

Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT
TO
DICKINS HYDRO RESOURCES**

**FORDIE HYDRO,
COMRIE, PERTSHIRE**

**Watching Brief
July 2016**

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INTRODUCTION

Perth & Kinross Council has granted planning permission for the construction of a hydro-electric scheme at Fordie, near Comrie, Perthshire (planning consent number 15/02142/FLL) although several conditions were attached including one to protect sites of archaeological and historical significance that have been identified in the vicinity of the proposed scheme.

In November 2014 John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology undertook a desk study of archaeological sites and a subsequent walk-over survey of the route to identify any relevant sites within it (Lewis 2014). This work was carried out at the request of MNV Consulting Limited in response to a condition laid down by the council on the advice of its archaeological advisors, Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust (PKHT).

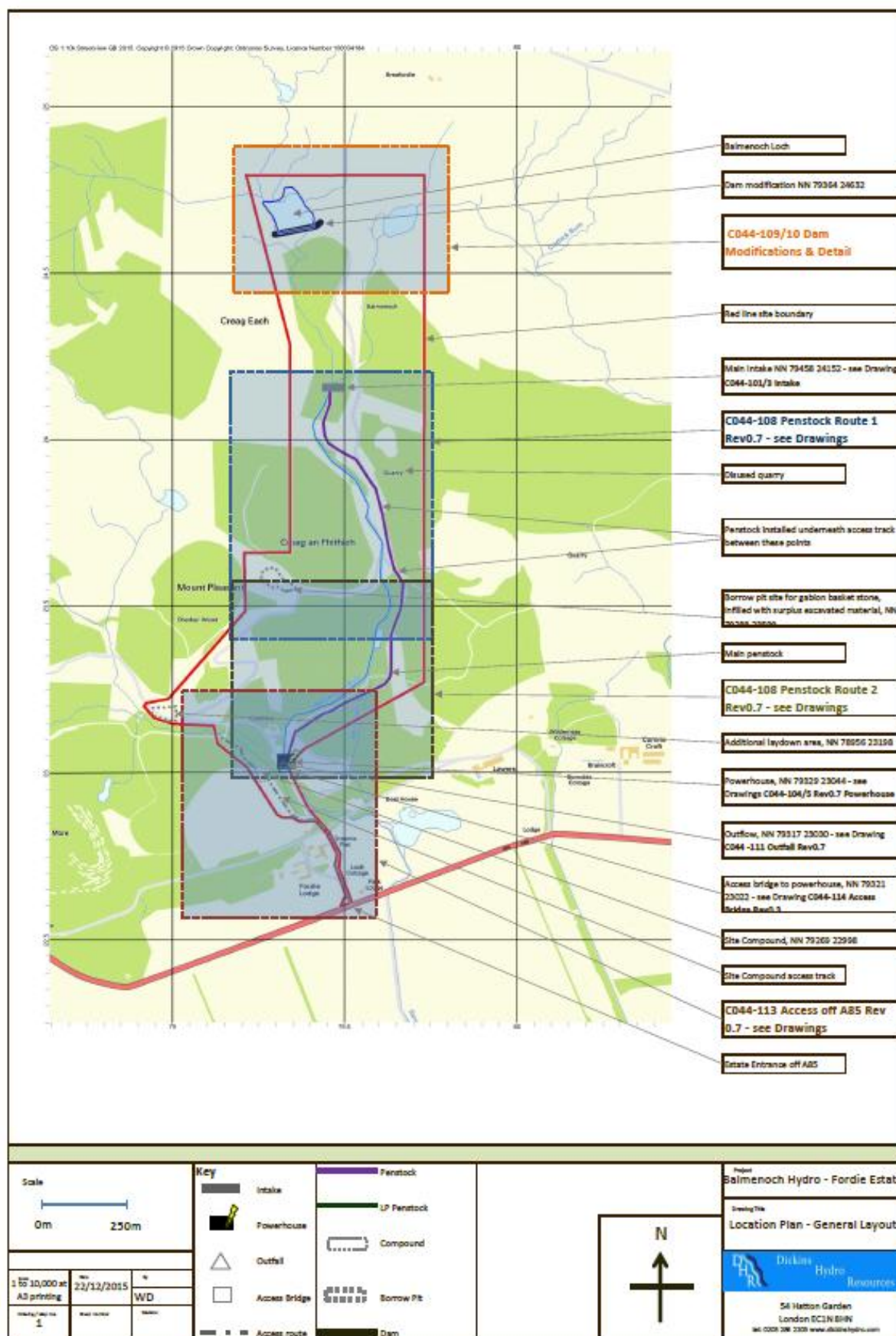
Thereafter, a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was forwarded to PKHT outlining measures that should be taken to protect archaeological sites and to mitigate any actions that might affect the archaeological record. The WSI was approved by PKHT before site work commenced.

THE SITE

The penstock is to be located 2km north of Fordie Lodge and some 3km north-east of Comrie. At the time of the survey, the intake point was to be at approximately NN 7940 2460, at a dam on the south shore of an artificial loch, close to the source of the Balmenoch Burn. However, since that time it has been decided to move the intake some 500m further south on the burn, at NN 79458 24152.

From there the pipeline will run southwards, roughly parallel with the burn, as far as a powerhouse to be sited at NN 79329 23044. Thereafter, the outfall from the powerhouse will run back into the Balmenoch Burn.

A map, supplied by Dickins Hydro Resources Ltd and detailing the revised route, is shown overleaf.



Revised location plan of Fordie Hydro

EARLIER WORK

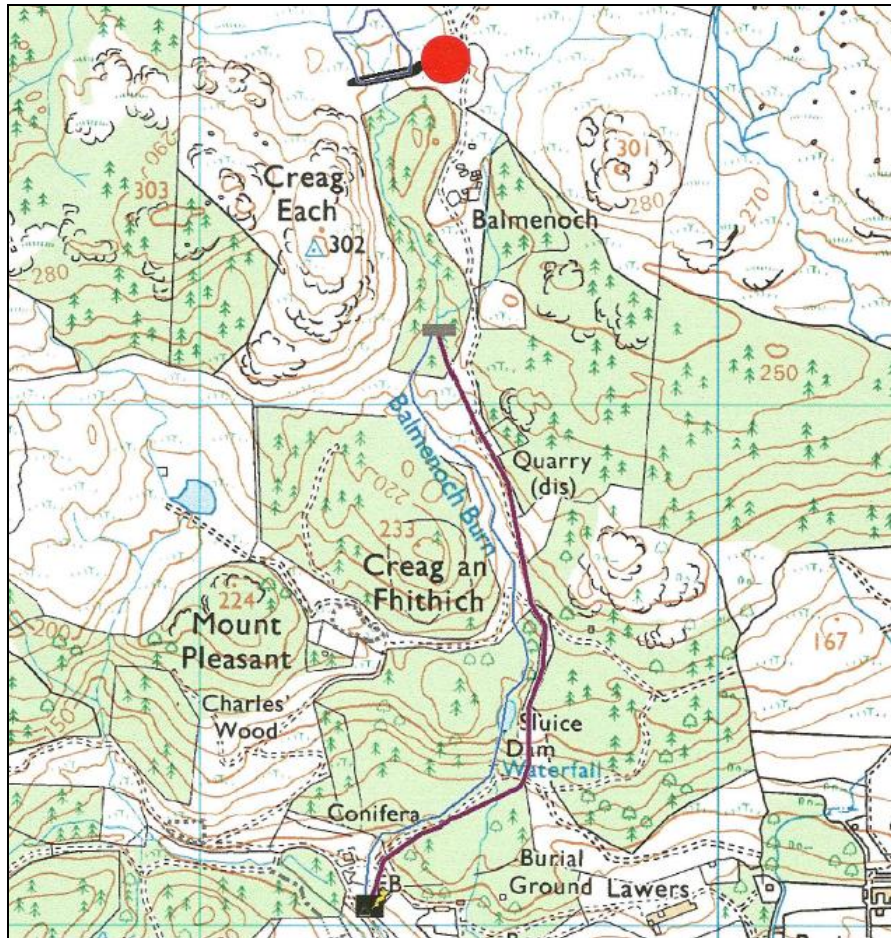
Two sites of archaeological significance were noted during the 2014 field survey. One was the remains of the pre-Improvement farmstead or township of Balmenoch (NN72SE 17), centred on approximately NN 7952 2441. Site numbers listed in this report are those allocated by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS)

Balmenoch survives as the remains of ten buildings, a corn-drying kiln and several small enclosures, defined by partially turf-covered walls some 0.4m high. These structures are depicted on the first edition Ordnance Survey (OS) 25-inch map published in 1866 (see below). The buildings vary in size from 18.0m by 3.0m to 5.0m by 2.0m. Seven unroofed buildings and two enclosures are shown on the current edition of the OS 1:10000 map. At the time of the survey these structures were covered with bracken and barely visible.



Extract from the first edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map showing the area of investigation before the Balmenoch Burn was dammed

Some 250m north of Balmenoch and a short distance east of the original intended intake point the survey identified a hitherto unrecorded site of some considerable significance. It comprises what appears to be a prehistoric barrow cemetery containing six or perhaps seven burials centred on approximately NN 7946 2463. RCAHMS has allocated the site number NN72SE 252 to the cemetery whose location is shown on the map below.



Site map, showing the course of the penstock; the location of the cemetery is shown as a red dot

THE CEMETERY

1 NN 79449 24680

A stony mound covered with grass and measuring 7m north/south by 3m wide and 0.5m high.

2 NN 79467 24645

A grass-covered mound measuring 5m north/south by 3.4m east/west and 0.6m high.

3 NN 79455 24647

Grave 3 is smaller than the other mounds and measures 2.4m north/south by 1.4m north/south and 0.3m high. Its south end has been penetrated by rabbits where some stones have been exposed although most of this feature is grass-covered.



*The barrow cemetery and loch viewed from the east.
Graves 4, 5 and 6, all covered with bracken, can be seen on the left*



Grave 2 viewed from the north-west



Grave 3 viewed from the south with Grave 1 beyond

4 NN 79423 24615

A mound measuring 7m north/south by 3.2m wide and mostly covered with grass and bracken although some stones are visible at its south end. It is 0.5m high on its west side but 1m high on its east side where the ground falls away slightly.



Grave 4 viewed from the west with Grave 6 beyond

5 NN 79438 24604

A short distance from a fence at the north limit of a coniferous forestry plantation, this mound is covered with grass and bracken although several stones are visible. It measures 5.5m east/west by 3.7m north/south and 0.5m high.

6 NN 79462 24612

This mound, which is mostly covered with grass, measures 5m north/south by 2.8m wide and 0.5m high.

7 NN 79519 24620

Located on the east side of an estate road, this is perhaps the least convincing of these features as a burial mound. It might constitute debris resulting from the construction of the adjacent road although equally it could represent the remains of a burial mound measuring 7m north/south by 3m east/west.

The full catalogue of photographs is contained within the site archive.

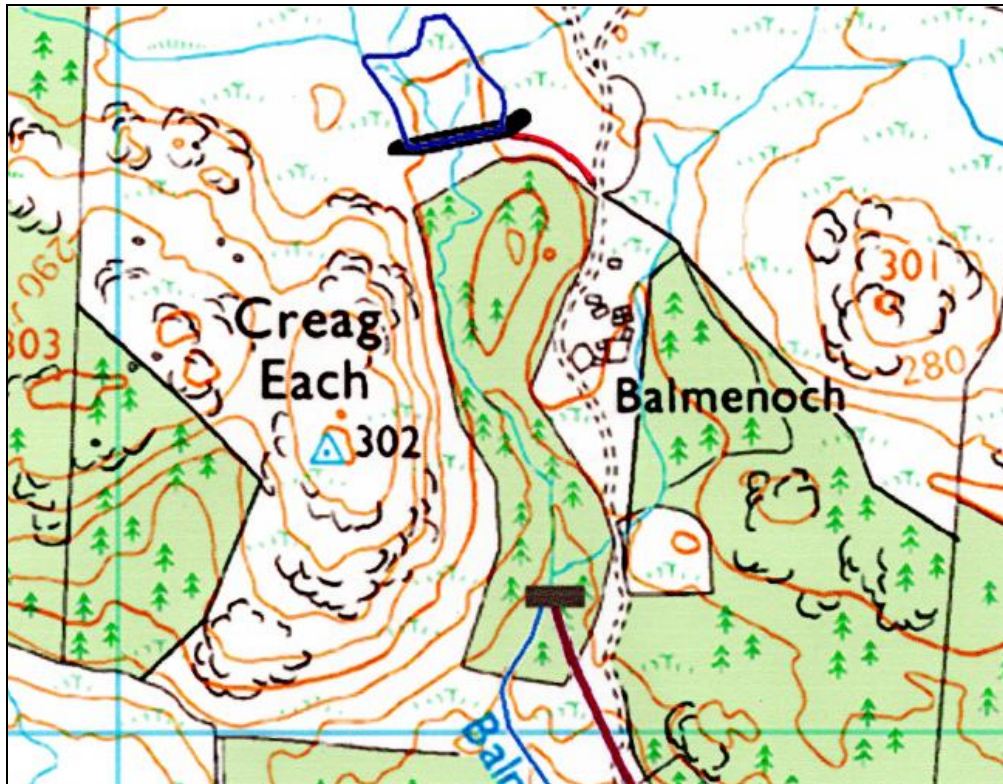
PROTECTION OF SITES

Although the intake will now be well away from the cemetery, some work will still be necessary at the dam on the south side of the nearby loch to control the flow along the Balmenoch Burn. As a consequence, vehicular traffic will need to cross the area containing the burials and also pass close by the remains of Balmenoch. The threat to the latter is minimal because an existing gravel road already runs along the edge of the ruined settlement. Nevertheless, as a precautionary measure, the area was taped off to ensure that all traffic accessing the area is aware of the site.

The putative burials identified during the walk-over survey were protected by post and wire fences extending at least 5m beyond each feature. The positions of the fences were marked out by the developer's contractor, A B Gairns of Comrie, under the supervision of the archaeological contractor. In some cases two or more graves were surrounded by a single fence. As an additional protection, orange barrier fencing was added to aid visual recognition of the graves, most of them being covered with bracken which was quite high when the fences were being erected.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

On 15 July 2016, a mainly wet day, a watching brief was undertaken by John Lewis during soil-stripping in advance of the construction of a temporary access road to the dam. The road trench ran in an arc from the existing estate road, at NN 79510 24573, to the point where the Balmenoch Burn debouches from the loch, at NN 79398 24628 (see map overleaf). Its overall length was some 140m.



Map showing the location of the access road trench represented by a red line running between the existing road and the dam

Soil-stripping was carried out using a smooth-edged ditching bucket on a tracked excavator. The trench measured 3.5-4.0m wide and cut through lush grass and, over most of its length, 0.2m of mid- to dark brown loam containing some stones. As the trench approached the dam the topsoil was barely 0.1m deep. Topsoil gave onto glacial till of orange sand, gravel, pebbles and boulders, many of which lay just below the ground surface.

No features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered within the trench and the only artefact retrieved from it was a fragment of plastic bag.

Following the removal of topsoil, aggregate will be laid to produce the temporary road.

CONCLUSIONS

Although nothing of interest was found in the trench, it is clear that the area between the estate road and the dam represents an archaeological landscape of potential significance.

The shallow depth of topsoil and the profusion of large boulders just below the surface suggest that this area has not been ploughed to any appreciable depth which, in turn, makes it unlikely that the mounds identified during the survey are the result of field clearance. This, together with their regular shapes, indicate that the mounds are most probably burial cairns.

REFERENCE

Lewis 2014 *Fordie Hydro, Comrie, Perthshire: walk-over survey, February 2014*. Report to MNV Consulting Limited.