



Highland Archaeology Services Ltd

Bringing the past and future together

Archaeological Evaluation



25 Lairg Muir Sutherland

July 2007

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Sutherland

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Report No.	HAS070705
Site Code	HAS/ LMR07
Client	Rev J Goskirk
Planning Ref	SU-06-230
Date	14/07/2007
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Summary

An archaeological evaluation was carried out in advance of construction of a new house at 25 Lairg Muir, 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 Rev J Goskirk for commissioning the work. The fieldwork was carried out by Cathy Dagg; John Wood plotted in the trenches and undertook the desk-based assessment. Background mapping is reproduced here by permission of the Ordnance Survey under Licence 100043217. All photographs are by Cathy Dagg.

Introduction

A desk-based assessment and archaeological trial trenching evaluation were carried out by Highland Archaeology Services at Lairg Muir Croft, Sutherland in July 2007 on behalf of Rev J Goskirk 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.

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:

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.

Location

The site is centred approximately at Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference NC 5864 0688, at a height of about 128m above sea level.

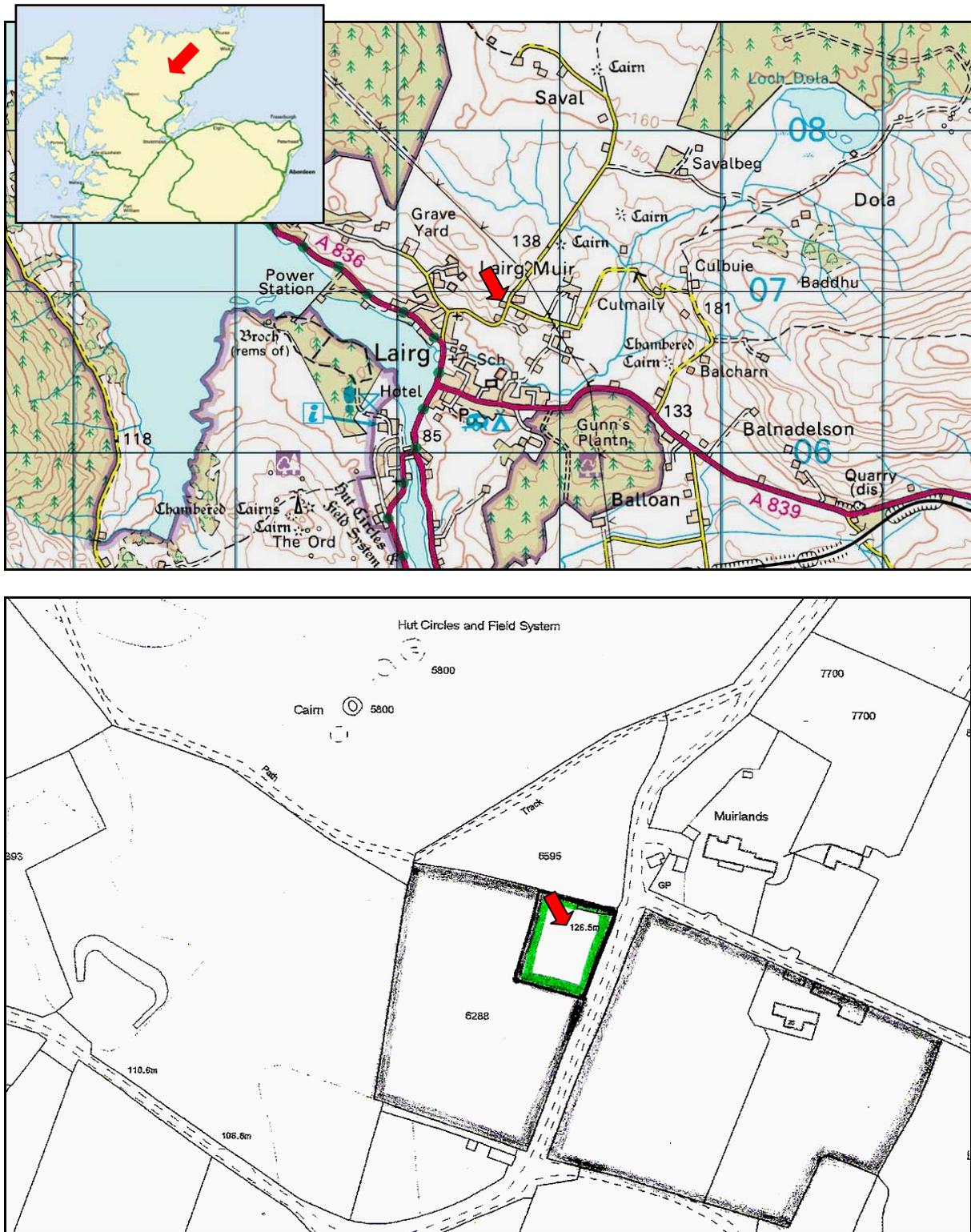


Figure 1 Site Location

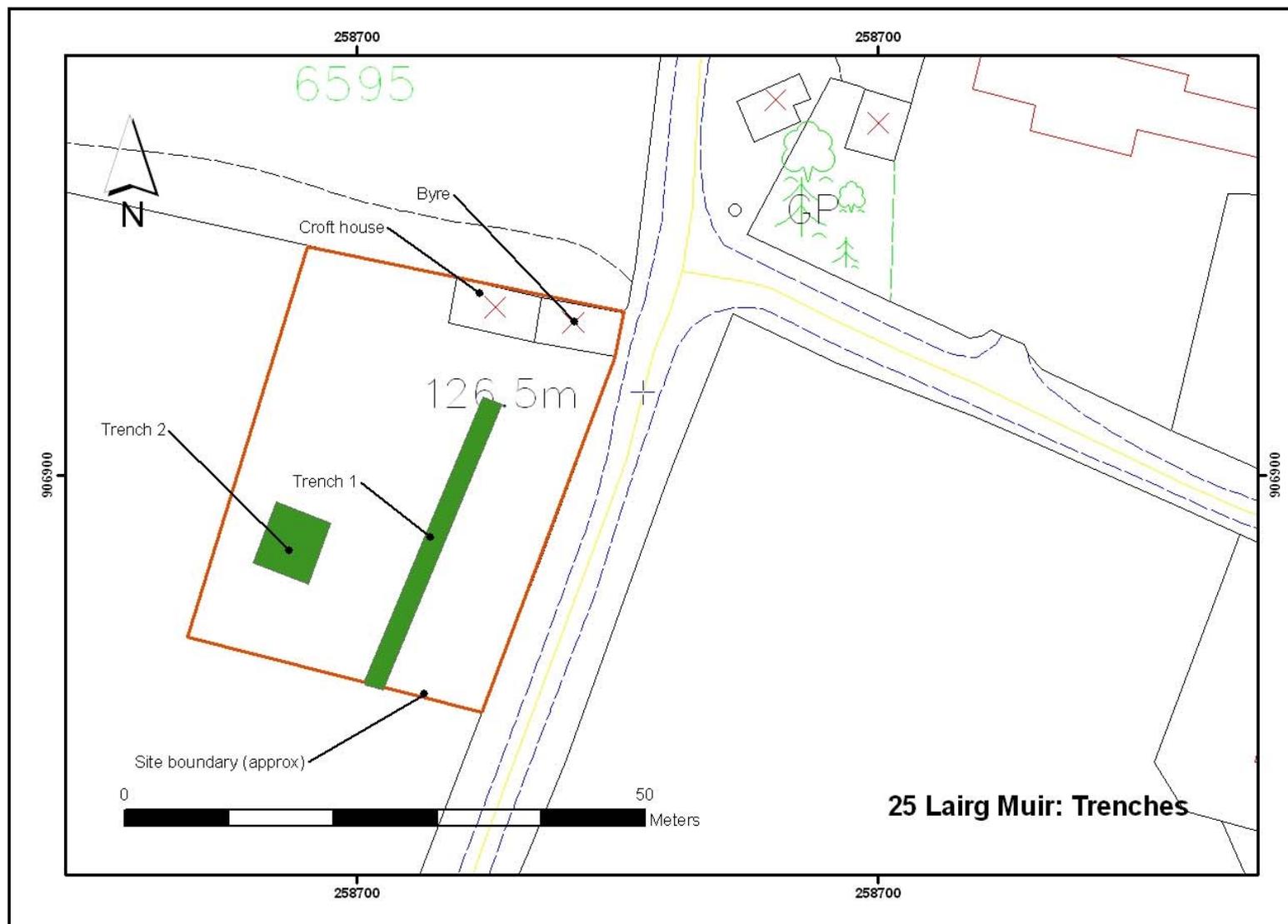


Figure 2 Trenches

Archaeological background and cultural significance

The area around Lairg in mid-Sutherland is exceptionally rich in archaeological features. There are no recorded features of archaeological interest within the site itself, but extensive prehistoric and later sites have been noted nearby, including hut circles, cairns and field systems of the Bronze Age and Iron Age periods (c. 4,400 – 1,600 years ago).

The development area occupies the north-east corner of an improved field, in-bye croft land, now under pasture. The field rises fairly steeply from the SE corner to a high point in the NW corner, but the development site occupies a relatively level platform between the break of slope and the public road to the east. This platform has recently been used for the dumping of agricultural machinery and other crofting detritus, most of which has been removed but the grass has been left uncut. In the north-east corner of the site is a derelict croft house and attached byre.

The field is defined by rubble dykes, and is bounded to the east by the public road, beyond which is further in-bye land, to the south by another croft holding and to the north and west by enclosed but unimproved ground. To the NW the ground rises steeply to moorland occupied by an extensive prehistoric settlement

The field, croft house and road are as recorded on the 1879 1st edition OS map. At that date one ‘tumulus’ associated with the prehistoric settlement was recorded in the NW corner of the field. This is most likely to have been a field clearance cairn and there is now no trace of this feature.



Figure 3 The site before excavation, from SW

Policy background

The planning and policy framework in this case includes the Highland Council's *Structure Plan*¹, and the Scottish Executive's *National Planning Policy Guidance Notes 5 (NPPG5)*² and 18 (NPPG18)³, and *Planning Advice Note 42 (PAN42)*⁴ (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)⁵ and the *Burra Charter* (Australia ICOMOS 1999).⁶

Programme

The work consisted of a desk-based assessment, a trial trenching evaluation, and a photographic building record, all designed to meet the requirements of the Highland Council Archaeology Unit. It followed the project design set out in the Written Scheme of Investigation submitted to the Council in June 2007. The Desk-based assessment included checks of all material available online and at the Highland Council's headquarters in Inverness.

Trial trenching was carried out on 27 June 2007 in sunny and dry weather conditions. Two trenches were opened: one linear trench measuring 1.5m by 30m and one box trench measuring 6m by 6m

Results

Desk-based assessment

Desk-based assessments and walkover surveys in the general area of Lairg Muir were carried out by Janet Hooper in 2002⁷ and Stuart Farrell in 2004⁸ for the Lairg Water Mains Renewal. Janet Hooper noted that Lairg Muir remained outside the great 19th c. sheep farms that took over much of the area. Although one 'Tumulus' is shown within the field (although not within the plot itself) on the First Edition OS 1:10560 map in the north of this field, no evidence of tumuli could be found on the ground and the field seems to have been improved, levelled and ploughed in the past. The 1946-1948 RAF aerial photographs were checked but no archaeological features were identified from them⁹.

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

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

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

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

⁵ www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pasttofuture.pdf

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

⁷ Highland Council SMR Report No 760

⁸ Highland Council SMR Report No 1391

⁹ CPE/UK/0182:2027; 541/A/064:3222; 541/a/0432:4095. Checked at Highland Council HQ, Inverness

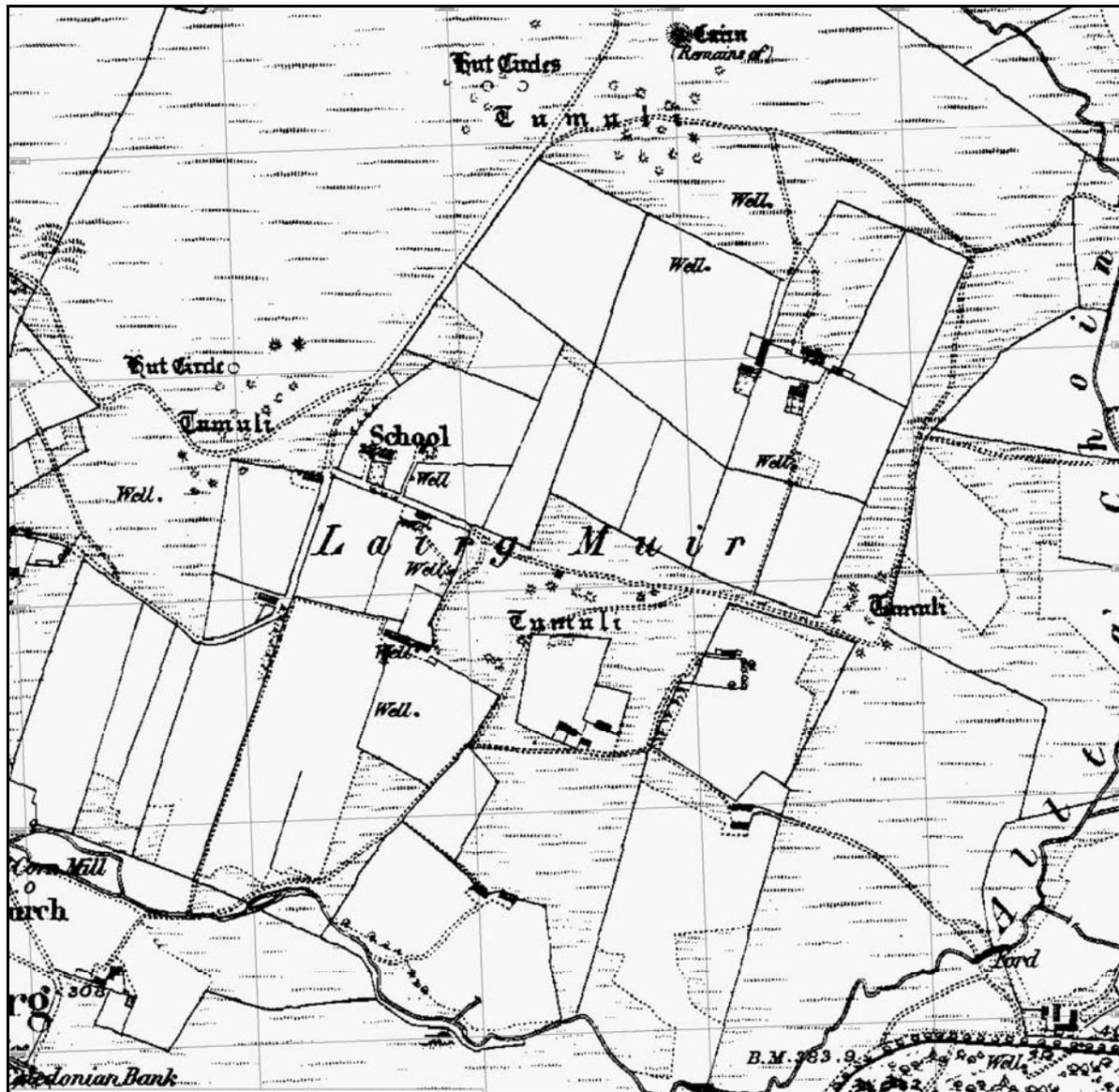


Figure 4 Extract from 1st edition OS 1:10560 Map (1879)

Trial Trenching Evaluation

A tracked back-acting mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.8m straight-edged ditching bucket excavated two trenches under close archaeological supervision. These trenches covered a total of 92.5 sq. m., representing a sample of approximately 7.7 % of the development site as far as it could be established.

Trench 1

Below 10cm of turf the brown, friable topsoil proved to be particularly deep: 0.43m at the north end of the trench deepening to 0.5m at the south end. This build up of soil is most likely the wash down of plough soil from the slope. Between 20.7m and 21.4m from the north end of the trench, in the west section only, a layer of black peaty soil was noted between the topsoil and subsoil. The topsoil at this point was 0.46m deep and the black peaty layer 5-8cm in depth. This may be the original peaty soil present before enclosure and improvement, surviving where the build up of topsoil was deeper than plough depth.

The subsoil varied from north to south. To the north of the trench, from 0-15m the subsoil was orange and sandy. South of this, from 15-25m it was pale grey with a clay content and generally stonier, while from 25m to 30m it continued pale grey but with a much greater number of medium and large stones. This variation is considered to be a natural phenomenon.



Figure 5 Trench 1 from S

Trench 2

This trench was located at the lower end of the slope. The topsoil layer became notably thinner as the slope rose: from 0.7m in the SE corner and 62cm in the NE to 0.35m in the SW and 0.2m in the NW. There did appear to be some differentiation visible in the south section, the upper 30cm of topsoil being more chocolate-brown and the lower 18cm a grey brown, more compacted, with flecks of charcoal. This differentiation was only noted at the east, lower end of the section.



Figure 6 Trench 2 - from SW

Small finds

9 fragments of ceramic and two of glass were recovered from the ploughsoil. Of the ceramics, one brown-glazed earthenware, three spongeware, two transferware and one shell decorated rim of whiteware and three undecorated bodysherds of whiteware are all consistent with a mid to late 19th century date.

Survey of Standing Buildings

As the croft house and byre are likely to be demolished, as a condition of planning consent on the new development, a rapid photographic record and building survey was carried out.

The cottage measures 9m by 4.5m and is single-storey, the walls standing to a height of 2.06m (east gable corner) There are fireplaces and chimneys in both gables, two windows in the south elevation flanking a doorway which has been widened to 2.2m. The interior was wood-lined; only the ceiling and one upright survive, but the original wood partitions can be traced. The layout consisted of a small entrance lobby and two rooms, but no back pantry. Both fireplaces have been infilled and there has been some repair to the rubble back wall. Traces of what may be the wooden flooring survive, and layers of wallpaper on the wooden upright, but the most recent use of the building has been as a byre. The only exterior alteration appears to be the widening of the doorway.

The attached byre measures 7.5m by 4.25m and has one window and one doorway in its south elevation, both apparently original. The interior is divided by a wooden partition with a doorway; the east part contains a milking stall and the west part, recently, has been used to store hay or straw. The east gable of the building is badly cracked. There appears to be an original line of skew stones in the walling, particularly on the south side, suggesting the original roof line was steeper.

The stonework is generally poor, particularly in the gable ends of both the cottage and the byre, and includes repaired or collapsed sections in the back walls.



Figure 7 Croft house - S elevation



Figure 8 Byre - S elevation



Figure 9 Byre - E gable



Figure 10 Croft house and byre from NE



Figure 11 Byre - N elevation



Figure 12 Croft house - N elevation



Figure 13 Croft house - W gable



Figure 14 Croft house and byre from W



Figure 15 Interior of croft house - surviving woodwork with wallpaper



Figure 16 Croft house - interior: W wall with fireplace



Figure 17 Byre - interior: milking stall in NE corner



Figure 18 Interior partition and reused door

Discussion and conclusions

No features of archaeological interest were identified. This field has been in cultivation for a very long time, and appears to have been levelled and improved in the 20th c.

Recommendations

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

Appendix 1: Photographs

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

No.	Feature	Description	Direction	Taken by
1	General	View over house site (rough vegetation) towards Lairg village	From NNE	C Dagg
2	General	General view of house site, with public road (marked by 2 mature trees) and existing buildings	From NW	C Dagg
3	General	House site within present crofting landscape	From NW corner of field	C Dagg
4	General	Site with existing croft house and byre	From SSW	C Dagg
5	Trench 1	Thin layer of dark peaty soil between ploughsoil and subsoil in W section	From E	C Dagg
6	Trench 1	Thin layer of dark peaty soil between ploughsoil and subsoil in W section		C Dagg
7	Trench 1	General view of trench with topsoil removed, showing transition from orange subsoil (N) to pale pink/grey (S)	From S	C Dagg
8	Trench 2	General view with topsoil removed	From SW	C Dagg
9	Trench 2	General view with topsoil removed	From NW	C Dagg
10	Croft house	South elevation	From S	C Dagg
11	byre	South elevation	From S	C Dagg
12	byre	East gable	From E	C Dagg
13	Croft house and byre	General view	From NE	C Dagg
14	Byre	North elevation	From N	C Dagg
15	Croft house	North elevation	From N	C Dagg
16	Croft house	West gable	From W	C Dagg
17	Croft house and byre	General view	From W	C Dagg
18	Croft house	Interior, detail of surviving woodwork with wallpaper	From E	C Dagg
19	Croft house	Interior, west fireplace	From E	C Dagg
20	byre	Interior, milking stall in NE corner	From SW	C Dagg
21	byre	Interior, partition and re-used door	From E	C Dagg
22	Lairg Muir prehistoric settlement	View from settlement towards development site. Croft house roof and digger on site are visible below near horizon	From N	C Dagg