



*Highland Archaeology Services Ltd*

**Bringing the Past and Future Together**

## **Clais na Canaich Caithness**



## **Watching Brief**

**7 Duke Street Cromarty Ross-shire IV11 8YH**

Tel / Fax: 01381 600491 Mobile: 07834 693378 Email: [info@hi-arch.co.uk](mailto:info@hi-arch.co.uk) Web: [www.hi-arch.co.uk](http://www.hi-arch.co.uk)

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# Clais na Canaich Caithness

## Watching Brief

Report No.	HAS101106
Site Code	HAS-CNC10
Client	J & M McIlhenny
OS Grid Ref	ND 2721 3836
OASIS	highland4-87585
HCAU / Planning Ref	10/02627/FUL
Date / revision	17/12/2010
Authors	Paul Humphreys and John Wood

## Summary

*A Watching Brief was conducted during initial site clearance works ahead of the construction of a house at Plot 4, Clais na Canaich, Caithness in response to a planning condition. The areas observed comprised sites for a barn and a caravan stance. Further watching brief will be undertaken when the house itself is cleared.*

*Two sub-linear, roughly parallel features were noted and sectioned: these were interpreted as rumbling drains that had originally been cut largely in the top soil and subsequently truncated by later ploughing.*

*The spoil was examined for archaeological material and yielded nothing other than occasional sherds of nineteenth century pottery.*

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## Acknowledgements

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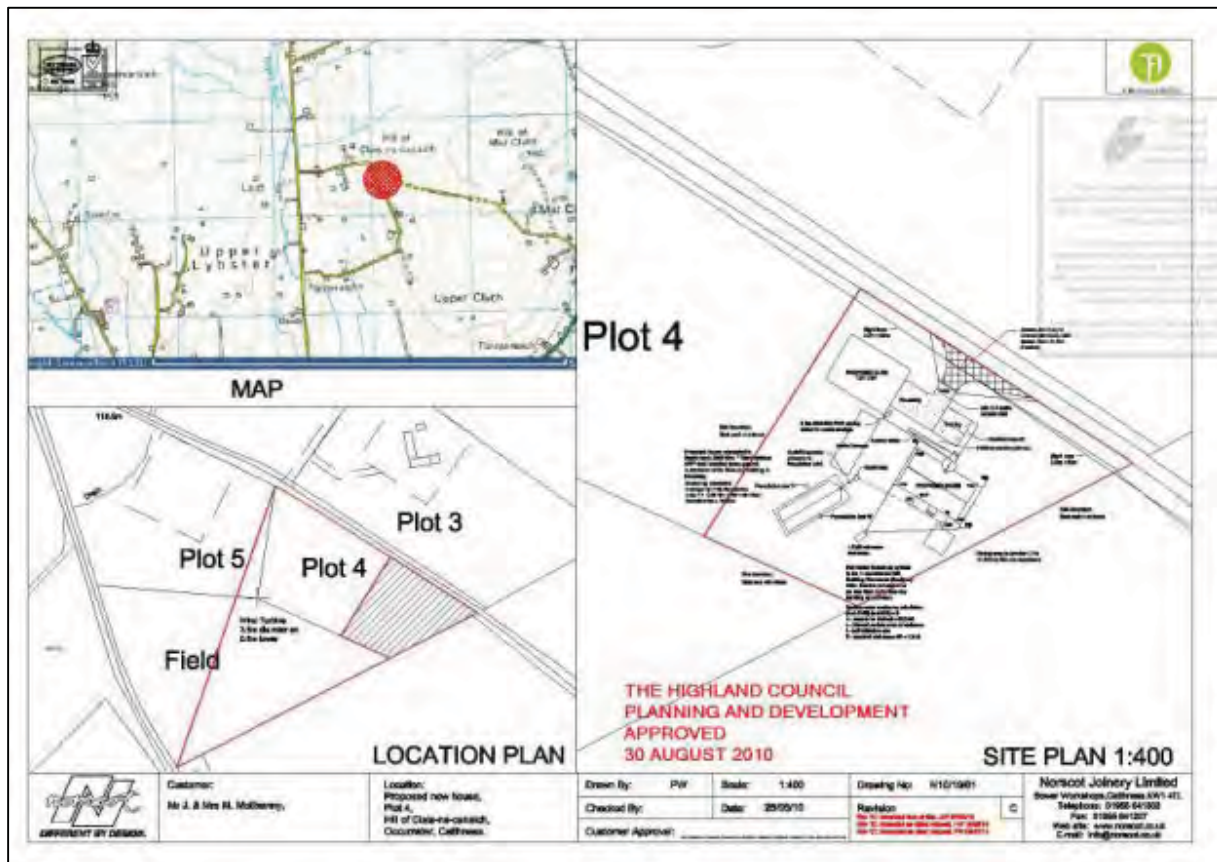
## Location

The site is centred at Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference ND 2721 3836 at a height of about 121 metres above sea level.



Figure 1 Site location





### Figure 2 Site plan

*Courtesy of J and M McIlhenny*

## Archaeology and policy background

An archaeological assessment was requested in this case because there was potential for finds or features of interest to be discovered during site works. The current planning and policy framework includes the Highland Council's *Structure Plan*<sup>1</sup>, and the Scottish Government's *Scottish Planning Policy* (SPP), issued in February 2010, which consolidates and supersedes the previous SPP and NPPG series<sup>2</sup>. The fundamental principles underpinning UK and Scottish policies are set out in *Passed to the Future: Historic Scotland's Policy for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* (2002)<sup>3</sup> and the *Burra Charter* (Australia ICOMOS 1999).<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/03132605/8>

<sup>3</sup> [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pasttofuture.pdf](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pasttofuture.pdf)

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

The landscape character here is one of improved agriculture with straight, 19<sup>th</sup> c. field boundaries and roads. Improvement does not appear to have started at the time of the 1<sup>st</sup> Statistical Account (1791-9)<sup>5</sup>, but the population of the parish is noted there to have increased significantly in the previous half-century; and by the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Statistical Account (1834-45) the density of population was remarked on.<sup>6</sup> By this time, Sir John Sinclair had undertaken some of the 'earliest and most extensive improvements in the several departments of agriculture, plantation, and sheep-farming'<sup>7</sup>. The Newlands of Clyth were no doubt brought into cultivation from the Red Moss as part of these improvements and there are ruins of several 19<sup>th</sup> c. buildings to the north of the present site. The early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> c. Achaver Bridge is very much in character with this<sup>8</sup>.

Although in the medieval period this area appears to have been peat moorland and not intensively occupied, it is replete with a remarkable density of brochs, apparently indicating prosperity in the Iron Age. South of the present site is that of the Lingland or Newlands of Clyth Broch, which is included as of regional importance in the Non-Statutory Register<sup>9</sup>. According to the RCAHMS record, this was first recorded in the Ordnance Survey Name Book in 1871 as

The site of a 'Tulloch' or 'Pict's House' which has been removed, leaving only a few of the foundation stones<sup>10</sup>.

The Ordnance Survey surveyed the site in 1967 and found that

Little remains of this broch apart from a few large facing stones protruding through the turf on its E and W sides. A short stretch of scarping 1.0m high to the SW indicates the former presence of a berm. The whole site has been mutilated by ploughing and later building, the remains of which are visible immediately to the N and W as vague rectangular foundations<sup>11</sup>.

There was therefore considered to be some potential for buried archaeology to be present.

## Programme

A desk-based assessment was followed by a watching brief during topsoil stripping of the area of a shed-base, caravan stance and access track, which was carried out on October 14<sup>th</sup> 2009 in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) previously approved by the Highland Council.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1791-99/Caithness/Latheron/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1834-45/Caithness/Latheron/>

<sup>7</sup> Op.cit, p89

<sup>8</sup> HHER MHG15108; MHG33704; Listed building (C(S)) 7930

<sup>9</sup> HHER MHG2401; NMRS ND23NE 7

<sup>10</sup> Name Book (Caithness). Object Name Books of the Ordnance Survey. Book No. 6, 191

<sup>11</sup> NMRS ND23NE 7

<sup>12</sup> Wood, J 2010 *Clais na Canaich: Proposed watching brief: Written Scheme of Investigation*, Highland Archaeology Services, Cromarty (Report No. HAS100906)

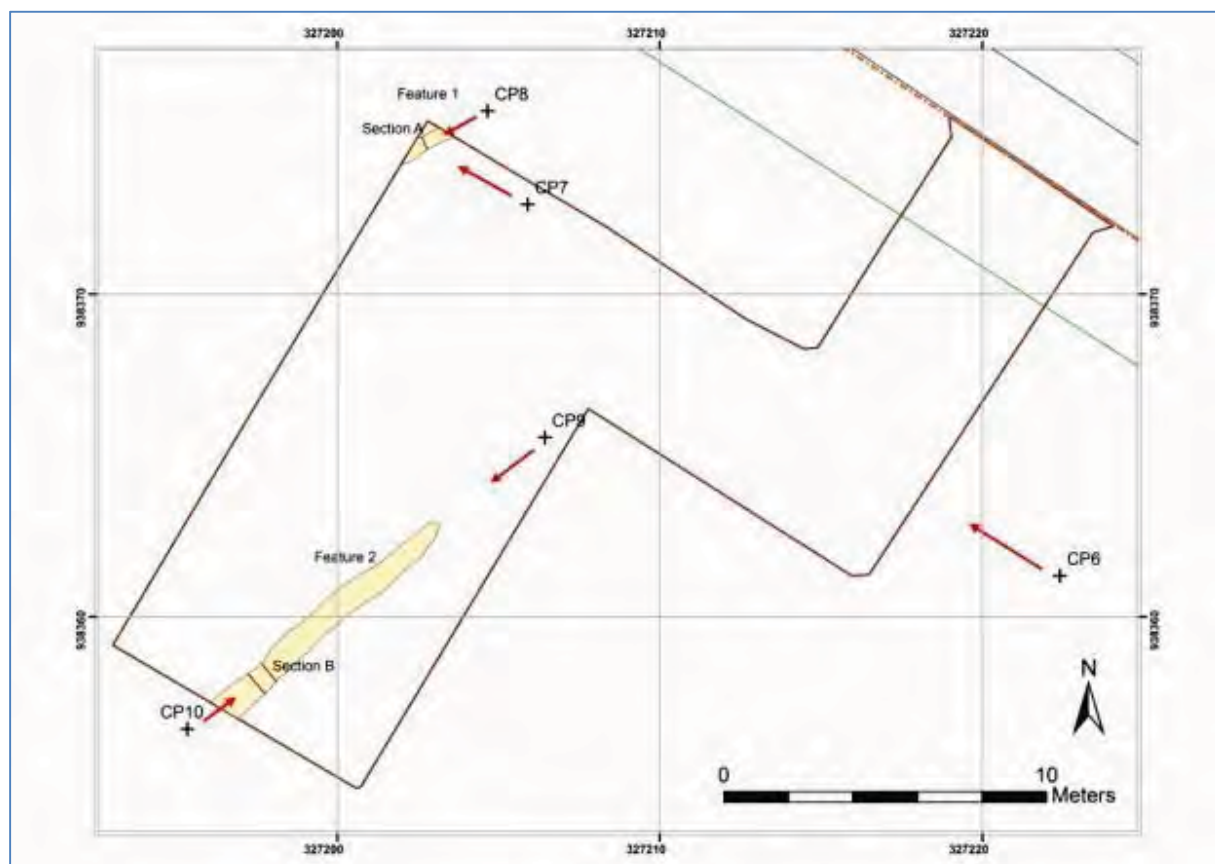


Figure 3 Watching Brief area, showing features and photo locations (CP)

## Results

The weather prevailing conditions for the fieldwork were patchy sun punctuated by frequent squalls of hail and snow.

The triangular area of land in which the site sits has the appearance of unimproved land, with rough grasses, heather and gorse. The peaty top soil overlaid oxidised clay till that varied in its character over the stripped area. It became evident that the land had been cultivated at one time, probably during the nineteenth century improvement period.

The following features are located on Figure 3 above.

### Feature 1

This was a sub-linear cut, appearing in the corner of the trench. Oriented SW-NE, it was approximately 0.4m wide. A maximum 1.8m length of this feature was visible. It was sectioned (Section A; Figure 4) and found to have a rounded profile of about 0.17m depth. The main fill (context 05) was indistinguishable from the topsoil with rounded stones c.40-100mm diameter in the base (context 06)

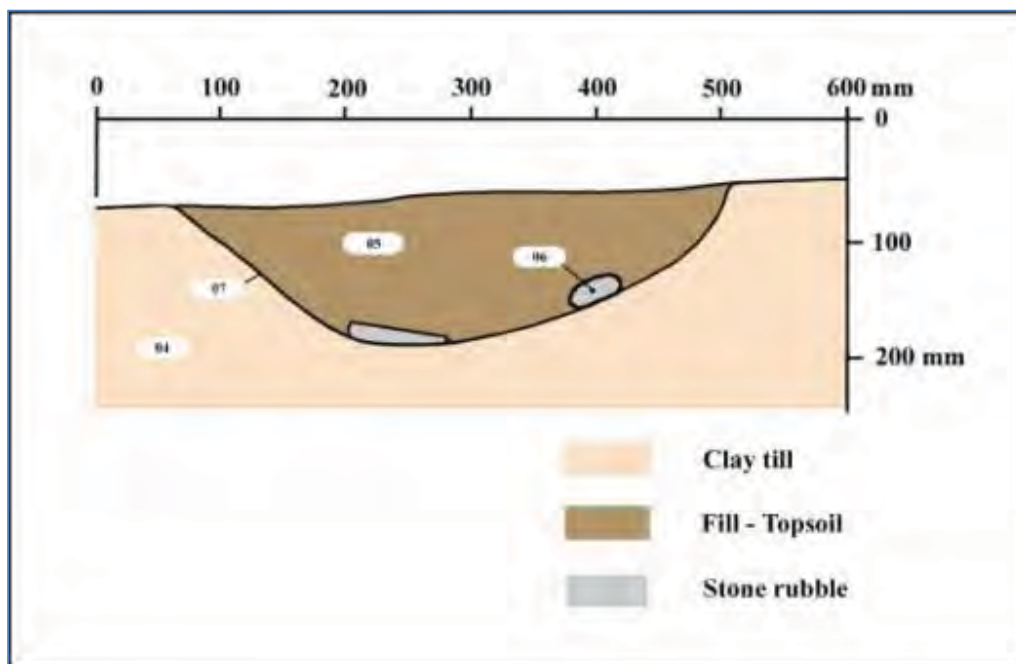


Figure 4 Feature 1 (Section A, facing E)



## Feature 2

A shallow, sub-linear feature, also oriented SW-NE, roughly parallel to FI, running through the middle of the trench. It was approximately 0.8-0.9m wide. A maximum 18.9 length of this feature was visible. It was sectioned (Section B; Figure 5) and found to have a shallow, rounded profile of about 0.11m depth. The main fill (context 01) was indistinguishable from the topsoil with rounded stones c.40-100mm diameter in the base (context 02)

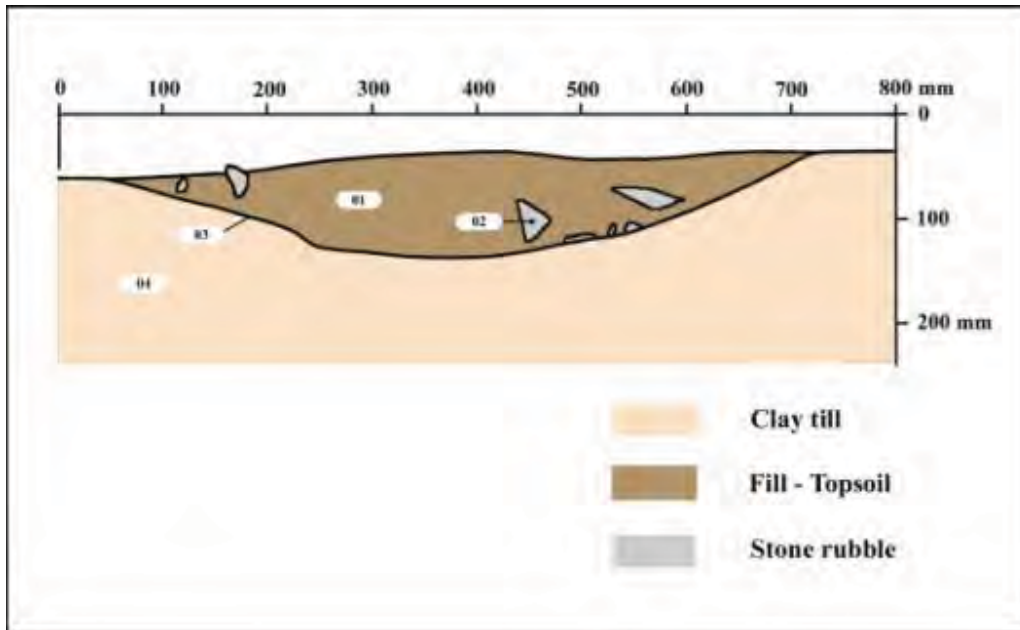


Figure 5 Feature 2 (Section B, facing SW)

## Conclusions and recommendations

The two sub-linear, roughly parallel features are interpreted as rumbling drains that had originally been cut largely in the top soil and subsequently truncated by later ploughing. This would be consistent with the improvements of Sir John Sinclair in the early 19<sup>th</sup> c.

The spoil was examined for archaeological material and yielded nothing other than occasional sherds of nineteenth century pottery.

No archaeologically significant features were recorded. A further watching brief will be undertaken when the house sites itself is stripped.

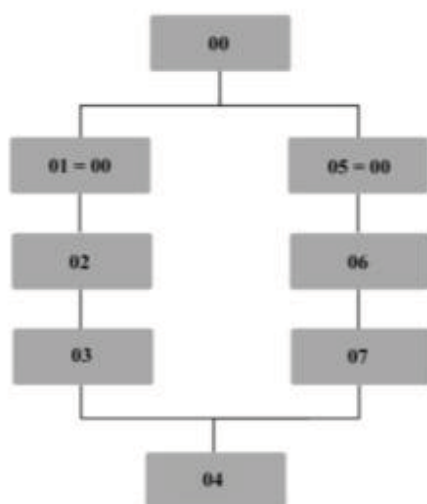
## Appendix 1: Features and Contexts

**Table 1 Features**

Ref	Type	Width	Length	Depth	Drawing	Photo	Interpretation
F1	Linear	0.4m	1.8m	0.17m	Drawing 4 (Section A)	Photo 7,8	Drain
F2	Linear	0.8-0.9m	8.9m	0.11m	Drawing 3 (Section B)	Photo 9,10	Drain

**Table 2 Contexts**

Ref	Type	Location	Description
c.00	Deposit		Topsoil
c.01	Fill	Feature 2	Upper fill (Topsoil)
c.02	Fill	Feature 2	Rounded pebbles c. 40-100mm diameter
c.03	Cut	Feature 2	
c.04	Deposit	Natural subsoil: oxidised clay till	Natural subsoil
c.05	Fill	Feature 1	Upper fill (Topsoil)
c.06	Fill	Feature 1	Rounded pebbles c. 40-100mm diameter
c.07	Cut	Feature 1	



**Figure 6 Harris Matrix, showing stratigraphy**

## Appendix 2: Drawings and Photographs

**Table 3 Drawings**

Drawing No.	Title	Subject	Drawn by	Date
1	Site location	Location	PDH	16/11/2010
2	Site plan	WB Area	PDH	16/11/2010
3	Section B	F2	PDH	16/11/2010
4	Section A	F1	PDH	16/11/2010

**Table 4 Photographs**

Photo No.	Location	Direction	Notes	Taken by	Date
Front	CP1		View (pre-start)	PDH	20/10/2010
1	CP1	W	View (pre-start)		
2	CP1	NNW	View (pre-start)	PDH	20/10/2010
3	CP1	SSE	View (pre-start)	PDH	20/10/2010
4	CP3	S	View (pre-start)	PDH	20/10/2010
5	CP2	WNW	View (pre-start)	PDH	20/10/2010
6	SW	SW	Stripping in progress	PDH	20/10/2010
7	WNW	WNW	Feature 1 in corner, section	PDH	20/10/2010
8	WSW	WSW	Feature 1 Section	PDH	20/10/2010
9	SW	SW	Feature 2	PDH	20/10/2010
10	NE	NE	Feature 2 Section	PDH	20/10/2010



**Photo 1** Pre-start view W



**Photo 2** Pre-start view NNW





**Photo 3** Pre-start view SSE



**Photo 4** Pre-start view S



**Photo 5 Pre-start view WNW**



**Photo 6 Stripping in progress**





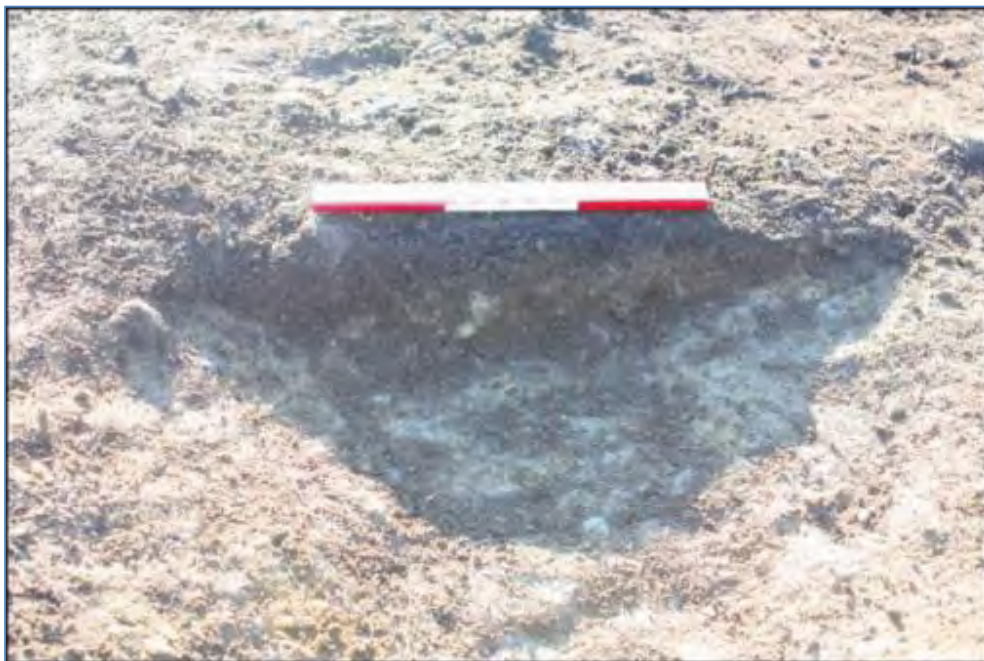
**Photo 7 Feature 1**



**Photo 8 Feature 1, Section A**



**Photo 9 Feature 2**



**Photo 10 Feature 2, Section B**