

Scotia *Archaeology*

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY**

**UNDERGROUND CABLE LINE
AT TIRAGHOIL,
BUNESSAN, MULL**

**Watching brief
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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during the excavation of a trench to accommodate an 11kv underground power cable to replace an overhead line at Tiraghoil, near Bunessan, Isle of Mull, Argyll. The watching brief was commissioned by Ian Nicoll of Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) and carried out by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology on 23-25 January 2012.

THE SITE

The new underground cable replaced a stretch of an overhead line that runs east/west on the south side of the A849 road between Bunessan and Fionnphort on the Ross of Mull, 2.5km west of Bunessan. The overhead line passed through the farm of Tiraghoil and a small coal yard to its immediate west, posing safety problems for farm vehicles and tipper trucks. As a consequence, SSE decided to replace the overhead line with an underground one to run from Pole 220, on the east side of the farm, to a point midway between Poles 222 and 223 in a field to the west of the coal yard.

The township of Tiraghoil is depicted on the first edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map of 1881 (Argyllshire, Islands of Mull, Erraid etc, sheet cxvii) and listed as NM32SE 40 by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS). This map shows three roofed, one partially roofed and one unroofed buildings. Although Tiraghoil now includes several large farm buildings, the farmhouse has become holiday accommodation.

To the north of the road, at NM 3532 2242, is a standing stone, a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 10632), its RCAHMS monument number being NM32SE 6. The granite stone stands to a height of 2.6m and measures 0.6m by 0.5m at its base. It is not known whether the stone is prehistoric in origin or was a marker stone for pilgrims travelling to Iona. The possibility of there being features associated with the stone surviving below ground prompted the West of Scotland Archaeology Service, archaeological advisors to Argyll & Bute Council, to ask for an archaeological watching brief in order that such features could be investigated during the excavation of the cable trench.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

Excavation, using a tracked mechanical excavator, commenced at Pole 220, at the east end of the cable route, terminating midway between Poles 222 and 223 at its west end. Although the trench was continuous, for the purposes of this report (in particular descriptions of photographs) it is divided into four sections.

Trench 1 ran from Pole 220, at NM 35448 22309, across a small grazing field to the fence bounding the access track into Tiraghoil. Trench 2 crossed the access track and the field to its immediate west, the latter mostly waterlogged land covered with reeds. Trench 3 traversed the coal yard, cutting through rough ground and concrete, while Trench 4 skirted a large mound of animal manure located between reasonable grazing to its north and reed-covered, waterlogged ground to its south. Its west terminus was at NM 35311 22381, midway between Poles 222 and 223.

Trenches were uniformly 0.8m deep and 0.4m wide, except where they had to be widened to allow large boulders to be removed. Where the ground was reasonably dry, the topsoil tended

to be 0.2-0.4m deep and consisted of mid- to dark brown humic loam with varying amounts of stone. Where it was waterlogged, the topsoil was usually deeper (up to 0.8m in places) and very peaty in nature. Below the topsoil was undisturbed glacial till comprising grey and orange clay and stones ranging in size from small pebbles to very large boulders.

No features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered, only occasional dumps of recently deposited debris and disturbed materials associated with the coal yard and the access track to Tiraghoil. No artefacts predating the 20th century were retrieved during the excavation.

CONCLUSIONS

It is not known whether the standing stone near Tiraghoil is a prehistoric feature or dates from early Christian times, acting as a marker for pilgrims aiming for Iona. If it is prehistoric in origin, secondary features, particularly burials, might be expected to lie within a short distance of it. No such features were uncovered during this exercise although it is still feasible that some may still lie undiscovered within this area.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

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

- 1 Trench 1, viewed from the south-east, at Pole 220
- 2 Trench 1, viewed from the north-west
- 3 Trench 2 crossing the access track to Tiraghoil, viewed from the east
- 4-5 Trench 2 crossing the access track to Tiraghoil, viewed from the west
- 6 The standing stone, viewed from the north-west
- 7-8 The standing stone, viewed from the east
- 9 The standing stone, viewed from the south-east
- 10 Trench 2, viewed from the south-east
- 11-12 Trench 2, viewed from the north-west
- 13 Trench 3, viewed from the east
- 14 Trench 3, viewed from the west
- 15 The east arm of Trench 4, viewed from the north-east
- 16-17 Trench 4, viewed from the west