

# Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT  
TO  
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY**

**UNDERGROUND CABLE  
FINCHAIRN  
LOCH AWE, ARGYLL**

**WATCHING BRIEF  
September 2013**

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## INTRODUCTION

This document describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken along a short section of the route of a new underground power cable running close to the south-east shore of Loch Awe, Argyll. The watching brief followed a desk study which identified a number of archaeological sites and monuments located close to the power line and a walk-over survey of the area, the latter conducted in June 2013. The desk study was carried out at the request of Max Bigham of Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) and the field work for Shaun McCabe, also of SSE. A summary of the results of both studies are included in this report.

The desk study, field survey and watching brief were all carried out by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology.

## THE CABLE ROUTE

The cable route runs almost the entire length of Loch Awe but only a stretch, some 600m long towards its south-west end, was subject to archaeological monitoring. This part of the route passes between several outcrops of bedrock upon which have been identified prehistoric rock art, particularly cup-markings. Some of these carvings constitute elements of a Scheduled Ancient Monument (see below) while Finchairn cairn, a prehistoric burial site and another Scheduled Ancient Monument, is located a short distance from a new power station where the cable line terminates.

## THE RESULTS OF THE DESK STUDY

The desk study identified several prehistoric monuments in the vicinity of the cable route. Their details are summarised below and shown on the accompanying map. The descriptions are based on records held by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS).

### 1 NM90SW 3 Finchairn: cup-marked rock

At NM 9057 0423, at the south end of a rocky ridge 100m WSW of a former shepherd's cottage, are three groups of decorated rock surfaces. They comprise at least nine widely-spaced cup-marks measuring up to 80mm by 30mm across.

### 2 NM90SW 7 Finchairn: rock-cut bowl

At approximately NM 907 043, on smooth, gently sloping bedrock 43m north-east of a byre attached to the former shepherd's cottage, is a basin measuring 210mm diameter by 150mm deep.

### 3 NM90SW 6 Finchairn: cup- and ring-marked rock

At NM 9071 0433, 50m north-east of the former shepherd's cottage, is a group of cup and ring marks on a gently sloping rock outcrop at the end of a ridge. They include a cup with two rings, a cup with a gutter and one and a half rings, a single cup and a cup with a gutter.

#### **4 NM90SW 8 Finchairn: cup-marked rock**

Three plain cups have been noted on a smooth outcrop of bedrock at NM 9085 0445, 60m north-east of NM90SW 6.

#### **5 NM90SW 9 Finchairn: cup- and ring-marked rock**

At NM 9060 0435, on exposed rock outcrops are 30-40 cup-marks, two of which are surrounded by partial single rings.

The cup-marked rocks at Sites 1-5 have been scheduled collectively as SAM 5407.

#### **6 NM90SW 2 Finchairn: fort (possible)**

A small earthwork, possibly a fort, crowns a low ridge to the north-west of the former shepherd's cottage, at NM 9066 0439. In addition, a nearby earth and stone dyke joins rock outcrops around the crag although these features are difficult to see because of afforestation.

#### **7 NM90SW 1/SAM 5421 Finchairn: cairn**

At NM 9020 0398, immediately north of Finchairn Farm, are the severely robbed remains of a cairn, measuring 24m in diameter and standing to a height of 1.2m. It is now turfed over but is believed to have an internal kerb. There is a cist near its south edge although it is now obscured by a large tree. The foundations of a modern structure overlay the north-east half of the cairn.

### **THE FIELD SURVEY**

On 25 June 2013 a site survey was undertaken by John Lewis along the stretch of cable route that passes close to the rock art described above and from there to the site of the power station at the end of the line. Also present during this survey were Shaun McCabe of SSE and Stuart Stankey, site manager for D A MacDonald of Lochgilphead, the contractors who carried out the ground works.

The survey failed to identify any surface features of archaeological interest directly on the proposed route of the cable, either structural remains or any evidence of pre-modern field systems.

### **THE AREA OF INVESTIGATION**

Monitoring began a short distance to the north-east of the former shepherd's cottage (now used as holiday accommodation), on a farm track which runs north-eastwards through forestry plantation and to the south-west across pasture land as far as Finchairn Farm. The first part of the trench was excavated through the farm track before it cut across the field which varied between reasonably well drained pasture and waterlogged ground covered in reeds. It terminated at a fence forming the boundary of a commercial forestry plantation which extends westwards around Finchairn Farm.

The land is relatively flat across the investigation area but slopes upwards to the east and south over moorland towards Sidh Mhor at a height of 326m. To the north and west the

ground drops away towards Loch Awe, over a narrow strip of land through which runs the B840 road between Cladich and Ford.

A noticeable feature of the landscape around Finchairn is the numerous outcrops of Dalradian schist that project through the vegetation. These outcrops occur as low, generally linear, mounds mostly topped with thin coverings of vegetation. It is upon some of these outcrops that the prehistoric rock art and the putative fort described above are located.

## **THE WATCHING BRIEF**

The watching brief was undertaken between 11 and 14 September 2013, the weather varying between warm and sunny and heavy rain. Trenching was carried out using an 18-tonne, 360° tracked excavator, the trench being approximately 1m wide at its top, narrowing to 0.4m at its base at a depth of 1m.

From the start of monitoring, at NM 90780 04409, the trench cut through the farm track comprising 0.7-0.8m of crushed rock, below which were silt and clay of glacial or lacustrine origin, varying in colour from pale brown to blue-grey. The trench continued along the track as far as a gate at NM 90723 04341 from where it ran parallel with, and 6-8m from, the track for some distance thereafter.

At NM 90571 04221 the trench angled to the west as far as the fence bordering the forestry plantation, at NM 90260 04069. Much of the ground in this area was very boggy and the trench became waterlogged regularly, a problem exacerbated when it had to cut across drainage channels. The geological sequence evident in this section of the trench varied somewhat. Topsoil was generally thin, reaching a maximum of 0.2m, and overlay a range of materials of glacial and post-glacial origins. These included clays and silts of probable lacustrine origin which varied in colour from yellow and orange to blue-grey, together with coarse sand, gravel, boulders and shattered bedrock.

In places, bedrock was exposed within the trench, usually towards its base although occasionally it was barely beneath the ground surface. Where the ground was boggy the topsoil tended to merge imperceptibly with the peat below which varied in depth from 0.6m to over 1m where it continued beyond the base of the trench. Lenses of small boulders intermingled with gravel and sand were identified at NM 90392 04092 (see Photo 16) and NM 90388 04093. These are thought to be the result of hill-wash from the slopes to the east of the site.

No structures, features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered within the trench and no artefacts predating the 20th century were retrieved from it.

## **OTHER OBSERVATIONS**

It proved difficult to locate some of the cup-markings that have been recorded in this area, partly because of vegetation cover but also because of the somewhat vague grid references attributed to many of them. It should be pointed out that the outcrop of rock upon which Site 2 (NM90SW 7) is recorded has been extensively quarried although the grid reference for the site is accurate only to within 100m and the date of quarrying is not known.

The outcrop containing Site 1 (NM90SW 3) is a linear ridge orientated north-east/south-west and located a short distance north-west of the farm track. Although the cup-markings of Site 1 could not be identified, an opportunity was taken during down-time in trenching to investigate the summit of the ridge for other archaeological features. This investigation yielded the remains of at least one structure and possibly more.

What appeared to be the remains of a rectangular building were noted at NM 90551 04231 (see Photos 27-30) (Site A on the accompanying map). It was evident only as remnants of an intermittent, single course of masonry mostly obscured by grass, reeds and other vegetation although its outline could still be traced. The east corner was the best surviving part of the structure which measured approximately 11m north-east/south-west by 4m wide internally with no obvious evidence of a partition.

Against the south-west end of this structure were the remains of an extension or perhaps a separate, roughly circular building measuring some 5m across. It is possible, however, that the arrangement of stone that appeared to define this structure is simply fortuitous.

Further along the ridge, at NM 90618 04295, are the remains of another possible building (see Photo 26) (Site B on the accompanying map), roughly circular and measuring approximately 5m across. Other similar features exist towards the north-east end of the ridge. These putative buildings may simply be the result of glacial activity although the fact that there are several, similar features within a small area might suggest otherwise.

## CONCLUSIONS

Nothing of archaeological interest was uncovered within the 600m of cable trench that was the subject of the watching brief, only geological features which attested to a prolonged period of waterlogged conditions across much of the area during post-glacial times. However, the presence of several examples of rock carvings and the nearby burial cairn are clear indications of activity in the late Neolithic and/or Early Bronze Age. Although these monuments do not provide definite evidence of early settlement at Finchairn, they are surely indications of prehistoric habitation within a reasonable distance of it.

The field through which the cable trench was cut appears to have been prone to waterlogging for millennia and it seems reasonable to expect houses to have been built on higher, better drained land. A good candidate could be the long ridge of bedrock where the cup-markings of Site 1 are located. The remains of the building at Site A seem to indicate as much although the outline of this structure suggests that it is of post-medieval rather than prehistoric date. Perhaps a better candidate for a prehistoric structure is Site B which could well be the remains of a circular hut. Indeed, it is quite possible that this is not the only such structure on the ridge.

It was not possible to investigate these putative monuments in any detail during the watching brief and it can only be suggested that a more thorough examination would be desirable at some stage.

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**PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE**

- 1 Laying the cable and backfilling the trench at the north-east end of the monitoring area. Viewed from the south-west
- 2 The trench during excavation, looking to the south-west from NM 90737 04346
- 3 View to the north-east from at a gate at NM 90723 04341. The cable is being laid on a bed of sand at the base of the trench
- 4 View to the south-west from the gate at NM 90723 04341. In the foreground the trench has been backfilled
- 5 View to the north-east along the trench from NM 90655 04285
- 6 View to the north-east from NM 90624 04261. On the right is the track leading to the former Shepherd's Cottage
- 7-10 General shots to the east and south from near the former Shepherd's Cottage
- 11 View to the south-west along the trench where it dog-legs at NM 90571 04221
- 12 View to the north-east from NM 90516 04181
- 13 One of the drainage channels crossed
- 14 View to north-east from NM 90446 04123
- 15 View to north-east from NM 90401 04098
- 16 Lens of cobbles in the peat at NM 90392 04092, viewed from the south
- 17-18 The field at the south-west end of the monitoring area, viewed from the north-east
- 19 Trenching across boggy ground near the west terminus of the trench, viewed from the east
- 20 View to the east along the trench from NM 90310 04083
- 21 View to the north-east from the terminus of the trench, at NM 90260 04069
- 22 View to the east from the terminus of the trench, at NM 90260 04069
- 23 View to the east along the trench from its terminus
- 24 View along the bedrock ridge from the north-east
- 25 View along the bedrock ridge from the south-west
- 26 Possible hut circle at NM 90618 04295, viewed from the north
- 27 Rectangular structure at NM 90551 04231 viewed from the south-west
- 28 The east corner of the structure at NM 90551 04231, viewed from the west
- 29-30 Rectangular structure at NM 90551 04231 viewed from the south-west
- 31 The level area to the west of the ridge, viewed from the north-east