

Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY**

**OVERHEAD LINE
AT MILL BRAE,
BUNESSAN, MULL**

**Watching brief
September 2011**

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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological watching briefs undertaken during the refurbishment of sections of an overhead power line near Buessan, Isle of Mull, Argyll. Prior to the commencement of fieldwork a desk study was undertaken of sites and monuments of archaeological and historical significance within the area around those sections.

The desk study and watching brief were commissioned by Ian Nicoll of Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) and carried out by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology, the field work being completed on 8th September 2011.

There were two areas monitored at Buessan: at Pole 180, a short distance east of the village on the main power line running through it; and at Pole 6, near Sheepknowe Cottage, Mill Brae on the Ardtun spur.

THE DESK STUDY

The desk study identified a small number of sites and monuments in the vicinity of the line changes. These are listed below.

NM32SE 3 Buessan: cairn

The remains of what was probably a large burial cairn stand at NM 3902 2204, on level ground close to Buessan War Memorial. It survives as a low spread of stones some 21m across and a maximum of 1m high with what appears to be a kerb around its perimeter.

NM32SE 9 Sheepknowe Cottage: cairn

Located 120m south-east of Sheepknowe Cottage, at NM 3876 2176, are the possible remains of a prehistoric cairn surviving as a low, grass-covered mound 8.5m in diameter and 0.3m high. In its centre are two upright stones of unknown significance.

NM32SE 20 Mill Brae: findspot

A carved stone head measuring 300mm across was found some time ago around NM 386 218, in Mill Brae field, although it is now located in a garden at Ardtun. Large stone slabs found with the head may indicate that it was associated with a cist burial.

NM32SE 4 Cachal A' Charrach: standing stone

A standing stone formerly located at NM 3890 2171 may have been one of a series of marker stones on a pilgrim route from Green Point to Iona.

NM32SE 19 Linne A' Dhuais: township

The first edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map (Argyllshire 1881, sheet cxvii) depicts a group of buildings and a field centred on NM 3893 2147. Modern 1:10,000 maps show a group of unroofed buildings at the same location.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

The presence of several prehistoric and some later monuments around Bunessan suggest that others may await discovery in the area. As a consequence, both the West of Scotland Archaeology Service, archaeological advisors to Argyll & Bute Council, and SSE considered it prudent to conduct watching briefs during excavations at Poles 6 and 180.

Pole 6

Pole 6 stands on the south edge of a field within an area of good pasture which gives way to boggy ground to the north. The intention had been to replace this pole, insert stays for two or three poles and to excavate a cable trench to supply houses to be built to the rear of Sheepknowe Cottage. However, the cable trench had already been dug, presumably by the house-builders, and the watching brief covered only the replacement of Pole 6 and its stay and the excavation of a trench between the old and new poles.

The trench for the new pole was located at NM 38613 21958, some 20m north-east of the old one which was located at NM 38603 21943. A stay trench was also excavated 8m east of the new pole. The pole trench measured 2m east/west by 0.6m wide and the stay trench 2m north/south by 0.8m wide while the cable trench was only 0.3m wide.

Topsoil, which gave directly onto bedrock, was 0.2m deep along most of the cable trench but deepening to 0.3m in the pole trench while it reached 0.7m in the stay trench. There was no obvious reason for this difference, the soil being homogenous in all of the trenches with no artefacts retrieved from it. It is possible that the stay trench was excavated through a large archaeological feature, such as a pit or ditch, although it might simply result from soil washing into an undulation in the bedrock.

Pole 180

The original intention to replace Pole 1 on the Ardtun spur was shelved although a new stay was inserted for the adjacent Pole 180 on the main power line. The stay trench was excavated some 6m to the east of the pole, at NM 39012 21663, within a level field of good pasture. Some 200m south of the pole stand the remains of the pre-Improvement township of Linne A' Dhuais.

The trench measured 2.0m north/south, 1m wide and 1.3m deep. It cut through 0.2m of mid-brown topsoil which gave directly onto fractured bedrock. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered and no artefacts retrieved from the trench.

CONCLUSIONS

No clearly defined archaeological features were identified in any of the trenches at Poles 6 and 180. However, the depth of topsoil in the stay trench for the new Pole 6 could not be explained satisfactorily and it is not clear whether it is the result of human activity or a natural phenomenon.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

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

- 1 Trench for stay at Pole 180, viewed from the south
- 2 View to the east from Pole 180
- 3 View to the west from Pole 180. Note the mound-like outcrop of bedrock between Pole 180 and Pole 1 on the Ardtun spur
- 4-5 Township of Linne A' Dhuais, viewed from the north
- 6 Remnants of rig and furrow on the west side of Linne A' Dhuais, viewed from the north
- 7 View to the north from the extant Pole 6 showing the trench for the new pole being excavated
- 8 View to the east from the extant Pole 6
- 9 The stay trench for the new Pole 6, viewed from the south
- 10 The trench for the new Pole 6, viewed from the west
- 11 The trench for the new Pole 6 with the stay trench beyond, viewed from the west
- 12 The cable trench between the extant Pole 6 and its replacement, viewed from the south
- 13 The cable trench between the extant Pole 6 and its replacement, viewed from the north