

Scotia *Archaeology*

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY**

**POLE REPLACEMENT
ACHNACREEBEAG
NORTH CONNEL**

**Watching brief
October 2011**

*5 Bank Street
ABERFELDY
Perthshire
PH15 2BB
Tel & Fax No: 01887-820880
email: scotarc@o2.co.uk*

INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during the upgrading of a section of an overhead power line at Achnacreebeag, near North Connel, Argyll. An existing pole (Pole 29) is to be replaced by a double pole which will support a transformer to enable power to be imported from a new hydro-electric scheme.

The pole stands a short distance from a prehistoric burial cairn, a Scheduled Ancient Monument (see below), although beyond the limits of the scheduled area. Nevertheless, the West of Scotland Archaeology (WoSAS), archaeological advisors to Argyll & Bute Council, recommended that a watching brief be carried out during ground-breaking activities at and near Pole 29 in case further burials or other prehistoric monuments might be located in the vicinity.

The archaeological work was carried out in the context of Scottish Planning Policy and Scottish Historical Environment Policy and in accordance with a Method Statement which was approved by WoSAS site work commenced. Ground works were undertaken on behalf of Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) and the watching brief carried out by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology on 27th October 2011.

THE SITE

A desk study of sites and monuments in the vicinity of Pole 29 revealed one known monument.

NM93NW 4 Achnacreebeag: chambered cairn

Standing at the edge of pasture land at approximately NM 9302 3642, this cairn was excavated between 1968 and 1970 by staff of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS). The cairn, which has been robbed extensively, was originally circular in shape with a diameter of 18m and contained a burial chamber measuring 1.25m by 0.9m and 1m high in its north-west side. At some point, the cairn was extended to 20.7m long by 18m wide when a small passage grave was inserted into its south-east side. A few sherds of Neolithic pottery, a flint knife and some jet disc-beads were retrieved during the excavations (see Ritchie 1970).

The cairn is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 3767) and is protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979.

Pole 29 stands in boggy ground, at the south end of a field which slopes gently upwards towards the north where the land is drier. A long period of very wet weather preceded this investigation, resulting in the ground being very heavily waterlogged for some distance around the pole. Indeed, manual access to the pole was all but impossible, even before the excavation commenced.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

Pole trench

The trench for the replacement pole was located approximately 5m east of the existing one and some 40m east of the chambered cairn, at approximately NM 93005 36400. It was not possible to take a more accurate grid reference because of the depth of water which also obscured the trench itself. All that could be achieved was to inspect the spoil from the machine-dug trench for artefacts or human remains that might point to a burial at that point. The spoil emanating from this trench comprised a mix of topsoil and underlying glacially-deposited clay, gravel and boulders. No artefacts or human or animal remains were recovered from this material.

Earth trench

As well as the trench for the new pole, another was dug around the edge of the waterlogged area to accommodate an earth cable. This trench described an arc around the east, south and west sides of the pole and roughly 15m from it although it was impossible to take accurate measurements because of the depth of water. There was a field clearance cairn of recent origin close to the trench, at NM 93009 36373, but which was not damaged by the excavation. Again, it was not possible to properly assess the results from this trench because of the waterlogged conditions although no artefacts or human remains were retrieved from its spoil.

Cable trench

Also monitored during this exercise was the excavation of a stretch of cable trench that will link the new Pole 29 with the power house of a new hydro-electric scheme. This part of the trench ran from the pole north-westwards to the edge of the field, at NM 92997 36453, and was 0.9m wide and 0.7m deep. The first half of the trench was also under water although, as the ground rose, it became possible to view and record the stratigraphic sequence within it.

Topsoil comprising 0.3m of dark, grey-brown loam with gravel and boulders sat directly on glacial till of orange gravel and boulders. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered within this trench and no artefacts retrieved from it.

The adjacent field through which the final part of the cable trench was dug was also waterlogged and its excavation was not monitored.

CONCLUSIONS

Although it was difficult to determine precisely what lay beneath the turf around Pole 29, the evidence retrieved from the spoil suggested that no burials had been disturbed during the excavation of the pole and earth trenches. Similarly nothing of interest was uncovered in the cable trench.

Notwithstanding the paucity of remains, the possibility of finding burials within the area surrounding the chambered cairn is still considered relatively high and it is recommended that further ground-breaking activities in close proximity to this monument should also be monitored archaeologically.

REFERENCE

Ritchie, J N G 1970 'Excavation of the Chambered Cairn at Achnacreebeag', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 102 (1969-70), 31-55.

PHOTOGRAPHS

- 1 Excavation in progress, viewed from the north
- 2-3 Achnacreebeag chambered cairn, viewed from the west
- 4 Achnacreebeag chambered cairn, viewed from the south-east
- 5 Achnacreebeag chambered cairn, viewed from the east
- 6 Trench for the earth cable being excavated, viewed from the north-west
- 7 The site, viewed from the south-east
- 8 The site, viewed from the south
- 9 The trench for the earth cable with the burial cairn beyond, viewed from the east
- 10 The waterlogged stretch of cable trench, viewed from the east
- 11 The cable trench, viewed from the north-west