

Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY**

**NEW POWER SUPPLY
TO
BALLIMACKILLICHAN
LISMORE**

**Watching brief
June 2011**

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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during the excavation of a cable trench for a new power supply to Ballimackillichan, Isle of Lismore, Argyll. The watching brief was commissioned by Gavin Carswell of Scottish & Southern Energy plc (SSE), on behalf of Sarah Campbell, and undertaken by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology on 9th June 2011.

The watching brief was intended to mitigate any action that might damage any surviving archaeological record during the excavation of the trench.

THE SITE

Ballimackillichan is located close to Bachull House (NM84SE 47) and Cnoc Aingil, a prehistoric burial cairn (NM84SE 13), towards the north end of the Isle of Lismore. At 42.7m in diameter and 7.3m high, Cnoc Aingil is the largest prehistoric cairn in Lorn although its height is probably accentuated somewhat by an underlying rock outcrop. A drystone field wall runs directly across the monument.

The site is set in a landscape given over predominantly to sheep-grazing and comprises undulating ground containing a mix of good and poor pasture with many outcrops of bedrocks protruding through it.

The construction of new buildings and the upgrading of others at Ballimackillichan necessitated an additional power supply to that part of the island. It will be tapped off an existing overhead line although most of the new stretch of cable will run underground. The proximity of Cnoc Aingil prompted Argyll & Bute Council, on the advice of its archaeological advisers the West of Scotland Archaeology Service (WoSAS), to attach a condition whereby trenching for the new cable would be conducted under an archaeological watching brief, in case further prehistoric burials might lie buried close by.

Unfortunately, a large section of the new cable route had been dug prior to the application being lodged and hence its excavation was not monitored archaeologically.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

The power supply will run from an existing line to a new pole at NM 86161 43871 from where the cable will run underground to supply several buildings, some new and some derelict ones which are to be refurbished. It had been the intention to monitor excavations from the position of the new pole north-eastwards to the point where the trench had already been opened, at NM 86267 43949. Most of this stretch ran through low-lying, waterlogged ground where the mechanical excavator had difficulties operating and where the likelihood of uncovering burials is remote. As a consequence, it was decided to abandon the watching brief along this part of the cable route.

The only section of the trench that ran through solid ground and which had not been opened on a previous occasion ran from NM 86267 43949 along the side of a farm track until it crossed the track into the bog at NM 86252 43944. On the other side of this track stand several abandoned farm buildings, at least some of which are to be restored.

Measuring 0.4m wide and 0.4m deep, the trench cut through 0.1-0.15m of humic topsoil and underlying pale brown, hard-packed silt and pebbles of glacial origin. The silt gave onto bedrock of shale towards the bottom of the trench. As the ground dipped down towards the south-west, the soil became increasingly peaty and neither silt nor bedrock was exposed.

No features of archaeological significance were uncovered within this trench and no artefacts predating the 20th century retrieved from it.

CONCLUSIONS

It is unfortunate that a section of the cable trench had been excavated prior to the commencement of the watching brief. Furthermore, the boggy nature of most of its remaining course reduced the length of trench that was monitored archaeologically to a mere 30m and nothing of archaeological interest was uncovered in it. However, given that important prehistoric graves (as Cnoc Aingil clearly is) often became a focus for further burials, any future ground disturbance in the vicinity of this monument should also be covered by an archaeological watching brief.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

The photographs listed below form part of the project archive and are not included in the hard copy of this report.

- 1-2 Start of the trench at NM 86161 43871, viewed from the north-east
- 3-4 Views along the boggy area from the north-east
- 5 Detail of the trench at its north end, viewed from the south-east
- 6 The north end of the trench, viewed from the south
- 7 The trench running alongside the farm track, viewed from the north-east
- 8 The trench running alongside the farm track, viewed from the south-west
- 9 The trench as it crossed the farm track, viewed from the north-west