

Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY**

**OVERHEAD LINES
NORTH OF
LOCHGILPHEAD**

**Watching briefs
March-April 2011**

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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of watching briefs undertaken during the replacement of poles carrying overhead power lines to the north of Lochgilphead, Argyll. The lines extend over an area between Lochgilphead, Kilmichael Glen, Cairnbaan, Ballymeanoch, Duntrune and Ford. Prior to the commencement of fieldwork Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE), who undertook this refurbishment, commissioned a desk study of sites and monuments of archaeological and historical significance lying close to those poles that were to be replaced.

The desk study was commissioned by Gavin Carswell and Keith Burnett of SSE (Oban Depot) and undertaken by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology who also carried out the watching briefs at intermittent times between 16th March and 21st April 2011.

THE DESK STUDY

The results of the desk study, which forms a separate document already lodged with SSE, identified those locations where ground disturbance might adversely affect the archaeological record. After the desk study was completed, it was decided that some of the poles originally intended for replacement would not be changed. As a consequence, some of the sites and monuments listed in the desk study are not mentioned in this report.

The sources consulted for the desk study included:

the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS) at the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS); and

Archaeology Scotland's annual journal *Discovery & Excavation in Scotland*.

THE WATCHING BRIEFS

The Kilmartin valley is archaeologically a very sensitive area and contains many important archaeological sites and monuments, mostly dating to the Neolithic and early Bronze Ages. As a consequence, watching briefs were needed during line refurbishments at several locations. Those locations are shown on the three maps accompanying this report, the areas of monitoring being marked in red.

It had been the intention to monitor excavations around Pole 11 at Eurach, on a line leading from Carnasserie, near Kilmartin, to the village of Ford. However, although Pole 11 stands relatively close to some cup ring-marked rocks, it stands in a low-lying, boggy field devoid of any rock outcrops and where it is thought unlikely rock art would be uncovered. As a consequence, the decision was taken not to conduct a watching brief at this location.

MAP 1

Site 1: Pole 36/37 Duntrune spur

Although no poles were replaced during this particular watching brief, monitoring was considered necessary when the ground level between Poles 36 and 37 on the Duntrune spur was lowered to allow sufficient clearance for the overhead power line at that point. This part

of the power line, close to Poltalloch, is surrounded by prehistoric sites, including four scheduled monuments as well as others of regional importance.

At this point the line crosses a small knoll at NM 80952 96612 where an area measuring approximately 6m square was stripped using a small mechanical excavator. The excavation revealed a very thin layer of pale brown, clayey topsoil lying directly on bedrock of shale. Some shale had been quarried out from the side of the knoll on an earlier occasion. Nothing of archaeological significance was uncovered during this operation.

Site 2: Pole 60 Duntrune spur

Pole 60 stands some 600m north-east of Duntrune Castle and 500m west of a vitrified fort (NR89NW 10) but not close to any known archaeological sites or monuments. However, because of operational reasons, there was an opportunity to monitor the excavation of a trench for a new stay for this pole.

The stay trench was located in a pasture field at NR 79847 95989, 5m north of Pole 60. It measured 2.3m east/west by 0.8m wide and 1.7m deep and cut through 0.2-0.3m of pale brown, sandy topsoil and underlying sandy subsoil through which ground water poured in rapidly. No features of archaeological significance were uncovered in this trench.

MAP 2

Site 3: Pole 7 Ducharnan spur

Pole 7 at Ducharnan is located within an area of high archaeological sensitivity. The name 'Ducharnan' has been interpreted as 'little black cairn' (Campbell & Sandeman 1962, 22) meaning that there is a potential for prehistoric burials in this vicinity. As a consequence of, a watching brief was carried out during the replacement of Pole 7 on the Ducharnan spur.

The pole stands at NR 86658 93891, on the edge of sheep pasture which slopes down to the south towards low-lying, boggy ground. The old pole was lifted vertically out of the ground and then replaced by a new one in the same location. Nevertheless, a trench measuring 1.9m north/south by 0.6m wide and 1.5m deep had to be excavated to facilitate easy placement of the new pole. Excavation revealed 0.1m of mid-brown topsoil over glacial till of sand, gravel and some boulders with nothing of archaeological significance visible in the trench.

MAP 3

Sites 4-6: Poles 27, 28, and 29 Kilbride Farm spur

Numerous cup and ring-marked rocks have been noted in the vicinity of these poles. They are listed by RCAHMS as:

- NR89NE 15 at NR 8525 9649
- NR89NE 16 at NR 8530 9650
- NR89NE 17 at NR 8510 9640 and NR 8520 9640
- NR89NE 19 at NR 8525 9650
- NR89NE 25 at NR 8512 9633
- NR89NE 26 at NR 8512 9632.

Being relatively close to these monuments, it was considered advisable to monitor excavations at Poles 27, 28 and 29 in case more such rocks lay just below the ground surface. The poles are located in the Add valley, within a flat, pasture field across which the power line runs from north-east to south-west.

Pole 27 is located at NR 85137 96269, the trench for its replacement measuring 1.9m by 0.6m and 1.6m deep. Below turf was 0.3m of reddish, sandy topsoil over glacially deposited grey and orange sand and gravel. Nothing of archaeological significance or any boulders upon which cup-marks might have been carved were uncovered in this trench.

Pole 28 is located at NR 85181 96323, the trench for its replacement cutting mostly through previously disturbed materials. The trench measured 1.6m by 0.6m and 1.6m deep and, where the ground had not been disturbed, cut through 0.3m of topsoil and underlying glacial till of orange sand and gravel. Nothing of archaeological significance or any boulders upon which cup-marks might have been carved were uncovered in this trench.

Pole 29, located at NR 85232 96379, its new trench measuring 1.5m by 0.6m and 1.7m deep. The trench cut through 0.3m of mid-brown loam which gave onto glacial subsoil of orange sand and gravel, the gravel increasing in concentration towards the base. Nothing of archaeological significance or any boulders upon which cup-marks might have been carved were uncovered in this trench.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Campbell, M & Sandeman, M L 1962 'Mid Argyll: a field survey of the historic and prehistoric monuments' *Proc Soc Antiq Scot* 95, 1961-62.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

The photographs listed below form part of the project archive and are not included in this report. They have the prefix LG-KM2011 in the archive.

- 1 Area between Poles 36 and 37 on the Duntrune spur prior to excavation, viewed from the north
- 2-3 Excavation complete between Poles 36 and 37, viewed from the east
- 4 The stay trench being excavated for Pole 60 on the Duntrune spur, showing the trench sides collapsing, viewed from the south
- 5 The stay trench being excavated for Pole 60 on the Duntrune spur, showing the trench sides collapsing, viewed from the west
- 6 Pole 60 and the stay trench, viewed from the west
- 7-8 The trench for Pole 7 on the Ducharnan spur, viewed from the north
- 9 The location of Pole 7, viewed from the west
- 10 Trench for Pole 27 on the Kilbride Farm spur, viewed from the south-east
- 11 Trench for Pole 27 on the Kilbride Farm spur, viewed from the north-east
- 12 Trench for Pole 28 on the Kilbride Farm spur, viewed from the south-east
- 13 Trench for Pole 28 on the Kilbride Farm spur, viewed from the north-east
- 14 Trench for Pole 29 on the Kilbride Farm spur, viewed from the south-east
- 15 Trench for Pole 29 on the Kilbride Farm spur, viewed from the north-east
- 16 Replacement Pole 29 being inserted, viewed from the south-west
- 17 The power line, viewed from the north-east with Pole 29 in the foreground
- 18 Cup-marks on a rock at NR 85165 96353
- 19 Cup-mark on a rock at NR 85181 96371
- 20 Location of the cup-marked rocks, viewed from the south
- 21 Location of Pole 27, viewed from the west