

Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY**

**TULLICH-KILMELFORD
OVERHEAD LINE
REFURBISHMENT**

**Watching brief
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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological watching briefs undertaken during the replacement of poles on sections of the 33kv overhead power line between Tullich Switching Station and Kilmelford to the south of Oban, Argyll. The refurbishment was carried out by Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) who also commissioned the archaeological work. Although the line extends over a considerable distance, only a small number of the poles required a watching brief when being replaced.

The West of Scotland Archaeology Service (WoSAS), archaeological advisors to Argyll & Bute Council, supplied SSE with a list of those poles whose replacement they considered should be monitored.

THE DESK STUDY

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, a desk study of readily available source material was undertaken on those parts of the line due to be upgraded, this work supplementing the research carried out by WoSAS to take account of poles not included in the original submission. The search area extended beyond the line itself to ensure that sites whose influence might stretch beyond their obvious limits were taken into consideration.

The sources consulted for this work included:

the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS);

WoSAS's Sites and Monuments Record; and

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

Several of the poles due for replacement were located within an area lying between Loch Nell and Loch Feochan, designated by WoSAS as of 'particular archaeological sensitivity'. This designation was applied because of the large number of known sites and monuments spread over that area with the corollary that further sites and monuments may well await discovery there. As a consequence, all work involving ground disturbance within that area was monitored archaeologically.

Two specific sites known to be located close to poles due for replacement are listed below. They are given the numbers allocated by RCAHMS (eg NR82SW 5) and WoSAS (eg WoSAS 1181).

NM82NE 58/WoSAS 11775 Moleigh: cairn

The Lorn Archaeological Society identified a cairn near Moleigh Farm, at NM 873 263. Further investigations suggested that the cairn may be simply a clearance heap, resulting from ploughing in the recent past and of no antiquity although this has yet to be proved.

NM82SW 5/WoSAS 1181 Achadh Deireadh Catha: battlefield

The site of a battle between Robert the Bruce and the MacDougalls of Lorn in 1308 reportedly lies around NM 83250 22340, towards the east end of Loch Feochan.

THE WATCHING BRIEFS

The watching briefs were undertaken by John Lewis on 11th and 12th October 2011. Several of the poles that were replaced stood within the area designated as archaeologically sensitive, the exceptions being those standing close to the battlefield site at Achadh Deireadh Catha. The original list of poles requiring watching briefs during refurbishment work was 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 40 and 46 on the main line and Pole 1 on the Moleigh Farm spur but subsequently it was decided that Poles 29, 30, 33 and 46 did not need to be changed. However, Pole 25 was replaced and a watching brief was carried out at that point.

Pole 1, Moleigh spur

The Moleigh spur is a short line of three poles running northwards from Pole 28 on the main line, taking power to Moleigh Farm which was in the process of renovation at the time of the watching brief. Pole 1 stands in a field of rough grass on level ground surrounded by low hills, some 800m south-west of Loch Nell and 4km south of Oban. The trench for the new pole was positioned to the immediate south of the extant one, at NM 87469 26061. It measured 2.2m north/south by 1.2m wide and 1.7m deep.

The northernmost half of the trench cut through backfill for the extant pole whereas the rest of the trench cut through 0.15-0.20m of dark brown topsoil below which was 0.3m of mixed soil and stone fragments over bedrock of schist. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered in this trench and no artefacts recovered from it.

Pole 25

Pole 25, which was not on the original list, stands just within the archaeologically sensitive area. It is located at NM 87285 26126, on a grassy slope above an alluvial fan which stretches to Loch Nell some 800m to the north-east. The trench was excavated to the immediate north-west of the extant pole and measured 2.6m north-west/south-east by 1.2m wide and 1.6m deep. It cut through 0.10-0.15m of mid-brown topsoil which lay directly on bedrock. Nothing of archaeological interest was uncovered within this trench and no artefacts retrieved from it.

Pole 31

Pole 31 stood atop a ridge of bedrock covered with gorse and coarse grass. The trench for the new pole was opened to its immediate south-east, at NM 87698 25674, and measured 2.3m north-east/south-west by 1.5m wide and 2m deep. Topsoil was barely 0.1m deep and sat directly on bedrock, other than where the trench for the original pole had been cut into it. Nothing of archaeological interest was uncovered in this trench.

Pole 32

Pole 32, an H-pole, stands at the base of a hill at NM 87775 25594, some 120m south-east of Pole 31. The trench for the new pole was opened 3m to the north-west of the old one and

measured 4.5m north-east/south-west by 1.8m wide and 1.9m deep. Topsoil was 0.45m deep and overlay 0.25-0.40m of hillwash comprising topsoil with lenses of gravel and pebbles derived from the underlying glacial till. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered and no artefacts retrieved.

Pole 40

Pole 40 is located in a grass-covered field lying between the A816 Oban to Lochgilphead road to its west and the River Nell to its east. The field was waterlogged at the time of the watching brief. The trench for the new pole was excavated to the immediate south of the existing pole, at NM 87796 24890, and measured 2.5m north/south by 1.2m wide and 1.6m deep. The topsoil of pale brown, sandy loam was 0.2m deep and sat directly on glacially deposited gravel which gave onto pebbles at a depth of 1m. The trench filled with water almost as soon as it was opened although there was sufficient opportunity to confirm that nothing of archaeological interest was uncovered there.

CONCLUSIONS

Although no features or deposits of archaeological significance were found in any of the pole trenches, the trenches were all relatively small and it is difficult to assess the archaeological potential in the surrounding areas from such results.

PHOTOGRAPHS

- 1 Trench for new Pole 1, viewed from the west
- 2 Trench for new Pole 1, viewed from the south
- 3 Pole 1 replaced, viewed from the north
- 4 Trench for Pole 25, viewed from the north-east
- 5 Trench for Pole 25, viewed from the north-west
- 6 Early stage of replacement for Pole 25
- 7 Old Pole 31 set on a ridge of bedrock, viewed from the north-west
- 8 Trench for Pole 31, viewed from the east
- 9 Trench for Pole 31, viewed from the south-east
- 10 Trench for Pole 31, viewed from the north-west
- 11 Trench for Pole 31, viewed from the north-east
- 12 Trench for Pole 32, viewed from the south-east
- 13 Trench for Pole 32, viewed from the south-west
- 14 Old Pole 32 with the trench for the new pole beyond, viewed from the south-east. Pole 31 is in the distance
- 15 Replacement Pole 32 being inserted, viewed from the north-west
- 16 Trench for Pole 40, viewed from the west
- 17 Trench for Pole 40, viewed from the south