

Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN ENERGY**

**UNDERGROUND CABLE AT
DUN MHUILIG, ARDFERN
ARGYLL**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF
AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2015**

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INTRODUCTION

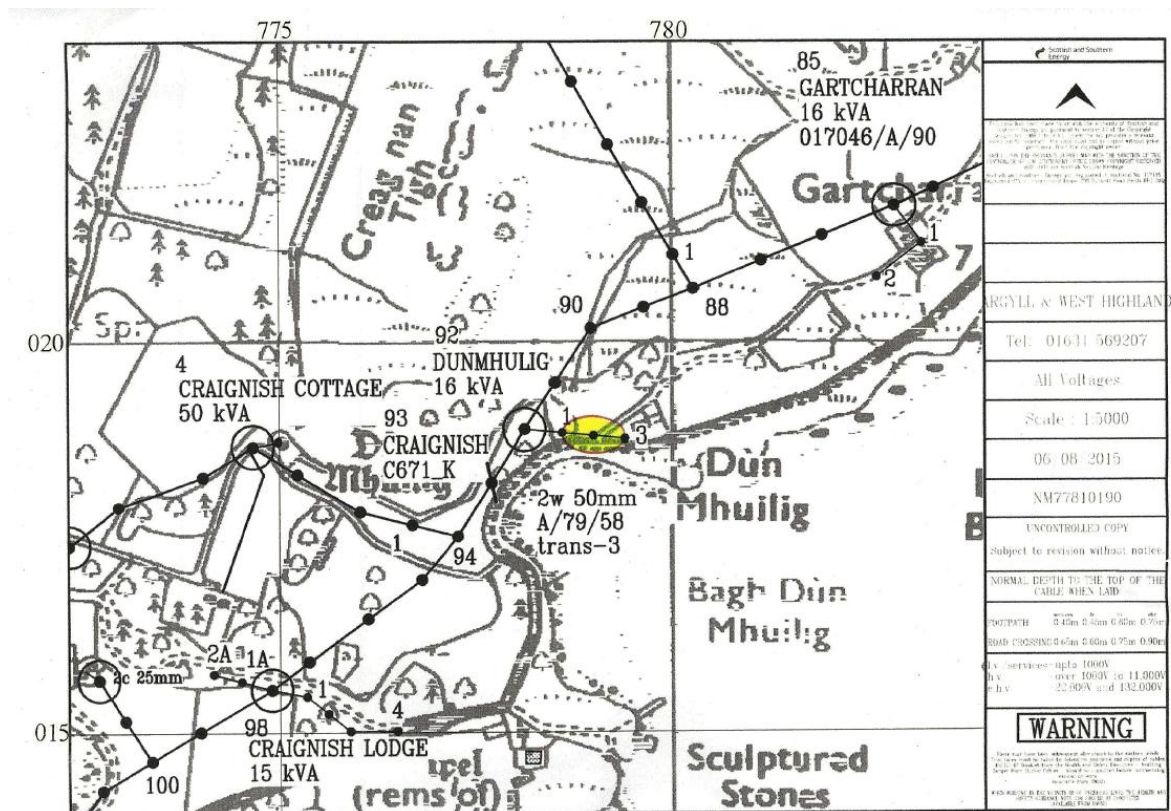
This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken on 31 August and 1 September 2015 for Scottish & Southern Energy plc (SSE) during the excavation of a trench to accommodate an underground power cable at Dun Mhuilig, Ardfern, Argyll.

The trench was close to several known sites of archaeological significance and, as a consequence, Argyll & Bute Council, on the advice of the West of Scotland Archaeology Service (WoSAS), imposed a condition whereby an archaeological watching brief be implemented during trenching.

THE SITE

The house named Dun Mhuilig stands near a sandy bay (Bagh Dun Mhuilig) on the west shore of Loch Craignish, a sea loch, 4km south-west of the village of Ardfern, some 12km north of Lochgilphead and 30km south of Oban. The house, owned by Mr Christopher Pigott, is currently undergoing extensive renovation, including the construction of a large extension, and new services will be fed into the building. These include a new power supply to run below ground replacing an extant overhead line.

The location of the development site is shown on the map below, based on one supplied by SSE.



Location map of site

LOCAL SITES AND MONUMENTS

Within a short distance of the development area are several sites and monuments of archaeological significance, ranging in date from the Bronze Age to the High Middle Ages. These monuments are listed here using numbers ascribed by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) and descriptions based on theirs.

NM70SE 14 Dun Mhuilig fort

At NM 7770 1088, on the summit of a rocky ridge some 270m west of the development site, stand the sparse remains of what appears to have been a late Iron Age galleried dun. It may have measured approximately 12m by 9m internally although its south and east sides are now completely demolished.

NM70SE 3 Saint Maelrubha's Chapel

The remains of Saint Maelrubha's chapel, believed to date from the early 13th century but later designated Craignish Old Parish Church, stand at NM 77826 01480, near the south end of Bagh Dun Mhuilig and some 500m from the site of the watching brief. Contained within the roofless building are several grave slabs of late medieval age.

NM70SE 19 Findspot

In 1927 part of a bronze spearhead and a rectangular, socketed bronze axe were discovered during gravel extraction near the Old Parish Church. The vague grid reference of NM 778 016 has been ascribed to the discovery of these artefacts which date to the Late Bronze Age.

NM70SE 20 Cists

Three short cists, one containing a food vessel, were uncovered during gravel extraction in 1936 near the Old Parish Church, again at approximately NM 778 016. Tradition states that further cists were uncovered although the record is incomplete.

NM70SE 22 Cross base

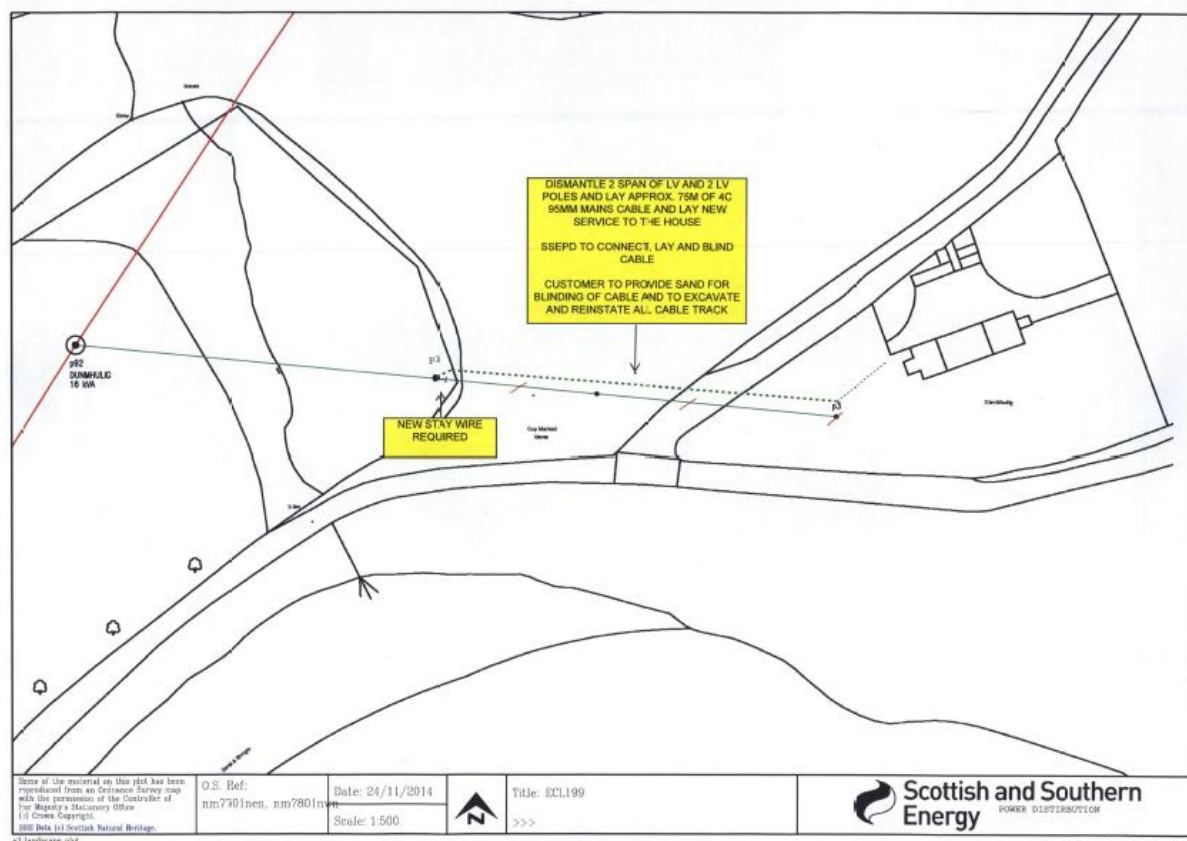
Approximately 60m west of the house of Dun Mhuilig, at NM 7790 0189, is a flat stone of local gneiss with a central socket, which is believed to have housed an upright cross.

NM70SE 25 Cup-marked rock

Some 70m west of the house, at NM 7789 0189, is a boulder bearing eight plain cup-marks, the largest of which lies at the centre of the stone.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

The overhead line to Dun Mhuilig comprises a short spur from a low voltage line running north-east/south-west which follows the shore of Loch Craignish. These lines are shown on the map above while the spur leading to Dun Mhuilig and an indicative route for the underground cable trench (as a broken green line) are shown on the SSE plan below. Two spans of the overhead line are to be removed and replaced with the underground cable.



Plan of overhead line and underground cable trench

The watching brief was undertaken by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology during warm, dry, mainly sunny conditions. Trenching was carried out using a 1.7-tonne mechanical excavator although occasionally a 7-tonne machine had to be employed to cut through bedrock towards the east end of the trench (see below). Sloan Builders Ltd, who are responsible for the house renovation excavated the trench although SSE are to lay the cable within it.

Monitoring was maintained only as far as the access road; beyond it the ground has been disturbed on previous occasions with the result that any archaeological record that might have existed there has been destroyed.

The trench was 0.7m wide and 0.7m deep over most of its 70m length although it was more than 1m deep towards its east end to accommodate a drain that will run along the east side of the access road. Excavation began at Pole 1 which stands to the immediate west of a drystone wall marking the boundary between a grassy field to its west and deciduous woodland, predominantly beech, to its east.

The trench described a gradual arc running slightly north of a straight line to avoid large trees and outcrops of bedrock. Its route ran approximately 7m north of both the cross base and the cup-marked stone, neither of which was affected by the development. A live alkathene water pipe was thought to run down the slope near the field wall although the excavation exposed only a defunct asbestos one, suggesting that the extant water supply runs through the grassy field to the west rather than the wood.



West end of trench with Pole 1 in the distance



East end of trench showing Dun Mhuilig house beyond

Topsoil comprised 0.2-0.3m of dark brown, peaty loam with pebbles and boulders, some of them large. Along most of the trench it gave onto glacial till of grey clay and boulders although towards its east end topsoil lay directly on bedrock of Dalradian metamorphic rock. In places the rock was very friable while in others it was extremely hard and proved difficult to move.

No features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered in the trench and no artefacts of any age retrieved from it. An examination of the boulders removed with the topsoil revealed that none had any cup-marks or any other rock art on its surfaces.

The opportunity was taken during this exercise to re-examine the cross base and the cup-marked stone; their descriptions are given below. Both features were cleared of moss and other vegetation. Unfortunately, the dense canopy within the woodland did not allow grid references any more accurate than eight figures to be taken.

Cross base

The cross base measures 960mm square and has split towards its south side. Its central socket measures 370mm by 170mm and 170mm deep. The stone may have held a roadside cross, perhaps associated with a nearby boat mooring point, or it may not now be in its original, intended position, having been moved from the nearby medieval church.



The cross base in its current setting, viewed from the north

Cup-marked rock

The rounded nature of the cup-marked rock suggests that it was probably deposited by glacial action rather than having fallen from the nearby cliffs in more recent times. It is perhaps

curious that larger, more impressive, boulders in the vicinity of this stone exhibit no such markings.



Cup-marked rock, viewed from the south

CONCLUSIONS

Although nothing of archaeological interest was uncovered with the cable trench, the Bronze Age artefacts and burials discovered during quarrying and the presence of the cup-marked boulder point to the area around Bagh Dun Mhuilig having been occupied in prehistory. Similarly, the existence of Saint Maelrubha's Chapel on the bay suggests that there may have been a medieval settlement nearby.