

Scotia *Archaeology*

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN
ELECTRICITY NETWORKS**

**REFURBISHMENT OF
OVERHEAD POWER LINES
ON ISLAY**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEFS**

**DECEMBER 2018 &
FEBRUARY 2019**

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INTRODUCTION

This document describes the results of archaeological watching briefs undertaken during the refurbishment of overhead power lines on the west side of the Isle of Islay. The work was commissioned by Duncan McLean of the Wayleave Department of Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN).

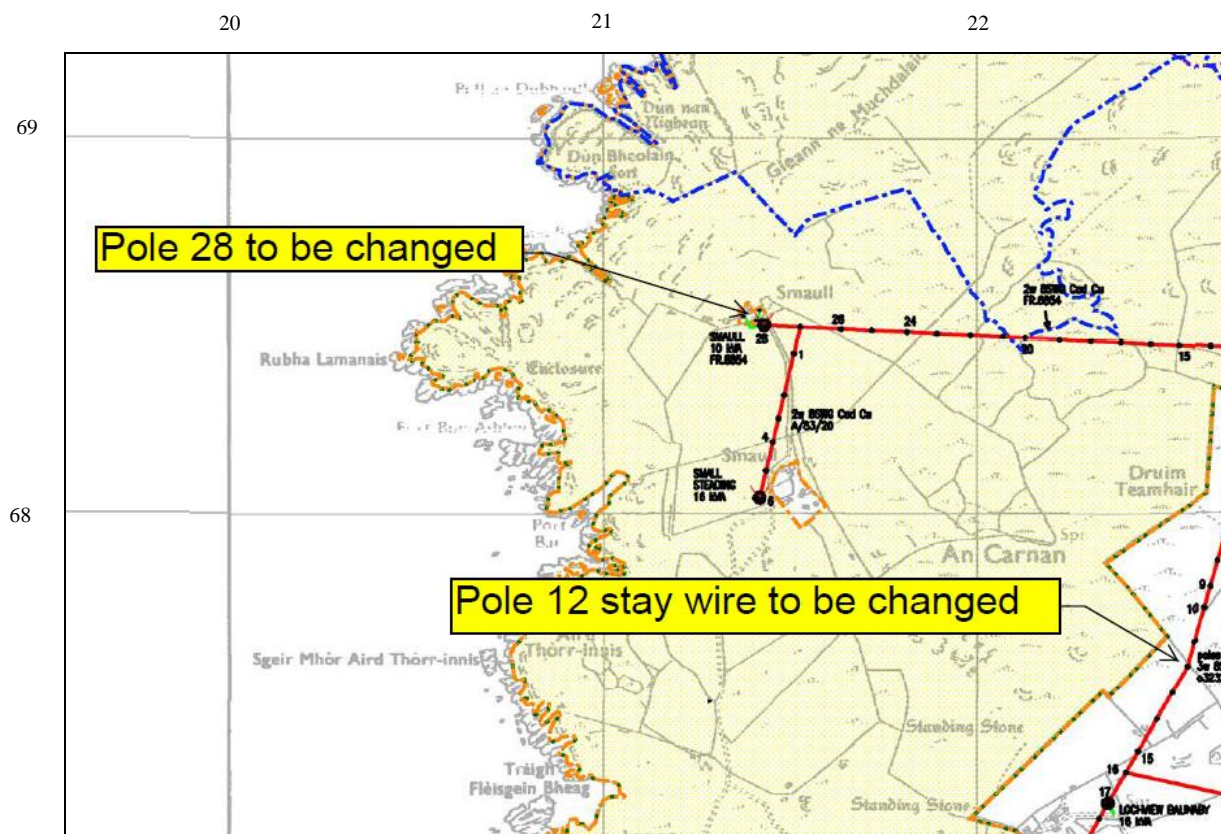
The excavation of three small trenches for replacement poles was monitored in December 2019 while watching briefs were carried out during trenching for earth wires for spark gaps at two locations in February 2019.

All trenching was undertaken by SSEN operatives based on Islay and the watching briefs undertaken by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology. All maps featured in this report were supplied by SSEN.

POLE TRENCHES

At the start of the project it was intended that a total of 15 poles would be replaced on various sections of overhead lines on the west side on the island although only three of them were sufficiently close to known archaeological sites to be subject to monitoring. The watching briefs were carried out on 5 December 2018 during very wet weather, trenching extending only as far as undisturbed subsoil. Thereafter, the trenches were backfilled and fully excavated at a later date when the poles themselves were replaced.

Pole 28 (Map 1)



Map 1, showing location of Pole 28 at Smuall

Pole 28 is located on a spur to Smaull Farm, at NR 21442 68502. Some 500m to its west, at NR 2095 6841, are the remains of a prehistoric hut circle (NR26NW 20) while a short distance further west are two pairs of orthostatic boulders (NR26NW 40 and NR26NW 41) at NR 2081 6842 and NR 2084 6849 respectively. These monuments are clear signs of a prehistoric presence near Smaull. In addition, several clearance cairns and other cultivation remains have been noted in the area.

The pole trench cut through coarse grass and 0.3m of dark brown, sandy loam which gave onto naturally-deposited orange sand, gravel and pebbles, nothing of archaeological significance being encountered.

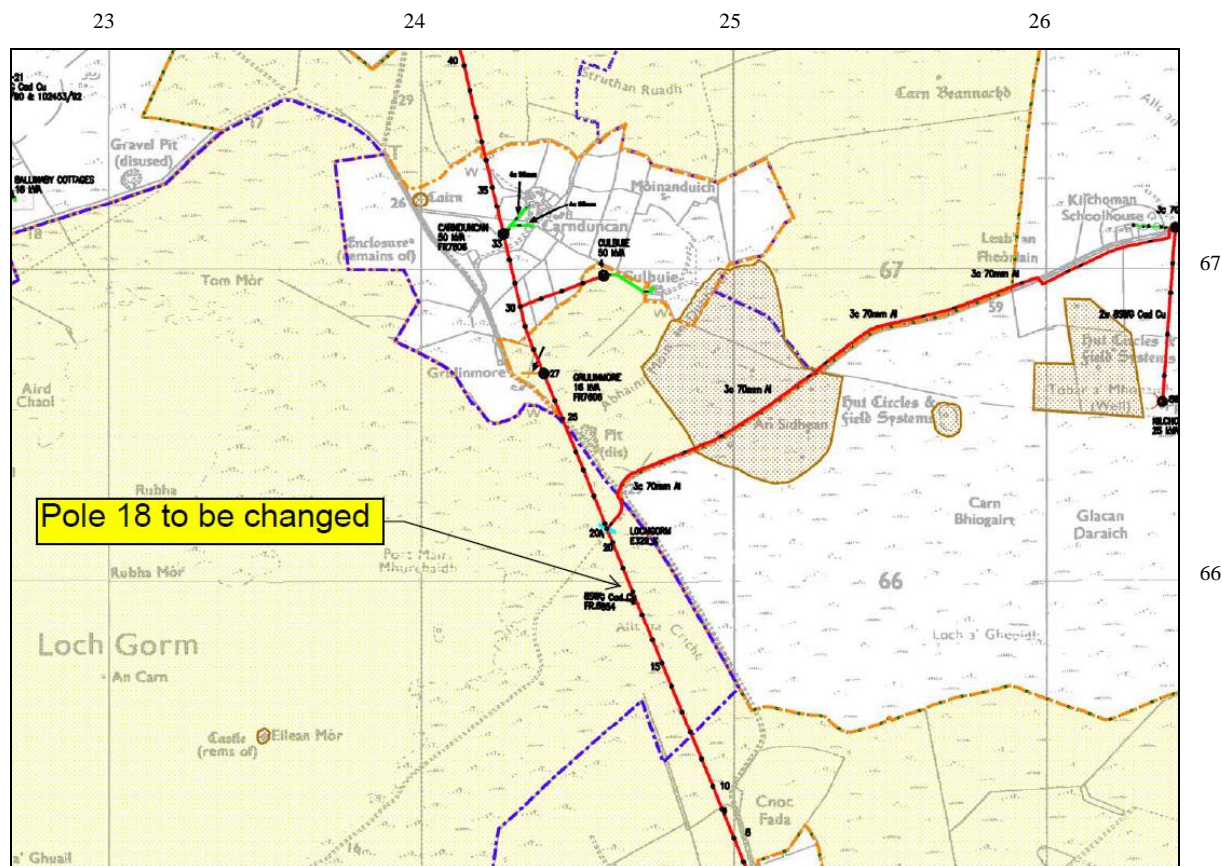


Trench for Pole 28, viewed from the north-east

Pole 18 (Map 2)

Pole 18 stands at NR 24703 65973 on an overhead line running north/south towards the west end of Islay. It sits in a waterlogged peat bog covered in coarse grass and heather. To the north-east of the pole are the remains of eight prehistoric hut circles together with a complex of field systems, at least some of which are presumed to be contemporary with the huts although some may be of more recent date.

This group of features comprise a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SM6127), known as An Sidhean and is divided into three blocks straddling the B8017 road between Culbuie and Kilchoman Schoolhouse. The map below shows the location of Pole 18 and the three blocks of the scheduled monument. The nearest and largest of these blocks (NR28NE 3) lies some 500m to the north-east of the pole.



Map 2, showing location of Pole 18 near An Sidhean

Trenching cut through vegetation and black peat to a depth of 0.5m at which point excavation was halted because the trench became totally waterlogged. Furthermore, it is thought likely that the pole would probably be replaced simply by lifting the extant one directly out of the ground and installing a new one in the resulting hole thus avoiding further excavation.

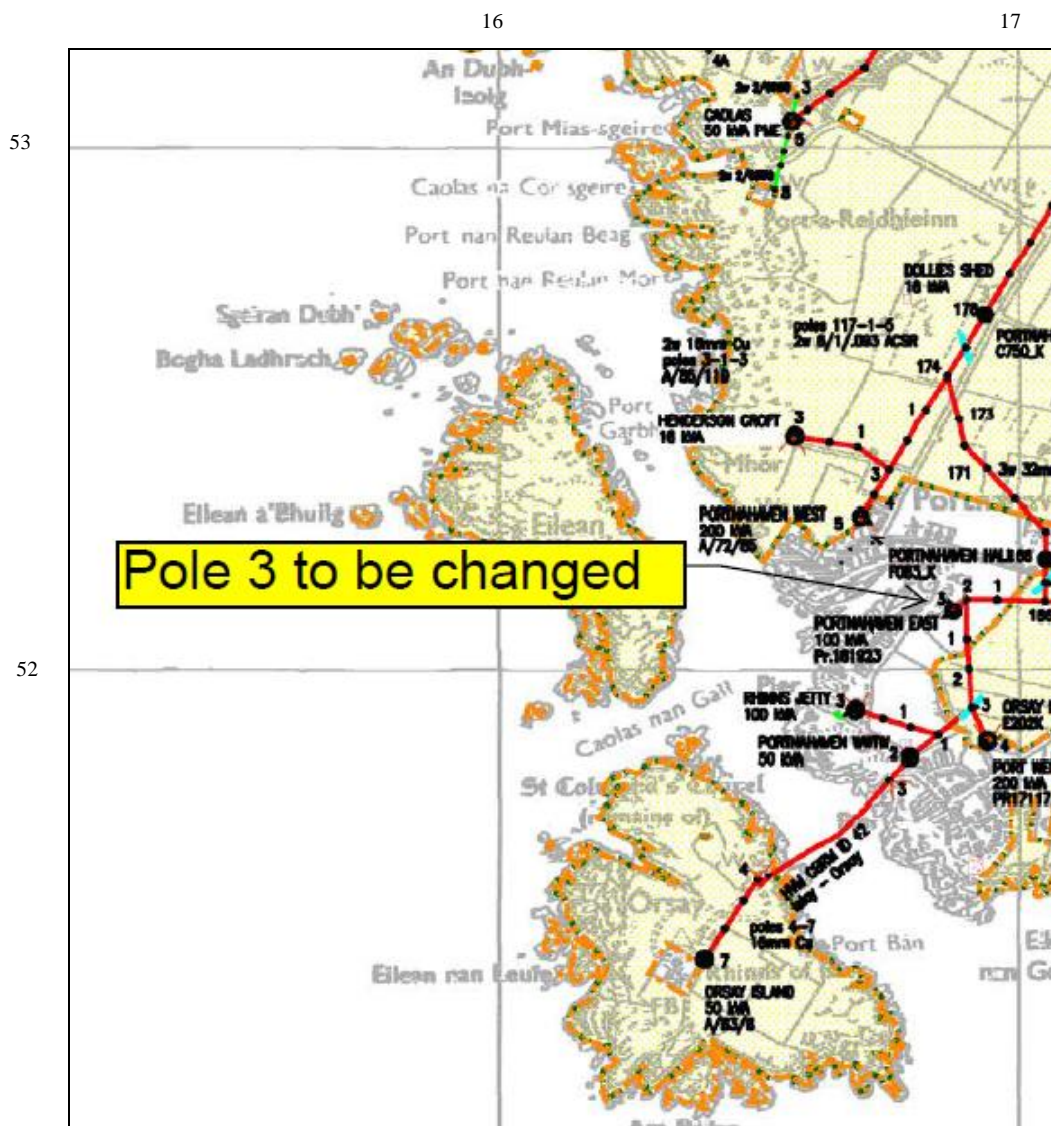
Pole 107

It was originally intended that Pole 107, on the main north/south line some 6km north of Portnahaven, was to be changed. This pole stands a short distance from a stone circle (NR15NE 1), a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SM3814) located at NR 1956 5697. However, it was decided later that this pole would not need to be replaced and, as a consequence, no excavation proved necessary at its location.

Pole 3 (Map 3)

Pole 3 stands at NR 16890 52104, in a pasture field on the west edge of the village of Portnahaven at the southern tip of the Rinns of Islay. It was realised latterly that the pole

change did not need to be monitored, there being no features of archaeological significance in its vicinity.



Map 3, showing location of Pole 3 at Portnahaven

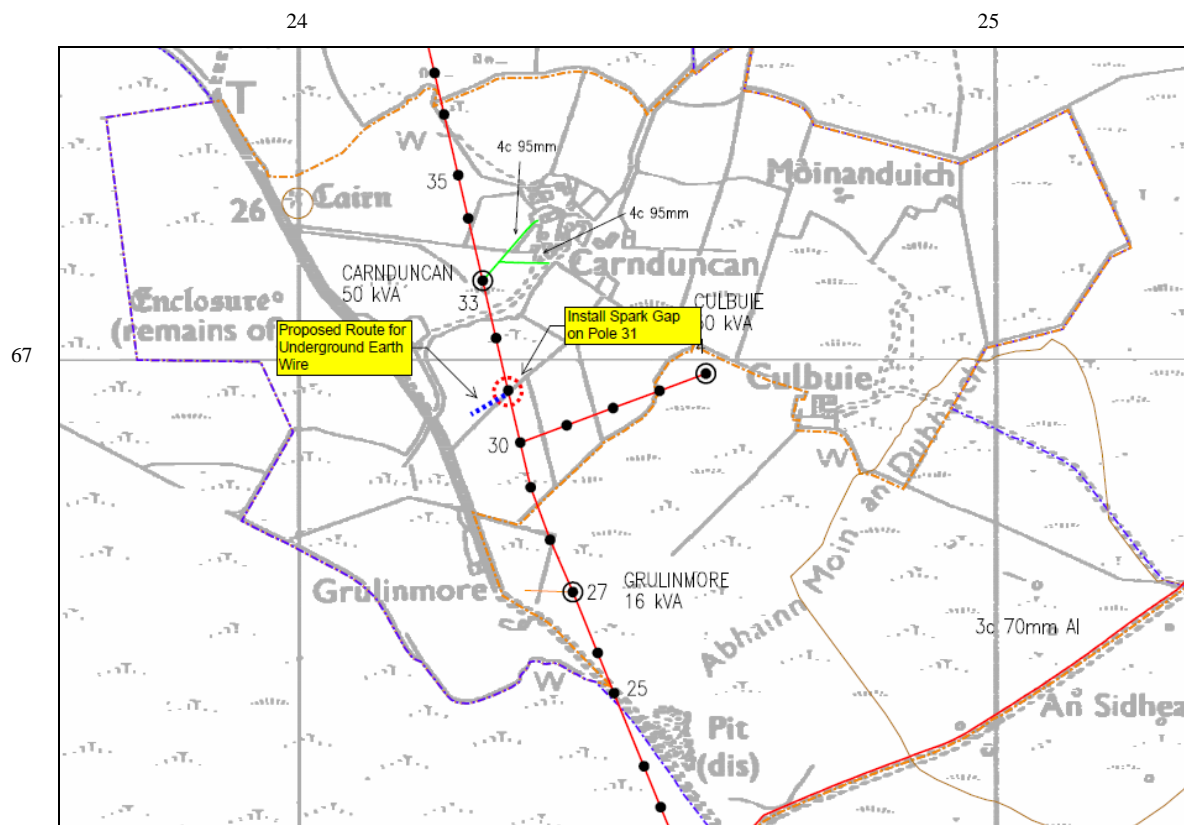
Nonetheless, a short record of its excavation is included here: removal of turf and 0.3m of brown loam revealed naturally deposited gravel and small pebbles, nothing of archaeological interest being exposed within the trench.

EARTH WIRE TRENCHES

Earth wire trenches are dug to accommodate copper wires designed to carry charge to earth when necessary, particularly during electrical storms. The copper wire extends upwards of 25m from a pole until electrical resistance is reduced to below 10 ohms. Two such trenches were excavated under archaeological monitoring, this work being carried out on 5 February 2019 at a time of extremely heavy rain and high winds.

Pole 31 (Map 4)

Pole 31 stands in a pasture field at NR 24321 66959, a short distance south of Carnduncan Farm on an overhead line that runs parallel with the B8018 road from Foreland to Sanaigmore.



Map 4, showing location of Pole 31 at Carnduncan

Some 400m north-west of the pole, on level ground at NR 2402 6721, stands a round burial cairn (NR26NW 12), a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SM6247). A short distance to its south, at NR 2396 6708, are the slight remains of a dun (NR26NW 21).

The trench, 0.4m wide and 0.4m deep, ran from Pole 31 southwards for approximately 40m (not to the south-west, as shown in the map above), cutting through 0.2m of red-brown loam and underlying glacial deposits of red clay, pebbles and boulders. No structures, features or deposits of archaeological significance were encountered in this trench.



Earth wire trench looking northwards to Pole 31

Pole 18 (Map 5)

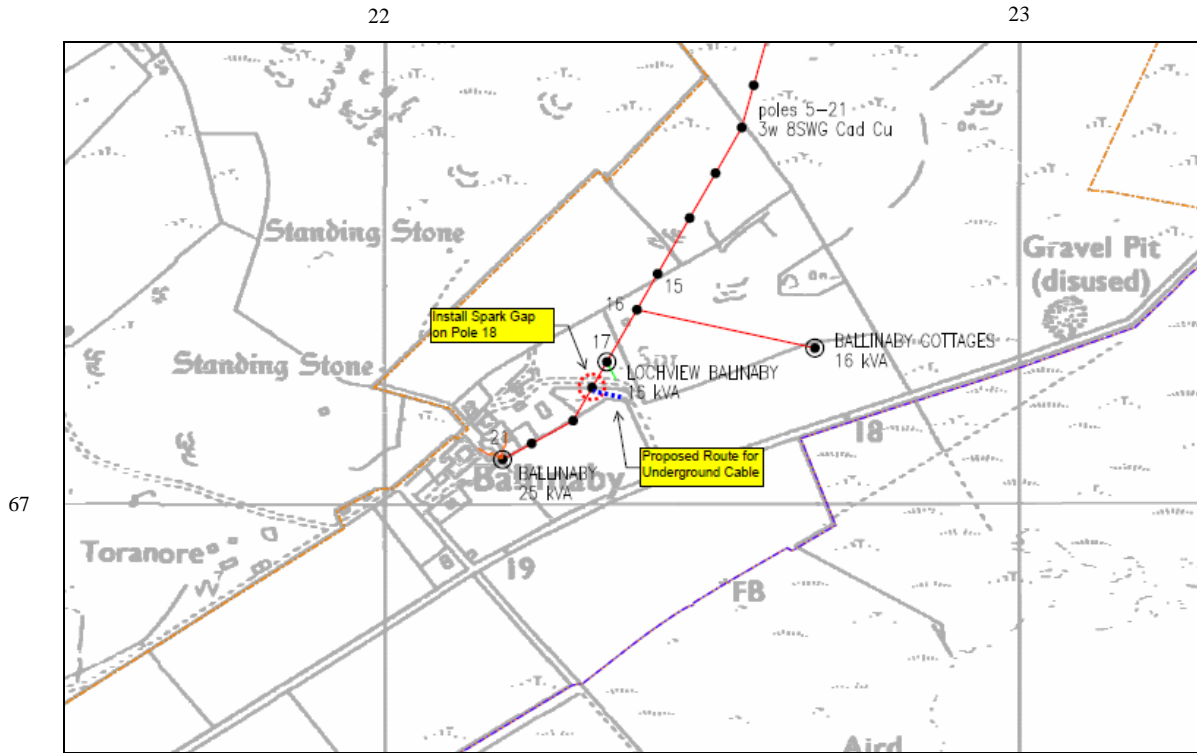
Pole 18 is situated on a spur on the eastern edge of the hamlet of Ballinaby in the north-west corner of Islay. The surrounding area is rich in archaeological remains of prehistoric and early Medieval dates.

Two Viking burials were discovered around NR 2181 6717, 500m west of Pole 18, when sand dunes were eroded in 1877. They comprise two adjacent graves dating to the 10th century, one containing the remains of a man, the other of a woman.

On the crest of a low ridge, 200m WNW of Ballinaby at NR 2199 6720, is a standing stone (NR26NW 13) while on gently sloping ground 200m to its NNE at NR 2210 6739, stands another stone (NR26NW 14).

Watching briefs have been maintained on several occasions during excavations around Ballinaby although nothing of archaeological interest has been uncovered in any of them.

Pole 18 stands at NR 22318 67133 within a fairly waterlogged field covered with coarse grass and reeds. The earth wire trench, which was 0.6m wide and 0.4-0.5m deep, ran eastwards for approximately 40m from the pole. It was excavated through 0.3m of dark brown peaty loam which gave onto black peat, the trench becoming rapidly waterlogged. Nothing of archaeological significance was encountered.



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Map 5, showing location of Pole 18 at Ballinaby



Earth wire trench looking westwards towards Pole 18