

# Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT  
TO  
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY**

**OVERHEAD POWER LINES  
MACHRIE,  
ISLE OF ARRAN**

**Watching brief  
May 2013**

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## INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological watching briefs undertaken during the replacement of poles on overhead power lines on the west side of the Isle of Arran, North Ayrshire.

The work was commissioned by Denise Harbut of Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) and carried out by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology, the watching briefs and other investigations being completed in May 2013. These investigations were prompted by the existence of known sites of archaeological importance close to some of the poles that were due for replacement, according to information supplied by the West of Scotland Archaeology Service, archaeological advisors to North Ayrshire Council.

An exploratory visit, accompanied by Barry MacTaggart and Phil Wares of SSE, was made to the area on 17 May and the watching briefs carried out on 22 May 2013.

## THE SITE

The poles whose replacements were to be monitored were at two locations on the edges of Machrie Moor, on the west coast of Arran, where there are numerous important prehistoric sites. One of these was some 2km south-east of Auchagallon where a pole was replaced and a new stay for another pole inserted. The second location was at Dereneneach, a further 2km to the east where a single pole was replaced.

In addition, a brief survey was undertaken approximately 1km south-east of Auchagallon where machinery would need to pass through an archaeologically sensitive area to access a pole that was to be replaced.

There has been some confusion over the numbering of some of the poles on the overhead line near Machrie Bridge on the north side of Machrie Moor. The problem arose partly because the line had been replaced on an earlier occasion and also because additional poles have been inserted in a few intermediate positions. For example, the pole located approximately 2km from Auchagallon is referred to as Pole 104 by some sources and as Pole 105 on SSE's map whereas the pole itself bears the number 111. As a consequence, for the purpose of this report, these four locations are referred to as Sites 1-4, their positions being shown on the maps accompanying this document.

## THE WATCHING BRIEFS

### Site 1: Machrie Farm (Photos 1-3)

The area between the Allt An Uachdair and the Machrie Burn, much of which is now a coniferous forestry plantation, includes a rich archaeological landscape containing several prehistoric and post-medieval monuments. Work was to be undertaken on one of the poles (Pole 80) on an overhead power line which runs along the south edge of the forest. While the remedial work itself would not disturb the archaeological record, access for machinery from the public road near Machrie Farm would have to pass through what appears to be a relict field system. The visual remnants of this system comprise a turf and stone bank and a small area of degraded rig and furrow.

During the first visit to the island a route through this field system for the machinery was agreed between representatives of Scotia Archaeology and SSE. It was decided that plant could pass through an existing gap in the turf and stone bank at NR 90017 34092, the gap being sufficiently wide to accommodate large machinery without damaging the feature.

### **Site 2: Dereneneach (Photos 4-5)**

Dereneneach sits in an elevated position just east of the B880 Brodick to Blackwaterfoot road (also known as 'The String'). Two poles stand within the field between the house and the road, one near the building, the other (Pole 9) close to the road. In 1999 topsoil stripping was monitored during excavations for a new water main which ran alongside this road. A number of archaeological features were identified at various locations along the 2km-long stretch, thus prompting a watching brief during the replacement of Pole 9.

Pole 9 was located at the base of a slope, at the extreme north edge of a field of good pasture, the trench for the new pole being positioned to its immediate south, at NR 92856 33181. The trench measured 1.8m north/south by 0.7m wide and cut through 1.2m of stony, reddish brown, clayey loam, the topsoil being quite deep at the bottom of the slope. This material gave onto glacially deposited grey clay and pebbles.

### **Site 3: Machrie Bridge pole trench (Photos 6-8)**

Labelled Pole 105 on SSE's map but 111 on the ground, this pole was located at NR 91674 33505, a short distance south of an unclassified road on the gently-sloping north side of Machrie Moor which is covered with coarse grass and heather. It stands some 50m east of a hut circle (NR93SW 29) which has no discernible field system associated with it. As a consequence of the proximity of the monument to this pole, a watching brief was kept during the excavation of the new pole's trench.

The trench was excavated to the immediate east of the extant pole and measured 1.8m east/west by 0.6m wide. It was excavated through 0.2m of peat which gave onto glacial till of pale brown clay and pebbles. Excavation was halted at a depth of only 0.6m (well into glacial material) during the watching brief because the pole was to be inserted at a later date.

### **Site 4: Machrie Bridge stay trench (Photos 9-10)**

A trench for a new stay for angle Pole 108 (new number) was dug at NR 91442 33467. The trench measured 2.2m east/west by 0.6m wide and cut through 0.2m of peat which overlay glacially deposited pale grey-brown clay and pebbles. Excavation was halted at a depth of 0.5m, the stay being inserted at a later date.

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

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Although the area around Machrie is clearly one of great archaeological importance and one littered with prehistoric sites and monuments, nothing of interest was found during these investigations. However, the pole and stay trenches covered very small areas and the close

proximity of known monuments, particularly to the trenches near Machrie Bridge, clearly necessitated the watching briefs.

## **PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE**

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

- 1 A gap through bank at Site 1, viewed from the north
- 2 A gap through bank at Site 1, viewed from the south
- 3 The bank at Site 1, viewed from the south-west
- 4 Pole trench at Site 2 (Dereneneach), viewed from the east
- 5 Pole trench at Site 2 (Dereneneach), viewed from the south
- 6-7 Pole trench at Site 3, viewed from the north
- 8 Pole trench at Site 3, viewed from the east
- 9 Stay trench at Site 4, viewed from the south
- 10 Stay trench at Site 4, viewed from the east