

Report of Archaeological Evaluation
13th July 2003
Durcha, Rosehall, Lairg, Sutherland
NC 50117 / 02358 (centred)

Client: Mr & Mrs Mouat

Planning Application No: 03/00224/FULSU

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Non-Technical Summary

Stuart Farrell was commissioned by Mrs J Anderson on behalf of Mr & Mrs Mouat in July 2003 to undertake an archaeological evaluation at Dura, Rosehall by Lairg (NC 50117/02358) as part of a proposed house development. Highland Council Archaeology Unit produced a specification for this work.

Work involved the placing of 5 trenches in relation to the proposed house, access road and area of service trench. Work revealed no archaeological features or deposits.

No recommendations for further work have been proposed.

1. Introduction

This report is for an archaeological evaluation conducted on behalf of Mr & Mrs Mouat by the author for a proposed house development at Durcha, Rosehall by Lairg.

The work was conducted on July 13th 2003.

2. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following for their help during the work:

- Mr. & Mrs Mouat;
- Mr. & Mrs Anderson;
- John the machine operator for onsite works;
- Staff of Highland Council Archaeology Unit.

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Figure 1 – General Site Location

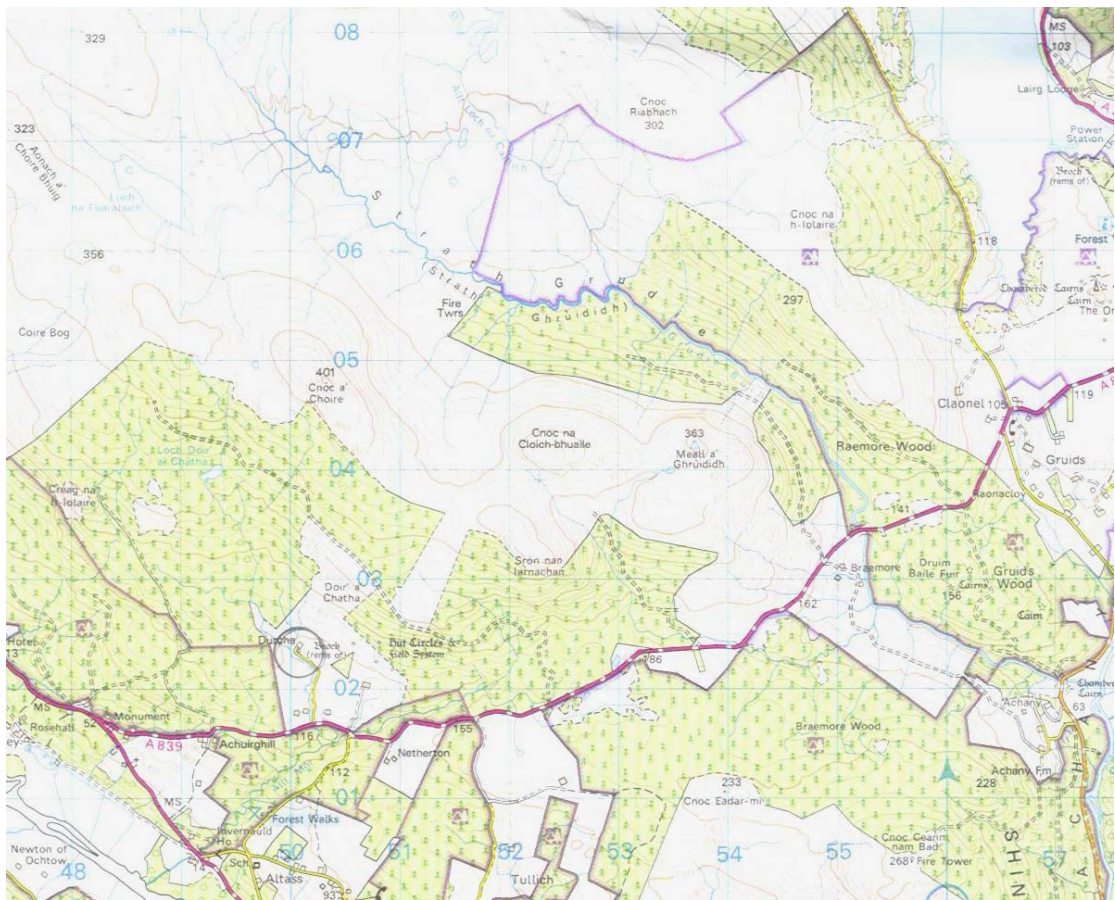


Figure 2 – Location of Development



Figure 3 – Location of Trenches



3. Historical Background

The site lies adjacent to the following sites as recorded in the Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record and the National Monuments Record of Scotland CANMORE database:

Durcha

HSMR – NC50SW 4

NMRS – NC50SW 4

Type – Iron Working

Grid Reference – NC 500/024

Noted in HSMR and NMRS of 'stray find of slag found in 1887'.

Durcha

HSMR – NC50SW 2

NMRS – NC50SW 2

Type – Broch, midden

Grid Reference – NC 50080/02391

A summary of the information noted in HSMR and NMRS of 'The remains of a broch is now a structureless heap of ruins from which most of the large stones have been removed. No wall-faces are visible but it was named in 1887 'Dun Cor', with the internal diameter was 30ft with walls 6ft thick. The mound now measures about 16m N-S by 14m and is 2-4m high on the north side (visited by OS 21 June 1963).

Archaeological excavation was carried out in May 1992 (Dunwell, 1993) in advance of construction of an extension to existing farmhouse. The presence of a broch named Dun Cor was referred to in 18th century, and a substantial mound behind the modern farmhouse was thought to relate to this structure.

Surface traces indicate that mound is multi-phase and capped by substantial post-medieval occupation. A structure provisionally identified as a galleried roundhouse occupied eastern side of the mound, outwith the area of excavation. This was restricted to a relatively small area of 9m by 6m on southern edge of mound, together with a slit trench of 3.5m by 0.8m projecting westwards from NW corner of main trench. There were no clear surface traces of structures within excavated area.

Excavation revealed a denuded length of drystone walling which projected westwards into the trench for c2m. To W of this the walling had been removed. Two distinct construction phases appeared to be present. The primary external face was of boulders backed by a disturbed and partially voided core of cobbles, from which a sherd of undecorated pottery was recovered. No internal face survived within the trench. These deposits were overlain by an irregular mound of midden material, possibly of comparatively recent origin. The excavated drystone walling is not inconsistent with that recorded in atlantic roundhouses of the first millennium BC. Any such interpretation is, however, determined more by the historically-recorded presence of a broch than by diagnostic characteristics of the excavated remains. The putative galleried roundhouse to the E of the excavated area may be the structure to which historical records refer, and certain of the excavated remains may represent features associated with it.

Further to work conducted in 1992 excavations were conducted in October 1996 (Dunwell, 1996) in order to determine the nature and extent of the principal structures present within the large grassed mound believed to contain the remains of a broch. Four trenches were opened in 1996, with the aim of removing modern material and collapsed remains to expose the preserved prehistoric levels, but without excavating them. Trench 1 was designed to establish whether the E end of the mound contained a broch or related structure, as had been suspected from surface traces. The majority of the deposits identified in this trench were post-medieval in date and related to the dumping of angular stone, possibly to form a yard surface. Beneath this material was a bed of substantial rounded boulders, which may relate to prehistoric activity. These boulders did not appear to form part of a wall, and may represent terracing to the E of the roundhouse. The remaining three trenches revealed the position of a broch-related structure. It was found that the structure lay immediately N of Durcha dwelling house, and that the postulated post-medieval structure atop the mound did not exist. Trench 2 was of

sufficient size to provide a complete plan view through the surviving remains of the broch wall on its NE circuit. Trenches 3 and 4 were opened to detect the position of the inner wall face, and thus to determine the diameter and extent of the structure. It proved to have an internal diameter of c 9m and walls c 5m thick. The prehistoric walling excavated in 1992 appears to have formed the heavily denuded remains of the S circuit of the outer wall face. There is little doubt that the identified structure is of a type traditionally classified as a broch.

Where exposed in Trench 2, the wall possessed inner and outer faces of large boulders, well fitted and with small chocking stones filling the gaps between them. Here the wall was of solid construction, containing discontinuous rough boulder internal faces, presumably devices used to ensure the stability of the construction, between which lay dumps of cobbles and boulders. A secondary face abutted the outside of the exterior face, against which a midden deposit had been subsequently banked. It is estimated that the inner wall face is preserved up to at least 2m high on the N circuit, whereas the outer face is nowhere likely to survive greater than 1m high.

Both the results of the 1992 and 1996 excavations have recently been published (Dunwell, 1999).

4. Objectives

To conduct an archaeological evaluation of the development to record those features revealed by excavation work. A copy of the specification provided by Highland Council Archaeology Unit is enclosed.

5. Methodology

A back-acting machine with a straight edged bucket excavated the trenches with possible archaeological features being cleaned by hand.

Weather on the day of work (13th July 2003) was Sunny and bright.

6. Evaluation Results

The evaluation was carried out in accordance with accepted professional archaeological standards as published by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 1999). Over the construction period a suitably qualified archaeologist was on site to carry out observations and assessment of the area affected by the excavation works.

Site Location

The site lies to the east of the current Durcha farmhouse in an area of rough pasture with some wet ground partly surrounding.

Results

Results of trenches are as follows:

1 – Aligned NW-SE 1.9m x 7m – Placed in location of access road in existing paddock. Start of trench at NW revealed in-filled small and large stones to a depth of 0.8m onto a natural of yellow-orange sand with overlying wet blue-grey silt. None of the stone looked structural or any kind of surface (like the post-medieval surface revealed in 1996 by the CFA) rather dumped material in a hollow for the paddock or partly the collapsed remains of the adjacent rubble dyke. Discussion on road levels will mean that deep excavation will not take place for road due to depth of materials rather that only the turf will be removed

and a geo-textile placed down with gravel above. No archaeological features or deposits were revealed.

2 – Aligned NW-SE 1.9m x 9m – Placed in location of access road to rear of proposed house plot. Work revealed turf and topsoil to an average depth of 230mm onto a natural of orange-brown silty sand on a slight SSE facing slope. No archaeological features or deposits were revealed.

3 – Aligned E-W 1.9m x 14.7m – Placed in location of house plot. Work revealed subsoil's of a dark-brown peat like deposit with flecks of charcoal overlying blue-grey wet silts to a depth of 0.5m at the west end of the trench rising onto a natural of orange-brown silty sand. No archaeological features or deposits were revealed.

4 – Aligned E-W 1.9m x 14.5m - Placed in location of house plot. Work revealed subsoil's of a dark-brown peat like deposit with flecks of charcoal overlying blue-grey wet silts to a depth of 0.5m at the west end of the trench rising onto a natural of orange-brown silty sand. A small trench was made to the E end of the trench to determine if knoll at E end was cut into, as there was a couple of stones through the turf on the surface, excavation showed it to be natural. No archaeological features or deposits were revealed.

5 – Aligned NE-SW 1.9m x 9.2m – Placed in location of proposed water service trench branching from existing supply. Work revealed an in-filled hollow comprising of debris from the nearby farmhouse of rounded and squared sandstone rubble within a fine subsoil heavily disturbed by tree roots overlying a natural of orange-brown silty sand. No archaeological features or deposits were revealed.

7. Conclusions

That trenches 1, 3 and 4 revealed wet blue-grey silts in natural hollows and no archaeological features it is likely that the broch itself sits in an area of a natural ridge surrounded by wet areas with no extended surrounding structures.

8. Recommendations

No recommendations with regard any further fieldwork for this project is to be proposed due to no archaeological features or deposits being revealed, and it is likely that no other features would be revealed with further work.

9. Archive

The following is to be deposited in the National Monuments Record in Edinburgh:

- Notebook of results
- Copy of this report

A set of colour slides showing the progress of the work has been deposited with Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record as well as a copy of this report as a PDF file.

10. Discovery & Excavation in Scotland

A short summary of the results of this project will be submitted to the Council for Scottish Archaeology's publication *Discovery & Excavation in Scotland*.

11. References

Dunwell, A (1993) *Durcha*, by Lairg, Sutherland, Highland Region – Archaeological Investigations Archive Report. CFA Ltd Report 105. Unpublished report – copy held by HSMR.

Dunwell, A (1996) *Excavations at Durcha*, by Lairg, Sutherland – Data Structure Report. CFA Ltd Report 299. Unpublished report – copy held by HSMR.

Dunwell, A (1999) An Atlantic roundhouse at *Durcha*, Sutherland. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 129, 281-302.

IFA (1999) *By-laws, Standards and Policy Statements of the Institute of Field Archaeologists*. Reading.

Appendix 1 – Details of Slides

- 1 – View of paddock area (proposed access route) facing SE.
- 2 – View of rear of house plot (proposed access route) facing NW.
- 3 – View of excavation of trench 1 – facing E – scales 1m.
- 4 – View of excavation of trench 1 – facing W – scales 1m.
- 5 – View of site of house plot facing SW.
- 6 – View of start of excavation of trench 2 facing SSE.
- 7 – View of trench 2 upon excavation facing SE – scales 1m.
- 8 – View of trench 2 upon excavation facing NW – scales 1m.
- 9 – View of trench 3 upon excavation facing W – scales 1m.
- 10 – View of trench 3 upon excavation facing E – scales 1m.
- 11 – View of trench 4 upon excavation facing W – scales 1m.
- 12 – View of trench 4 upon excavation facing E – scales 1m.
- 13 – View of additional trench at end of trenches 3 and 4 facing N – scales 1m.
- 14 – View of trench 5 upon excavation facing N – scales 1m.
- 15 – View of trench 5 upon excavation facing S – scales 1m.
- 16 – View of site from top of broch facing E.