

**Date: August 2007**

**Client: Aviemore and Highland Developments Ltd**

**Project Code: SQI07**



## **Slacknamarnock Quarry, Inverness Results of an Archaeological Watching Brief**

Colin Hewat

## PROJECT SUMMARY SHEET (SQI07)

<b>Client</b>	Aviemore and Highland Developments Ltd
<b>National Grid Reference</b>	NH 6585 4160 (site centred)
<b>Project Manager</b>	Simon Stronach
<b>Text</b>	Colin Hewat
<b>Illustrations</b>	Caroline Norman
<b>Fieldwork</b>	Colin Hewat
<b>Schedule</b>	
Fieldwork	August – October 2007
Report	October 2007

### **Summary**

*This report presents the findings of an archaeological watching brief on the site of a proposed housing development at a former quarry site in Slacknamarnock, Inverness. The watching brief entailed monitoring the clearing of vegetation and excavation of topsoil to form an access road into the disused quarry and the monitoring of soil stripping in areas designated as 'archaeologically sensitive' within the development area. No features were encountered along the course of the road. It appears that a large part of the site had been stripped down to below the underlying sand and gravel deposits at the time of the quarrying, rendering it archaeologically sterile. The only area that appeared to be undisturbed, and therefore 'archaeologically sensitive', was the high area located along the south edge of the site; although some sections of this area are also disturbed. It was within this area that a cist burial was recorded in 1970 (NMRS NH64SE33). No features were encountered during monitoring of soil stripping in the 'archaeologically sensitive' areas.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Headland Archaeology Ltd was commissioned by Aviemore and Highland Developments Ltd to undertake a series of archaeological watching briefs in advance of a proposed housing development at a former sand and gravel quarry in Slacknamarnock, Inverness. This report presents the results of a watching brief on the clearing and excavation of a road into the quarry and the monitoring of topsoil stripping within designated 'archaeologically sensitive' areas.

Based on the recommendations from a desk-based assessment by Highland Archaeology Services (Wood 2006) the original Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was for an archaeological evaluation to be conducted within the site. The developer planned to excavate a route through the western, less archaeologically sensitive, section of the site into the quarry. Therefore the WSI was amended to incorporate a watching brief of these works to suffice as an evaluation of the western area. The desk-based assessment identified the north-eastern, eastern and southern edges of the site as 'archaeologically sensitive' (Wood 2006). The strategy within the 'archaeologically sensitive' area was altered to monitored topsoil stripping of all ground disturbances within this area. The WSI was submitted to and agreed with the Highland Council Archaeology Unit.

The watching brief on the access track was undertaken between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> August 2007 in variable weather conditions. Topsoil stripping within 'archaeologically sensitive' areas was monitored on 10<sup>th</sup> September and 4<sup>th</sup> October 2007 in fair weather conditions.

## 2. SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The site of the proposed housing development (centred on NGR NH 6585 4160) is located in the southern outskirts of Inverness. The site is bounded to the north by Culduthel Avenue and to the west by a row of houses along Essich Road (see **Figure 1**). Access to the site is through a gap between this row of houses, off Essich Road. To the east of the site lies a new housing development and to the south is a cultivated field. The site topography is varied and undulating, there are slopes down into the site along the north, east and south edges. Quarry activity has disturbed large areas of the site; mounds of quarry material covered the site along with more recent dumps of building debris and household waste. The largest quarry pit was situated in the southern half of the site. The areas along the south and eastern edges of this quarry pit remain the highest across the site and therefore may have avoided disturbance from quarry activity. It was within this area that a cist burial was discovered in 1970. This area was therefore designated 'archaeologically sensitive' (Wood 2006). Since the quarry went out of use around 1970 it has been left relatively untouched allowing dense vegetation to grow, covering the site in trees and gorse bushes.

## 3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

A desk-based assessment and walkover survey undertaken by Highland Archaeology Services identified some potential for buried archaeological remains to exist within the site. Many prehistoric sites and finds have been recorded within the local area including several cist burials, burial cairns, settlement sites, and other occupation remains. The sites range in date, covering the Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age periods; they provide a wealth of information about human activity within the area over the past 6,000 years. In respect to this

site, the discovery of a cist burial in 1970 within the south east corner greatly increased the archaeological sensitivity of the site. The cist (NMRS NH64SE33) was discovered 0.5m beneath the ground surface and consisted of four side slabs and a covering slab, it contained a crouched inhumation but no artefacts.

#### 4. AIMS AND METHODS

The primary objective of the watching brief was to determine the presence or absence, quality, nature, extent and character of any buried archaeological remains within the site. The results would be used to allow the client and the local authority to make an informed decision regarding further mitigation works.

A 360° tracked excavator equipped with a 2m wide ditching bucket was used to strip topsoil under direct archaeological supervision. All recording was undertaken using standard Headland Archaeology Ltd methods and record sheets. Colour transparencies, colour print and digital photographs were taken.

#### 5. RESULTS

**Figure 1** shows the location of the access track and the 'archaeologically sensitive' areas monitored, Areas A, B, C and D.

The access track (Area A) wound through the site and into the quarry. The topsoil was between 0.2 – 0.4m thick and consisted of a dark brown sandy loam with frequent small rounded stones and occasional medium rounded stones. Modern glass, pottery and other household debris was identified within the topsoil. There was very little interface between the topsoil and the underlying sands and gravels. The shallow depth of the topsoil suggested it had formed over a relatively short space of time or been dumped after the quarry went out of use. It is highly likely that this area was stripped and truncated to some degree through the activities of the quarry. No archaeological features were recovered along the length of the access track. No buried soil was identified and it is possible that the original ground surface does not survive anywhere within the development site, apart from potentially along the eastern and southern edges of the site.

Stripping within the archaeologically sensitive area to the west of the site (Area B) also produced no archaeologically significant results. Again the topsoil was between 0.2 – 0.4m thick, dark brown sandy loam. The shallow depth of topsoil and limited interface with the underlying sand and gravels again suggested relatively recent formation or deposition. Modern debris such as bedsprings and a disposable lighter were also identified within the topsoil just above the natural sand and gravel deposits. No buried soil was identified and even though this area was not quarried it may still have been stripped and truncated to some degree through the activity of the quarry. The stripping took a section through the bank surrounding the quarry and proved it to be of modern construction; as it contained modern debris within it. It is most likely related to the establishment and activities of the quarry.

The excavation of a sewer trench (Area C) across the eastern edge of the site, through the 'archaeologically sensitive' area, was monitored. The sewer trench cut through a large bank running along the eastern edge of the site. Topsoil was between 0.2 – 0.4m thick. Stripping revealed that this bank consisted largely of modern building debris and waste. Large concrete

slabs, bricks, plastics and other waste materials were present to a depth of around 3m. It appears as if this area was used as a dump and the material would have acted as a barrier for the quarry, shielding the surrounding areas from its activities. A low area between the base of the bank and the burn was stripped down to the underlying sands and gravels; no archaeological features were present. Topsoil was on average 0.4m thick and no buried soil was identified, it is likely that this area may have also been truncated to some degree by quarry activities.

An area close to the location of the cist in the southern section of the 'archaeologically sensitive' area was stripped (Area D). This area was bounded to the west by badger sets that had been protected from disturbance at that time. This area had a high potential for archaeological features due to its proximity to the cist discovered in 1970 and the assumption that this area had not been heavily affected by quarry activity. Like Area B the topsoil was between 0.2 – 0.4m thick, the shallow depth of topsoil and limited interface with the underlying sand and gravels again suggested relatively recent formation or deposition. No archaeological features were identified. No buried soil was evident and even though this area was not quarried it may still have been stripped and truncated to some degree through the activity of the quarry

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Although the surrounding area is rich in prehistoric remains and a cist burial was recorded on the site in 1970 the monitoring of works within the site has not produced any archaeological features. It is very likely that quarry activity affected most of the site, leaving very little untouched. The fact that the cist was recorded in 1970 within the higher 'archaeologically sensitive' area suggests that at this time even this higher area was stripped down to the natural sand and gravel deposits. The cist was recorded at a depth of 0.5m below ground surface; this suggests the topsoil was around 0.5m thick if the cist was situated close to the top of the natural deposits. As topsoil was around 0.2m thick at the time of this monitoring it is clear this area was truncated to some degree. It may also suggest that some depth of the underlying sand and gravel deposits may have been removed at this time. If the whole site were this extensively stripped the chances of finding other prehistoric features would have been much reduced.

The bank identified in Highland Archaeology Services desk-based assessment appears to have been constructed at the time the quarry was established. It is very likely this bank was formed when the area was originally cleared to make way for the quarry. The bank runs around the edge of the quarry face in several sections. A section of the bank at the western extent of the site (Area B), within the 'archaeologically sensitive' area, was excavated and contained fragments of modern glass and other household waste. Natural sand and gravel deposits beneath the bank and the surrounding area yielded no archaeological features and this area may have been truncated to some degree by quarry activities.

The bank along the eastern edge of the site, seen in Area C, was much more substantial and contained much more rubble, concrete, brick and other waste than the bank within Area B. This area was thought to have remained high due to lack of quarrying but it appears as if the activity of the quarry was much more extensive. The area is likely to have been heavily disturbed during the quarrying and the large bank is likely to have been constructed to shield the quarry activities from the surrounding areas.

The site remains a sensitive area and retains potential for archaeological features within some sections of the southern portion of the 'archaeologically sensitive' area. It can now be considered that much of the north and east sections of the 'archaeologically sensitive' area have been heavily disturbed and therefore no longer yield any archaeological potential. At present there are no plans to disturb the south eastern corner of the 'archaeologically sensitive' area. This means the area surrounding the cist found in 1970 should remain undisturbed. It is suggested that if any future works are planned for areas within the southern edge of the site, an archaeologist should be present to monitor any ground disturbance.

## **7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The evaluation was commissioned and funded by Aviemore and Highland Developments Ltd.

## **8. BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Wood, J (2006) *Archaeological Assessment, Slacknamarnock*. Unpublished report by Highland Archaeology Services Ltd for Highland Council.

**APPENDIX 1: PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER**

Shot No.	Direction Facing	Colour Slide	Colour Print	Digital	Description
1	E	Yes	Yes	No	Area A - Stripped access track
2	S	Yes	Yes	No	Area A - Stripped access track
3	E	Yes	Yes	No	Area A - Stripped access track
4	E	Yes	Yes	No	Area A - Stripped access track
5	S	Yes	Yes	No	Area A - Stripped access track
6	S	Yes	Yes	No	Area A - Stripped access track
7	SE	No	Yes	Yes	Area B - Bank within archaeologically sensitive area
8	E	No	Yes	Yes	Area B - Bank and quarry
9	SE	No	Yes	Yes	Area B - Bank within archaeologically sensitive area
10	S	No	Yes	Yes	Area B - Section through bank
11	S	No	Yes	Yes	Area B - Bank and quarry dumps
12	N	No	Yes	Yes	Area B - Section through bank
13	E	No	Yes	Yes	Area B - Stripped area within archaeologically sensitive area
14	N	No	Yes	Yes	Area B - Stripped area within archaeologically sensitive area
15	N	No	Yes	Yes	Area B - Stripped area within archaeologically sensitive area
16	W	No	Yes	Yes	Area B - Section through topsoil
17	SE	No	Yes	Yes	View of quarry and dumps
18	NE	No	Yes	Yes	View of quarry
19	S	No	Yes	Yes	Area B - Stripped area within archaeologically sensitive area
20	S	No	Yes	Yes	Area B - Stripped area within archaeologically sensitive area
21	S	No	Yes	Yes	View of quarry and dumps
22	E	No	Yes	Yes	View of quarry and dumps
23	N	No	Yes	Yes	View from base of quarry
24	SE	No	Yes	Yes	View of Badger area
25	S	No	Yes	Yes	View of Badger area
26	S	No	Yes	Yes	View of Badger area
27	N	No	Yes	Yes	View of quarry
28	NE	No	Yes	Yes	Area C - Stripped area alongside burn
29	W	No	Yes	Yes	Area C - Stripping bank
30	NW	No	Yes	Yes	Area C - Stripping bank
31	N	No	Yes	Yes	Area C - Stripping bank
32	SW	No	Yes	Yes	Area C - Stripping bank
33	W	No	Yes	Yes	Area C - Stripping bank
34	W	No	Yes	Yes	Area C - Stripping bank
35	NE	No	Yes	Yes	Area C - Stripping bank
36	E	No	Yes	Yes	Area C - Stripped area
37	N	No	Yes	Yes	Area C - Test pit in bank

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38	N	No	Yes	Yes	Area D - Stripped area near cist location
39	N	No	Yes	Yes	Area D - Stripped area near cist location
40	S	No	Yes	Yes	Area D - Stripped area near cist location
41	E	No	Yes	Yes	Area D - Stripped area near cist location
42	S	No	Yes	Yes	Area D - Stripped area near cist location



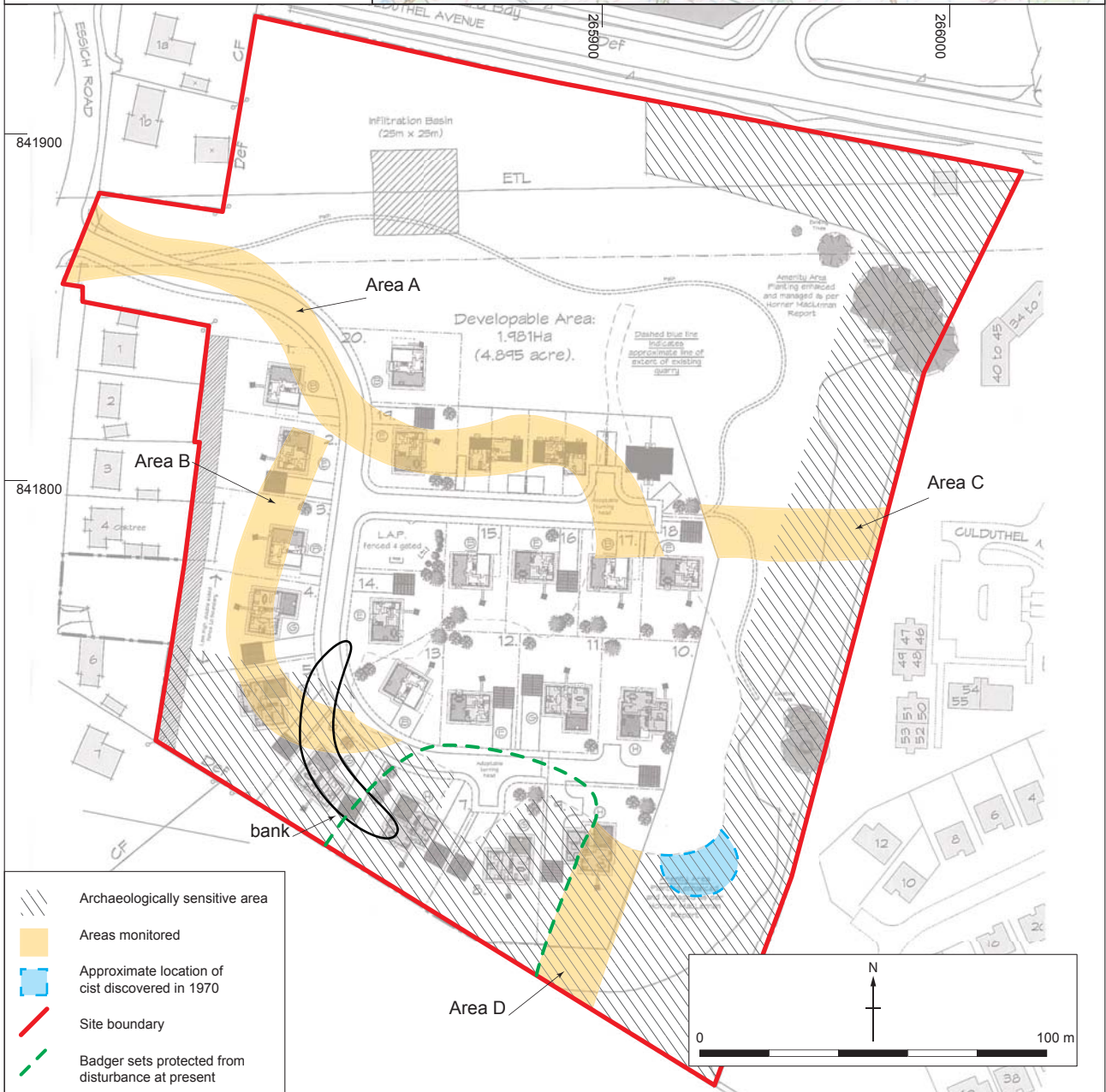
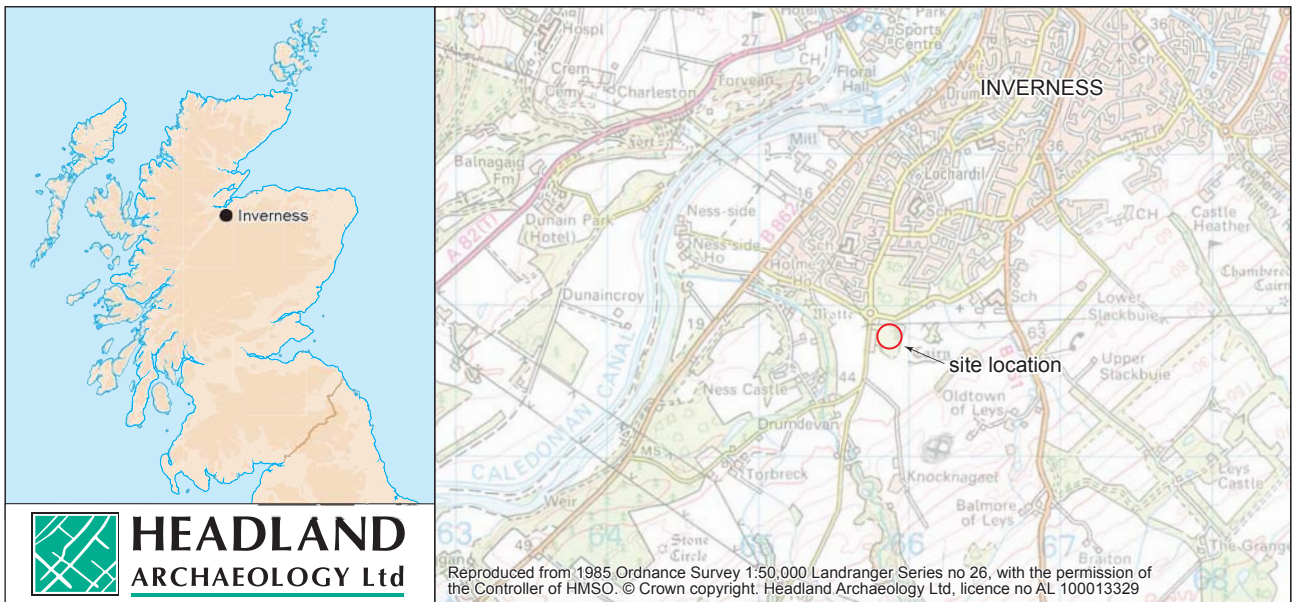


Figure 1: SQI07, Slacklarmanock Quarry, Inverness - Site location and plan of monitored area.