



Highland Archaeology Services Ltd
Bringing the Past and Future Together

Kilbeg, Isle of Skye



Archaeological Survey



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Kilbeg, Isle of Skye

Archaeological Survey

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Summary

An archaeological desk-based and walk-over survey was undertaken to inform the design and construction of a new village at Kilbeg, Isle of Skye. 2 new sites were recorded plus 2 landscape boundaries and 1 enclosure boundary. Two possible cairn sites recorded in 1997 were visited and re-assessed.

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Acknowledgements

Fieldwork was carried out by Martin Wildgoose and Steven Birch. Background mapping has been reproduced by permission of the Ordnance Survey under Licence 100043217. Historic maps are courtesy of the National Library of Scotland. Thanks to Clan Donald Centre for the Estate map of 1810 on the cover and other helpful notes. Other detailed plans have been kindly supplied by the client.

Aims and Objectives

- To minimise any possible delay or cost to the development by identifying possible archaeological issues at the earliest possible stage.
- To determine as far as possible the character, extent, condition, date and significance of any archaeologically significant remains; and to recommend mitigation where appropriate so that they can be preserved where possible and recorded where necessary in line with national and local policies and standards.

Location

The site is centred at approx. Grid reference NG 656 062 at about 45m above sea level.

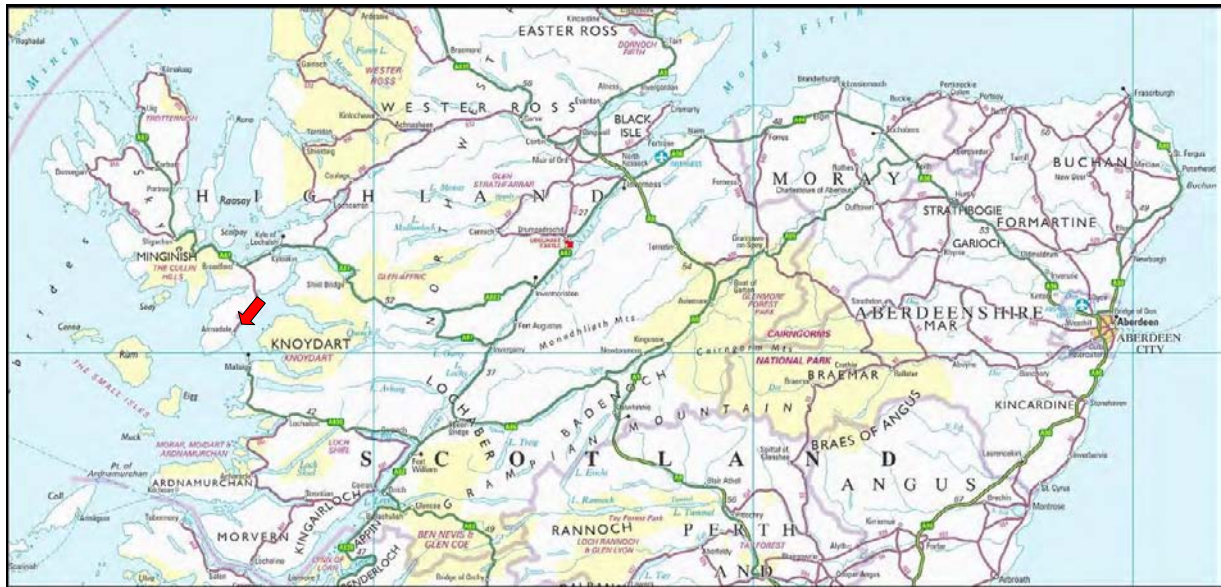


Figure 1 Site location

Introduction

A desk-based assessment and walk-over survey were undertaken by Highland Archaeology Services Ltd at Kilbeg, Isle of Skye, to identify and record the nature and extent of archaeological features that might be affected by the construction of a new village.

The area under survey consists of a mix of improved pasture and former forested areas lying on a SE facing slope overlooking the sound of Sleat. The A851 runs through the survey area. Much of the eastern half of the survey area has been either heavily disturbed by recent tree planting or totally destroyed (from landscape boundary Site K.06 eastwards), during recent road widening operations.

The survey was carried out on a dry sunny day. Ground conditions underfoot were wet and in places very boggy. Vegetation was at a minimum but along the edge of the sea cliff a tangle of scrub woodland and brambles made it impossible to survey to the very edge of the cliff. 2 new sites were recorded plus 2 landscape boundaries and 1 enclosure boundary. A possible cairn site recorded in 1997 (Kenworthy 1997) was visited and re-assessed.

Archaeology and Policy Background

Archaeological survey was requested in this case because there is considered to be potential for finds or features of interest to be discovered during site works. The name *Kilbeg* means 'little church', in comparison with Kilmore, the big church, immediately to the North East. The 'big church' was apparently established in the 13th century, and ruins still survive. As Kenworthy¹ pointed out in 1998, 'this may imply that the 'little church' was the earlier church for the area - and if so might be early in origin. In any case, its location has not been established'. Kenworthy also noted the presence of two possible Bronze Age burial cairns in Kilbeg Wood, which might be associated with evidence of settlements and fields nearby, hidden by peat growth.

The planning and policy framework includes the Highland Council's *Structure Plan*², and the Scottish Government's *Scottish Planning Policy SPP 23: Planning and the Historic Environment* (2008)³. The fundamental principles underpinning the above policies are set out in *Passed to the Future: Historic Scotland's Policy for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* (2002)⁴ and the *Burra Charter* (Australia ICOMOS 1999).⁵

¹ Kenworthy J, 1998 Report on a Watching Brief during ground clearance at the St Columba Campus, Sabhal Mor Ostaig, Rubha Cille Bhig, Sleat, Skye, November-December 1997

² <http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/planning/developmentplans/structureplan/thehighlandstructureplan.htm>

³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/10/28135841/0>

⁴ www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pasttofuture.pdf

⁵ <http://www.icomos.org/australia/burra.html>

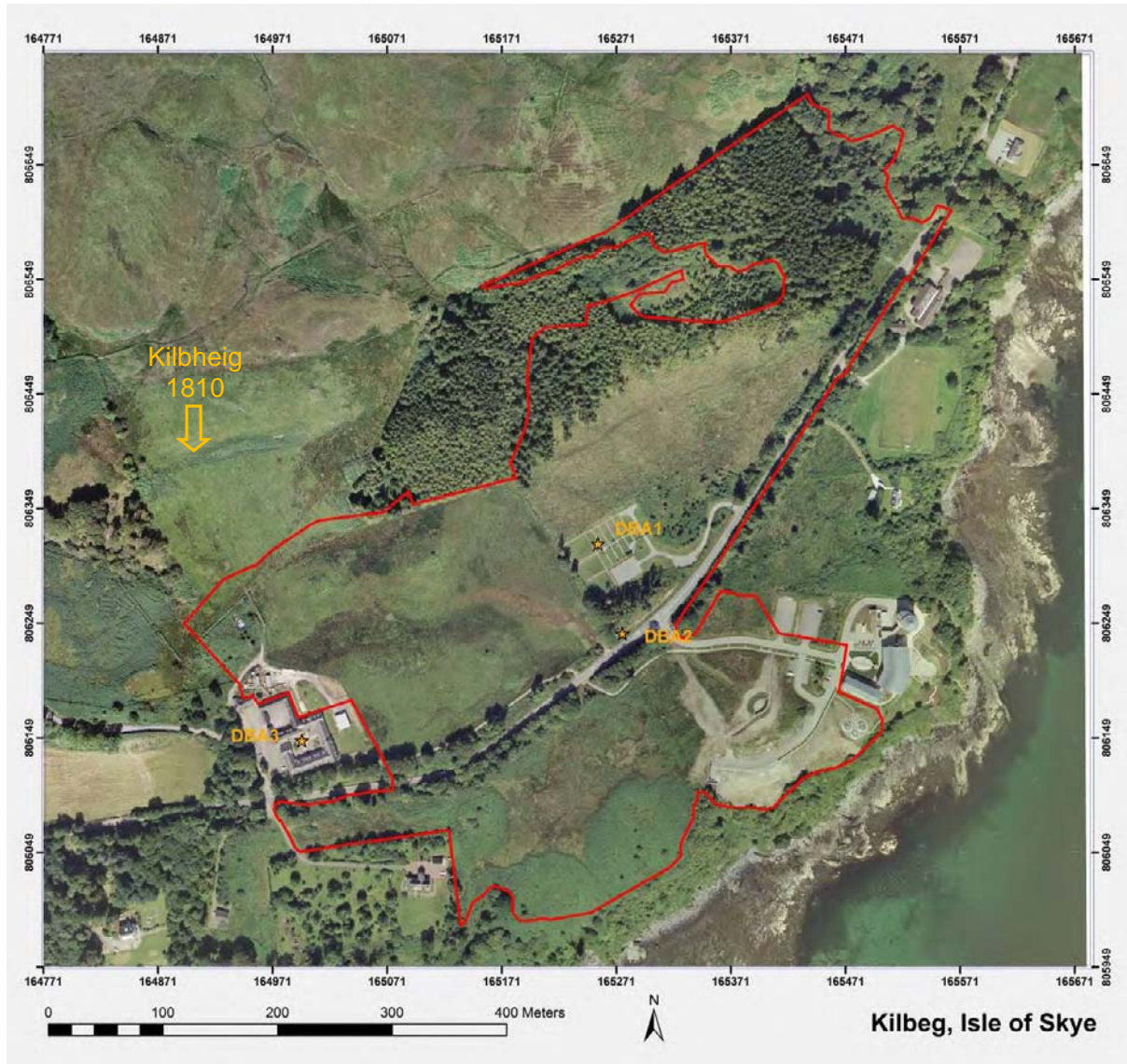


Figure 2 Site outline and previously recorded features (aerial photograph)

Photograph courtesy of Getmapping.com and Landmark Information Group

Methods and Results

1. Desk Based Assessment

The desk-based assessment was carried out by John Wood. Relevant archaeological / historical records, maps and aerial photographs were checked for recorded sites and background information. An estate map of 1810 (see cover) shows the entire area as arable, with the farm being divided into 2 holdings by a red line down the middle. This boundary was identified on the ground by the field survey (K.06). By

1820 there are 9 tenants listed in the rentals⁶: it is unclear whether they all had individual crofts but the township of Kilbheig is clearly marked on the map NNW of the steading, now Àrainn Ostaig⁷. The township has disappeared by 1876 when the 1st edition 6 inch Ordnance Survey map was surveyed (Fig 3). The location is outside the present development area (see Fig 2), and no evidence of former crofts was found during field survey.

The 1810 map has been annotated in about 1830 when the Ostaig steading has been pencilled in, suggesting it was constructed between these dates.



Figure 3 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 1:10560 map, surveyed 1876
Inverness-shire (Isle of Skye), Sheet LVII. 1882. Not to scale; north to top of map.

The following previously recorded sites were noted:

Kilbeg Cemetery ***NGR: NG 6527 0631*** ***Highland HER: MHG31764***

This is a modern cemetery, still in use. It is of mid 20th c. origin. There are no known archaeological concerns here.

Kilbeg Wood Cairns ***NGR: NG 6527 0631*** ***Highland HER No. EHG325***

Two cairns in Kilbeg Wood were noted by James Kenworthy in 2007 during a watching brief on the site clearance for the new campus for Sabhal Mòr Ostaig:

⁶ Maggie Macdonald, pers.comm

⁷ Analysis of these maps using GIS shows the grid reference to be approximately NG 6489 0639

The cairns lie about ten metres apart, nearly parallel to, and adjacent to, the old fence line, which runs to their SE. Their estimated height is somewhat over 2m. From a few tree-throws, it would appear that at least in part they are composed of the weathered bedrock found on the site below. They are both oval, that to the SW being roughly 19m SW-NE by 15m transversely, that to the NE being roughly 19m SW-NE by 12m transversely. While the SW cairn appears to be undisturbed, except for the planting of trees, there is a subrectangular hollow about 3m long, 2m wide at the edge and perhaps 1m towards the interior, cut into the SE side of the NE cairn. It is completely covered in vegetation, and is unlikely to be recent. At its NE edge there is a probable spoil tip 1.5m high and some 3m in diameter. This too is fully vegetated. Most likely this is the result of an unrecorded nineteenth-century excavation⁸

These cairns were visited during the field survey – see below.

Àrainn Ostaig *NGR: NG 6498 0615* *Listed building 13985, Category B*
Highland HER Nos 5254, 44196, 46850
NMRS: NG60NW 3

Built circa 1810-1830 as a farm steading, and now converted to a college. The National Monuments Record entry includes the following:

Dunscraith a bare cairn of stones
and the Green Castle under ivy,
and the ghosts of feuding and death
haunting their weak dead ramparts;
the herbs and flowers of aspirations
about Sabhal Ostaig; and a light,
sunbeam of the Gael's hope,
about its old and new walls.
May good fortune and success
be with the great work of the Sabhal⁹

2. Walk-over survey

The walk-over survey was undertaken by Martin Wildgoose and Steven Birch on 30 April 2010. The proposed development area was carefully inspected for signs of archaeological or other cultural heritage features, including potential for buried evidence. The walkover survey was carried out by two surveyors, walking at or as close to 25m intervals as the terrain allowed. Spot sites were given a GPS location using a Garmin GPS 60 hand held unit. Landscape and enclosure boundaries were recorded on to a relevant OS map of the area (in this case 2nd Ed 6" 1901). All sites were recorded on prepared recording sheets and where instructive, a photograph was taken.

⁸ Kenworthy J, 1998 op.cit, 3

⁹ Translation from Gaelic of 'A Waxing Moon above Sleat' by Sorley Maclean, co-founder of the college

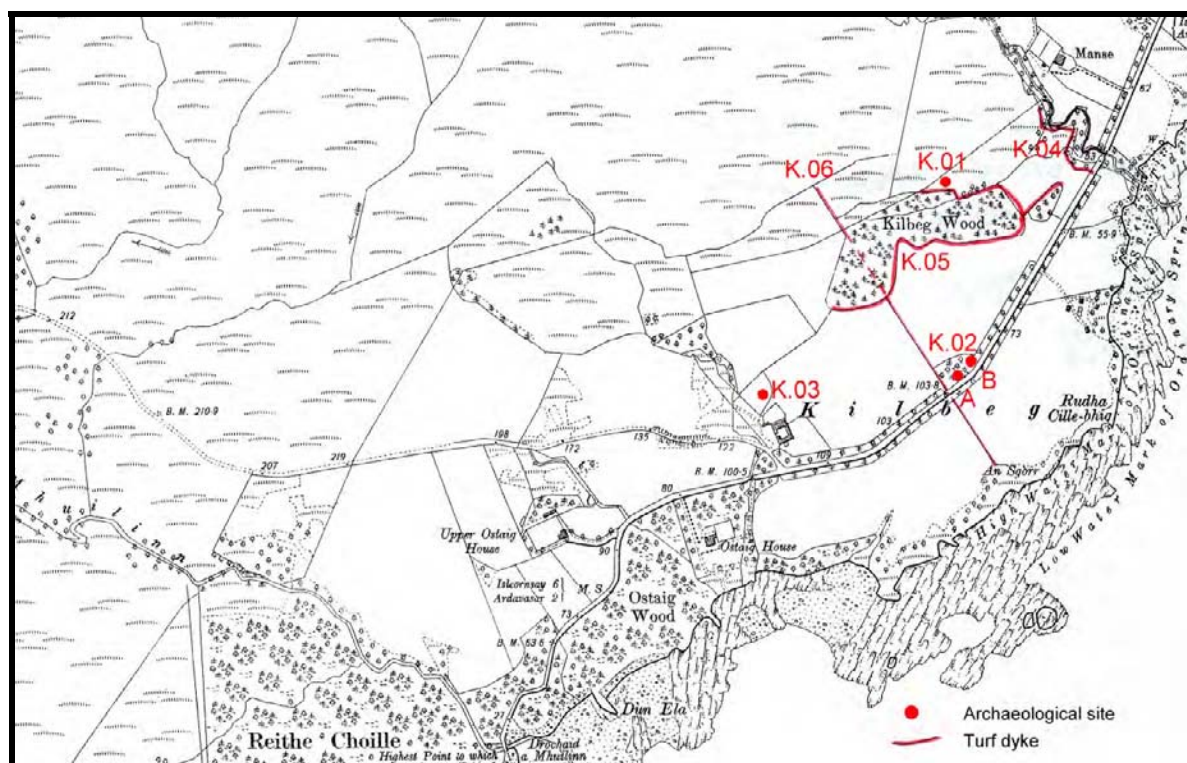


Figure 4 Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 1:10560 map (revised 1901), showing field survey results Inverness-shire (Isle of Skye), Sheet LVII. 1903. Not to scale; north to top of map.

Site no.	Type of site	OS Grid Ref.	Condition
<i>K.01</i>	<i>Shell midden</i>	<i>NG 65295 06579</i>	<i>Well preserved</i>

A small shell midden comprising a mix of limpet and periwinkle shells with many of the limpets nested together. No visible bones or lithics were present. This site had been revealed when an excavator turned a large sod over to form a planting mound. Due to re-growth of grass and rushes it was not possible to say which of the surrounding holes the midden originated from. This appears to lie outside the boundary of the present development proposal.

<i>K.02</i>	<i>Cairns (2)</i>	<i>NG 65287 06245</i>	<i>Very degraded (see Plate 1 above)</i>
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These are the cairns referred to above, recorded in 1997 during the watching brief carried out for the new campus to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig College¹⁰. Lying on the summit of a Schist outcrop opposite and across the road from the entrance to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig's new campus are the remains of two possible stone-built burial cairns. The outcrop is grass covered under dense larch, birch and Sitka spruce.

¹⁰ Kenworthy 2008, op.cit

Cairn A presents as a low grass covered mound with occasional fragments of slaby schist showing through the grass. The site measures circa 6-7 meters in diameter and stands no more than 1 meter high. As visible it is not possible to say if this is a cairn or not. If it is a cairn its size would indicate a Bronze Age rather than Neolithic date.

Cairn B is clearly not a cairn. Recent tree throws on the summit of this mound reveal very solid natural rock beneath the grass.



Plate 1 Cairn A (K.02)

K.03 *Recent/agricultural* **NG 64955 06222** *Well preserved (see Plate 2 above)*

Situated within a small wire fenced enclosure to the north side of Arainn Ostaig is a shuttered concrete silage pit. The pit lies within a slot cut into the south side of a low grassy mound and measures 9 metres north to south by 3.2 metres east to west over walls 300mm thick. The shuttered concrete walls stand to 1.8 metres at north end sloping down to 1.1 metre at the south end. A 1.9 metre wide entrance lies in the centre of the south end. Lying within the north end of the pit is a corrugated iron clad shed which measures 2 metres on all sides by 2 metres to the eaves and 2.6 metres to the ridge. A small glass paned window lies in the west gable and a door lies at the east end of the south wall. The remains of a chicken wire cover survive over the pit, perhaps indicating its secondary use as a chicken shed and run.



Plate 2 Silage Pit K.03



Plate 3 Boundary Dyke K.04

K.04 Landscape boundary NG 65500 06650 well preserved (see Plate 3 below)

To the east side of the former roadworks site camp and to the west of a small burn is a well preserved length of earth boundary dyke. This dyke lies generally on a NW to SE alignment running roughly parallel to the burn. The remains measure 1 metre + high and are 1.5 metres wide at the base and 0.6m wide at the top. A quarry ditch lies to the SW side of the dyke, now much silted up. A number of small trees are currently well rooted into the dyke.

K.05 Enclosure Boundary See 2nd Ed. OS map Degraded

An earth dyke, surrounding formerly wooded ground which has been felled and is now replanted. This dyke survives as a much eroded feature ranging from 0.3m to 1.1m high, and is in best places 1.8m wide at the base and 0.8m wide at the top. A silted quarry ditch is visible in places outwith the dyke.

K.06 Landscape boundary NG 6526 0623 - NG 6509 0652 Ruinous

A perfectly straight linear boundary lying on a NW to SE alignment which currently divides improved grassland from wooded ground. This feature measures circa 0.3m to 1.0m high and is 1.6m wide at the base and 0.6m wide at the top. There is no obvious quarry ditch. A wire fence lies to the NE side of the dyke. The continuing boundary to the south east side of the main road survives as a wire fence and shallow ditch. This is clearly the estate division shown on the 1810 estate map.

Conclusions

The ground to the north side of the main road appears to have been used as either improved grazing or as enclosed woodland. Apart from the small shell midden (Site K.01) There would appear to be no indications of either cultivation or occupation of the area. As there are no obvious indications of recent settlement in this area it is likely that the shell midden is early in date.

The area to the south of the main road is very poor ground being wet and rank and is not even suitable for rough grazing. Therefore, although it is possible that earlier features could survive beneath the peat, it is unlikely to have been usable within the historic period for either agriculture or settlement.

Recommendations

All the recorded sites except for K.03 (silage pit) lie within recently planted woodland and are not therefore likely to be further disturbed by development. The silage pit/hen shed is of limited cultural heritage value and once recorded could be sacrificed to development.

If the woodlands are to be developed at some stage, the shell midden (K.01) and Cairn A (K.02) should be clearly marked on the project plans and safeguarded on the ground. If impacting either of these features

cannot be reasonably avoided trial excavation should be undertaken to establish their nature and extent. If either is found to be archaeologically significant, full excavation should take place before it is destroyed.

Additional photography of the landscape boundaries (including K.05-6) is recommended before development takes place.

Intrusive investigations such as trial trenching are not recommended in this case in view of the apparently limited archaeological potential of the area. However, topsoil stripping and site clearance works should be covered by a non-intensive archaeological watching brief. This would help to ensure that any discoveries made at that stage are recorded with a minimum of disruption to the construction programme.

Tables

Table 1 Photographs

K.photo 1	Site K.02 taken from the SE looking across the road from the entrance to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. Scale is Steven Birch standing on the summit of mound 'A' holding a 2m ranging pole. (Plate 1)
K.photo 2	Site K.03 taken from the SE looking into the silage pit to the tin shed at the rear. Scales are 1m pole at front and Steven Birch holding a 2m ranging pole at right rear of pit by shed. (Plate 2)
K.photo 3	Site K.04 taken from the N looking down the length of dyke and quarry ditch. Scale is Steven Birch holding a 2m ranging pole. Note the large tree growing on the dyke. (Plate 3)

Table 2 Recorded Features

Site no	Type	NGR	Easting	Northing	HER
K.01	Shell midden	NG 6529 0657	165290	806570	
K.02	Cairns (2)	NG 6528 0624	165280	806240	EHG325
K.03	Recent/agricultural	NG 6495 0622	164950	806220	
K.04	Landscape boundary	NG 6550 0665	165500	806650	
K.05	Enclosure Boundary				
K.06a	Landscape boundary	NG 6526 0623	165260	806220	
K.06b	Landscape boundary	NG 6509 0652	165100	806600	
DBA1	Kilbeg Cemetery	NG 6527 0631	165270	806310	MHG31764
DBA2	Kilbeg Wood Cairns	NG 6528 0624	165280	806240	EHG325
DBA3	Sabhal Mòr Ostaig: Arainn Ostaig	NG 6498 0615	164940	806180	MHG5254, 44196, 46850

References

Kenworthy J, 1998 *Report on a Watching Brief during ground clearance at the St Columba Campus, Sabhal Mor Ostaig, Rubha Cille Bhig, Sleat, Skye, November-December 1997* Cannich.

Highland HER: <http://her.highland.gov.uk>

RCAHMS: <http://www.rcahms.gov.uk>