

**New Road at Kinellan Farm, Strathpeffer (RC-06-281)**  
**Archaeological Watching Brief and Metal Detecting Survey**

**Phase 1: Metal Detecting Survey**

**Phase 2: Watching Brief**



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# **New Road at Kinellan Farm, Strathpeffer (RC-06-281): Archaeological Watching Brief and Metal Detecting Survey**

## **1.0 Background**

The development covered by this archaeological evaluation is a new road to serve forestry, agriculture and one existing house. The road crosses the edge of the reputed site of a clan battle (Blar na Pairce) In addition it crosses a wider area where significant archaeological remains are recorded. The evaluation therefore covers an area where there is the potential for the survival of buried historic and archaeological remains. Accordingly, the following condition was imposed on any planning permission granted:

*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*

The project was required to be the subject of an archaeological evaluation by a metal detecting survey, in advance of any development, in order to establish the historic content and potential. In addition, a watching brief was undertaken during ground-breaking works for the construction of the road. This work was conducted by a qualified archaeological contractor and backed up by desk-based research to produce a report setting out the results and any required mitigation strategy.

## **2.0 Methodology**

The evaluation contains the following components:

- Desk-based assessment: a check of all relevant archaeological and historical records, maps and air photographs
- Metal Detector Survey: A systematic metal detector survey carried out across the entire wayleave
- Watching Brief carried out on ground breaking work along the wayleave.

## **3.0 Location and Site Description**

The route of the proposed new road leaves the A834 Strathpeffer-Contin road west of Jamestown, passes through an area of forestry, crossing the Mains of Coul east access road then crosses fields to the west end of Loch Kinellan to join an existing road, running along this west for 100m before cutting north to join another existing track

which runs along the north side of Loch Kinellan. At the end of this existing track, a new section will continue for another 150m to the boundary of the An t-Ord forestry area from which timber is to be extracted.

The route consists of the following elements, from south to north: (see Plan 1.)

1. **Felled woodland:** This woodland is recorded on the 1881 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map. The timber has been removed but a thick layer of brashings make a metal detecting survey in this section impossible at present
2. **Blar na Pairc.** The field of this name which is the reputed site of the battle is low-lying and poorly drained with a cover of rushes. The exceptions are one enclosed, low flat knoll bearing a stand of mature trees and a smaller oval knoll which is the exact location of the battle as marked on the 1881 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map. Both knolls are recorded as wooded on the 1881 map. A drain has been cut eastwards from the battlefield knoll. It must be assumed that prior to modern drainage, this field was much wetter and could have been a bog above which the two knolls rose as dry ground. If the battle took place here, it is likely to have concentrated on the drier ground, but the surrounding wetland may have been historically recorded as a river in which the MacDonald men were caught and killed or drowned (see below, Section 5) If this is the case, it is likely that weaponry and other relics of battle would have been lost in the bog rather than, as would have been expected, retrieved after the fighting was over. This increases the likelihood of relics surviving in the ground to the present day, but too deep to be detected by metal detector. This field is only briefly entered by the proposed road, in its SW corner.
3. **Improved fields.** West of Blar na Pairce the field rises smoothly, although there are rocky outcrops at the top of the slope. This is drained and improved grassland, which extends north over the high point of the ridge and drops down to Loch Kinellan
4. **Rough Ground.** West of Loch Kinellan the ground is poorly drained and unimproved. The 1881 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map suggests that there was an attempt to establish a tree plantation here, but there is now no trace
5. **Improved Field.** To the WNW of the loch is an enclosed improved field, approximately as recorded on the 1881 map and now used for grazing.
6. **Rough Ground.** The north side of Loch Kinellan is rough ground, rising fairly steeply to Knock Ardaging
7. **Kinloch croftland.** To the east of the loch is a landscape of in-use and abandoned croft structures, together with some modern housing

#### 4.0 Archaeological Background

The following sites are recorded on the Highland Sites and Monuments Record: (see Plan 1)

- a) Blar na Pairce, Battle site at NH 4732 5690, SMR no. NH45NE0008
- b) Findspot, Bronze Age axehead at NH 4700 5700, SMR no. NH45NE0010
- c) Findspot, Bronze Age axehead at NH 4700 5750, SMR no. NH45NE0012
- d) Loch Kinellan, crannog at NH 4710 5759, SMR no. NH45NE0007

- e) Knock Ardaging, cairn at NH 4700 5800, SMR no. NH45NE0028. This cairn, together with about 12 smaller cairns, are recorded on the NE slope of the knock.

The two axeheads are presumed to have been recovered during 19<sup>th</sup> century field improvement and the precise location of the findspots is not recorded. This offers the possibility that both originally formed part of one or two hoards, of which the remains are still in situ.

In addition to the recorded sites and findspots, there is a local tradition of a burial ground on the NW side of Loch Kinellan at approximately NH 4715 5775. This is on a sloping platform overlooking the lochan and the crannog, but there is no trace of any structures.

## 5.0 Historical Background

### 5.1 The Battle of Blar na Pairc

Blar na Pairc is a recorded battle which took place at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is associated with the place name recorded on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map, but it is not clear that the battle, or skirmish took place exactly there.

The 1881 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map records at NH 4732 5690:

**Blar na Pairce:** Site of conflict between the MacDonalds and the MacKenzies about 1490

Watson's *Placenames of Ross and Cromarty* (1904) gives the following:

**Park** – Park 1476, le Park 1479; G. a' Phairc. The Battle of Park, Blar na Pairce, between the Mackenzies and the MacDonalds, took place about 1490

David Alston, in *Ross and Cromarty: a Historical Guide* (1999) states:

**Blair na Pairc** 1491. Possibly near Dingwall. Defeat of Alexander MacDonald of Lochalsh  
In 1491 Alexander MacDonald of Lochalsh led a raid into Easter Ross and, along with Farquhar, son of the MacIntosh chief, seized the castle of Inverness before being defeated at Blair na Pairc, possibly near Dingwall.

There is a more detailed account of the battle by James Brown in his *A History of the Highlands and of the Highland Clans* (1837)

Gillespoc, cousin of the Lord of the Isles, at the head of a large body of the islanders, invaded the higher part of Ross, and committed great devastation. The inhabitants, or as many as the shortness of the time would permit, amongst whom the Clankenzie were chiefly distinguished, speedily assembled, and met the islanders on the banks of the Connan, where a sharp conflict took place. The Clankenzie fought with great valour, and pressed the enemy so hard, that Gillespoc MacDonald was overthrown,

and the greater part of his men were slain or drowned in the river about two miles from Braile, thence called Blar-na-Pairc.....It is reported that, before the skirmish, the Clandonald robbed and burned a chapel near the river Connan, not far from the place they fought

If there is any truth in this account, the only candidates to be the chapel burned by the MacDonalds would be Contin parish church, known to have been in use in 1490, or Praes Mairi, a private burial ground associated with St Maelrubha which may have been the site of an early chapel. Both of these are near to the Blackwater rather than the Conon, but are both only 2km from the recorded site of Blar na Pairc. The details given in this account would suggest that the actual battle took place on a river bank.

The most complete account of the battle is given by the Earl of Cromarty (1979):

Before noon on Monday, MacDonald moved east, forming up in the area east of the thick woods where Coul House now stands, and north of Jameston. Less than 500 yards away were the Mackenzies, most of them in full view, but what MacDonald's scouts had failed to discover was the presence of a quagmire – since drained – covered with deceptive moss and grass, which lay between the opposing forces....Through the bog were certain safe paths known only to the defenders and across them Kenneth led a decoy force having previously posted strong formations of MacRae archers in the woods that flanked the bog, with orders to stay out of sight till required. Kenneth's advance was the signal for a mass attack by the over-confident enemy who already thought the battle won on seeing Kenneth start a slow retreat back to his own lines. Their disillusionment followed very quickly when the whole force, many of them encumbered with armour, found themselves floundering knee-deep and more in soggy peat, the sign for Duncan and his archers to pour in flight after murderous flight of arrows...

While this account may be fanciful and is far removed from direct sources, it does have various topographical details, particularly the boggy nature of the site of engagement, which link the events to the recorded site of Blar na Pairce.

## **5.2 Settlement History**

The crannog on Loch Kinellan, although probably prehistoric in origin, was used as a MacKenzie stronghold in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, presumably until the nearby Brahan castle was built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Avery's map of the Moray Firth, dating to 1727, and Roy's military survey of the 1750s both indicate Kinellan township to the south of the loch, possibly in the same location as the present Kinellan Lodge. Curiously, Roy gives no indication of surrounding cornlands, although the adjacent Coul is shown as enclosed and wooded. This might indicate that the Kinellan area was used primarily for grazing even before the introduction of sheep.

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century the lands of Kinellan was a part of the estate of Sir George MacKenzie of Coul, the great improver and thorough remover of small tenants. The introduction of sheep farming took place in the parish of Fodderty around 1793. Dr John MacKenzie took the lease of Kinellan Farm in 1832, at which date the farm was in the hands of the proprietor. This suggests that a term of lease had just run out, possibly a second 19 year lease to a sheep farmer although possibly Kinellan was a part of the land referred to in 1808 when Sir George bought a large stock of cheviots

‘for the purpose of stocking an extensive sheep farm which he has lately taken into his own hands’

In 1832 the farmhouse was newly built, and ‘not one stick was visible on the farm, except some hedges just planted to divide the fields’ The Coul woods, however, must have been well established, separated from the Kinellan fields by ‘a five-foot stone wall with a bar of paling on its top’ Dr John grew barley, oats and turnips and raised cattle and sheep until moving to Isle Ewe in 1848. There is now little trace of the hedges planted by Dr John, although the stand of mature trees along the field boundary west of the new house may be the remains of his planting, as may the trees on the knoll at Blar na Pairce.

## **6.0 Metal Detecting Survey**

### **6.1 The Survey**

A metal detecting survey was carried out along the wayleave of the proposed road on 28.3.07 in dry weather conditions. The most southerly section was excluded as lying brashings from timber felling prevented any meaningful survey. The survey area is indicated on plan 2. The recent post and wire fence running north along the west boundary of Blar na Pairce provided a large number of readings which proved to be fencing debris in the form of staples and sections of wire, and also masked any other readings which may have lain within a metre of the fence. Beyond this, a number of corroded iron objects were recovered (Photo nos 5, 6.) These include a horseshoe of a Clydesdale-sized horse, a segment of cast iron cauldron or pot of the type used to hold tar during shearing, and a substantial bar. All appear to be agricultural debris dating to the late 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century. These objects were retained, with the exception of the large iron bar, and photographed, but their precise locations were not plotted. It was notable that these items had a slight concentration near the gateway where there would have been an increased passage of farm machinery and carts and at the base of the slope of the west field where the soil has washed down and built up against a now no longer extant field boundary dyke or hedge.

It was noted that the base of the plough soil was not reached while recovering these items. This offers the possibility of items lying deeper than the metal detector can penetrate, and these will have to be recovered while topsoil stripping for the road is taking place.

### **6.2 Conclusion of Metal Detecting Survey**

No items dating to the period of the battle were recovered. If the battle did in fact take place at the recorded location and if items were dropped or lost and not recovered at the time, they are most likely to be located deep in the wet ground to the east of the route of the new road. There remains the possibility of mass graves contemporary with the battle, which may be on the drier ground, but these will not be located until the Watching Brief.

## **7.0 Watching Brief**

### **7.1 Area covered by the watching brief**

Subsequent to the metal detecting survey, it was decided, on engineering grounds, to 'float' the road on a Terram surface in section 2, the low-lying ground which is the edge of the battlefield. There was, therefore, no ground disturbance in this section (Photos 7, 8). The watching brief covers section 3, the steeply rising improved fields to the NW of the battlefield. In this section, topsoil was removed to create a firm foundation for the road, and borrow pits were opened in the NW corner to provide hardcore for the built sections of road. (Photos 10, 11)

Work was carried out on November 2007 in bright and generally dry weather conditions. The following observations were made:

- Topsoil, up to 0.4m of ploughsoil, overlies grey clay subsoil
- No features were revealed during removal of topsoil.
- One stone field drain was uncovered during deeper excavation for drainage at the break of slope. (Photo no. 9)
- One metal object was recovered from the topsoil (Photo no. 12) This is a wheel or part of 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century farm machinery and was not retained

### **7.2 Conclusions of Watching Brief**

Ground breaking work revealed no structures or artefacts pre-dating field improvement and cultivation of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. No burials, the most likely feature associated with the battle of Blar na Pairce, were located. This does not mean that there are no contemporary graves elsewhere in the fields adjacent to the battlefield, and any future development in these fields should also be covered by an archaeological watching brief. Similarly, any artefacts lost during the battle are likely to be deeply buried in the wet ground, but could be disturbed during deep digging for drainage, an event which is unlikely to be covered by an application for planning consent which would flag up the site and allow for further archaeological investigation. Metal detecting of the cast-up soil is likely to be the most efficient method of recovering artefacts.

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## **Appendix 1. Plans**

**Plan 1.** Location plan showing route of proposed road, archaeological sites and land use

**Plan 2.** Area of metal detecting survey

## **Appendix 2. Photographs**

Cover: View from NW, Blar na Pairce left of wooded knoll, proposed road to right of knoll in improved field

1. Blar na Pairce from NW. Dark spot in far left of low, rushy ground is the low knoll indicated on OS 1881 map as site of battle. Route of road is out of picture to the right
2. Blar na Pairce from west. Dark spot in centre distance of low rushy ground is knoll. Route of road is in improved grassland in the foreground
3. Blar na Pairce from north. To left is low, poorly drained ground associated with battlefield. To right is improved grassland where route of road crosses from centre right to far centre and enters felled woodland
4. Route of road across improved grassland beyond fenceline, view from NW
5. Selection of 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century iron agricultural items recovered by metal detecting.
6. Large iron bar recovered by metal detecting.
7. Detail of 'floating' road crossing edge of battlefield, from SE
8. 'Floating' road passing battlefield, from S
9. Water from stone land drain broken during excavation, from E
10. Topsoil stripped in section 3, spread over ground to NE
11. View of section 3. topsoil stripping from S
12. Iron object recovered during topsoil stripping in section 3.

## **Appendix 3. Data sources and Bibliography**

The following data sources were consulted during the desk-based evaluation:

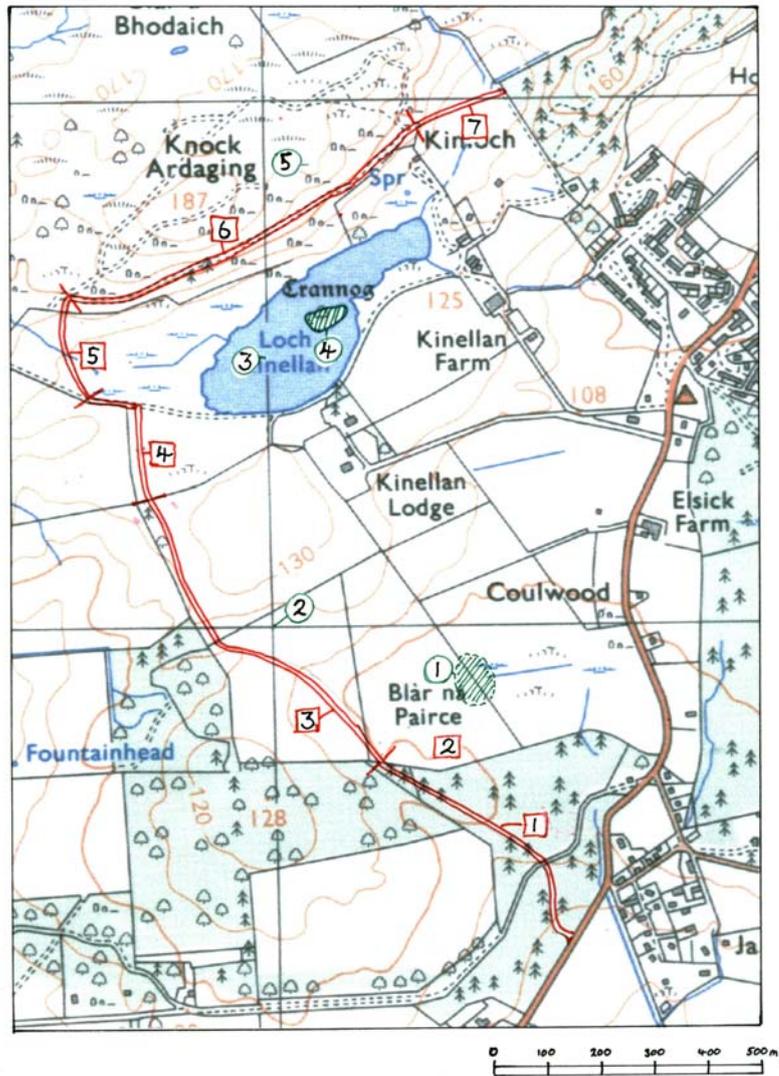
- Highland Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) held by the Archaeology Unit at Highland Council in Inverness
- National Monuments Record for Scotland (NMRS) held by RCAHMS in Edinburgh
- Early maps held by the Map Library within the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh

The following books provided background information for the evaluation:

- Alston D, 1999 *Ross and Cromarty, A Historical Guide*
- Cromartie, the Earl of, 1979 *A Highland History*
- Watson 1904 *Placenames of Ross and Cromarty*
- Brown J. 1837 *A History of the Highlands and of the Highland Clans*

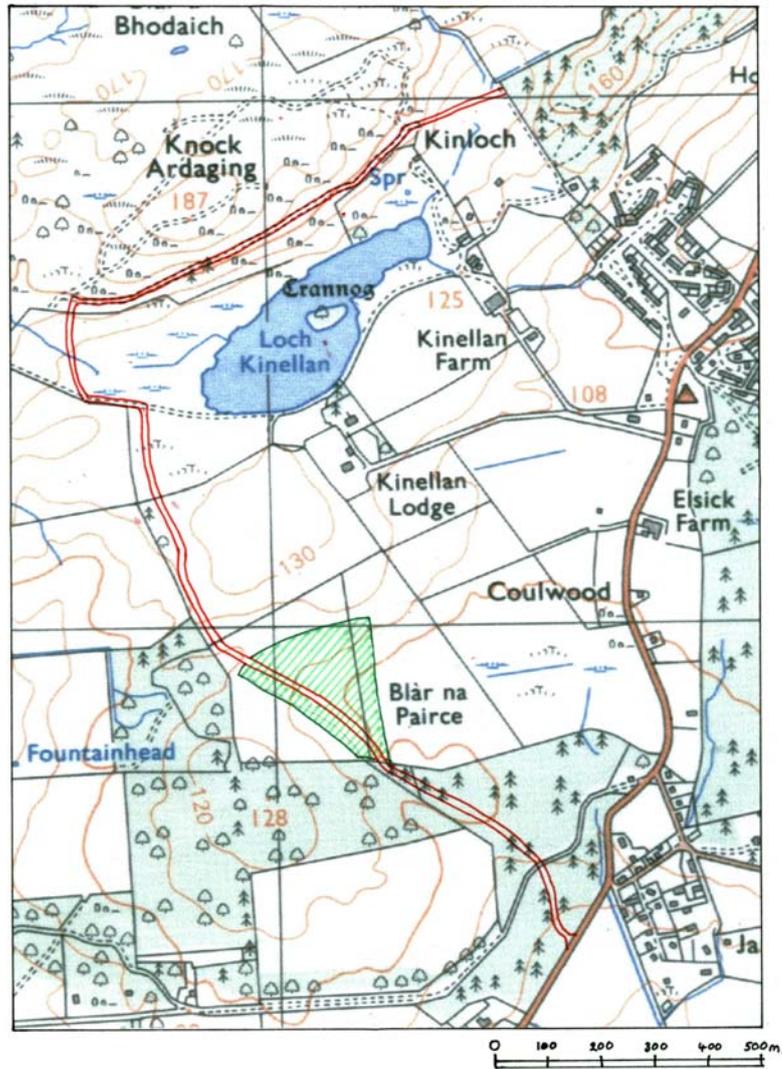
New Road at Kinellan: Archaeological Evaluation

-  Approximate route of new road
-  Land use description
-  Recorded archaeological site



New road at Kinellan: Archaeological Evaluation. Plan 2

-  Approximate route of new road
-  Area of metal detecting survey





1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



8.



9.



10.

11.



12.



