

Scotia *Archaeology*

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY**

**REFURBISHMENT
OF POWER SUPPLY
ISLE OF ISLAY**

**WATCHING BRIEFS
SEPTEMBER 2012-FEBRUARY 2013**

*Lismore
Dollerie Terrace
Crieff
Perthshire
Tel: 01764-653638
email: scotarc@btinternet.com*

INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological watching briefs undertaken over a period between September 2012 and February 2013 in conjunction with a large-scale overhaul of the domestic power supply on the Isle of Islay, Argyll. The refurbishment was carried out by Scottish & Southern Energy plc and the archaeological work by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology.

Prior to the commencement of this work a desk study of archaeological and historical monuments was undertaken of the sections of lines due for repair; thereafter walk-over surveys were carried out along many of those sections. The illustrated results of this research were produced as a document which was deposited with:

Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE);

the West of Scotland Archaeology Service (WoSAS), archaeological advisors to Argyll & Bute Council; and

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

Reference to that document should be made for more details concerning the sites encountered during the desk study and field survey.

The refurbishment work comprised both the installation of underground cables and the replacement of overhead power lines at several locations around the island. By far the longest stretch of underground cable was laid between Bowmore Power Station, on the north-east side of the village, and Braibruich, near Port Charlotte, although most of this work was undertaken using a mole plough which digs a narrow furrow, installs the cable and backfills the trench thereafter. This process, which disturbs a minimal amount of materials, allows no visual inspection of the trench and hence was not monitored archaeologically. Roads, farm tracks and rivers were traversed by drilling beneath them. Only two small sections of this line that were in archaeologically sensitive areas, at Bruichladdich and Braibruich, were excavated by open trenching.

The only other stretch of open trenching to be monitored was located a short distance east of Loch Gorm, through an extensive archaeological landscape that comprises the Scheduled Monument of An Sidhean.

Watching briefs were also maintained during the excavation of a line of new pole trenches to the west of Foreland House, 3km north of Bruichladdich, and for individual poles near Uiskenie, 4km west of Bridgend, and at Gartmain 2km north-east of Bowmore.

THE WATCHING BRIEFS

The five areas of monitored investigation were as follows, their locations being shown on the accompanying map.

Area 1: a trench for an underground cable to the rear of the Bruichladdich distillery;

- Area 2: a trench for an underground cable from Braibruich to St Kieran's parish church of Kilchoman, between Bruichladdich and Port Charlotte;
- Area 3: a trench for an underground cable through An Sidhean, to the east of Loch Gorm in the north-west of Islay;
- Area 4: a series of pole trenches to the west of Foreland House;
- Area 5: a single pole trench near a standing stone at Uiskenie; and
- Area 6: a single pole trench near the site of the old chapel and burial ground of Cill A' Bhuilg at Gartmain.

Areas 1 and 2 were excavated on an intermittent basis, timing being dependent on operational factors.

It should be noted that the routes through An Sidhean and around Foreland differed somewhat from those given at the time of the original desk study and walk-over survey. A second walk-over survey was undertaken through An Sidhean prior to the commencement of excavation there.

Area 1: Bruichladdich (Photos 01-22)

Watching briefs were kept between 18 and 28 September 2012 at Bruichladdich on the recommendation of WoSAS because of the discovery of prehistoric artefacts at several locations between Bruichladdich and Port Charlotte. These finds comprise the following:

flints, including cores, (NR26SE 5) found at NR 2602 6042 near Coultorsay in 1958 and 1959;

an assemblage of struck flints (NR26SE 7) unearthed at approximately NR 2582 6016, between the 100ft and 150ft contours in a field on Coultorsay Farm. Of over 100 pieces of whitish and brownish flint, about a dozen were small blades, 20-30mm long. One of them was a scraper; and

an oval quartzite pebble (NR26NE 6) with pecked cups found at NR 2595 5995, in the face of the raised beach at Port Ban, and two small hammer stones recovered from early turf and cobble walls nearby. The pebble measures 178mm by 133mm by 57mm and has one cup pecked on each face, the cups being 50mm and 63mm in diameter and 12mm deep.

Although it was realized that the retrieval of further such artefacts from the excavation trenches might prove unlikely, the presence of flints in several locations around Bruichladdich and Braibruich does suggest that the area was inhabited at some stage in prehistory. As a consequence, it was considered that structural remains might be uncovered during the excavations and hence the watching briefs were maintained during trenching in this area.

The monitored stretch of trenching was located behind a bonded warehouse belonging to the Bruichladdich distillery. Open excavation ran from NR 26345 61433, adjacent to the Conisby road, as far as a field boundary at NR 26210 61175, crossing the Bruichladdich River and skirting around the small settlement of Burnside in the process. The overall length of the trench was some 330m. It cut through gently sloping pasture fields on the raised beach upon which the bonded warehouse stands.

Trenching was undertaken in two stages, using a 13-tonne mechanical excavator. Initially a strip, 3.5-4.0m wide, of turf and 0.2-0.3m of topsoil was removed before the 0.7m wide and 1.0m deep cable trench was cut through the underlying glacial materials. Topsoil comprised dark brown, humic loam over most of the trench although, in those places where the ground was waterlogged, it was very peaty. It lay directly on glacial till which varied in colour from grey to orange and in texture between very fine sand, through clay, gravel and small stones to boulders, some of them very large. In places bedrock lay barely beneath the ground surface and had to be removed using a breaker attached to the mechanical excavator.

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

Area 2: Braibruich (Photos 23-37)

As at Bruichladdich, open excavation here was carried out on an intermittent basis and was undertaken because of the proximity of the finds spots described above. The watching briefs spanned a period between 12 September and 6 October 2012, work being halted on more than one occasion because of torrential rain which resulted in the fields and the trench being flooded.

Monitoring began at NR 25887 60040, some 350m north-east of Braibruich in a field to the immediate west of the A847 Bruichladdich to Port Charlotte road. The trench ran southwards from that point as far as NR 25759 59613, through fields which were given over to pasture at the time although they are regularly ploughed to a shallow depth. For convenience, the trench has been ascribed separate numbers (Trenches 1, 2 and 3) depending on which field it was in. From NR 25759 59613 the trench returned westwards (Trenches 4 and 5), terminating at NR 25599 59589 where a new pole connecting to an existing overhead line was to be erected. The overall length of the trenches was approximately 630m.

The trench was dug using a 13-tonne mechanical excavator. A strip, approximately 5m wide, was cleared of vegetation and topsoil and thereafter a narrow, 1m-deep cable trench was cut through the centre of the strip. Topsoil comprised pale brown, silty loam which varied in depth from 0.2m to 0.4m. It overlay glacial till of pale brown clay, gravel and boulders, some of them very large. At several locations bedrock protruded through these deposits.

No features of archaeological or historical significance were uncovered in this trench and no artefacts predating the 20th century recovered from it.

Area 3: An Sidhean (Photos 38-46)

An underground cable was inserted to connect two existing overhead lines, one near Grulinmore, on the east shore of Loch Gorm, the other near the former Kilchoman Schoolhouse 2km to the east. The new line was located on the north side of the B8017 which

runs east/west through an important archaeological landscape known as An Sidhean (or An Sithean).

This Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 6127) lies 1km east of the loch and comprises an extensive landscape of prehistoric settlement and farming, partially overlain by pre-Improvement field systems. It has been divided into three distinct areas and described under numerous separate monument numbers by RCAHMS. The westernmost area, centred on approximately NR 2500 6670, measures some 700m north/south by 600m east/west. Another large area, measuring a maximum of 350m by 350m is centred on approximately NR 2620 6670 while midway between the two is a smaller, circular area, some 100m in diameter and centred on NR 2567 6650.

These prehistoric remains were noted by Thomas Pennant in the 18th century and included in a handbook to Islay written in 1960 (Celoria 1960). In 1981, when ditches bordering the road were being recut, the opportunity was taken to carry out a more thorough investigation of the area. The remains of eight hut circles, field banks and clearance cairns, probably dating from the late Bronze Age, as well as traces of rig and furrow agriculture of probable post-medieval date, were identified (Barber & Brown 1984; RCAHMS 1984, 123-26). In 1994 the three individual areas containing prehistoric remains were given statutory protection under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979.

Only the westernmost of these areas, which straddles the B8017 road, was affected by the power line refurbishment, a watching brief being kept during the excavation of the cable trench through it. Monitoring was undertaken between 29 and 31 January 2013, commencing at NR 25380 66750, 230m east of the limit of the scheduled area, and terminated at NR 24858 66410, 60m beyond its west edge. The overall length of the monitored area was roughly 700m.

The trench, which was excavated using a 5-tonne mechanical excavator, was located a short distance (usually 5-7m) from the edge of the road and ran through waterlogged ground covered mainly in coarse grass, heather and bracken. The cable was laid in short stretches following excavation and the trench backfilled immediately thereafter. Throughout this process there were gale force winds and torrential rain and hail.

Topsoil varied in depth from 0.2m to nearly 1m and was always very peaty in nature. Over much of the area it consisted almost entirely of waterlogged peat whereas the underlying glacial till was remarkably dry although the trench rapidly filled with water once opened. The till varied in character, comprising variously sand, gravel and boulders, some of them very large.

The trench cut through the remains of two earth and stone banks, at NR 25199 66607 (Bank 1), some 100m west of the farm road to Culbuie, and at NR 25045 66511 (Bank 2), a further 170m west, both features extending roughly northwards from the road. Bank 1 was barely visible in the trench edge whereas Bank 2 was more obvious from the concentration of small stones in the section. Where excavated, neither feature rose significantly above the surrounding ground level.

Although it was not possible to avoid these two features, there was no difficulty skirting around a low mound at NR 24945 66454 where the trench was taken much nearer the road and several metres from this feature. This mound could be interpreted as a field clearance

cairn although its appearance suggests otherwise. In plan it forms a rather regular oval, measuring approximately 5m north/south by 3m wide and 1m high and is covered with grass, moss and bracken. In some respects it resembles a small drumlin although there are no other such features in the near vicinity. Another possibility is that this feature might be a burial mound.

No hitherto unsuspecting features were uncovered in the trench, either above, within or below the peat and no artefacts predating the 20th century retrieved from it.

The mound appears to be the same feature shown a short distance west of Hut Circle A on RCAHMS's map while the two field boundaries cut by the trench are less easy to equate with those depicted on the same map (see RCAHMS 1984, 124-5). A more detailed survey of the site would be helpful here although such work was beyond the remit of the watching brief.

Area 4: Foreland (Photos 47-80)

A new overhead line was built from near Sunderland Farm, south-east of Loch Gorm, skirting to the west of Foreland House and linking with an existing line that runs east/west along the north shore of Loch Indaal. The new line was constructed to accommodate a heavier load than could be accommodated by the one standing in 2012.

Various accounts have been written about burial cists to the west of Foreland House. One report refers to eight burials while another describes only one. Perhaps the most reliable summary is provided by RCAHMS who describe the discovery of two cists in 1926 about 1.2m below the surface of the south-east flank of a grass-covered, sandy hillock at NR 2691 6355, 750m south of Foreland House. Each was built of four slabs and a cover slab, the larger cist measuring about 1m by 0.6m and 0.5m deep, the smaller one 1m by 0.4m and 0.35m deep. The latter contained the fragmentary remains of an inhumation and a flint knife. The cists and the bones were reburied, and the flint knife has subsequently been lost.

The proximity of the presumed burial site prompted watching briefs to be undertaken during the excavation of 24 new pole trenches to the west and south of Foreland, over a distance of some 1.35km. Monitoring commenced at Pole 24, 350m west of Foreland House, although it soon became clear that bedrock, which protrudes through the ground surface throughout this area, would become a problem during trenching. With the exception of Pole Trench 24, all the trenches were excavated initially only as far as geological levels (glacial till or bedrock), their full depth of 1.6-1.8m being reached at a later date, thus avoiding unnecessary downtime for the archaeologist. The monitored trenches were dug using a 7-tonne mechanical excavator on 4 and 5 December 2012.

Although the watching briefs began at Pole 24 and ended at Pole 1, the excavations are described here in reverse order. All the trenches measured approximately 1.5-2m by 1m. The new line runs through farmland of generally poor quality, especially towards its south end where the ground was very boggy. The exception was around Pole Trench 1 where the ground was well drained. The north end of the line is characterized by numerous outcrops of bedrock protruding through coarse grass and other vegetation. The ground slopes fairly gently downwards from north to south, the line stopping before the edge of the raised beach located roughly 100m from the present shoreline.

Pole Trench 1

This trench, the southernmost in this sequence was located at NR 27273 63045, approximately 80m north of Pole 151 on the existing overhead line that runs alongside the coast road. Short grass overlay 0.7m of dark brown, gravelly soil which sat directly on glacially deposited orange boulder clay.

Pole Trench 2

Located at NR 27240 63110, Pole Trench 2 cut through 0.2m of peat and 0.4-0.5m of a mix of peat and gravel which overlay orange boulder clay.

Pole Trench 3

Pole Trench 3 was located hard against a field boundary fence in waterlogged ground at NR 27210 63165. It was dug through 0.6m of peat which overlay glacial till of grey clay and gravel.

Pole Trench 4

Located at NR 27178 63216, this trench cut through 0.6m of peat which sat on glacially deposited clay whose colour changed from grey to orange over a short depth.

Pole Trench 5

This trench was located at NR 27150 63265 and was excavated through 0.3-0.4m of peat which sat directly on pale grey boulder clay.

Pole Trench 6

This trench, located at NR 27122 63317, cut through 0.6m of peat which overlay glacial till of grey clay.

Pole Trench 7

Pole Trench 7 was located at NR 27090 63369 and was excavated through 0.5m of peat as far as the underlying grey clay and gravel.

Pole Trench 8

Located at NR 27059 63417, Pole Trench 8 contained 0.3m of peat which sat on glacially deposited grey clay and gravel.

Pole Trench 9

This trench was located at NR 27035 63460 and cut through heather and 0.5m of peat onto glacial deposits of grey clay and gravel.

Pole Trench 10

Pole Trench 10 was located at NR 27005 63516 where 0.3m of dark, peaty topsoil was removed to reveal underlying glacial till of grey clay and gravel.

Pole Trench 11

Located at NR 26971 63572, Pole Trench 11 contained 0.4m of mid-grey-brown, clayey topsoil which overlay orange boulder clay.

Pole Trench 12

In this trench, located at NR 26945 63621, there was only 0.1-0.2m of topsoil, comprising pale grey-brown, clayey loam over glacial deposits of grey clay and gravel.

Pole Trench 13

Pole Trench 13 was located at NR 26900 63665 and cut through 0.3m of dark grey-brown, clayey loam which overlay orange boulder clay.

Pole Trench 14

Located at NR 26877 63707, this trench cut through 0.3-0.4m of dark brown topsoil which gave onto orange boulder clay.

Pole Trench 15

Only a short distance north of Pole Trench 14 at NR 26857 63741, this trench cut through 0.3m of topsoil comprising dark brown loam with some large boulders which gave onto glacial till of compact orange sand, clay and gravel.

Pole Trench 16

This trench was located at NR 26814 63808 and contained 0.3m of dark, peaty topsoil over large boulders which gave onto glacial till of grey clay at a total depth of 0.6m.

Pole Trench 17

Located at NR 26780 63867, this trench cut through turf and 0.3m of black peaty topsoil which sat directly on glacially deposited, pale brown sand.

Pole Trench 18

In a boggy area at NR 26756 63900, Pole Trench 18 contained 0.4m of grey-brown, clayey topsoil which gave onto glacial till of grey clay.

Pole Trench 19

Located at the base of a rocky outcrop at NR 26722 63955, this trench cut through 0.2m of pale brown loam over grey boulder clay which sat on bedrock at a total depth of 1m.

Pole Trench 20

Pole Trench 20 was located on level, boggy ground at NR 26676 63997. It cut through 0.2m of pale brown, clayey topsoil which overlay a similar depth of soil intermixed with shattered rock over undisturbed bedrock.

Pole Trench 21

This trench for an angle pole was located at NR 26681 64073. It cut through 0.3m of materials which had been disturbed on a previous occasion when an existing transformer pole was installed nearby.

Pole Trench 22

Located at the east edge of a rock outcrop, at NR 26622 64115, Pole Trench 22 cut through turf and reeds and 0.3-0.4m of pale brown, clayey topsoil containing boulders resulting from the erosion of the rock outcrop. This material overlay 0.2-0.3m of pale brown boulder clay which sat on bedrock.

Pole Trench 23

Located at NR 26586 64172, this trench cut through a mere 0.1m of black, peaty topsoil which sat directly on bedrock.

Pole Trench 24

Located at the base of a rock outcrop at NR 26563 64208, this trench was excavated to its full intended depth of 1.7m and contained 0.2m of dark brown, peaty topsoil over 0.5m of grey clay with rock fragments with pale brown boulder clay beneath.

No features of archaeological significance were uncovered in any of these pole trenches and no artefacts of any age retrieved from them.

Area 5: Uiskenie (Photos 81-83)

Pole 118 on the overhead power line between Bowmore and Bruichladdich had to be replaced because of decay. Located at NR 29404 63315, the pole stood in a cropped cereal field atop a raised beach which is clearly visible, running parallel with the A847 and the adjacent north shore of Loch Indaal. It is also very close to a prehistoric standing stone (NR26SE 2) which is located at NR 29380 63360 and which measures 3.0m high and 1.4m by 0.6m wide at its base. As a consequence of the proximity of this monument, the pole's replacement was accompanied by an archaeological watching brief which was undertaken on 12 September 2012.

The trench for the new pole, excavated by a 6-tonne mechanical excavator on 12 September 2012, was dug to the immediate east of the existing pole and measured 1.8m east/west by 0.7m wide and 1.6m deep. Topsoil of dark brown loam was only 0.1m deep and sat directly on pale brown gravel which forms the upper levels of the raised beach. No features of archaeological significance were uncovered within the trench and no artefacts retrieved from it.

Area 6: Gartmain (Photos 84-85)

Pole 16 on the Bowmore to Bruichladdich overhead power line required replacing because of rot in the wood. The pole stood at NR 33136 60618, at the north edge of a pasture field and close to a track leading to Gartmain.

Some 130m to the south-west of the pole, in a level field at NR 33030 60530, stands an elevated, embanked enclosure measuring 18m by 16m, within which is the site of an early chapel and burial ground although no trace of the chapel is now visible. This site, known as Cill A' Bhuilg (NR36SW 11) is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 2355) and protected by law. As a consequence of the proximity of Pole 16 to this monument, a watching brief was kept during the pole replacement.

The trench for the new pole, located to the immediate south-west of the existing pole, was dug by a 6-tonne mechanical excavator on 12 September 2012 and measured 2m NE/SW by 0.6m wide and 1.8m deep. It cut through 0.15m of pale grey-brown, clayey loam over 0.6m of grey clay which sat on peat. No features of archaeological significance were uncovered in the trench and no artefacts retrieved from it.

REFERENCES

Barber, J & Brown MM 1984 *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 161-88.

Celoria, F 1960 *Preliminary handbook to the Archaeology of Islay*. Islay.

RCAHMS 1984 Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland: Argyll, an Inventory of the Monuments, 5. Edinburgh.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

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

Area 1: Bruichladdich

- 01-02 View from the south along the trench in Field 1 after the topsoil is stripped
- 03-04 View from the north along the trench in Field 1 after the topsoil is stripped
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Area 5: Uiskenie

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Area 6: Gartmain

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