
SUAT Ltd

*Archaeological Monitoring
of
Excavation
at
Cnoc Udais
(Muir of Ord)*

Archaeological Monitoring of Excavation at Cnoc Udais near Muir of Ord Highland

Abstract

On 27th November 2000 SUAT Ltd undertook archaeological monitoring of an excavation required for a cabin base on the telecommunications site at Cnoc Udais near Muir of Ord, Highland. The excavated area was considered to archaeologically sensitive because of its close proximity to known prehistoric features. Some modern services in the form of cables and a plastic pipe were uncovered but nothing of archaeological significance was found.

Introduction

SUAT Ltd was commissioned by Main McCook, Chartered Architects, Inverness on behalf of their clients Orange PCS Ltd to undertake archaeological monitoring in the form of a watching brief (SUAT site code MD01). The watching brief was undertaken on ground works required for the erection of a telecommunications cabin (telecommunications proposal HGH0115 - Muir of Ord (Ord Hill - NC). A brief for the archaeological monitoring was supplied by Senior Archaeologist John Wood of the Archaeology Unit, Highland Council Planning and Development Service. The watching brief was required due to the location of the site within an area where archaeological features have been recorded, and where there is potential for associated sub-surface remains of archaeological interest.

The Site (Illus 1)

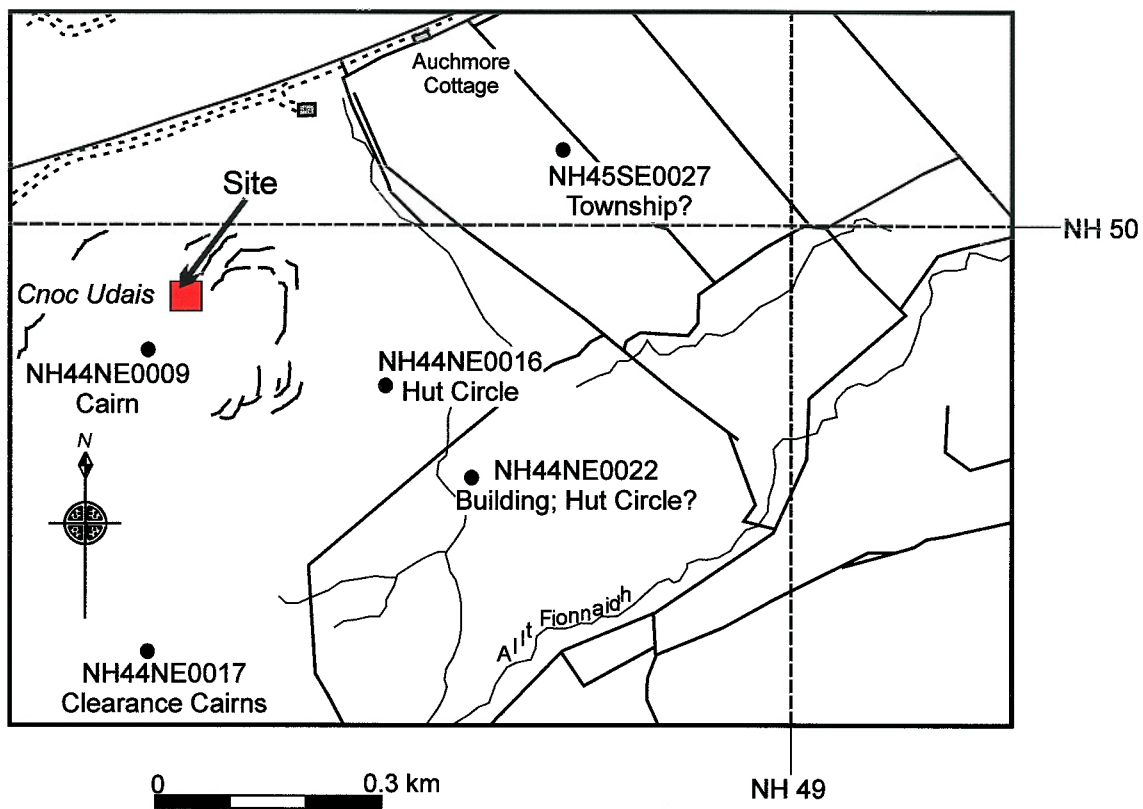
The site is located at Cnoc Udais, OS grid reference NH 4820 4990, near Muir of Ord, a prominent hill giving extensive panoramic views of the surrounding countryside and now used for the sighting of telecommunications masts. The excavation was on flat ground adjacent to an existing mast, with cabins on the north east side and south east side. It was also approximately 100 m to the north east of a large cairn located at a higher level on the summit of the hill. In the valley below to the south and south-east lie prehistoric archaeological features comprising hut circles, clearance cairns and a possible post medieval township.

The Excavation (Illus 2)

The watching brief took place in the late morning and afternoon of 27th November 2000. The weather was mainly clear but very cold with a strong southerly wind. The weather conditions did not hamper the archaeological monitoring.

An area measuring 3.20 X 3.50 m, and a small adjacent trench on the south side measuring 1.50 X 0.65 m, were hand excavated by the contractors through soft blanket peat down to a more solid sub-soil.

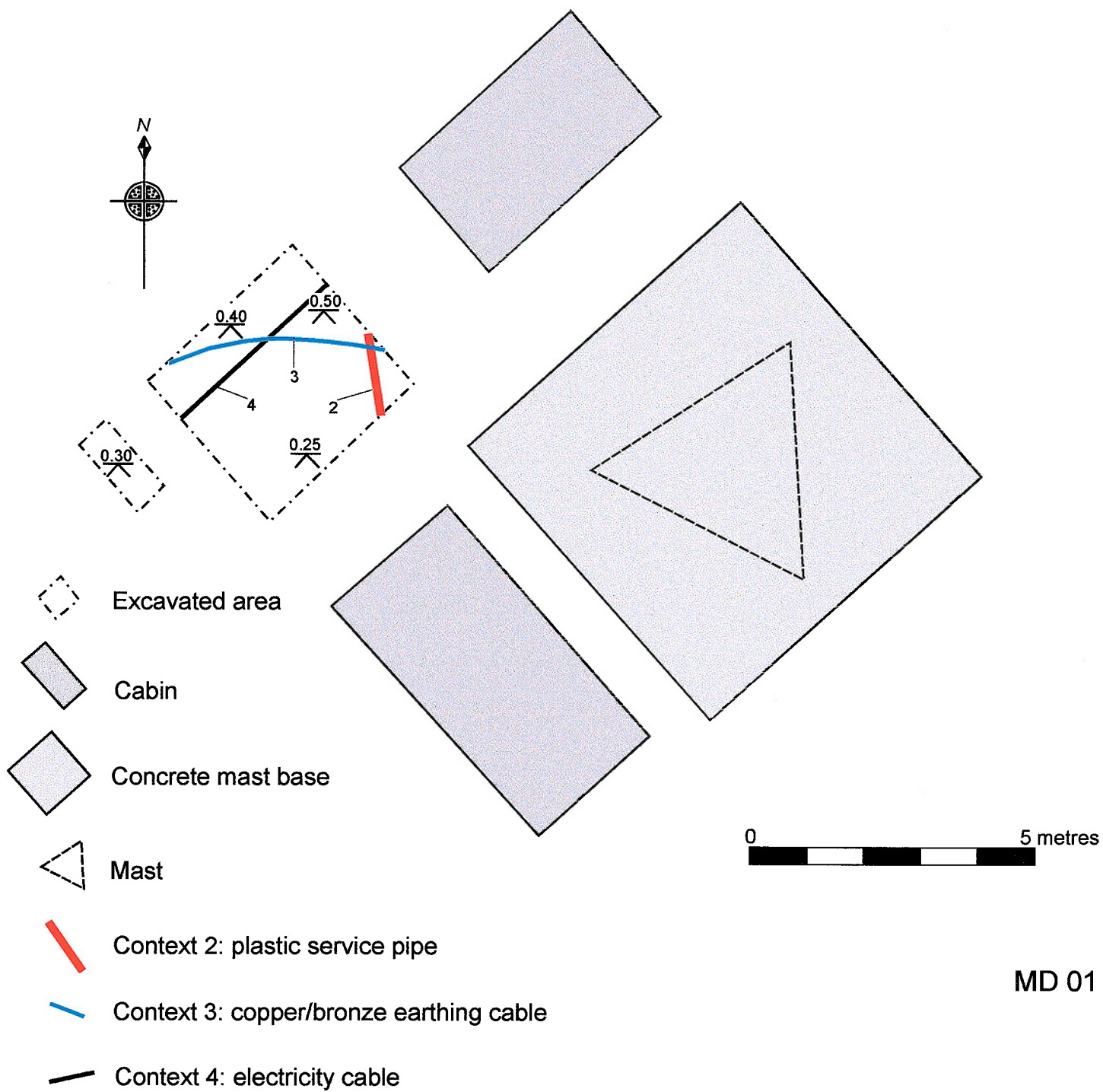
Illus 1 Site location and nearby known archaeological sites



MD 01

Illus 2

Plan of excavated areas



MD 01

Within the peat several services were found that connected with the adjacent cabins. These comprised a plastic pipe in the north-east corner, an earthing cable running across the north-west section and an electricity cable running through the north part of the area. These services had created minimal disturbance within the peat. Also within the peat were natural inclusions of frequent small pebbles and cobbles, and occasional large cobbles and small boulders. The sub-soil reached in the north part of the area comprised fragmented stone within a matrix of black organic silt. In the south-eastern part of the area the sub-soil was at a higher level and comprised stone fragments within a light brown silt. The maximum depth reached was 0.53 m in the north-west corner of the excavation.

In the adjacent smaller area a satisfactory base was reached at a depth of 0.30 m which comprised fragmented stone in black organic silt. No archaeological features or finds were encountered in this trench.

Conclusions

The watching brief revealed that there had been limited modern disturbance within the excavated peat, however, no features or finds of archaeological significance were found within the excavated areas and no further archaeological work will be required on this site.

Although the area covered by the excavation was relatively small and the results of the watching brief may be considered as negative, it is important that this work was undertaken to ensure that any relevant archaeological remains that may have been encountered would have been properly interpreted and recorded.

Acknowledgements

The watching brief was entirely funded by Orange PCS Ltd.

Appendix

Watching Brief Records

Contexts

- 1 Natural blanket peat, 0.25-0.53 m thick
- 2 Plastic service pipe
- 3 Copper/bronze earthing cable
- 4 Electricity cable
- 5 Small boulder removed in excavation
- 6 Base of trench area of fragmented stone in brown and dark brown silt.
- 7 Base of trench, area of fragmented stone in black organic silt

Photographic

- 1 View NE general of site prior to work starting
- 2 View SW start of contractor's excavation
- 3 View NW general working
- 4 View NE general of excavated area
- 5 View NE general working excavation almost complete

Plans and sections

Sheet of permatrace with areas of excavation at scale 1:20 with context descriptions etc and final below surface levels