

Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY**

**OVERHEAD POWER LINE
AT ARDOCH ROMAN FORT
BRACO, PERTSHIRE**

**Watching brief
July 2013**

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INTRODUCTION

This document describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during the replacement of a pole on an overhead power line near the village of Braco, Perthshire. The original intention was to monitor the replacement of two poles but only one was changed during this exercise. The refurbishment was carried out by Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) whose representative, Denise Harbut, commissioned the watching brief, undertaken by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology on 18 July 2013.

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), outlining proposals for this work, was presented to Historic Scotland because the pole stands within an area protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979. The WSI described a programme intended to mitigate any action that might damage the surviving archaeological record. SSE agreed to the work outlined in that document and to funding it.

THE SITE

The overhead power line between Gleneagles and Braco runs roughly east/west approximately 1km north of Braco. From Pole 104 on that line another line branches off north-westwards to Blackhill. Pole 1 on the Blackhill spur was the subject of the watching brief. The cable line crosses the east side of the scheduled area at approximately NN 8443 1053, a short distance from Pole 1 whose location is shown on the accompanying plan supplied by SSE.

The cable line runs through the north side of a complex of Roman forts and camps which together constitute a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 1601). This monument includes a series of superimposed forts, a large annexe and several temporary camps and signal stations together with some prehistoric remains. Most of these features have been identified by means of aerial photography although the most famous, and most obvious, of these still constitutes a prominent feature of the local landscape. It consists of a fort (NN80NW 10) centred on NN 8390 0990 which lies to the immediate north of Braco. It is one of the best preserved forts in the Roman Empire, covering an area of approximately 2 hectares and surrounded by ramparts and, in places, up to five ditches.

Pole 1 stands towards the north end of the complex, within an area formerly occupied by Roman temporary camps. These are described briefly below. They are listed according to the numbers allocated by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) (eg NN81SW 18) and by the Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust (PKHT) (eg MPK799).

NN81SW 18/MPK799 Ardoch: Roman temporary camp

This camp was identified primarily from aerial photography although a small section does survive as an upstanding monument. It covers an area of approximately 56 hectares and is centred on NN 8410 1070.

MPK796 Ardoch: Roman temporary camp and annexe

This camp and annexe are centred on NN 8380 1090.

NN81SW 7/MPK809 Ardoch: Roman watch tower

The faint outline of an outer bank is the only visible remains of this signal station which has been otherwise identified by aerial photography, geophysical survey and limited excavation. Centred on NN 8452 1075 and defined by two concentric, V-shaped ditches, this monument measures some 25-26m in diameter.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

Pole 1 is located at NN 84306 10602, in a gently undulating hay field which, unlike some neighbouring fields, had not been cropped at the time of the watching brief. The trench for the new pole was excavated to the immediate north-west of the existing one. It measured 1.5m north-west/south-east by 0.7m wide and 1.5m deep. It cut through 0.2m of red-brown ploughsoil, containing much gravel, and underlying glacial till of red-brown sand, gravel, pebbles and boulders.

No structures, features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered within this trench and no artefacts were retrieved from it.

CONCLUSIONS

With the exception of the impressive earthworks of the Roman fort NN80NW 10, it is difficult to resolve the outlines of the various archaeological structures and features that lie to the north of Braco. As a consequence, it is not at all clear what one might expect to unearth at any particular location in this area and, although nothing of significance was found in the pole trench, it is very possible that important discoveries could be made in other such investigations nearby.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

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

- 1 The pole trench, viewed from the south-east
- 2 The pole trench and surrounding area, viewed from the north-west
- 3 The pole trench and surrounding area, viewed from the east