

# 194 Migdale

## Archaeological Watching Brief

### Report



|                   |                                                   |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Site Number       | AN2                                               |
| OS Grid Reference | NH 6336 9201                                      |
| Author            | Pete Higgins with a contribution by Anne Johnston |
| Date Produced     | 20/09/10                                          |
| Date revised      | 22/09/10; 15/10/10                                |

Photograph shows the footprint of the house after stripping; Loch Migdale is in the background

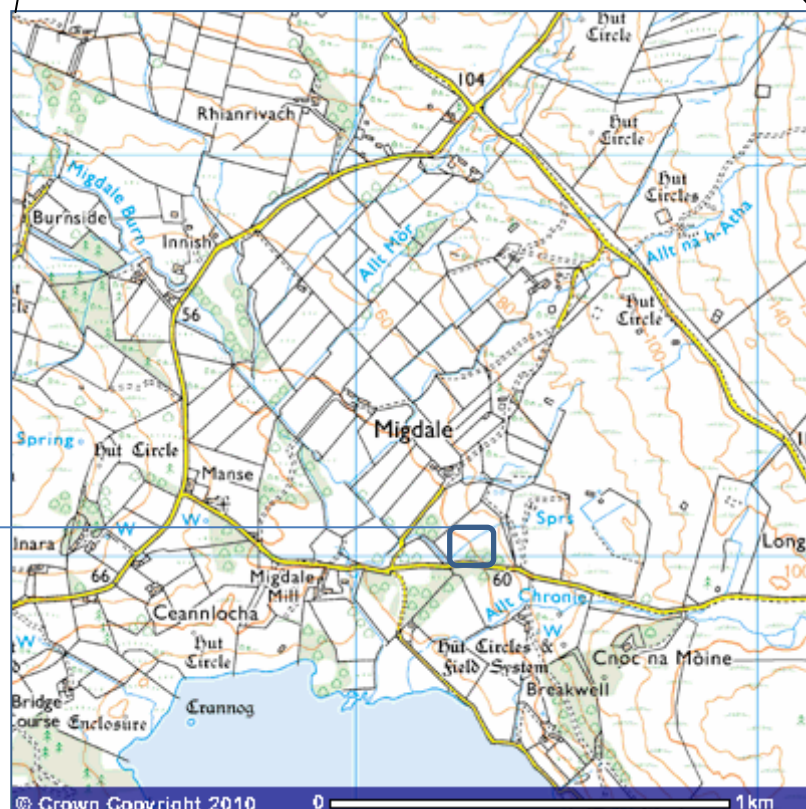
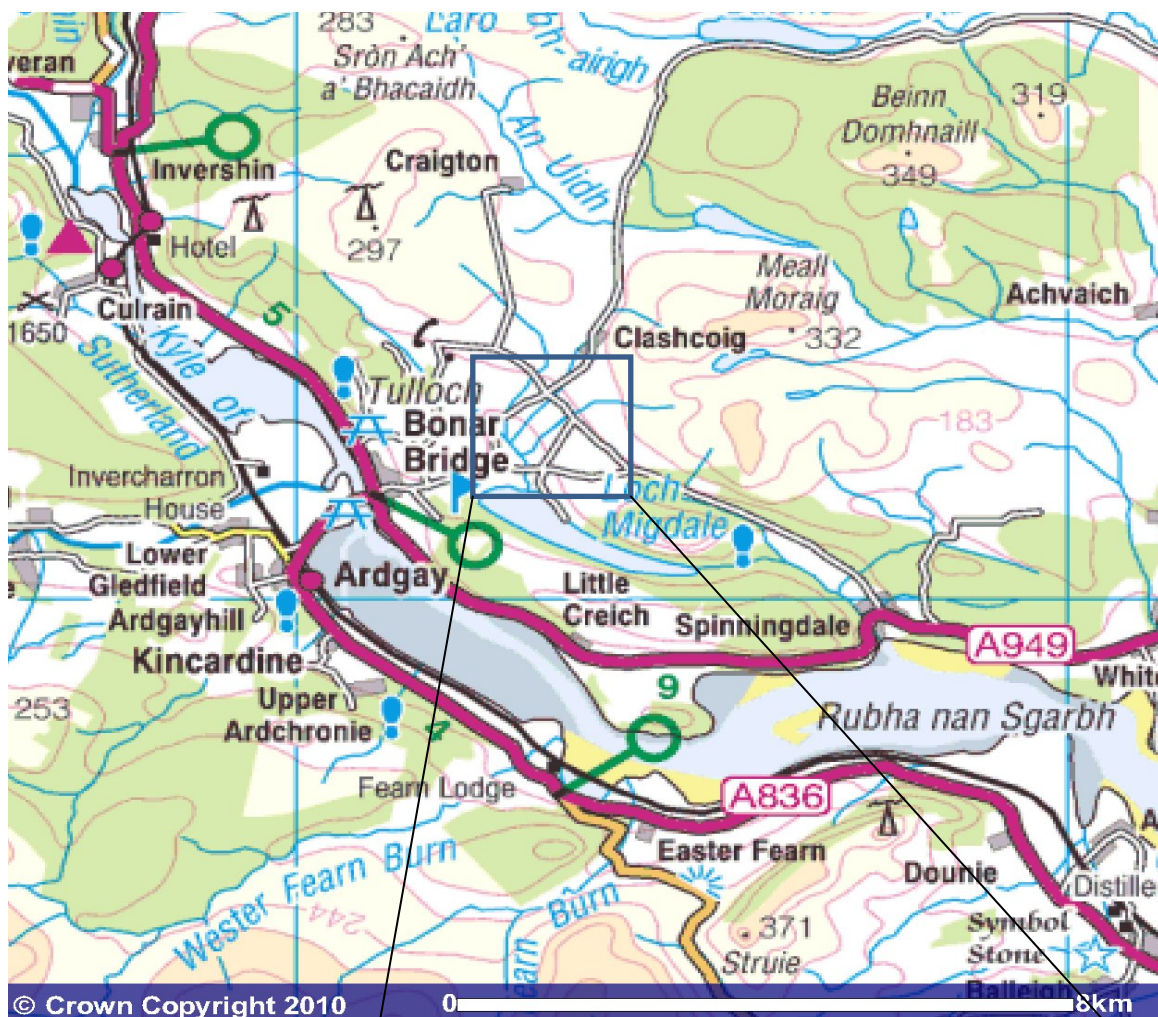
## **Summary**

*A watching brief on groundworks for the construction of a new house and access road at 194 Migdale, Bonar Bridge, was carried out on 15 September 2010. A stane dyke, marked as an enclosure boundary on the OS 1<sup>st</sup> edition map, 1874, was found, together with a land drain. Both probably date from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. The Highland Council required an archaeological watching brief on groundworks as a condition of planning consent for construction works at 194 Migdale, Sutherland, NGR NH 6336 9201. Planning reference number 09/00557/PIPSU.
- 1.2. The client, Mr T McBride of Spinningdale, commissioned Archaeology North Ltd to carry out this work.
- 1.3. The map below shows the location of the site.
- 1.4. An online digital version of this report may be found on the OASIS website at <http://www.oasis.ac.uk/form/formctl.cfm?oid=archaeol21-82512>





The site

## 2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1. To minimise possible delays or costs to the development by integrating archaeological works with the project.
- 2.2. To identify, so far as is possible, the nature, extent, date, state of preservation and significance of the archaeological resource of the site, and to preserve this; where preservation is not possible, to record the resource in line with local and national standards.
- 2.3. To propose arrangements for the safeguarding where possible, and recording where necessary of any archaeological features or finds identified.
- 2.4. To analyse and report on the findings of the investigations in line with local and national guidelines and requirements.

## 3. SITE LOCATION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1. The site lies to the north of Loch Migdale, in an area known to contain archaeological remains of several periods.
- 3.2. The site, which has been formed from a larger field, is currently partly wooded with mature *Betula pubescens*, partly grassed, and lies on a gentle south-facing slope. Two mounds lie within the site and several more and to the east; these are thought to be of natural origin, see 6.7 below. To the north a watercourse runs down from northeast to southwest. Its straightness and regularity betray its artificial nature, and it is marked on the current OS map as a drain; it is possibly a supplementary leat for the mill downstream. The field north of the watercourse is improved, fenced pastureland containing a few unroofed stone buildings.
- 3.3. The British Geological Survey shows the superficial geology of the site to be Devensian Till deposits of sand and gravel.

## 4. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

- 4.1. Scottish Planning Policy (SPP)<sup>1</sup>, Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP)<sup>2</sup>, Planning Advice Note 42 (PAN 42)<sup>3</sup> regulate the way archaeological matters are dealt with during the planning process. There is an assumption in favour of preservation *in*

---

1 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/03132605/0>

2 <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/shep-july-2009.pdf>

3 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/1994/01/17081/21711>

*situ*, although *preservation by record* may be deemed sufficient by the planning authority, in this case Highland Council, advised by their in-house Archaeology Unit.

4.2. The Highland Council Structure Plan 2001<sup>4</sup> sets out the ways Highland Council implements the above policies. Those relevant include Identifying and Regulating the Use of Archaeological Sites, (BC1) Archaeological Heritage Areas, (BC3) the Integration of Environmental and Community Interests (G5), and the Conservation and Promotion of the Highland Heritage (G6).

4.3. Archaeology North Ltd follows the Code of Conduct of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA). Quality of work is assured both through adherence to the standards of the IFA and through internal monitoring.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. The archaeological works comprised the following:

5.1.1. *Desk-based assessment*. The available archival resources were reviewed, interpreted in context and listed in gazetteer form.

5.1.2. *Watching Brief*. The watching brief involved the archaeological observation of topsoil stripping over the whole of the house and garage footprint, and of the access road. Written, photographic and drawn records were made of all archaeological features or deposits exposed; their positions were plotted on a large scale plan.

## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1. *Desk-based assessment and documentary research* By Anne Johnston

The data-bases of the *National Monuments Record of Scotland* (NMRS) and Highland Council's *Historic Environment Record* (HER) were viewed online<sup>5</sup>. Whilst no archaeological sites or artefacts are noted as lying within the confines of the proposed building site, the records reveal that 194 Migdale lies within a wider area which preserves many traces of former settlement and land-use. This favourable land, lying on the gentle south-facing slopes above Loch Migdale clearly formed a focus for settlement over several millennia with the current pattern of dwellings and field boundaries mostly dating to the time of the late 18th/early 19th-century agricultural improvements carried out by Skibo Estate.

The majority of known sites relate to the prehistoric period. The hut circles and an associated field system to the south of the site at Cnoc na Moine (GR NH 6360 9180) are representative of many surviving in the Migdale/Spinningdale area. It is likely that later farming activity

---

4

<http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/planning/developmentplans/structureplan/thehighlandstructureplan.htm>

5 See Bibliography

may have erased surface evidence of other sites dating to the later prehistoric and medieval periods, although a crude enclosure at GR NH 6344 9212 is thought to be post-medieval in origin. 194 Migdale lies on the eastern periphery of the better land at Migdale, on the fringes of rough pasture/moorland (as alluded to by the Gaelic topographical name *Cnoc na Moine* - Hill of the peat/moss). The primary use of this rougher pasture for stock grazing as opposed to cultivation may partly account for the better survival of archaeological features in this part of Migdale. Of particular importance is the find-spot of the so-called Migdale Hoard (GR NH 6336 9214), a collection of high-status bronze-age artefacts uncovered in 1895 to the immediate north of the site, and now in the collection of the National Museums of Scotland<sup>6</sup>. An assemblage of stone tools which may date from the neolithic to the late bronze age was later found close to the location of the hoard at GR NH 6330 9210. Lacking from the archaeological record is any trace of the Norse-speaking peoples whose place names survive so prominently in the landscape, including the many ending in the Norse suffix *dalr* (dale) as seen in settlement names Migdale, Spinningdale and Swordale.

East Sutherland was systematically surveyed in the early 1900s by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) in the course of preparing an inventory of archaeological sites in the area.<sup>7</sup> In the late 20<sup>th</sup> Migdale formed part of the survey area covered by the RCAHMS' *1<sup>st</sup> Edition Map Project* which sought to record sites noted on the Ordnance Survey's map of Sutherland first published in 1879. This resulted in many new potential sites being recorded on paper but which still remain to be investigated on the ground. A survey in woodland to the east of the site in 1977, at Ledmore<sup>8</sup> revealed the potential of the area to yield additional information about past habitation and it is not unlikely that the area around 194 Migdale might prove equally fruitful.

### Documentary Background

The site lies within the parish of Creich and, in common with the other land-holdings in Migdale and Spinningdale, formed part of the estate of Skibo and Pulrossie. The land divisions as seen today date mostly from the reforming practices of Sir George Dempster, estate owner, who in the latter decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and whilst most of his contemporaries were focusing on introducing sheep runs on their land, determined to create a manufacturing base reliant on spinning and weaving. Part and parcel of this enterprise was a desire to create villages to support a working population and Dempster was determined to 'give the people secure possession of their houses, gardens and arable lands, with full liberty to cultivate as much of the waste land as they please'. Thus the loosely-arranged townships of Spinningdale, Migdale and Bonar Bridge took on the aspect of planned settlements with a regular pattern of associated enclosures. Dempster's plans are outlined succinctly in the Rev George Rainey's report for the Statistical Account of Scotland, compiled between 1791 and 1799, which also gives a snapshot of life in the parish at the period.<sup>9</sup>

---

6 Anderson, Joseph, 1901-02, *Notice of a hoard of bronze implements and ornaments and buttons of jet found at Migdale on the estate of Skibo Sutherland*, in Proceedings of the Society of Antiquities of Scotland, vol.36 pp.236-42.

7 RCAHMS, 1911, Inventory of Ancient Monuments and Constructions in the County of Sutherland.

8 Carter S. and Wordsworth J, 1997, *Forestry Survey: Ledmore and Migdale, Spinningdale, Sutherland*.

9 Rainey Rev. Mr Geroge, 1799, *Parish of Creich* in Statistical Account of Scotland, Sutherland and Caithness, Vol XVI pp.331-352



Rainey reports, too, on the chief crops of the district, the barley, white oats, 'small black oats' and potatoes that sustained the populace and speaks of the inhabitants' reliance on the rearing of black cattle. Migdale Mill which lies to the west of 194 Migdale dates from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and it is the proximity to this building which best explains the dykes and enclosures represented on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map published over a century later. Earlier maps of the area are known, notably Roy's survey of 1745-1755 but neither it, nor the smaller scale maps of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century show any features in the area under consideration. The 1<sup>st</sup> edition map, by contrast, details the Mill, mill dam, leats and water courses and is particularly useful in showing the boundaries between cultivated land and rough, boggy moorland. It highlights also the new soft wood plantations which resulted from Dempster's plans to improve his estate's income, he having reserved the right to 'enclose and plant all such areas of wasteland as are fit for no other purpose'<sup>10</sup>. Also of note is the positioning of the road that links this part of Migdale to the west with Bonar Bridge to the west and with Spinningdale to the east and which forms the southern boundary of the site.

NMRS: [www.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk)  
 HER: <http://her.highland.gov.uk>  
 NLS: [www.nls.uk/collections/maps/index.html](http://www.nls.uk/collections/maps/index.html)  
<http://geo.nls.uk/OS6inch/>

### **Bibliography**

Anderson, Joseph, 1901, '*Notice of bronze implements and ornaments and buttons of jet found at Migdale on the estate of Skibo, Sutherland*' in Proceedings of the Society of Antiquities of Scotland vol. Pp 266-75

Bangor-Jones, 2010, *Sheep farming in Sutherland in the eighteenth century*, in Agricultural History Review vol. 50 II, pp 181-202

Carter Stephen and Wordsworth Jonathan, 1977, *Forestry Survey: Ledmore and Migdale, Spinningdale, Sutherland*.

Rainey Rev. George, 1799, *Parish of Creich in Statistical Account of Scotland, Caithness and Sutherland*

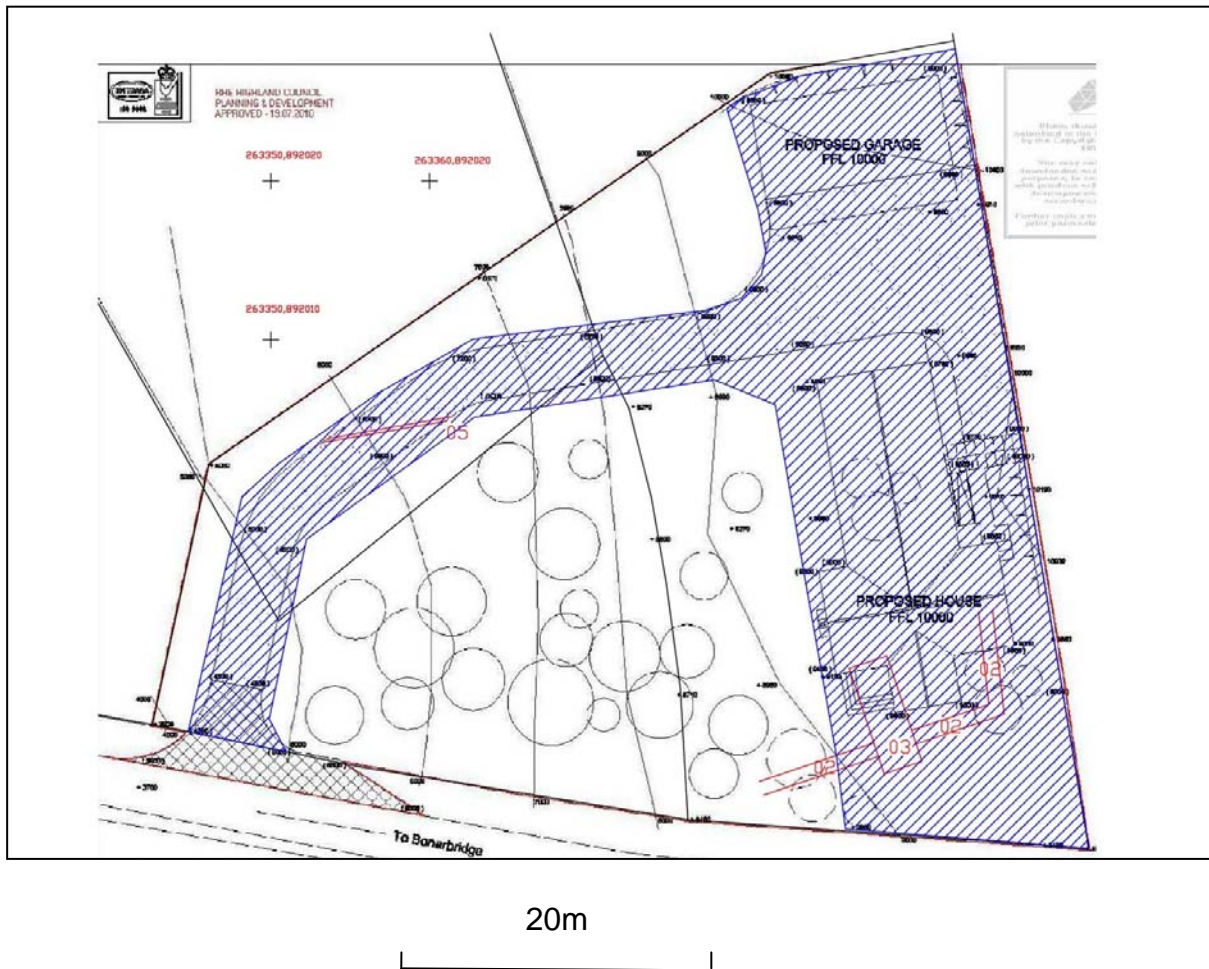


Figure 2 Plan of site, showing stripped area (blue), archaeological feature (red)s, and OS grid reference points



**Table 1.**  
**Context table**

| Context   | Category  | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Colour     | Texture          | Length (m) | Width (m)  | Ht/Depth/Thk (m) |
|-----------|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------------|------------|------------|------------------|
| <b>01</b> | Layer     | Topsoil.<br>Firm, with rare charcoal and CBM inclusions. No apparent subsoil, only very thin and indeterminate interface zone with natural, <b>04</b>                                                                                                                                                                              | Dark brown | Peaty silty loam | Site       | Layer      | 0.25             |
| <b>02</b> | Structure | Wall – stane dyke.<br>Alignment of large, sub-round to sub-square stones set into top of natural, <b>04</b> , running approximately ENE/WSW. Only one discontinuous course present in most places; occasionally two courses. Possible right angle return in north, heading NNW. Gap where it meets <b>03</b> is possible entrance. | N/A        | N/A              | >15.0      | 0.9        | 0.3              |
| <b>03</b> | Layer     | Road/path.<br>Broad scatter of medium and small (6-200mm) stones in dark brown peaty silty loam, forming a band running approximately N/S.                                                                                                                                                                                         | Dark brown | Peaty silty loam | 7.0<br>N/S | 2.5<br>E/W | 0.15             |

|           |         |                                                                                                                                                                               |                                      |             |       |       |          |           |
|-----------|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------|-------|----------|-----------|
| <b>04</b> | Layer   | Natural deposits.<br>Range from strong yellow brown silty sand with many large (>600mm) stones at top of site to almost stoneless greyish brown silty sand further downslope. | Strong yellow brown to greyish brown | Silty sands | Site  | layer | >1.<br>7 | UE        |
| <b>05</b> | Feature | Land drain.<br>Straight linear cut running approximately ENE/WSW in access road.                                                                                              | N/A                                  | N/A         | >10.0 | 0.2   | 0.5<br>5 | <b>04</b> |
| <b>06</b> | Fill    | Fill of drain.<br>Where disturbed vertically-set slab stones with rubble fill between were observed, with light greyish brown silty loam between – a French drain.            | Light greyish brown                  | Silty loam  | >10.0 | 0.2   | 0.5<br>5 | <b>05</b> |

## 6.2. Watching brief

Table 1 lists the contexts recorded, together with their descriptions and interpretations. Their position is plotted on figure 2. The maximum depth of the strip was 0.45m, although this included removal of 0.25m of natural deposits. The road frontage of the site lies at approximately 60m aOD;; the ground rises to c. 62m aOD at the north-east corner.

6.3. The topsoil, **01**, appears to have formed almost directly on the natural deposits, **04**, with little or no subsoil; this is distinct from the soil formation within the small copse on site and within the area of cleared trees, where a forest soil appears to be in process of formation. The copse is marked on the 1st edition OS map, surveyed 1874.



Figure 3 Stane dyke, **02**

6.4. A stane dyke, **02** was recorded in the southeast corner of the site, with a possible return, see figure 2. This corresponds with the edge of an enclosure marked on the 1874 map; no other trace of the enclosure boundary was found. Since **02** survived with at most two courses of stone it is probable the most of the wall had been robbed out at some point.



Figure 4 Road surface, **03**

- 6.5. A spread of stone, **03**, was recorded where there appeared to be a gap in **02**, although given the fragmentary nature of its survival in other locations this may be purely fortuitous. Nevertheless, **03** has been interpreted as a road or path in an entry to the enclosure noted above. **03** sat directly on the natural deposits and appeared to have been deposited as one layer. The full extent of the layer is shown on figure 2, and it may simply be an attempt to counter poaching in a field entrance.



Figure 5 Section across the French drain

- 6.6. A French drain, **05** (filled by **06**), was also recorded. No dating evidence was recovered from the sample excavated, and French drains have been in use for many years, so it is difficult to date its origin. However, since it lies just within the enclosure shown on the 1874 map, and is oriented approximately parallel to the southern boundary of, it may well be contemporary with that, and thus form part of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century land improvements mentioned in the Documentary Background above.
- 6.7. One of the mounds mentioned in 3.2 above, lying at the northern end of the garage location, was partly excavated, see figures 7 and 8. It proved to be composed of till and is presumably a glacial feature. The other mounds in and around the site are of similar size and shape, and it is assumed that they are of the same nature. No mounds were observed to the north, in the improved land; presumably either only land without mounds was improved, or they were reduced during improvement.
- 6.8. No finds were recovered, and no other archaeological features were observed.





Figure 6. Recorded features plotted on 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map, 1874



Figure 7. Site plan showing the location of the natural mounds (red circles).



Figure 8 East facing section through top of mound in northeast of site, showing topsoil over natural

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1. All the evidence recorded dates from the improvement of agricultural land during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As stated in 6.1 above it is probable that the agricultural improvements of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century have obscured or removed any traces of earlier activity.

7.2. There are no recommendations for further archaeological work.

Copyright. Copyright of the report rests with Archaeology North Ltd with all rights reserved; excepting that information deposited with the HCAU may freely be copied without reference to Archaeology North Ltd for the purpose of study or development control in respect of the planning process.

## APPENDIX

### *Planning application references*

**Ref Number** 09/00557/PIPSU **Application Type** Planning Permission in Principle

**Decision Date** 02/02/2010 **Grid Reference** 263366 892014

**Decision** The Highland Council Grant Permission

**Description of Works** Erection of house. Installation of septic tank and soak away system. Formation of new access to public road (Amended access position to previous permission Ref: 09/00429/PIPSU)

**Location of Works** 194 Migdale, Bonar Bridge,

**Applicant Name** Mr T McBride

**Applicant Address** Crossroads Cottage, Spinningdale, Ardgay, Sutherland, IV24 3AD

**Case Officer** Rebecca Scott

01408 635276