

**MMullans Wood, Tore, Killearnan**  
**Proposed Recycling Centre**  
**Archaeological Monitoring and Trial Trenching**

**Catherine Dagg**

**For**

**Gunn MacPhee & Associates**  
**Ross-shire Business Centre**  
**1, Castle Street**  
**Dingwall**  
**IV15 9HU**

# **Mullans Wood, Tore, Killearnan: Proposed Recycling Centre Archaeological Monitoring and Trial Trenching**

## **1.0 Summary**

|                                    |                                     |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Site summary</i>                | Rural site                          |
| <i>Site location (NGR)</i>         | NH 575 526                          |
| <i>Total area of construction</i>  | 5.18 hectares                       |
| <i>Work required</i>               | Trial trenching                     |
| <i>Area of evaluation required</i> | 7% of development area (3629 sq m.) |

## **2.0 Executive Summary**

Archaeological trial trenching within an area of felled coniferous planting scheduled for re-development ascertained that mounds identified during an initial walk-over survey were piles of stones without any structure and were most likely to have been field clearance piles, possibly contemporary with a hut circle located within the undisturbed part of the plantation. Ditches and plough marks were noted. These are possibly associated with short-term expansion of croft land during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **3.0 Background.**

The author was asked by Gunn MacPhee & Associates on behalf of Tore Recycling to carry out an archaeological investigation in the form of 7% trial trenching of an area of proposed development at Mullans Wood west of Tore. The evaluation is in compliance with a brief for archaeological work prepared by the Highland Council Archaeology Unit and follows on from an initial desk-based assessment and walk-over survey of the area carried out in December 2007. This evaluation located one Bronze/Iron Age hut circle and a number of cairns or stone piles which may be contemporary with the hut circle and may be either a Bronze Age cairnfield or prehistoric field clearance associated with cultivation. A visual impact assessment of the development on adjacent Scheduled Monuments concluded that the impact of the development would be minimal and may not be entirely negative.

The evaluation concluded:

*The majority of the sites identified during the walk-over survey, with the exception of the small cairns which form site no. 3, lie outwith the area of the proposed recycling centre. These small cairns or field clearance piles would be destroyed by the development. If they are, in fact, field clearance piles representing the surviving remnants of a prehistoric field system, they*

*would be classed as of local significance only and it is unlikely that a watching brief or further evaluation would offer more information about the site. However, there remains the slight possibility that these are burial cairns. A small controlled archaeological investigation of one of the mounds before any ground breaking work or tree felling commences would be advisable.*

## **4.0 Methodology**

### **4.1 Marking of Sites**

This was carried out before felling commenced. The site was visited in the company of the felling contractors and the visible archaeological features within the felling area, the Site 3. stone piles, were marked with canes and construction tape. Exclusion zones where no machinery would enter were agreed and a methodology for felling and removing trees within these exclusion zones while causing minimum damage to possible sub-surface features was agreed. All the visible stone piles were within breaks in the planting and had survived for the reason that they had not been ploughed or planted over. Therefore no felling or removal of stumps was required on the features themselves.

### **4.2 Trial Trenching**

This was carried out on 17.12.08 in partly dry but deteriorating weather conditions. Work was carried out using a 2m wide flat bucket, including the investigation of the stone piles, but this was done with extreme caution with a view to continuing by manual excavation should any construction features become evident. The mounds were approached from the side, removing approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the material to expose a section which could be examined for stratigraphy, constructional remains or large flat stones which might indicate the presence of a cist, also to expose the natural subsoil and any buried soils or former ground surface. This process was then repeated to bisect the mound and finally in the remaining area in case of off-centre features.

## **5.0 Results of Trial Trenching**

### **5.1 Site 3. Stone piles**

Three of the stone piles identified in the initial evaluation were investigated. The following observations were made:

1. At NH 57759 52616 Visible as a moss-covered stony mound spread to 4m in diameter and to a maximum height of 1m. The mound was shown to consist of stones within a matrix of pink-black soil, similar to the thin topsoil noted elsewhere. The stones consisted of a mix of large, 200-350mm across, and smaller, 150mm or less. The majority were rounded cobbles but some were sharper edged and were probably flaked bedrock.

All the broken or exposed surfaces showed the stone to be the same pink sandstone as the bedrock. The subsoil lay directly below the stones with no visible intervening buried soil layer, and consisted of an orange gritty clay containing gravels of varying sizes and intrusions of shattered bedrock. Some grey irregular shapes crossing this surface may be the remains of former tree roots. No stratigraphy of stone size or matrix was noted, suggesting that all the stones were placed in the pile in one event.

2. At NH 57734 52620 Visible as a low stony mound spread to 5m diameter. This pile appeared to have a concentration of the larger size of stone in the centre with smaller stones above and to the sides, and with very little pink-black soil matrix, most stones in the central core being separated by voids. On the north side of the pile a rough row of 4-5 similarly shaped and sized stones, approximately 300mm across may have been a revetting to contain the stone pile. Below the pile was a large boulder, measuring 1.2m by 0.4m and 0.4m high, embedded in the grey, gritty and stony subsoil. This suggests that the field clearance stones were piled onto a boulder too large to remove, a common crofting practice.
3. At NH 57723 52621 Visible as a very low mound spread to 5m diameter. Similar range of stone sizes to mounds 1 and 2, within a soil matrix. No visible former ground surface and subsoil containing mostly broken sandstone bedrock fragments.

All three piles proved to be typical of field clearance and indicate that this area was formerly cultivated, but no associated cultural material was recovered to give any indication of date. It remains likely that they are contemporary with the hut circle located within the remaining plantation to the west.

## **5.2 Fence Access Route**

A broad area was stripped to allow access for constructing a deer fence along the west boundary of the development area. This strip ran from NH 57475 52742 to NH 57616 52555 to a width of 6-8m and from NH 57616 52555 to NH 57734 52599 to a width of 12m. generally, topsoil stripping revealed the following stratigraphy:

- a. Vegetation: a forest floor mix of fallen pine needles, heather and moss, forming a fibrous mat to a depth of 200-300mm
- b. Topsoil; not always present. Impoverished, slightly peaty and sandy dark brown layer to a maximum depth of 150mm
- c. Subsoil: generally orange sandy with grey clay patches, ranging from relatively stone free to very gravelly. Interface with overlying layer includes irregular dark brown shapes interpreted as the remains of former tree roots
- d. Bedrock: occasional surfacing strata of pink sandstone and occasional embedded boulders of the same rock.

The following possible archaeological features were noted:

4. at NH 57481 52622 Concentration of medium sized cobbles forming a layer 1-3 stones deep across an area several metres in diameter, with no overlying topsoil, probably the ploughed remains of a field clearance pile.
5. at NH 57516 52581 Small concentration of spread cobbles, probably the ploughed remains of a field clearance pile.
6. at NH 57672 52587 Thin cobble layer spread to a diameter of 4-5m, probably the ploughed remains of a field clearance pile.
7. at NH 57682 52581 Thin cobble layer containing mostly small stones and 1-2 large, probably the ploughed remains of a field clearance pile. One small fragment of charcoal (not retained) within this area.

### 5.3 Trial Trench

This was dug across the area of proposed office and plant building, to a length of 122m and one bucket width, from NH 57666 52714 to NH 57754 52620. The following archaeological features were noted:

8. **Probable drainage ditches**, meeting at NH 57682 52712, Two shallow trenches cut into the subsoil and infilled with dark brown soil and small stones. Width at top of subsoil 200-250mm and depth of cut into subsoil 100mm. Ditch a. ran ESE-WSW and ditch b. NE-SW. Both crossed a visible low point on the otherwise relatively level area. The subsoil here was a stone-free pale grey clay deposit. This dip began immediately to fill with water, indicating poor natural drainage
9. **Field clearance pile** at NH 57705 52667. Two large boulders embedded in the subsoil, against the south faces of which
10. **Plough marks**, from NH 57712 52670 to NH 57728 52652. Between these two points a group of 8 narrow, shallow cuts into the subsoil were noted. These ran, parallel, N-S and were spaced approximately 1m apart although there were gaps in the sequence the cuts measure 100-150mm across and cutting no more than 20-30mm into the exposed subsoil layer. These were interpreted as plough cuts and relatively modern in date.

### 6.0 Small Finds

Two fragments of undecorated, white glazed pottery and two broken bottles, all probably 19<sup>th</sup> century in date, were recovered from the topsoil in different locations. While the bottles were effectively on the surface and could have been brought to the site for several purposes, the ceramics are typical of fragments which find their way onto manured fields via middens. The corroborate the evidence of feature 10 that the area was cultivated at a relatively recent date.

### 7.0 Discussion

The identification of five further field clearance piles (features 4-7, 9) indicate that early clearance for cultivation was originally more widespread than the

surviving stone piles (Features 1-3) would suggest. It is likely that more spread remains of former stone piles will be exposed during topsoil stripping of the rest of the site. This raises the question of whether more settlement remains in the form of hut circles or other contemporary structures might also have been located in this part of the wood and had all surface remains removed or obscured by ploughing or planting. This possibility cannot be ruled out, although the known hut circle stands on slightly higher ground. The thinness of the soils and proximity of the bedrock to the surface make it unlikely that contemporary sub-surface features pits could have been excavated, while shallow features are likely to have been completely removed by later ploughing.

The regularly spaced plough marks, feature 10, indicate relatively modern cultivation. Within the known historical sequence of land use, this may have occurred in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the formerly common ground was enclosed, possibly initially for tree plantation but later given over to croft land. If it was crofted, it reverted to rough ground by the 1880s. Mullens Wood is shown as enclosed rough ground on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map, but on the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition map appears to be planted with young trees. A second possible period of ploughing may have occurred between this plantation being harvested and the Forestry Commission plantings of 1943.

## **8.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

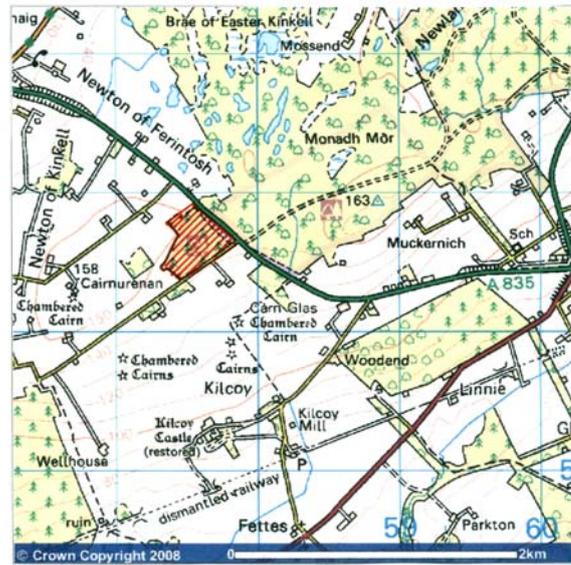
The trial trenching has revealed further information about historical land use of the development area, particularly the extent of cultivation in the prehistoric period and a later phase of intensive cultivation in the 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is unlikely that any further archaeological monitoring will provide any further insights into this area and no further archaeological work is recommended.

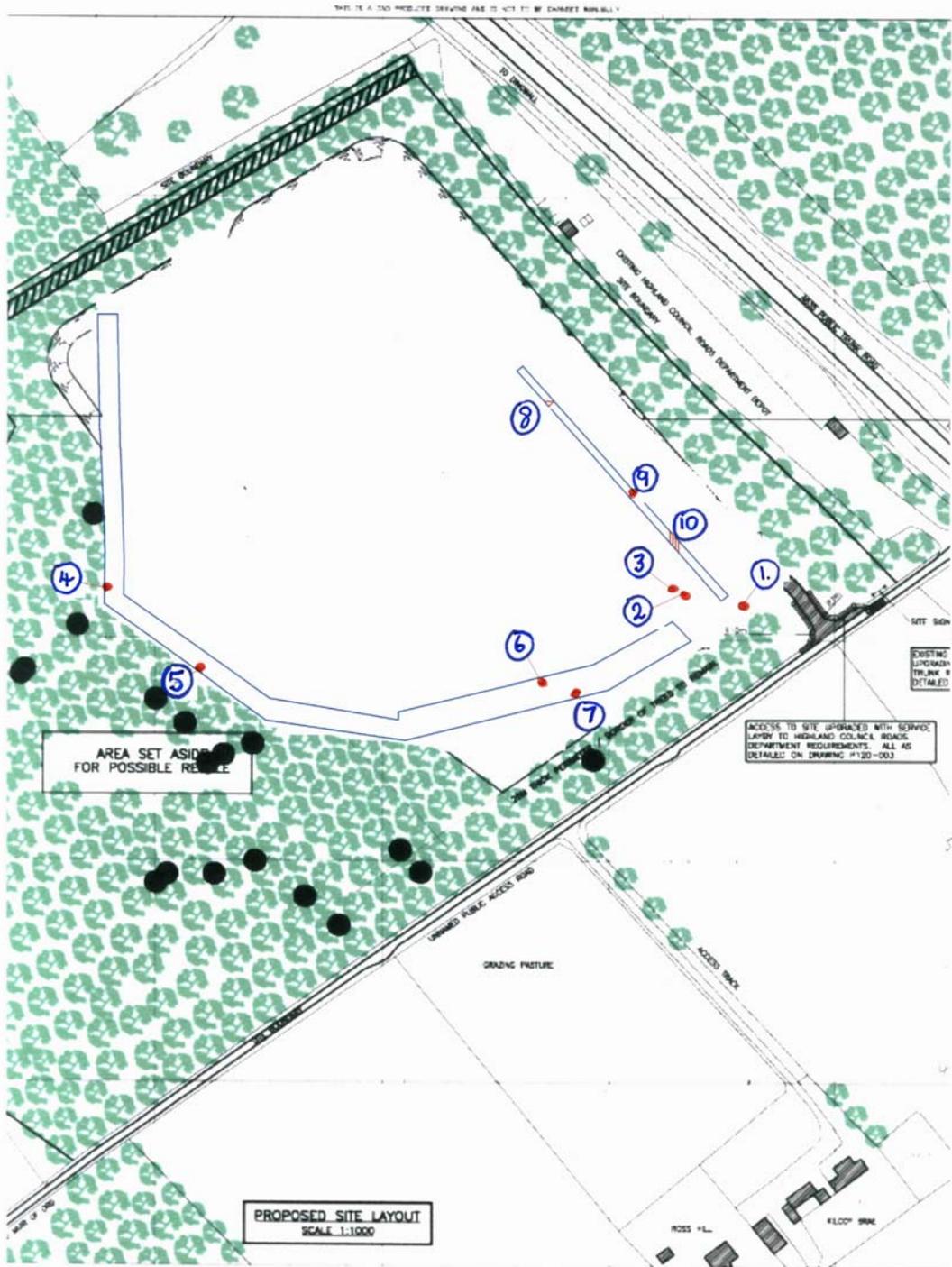
**Catherine Dagg, BA, AiFA  
2, Ruigh'Riabhach  
Scoraig Peninsula  
Dundonnell  
Wester Ross  
IV23 2RE  
Tel: 01854 633 337**

**22.12.08**

Mullans Wood, Tore: Archaeological Evaluation

Plan 1. Location Plan





Plan 2. Mullans Wood: Area covered by trial trenching and archaeological features

Plan 2. Location of trial trenches and archaeological features