

Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report



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Archaeological Watching Brief

REPORT

Site Number	AN45
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Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report

Summary

As a condition of Highland Council's planning consent for the clearance of a house site and access track at land south of Culnabrae, Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit an archaeological watching brief took place on 19th November 2013 during stripping of topsoil. Excavations revealed five field drains cut into the underlying boulder clay but did not disturb any other significant features or deposits. Traces left by previous land use were either ephemeral or had been destroyed by ploughing.

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Cover photograph Building in SW corner, now demolished. Photograph 5.

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was undertaken by Anne Johnston and the report produced by Pete Higgins and Anne Johnston of Archaeology North Ltd. Historic maps are courtesy of the National Library of Scotland.

Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report



Figure 1 Site location.

Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report

INTRODUCTION

To fulfil a planning condition a controlled topsoil strip of the footprint of the development was conducted in accordance with the Project Design¹.

Professional standards during the present project were ensured by adherence to the *Codes of Conduct and Approved Practice and Standards* of the Institute for Archaeologists and the Highland Council's *Standards for Archaeological Work*.



Figure 2 Plan of site showing area of topsoil strip (green); existing building (blue) and land drains (red)

¹ Higgins, P 2013, Land S of Culnabrae, Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit; Archaeological Controlled strip; Project Design.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP)², Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP)³, Planning Advice Note 2012-24 regulate the way archaeological matters are dealt with during the planning process.

The Highland-wide Local development Plan (HWLDP), adopted by the Highland Council in 2010, encourages appropriate developments while protecting archaeology and built heritage.

Archaeology North Ltd follows the Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA). Quality of work is assured both through adherence to the standards of the IFA and through internal monitoring.

SITE LOCATION, DESCRIPTION, AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The site lies in an area rich in archaeological remains spanning from prehistoric times to the 20th century. Cartographic evidence from the late 19th century shows the presence of a roofed building, identified as the existing bothy/byre, and an area of cultivated land to its N and E. Local knowledge indicates that the plot was regularly ploughed in the 1970s - 1990s and that upgrading of the road to the E resulted in increased water run-off to the site. The existing site access and boundary wall are believed to be of relatively recent construction.

The Highland Historic Environment Record (HER) records a firing range⁵ c.60m to the east and a findspot⁶ of a quernstone c.150m to the north, within a landscape containing remains of many types and periods, including lime kilns, townships, enclosures, burnt mounds, (one a Scheduled Ancient Monument, SAM 11441⁷), and hut circles (including SAMs 11437 and 11455).

The development comprised the erection of a house and shed/garage, with associated service runs.

A standing building, shown on the 1st edition OS map (surveyed 1870-71), has been the subject of a photographic survey conducted by the clients to fulfil a planning condition, and was demolished during the strip.

Modern air photographs (Google Earth) show a possible dyke enclosing the NW quadrant of the site, shown on figure 2 as 'Dyke ' and 'Dyke AP'.

2 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/03132605/0>

3 <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/shep-july-2009.pdf>

4 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/08/04132003/1>

5 HER reference MHG49669

6 HER reference MHG53741

7 HER reference MHG3314

Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report



Figure 3 Extract from 1st edition OS map surveyed 1870-71

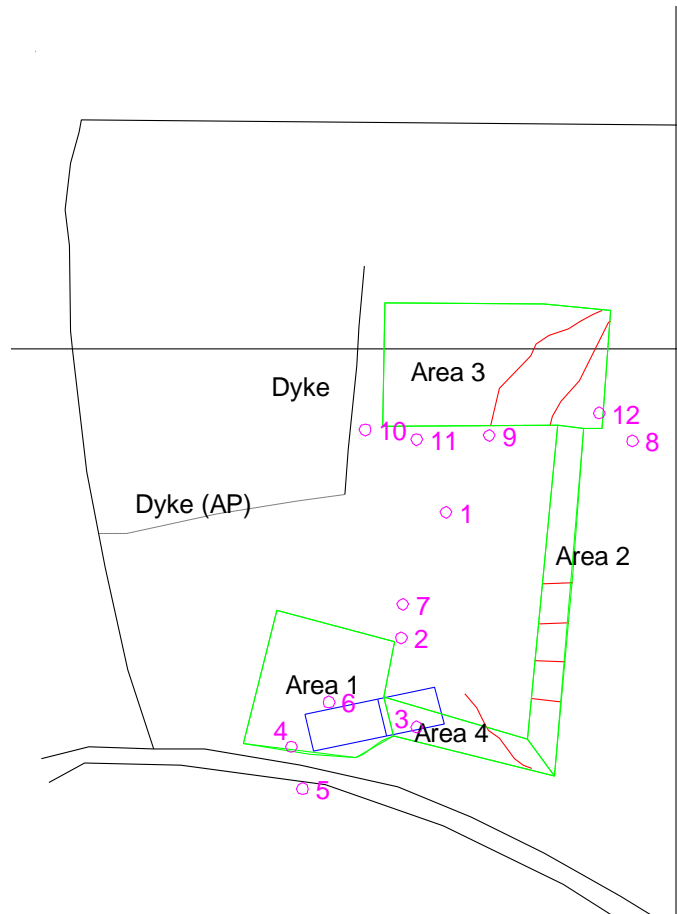


Figure 4 Excavation areas

METHODOLOGY

Topsoil stripping was by a tracked back-acting machine with toothless ditching bucket, directed by the archaeologist, Anne Johnston. Observed deposits were recorded using a single context recording system with pro-formae, photographs and drawings. Spoil heaps were checked for artefacts.

Topsoil was stripped to a depth of between 0.30m and 0.45m, depending on overburden, and stored beside the excavations.

Fieldwork took place on 19 November 2013; snow and low temperatures hampered observation and recording but the authors are confident this report is an accurate reflection of the nature and extent of features encountered.

The soil strip took place in accordance with the specifications laid down in Archaeology North's Project Design in clear, cold weather with a light covering of snow. Four areas were stripped from S to N with all spoil being removed from the cleared areas and no back-tracking occurring save in Area 4.

Area 1: Land to the NW and W of the bothy/byre

Area 2: Access track linking site access to house site

Area 3: House site

Area 4: Link track between byre and access track

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Area 1

Stripping commenced working from the bothy northwards to a depth of 30 - 40cm exposing the underlying boulder clay (**002**) and the substantial stone footings of the N wall of the building. The topsoil (**001**) was heavily disturbed and comprised an amalgam of modern building debris - concrete blocks, wooden lathes, boulders and plastic ephemera - well mixed with sizeable boulders and smaller stones characteristic of the plot as a whole. Given that the N wall of the bothy had at some period been refaced it is possible that this layer/context represents demolition debris from a lean-to and subsequent re-build.



Figure 5 Part of Area 1, stripped. Photograph 17

To the W of the bothy the topsoil was different in appearance being of a darker, drier, loamier consistency with fewer large boulders and was of slightly greater depth (**003**). This was suggestive of a garden soil.

Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report

Area 2

Stripping for the access track commenced at the junction with the site access, working northwards. The topsoil in the southern portion of the track (**1001**) was consistently wetter, stickier and stonier than that found elsewhere. Four field drains were laid bare, running E- W and cut into the underlying boulder clay. All were of rudimentary and similar construction being ca. 30cm in width and created from field stones. The southern-most drain appeared to be of the most robust construction. The remaining three, being partially submerged in pooling water, were less easy to investigate. Immediately to the N of the northernmost drain the topsoil became markedly lighter and drier in texture and colour (**1004**).



Figure 6 Land drain in Area 2. Photograph 19

Area 3

The topsoil stripped from the house site (**2001**) was identical to that found along the northern portion of the access track. Two further field drains, ca.10m apart, were revealed running for some 25m NNE - SSW across the eastern part of this area. These were similar to those found in Area 2 in that they were cut into the boulder clay and created from field stones but took a rather more meandering course across the site. The W boundary of the house site abutted a stone dyke (figure 2, 'Dyke') believed by the owners to be a consumption dyke built with the larger stones removed from the ploughed land; it is smaller than most consumption dykes, and is more likely to be a simple dyke to sub-divide the land parcel, with a return to the west, see figure 2.

Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report



Figure 7 Area 3 stripped. Photograph 25.

Area 4

The link track between the access track and bothy/byre showed a greater depth of topsoil than anywhere else on site (**3001**) but this was clearly a result of earth having been mounded up during the creation of a new access area for the plot in the 21st century. This context, a darker and drier soil that differed from the wet, stony layer of the access track was very similar to that found to the W of the bothy. A further field drain was uncovered cut into the boulder clay (**3002**) running at almost 90 degrees to the field drains found in Area 3 suggesting the presence of a herring-bone drainage pattern.



Figure 8 Area 4 stripped. Photograph 21.

Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report

Although no direct relationships between the land drains were observed, they could belong to two phases; the drains in areas 1 and 3 were not straight and could be elements of a herring bone pattern, possibly associated with field drainage, while the drains in area 2 ran parallel to each other and appeared straighter, (although only short lengths were seen); these may be associated with drainage of the road, which lies to the east.

Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report

Table 1 Context Index

Context no:	Description	Comments	Interpretation
Area 1			
1	Heavily disturbed, well-mixed soil containing building debris (concrete blocks, wooden strips, plastic ephemera). High concentration of small, medium and large boulders.	Greatest density of building debris in immediate vicinity of the bothy. Depth 30-45cm throughout	Top soil
2	Orangey-brown clay with high concentration of boulders of varying size.	Consistent colour and texture throughout area. Pooling of water at interface with 001 in vicinity of building.	Natural/boulder clay/glacial till
3	Dark, well-mixed soil. With comparatively few boulders.	Darker, loamier and drier than 001 . Depth ca. 30-40cm throughout	Garden soil
Area 2			
1001	Wet, dark clayey soil with many small boulders.	Consistent over southern portion of access track. Depth 30-40cm.	Topsoil
1002	Cut	Crudely constructed field drain cut into boulder clay (1003)	Field drain running E-W
1003	Orangey-brown clay with high concentration of boulders of varying size.	Identical to 0002 . Pooling of water on surface at interface with 1001 and in vicinity of 1005 and 1006 .	Natural/boulder clay/glacial till
1004	Mid -brown soil containing many small to medium boulders with some clay inclusions.	Lighter and considerably drier than 1001 . Consistent over northernmost portion of access track to depth of. 30 - 40cm	Top soil

Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report

Context no:	Description	Comments	Interpretation
1005	Cut	Crudely constructed field drain cut into boulder clay (1003). Partially submerged with indistinct edges.	Field drain running E-W
1006	Cut	Crudely constructed field drain cut into boulder clay (1003). Partially submerged with indistinct edges.	Field drain running E-W
Area 3			
2001	Mid-brown soil containing many small to medium boulders with some clay inclusions.	Identical to that uncovered in northern portion of Area 2 (1004)	Topsoil
2002	Orangey-brown clay with high concentration of boulders of varying size.	Identical to 0002 and 1003 .	Natural/boulder clay/glacial till
2003	Cut	Crudely constructed field drain cut into boulder clay 2002	Field drain running NNE-SSW
2004	Cut	Crudely constructed field drain cut into boulder clay 2002	Field drain running NNE -SSW
Area 4			
3001	Dark, well-mixed soil.	Very similar to 003	Top soil
3002	Cut	Crudely constructed field drain cut into boulder clay 3003	Field drain running SSE - NNW
3003	Orangey-brown clay with high concentration of boulders of varying size.	Identical to 0002 , 1003 and 2002	Natural/boulder clay/glacial till

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

No archaeologically significant deposits or features were encountered, and no further work is recommended.

Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report

Photo no:	Area no:	Description	Viewpoint -facing	CP
1	Plot	Panoramic general view of entire plot prior to work commencing.	N	1
2	ditto	ditto	NE	1
3	ditto	ditto	E	1
4	ditto	ditto	SE	1
5	ditto	ditto	S	1
6	ditto	ditto	SW	1
7	ditto	ditto	W	1
8	ditto	ditto	NW	1
9	ditto	Bothy and byre prior to partial demolition of bothy	SW	1
10	1	Start of soil strip to NW of bothy	S	2
11	1	Removal of disturbed topsoil (0001) to depth of ca.30cm	S	2
12	1	Exposed subsoil/boulder clay (0002) after removal of topsoil	S	4
13	1	Completion of strip	S	2
14	1	Breaching N wall of bothy	S	2
15	1	Removal of bothy roof	S	5
16	1	Demolition rubble from bothy	S	6
17	1	W-facing section with exposed boulder clay in foreground (0002)	E	6
18	1	E-facing section with exposed boulder clay in foreground (0002)	W	7
19	2	Field drain (1002) running E-W cut into boulder clay	E	7
20	2	E-facing section of completed track strip showing topsoil (2001) and underlying boulder clay (1003)	W	1
21	2	Access track after removal of topsoil	N	1
22	2	Access track after removal of topsoil	S	1
23	3	Junction of access track [Area 2] and house site [Area 3] at start of topsoil removal	N	8
24	3	Field drain cut into boulder clay (2003)	N	9
25	3	Field drain cut into boulder clay (2004)	N	10
26	3	Consumption dyke (?) at W boundary of house site	W	11
27	3	Completed strip	N	12

Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report

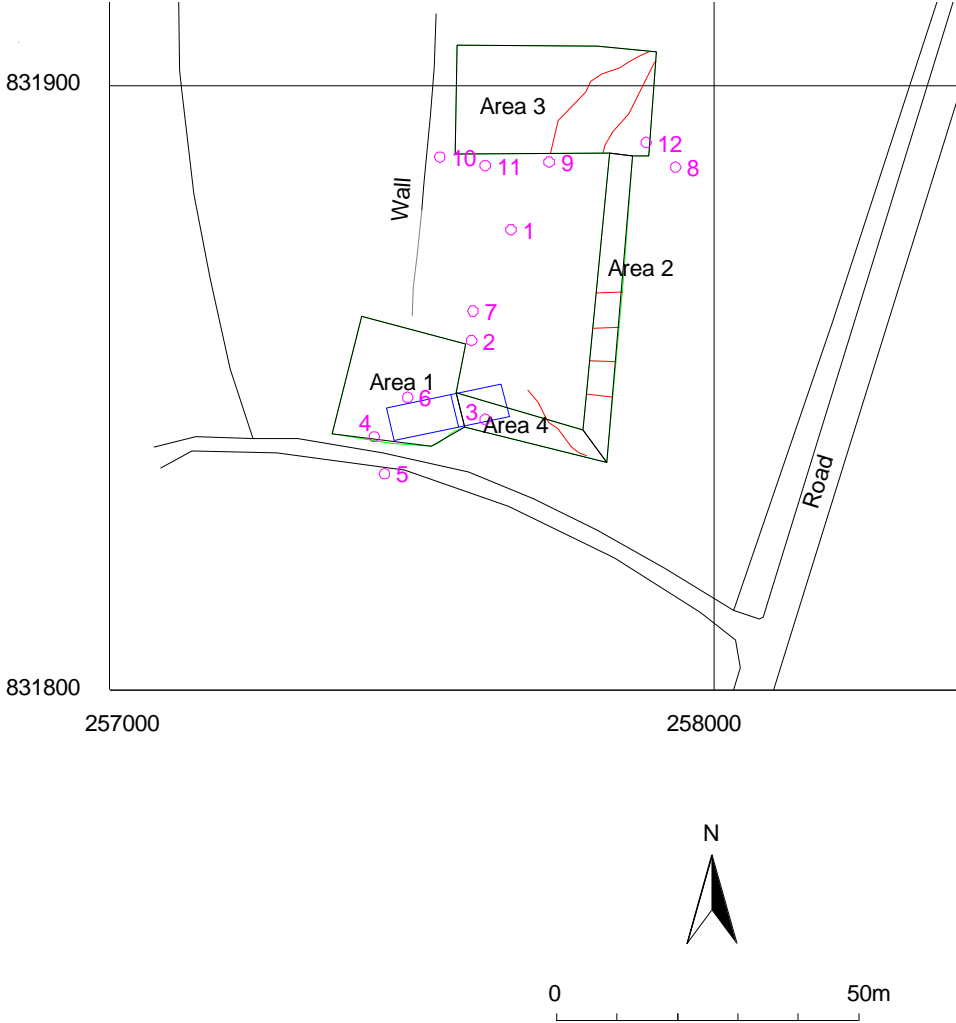


Figure 9 Camera positions

Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report

Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report

Table 2 Gazetteer of sites

HER number	NAME	Type	DESCRIPTION	NMRS	NGR	SAM
MHG450	Garbeg	Find spot	Two polished stone axe heads	NH53SW22	NH 5070 3130	
MHG2675	Clachmor	Field system	Walls and clearnace heaps	NH43SE9	NH 4970 3130	
MHG2680	Culnakirk	Cup-marked stone	Two cups marks on a stone	NH43SE4	NH 4900 3100	
MHG2681	Culnakirk	Cup-marked stone	Five cups marks on a stone	NH43SE3	NH 4986 3107	
MHG2682	Clachmor	Cup-marked stone	Eponymous stone with many cup marks	NH43SE2	NH 4991 3109	11435
MHG2683	Carn Daley	Chambered cairn	Clava type cairn, much damaged and partly under field stones	NH43SE1	NH 4944 3145	
MHG334	Garbeg	Burnt mound	2 horse-shoe shaped burnt mounds	NH53SW21	NH 5030 3190	11441
MHG3317	Garbeg	Burnt mound	Probable burnt mound	NH53SW19	NH 5040 3200	
MHG3357	Garbeg	Settlement	Up to 21 hut circles with field system	NH53SW7	NH 5020 3230	11437, 11438
MHG14106	Balnagrantach	Limekilns	-	-	NH 4908 3162	
MHG23372	Easter & Wester Balnagrantach	Township	10 buildings, enclosure, lime kiln on 1875 map	NH43SE23	NH 4930 3150	
MHG25716	Garbeg	Township	12 buildings, 2 enclosures on 1875 map	NH53SW28	NH 5050 3150	
MHG27561	Creag Ard	Hut circle	2 possible hut circles with cairns	NH53SW37	NH 5002 3282	
MHG27878			See MHG14106			
MHG37783	Loch Nam Faoileag	Hut circles	2 or more hut circles	NH43SE39	NH 4912 3225	11455
MHG39899			See MHG3357			
MHG40047			See MHG23372			

Land at Culnakirk, Drumnadrochit
Watching Brief Report

HER number	NAME	Type	DESCRIPTION	NMRS	NGR	SAM
MHG47277	Upper Gartally	Farmstead	Up to six buildings on 1875 map; horse-engine probably later	NH43SE53	NH 49115 31075	
MHG47307	Culnakirk	Cup-marked stone?	Possible cup-marked stone	NH43SE82	NH 4991 3104	
MHG47348	Culnakirk burn	Burnt mound	Low burnt mound	NH53SW65	NH 50685 32163	
MHG47439	Culnakirk burn	Burnt mound	Low burnt mound, partly eroded	NH53SW66	NH 50509 32251	
MHG47350	Culnakirk burn	Burnt mound	Burnt mound with lining stones	NH53SW67	NH 50428 32165	
MHG47351	Culnakirk burn	Building	Building and enclosure, with later field bank	NH53SW68	NH 50355 31831	
MHG47352	Culnakirk burn	Kiln	Kiln with collapsed flue	NH53SW69	NH 50358 31921	
MHG47353	Garbeg	Building	Rectangular building with overlying clearance cairn	NH53SW70	NH 50543 31944	
MHG47359	Culnakirk burn	Building	Mortared shed with enclosure	NH53SW76	NH 50276 31885	
MHG47361	Craig Achmony	Building	Building on 1875 map	NH53SW78	NH 5060 3097	
MHG47364	Culnakirk	Burnt mound	Burnt mound	NH53SW81	NH53SW78	
MHG49669	Easter Balnagrantach	Firing ranges	Four undated rifle ranges	NH43SE85	NH 4989 3183	
MHG53741	Culnakirk	Find spot	Rotary quernstone	-	NH 49806 32119	