

Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN
ELECTRICITY NETWORKS**

**POWER SUPPLY TO EE MAST
AT ARICHONAN,
TAYVALLICH, ARGYLL**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF
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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken in February 2018 close to the deserted township of Arichonan, near Tayvallich, Argyll for Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) during the excavation of a trench to accommodate a new power supply to an EE mast and another to an associated earth cable.

The area around Arichonan is rich in archaeological sites. They include the extensive remains of several deserted medieval townships stretching from Caol Scotnish, a narrow sea-loch, northwards to Loch Crinann. Arichonan, the largest and best-preserved of these is listed by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) as NR79SE 23 and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (monument number SAM5797). It is centred on NR 7740 9120 and includes numerous ruined buildings and enclosures. The extent of these structures can be seen from the photographs below.



The remains of Arichonan township, viewed from the north

Arichonan dates from around 1654 and clearly housed several families although by 1802, when the estate passed from the MacNeills to the Malcolms of Poltalloch, only four tenants remained. This number was reduced to three by 1848 when land clearance on the estate resulted in public disorder.

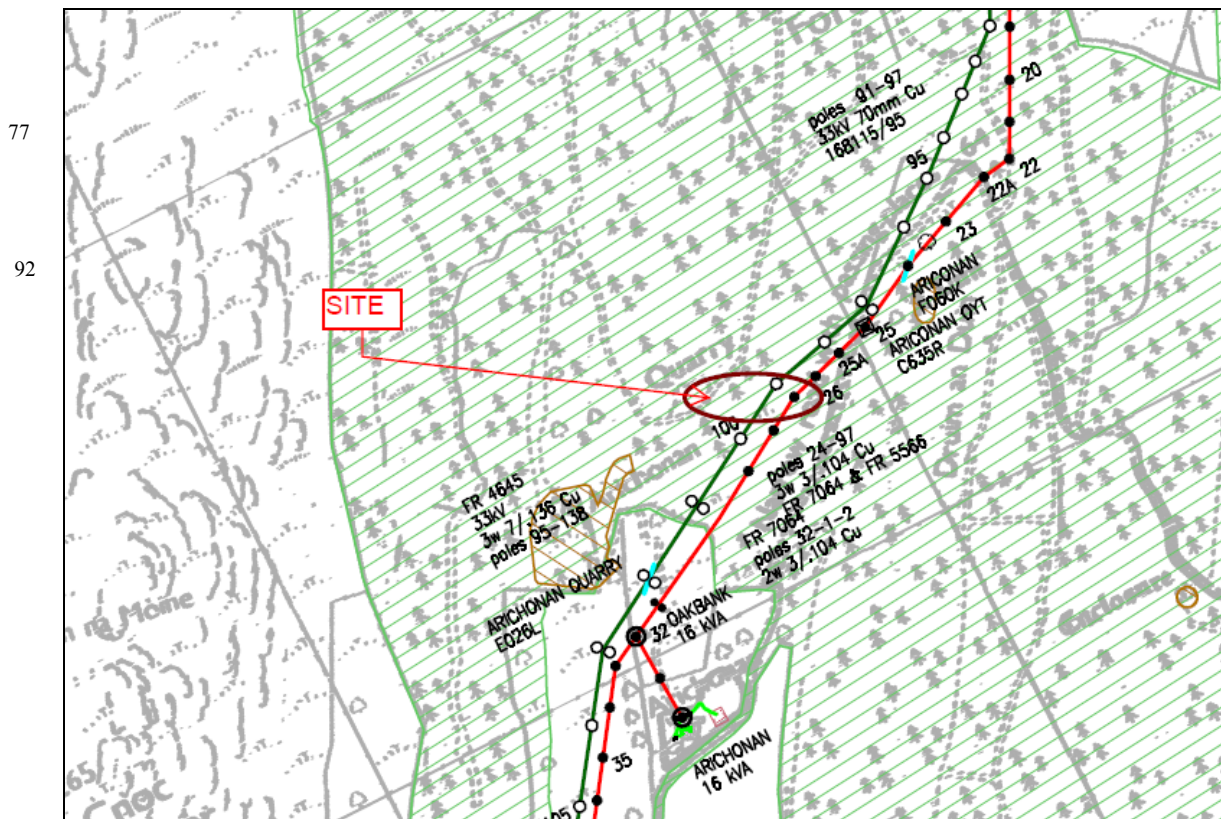
Another important site in the area is Druim an Duin (NR79SE 1; SAM2420), a late prehistoric fort at NR 7811 9130, some 700m east of the excavation.



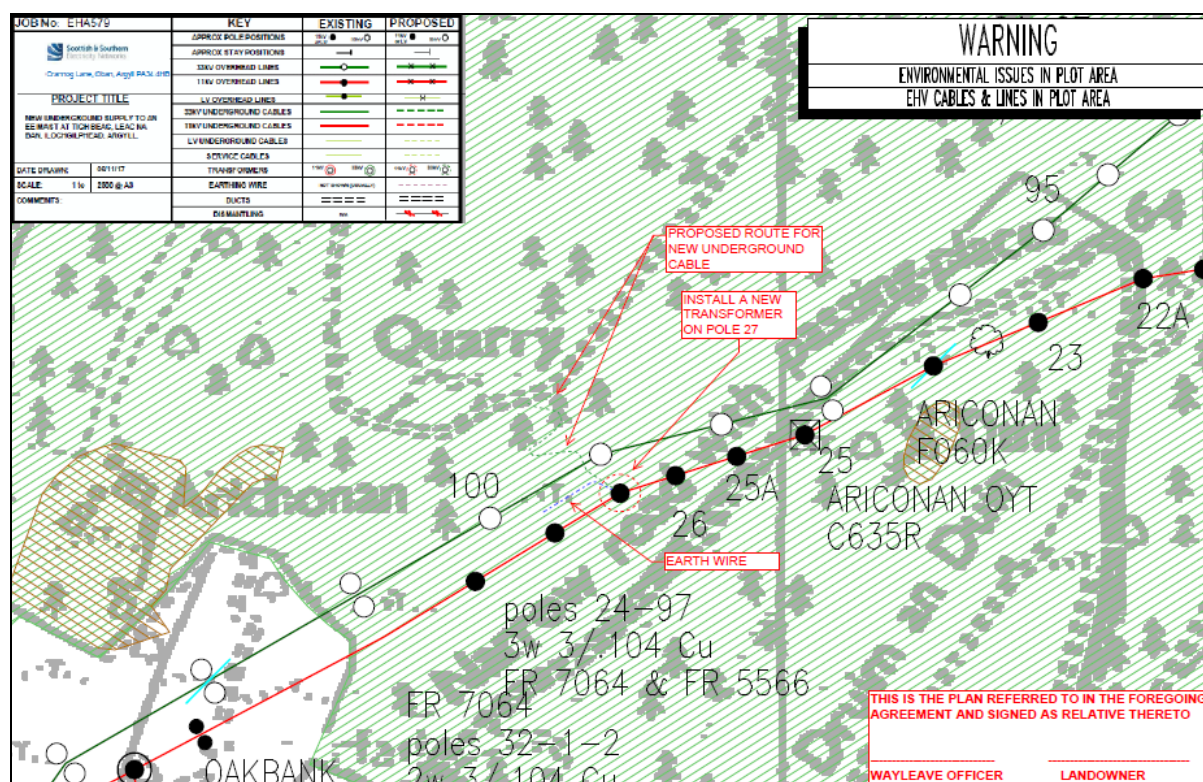
Arichonan, viewed from the east

THE SITE

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Location of the area of investigation



Routes of the trenches, the power line in green and the earth wire in blue

The site is located 500m east of Arichonan township, 5km north-east of the village of Tayvallich and some 10km west of Lochgilphead, Argyll. The trench for the new underground cable ran from NR 77878 91294, at Pole 27 on an 11kv overhead line adjacent to a 33kv line, westwards up the north-west side of a narrow valley to the EE mast, located at NR 77837 91329. Much of the route was circuitous because of the steepness of the slope.

Two earth wires also ran from Pole 27, one of them within the main cable trench, the other extending westwards in a separate trench for some 30m.

Much of the area around Arichonan is covered in mature commercial forestry, some of which had been felled in recent times. The ground through which the trenches were dug was covered mainly with bracken, which was dead at the time of the excavation, and with coarse grass and reeds near Pole 27 where the ground was partially waterlogged.

A short distance west of the pole, at the base of the slope at NR 77863 91310, was what may be a burial cairn. It was covered in bracken and moss and measured approximately 6m north/south by 5m wide and up to 1.5m high. Probing revealed that immediately beneath the vegetation it was very stony in nature. This feature could be of glacial origin although nothing of a similar nature was evident in the vicinity of the site which is defined very much by glacial activity.



Possible burial cairn, viewed from the east

THE WATCHING BRIEF

The watching brief was undertaken by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology on 20 and 21 February 2018 when the weather was predominantly dry and sunny. Trenching was carried out using a 3.5 tonne mechanical excavator supplied by D A MacDonald Contractors Limited of Lochgilphead.

In order to allow the cable to be run up the steep slope the machine had to excavate an access track which measured some 2m wide and up to 0.5m deep. A narrow cable trench was cut slightly deeper into the track, giving a maximum depth of excavation of 0.7m. Around the base of the slope and at its apex it was necessary to excavate only a narrow trench, 0.2-0.3m wide and 0.5m deep, the same dimensions as the earth wire trench.

Topsoil of mid- to dark brown, clayey loam varied in depth from 0.1m to 0.3m and contained many boulders, some of them very large, resulting from erosion of bedrock which was exposed in places on the sloping ground. The topsoil overlay glacial till of grey and yellow clay, gravel, boulders and shattered bedrock. In places undisturbed bedrock was exposed in the trenches. As the cable trench neared the EE mast, it cut through ground that had been disturbed during the construction of the mast.

Particular attention was paid around the base of the slope to ensure that no spoil fell onto the putative cairn which was some 10m from the new access track and cable trench.



The access track and cable trench on the slope. Pole 27, on the 11kv line, is on the extreme right of the photograph; the 33kv line is adjacent to it



The cable trench approaching the EE mast, viewed from the east

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

No trace of structures or features contemporary with Arichonan township were uncovered during this excavation and no indications that such a settlement existed in the near vicinity of the trenches. However, there does seem a reasonable possibility that the mound identified at the base of the slope is a burial cairn, the view directly down the valley to the sea loch Caol Scotnish perhaps supporting this theory.

As a consequence, any future ground-breaking activities in this area should take account of this feature.