

on survey shape

Archaeological
Watching brief

at

Woodside,
Ardvannie,
Ross-shire.

24th February
2001

by

Charles A. Miller

Report 268
Entered 6/3/01.

Introduction

This archaeological watching brief was initiated by an Arch1 planning condition imposed by the Senior Archaeologist, Highland Council planning department on the proposed erection of a barn by Ms R. Clayton of Woodside, Ardvannie, Edderton parish, Ross-shire. NGR 683 875. Historic Scotland have indicated that the barn erection does not affect the setting of the Scheduled Ancient Monument [SAM] known as 'Ardvannie, chambered Cairn 100m SW of Woodside', in a communication of 19th February 2001, from Dr N. Fojut, Principal Inspector of Monuments.

Location

Woodside croft lies due north of the Struie hill, in the parish of Edderton, Ross-shire. The site topography is of a broad undulating terrace facing northwards across the Dornoch Firth, to which the terrace slopes. The terrace is bounded to the south by the A836 road and to the north by the Inverness to Thurso railway. The terrace geomorphology is gravels and sands, derived from fluvio-glacial outwash. [Gillen]

History

The single storey house structure currently standing on Woodside is a relatively recent addition to the landscape. It is not recorded on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps, although the then recorded property sub-divisions are still identifiable today on the ground. It appears that Woodside may have replaced the structure on the roadside, identified as 'Halfway House' [lying halfway between Tain and Ardgay] in local traditions. Prior to Woodside being placed on the market in 2000, the previous owners demolished all associated structures to the rear of the original house, the barn and sheds etc. including the modern kitchen extension, bounding the small cobbled yard.

The area of the proposed barn construction had been left as rough pasture. From neighbours, pers coms, some 25 years ago there were attempts to utilise this ground for hay. This was abandoned due to the shallowness and presence of large quantities of stones in the soil. The area was then repeatedly deep ploughed and planted for potatoes as a means of breaking up the natural gravels. This was abandoned due to resultant soil erosion and damage to ploughs. The ground has been in pasture for at least 20 years. Part of wider efforts to clear the original fields to south of the current development led to dumping of field stones onto the eastern edge of the SAM, obscuring the shape and extent of this monument.

Methodology

The proposed barn site had been largely topsoiled by the earthworks contractor, who had been initially been employed to level and widen the access track to Woodside, and extend it towards the barn site. The site had been walked the week previous to the arrival of the Arch1 documentation by Mr Miller with Ms Clayton. The site had been weathered, revealing that there was slim likelihood of any archaeological deposits surviving, as the previous agricultural regime [above] had both denuded the topsoil, [leaving a maximum depth of 15cm, with an average depth of 10cm] and disturbed the underlying gravel and boulder natural. The natural was confirmed by use of shovel scraping and hoeing.

Subsequent to the imposition of the watching brief, it was agreed that the contractor would clear the remaining partially cleared strip of 6 X 30m in the south of the proposed barn building area. This took place on the Saturday 24th February. There had been a steady snowfall from 07.15 until 08.30 that morning, with a steady northerly wind. However, the remainder of the morning was bright and clear. After the remaining topsoil was mechanically removed, the area was hand-shovelled, any large earth fast boulders were examined using a draw hoe and WHS trowel for signs of anthropological use, e.g. posthole packing, hearth settings etc.

No archaeological deposits or cut features were observed. No artefacts were recovered.

Results

During the initial walking of the site, before the imposition of the watching brief, it was noted that there was markedly little artefacts of any period in the machined soil. Four abraded modern ceramic fragments were retrieved, mostly from the extreme north eastern corner of the machined area. A potential stone ard point was retrieved from one of the trackway spoil heaps on the same visit.

Discussion

That this site failed to produce any archaeological deposits came as no surprise, given its recent agricultural history. Further, the site lies too close to the the Struie hill [260 m], which leaves the area in shadow from November to February. This 'shadow' effect may have been the reason for the abandonment of the 'Halfway House' on the 1st edition map. In the broader Ardvannie location, prehistoric and early modern settlement is felt to be near, or on the coast line, to the north east of this watching brief, where there the sun shines all year, and there is a wider range of subsistence options.

Bibliography

Gillen C. Geology and Landscape of Easter Ross and Sutherland, *in* Firthlands of Ross and Sutherland. Baldwin J. R (ed). 1986. p20.

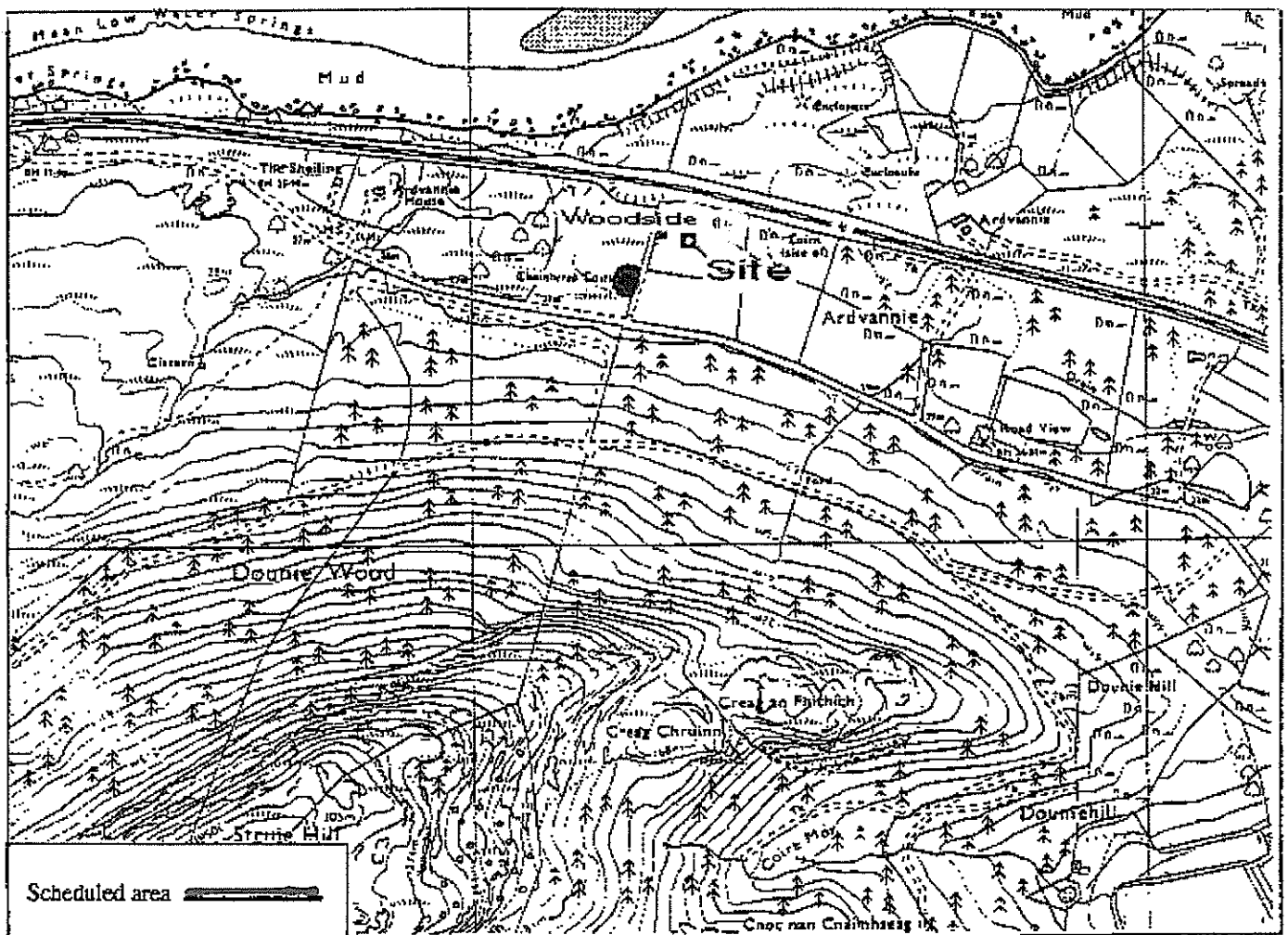
Archive

Copies of this report have distributed as per the Highland Council 'watching Brief' specification, with one additional copy to be place in Tain library.

The possible ard point has been forwarded to the Museum Archaeologist at Inverness museum for identification and appropriate disposal.

**Woodside,
Ardvannie
Edderton parish
Ross-shire.**

Copied from Historic Scotland Schedule as amended 23 February 1998. Modified to demonstrate location of area covered in watching brief.



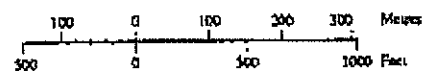
**Ardvannie, chambered cairn 100m
SW of Woodside**

Edderton Parish



Sheet: NH68NE

Scale 1:10,000



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The Stationery Office Catalogue Centre JJ6221

RDS 98 134

John Wood

To: Charles Miller (Resurgam)
Subject: Ardvannie Watching Brief Report

Thank you for this report, received by me this morning. I will check this through with Dorothy, but meanwhile could you please send through your photographs of the site taken as part of the watching brief, as they seem to be missing. These could be emailed if you like as good quality scanned or digital images.

Mrs Clayton has spoken to me on the phone and expressed concern about the possible implications of her plans to extend the croft house. Could you please tell her that I would be very willing to come out and have a look at the site as requested, but will need a couple of weeks' notice. She also said that she has a web-site giving details of her proposals, but I omitted to take the address - do you have it please?

John Wood

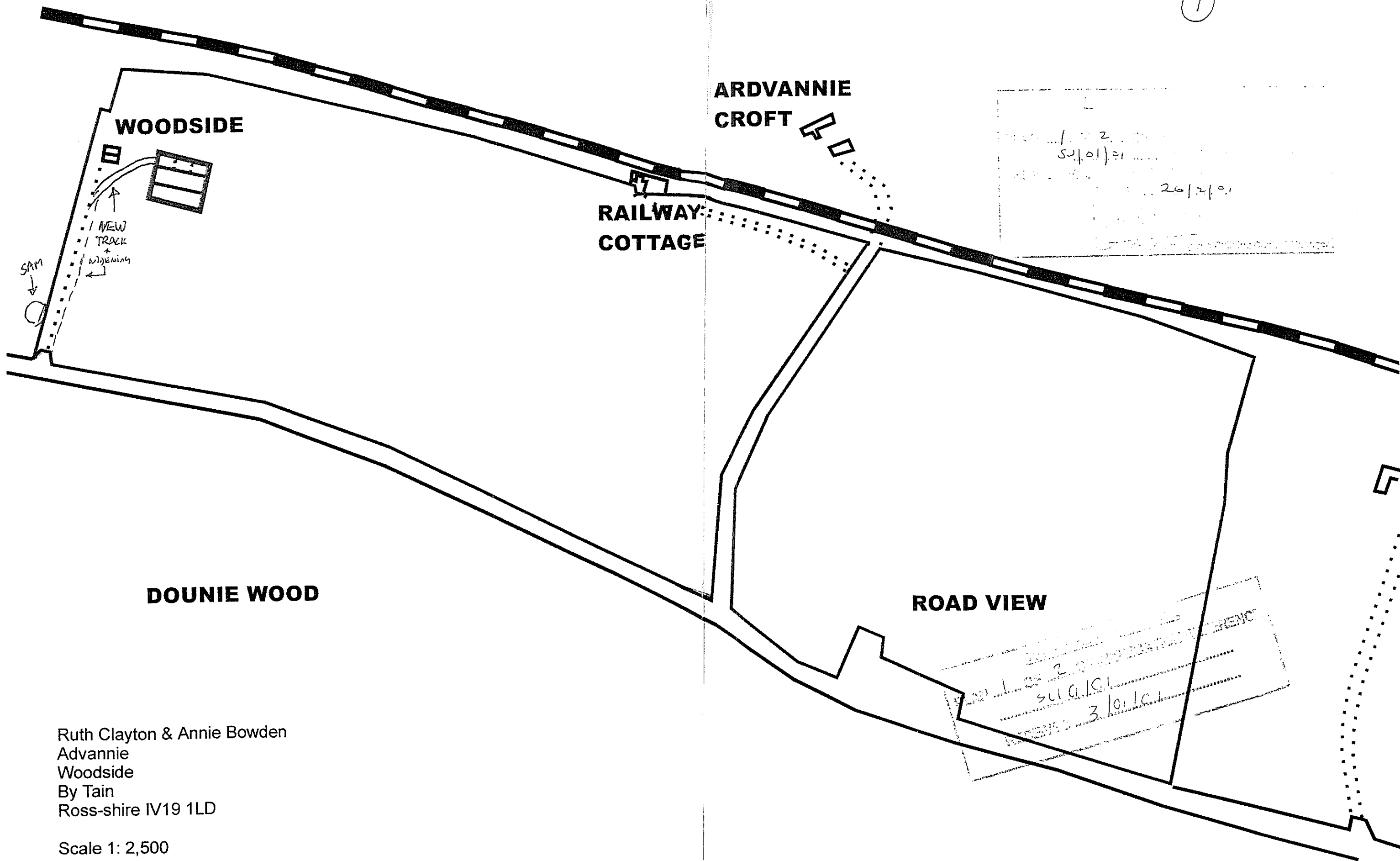
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Opinions expressed herein are my own and do not necessarily represent those of my employer.

SU/01/01

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Scale 1: 2,500