project design and method statement previously approved by the client and the Highland Council.<sup>12</sup> The two areas investigated are shown on Figures 1-2 above. The areas were walked over and

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<sup>8</sup> HHER: MHG9698

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Dagg, C 2002, *Archaeological Assessment of the Route of a Proposed Water Main between Halladale Bridge and Connagill, Strath Halladale, Sutherland*, HHER EH637

<sup>11</sup> *Highland Council Standards for Archaeological Work* (checked at <http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/conservation/archaeology/developmentguidance.htm>).

<sup>12</sup> Wood, J 2012 *Proposed Archaeological Walk-over Survey- Melvich, Sutherland, Highland: Project Design, Risk Assessment and Method Statement*, Highland Archaeology Services, Cromarty (Report No. HAS120508)



inspected carefully for possible archaeological features. No archaeological excavation was undertaken as part of this work. Photographs were taken to record the areas.



**Figure 4 Stone Quarry - annotated aerial view**  
PDH 05/06/2012

## Results

The prevailing weather conditions for the walk-over were clear and sunny and the ground was very dry.

### Stone Quarry

It was evident that a limited amount of recent disturbance to the old quarry had taken place, but this had not significantly encroached on the previously un-quarried area. No archaeology was noted within the consent area. Feature A (NC 89961 62674) noted on the aerial photograph (Figure 4 above) appeared less convincing

<sup>8</sup> *Peach and Horn*, Proc. Roy. Phys. Soc. Edin. vol. vi., 1881 p321

on the ground, the longest element being only 8 m long. It was concluded that this feature was either natural or an old stock-feeder site. The nearby hut circle, clearance cairns and burial cairn, mentioned above, were visited. In the opinion of the author the burial cairn previously recorded as Neolithic is more likely to be Bronze Age in date.



**Figure 5 Sand Quarry – annotated aerial view**  
 PDH 05/06/2012

### **Sand / Gravel Quarry**

It was evident that a limited amount of recent disturbance to the old quarry had taken place and this had encroached on the previously un-quarried area of the Kame to a small degree.

Two features were noted on the Kame which had some potential to be archaeologically significant; however their interpretation was uncertain. After a discussion with the landowner as to their origin, the author was satisfied that they resulted from modern farming activity.

The walk-over of the wider area outside the proposed quarry area yielded one possible vestigial hut circle and two 20<sup>th</sup> century shooting butts. The 'hut circle' may yet prove to have been entirely produced by modern farming as the site of a stock feeder, but a pre-existing feature cannot be ruled out at this stage.

An unrecorded pre-clearance rural settlement site comprising buildings and field boundaries was noted in an adjacent field (not on Ackron Farm land).

## Conclusions and recommendations

It is concluded that no significant archaeology appears to lie within the current extraction consent boundaries of the sand and rock quarries, and that no further archaeological fieldwork or mitigation is required.

## Photographs

The photographs are located on Figures 4 and 5 above.



**Photo 1**      **View of quarry from hut circle looking N**



**Photo 2** View from site looking SSW



**Photo 3** View from site looking W



**Photo 4** Feature A looking W



**Photo 5** Kame setting looking NW



**Photo 6** Kame looking NW



**Photo 7** Sand quarry looking SW



**Photo 8**      **Shooting butt looking E**



**Photo 9**      **Second shooting butt looking WSW**



**Photo 10** Possible vestigial hut circle looking NE

**Table 1 Photographs**

<b>Photo No.</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Taken by</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	View of quarry from hut circle looking N	PDH	26/05/2012
2	View from site looking SSW	PDH	26/05/2012
3	View from site looking W	PDH	26/05/2012
4	Feature A looking W	PDH	26/05/2012
5	Kame setting looking NW	PDH	26/05/2012
6	Kame looking NW	PDH	26/05/2012
7	Sand quarry looking SW	PDH	26/05/2012
8	Shooting butt looking E	PDH	26/05/2012
9	Second shooting butt looking WSW	PDH	26/05/2012
10	Possible vestigial hut circle looking NE	PDH	26/05/2012