

Land 60m NW of Old Schoolhouse Bonar Bridge



Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Site Code	AN63
Client	Mrs Irene Macnab
Planning Ref	13/02735/PIP
OS Grid Ref	NH 61633 91876
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Summary

Archaeology North Ltd were commissioned to undertake an controlled topsoil strip prior to construction of a new house 60m NW of the old Schoolhouse, Bonar Bridge.

A possible ploughed-out clearance cairn was recorded. No further archaeological work is recommended.

Acknowledgements

The fieldwork was undertaken by Pete Higgins. The report was written by Pete Higgin. Historic maps are courtesy of the National Library of Scotland.

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Cover photograph Stone-lined drain 6. Photograph 13.

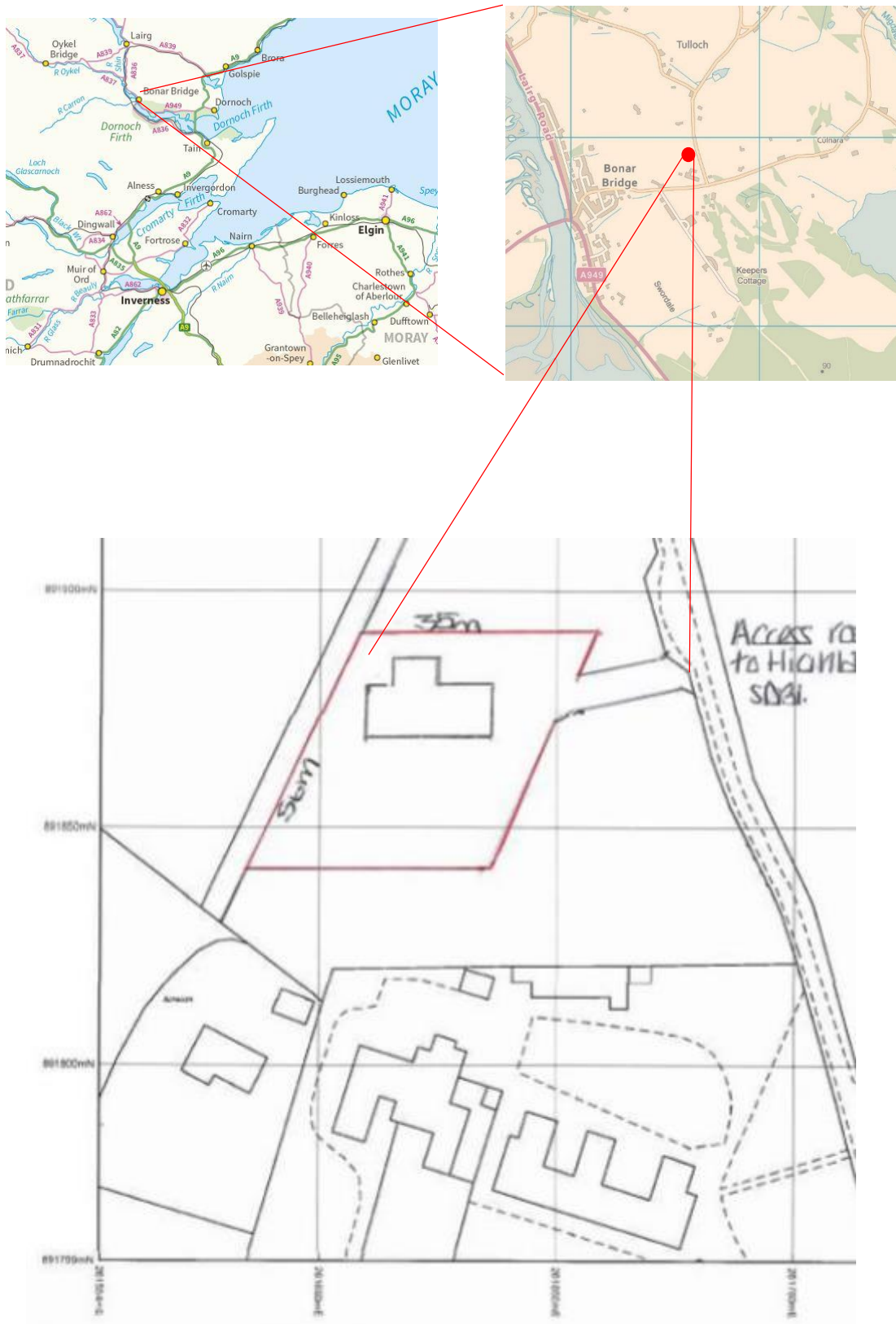


Figure 1 Site location

Aims and objectives

The objectives of the work were to:

- Supervise ground breaking works in agreed areas.
- Determine as far as possible the nature, date, extent, condition, and significance of any archaeologically significant remains, and to record these where necessary in line with national and local policies and standards.
- Minimise any delay or cost to the development by anticipating archaeological requirements as far as possible, by timetabling and integrating archaeological recording work with the project, and dealing with any issues arising quickly and efficiently.

Location

The site lies on rough ground 60m NW of the Old Schoolhouse, Bonar Bridge.

Introduction

The site slopes down gently from north to south, and is covered in uncut grass and scrub.

British Geological Survey mapping shows the underlying geology as Altnaharra Psammite Formation. No superficial deposits are shown.

Regulatory Background

International conventions, national legislation and local authority planning policies all include the aim to identify and safeguard cultural heritage assets in advance of development, with appropriate recording of features and recovery of artefact taking place if a development involves unavoidable disturbance of such assets. These have been set out in international and European Union agreements, and UK and Scottish legislation, as well as national and local planning policies.

Quality Assurance

The *Codes of Conduct and Approved Practice and Standards* of the Institute for Archaeologists and the Highland Council's *Standards for Archaeological Work* were followed throughout this project.

Background

The site is bounded on the east by the Airdens road, to the south by the Old Schoolhouse and other buildings, to the west and north by land cultivated as part of a large croft.

A low, grassed over mound was visible in the west of the site; three more were noted outwith the site to the north, at NH616529 91892, NH616521 91904 and NH616527 91936. These were all assumed to be clearance cairns, see below.

Table 1 lists the cultural heritage assets shown on Highland Historic Environment Record database.

Table 1 Known cultural heritage assets and investigations

HER reference	Description	Grid reference	NMRS number
MHG9999	Hut circle	NH 6200 9220	NH69SW14
MHG10001	Clearance cairn	NH 6155 9218	NH69SW17
MHG10002	Clearance cairn	NH 6167 9190	NH69SW18
MHG10006	Findspot, Bronze Age axe	NH 6163 9170	NH69SW21
MHG10016	Cairn with two cists	NH 6166 9220	NH69SW31
MHG10076	Burnt mound	NH 6120 9173	NH69SW54
MHG19686	Clubhouse	NH 6176 9170	NH69SW105
MHG19707	Free Church	NH 6173 9178	NH69SW104
MHG30319	Pillbox	NH 6177 9219	-
MHG32938	Cairns, field system	NH 6164 9217	-
MHG36353	Pillbox	NH 6177 9220	NH69SW121
MHG40405	Field system	NH 6200 9220	NH69SW14
MHG41023	Cist	NH 6166 9220	NH69SW31

Some ground disturbance was noted at the east end of the access strip, next to the Airdens road, probably from works associated with the road.

Methodology

Fieldwork took place on 12 September 2015 on a breezy, rainy day. Conditions for observations were fair, and confidence in the results is high.

The area of the house plot and access drive were stripped of topsoil by a back-acting excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. Exposed surfaces were hand cleaned. Overburden depth varied between 0.12 and 0.31m.

Written, drawn and photographic records were made.

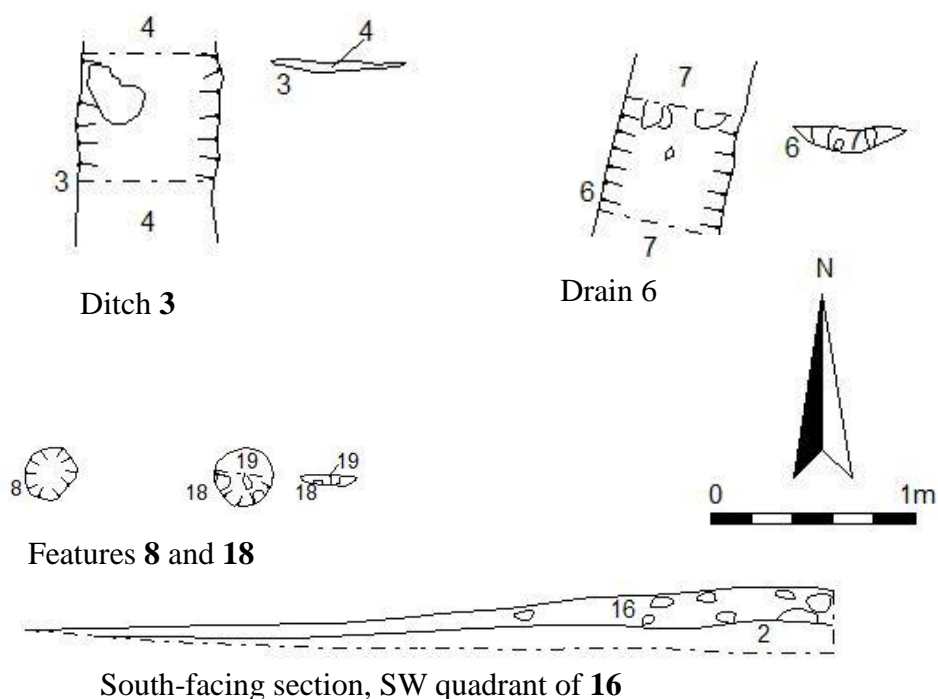


Figure 2 Plans and sections of archaeological features

Results and Discussion

Topsoil

Context 1

The topsoil was a rather peaty loam, moderately well-mixed and with a good crumb structure; the interface with context 2 was fairly sharp. The latter factors argue a level of cultivation in the not too distant past, although other evidence (Mr Macnab, pers comm) states that this parcel of land is not routinely cultivated in the same way as the parcels to the south. Shards of modern bottle glass and many golf balls were noted.

Natural deposit

Context 2

Below the topsoil lay a variable layer of sand, gravel and occasional clay, interpreted as glacial till. In places this was absent, the topsoil sitting directly on rock. The surface of the till was far from even, and in the hollows small pockets of peat were sometimes seen.

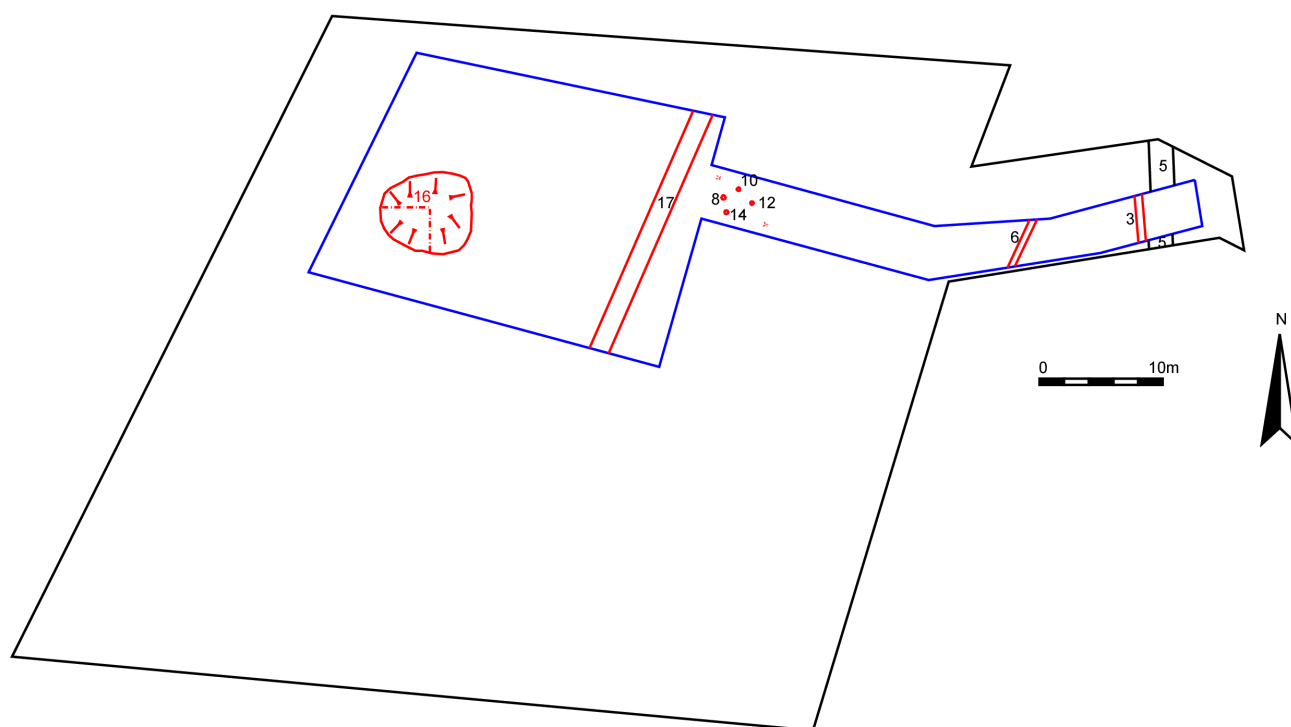


Figure 3 Plan of site, showing site boundary (black); stripped area (blue); and location of archaeological features (red)

Ditch

Contexts **3** and **4**

At the east end of the access track a shallow, much truncated linear feature, **3** ran more or less parallel to the road. It was filled with a peaty deposit, **4**, and is interpreted as a ditch. No signs of re-cuts.

Dyke

Context **5**

A line of scattered boulders, interspersed with smaller stones, runs parallel to the road, between it and ditch **3**. This appears to be the remains of a much tumbled dyke. The pattern of road, ditch and dyke is a familiar one in this area, but in this case the ditch is positioned behind the dyke rather than between it and the road; it is thus possible that the ditch is not related to the road and may be the remnant of a field system into which the road and dyke have been inserted.

Drain

Contexts **6** and **7**

Running across the access track, but not parallel to the road, this linear feature was lined with stones set on edge. It lacked a stone bottom, and was filled with a much siltier material than was found elsewhere on site. It is probable that this is a land drain of unusually fine construction.

Burnt features

Contexts **8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15**

At least four small, sub-circular features were found in a cluster at the west end of the access track. All were filled with unmixed redeposited topsoil and natural, with common ash and charcoal. Since excavation of one feature, **8**, yielded a copper alloy Girl Guides badge and several iron objects (all very rusted) it was assumed that these features are modern, so no more were excavated. They may well be the remains of small individual camp fires, or – since no signs of in situ burning were seen – the deliberate burial of material from camp fires. Two other possible features were noted, but were little more than smears of ashy material.

Clearance cairn

Context **16**

A low, grass-covered mound in the west of the site was stripped and found to be composed of a natural mound sparsely covered with fist-sized and larger stones; a few larger stones were noted just away from the foot of the mound, to the south (downslope). It is probable that this is a ploughed-out clearance cairn.

Stone spread

Context **17**

A linear spread, up to 1.6m wide, of sub-rounded to angular stones, ranging in size from 0.1m to 0.4m across, ran approximately NE/SW across the east end of the house plot. It is similar to spreads of stone noted at field edges in this area, and may well denote a former land division.

Posthole

Contexts **18** and **19**

A very truncated sub-circular feature filled with silty sand (and charcoal in the west side), this appears to be an isolated posthole. It is assumed that any other postholes nearby were not cut as deeply and so have not survived.

Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

The unusual arrangement of road, ditch and dyke in the east of the site may well indicate that the ditch, **3**, is a relic of a field system in place before the road and dyke were built. The line of clearance stones, **17**, and the clearance cairn, **16**, can be interpreted as further evidence of a former field system. However, none of these survive in even reasonably good condition, and this interpretation is open to question.

No further archaeological work is recommended.

Table 2 Photographic index

Photo No	Camera point	Description	Facing	Scale
1	1	Site as works start.	N	-
2	1	Site as works start.	NW	-
3	1	Site as works start.	W	-
4	1	Site as works start.	SW	-
5	1	Site as works start.	S	-
6	1	Site as works start.	SE	-
7	2	Ditch 3 , cleaned	N	1 x 1m
8	2	Dyke 5	SE	1 x 1m
9	2	Ditch 3 sectioned	N	1 x 1m
10	2	South-facing section, ditch 3	N	1 x 1m
11	3	Drain 6 , cleaned	N	1 x 1m
12	3	Stone lining of 6 exposed	NE	1 x 1m
13	3	Drain 6 partly excavated	NE	1 x 1m
14	3	Drain 6 , removing lining stones	NE	1 x 1m
15	3	Drain 6 sectioned	NE	1 x 1m
16	4	Features 8 , 10 , 12 , and 14 , cleaned	N	1 x 1m
17	4	Feature 8 part dug	N	1 x 1m
18	4	Feature 8 excavated	N	1 x 1m
19	5	Feature 16 stripped	SW	1 x 1m
20	6	Feature 16 quarter-sectioned	N	1 x 1m
21	7	Feature 17 partly exposed	S	1 x 1m
22	8	Feature 18 half-sectioned	N	1 x 1m
23	8	South-facing section, feature 18	N	1 x 1m
24	7	Feature 17 continuing south	E	1 x 1m
25	8	House plot stripped	E	1 x 1m

Photo No	Camera point	Description	Facing	Scale
26	8	House plot stripped	SE	-
27	8	House plot stripped	S	-
28	8	House plot stripped	SW	-
29	8	House plot stripped	W	-

Table3 Context table

Number	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)			Before	After	Interpretation
			Length	Width	Depth			
1	Layer	Dark greyish brown peaty loam, partly mixed.	Site	layer	0.23	-	2, 4, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19	Topsoil
2	Layer	Gravel, sand and clay	Site	layer	>0.22	3, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18	UE	Glacial till
3	Feature	Linear feature, almost flat-bottomed, too truncated to distinguish nature of sides	>4.00	0.60	0.03	4	2	Ditch
4	Fill	Very dark greyish brown sandy peat	>4.00	0.60	0.03	1	3	Fill of ditch
5	Feature	Line of scattered boulders; some sub-rounded smaller stones between	>4.00	c.1.2	0.4			Tumbled dyke
6	Feature	Linear feature, steep sides, flat bottom	>4.00	0.52	0.22	7	2	Stone-lined drain
7	Fill	Dark brown silty loam	>4.00	0.52	0.22	1	6	Fill of drain
8	Feature	Sub-circular feature, flat base, sloping sides	0.31	0.31	0.08	9	2	Campfire dump
9	Layer	Dark greyish brown silty loam with charcoal and ash	0.31	0.31	0.08	UE	8	Buried campfire residue
10	Feature	Sub-circular feature, flat base, sloping sides	0.34	0.34	UE	11	2	Campfire dump
11	Fill	Dark greyish brown silty loam with charcoal and ash	0.34	0.34	UE	UE	10	Buried campfire residue

Number	Type	Description	Dimensions (m)			Before	After	Interpretation
			Length	Width	Depth			
12	Feature	Sub-circular feature, flat base, sloping sides	0.28	0.28	UE	13	2	Campfire dump
13	Fill	Dark greyish brown silty loam with charcoal and ash	0.28	0.28	UE	UE	12	Buried campfire residue
14	Feature	Sub-circular feature, flat base, sloping sides	0.28	0.28	UE	15	2	Campfire dump
15	Fill	Dark greyish brown silty loam with charcoal and ash	0.28	0.28	UE	UE	14	Buried campfire residue
16	Feature	Sub-circular mound	6.00	6.70	0.19	1	2	Clearance cairn
17	Feature	Linear stone spread; stones sub-rounded to angular	>20.00	1.6	0.21	1	2	Clearance stones, possibly at edge of former field
18	Feature	Sub-circular feature, sloping sides, flat base	0.34	0.34	0.05	19	2	Posthole
19	Fill		0.34	0.34	0.05	1	18	Fill of posthole

Selected photographs



Figure 4 Ditch 3. Photograph 9



Figure 5 Feature 8 half-sectioned. Photograph 17



Figure 6 Clearance cairn **16** quarter sectioned. Photograph 20



Figure 7 House plot stripped. Photograph 28