Client: Mr I Offor
Date: August 2008

Archaeological Evaluation of a Development at Sydney House, Lairg, Highland.

Director: Stuart Farrell
Written by: Stuart Farrell
Planning Ref. 08/00209/FULSU
Grid Ref: NC 58891/07161
Non-Technical Summary

Stuart Farrell was commissioned by Mr Peter Harrison of Sutherland Drawing Services on behalf of Mr I Offor in August 2008 to undertake an archaeological evaluation at Sydney House, Lairg (NC 58891/07161) as part of a project for a new house with associated access and services. Highland Council Archaeology Unit produced a specification for this work.

Work revealed no archaeological features or deposits, the site of the new house lying in an area of improved farmland that had been landscaped in the last 150 years.

No recommendations for further archaeological work are to be proposed.
Figure 1 – Site Location. 1:25000
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Figure 2 – Site Plan 1:2500
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Figure 3 – Site Plan 1:500.
Figure 4 – Location Of Trenches. 1:500

FD – Field Drain
TD – Tile Drain
Figure 5 – 1st Edition Ordnance Survey of 1881
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1. INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by the author on behalf of Mr A Ross in regard to a condition of planning as required as part of a planning application. The development site is a ‘greenfield’ site located at Sydney House, Lairg, Highland. The proposed development is close to an archaeological site, of Lairg Muir Hut circles and associated field system located to the north edge of the proposed development site.

The work was required as part of planning condition no.6 by Highland Council Planning Department (ref. 08/00209/FULSU), which stated the following:

Prior to the commencement of development, a programme of archaeological work for the preservation and recording of any archaeological features affected by the proposed development, including a timetable for investigation, all in accordance with the attached specification, shall be submitted to and require the approval in writing of the Planning Authority. All arrangements thereby approved shall be implemented by the developer at his expense in accordance with the approved timetable for investigation.

Reason: In order to ensure the protection of the archaeological interest of the site.

A specification for the work was supplied to the client by the Highland Council Archaeology Unit (see Appendix 1).

2. BACKGROUND

The site is located to the east of the existing public road, from Lairg to Saval, and access is gained from an existing access point to the south-west corner of the development site. The development site is a greenfield site within an existing improved field, bounded to the west and north by a stone-wall topped with a post and wire fence, to the south by a track running east to Sydney House, whilst at the east it is open ground. There is a natural rise towards the western edge of the site, though the location of the house-plot lies on an east facing slope. No upstanding archaeological features are to be found in the field, though to the north of the development area was located a possible structure, no evidence of field system as recorded to north or west of development area.

The following archaeological sites are located in the vicinity of the development site:

1 – Lairg Muir
Alt Name: Sydney House
HSMR – MHG 40493 & 11987
NMRS – NC50NE20
Grid Ref – NC 5890 0720
Type – Field System, Hut Circles
A scattered settlement of three hut circles with associated field clearance.

'A' oval, consisting of an earth and stone bank and measuring 9m NW-SE by 6m, with an entrance 1.5m wide in the SE. The bank is 0.6m high externally and 0.3m internally. Many large field stones lie scattered over the hut. Surveyed at 1:2500.
'B': 8m by 7.2m, slightly scooped into the slope on the NW and consisting of an earth and stone bank spread to 3m with an external height of 0.6m. The entrance, 1m wide, is in the SE side.

'C': 6.7m in diameter, slightly scooped on the NW and comprising an earth and stone bank, 2.6m wide and 0.4m in maximum external height, with an entrance 1m wide in the SE. A late field bank encloses 'B' and 'C'. The field clearance heaps are generally small. RCAHMS 1911; Visited by OS (W D J) 27 June 1963.

This settlement of three, broadly similar huts (A-C) is as described by previous authorities. It occurs within an associated field system which occupies about six hectares of a low ridge, and is best preserved around huts 'B' and 'C', where stone clearance heaps and lynchets define small irregular plots. On the east side of the public road where later cultivation intrudes, the clearance is more scattered and the cleared plots are poorly defined. Revised at 1:2500 and 1:10,000. Visited by OS (N K B) 9 August 1976.'

2 – Sydney House, Lairg Muir
Alt Name: Lairg Muir South
HSMR – MHG 12001
NMRS – NC50NE 37
Grid Ref – NC5900 0730
Type – Chambered Cairn
Status – Scheduled Monument

Recorded in HSMR and NMRS as ‘Lairg Moor, South: The site of a round chambered cairn. The cairn was about 47ft diameter, but has now been almost totally removed except for a ring about 2ft high round the edge. A number of large stones in centre are obviously not earthfast and there is now no indication that there was a chamber. In 1909 RCAHMS (1911) reported ‘a portion, however, still remains across the centre, from which the ends of several large upright stones protrude, indicating the chambered character of construction’.
RCAHMS 1911; A S Henshall 1963.

The remains of this cairn are as described above. It measures about 14m in diameter and the maximum height is 1m. A mutilated mound occupies the centre of the cairn but no evidence of a chamber was noted. Revised 1/2500. Visited by OS (W D J) 26 June 1963.

This chambered cairn is as previously described. Resurveyed at 1:2500 and 1:10,000. Visited by OS (N K B) 13 August 1976.

Scheduled as 'Lairg Moor South, chambered cairn...' Information from Historic Scotland, scheduling document dated 22 March 2005.'

No past archaeological work has been conducted to the area of development. Survey work to the south of the development site has been conducted by the author (Farrell, 2004), though the work was limited to a water main with only a narrow way-leave study undertaken.

A survey of historical maps held in the National Library of Scotland, indicated indicates that a few fields are marked on Roy's Military Map of c1747 in the area of Lairg but without enough detail. Other historical maps do not provide enough detail for the area of interest. The development site is indicated on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1881 (see figure 5) as an open field. The same is shown on the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of 1896, hut circles being marked to the north-west and the cairn to the north-east of the development site.
3. METHODOLOGY

The archaeological evaluation took place on the site on the 25\textsuperscript{th} of August 2008. Weather during the work was overcast with sunny intervals. The trenches were excavated using a 10-tonne tracked back-acting machine with a 1.9 m wide straight-edged bucket under direct archaeological supervision. Trenching was conducted on areas where any new sub-surface ground works were to be carried out, these being the road, house plot and location of septic tank. Topsoil was removed to a depth of between 0.2 m and 0.3 m in depth, though to the east side of the development area, depth of soil was up to 0.45 m.

4. RESULTS

A total of 5 trenches or 330 m\textsuperscript{2} were excavated being about 16\% of the development area (which is roughly 2025 m\textsuperscript{2}) with depth of topsoil and subsoil ranging from between 0.2 – 0.35 m. The topsoil and subsoil consisted of loose dark black-brown soil with frequent small angular and rounded stones. It lay on top of a loose, soft mid orange sandy silt natural. The natural contained occasional areas of fine yellow sand and patches of rotten rock. The depth of soil rose to 0.45 m following the break of natural slope to the East in an area of bog, which had a natural of fine grey silts.

Results of trenches (see figure 4), all 1.9 m wide, were as follows:

1 – 40m in length (or 76 m\textsuperscript{2}) excavated N-S in area of road. Work revealed no archaeological features or deposits.

2 – 39.2m in length (or 74.48 m\textsuperscript{2}) excavated E-W in area of house plot. Work revealed no archaeological features or deposits of interest. Two rubble field drains both 0.25m wide were revealed with a central drain (still running) 0.6m wide.

3 – 34.5m in length (or 65.55 m\textsuperscript{2}) excavated E-W in area of house plot. Work revealed no archaeological features or deposits of interest. One tile drain was revealed with a drain (still running) 0.6m wide.

4 – 34.6m in length (or 65.74 m\textsuperscript{2}) excavated E-W in area of house plot. Work revealed no archaeological features or deposits of interest. Two rubble field drains both 0.25m wide were revealed with a drain (still running) 0.6m wide. This drain matched that recorded in trenches 2 and 3, it was capped by flat stones.

5 – 25.5m in length (or 48.45 m\textsuperscript{2}) excavated N-S in area of septic tank and drainage system. Work revealed no archaeological features or deposits of interest. Two rubble field drains both 0.25m wide were revealed.

5. DISCUSSION

The archaeological evaluation conducted on this site revealed no archaeological features or deposits of interest, only agricultural field drains. The map and documentary evidence available indicate that the lands of Sydney House were probably set out during the mid 19\textsuperscript{th} century, hence no archaeological deposits of features being found, though in a wider area archaeological features are to be found.
though in a poor condition. The site was dominated by a bog to the east part of the site with a number of field drains uncovered in all the trenches, a main stone-lined drain was still working.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no further archaeological work recommended for this site as comprehensive testing work has taken place and no deposits or features of archaeological interest were identified. The desk based assessment has also been carried out by the author and although there is recorded archaeology in the vicinity of the development site (Lairg Muir Hut circles and field system); no associated features were identified within the development site.

7. REFERENCES


Highland Council SMR entries MHG

National Monuments Record of Scotland sheet NC50NE.

RCAHMS (1911) The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions of Scotland. Second report and inventory of monuments and constructions in the county of Sutherland. 146-7, Nos. 419, 420.

Maps Consulted

1654 - Joan BLAEU - SOVTERLANDIA - Southeast Sutherland.

1745 - Herman MOLL - The Shires of Caithness and Sutherland. With Strath Navern which is Part of Sutherland Shire.

1747-55 - William ROY - Military Survey of Scotland

1776 - George TAYLOR and Andrew SKINNER - Survey and map of the roads of... Scotland

1815 - Anon. - Sketch of the the county of Sutherland showing the boundaries & divisions of the earldom of Sutherland.

1820 - William FORBES - Sutherlandshire.

1823 - John THOMSON - Sutherland Shire.

[1855] - Gregory BURNETT, William SCOTT - Map of the county of Sutherland made on the basis of the trigonometrical survey of Scotland in the years 1831, 1832.
8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following for their help during the work:
- Mr A Ross;
- Mr Peter Harrison of Sutherland Drawing Services;
- Mr S Allison Contractor for onsite works;
- Staff of Highland Council Archaeology Unit;
- Staff of Inverness Library;
- Staff of Highland Council Archives.

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 digital images showing the progress of the work has been deposited with Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record. Digital images used in this report have been deposited with HSMR on disc 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.
Plate 1 – View of house plot before excavation facing E.

Plate 2 – View of house plot before excavation facing N.
Plate 3 – View of trench 3 upon excavation facing W – scales 1m.

Plate 4 – View of trenches 2-4 upon excavation facing SW.
Plate 5 – View of trench 1 in area of access road upon excavation facing N – scales 1m.
Erection of house and formation of access at Land N of Sydney House, Lairg
NGR: 2588886 807160 (ref: SU-08-209)

1) Summary
This project may impact on valuable features of historic and archaeological
importance. In view of the archaeological sensitivity and potential of the site,
HCAU advised that an archaeological evaluation be undertaken. The
implementation of this brief will meet the concerns raised.

This brief is for an evaluation to determine the archaeological baseline of the
application site. If significant deposits are encountered, recommendations for
further measures necessary to mitigate the impact of the development should be
made.

This brief has been produced for the applicant who will be responsible for the work
and all costs incurred, including any tendering and contractual arrangements. This
brief must be read with reference to the HCAU Development Guidance that sets
out in detail who is responsible for what, as well as the terms of reference,
objectives, methods, monitoring and reporting arrangements.

The Development Guidance is available on our webpage at
www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/conservation/archaeology or a printed
copy is available from this office on request.

2) Archaeological Background
Lairg and its immediate environs are well known for their exceptionally well
preserved prehistoric landscapes comprised of both settlement and burial
monuments; the application lies in an area where large of numbers of significant
archaeological remains are recorded. Located within close proximity to
the proposed site (80-100m distant, to the N and E) are the remains of three Iron Age
roundhouses with accompanying clearance cairns and field systems. An earlier
Neolithic/Bronze Age chambered cairn, which is protected as a Scheduled Ancient
Monument, is located c.180m to the NE. There is a high potential for buried
features to survive within the application site and to be impacted by the proposed
development.

3) Objectives
• To identify the location, nature and extent of any features or objects of
archaeological importance that would be damaged or destroyed by this
development.
• To propose arrangements for the safeguarding where possible, and recording
where necessary of any archaeological features or finds identified. These will
need to be agreed with the Highland Council Archaeology Unit.
• To make sure that the needs for archaeological conservation and recording
are met without causing any unnecessary delay or disturbance to the
development project.
4) Methodology
All fieldwork must be informed by a desk-based assessment undertaken in advance of the start of works.

Fieldwork
An evaluation by trial trenching will be conducted across the entire application site. The location of these trenches will be informed by the results of a desk-based assessment and a study of the local topography. The trenches must be a combination of linear strip trenches and block trenches (of at least 100 sq m).

The application site will be subject to a 10% sample evaluation. The evaluation report will make recommendations regarding the need for further excavation work to record any identified features. All recovered artefacts and ecofacts must be subject to a programme of post-excavation analysis and the results incorporated into a final report.

The Archaeological Contractor must refer to the minimum standard requirements as laid out in HCAU Development Guidance. This brief itself is not comprehensive or definitive - tendering Archaeological Contractors will need to determine for themselves the methodology that will deliver the required product. This should be laid down in a Project Design (or Written Scheme of Investigation) and agreed with HCAU in advance of the start of site works. The start of archaeological work will be subject to the submission and approval of this document.

5) Schedule & Monitoring
The Archaeological Contractor is responsible for agreeing arrangements for monitoring with HCAU staff. We will monitor projects as necessary to ensure that minimum standards are met. Prior notice of fieldwork starting dates, with contact names, telephone numbers and arrangements for access must be given to HCAU by the Archaeological Contractor.

The Archaeological Contractor must make a short progress report (by telephone) to HCAU for every week of fieldwork undertaken. Any unexpectedly significant or complex discoveries, or other unexpected occurrences which might significantly affect the archaeological work and/or the development must be notified by the Archaeological Contractor immediately to the applicant and HCAU. The finds or features must be left in situ until arrangements have been agreed for safeguarding or recording them. In the meantime work may continue on other areas of the site.

6) Products
Following completion of the fieldwork, an archive and report will be produced and disseminated according to the standards set out in the HCAU Development Guidance. The report should describe the nature of the fieldwork undertaken; the conditions and limitations within which the work was carried-out; the results that were obtained and recommendations for mitigation and/or further work, as appropriate.
Appendix 2 – Photograph Register

1 – View of access road prior to excavation facing N.

2 – View of house plot prior to excavation facing NE.

3 – View of house plot prior to excavation facing E.

4 – View of house plot prior to excavation facing N.

5 – View of hut circles to NW from road facing W.

6 – View of possible structure to N of development site facing E.

7 – View of cairn to NE from road facing NE.

8 – View of trench 4 upon excavation facing W – scales 1m.

9 – View of trench 4 upon excavation facing E – scales 1m.

10 – View of trench 3 upon excavation facing W – scales 1m.

11 – View of trench 2 upon excavation facing W – scales 1m.
12 – View of trenches 2-4 upon excavation facing SW – scales 1m.

13 – View of trenches 2-4 upon excavation facing SW – scales 1m.

14 – View of trench 2-5 upon excavation facing S.

15 – View of trench 2 upon excavation facing E – scales 1m.

16 – View of trench 3 upon excavation facing E – scales 1m.

17 – View of trench 4 upon excavation facing E – scales 1m.

18 – View of trench 5 upon excavation facing N – scales 1m.

19 – View of trench 1 upon excavation facing N – scales 1m.

20 – View of trench 1 upon excavation facing S – scales 1m.