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# Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT  
TO  
DONALD RIDDLE ESQ**

**HIGHLAND ADVENTURE SAFARIS  
CYCLE SKILLS TRACK**

**Archaeological monitoring  
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## INTRODUCTION

This document describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during excavations for a new cycle skills track at Highland Adventure Safaris, Dull, near Aberfeldy, Perthshire. On the advice of its archaeological advisers, Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust (PKHT), Perth & Kinross Council attached two conditions whereby a programme of archaeological investigation had to be undertaken in conjunction with this development (Planning Application reference number 10/00330/FUL). These conditions were intended to safeguard sites of archaeological and historical significance that might be adversely affected by the proposed development.

One condition required that the land to the immediate east of the development area was to be fenced off to protect known archaeological sites from accidental damage during the construction process. The other condition stated that ground works should be monitored to ensure that anything of archaeological significance uncovered during excavation was preserved either in situ or by record. The archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) that outlined proposals to safeguard the archaeological record, the scheme being agreed by PKHT and approved by the planning authority before development commenced.

## THE SITE

The north side of the Tay valley contains numerous archaeological sites and monuments, ranging from prehistoric farms to post-medieval settlements. Several have been identified close to the development area. These include:

a possible house platform (perhaps an Iron Age ring fort) (NN84NW 37; MK1033), noted during a field survey in the 1970s to the east of the Highland Adventure Safaris visitor centre, at NN 8127 4903;

a cup-marked stone and a standing stone (collectively NN84NW 1), located at NN 8130 4910 and NN 8132 4913, respectively, to the north of the visitor centre;

one of four early Christian sanctuary crosses which still stood in this area in 1842. This cross (MK1007) is believed to have been located at approximately NN 812 484; and

a round barrow cemetery (NN84NW 53; MK1050), centred on NN 8130 4889 and identified by aerial photography. Four barrows, which range in size from approximately 5m to 10m in diameter, are arranged in a line running east to west over a distance of 60m. Aerial photographs have also shown up traces of three sunken buildings, perhaps contemporary with the barrows, a short distance to their east.

Centred on NN 81310 48915, the development site is located to the south-east of Dull, in a grassy field to the immediate north of the B846 Aberfeldy to Tummel Bridge road and some 4.5km west of Aberfeldy. To the north of this field is the Highland Adventure Safaris visitor centre together with associated outbuildings and car parks. The site of the new cycle track is contained within an L-shaped area running along the south and west sides of the field. The

ground rises towards the north of the field although the slope is irregular and there are a few level areas within it, noticeably in its north-west corner.

To protect the surviving remains of the barrow cemetery and adjacent structures, a temporary fence was erected along the re-entrant angle of the L-shaped area, the fence remaining in place throughout the development process.

## **THE WATCHING BRIEF**

The watching brief was undertaken on 6th September 2010 by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology, trenching being carried out using an 8-tonne, tracked excavator with a toothless bucket. The circuitous trench was approximately 600m long and 1.5m wide over most of its length but reduced to 0.9m along its eastern arm and widened considerably at a practice area, on a level platform at the north end of the site, where the trench measured 19m east/west by 7.5m wide.

The intention was to remove soil as far as stable substrate upon which the base of the cycle track could be laid. This was easily achieved in the north half of the area, where the topsoil was quite thin, whereas excavation needed to be deeper on the south stretch where soil had accumulated by natural erosion and because of ploughing which had taken place annually until recent years. The topsoil of mid-brown, humic loam was rarely more than 0.25m deep on the slope, where it gave onto river gravel, sand, shattered rock and occasionally bedrock, whereas on the south stretch, where it overlay river gravel, it was generally 0.4m deep but up to 0.6m deep in places. The latter depth was assessed by means of test pits rather than machine excavation which halted at about 0.4m.

No features of archaeological significance were uncovered in any part of the trench although the relatively deep topsoil in the south part of the field might yet mask evidence of burials, structures or other features.

The only artefact retrieved from the excavation was one small body sherd of transfer-printed ware of probable 19th-century date. It was not retained.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Trenching in the south side of the field did not reach the bottom of the topsoil and any archaeological features that might survive there remain undisturbed by this development. As might be expected, nothing of interest was uncovered on the sloping ground further north where subsoil and bedrock were exposed barely 0.2m below the turf but the same was also true on the level platform where the practice area is to be sited.

Although nothing of archaeological significance was found during this project, the presence of the early cemetery on the east side of the field and the numerous other archaeological sites around Dull are clear indicators of the richness of the archaeological record within this area.

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## PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

The photographs listed below are contained within the project archive and are not reproduced within this report.

The locations from which many of these photographs were taken are shown on the accompanying drawing as Points 1 to 13.

- 1 The site prior to excavation, viewed from the west
- 2 The south section of the site early in the excavation, viewed from the north
- 3-9 Shots of the site during its excavation, viewed from the north-west
- 10 View to the south from Point 1
- 11 View to the north from Point 2
- 12 View to the west from Point 3
- 13 View to the west from Point 4
- 14 View to the west from Point 5
- 15 View to the west from Point 6
- 16 View to the west from Point 7
- 17 View to the north from Point 8
- 18 View to the east from Point 9
- 19 View to the south-west from Point 10
- 20 View to the south from Point 11
- 21 The east end of the site fully excavated, viewed from the north-west
- 22 The east end of the site fully excavated, viewed from the west
- 23 View to the east from Point 12
- 24 View to the west from Point 13
- 25 The practice area fully excavated, viewed from the east
- 26 The practice area fully excavated, viewed from the west