Archaeological Assessment of the site of Achiltibuie Water
Supply Water Treatment Works, Storage Reservoir and
Access Road

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Archaeological Assessment of the site of Achiltibuie Water Supply Water Treatment Works, Storage Reservoir and Access Road

Introduction

The author was asked by the North of Scotland Water Authority to carry out an archaeological assessment of the area of the proposed water treatment works, storage reservoir and access road at Achvraie, Achiltibuie, Wester Ross. This project is intended to combine a desk-based assessment of known archaeological and historical data with an archaeological field survey. The object of the project is to identify areas where construction work might affect the archaeological record, both visible and conjectural, and to recommend measures to be taken to safeguard the archaeological record.

These measures might include the marking of known archaeological features to avoid accidental damage during excavation work or on access routes. Recommendations will be made on which known archaeological features it would be acceptable to damage or destroy during work, and what level of recording or monitoring should be carried out on such features prior to or during work. An assessment will be made based on the known archaeological record and on written records as to the likelihood of further archaeological features being revealed during excavation in any given area, and recommendations will be made on the advisability of trial excavations or archaeological monitoring during work in such areas.

All decisions based on these recommendations will be made by the Senior Archaeologist.

Method

As the area of the proposed work was known by the author to be rough hill grazing outwith the areas of historic settlement, and therefore where information on land use would not be found in the available archive material, effort was concentrated on the field survey. This was carried out on October 10th 2000, in wet but reasonably clear conditions, and involved walking over the whole area surrounding the proposed developments, identifying all archaeological features. Previously recorded archaeological features close to the proposed developments were also visited to ascertain their exact location and ensure that they would not be affected by any aspect of the work.

Background information on the area was obtained from 'People and Settlement in Northwest Ross' ed. JR Baldwin, and RCAHMS Broadsheet no. 3: Achiltibuie, the Archaeology of a Crofting Landscape.
Archaeological and Historical Background

A previous survey of the Achiltibuie area revealed two hut circles and a shieling group on the Allt Ach a' Bhraighe. The hut circles are part of a wide scatter of 1st millennium settlement in the Coigach peninsula, most of which appear to have been abandoned when cooler and wetter climatic conditions set in, in the mid-1st millennium. The proximity of a shieling group in this case, however, does suggest the possibility of continuous land use. Further downstream, at Achininver, two meal mills were located during the previous survey.

Blaeu's map of North Scotland, based on Timothy Pont's survey in the 1580s but published in 1654, shows that several townships in Coigach were already in existence in the 16th century. In the early 19th century the Cromarty estate reorganised the tenancies, although none of the population were actually cleared, creating a series of crofting townships. It was at this time that most of the shieling sites fell out of use, as the hill pasture was given over to large scale sheep farming. Some shielings did continue to be used until the end of the 19th century, but the presence of a sheepfank at the Ach a' Bhraighe shielings suggests that here this was not the case.

The Archaeological Survey

The following two archaeological features were noted as lying directly in the area of the proposed developments, and therefore likely to be inevitably affected by the work. Recommendations on actions to be taken to mitigate the effect of the project are given in italics after the description of each feature.

1. Peat Track at NC 0441 0613 This track is marked on the Ordnance Survey Pathfinder map as continuing for some distance onto the hill, but at present it is only visible for approximately 50m. beyond where it forks off from the access track to the storage reservoir. It is visible as a sunken trackway, edged by large stones presumably removed from the track to make the route smoother for carts.

   This feature lies entirely within the area of the proposed water treatment works site, and will presumably be destroyed. It is not felt that there are sufficient recordable archaeological features to make any measured or photographic survey worthwhile.

2. Turf and Stone Dyke from NC 0463 0630 to NC 0474 0618 The section of this dyke running NW from a sharp bend in the burn is clearly visible, but where it turns west and runs towards the smaller burn, it is degraded and more conjectural than evident. Where the present access track crosses the dyke, immediately east of where the track crosses the small burn, a double line of placed stones are visible although hardly protruding above ground level. Immediately north of the track, the dyke
crosses to the west bank of the burn and follows this bank an undetermined distance north.

A section of this feature will be destroyed by the upgrading of the access track, but it is presumed that this will only be a few metres in length, and this section of the dyke is so degraded that it is felt that no measures need be taken to protect it. Damage could be minimised, however, by flagging the feature prior to the commencement of work, and avoiding the dumping of excavated material on the sections of dyke remaining on either side of the track.

The following archaeological features were noted as being close enough to the proposed project for the area to be flagged to prevent accidental damage from turning vehicles or the dumping of material:

3. **Sheep fank at NC 0494 0618** a rough rubble enclosure divided internally into one large and two small pens, aligned WNW-ESE. A section of turf dyke extends WNW from the entrance in the west wall, for a distance of about 60m.

4. **Turf dyke from NC 0478 0621 to 0498 0618** This low turf and stone dyke follows an irregular route enclosing the area of possible shieling structures. Where it passes through wet ground it has almost entirely disappeared but on better drained ground is clearly visible and stands up to 0.4m high. At its closest it is only 10m. from the present access track.

5. **Turf Dyke from NC 0481 0624 to NC 0492 0619** This dyke is more substantial than the previous site, but appears to only run, in a roughly straight line, NW from the sheepfank for about 120m. It was not traced further NW than the previous dyke which crosses its path, and the two do not appear to join.

6. **Two structures at NC 0486 0623** These two small rubble structures are built onto the NE side of the previous dyke, about 10m. apart. They measure no more than 2m. in width and 0.5m. in height, and appear to have been possibly lambing pens.

7. **Structure at NC 0468 0623.** On the summit of a slight ridge, a rough oval of placed stones possibly the footings of a structure measuring 4.5m. NW-SE by 4m. NE-SW. This lies 10m. north of the westernmost of the two previous structures. It was interpreted as some type of shieling. Further stones some metres NW along the ridge may represent another building.

8. **Turf dyke from NC 0518 0614** This substantial dyke begins abruptly on the north bank of the stream some 50m. upstream from the present Intake Site, and follows
this bank an undetermined distance east. It does not appear that this dyke originally extended further west, but stone may have been removed along the missing section to provide fill for the dam at the intake site.

It is recommended that the dyke, site no. 4. Be treated as the outer boundary of this complex of features, and that an exclusion zone be marked out by placing canes and construction tape at 5m. beyond this dyke along its northern edge.

Archaeological Conclusions

The two hut circles were not located during this survey and are presumed to be on the other side of the Allt Ach a Bhrraighe and far enough from the present project to be unaffected. No traces of prehistoric cultivation, in the form of field clearance cairns were identified, and it is assumed that all the features located in the survey date to the 18th or 19th century; the turf dykes and shieling structures to the pre-improvement period, and the sheep fank to the period of large scale sheep farming.

Catherine Dagg
15.10.00
VARIA N ON OF P LANNING P ERM ISSION
S UBJECT TO C ONDITIONS

VARIA N ON NO.: 1

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING (SCOTLAND) ACT 1997

TO:
Blyth & Blyth
28 Church Street
Inverness
IV1 1EG

With reference to planning permission subject to conditions, reference 01/00957/FULRC dated 5 April 2002 for planning permission under the above-mentioned Act for the following development viz:-

CONSTRUCTION OF WATER TREATMENT WORKS BUILDING WITH ASSOCIATED SITE WORKS (DETAIL) AT ACHVRAIE ACHILTBUIE ULLAPOOL ROSS-SHIRE

and to your written request dated 19.04.2002 for variation in terms of the said planning permission.

The Highland Council in exercise of its powers under Section 64 of the said Act and being satisfied that the following variation is not material hereby vary the said planning permission granted by them as follows:

Amend Condition No 4 to read:
4. The water treatment works cannot commence operating until such time as a Discharge Consent has been obtained from Scottish Environment Protection Agency to discharge to the watercourse, as agreed with the applicants' agents and Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

Reason: To minimise the risk of pollution.

Amend Condition No 7 to read:
7. A building reservation of at least six metres shall be maintained from the existing overhead electricity line, measured in the horizontal plane, at all times to the satisfaction of Scottish & Southern Energy plc and during construction works safety measures to the satisfaction of Scottish & Southern Energy plc shall be observed at all times in the vicinity of the overhead line.

Reason: In the interests of public safety.

Dated 26 April 2002

[Signature]
Area Planning & Building Control Manager