

Scotia *Archaeology*

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY**

**OVERHEAD POWER LINE
AT BALLINABY,
ISLAY**

**Watching brief
December 2013**

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INTRODUCTION

This document describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during ground works for the installation of a new overhead power supply to a domestic residence which is still under construction at Ballinaby, Isle of Islay. The work was carried out on behalf of Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) whose representative, Gavin Carswell, commissioned the investigations.

THE SITE

Ballinaby is a small hamlet located near the north shore of Loch Gorm and some 1.5km from the coast, towards the north-west corner of Islay. The new overhead line will run roughly west to east, tapping off an existing line that runs northwards from Ballinaby, the new residence being located at the east end of the settlement.

A total of five new poles will be needed to support this line. Their trenches were located within a well-drained pasture field which rises to the north towards a rocky ridge against the south face of which were deposits of boulders and other glacial debris. This material, as well as the ridge itself, has been quarried to provide stone for local buildings and field walls. The pasture field has been cultivated in the recent past, the area being intensively farmed during World War II when some 5,000 troops were stationed on the island. Relics of this occupations litter the area. To the south of the field the land is poorly drained and leads into boggy ground on the north side of Loch Gorm.

Several important archaeological discoveries have been made at and near Ballinaby. They comprise mainly prehistoric standing stones and Viking burials and are listed below according to the numbers allocated by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) (eg NR26NW 13) or by the West of Scotland Archaeology Service, archaeological advisors to Argyll & Bute Council, (eg WoSAS Pin 1998).

Standing stones

On the crest of a low ridge, 200m WNW of Ballinaby at NR 2199 6720, is a standing stone (NR26NW 13/WoSAS Pin 1998) measuring 4.9m high. It is 1.1m wide and 0.3m thick at its base.

At NR 2210 6739, on gently sloping ground 200m NNE of NR26NW 13, is a standing stone (NR26NW14/WoSAS Pin 1999) measuring 2m high with a girth of 3m at its base. This stone is thought to have been damaged at some stage.

Viking burials

A series of Viking burials have been discovered at Ballinaby although, unfortunately, the records of these sites are somewhat confusing to the reader. They are all grouped together as NR26NW 4 by RCAHMS, this entry having been sub-divided into Ballinaby 1 (NR26NW 4.02 at NR 2181 6717), Ballinaby 2 (NR26NW 4.01 at NR 218 671) and Ballinaby 3 (NR26NW 4.03 at NR 214 671).

In summary, they comprise two adjacent 10th-century graves, one containing the remains of a man, the other of a woman together with a single cist burial. The man's grave contained tools and weapons; the woman's contained domestic implements and ornaments, including two tortoiseshell brooches. The cist burial contained weapons. To complicate matters, one record describes the brooches having been discovered beneath one of the nearby standing stones.

Flint scatter

In 1961 a scatter of Mesolithic flints (NR26NW 10) was found at NR 229 677, on and around a small hillock near the burial ground of Cill Dubhain (NR26NW 17).

The presence of these sites, which span several millennia, prompted WoSAS to ask for an archaeological watching brief during ground disturbance associated with the new power supply.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

The watching brief was undertaken by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology on 3 December 2013, on a cloudy but dry day. The trenches were excavated using a mechanical excavator operated by John MacPherson, on behalf of SSE. They ran in a line from west to east, the poles being 50-70m apart. Their locations are shown on the accompanying map which is based on one supplied by SSE.

The excavation of the trenches was monitored only as far as the subsoil, following which they were excavated to their full depth of some 1.8m when the new poles were being inserted by SSE operatives.

Pole Trench 1

Centred on NR 22472 67296 and measuring 1.9m east/west by 0.5m wide, this trench was located just south of the rock ridge. Below turf was 0.3m of mid-brown loam which gave directly onto glacially deposited orange clay, sand and pebbles.

Pole Trench 2

Pole trench 2 was located in front of the rock ridge, on steeply sloping ground composed of glacial debris and covered with coarse grass and gorse bushes. It was centred on NR 22528 67289 and measured 2.8m east/west by a maximum of 1m wide. Topsoil, up to 0.4m deep and consisting of mid-brown, humic loam with a few small stones, sat directly on undisturbed glacially-deposited orange clay and stones.

Pole Trench 3

This trench was located on the edge of the mound of glacial debris and centred on NR 22595 67278. It measured 1.9m east/west by 0.9m wide and contained 0.2m of mid-brown, humic topsoil over yellow-grey glacial boulder clay.

Pole Trench 4

Located at NR 22660 67276 on a level part of the pasture field, Pole Trench 4 measured 2m east/west by 1m wide. Within the trench 0.25m of dark brown, humic topsoil gave directly onto red-brown, glacially-deposited sand and gravel.

Pole Trench 5

Pole Trench 5 was located at NR 22725 67264, just within the garden of the new property and on the south edge of the pasture field. The trench measured 1.6m north/south by 0.8m wide and cut through 0.4m of dark brown, silty loam which overlay dark brown sand and gravel of glacial origin.

From Pole 5 power will be transferred to the new residence along an underground cable. The trench for this cable had been excavated before this watching brief commenced and was not SSE's responsibility.

No structures, features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered within any of the trenches and no artefacts of any age retrieved from them.

CONCLUSIONS

Although nothing of archaeological interest was found in any of the trenches, records do show that significant discoveries have been made at Ballinaby and it may be simply a matter of chance if and when further discoveries are made in this area.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

- 1 Pole Trench 1, viewed from the south
- 2 Pole Trench 1, viewed from the north
- 3 Pole Trench 2, viewed from the south
- 4 Pole Trench 2, viewed from the north
- 5 Pole Trench 3, viewed from the south
- 6 Pole Trench 3, viewed from the north
- 7 Pole Trench 4, viewed from the south
- 8 Pole Trench 4, viewed from the north
- 9 Pole Trench 5, viewed from the west
- 10-13 Views to the west and north-west from Pole 5