



*Highland Archaeology Services Ltd*

Bringing the past and future together

## Watching Brief



## Littleferry House Sutherland

April 2007

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April 2007

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Site Code	HAS/ LFL07
Client	Mr S Lyon
Planning Ref	04/00362/REMSU
Report Date	22 June 2007
Authors	Mary Peteranna

## Summary

*An archaeological watching brief was carried out on excavations for a new house at Littleferry, Sutherland, as a condition of Planning Permission. No features or artefacts of archaeological significance were found. There are no recommendations for further archaeological work in this case.*

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## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Anta Architecture for commissioning the work. The archaeological fieldwork and all photography was undertaken by Mary Peteranna; the project overall was managed by John Wood, who also edited this report. Background mapping is reproduced here by permission of the Ordnance Survey under Licence 100043217; the site plan is courtesy of Anta Architecture.

## Introduction

A desk-based assessment and archaeological watching brief were carried out by Highland Archaeology Services at Littleferry, Sutherland from 23-24 April 2007 on behalf of Mr. Scott Lyon to fulfil a planning requirement prior to development of a new house site. The purpose was to identify and record the nature and extent of any archaeological features likely to be affected by the construction of a new house. This report describes the work and presents the results.

# Location

The site is centred approximately at Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference NH 8048 9564.

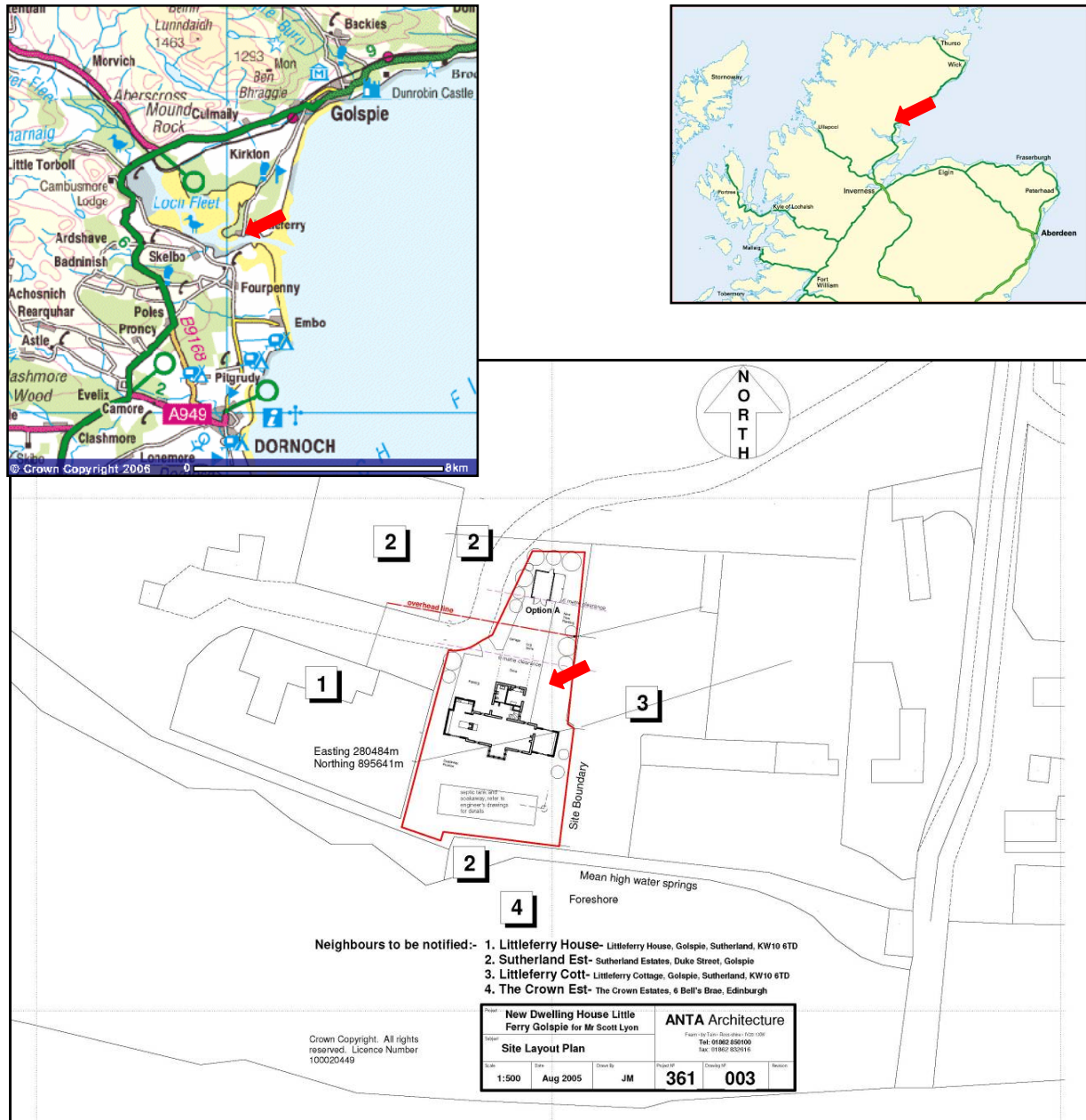


Figure 1 Site Location

## Archaeological background and cultural significance

There is a long history of settlement in the south-eastern part of Sutherland between Golspie and Dornoch. Many recorded prehistoric sites such as Neolithic chambered cairns and Iron Age brochs and hut circles provide evidence of early settlement in the fertile plains, sandy beaches and sheltered bays. The large collection of Pictish carvings in Dunrobin Museum in Golspie, recovered throughout Caithness and Sutherland, recalls the Pictish inhabitants of the region in the mid to late 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD.

Littleferry, a small village three miles south of Golspie, Sutherland, is situated on a small peninsula, bordered by Loch Fleet from north to southwest and the yellow sand beaches of the Dornoch Firth from northeast to south. The house site, located on the entrance from the Moray Firth to Loch Fleet, lies next to Littleferry Cottage and west of Littleferry pier, which once served as the crossing point to Dornoch in the south.

Although the ferry has long been superseded by the Mound to the west, built by Thomas Telford in 1814-16, which carries the modern road across, it is likely that there has been a crossing point in this locality from the earliest times. Finds from this area have included Neolithic material and an important collection of Pictish carved stones.

Prior to excavation, the site was mostly low-lying, turf-covered sand dunes with numerous pine trees and shrubs.

## Policy background

The planning and policy framework in this case includes the Highland Council's *Structure Plan*<sup>1</sup>, and the Scottish Executive's *National Planning Policy Guidance Notes 5 (NPPG5)*<sup>2</sup> and 18 (NPPG18)<sup>3</sup>, and *Planning Advice Note 42 (PAN42)*<sup>4</sup> (SOEND 1994). The fundamental principles underpinning the above policies are set out in *Passed to the Future: Historic Scotland's Policy for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment (2002)*<sup>5</sup> and the *Burra Charter* (Australia ICOMOS 1999).<sup>6</sup>

## Aims and objectives

The archaeological investigation was requested in this area because of the potential for archaeological finds and features of interest. The overall aims of the archaeology programme were to:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/planning/developmentplans/structureplan/thehighlandstructureplan.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/1998/10/nppg5>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/1999/04/nppg18>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/1994/01/17081/21711>

<sup>5</sup> [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pasttofuture.pdf](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pasttofuture.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.icomos.org/australia/burra.html>

1. Minimize any possible delay or costs to the development by anticipating any archaeological requirements as far as possible, timetabling and integrating archaeological recording work with the project, and dealing with any issues arising quickly and efficiently.
2. Determine as far as possible the character, extent, condition, date and significance of any archaeologically significant remains; and to preserve these where possible and record where necessary in line with NPPG 5 (SOEND 1994) and PAN 42 (SOEND 1994).
3. Ensure that any artefacts or human remains are dealt with in accordance with legal requirements and current Historic Scotland policy guidance.
4. Meet the requirements of the Highland Council Archaeology Unit brief for this project.

## Programme

The work was designed to meet the requirements of the Highland Council Archaeology Unit. It followed the project design set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation (Report HAS070403) submitted to the Highland Council in April 2007.

1. A desk-based assessment was conducted prior to fieldwork and all accessible records and aerial photographs were checked for archaeological information.
2. An initial walkover survey and risk assessment was conducted on 23 April 2007.
3. In accordance with the planning requirement, a watching brief was conducted to monitor the approximate area to be disturbed during development.
4. A digital photographic record was made, and all photographs and an index are included with this report.
5. No human remains were encountered and palaeo-environmental sampling was not undertaken.

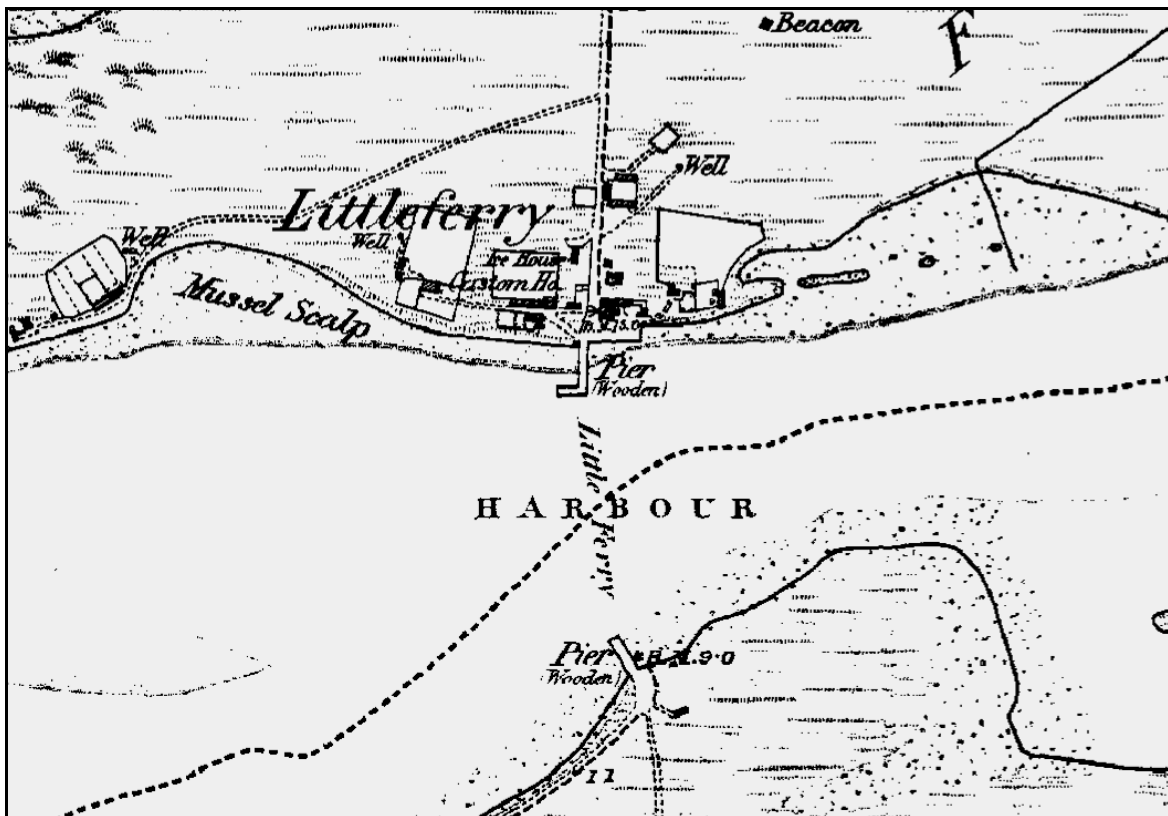


Figure 2 1st Edition OS 1:10560 map 1879 (not to scale)

Derived from digital mapping courtesy of Landmark Information Group Ltd.

## Results

### *Desk-based assessment*

There do not appear to be any aerial photographs that show this site in any detail.

Within Littleferry there is a small cluster of mostly 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings along the shore by the old ferry pier and icehouse. Littleferry House (Highland SMR NH89NW0073), adjoins this site to the west. It was the former Customs House (See Fig 2 above). To the east is Ferry Cottage (Highland SMR NH89NW0037). These are not Listed Buildings. The site of a former cottage is also recorded close to this site on its south-eastern side (Highland SMR NH89NW0080), but there are no details. The remains of an old boat pier also lie on the shoreline, directly in front of the site's south boundary.

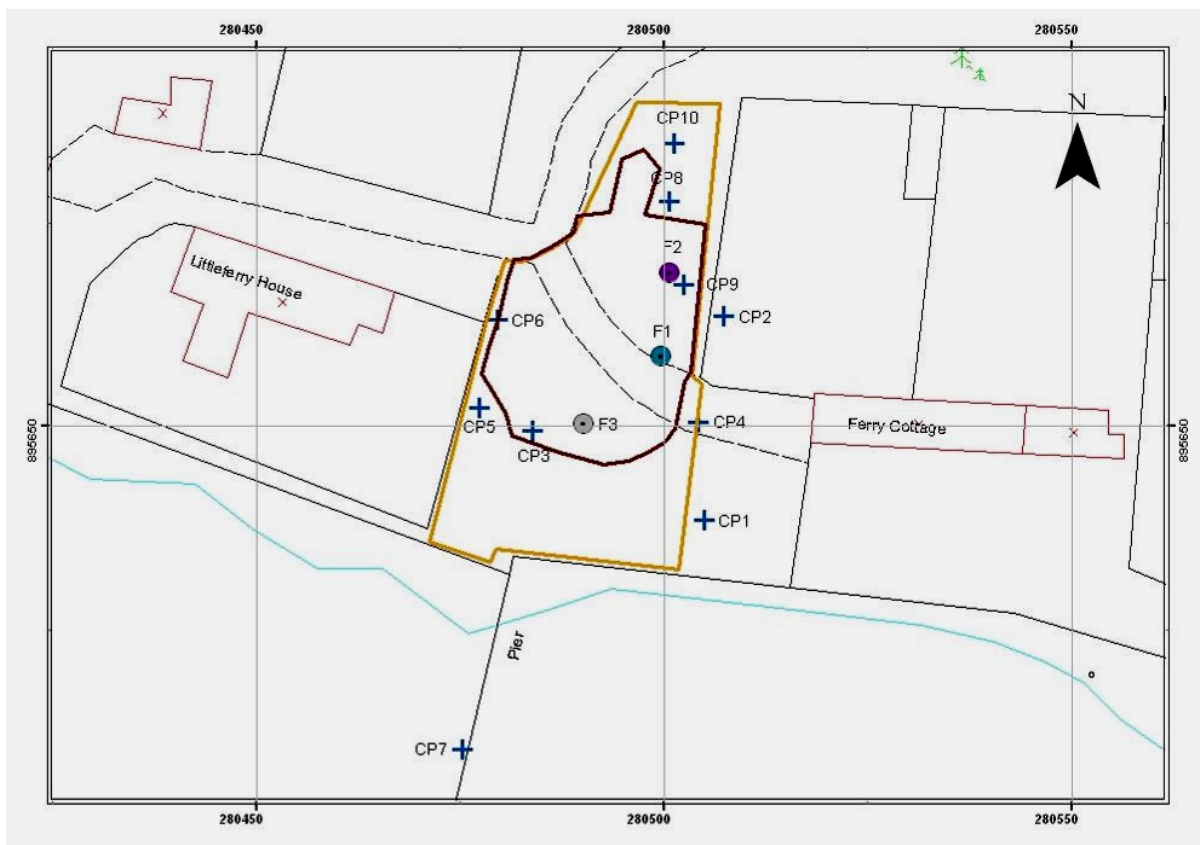
Previous archaeological finds in the area surrounding the village include fragments of Pictish stone carvings, stone artefacts and flint debitage. Human burials have also been uncovered; they are most likely associated with a Jacobite-era disturbance (Highland SMR NH89NW0070-72). In 2003, a shell midden was located in the garden of a Littleferry home (Highland SMR NH89NW0069). Prehistoric pottery (including cordoned and cinerary urns) was found in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Littleferry and taken to Dunrobin Castle and Elgin Museums (Highland SMR NH89NW0008, 10,11). However its exact provenance is not now known.

## Watching Brief

The entire house site, garage site and areas for services were excavated under close archaeological supervision by mechanical back-acting digger fitted with a straight-edged bucket.

The site lies at about 8 metres above mean sea level and prior to excavation was composed of small mounds of turf, shrub and tree roots. According to the architect's site plans, the proposed house would occupy the south half of the site and the garage/septic areas would occupy the northeast side while access drives separate the two sides of the site. However, halfway through the excavation, the architect suggested that the house be moved further to the north. Approximately 70% of the entire site was eventually excavated under archaeological supervision to ensure complete coverage (see Figure 3 below).

The topsoil on the northern half of the site was deeper than the topsoil on the southern half because of larger numbers of shrubs and trees. These had been removed before the archaeologist arrived. A thin layer of topsoil, mostly 5-15cm deep covered the natural sand subsoil on the more level southern part of the site, with deeper areas of topsoil associated with tree roots and other plant remains. The topsoil on the northern half of the site was sometimes up to 60cm deep around the largest tree roots. The yellow sand subsoil was stained throughout the site from root action, and had scatters of beach cobbles in places.



**Figure 3 Site plan**

*F: Feature; CP: Camera point; Site outline in orange; approximate area observed outlined in brown. British National Grid shown at 50m intervals.*





Figure 4: Feature 1

### Feature 1

One feature (F1) was identified and excavated (see Illustration 4 above) and later determined to be the result of root action. Similar sub-circular features were seen throughout the site in association with many other former shrubs and trees.



Figure 5: Feature 2

## Feature 2

Next, a loose dump of rubble (F2) was revealed within the northeast portion of the site cleared for the garage. This appeared directly below the turf and had two broken 20<sup>th</sup> c. plate fragments and drainage pipe fragments within it. It is believed that the stones could be rubble from the ruined dry-stone wall that stands next to it by the eastern driveway (See Illustration 5).

## Feature 3

Lastly, the remains of a loose gravel surface (F3) covered approximately one half of the south half of the site (see Illustration 6). It was about 3-4cm thick, and lay directly below the turf. Although no finds were recovered, the gravel was full of the beach flint (see Illustration 7 below) that is so prevalent in Littleferry. It is possible that the surface was associated with the use of the old pier in front of the site, or that it was an earlier drive for the residents of Littleferry Cottage, next to it. However it did not appear to have any apparent archaeological significance.



Figure 6: Feature 3

## Discussion and conclusions

No features of archaeological interest were identified. It is worth noting the amount of beach flint amongst the gravel on site. This is an indication of a good natural source of flint for early residents of the area involved in stone tool manufacture.



Figure 7: Beach flint from Feature 3

## Recommendations

1. There are no areas that warrant preservation *in situ*.
2. No further work is proposed and on completion of the fieldwork we recommended that archaeological clearance should be given to the site.

## Appendix 1: Photographs

A full set of photographs is included on the accompanying CDROM.

Photo No.	Camera Location	Direction Facing	Notes	Taken by	Date
1	CP1	NW	View over the site prior to excavating	MKP	23/04/2007
2	CP2	SW	View over the site prior to excavating	MKP	23/04/2007
3	CP1	W-SW	River entrance and old pier along shoreline south of site	MKP	23/04/2007
4	-	-	Feature 1 - plant hole	MKP	23/04/2007
5	-	-	Feature 1 - plant hole	MKP	23/04/2007
6	CP3	W	Appearance of gravel layer directly below turf in profile	MKP	23/04/2007
7	-	-	Beach flint from scattered gravel on south half of site	MKP	23/04/2007
8	CP4	WNW	South half of site during excavation for house foundations	MKP	23/04/2007
9	CP3	E	Scattered gravel layer	MKP	23/04/2007
10	CP3	E	Scattered gravel layer	MKP	23/04/2007
11	CP4	W	View over south half of site after excavation for house	MKP	23/04/2007
12	CP5	E	View over south half of site after excavation for house	MKP	23/04/2007
13	CP6	SE	View over south half of site after excavation for house	MKP	23/04/2007
14	CP7	N	View over old pier remains, looking toward site	MKP	23/04/2007
15	CP8	S	View over garage site	MKP	24/04/2007
16	CP8	S	View over garage site	MKP	24/04/2007
17	CP9	N	Rubble fill next to wall by garage position	MKP	24/04/2007
18	CP9	NE	Ruined wall along eastern site boundary, next to rubble	MKP	24/04/2007
19	CP10	S	View over site after excavation	MKP	24/04/2007
20	CP9	SE	View to neighbouring house to east	MKP	24/04/2007
21	CP10	SW	View over site after excavation	MKP	24/04/2007