



Highland Archaeology Services Ltd

Bringing the Past and Future Together

Lower Camster

Caithness



Watching Brief

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Caithness

Watching Brief

Report No.	HAS120701
Site Code	HAS-CAM12
Client	Stephen Firth
Planning Ref	11/04726/FUL
OASIS	
Grid Ref	ND2509 4552
Date/ revision	04/07/2012
Authors	Paul Humphreys and John Wood

Summary

A controlled topsoil strip (Watching Brief) was undertaken to meet a planning condition during site preparation work for a house at Camster, Caithness. Despite a large number of significant sites in the surrounding area, the bedrock here was found to lie close to the surface and no archaeological artefacts or features were recorded.

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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.

Location

The site is at Lower Camster, at approximate OS Grid reference ND2509 4552 and about 105m above sea level, adjacent to the Camster Burn one of the tributaries of the Wick River (Figure 1). It lies within a small area of isolated improved land currently enclosed by conifer forestry established during the mid 20th century and set within a very much larger area of peat bog and moorland.



Figure 1 Site location

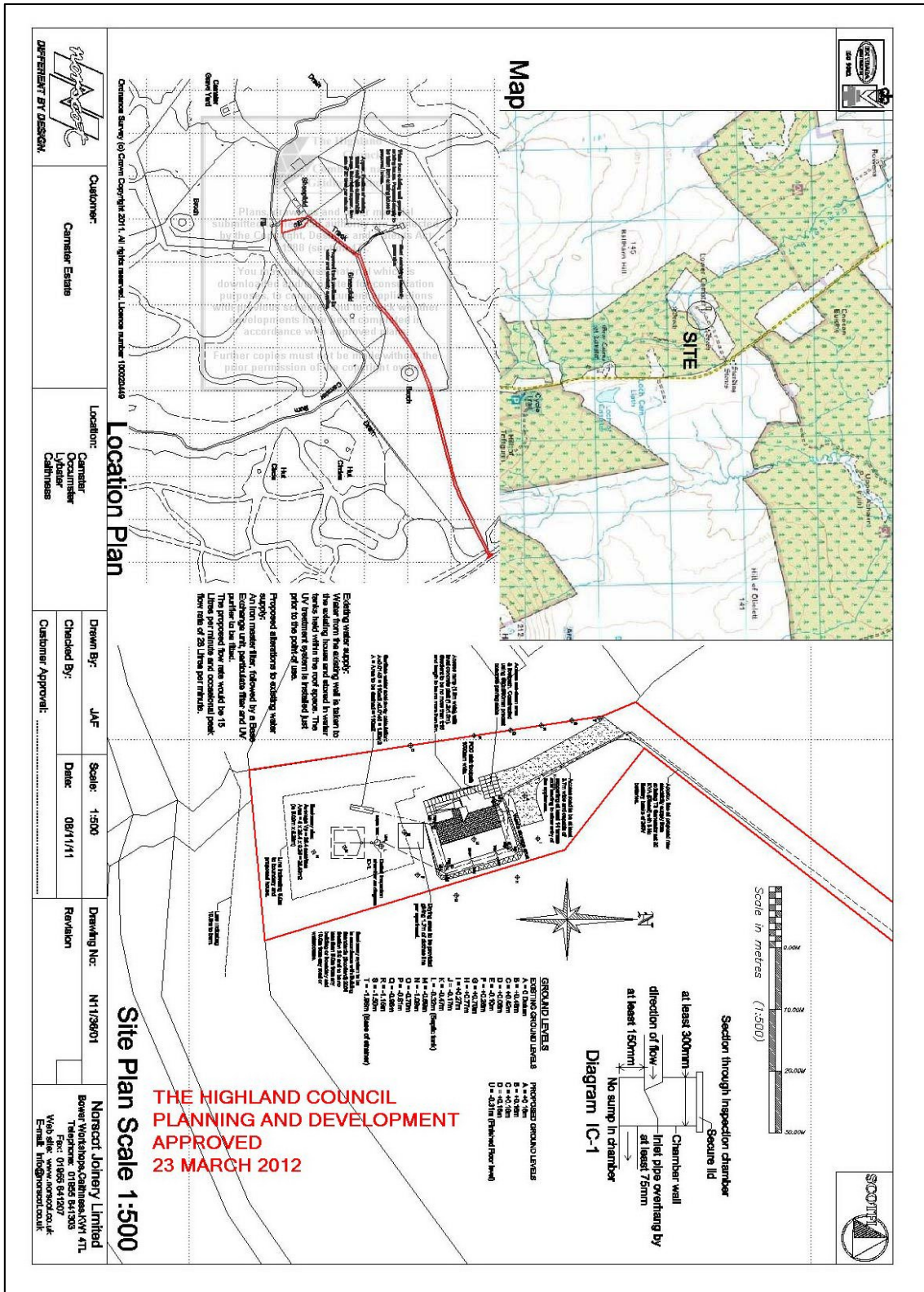


Figure 2 Proposed development
Drawing courtesy of client

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.

Introduction

A desk-based assessment and watching brief (controlled topsoil strip) were undertaken in response to a planning condition on the construction of a house at Camster, Caithness. Paul Humphreys undertook the fieldwork on 7 June 2012.

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*¹

The policy framework includes the Highland Council's *Structure Plan*², 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)³ and the *Burra Charter* (Australia ICOMOS 1999).⁴

In response to the planning application for this house the Highland Council's archaeologist advised,

The application is located within an archaeologically sensitive landscape within which many upstanding archaeological remains, some of which are of national importance, survive. The proposed house is located in a field which has been improved from at least the mid-19th century and whilst there is unlikely to be any risk of impacting upstanding archaeological remains, there is some potential for buried archaeological remains associated with prehistoric or later settlement to survive in this area. Accordingly, I recommend that an ARC4 condition (see below) requiring archaeological monitoring (as per a watching brief) is attached to any consent issued to ensure that any buried remains are recorded in advance of destruction.

Whilst the application does not appear to mention any need to upgrade the existing access track, it is worth noting that the access track passes through and past many significant archaeological remains, including a scheduled prehistoric broch and standing stone. If, as part of this application, it is required or intended to improve the existing access track through, for example, widening in whole or in part, or by the addition of passing places, I would ask that details are submitted to the Historic Environment Team on behalf of the

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/17/contents>

² <http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/planning/developmentplans/structureplan/thehighlandstructureplan.htm>

³ www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pasttofuture.pdf

⁴ <http://www.icomos.org/australia/burra.html>

Planning Authority for consideration. There are areas where widening not be acceptable, areas in which monitoring may be required and a possibility that Historic Scotland may need to be consulted, depending on the location of such works.⁵

Historic Scotland were consulted by Highland Council on this application. They responded,

The proposed development lies in the vicinity of two scheduled monuments, both being the remains of monumental Iron Age roundhouses:

Camster, broch 275m E of (Index No 536)
Camster, broch S of (Index No 537)

While the development will affect the setting of these two nationally important monuments, we note that the proposed house is relatively small and is in the vicinity of existing structures. We understand that the existing access tracks are also to be used. The impact is therefore relatively minor and we do not object to the proposal.

We therefore confirm that your Council should proceed to determine the application without further reference to us⁶.

The Codes of Conduct and Approved Practice and Standards of the Institute for Archaeologists⁷ were applicable to this work.

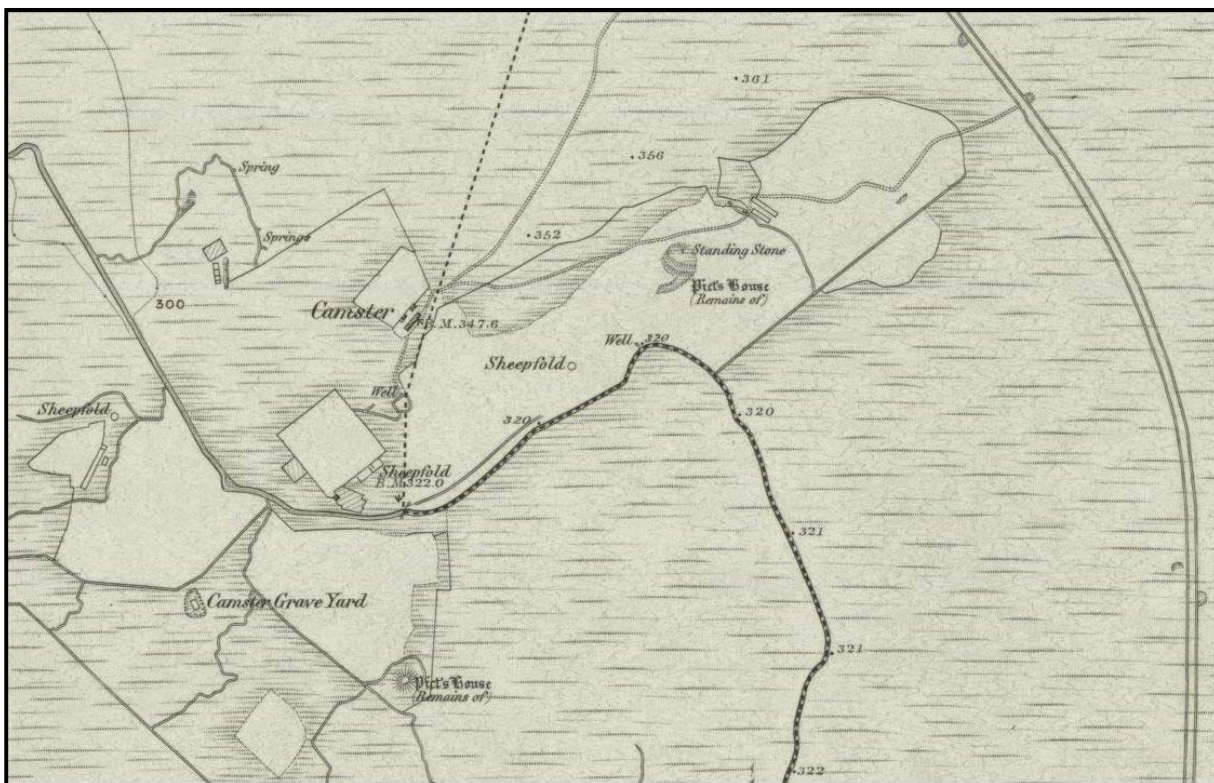


Figure 3 Extract from OS 1st Edition 6 inch (1:10560) map
 Caithness, Sheet XXIX, surveyed 1871; published 1877.

⁵ Email, Andrew Puls to Andrew Parker, 10 January 2012

⁶ Letter Mairi Davies (Historic Scotland) to the Highland Council, 28 February 2012

⁷ <http://www.archaeologists.net/>

Archaeology background

The house site is located within an archaeologically sensitive landscape, in an area of improved land currently used as sheep pasture. The most notable monuments in the vicinity, 'The Grey Cairns of Camster' lie 1.5 km to the south east⁸. These are Scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, and also in State Guardianship. Two brochs, also Scheduled,⁹ as well as 3 round houses of Bronze Age or Iron Age date¹⁰ lie within 450 m of the house site. Evidence of medieval or later settlement comprises an apparently late 18th or early 19th century arable farm, underlying the present small sheep farm.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey 6 inch (1:10560) map, surveyed in 1871, shows a rectangular enclosure and sheepfold adjoining the present site, which seems to have then been on the boundary between cultivated land and rough grazings (Figure 3).



Figure 4 Lower Camster aerial view (annotated)

Photograph courtesy of getmapping.com

⁸ HHER MHG1809 (SAM90056)

⁹ HHER MHG 1801 (SAM 536); and HHER MHG1800 (SAM 537)

¹⁰ HHER MHG1926

Method

The whole project was carried out in accordance with the project design and method statement agreed previously with the client and the planning authority.¹¹

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 Work¹².

The area investigated is shown on Figure 5 below. Topsoil and overburden were removed to the first visible soil change, using a back-acting 360° wheeled excavator fitted with a straight-edged bucket to provide a clean scrape. The resulting surface was then cleaned if necessary by hand to identify any features.

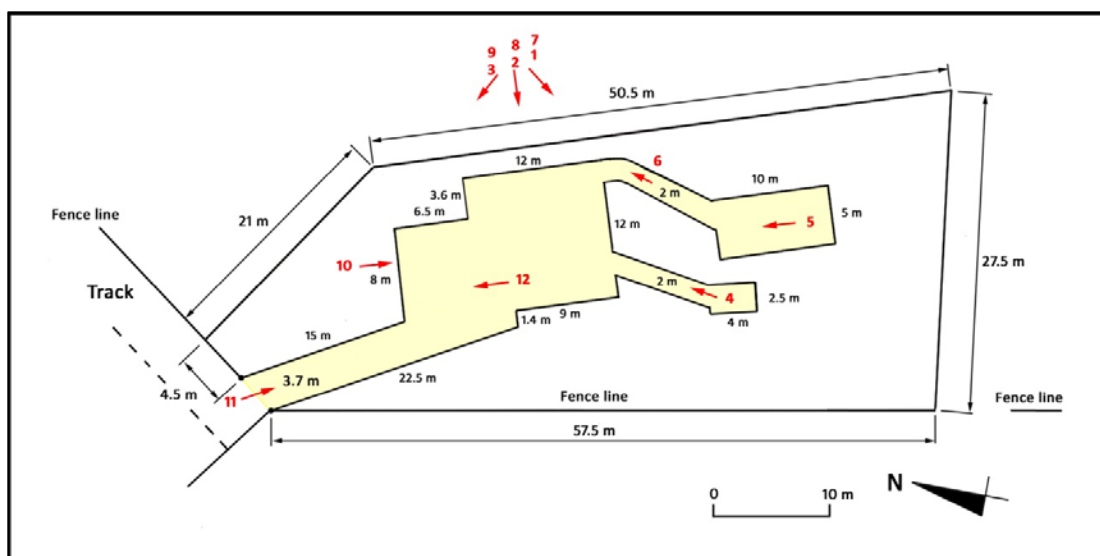


Figure 5 Sketch site plan, showing area observed and photograph locations

PDH Drawing 1

Results

The prevailing weather condition for the watching brief was cloud at ground level with visibility limited to circa 200 m. Consequently it was not possible to photograph the site view-sheds (Cover photo).

The job was completed without incident and no archaeological features or artefacts were recorded. It was found that the top soil had formed directly over a chemically weathered bed-rock that constituted the parent material. Traces of till were vestigial.

¹¹ Wood J 2012 *Proposed Archaeological Fieldwork: Camster, Caithness, Highland. Project Design, Risk Assessment and Method Statement* Highland Archaeology Services report HAS120507, Cromarty

¹² *Highland Council Standards for Archaeological Work* (checked at <http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/conservation/archaeology/developmentguidance.htm>).

Conclusions and recommendations

The bedrock proved to lie close to the surface over the whole area, and no archaeological features were recorded. No further archaeological investigation is proposed.

Tables

Table 1 Photographs (Located on Figure 5)

Photo No.	Notes	Taken by	Date
1	View of site looking SW	PDH	07 06 2012
2	View of site looking W	PDH	07 06 2012
3	View of site looking NW	PDH	07 06 2012
4	Rain water drain track looking N	PDH	07 06 2012
5	Septic tank and soak-away area looking N	PDH	07 06 2012
6	Foul water drain track looking N	PDH	07 06 2012
7	Stripped area looking SW	PDH	07 06 2012
8	Stripped area looking W	PDH	07 06 2012
9	Stripped area looking NW	PDH	07 06 2012
10	Stripped area looking S	PDH	07 06 2012
11	Drive looking S	PDH	07 06 2012
12	Typical chemically weathered bedrock over site	PDH	07 06 2012

Table 2 Drawings

Drawing No.	Title	Subject	Location (Centre E,N)	Drawn by	Date
1	Site plan	Stripped area	ND2509 4552	PDH	05 06 2012

Photographs



Photo 1 View across site pre-excavation, looking SW



Photo 2 View of site pre-excavation, looking W



Photo 3 View of site pre-excitation, looking NW



Photo 4 Rain water drain track cleared, looking N



Photo 5 Septic tank and soak-away area cleared looking N



Photo 6 Foul water drain track cleared, looking N



Photo 7 Stripped area looking SW



Photo 8 Stripped area looking W



Photo 9 Stripped area looking NW



Photo 10 Stripped area looking S



Photo 11 Drive looking S



Photo 12 Typical chemically weathered bedrock over site