



ROSS & CROMARTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICES

## **New house site, Rhitongue, Sutherland: Archaeological Watching Brief**



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Planning Reference	10/04188/FUL
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## **Acknowledgements**

Fieldwork was carried out by Lynn Fraser. We wish to thank Peter MacDonald for his help on the site. All mapping, unless otherwise stated, is reproduced by permission of Landmark Information Group under RoCAS licence LIG1044.

## Summary

*A watching brief was carried out on behalf of Peter MacDonald on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2011 on the site of a proposed single house site development at Rhitongue, Sutherland. There were no significant archaeological features or finds identified.*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 General

An archaeological watching brief was conducted by Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services (RoCAS) on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2011 in advance of development of the site for a single house at 115 Rhitongue, near Tongue, Sutherland (centred on NGR NC 60504 5986; see Figures 1 and 2). The work was commissioned by Peter MacDonald.

A Written Scheme of Investigation was produced by RoCAS<sup>1</sup> based upon information supplied by the Highland Council Historic Environment Team and Peter MacDonald.

### 1.2 Aims and objectives

The purpose of the archaeological watching brief is to efficiently identify and record any features or finds of archaeological interest prior to development, in order to minimise any delays or disruptions to the project or to propose appropriate mitigation in the event that significant features of interest are uncovered. The *Scottish Planning Policy 2010* describes how archaeology should be managed when considering planning decisions and determining conditions for developments that have an impact on the historic environment<sup>2</sup>.

The specific objectives are:

- To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area
- To remove by hand any overburden in order to expose the archaeological deposits
- To excavate, sample and record any features or to propose arrangements for their safeguarding, where possible.

## 2. Planning background

The archaeological watching brief was conducted on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2011, as per Highland Council Planning Reference 10/04188/FUL.

The watching brief was a requirement due to the situation of the proposed house site within an area of archaeological potential. A previous watching brief on a nearby house site uncovered the remains of a cobbled surface<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Fraser 2011

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government 2010

<sup>3</sup> Dagg 2007

### 3. Site location, geology and topography

The development site is centred at approximately Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference NC 60504 59866 at Rhitongue, Sutherland on the west side of the A836 between Tongue and Coldbackie(Figure 1).

Rhitongue is situated to the north-east of Tongue on the eastern side of the Kyle of Tongue on the northern coastline of Scotland. The proposed house site is at 115 Rhitongue and the plot sits on a north-west facing grass slope overlooking the Kyle of Tongue at approximately 60m above sea level.

Rhitongue sits on bedrock geology of Altnaharra Psammite Formation made up of Psammite and Micaceous Psammite. This forms part of the Moine Supergroup<sup>4</sup>.

### 4. Archaeological and historical background

Rhitongue is situated on the north coast of Scotland on the eastern bank of the Kyle of Tongue and Tongue Bay in the former county of Sutherland, now Highland Region.



Figure 1: General site location

<sup>4</sup> British Geological Survey 2011

The remains of Rhitongue Broch lie to the south-west of the development site; this is one of many that line the coastline in both Sutherland and neighbouring Caithness. There are no other prehistoric remains in the vicinity<sup>5</sup>.

Roy's Military Survey of 1747-1755 records a township at Rhitongue; he shows cultivation to the north-east of a stream and a track running to the south of the township dropping down to, what is presumably, a ferry crossing across the Kyle of Tongue<sup>6</sup>.

The 1878 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map shows houses to the north-west, west and south-east of the broch<sup>7</sup>.

An archaeological watching brief on another house site at 115 Rhitongue in 2007 uncovered the remains of a cobbled surface, which was interpreted as possibly being associated with a structure or building of which there is now no trace<sup>8</sup>.

The land upon which the site is located has been in the MacDonald family for many years and has not been used for arable purposes in that time. Approximately thirty years ago the ground was re-seeded and has been used for grazing since then<sup>9</sup>.

## **5. Methodology**

### **5.1 Desk-based assessment**

A desk-based assessment was conducted prior to commencement of the evaluation in order to assess the archaeological potential of the area based on previously recorded sites and any historical documentation.

The drawings of the area, as supplied by the client, were checked in detail against the Ordnance Survey 1:25000 Map, the Highland Council's Historic Environment Record (HER), the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS), the Highland Council Archives and Historic Scotland's records of scheduled monuments and listed buildings. Online aerial photographs were checked and the map collections of the National Library of Scotland (NLS) were studied. Other literary sources were also consulted.

### **5.2 Archaeological evaluation**

The purpose of the archaeological watching brief was to efficiently identify and record any features or finds of archaeological interest prior to development, in order to minimise any delays or disruptions to the project or to propose appropriate mitigation in the event that significant features of interest are uncovered.

The site topsoil clearance of the house site, driveway and septic tank locations were conducted under constant archaeological supervision using a mechanical excavator with 4-ft wide flat-edged bucket

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<sup>5</sup> HER MHG12605

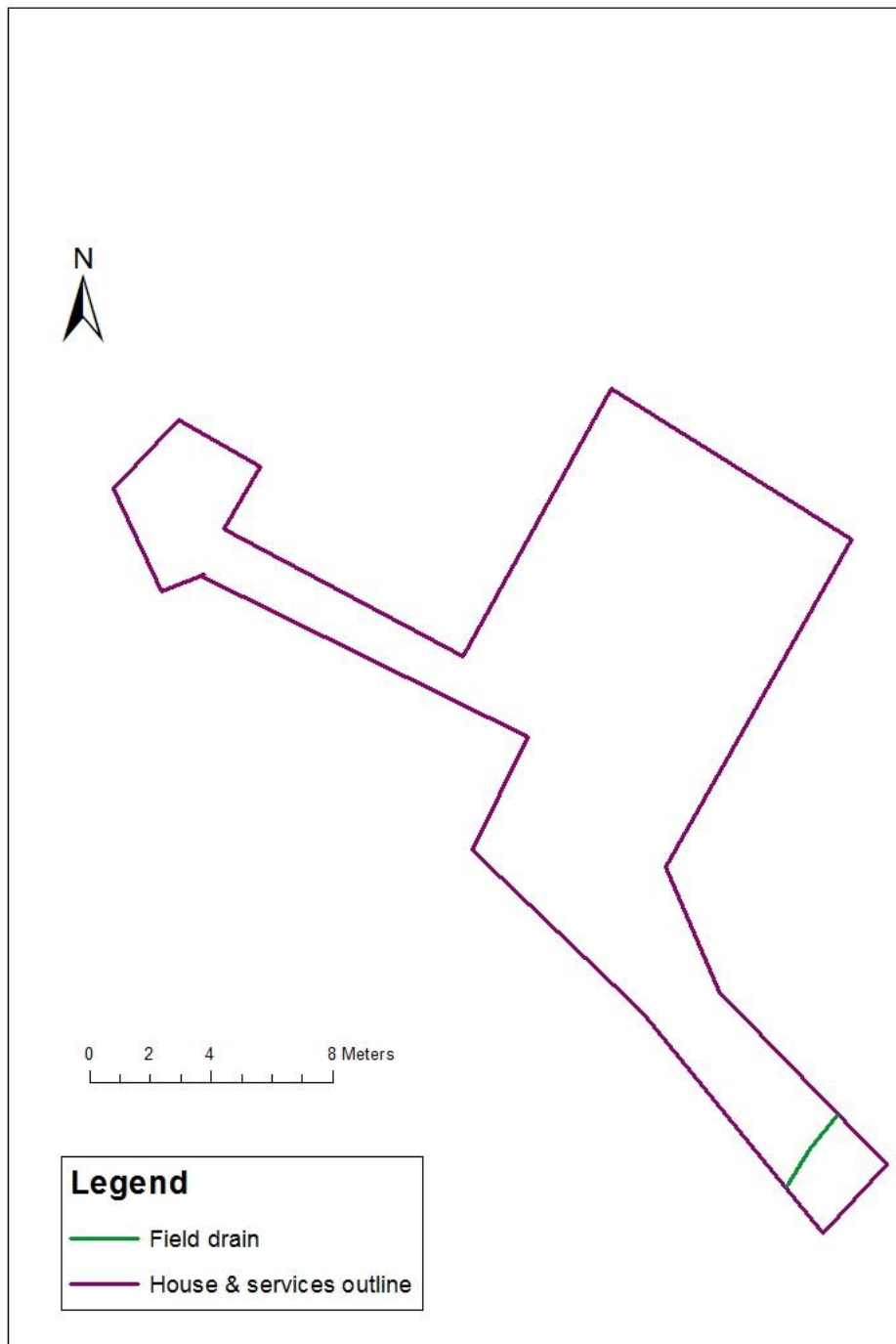
<sup>6</sup> NLS 2011

<sup>7</sup> NLS 2011

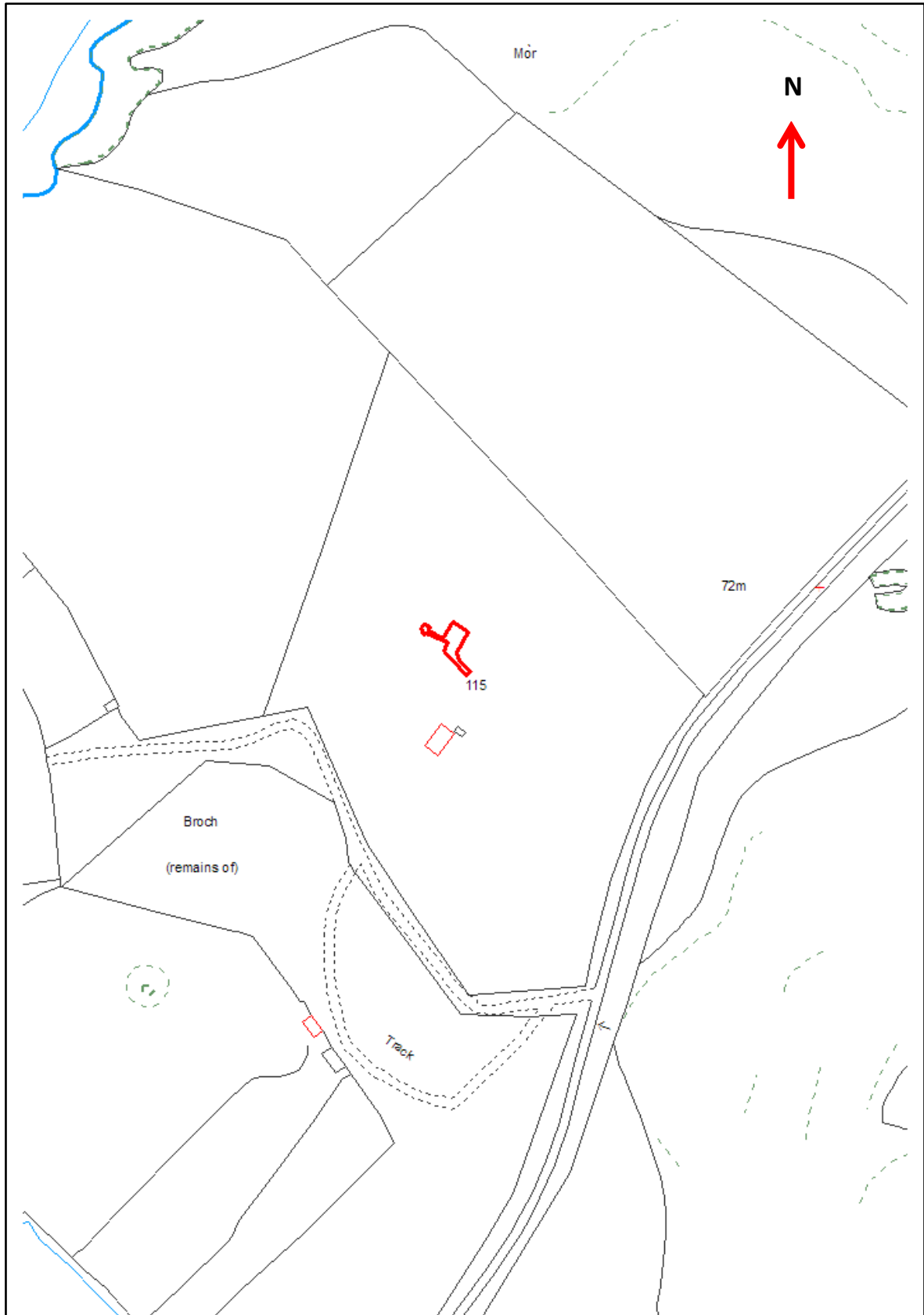
<sup>8</sup> Dagg 2007

<sup>9</sup> MacDonald pers.comm.

(Figures 2 and 3). Following machine excavation, the clearance area was cleaned back using a draw-hoe to allow for the identification of archaeological features. The site and any archaeological features or finds were plotted using ArcPad software with GPS technology with sub-metre accuracy on a handheld Windows Mobile-based computer.



**Figure 2:** Outline of the area of the archaeological watching brief



**Figure 3:** Outline of the site in its landscape context (scale 1:2500).

The development site was recorded using high resolution digital photography throughout the watching brief in order to record the evaluation as well as any features or finds of interest.

All fieldwork was conducted in accordance with *Institute for Archaeologists' Code of Conduct*<sup>10</sup> and Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief<sup>11</sup>.

## **6. Results**

### **6.1 Desk-based assessment**

#### **6.1.1 Historical mapping**

The following historical maps were consulted online<sup>12</sup>:

##### **William Roy's Military Survey of Scotland**

A township is shown at Rhitongue together with cultivation to the north-east of a stream and a track running to the south of the township dropping down to, what is presumably, a ferry crossing across the Kyle of Tongue

##### **First Edition OS Six-inch to the mile map**

The 1878 map shows houses to the north-west, west and south-east of Rhitongue Broch but none in the area of the development site.

##### **Second edition OS map**

The 1896 map shows houses to the north-west and south-east of the broch but none in the area of the development site.

#### **6.1.2 Highland Historic Environment Record**

The Highland Historic Environment Record<sup>13</sup> was consulted online and there were no events or archaeological discoveries reported within the site boundaries. However, there are two notable entries in the vicinity of the development site:

##### **MHG12605 Rhitongue Broch Broch NC 6036 5977**

This structure sits on the summit of a hill to the south-west of the development site. It is recorded as measuring about 18m in diameter and 2m high. The footings of a late stone dyke cross the site. The hill is currently covered in gorse bushes.

##### **EHG1631 Rhitongue Archaeological evaluation NC 6051 5985**

An archaeological evaluation close to the present development, conducted in 2007, uncovered a cobbled surface that may have been associated with a structure or building that is no longer in evidence.

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<sup>10</sup> IfA 2008

<sup>11</sup> IfA 2010

<sup>12</sup> NLS 2011

<sup>13</sup> HHER 2011



## 6.2 Watching brief

Weather conditions: dry and breezy

The site sloped downhill from an existing track in a north-westerly direction and, prior to clearance, was grass covered (Plate 1). Below the turf there were two strata: context 101, a rich, black, peaty soil, which overlay context 102, a mid-brown clay/silt matrix. Beneath these contexts the sub-soil was formed of a grey gleyed material, which was exceptionally hard in places (Plate 2). There were very few stones within any of the contexts. Patches of decaying vegetation appeared in patches within the gleyed material but formed no more than a thin layer. The trench depth varied from 25cm – 34cm, the deepest areas being at the lower end of the slope.

The only archaeological feature uncovered was a possible field drain close to the existing track at the south-eastern side of the site (Plate 3). There were no artefacts found.



**Plate 1:** View of the site, pre-excavation, looking towards the north-north-west



**Plate 2:** View across the plot towards the south-west showing the existing house at 115 Rhitongue and Rhitongue Broch on the gorse covered mound (top right).



**Plate 3:** View towards the north-east of the field drain

## **7. Discussion**

There were no significant archaeological features uncovered during the watching brief. The lack of even the usual topsoil 'midden' type material is most likely attributable to the fact that the field has only been used for grazing, at least within living memory.

## **8. Conclusions and recommendations**

As no significant archaeological features were uncovered during the watching brief, it is recommended that no further work is necessary. The final decision, however, rests solely with the Highland Council Historic Environment Team.

## **9. Reporting**

This report will be disseminated to the contractor/developer, Highland Council Historic Environment Team and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

A digital report will be submitted with digital copies of the site photographs and georeferenced site plans in ESRI shapefile format. Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services will retain copyright of this report.

A summary of the watching brief will be submitted for publication in Archaeology Scotland's annual journal, *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*. An OASIS entry has been completed.

## 10. References

British Geology Survey 2011. Geology Viewed accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2011 at [http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyviewer\\_google/googleviewer.html](http://maps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyviewer_google/googleviewer.html)

Dagg, C. 2007.

Fraser, L. 2011. *New house site, 115 Rhitongue, Sutherland: Watching brief, Written scheme of Investigation*. RoCAS report 2011-07/RTE.

HHER 2011. Highland Historic Environment Record accessed at <http://her.highland.gov.uk/home.html>

IfA 2008. *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*. Reading: Institute for Archaeologists.

IfA 2010. *Code of Conduct*. Reading: Institute for Archaeologists.

NLS 2011. National Library of Scotland accessed at <http://maps.nls.uk/>

Scottish Government 2010. Scottish Planning Policy accessed at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/109640/0026470.pdf>

## Appendix 1

RTE11: Index of Contexts										
No.	Type	Description	Over	Under	Fill of	Filled by	Cut by	Finds	Feature	Interpretation
101	Deposit	Black organic rich, peaty varying in depth over the site from 0.12-0.17m	102	Turf						Upper layer of topsoil
102	Deposit	Mid-brown clayey silt	103	101						Lower layer of topsoil
103	Deposit	Grey, gleyed clayey matrix, which was very hard in places		102						Sub-soil
104	Cut	Shallow field drain filled with loose stones and 101		101		105				Field drain
105	Deposit	101 combined with small stones								Fill of 104

## Appendix 2

RTE11: Index of Photographs				
No.	Direction Facing	Description	Taken By	Date
1	NNW	Pre-excavation	LF	09/06/2011
2	NNE	Pre-excavation	LF	09/06/2011
3	NW	Post-excavation of the driveway	LF	09/06/2011
4	NW	Post-excavation of the driveway	LF	09/06/2011
5	NW	Post-excavation of the driveway	LF	09/06/2011
6	NE	Field drain	LF	09/06/2011
7	NW	Field drain	LF	09/06/2011
8	N	Field drain	LF	09/06/2011
9	SE	Driveway looking up to existing track	LF	09/06/2011
10	N	Post-excavation of house site	LF	09/06/2011
11	W	Post-excavation of track to septic tank	LF	09/06/2011
12	SE	Post-excavation of track to septic tank	LF	09/06/2011
13	SW	Post-excavation of house site	LF	09/06/2011

### Appendix 3

RTE11: Index of Features								
Feature	Type	Location	Dimensions (m)	Plans	Photos	Contexts	Finds	Comments
1	Field drain	SW end of the driveway approx. 1m from the existing track	approx. 2.8m x 0.3m		6-8	104, 105		Shallow, stone filled