

# Scotia Archaeology

REPORT  
TO  
MÓR HYDRO LTD  
AND  
MR ANGUS DOUGLAS

ALLT GRUINICHE  
HYDRO-ELECTRIC SCHEME  
BRIDGE OF AWE, ARGYLL

Archaeological Watching Briefs  
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## INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of archaeological watching briefs undertaken along sections of the route of a proposed new hydro-electric scheme on the Allt Gruiniche near Bridge of Awe, Taynuilt, Argyll.

Argyll & Bute Council had granted Mór Hydro Ltd and Mr Angus Douglas planning consent (Planning Application Reference 12/0262/PP) to construct the hydro-electric scheme subject to certain conditions, one of them being to have excavations at specific parts of the route monitored archaeologically. Scotia Archaeology was commissioned to undertake this work which was preceded by the production of a method statement setting out proposals based on conditions laid down by the council on the recommendation of the West of Scotland Archaeology Service (WoSAS), its archaeological advisory body. The method statement described a programme of works whose implementation was intended to mitigate any actions that might damage the surviving archaeological record during the proposed development. Its contents were agreed by WoSAS and approved by the planning authority before work commenced on site.

## THE SITE

The intake for the scheme is located at an existing dam on the Allt Gruiniche, at approximately NN 03840 29630, and the power house will be sited adjacent to an unnamed burn, at approximately NN 03442 29733, some 400m to the west. The route of the penstock runs down the steeply sloping east side of the valley of the River Awe, much of which is covered with commercial forestry plantation.

A new access track will run southwards from the power house, meeting the A85 trunk road at approximately NN 03395 29610, directly opposite the Crunachy Caravan and Camping Site. In 2008 Argyll Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation in advance of the proposed construction of several houses in a level field to the immediate south-east of the caravan park, in an area centred on NN 03400 29500. Within that area, close to the River Awe, were found the substantial remains of a prehistoric (probably Bronze Age) cemetery. The evaluation was followed in 2011 by a watching brief during soil-stripping for one of the house plots.

Thus far, 17 pits have been excavated, most of them yielding some evidence of cremations, including burnt bone and charcoal. Similar materials were also retrieved from unstratified deposits elsewhere around the site. No trace of an encircling ditch or bank was found and it is possible that this dispersed cremation cemetery had neither. Alternatively, the cemetery may have extended beyond its exposed limits and the remains of a boundary may lie some distance away from the area already investigated.

The level ground upon which the cemetery is located extends along the route of the access track for the new development as far as the site of the power house. From that point the ground rises steeply along the penstock.

Another feature of historical significance within the development area is the 18th-century Dalmally to Bonawe military road which the penstock crosses at NN 03602 29753. This road formed part of a network of communications and fortifications built by the Hanoverian government following the unsuccessful Jacobite uprising of 1715. These roads survive in

various states of repair, while many stretches have been subsumed by later roads or reused as farm tracks and forestry roads.

The military roads were intended to be a standard 16ft (5m) wide although this was reduced to 10ft (3m) where they crossed difficult terrain. They were meant to comprise a base of large boulders overlain by smaller stones and surfaced with gravel although this ideal plan was not always fully implemented, as has been shown by excavation (Lewis 2009).

## **THE WATCHING BRIEFS**

Watching briefs were required during excavations at two areas of this development: along the line of the access track between the A85 and the power house; and where the penstock crosses the military road. In each case trenching was undertaken using a 13-tonne, tracked mechanical excavator operated by Jones Brothers, the main contractors.

### **The military road**

A watching brief was kept on 10 July 2014 when the pipe trench was cut across the military road at NN 03602 29753. Originally, the crossing point was intended to be a short distance to the south, where the Allt Gruiniche has been ducted beneath the road, but for operational reasons its location was moved slightly. The road runs roughly north/south where the penstock crosses it, the trench cutting it in an approximate east/west direction. The ground is very steep in this area and, for reasons of safety, the machine had to sit on the road, rather than be positioned in line with the pipe trench.

Unfortunately, little of the 18th-century military road survived at this point. Erosion appears to have removed most of its original structure although clearly it has been repaired on more than one occasion, presumably for farm and forestry traffic. The only original material to survive was at the base of the road and comprised large boulders between which silt had percolated from above. In places there was little to distinguish this layer from the underlying glacial till. There were no drains, culverts or any other ancillary features in evidence at this location.

### **The new access track**

A new track from the A85 trunk road to the power house will allow access for inspection and maintenance of the building and its contents. The initial stage of construction required the removal of vegetation and topsoil from the entire track, following which a membrane will be laid and metalling deposited over it. Topsoil stripping was undertaken on 1 August 2014 on a day characterised by predominantly dry weather with occasional showers.

The trench ran from the edge of the A85 road, at NN 03395 29610, to the site of the power house, at NN 03442 29733, its overall length being some 180m. It ran north-eastwards from the A85, turning 90 degrees to the north-west roughly midway along its length. The trench was approximately 4m wide, its east leg running in a corridor between a coniferous forestry plantation on its west and a pasture field bounded by a post and wire fence on its east. The corridor through which the north arm ran was bounded on both sides by forestry.

The trench was widened to 17m where the track meets the A85, at which point the ground level had been raised for the road's construction. Excavation in this area removed 0.3m of

topsoil which contained modern materials such as plastic and large pieces of tarmac, the latter presumably from the construction or repair of the nearby road. Along the rest of the trench excavation varied in depth from 0.2m to 0.4m although the underlying glacial till was rarely uncovered. The only times when the subsoil was fully exposed was where large tree roots had to be removed, this occurring several times along the east arm of the trench. Along most of the trench the till comprised rounded boulders although where it dog-legged, around NN 03460 29690, the boulders were overlain by a thick deposit of pink clay, presumably lacustrine in origin.

The topsoil consisted of pale brown loam with a high clay fraction from which no pre-modern artefacts were retrieved. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered at any point in the trench.

## CONCLUSIONS

Nothing of archaeological interest was uncovered during excavations for the new access track. However, trenching did not remove all the topsoil from the trench, other than during the extraction of a few tree stumps, and it is possible that evidence relating to the nearby prehistoric cemetery may still survive in that area. Nevertheless, the construction of the access track will necessitate only laying a membrane and importing gravel onto it, thus in effect preserving whatever might lie beneath it.

Trenching across the military road yielded little to add to our knowledge of this structure, erosion and subsequent modern repairs having removed most of the original road.

## REFERENCE

Lewis, J 2009 *Military road, Kingshouse, Glencoe: watching brief, March 2009*, unpublished report to Scottish & Southern Energy.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

- 1 East section of the trench across the military road, viewed from the west
- 2 The trench across the military road, viewed from the west
- 3 The trench across the military road, viewed from the north
- 4 The removal of a tree stump in the access track
- 5 View to the south-west from the bend in the access track trench
- 6-7 Views to the south from the bend in the access track
- 8 The access track trench stripped of some topsoil, where the trench meets the A85, viewed from the north-east
- 9 View to the north-east along the east leg of the partially excavated access track
- 10-11 The east leg of the access track completed, viewed from the south-west
- 12 The north leg of the access track completed, viewed from the south-east
- 13 The north leg of the access track completed, viewed from the north-west