Highland Archaeology Services Ltd
Bringing the past and future together

# Report on Watching Brief:

# Power line re-routing
# East Brims,Caithness

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# Power line re-routing East Brims,Caithness

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|---|---|
| **Report No.** | HAS080504 |
| **Site Code** | HAS-EBR08 |
| **Client** | Scottish and Southern Energy |
| **Planning Ref** | N/A |
| **Date/ revised** | 26/05/2008 |
| **Author** | Paul Humphreys |

## Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out in April 2008 by Highland Archaeology Services Ltd on behalf of Scottish and Southern Energy at East Brims, Caithness. No significant archaeological features or finds were recorded and there are no recommendations for further work.

# Contents



## *Illustrations*



# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Scottish and Southern Energy for commissioning the work. The fieldwork was undertaken by Paul Humphreys, who took and labelled the photographs, drafted the report, and drew Fig 2. John Wood managed the project and edited the report. Ordnance Survey mapping is reproduced by permission of the Ordnance Survey under the Company's Licence no.100043217.

# Introduction

Scottish-Southern Electricity required to re-route an existing overhead power cable in order to supply a new housing development to be built at East Brims, Forss, Caithness. The proposed route required a line of poles to be erected that passed close to a burnt mound (ND 0547 6960) plates 1 &2). A watching brief was required for the excavation of the pole holes and any associated cable trenching.

This report presents the results.

# Location

The site is located at East Brims, Caithness (ND 054 699) at about 50m above sea level

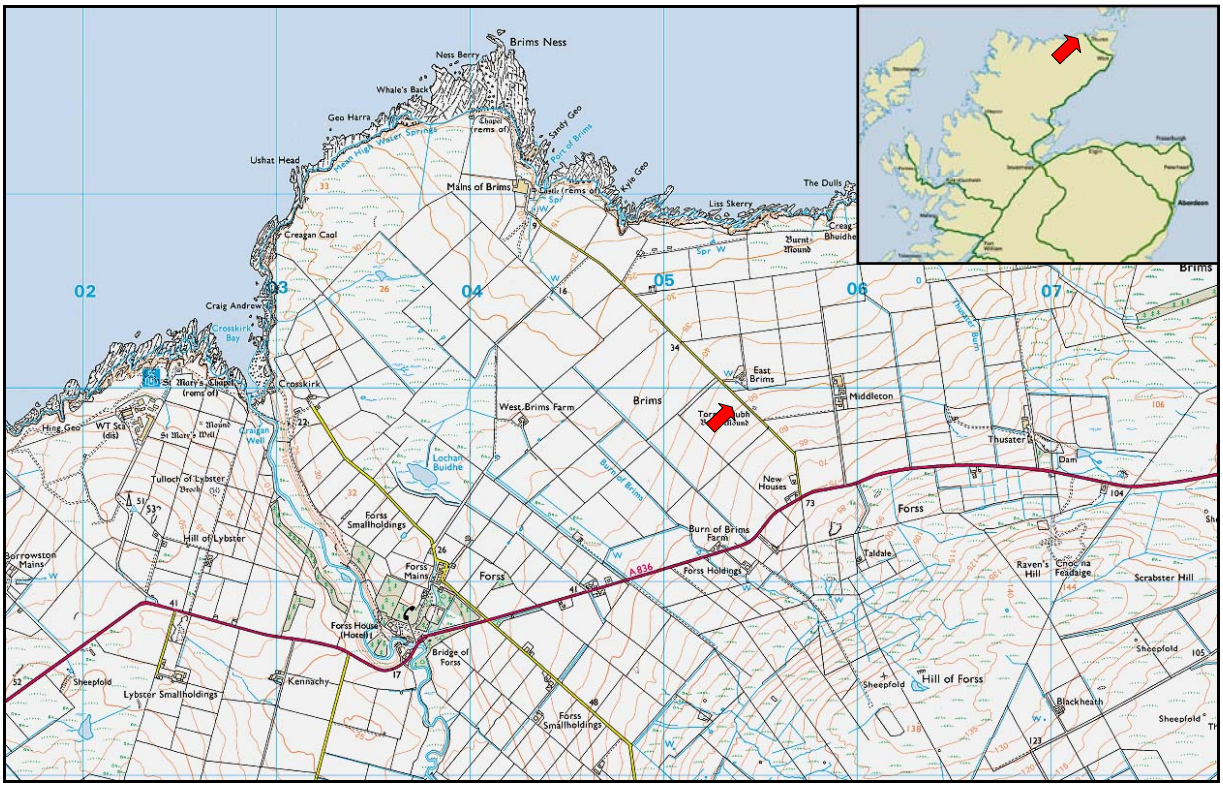


**Figure 1 Site Location**

# Archaeology and policy background

Caithness has a rich and diverse archaeological past, and is noted for its abundance of Neolithic sites including varying types of cairn, enclosures and standing stones. The area around Brims is typical of this with archaeological sites of different dates, from the Neolithic (c. 6000 – 4,400 years ago), Bronze or Iron Ages (c. 4,400 – 1,500 years ago), to post-medieval features (since about 1550). East Brims farmstead itself is recorded on the National Monuments Record (NMRS ND07SE 30) as a small farmstead of L shape plan with a flagstone roof. A watching brief by Stuart Farrell at a house plot here found no archaeological features, but 'a farmstead was noted in the vicinity at ND 0540 7006'.

Close to the line of the new cable is Torran Dubh burnt mound (NMRS and HSMR ND07SE0006) which is an unusually large example, some 15m long x 13m and 2m high. It is also unusual in that it appears to contain a large proportion of earth to the stones. It has not been excavated. Burnt mounds appear to date from the late Bronze Age and Iron Age (c. 3,000 to c. 1,700 years ago.) and consist of debris from pits in which hot water was heated for cooking of perhaps a form of sauna.

An archaeological watching brief was therefore requested for this cabling as there was some potential for finds or features of interest to be discovered during site works.

The watching brief was carried out to enable any discoveries to be recorded quickly and efficiently with minimal delay or disruption to the development. The planning and policy framework includes the Highland Council's *Structure Plan*[1], and the Scottish Government's *National Planning Policy Guidance Notes* 5 (NPPG5)[2] and 18 (NPPG18)[3], and *Planning Advice Note* 42 (PAN42)[4] (SOEND 1994). The fundamental principles underpinning the above policies are set out in *Passed to the Future: Historic Scotland's Policy for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* (2002)[5] and the *Burra Charter* (Australia ICOMOS 1999).[6]

# Aims and objectives

- 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 determine as far as possible the character, extent, condition, date and significance of any archaeologically significant remains; and to preserve these where possible and record where necessary in line with national and local policies and standards.

- To ensure that any artefacts or human remains are dealt with in accordance with legal requirements and current Historic Scotland policy guidance.

# Method

## *Desk Based Assessment*

A desk-based assessment was undertaken. This included researching the records of archaeological sites held at the Highland Sites and Monuments Record at the offices of the Highland Council's Archaeology Unit, based within the Planning and Development Service in Inverness. Information made available online by the RCAHMS, Historic Scotland, and the National Library of Scotland on-line database was also consulted.

[1] http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/planning/developmentplans/structureplan/thehighlandstructureplan.htm

[2] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/1998/10/nppg5

[3] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/1999/04/nppg18

[4] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/1994/01/17081/21711

[5] www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pasttofuture.pdf

[6] http://www.icomos.org/australia/burra.html

## *Site assessment – preliminary visit*

The site was visited by the author and Mr Ross McEwan of SSE to evaluate options to minimise any possible impact of the proposed power line installation on any archaeology. The proximity of one of the proposed new poles to the extant burnt mound (Figs. 1 & 2) was clearly an issue. The installation options were constrained by the need for the new overhead line to follow the line of the access road and for the pole spacing to be circa 70 m.

The morphology of the burnt mound suggested that the location of cooking tank / area and hence the focus activity lay on the NE flank of the mound and that the original spring would have been similarly located.

The possibility of moving the proposed pole closest to the mound was considered but this would have required an additional pole relatively close to the mound. It was decided, on balance, to go with the existing proposal.

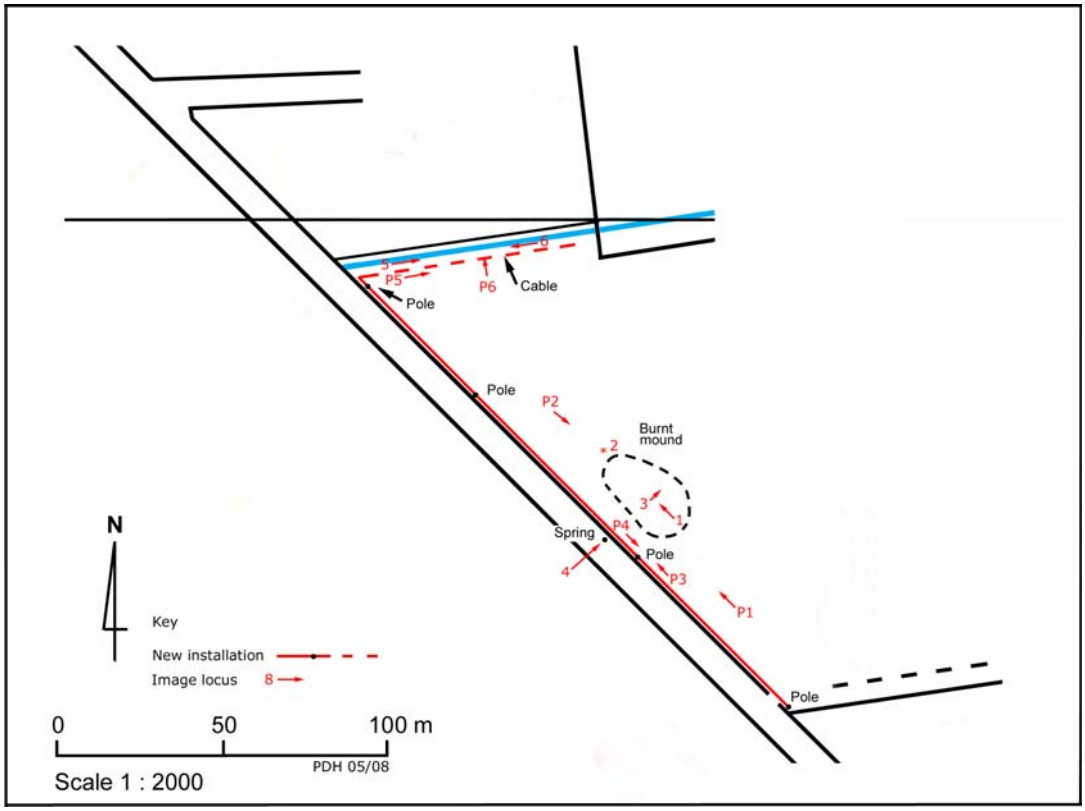


**Figure 2 Site layout (sketch plan). Numbers and arrows indicate photographs**

## *Watching Brief*

Working in co-ordination with the contractor, a watching brief was carried out by Paul Humphreys on all ground-works.

# Observations

A pole auger not being available, the pole holes were excavated using a tracked 360 excavator (plates 3 & 4). No evidence of buried archaeology was encountered in any of the pole excavations.

Watching was also conducted for cable trench which respected the line of an existing land drain with consequent pre-exiting soil disturbance. The only feature found a cluster of large, glacially-rounded, cobles oriented in a vaguely wall-like manner (plates 5 & 6). They may represent a disturbed field drain; however, according to the farmer stones were thrown in holes in that area when the main drainage ditch was cleaned out.

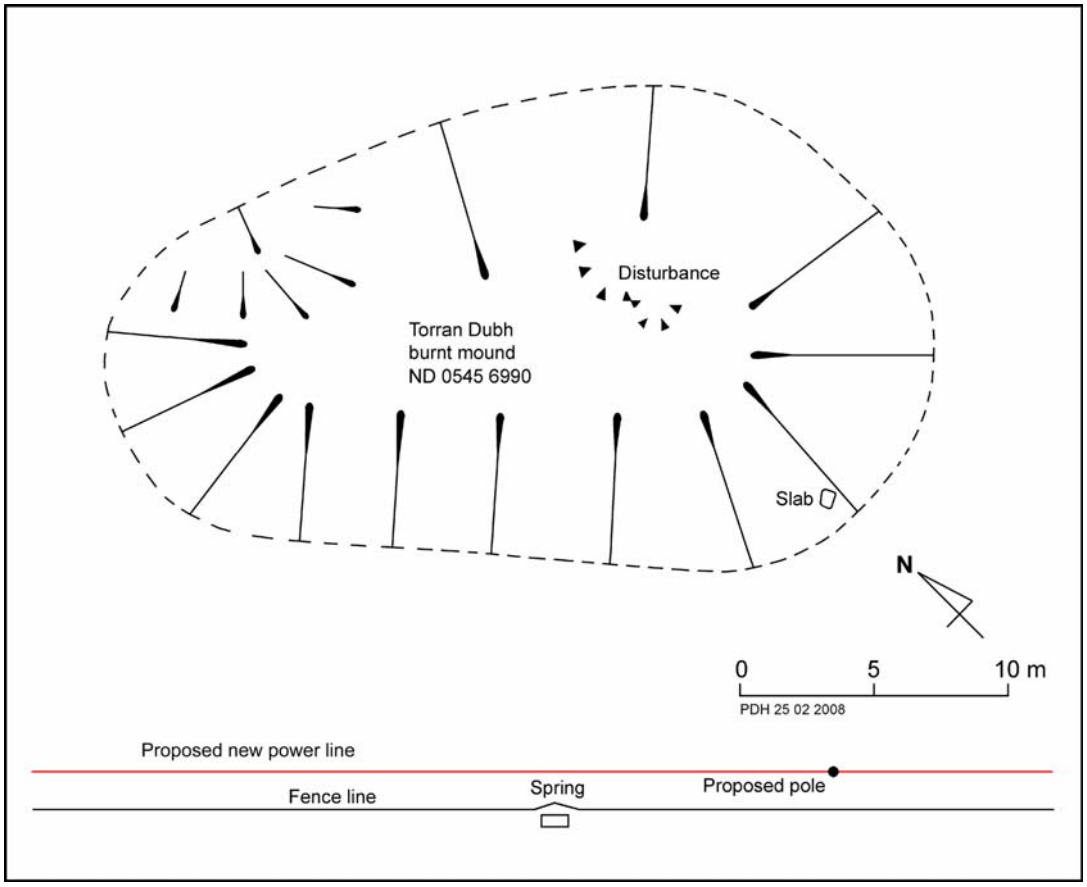


**Figure 3 Burnt Mound**

**Plate 1 Burnt mound looking NW**

**Plate 2 Burnt mound looking S**

**Plate 3 Pole excavation**

**Plate 4 Pole excavation detail**

**Plate 5 Cable trench excavation**

**Plate 6 Cable trench feature**

# Conclusions and Recommendations

Nothing of important archaeological significance was observed in the trench or the holes dug for poles. areas. There are no recommendations for further work.

# Appendix 1: Photo Index

| Photo No. | | Notes | Taken by | Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Plate 1 | Burnt mound looking NW | PDH | 25 02 2008 |
| 2 | Plate 2 | Burnt mound looking S | PDH | 25 02 2008 |
| 3 | Plate 3 | Pole excavation | PDH | 25 03 2008 |
| 4 | Plate 4 | Pole excavation detail | PDH | 25 03 2008 |
| 5 | Plate 5 | Cable trench excavation | PDH | 26 03 2008 |
| 6 | Plate 6 | Cable trench feature | PDH | 26 30 2008 |
| 7 | | Mound axis looking NW | PDH | 25 02 2008 |
| 8 | | Eroded burnt mound material | PDH | 25 02 2008 |
| 9 | | Mound damage NE flank | PDH | 25 02 2008 |
| 10 | | Modern spring structure | PDH | 25 02 2008 |
| 11 | | Cable route looking E | PDH | 25 03 2008 |
| 12 | | Cable route looking W | PDH | 25 03 2008 |