



Highland Archaeology Services Ltd

Bringing the Past and Future Together

Cairnurenan, Mulbuie, Muir of Ord

Archaeological Watching Brief 2021



Data Structure Report (DSR)

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Cairnurenan, Mulbuie, Muir of Ord

Archaeological Watching Brief Project 2021

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Client	Mr Jonathan Coats
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Summary

A programme of archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the ground work stages of development at Cairnurenan for a new house and associated services. The site is located at the SW end of the Black Isle to the NE of Muir of Ord and incorporates the remains of a large prehistoric passage-grave ring-cairn, Cairn Irenan, of probable Bronze Age date, which is a Scheduled Monument (SM3122). The project was commissioned and funded by the landowner and developer, Jonathan Coats, and was undertaken in accordance with a Condition attached to planning consent (18/01944/FUL).

This final stage of archaeological fieldwork for the development included monitoring during topsoil stripping, the excavation of a service trench for the new build and the demolition of an existing croft house. It followed on from earlier stages of archaeological work including documentary research and a programme of standing building recording and intrusive trial trenching, the results of the latter being essentially negative.

No significant archaeological deposits, features or finds were revealed during the course of the watching brief and no further archaeological work is recommended.

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Acknowledgements

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Location

The farmstead at Cairnurenan is located to the north west of Inverness at the SW end of the Black Isle at NGR NH 5665 5231, approximately 5km to the north east of Muir of Ord and east of the hamlet of Newmore (Figures 1, 2 and 3). It is situated at an elevation of approximately 156 m above Ordnance Datum, precisely at the high point of an elongate plateau that extends between Cairnurenan and the A835 to the north east.

The site (Figure 3) has an overall footprint of approximately 10,000 square metres and has received planning consent (18/01944/FUL) for the demolition of an existing building and the construction of a new house with associated services, landscaping and hardstanding.

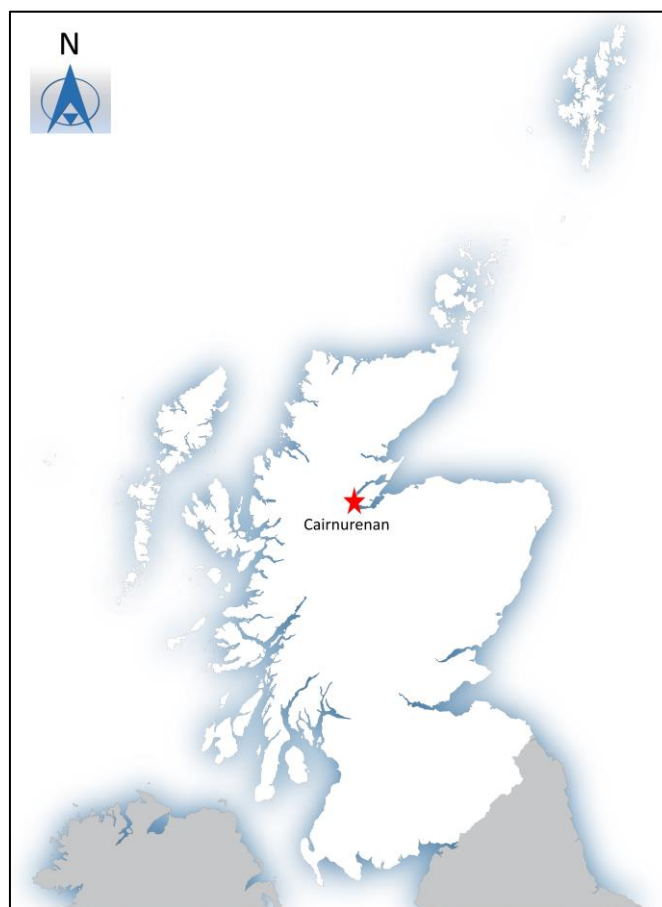


Figure 1 - General site location

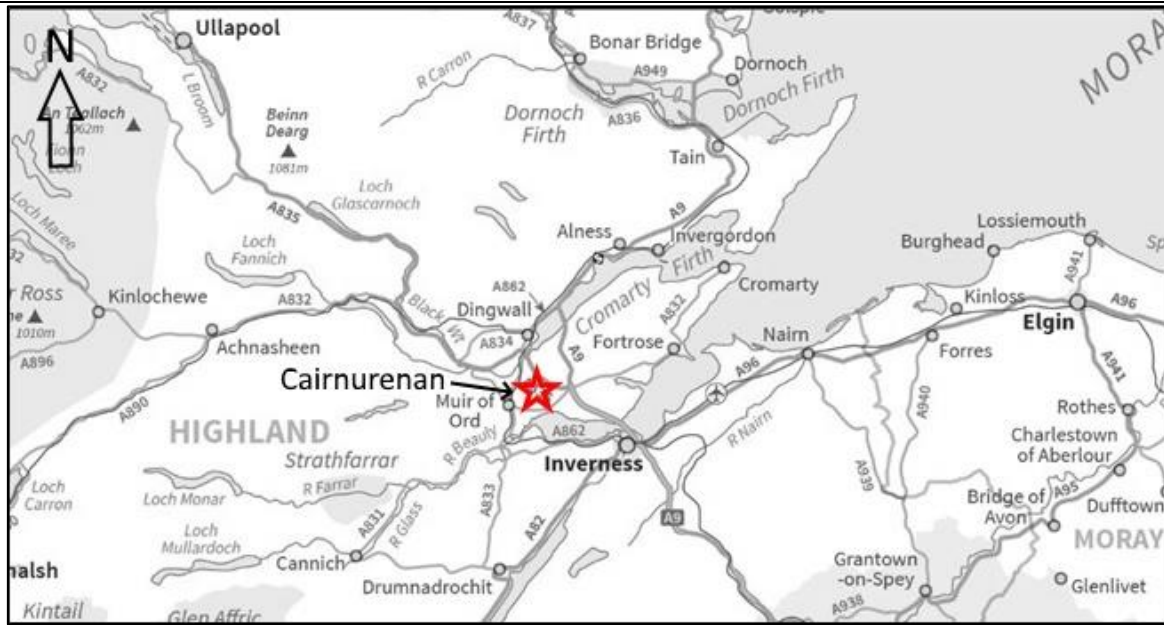


Figure 2 - General Site Location

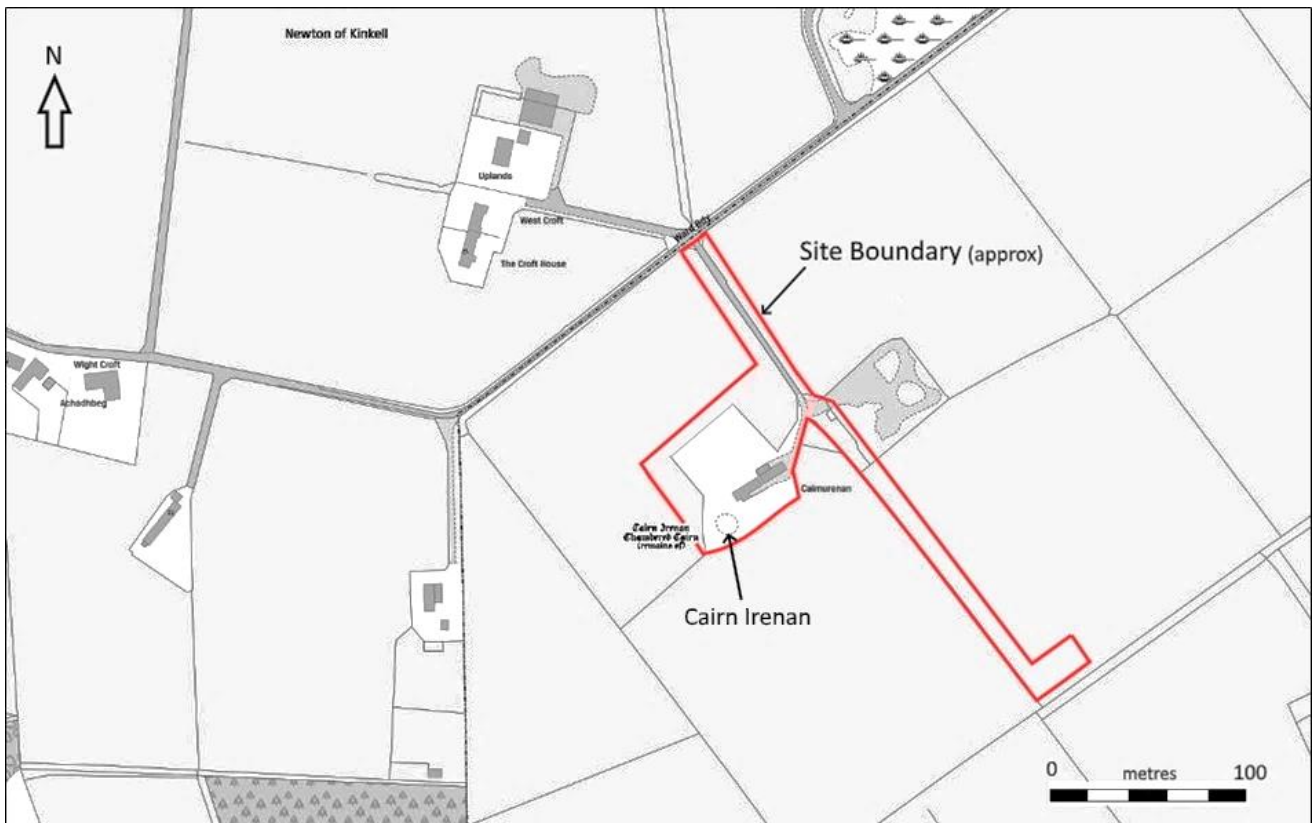


Figure 3 - Boundary of the Cairnurenan development site. Scale shown

Introduction & Background

A programme of archaeological Watching Brief has been commissioned by Jonathan Coats, the landowner and developer, in order to satisfy conditions attached to planning consent by Highland Council (planning reference 18/01944/FUL) for the redevelopment of the farmstead at Cairnurenan, Mulbuie, Muir of Ord (Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4).

The area for which planning consent has been granted (Figure 3) has an overall footprint of approximately 10,300 square metres and contains a Scheduled Monument, Cairn Irenan (SM3122), a prehistoric passage-grave burial cairn of probable Bronze Age date. In view of the importance of the prehistoric monument planning consent for the development included a requirement for the demarcation and protection of the scheduled area during development works, photographic recording of the existing standing buildings prior to their demolition and the evaluation of a representative sample of the development site in advance of development, with special attention to areas where intrusive development ground works were proposed.

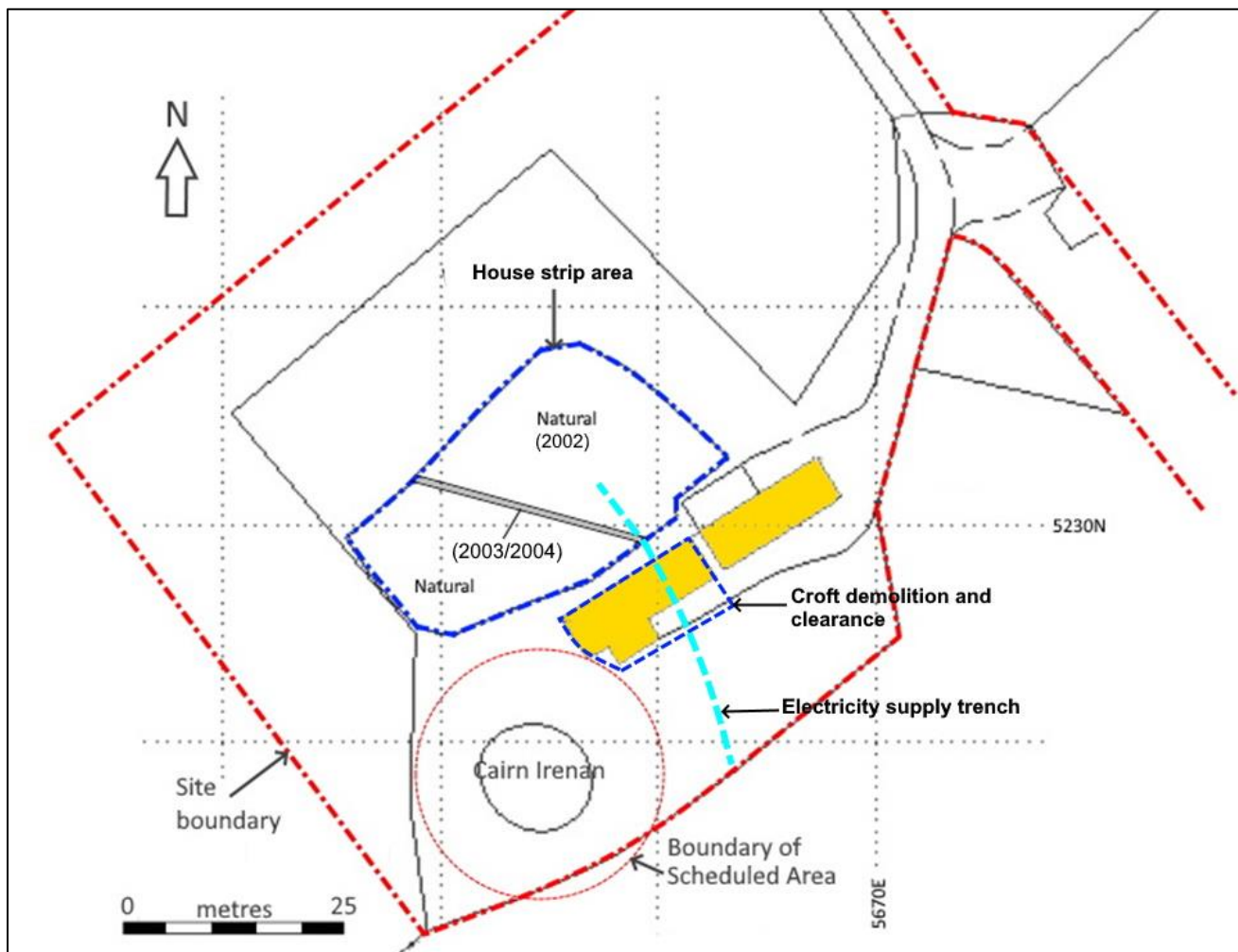


Figure 4 - Site plan showing watching brief areas at Cairnurenan. Scale shown

The evaluation trenching was undertaken in 2019 (HAS 2019) and to establish the presence of absence of significant buried archaeological deposits, in particular associated with the prehistoric scheduled monument. The work involved the excavation of 19 trial trenches designed to provide a representative sample of the site.

The evaluation failed to locate any significant buried archaeological deposits associated with the prehistoric monument but did locate minor buried features associated with the 19th century occupation of the farmstead.

On the basis of these largely negative results a final stage of watching brief was undertaken during preliminary development works in order to ensure that any unforeseen archaeological remains associated with the scheduled monument that were revealed were identified and fully recorded.

Archaeological Background

Desk-based Assessment

Documentary and cartographic sources for the study area were reviewed as part of the WSI for the preceding evaluation trenching and standing building recording. With the exception of the Cairn Irenan scheduled monument, the sources consulted failed to identify any significant recorded archaeological remains within the footprint of the development area. A summary of the documentary and cartographic evidence is included in the report (HAS 2019) detailing the evaluation trenching and standing building recording.

Cairn Irenan – Condition Statement (updated 2021)

In January 2021, at the time of the watching brief, the Cairn Irenan Scheduled Monument had been cleared of gorse bushes and vegetation with the agreement of Historic Environment Scotland (HES).

The clearance work has allowed a far more complete and coherent view of the megalithic monument (see Figure 5 below).



Figure 5 - Cairn Irenan viewed from the S in January 2021 after the clearance of vegetation, showing the stones of the inner and outer kerbs and the kerb of the passage-chamber entrance. Wide angle image facing N

Watching Brief

Aims

The aims of the final watching brief stage of the project were:

- *To monitor all preliminary ground works for the construction of the new house and the installation of associated services and to identify, characterise and fully record all buried heritage assets revealed during the course of those works.*
- *To examine and establish the nature and extent of all features of potential archaeological significance revealed and to record all such remains to professional standards, in line with current legislation and policy.*
- *To monitor the demolition of the existing croft building in order to identify and record any significant archaeological deposits or features that underlie the building.*
- *To minimise any possible delay or cost to the development by anticipating archaeological requirements as far as possible, timetabling and integrating archaeological recording work with the project, and dealing with any issues arising quickly and efficiently.*
- *To set out the results of the site work in a Data Structure Report for submission to The Highland Council. The report will include recommendations for further archaeological mitigation if significant buried archaeological deposits are identified during the evaluation fieldwork.*
- *To prepare a summary of results for inclusion in Discovery & Excavation Scotland (DES) and to submit all finds for assessment by Scottish Treasure Trove.*

Methodology

- All preliminary ground works were monitored by the writer, a qualified and experienced archaeologist.
- Preliminary topsoil stripping and earthmoving was undertaken using a toothless grading bucket. A toothed bucket was used where necessary during the demolition of the croft building.
- The precise location of the watching brief areas and all significant archaeological features and deposits revealed were located using a survey grade GPS unit. Recording included standard drawn and photographic records with description of content and the direction of all photographs taken. If required, plans and scaled drawings of archaeological features were to be produced at 1:10 or 1:20 scales. Depths of excavations were recorded in relation to Ordnance Survey datum. All archaeologically significant features, deposits and finds revealed were fully described and recorded in written records using the HAS unique numeric context-based recording system.
- All portable artefacts recovered were retained, conserved and recorded and will be declared as necessary for Scottish Treasure Trove.
- Primary archaeological records compiled during the course of the watching brief fieldwork, for example photographic and context-based records, have been transferred to a digital record as part of post excavation work.

Watching Brief Observations

Topsoil stripping for the new house

Note – the sequence of context numbers used for recording during the watching brief fieldwork followed on directly from the sequence used during the evaluation trenching and started with (context 2001).

Topsoil stripping was undertaken using a toothless grading bucket across the area of the new house (Figure 4), a part of the site that was previously evaluated by Trenches 8, 9 and 11.

The clearance (Figure 7) revealed a uniform sequence of deposits restricted to mixed topsoil (2001) that directly overlay the natural gravelly substrate (2002). The topsoil varied in depth between 250mm and 450mm and overlay a single narrow cut linear soil feature (Figure 8: contexts 2003/2004) orientated NW to SE. The feature was recognised as the outfall pipe for Croft's septic tank, which was recorded during the preceding evaluation trenching stage as feature (803). The feature (2003/2004) was linear, up to 600 mm wide and contained occasional fragments of modern ceramic roof tile, brick and fragments of plastic.



Figure 6 - The area of the new building after topsoil stripping. Facing NE. Scales 1m

Topsoil stripping across the area of the new house failed to reveal any significant archaeological deposits, features or finds of any type.



Figure 7 – The modern septic tank pipe trench and fill (2003/2004) as revealed. Facing NW. Scales 1m

Demolition of the Croft Building

The croft building was located just to the NE of the prehistoric cairn, directly adjacent to the scheduled area (Figure 4). A photographic record of the building fully intact was made during the preceding evaluation stage work.

Removal of the roof structure by machine left the shell walls of the building as an unstable structure (Figure 9). These were then reduced to ground level by machine during which it was noted that the fabric of each of the four walls, in places up to 700mm wide, was bonded with an extremely friable and loose sandy silt soil that contained sparse fragments of lime-based mortar.

The final clearance of the building footprint at ground level was undertaken using a toothless grading bucket during which particular care was taken to ensure that any soil features or larger boulders built into the foundations were inspected. In the event no soil features or substantial boulders were present and throughout the footprint of the building the remnant stone that formed the walls and the remains of a suspended internal wooden floor overlay patches of weathered Marl bedrock and sandy silt gravel substrate (205), all of which was natural. Each of the croft walls had been built directly over the natural substrate and no excavated footings were present.

No archaeologically significant deposits, features or finds were revealed during the course of the demolition and clearance work.



Figure 8 – Demolition of the croft building after removal of the roof structure. Facing N



Figure 9 – Final ground level clearance of the croft building in progress. Facing N. Scales 1m

Excavation of a new electricity supply trench

The trench was excavated by machine from the site boundary to join the position of the new house (Figure 4). The cutting was up to 600mm wide and between 750mm and 900mm deep and crossed the footprint of the former croft building after it had been demolished and cleared (Figure 10).

The trench revealed a uniform sequence of deposit consisting of up to 350mm of sandy silt topsoil (2006) that overlay up to 450mm of gravelly sandy silt (2007), which in turn overlay weathered marl bedrock (2008) in the base of the trench.

The cutting did not reveal any significant buried archaeological deposits, features or finds.



Figure 10 – The electricity supply trench during excavation. Facing N. Scales 1m

Finds

Finds were restricted to items of 20th century date and were not retained. No significant finds of any type were recovered during the course of the watching brief work.

Discussion & Conclusions

A programme of archaeological watching brief has been undertaken during the preliminary ground work stages of development at Cairnurenan, Mulbuie, in an area adjacent to the scheduled monument Cairn Irenan.

This final stage of archaeological fieldwork included monitoring during topsoil stripping and excavation of a service trench for the new build and the demolition of an existing croft house. It followed on from earlier stages of archaeological work that included documentary research, standing building recording and a programme of intrusive trial trenching, the results of the latter being largely negative.

No significant archaeological deposits, features or finds were revealed during the course of the watching brief and no further archaeological fieldwork or analysis is recommended.

Recommendations

The archaeological data recovered during the watching brief stage of fieldwork has no future research potential and does not justify any further detailed post excavation analysis or reporting. In respect of the evidence gathered to date from the site it is recommended that:

- *This DSR report and supporting data is submitted to the Highland Council Historic Environment Record (HER)*
- *A summary of results is prepared for submission to Discovery & Excavation Scotland*
- *The project archive is prepared for deposition with HES*

References

HAS 2019 *Cairnurenan, Mulbuie, Muir of Ord – Archaeological Recording and Evaluation Project*. Unpublished client report. Highland Archaeology Services Limited. Report CUR19-005.

Scottish Government 2014 *Our Place in Time – The Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland*

www.archaeologystrategy.scot 2015 *Scotland's Archaeology Strategy*

Appendices

Context Register

Context No.	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (mm)	Type (Cut, Fill, Deposit, surface)	Description	Interpretation	Find No.	Plans)	Sections (Drwg #)	Photos (Y/N)
2001			250-450	Deposit	Brown sandy silt soil with rare small stones	Topsoil		Y		Y
2002			-	Deposit	Red/Orange gravelly silt sand	Natural substrate		Y		Y
2003			0.3	Deposit	Brown sandy silt soil	Modern service trench		Y		Y
2004			>0.1	Deposit	Red/Orange stony silt sand	Fill of modern service trench		Y		Y
2005			-	Deposit	Brown sandy silt soil with sparse stones	Natural marl substrate		Y		Y
2006			350	Deposit	Brown sandy silt soil with rare smaller stones	Topsoil		N		Y
2007			Up to 450	Deposit	Yellowish -brown sandy silt with sparse small stones	Subsoil		N		Y
2008			>150	Deposit	Reddish-grey weathered marl	Natural substrate		N		Y

Photographic Register

Photo No.	Facing	Description	Scales
5123	NE	Topsoil stripping in house area in progress	
5124	NE	As 5123	
5126	ENE	Topsoil stripping in house area near completion	
5127	NE - E	As 5126 – wide angle image	
5132	NW	Modern service trench (2003/4) as exposed	2 x 1m

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Photo No.	Facing	Description	Scales
5133	NW	Modern service trench (2003/4)	2 x 1m
5134	NE	The house area fully stripped	2 x 1m
5135	NE	The house area fully stripped	2 x 1m
5136	SE	The house area fully stripped	2 x 1m
101116	NE	Cairn Irenan after clearance of vegetation – wide angle with snow lying	-
101117	NE	Demolition of the croft building in progress	2 x 1m
101118	N	Demolition of the croft building in progress	2 x 1m
1050930-41	N to NE	Demolition of the croft building in progress	-
1050942-52	N to NE	Later stages of the croft demolition and ground level clearance	2 x 1m
1050955-56	NW	The footprint of the croft building fully cleared	2 x 1m
1050957-62	N	Excavation of the new electricity supply trench	2 x 1m