

# **West Coast Archaeological Services**

## **New House to NE of Clar Inis, 3 Ardmore, Harlosh, Dunvegan, Isle of Skye**



### **Archaeological Desk Based Assessment and Watching Brief**

National Grid Reference	<b>NG 2860 4095</b>
Site Code	<b>ARD11</b>
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## Acknowledgements

Fieldwork was carried out by Steven Birch. I would like to thank Peter Campbell for commissioning *West Coast Archaeological Services* to undertake the work and for supplying copies of the Watching Brief Document from Highland Council HET and for an area location map and development site plan. All mapping, unless otherwise stated, is reproduced by permission of Landmark Information Group under RoCAS licence LIG1044.

## Summary

*A watching brief was carried out on behalf of Peter Campbell on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2011 on the site of a proposed single house site development to the northeast of Clar Inis at 3 Ardmore, Harlosh, Dunvegan, Isle of Skye. There were no significant archaeological features or finds identified.*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 General

An archaeological watching brief was conducted by West Coast Archaeological Services (WCAS) on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2011 in advance of development of the site for a single house to the northeast of Clar Inis, 3 Ardmore, Harlosh, Dunvegan, Isle of Skye (centred on NGR NG 2860 4095; see Figures 1 and 2). The work was commissioned by Peter Campbell.

A Written Scheme of Investigation was produced by WCAS<sup>1</sup> based upon information supplied by the Highland Council Historic Environment Team and Peter Campbell.

### 1.2 Aims and objectives

The purpose of the archaeological watching brief is to efficiently identify and record any features or finds of archaeological interest prior to development, in order to minimise any delays or disruptions to the project or to propose appropriate mitigation in the event that significant features of interest are uncovered. The *Scottish Planning Policy 2010* describes how archaeology should be managed when considering planning decisions and determining conditions for developments that have an impact on the historic environment<sup>2</sup>.

The specific objectives are:

- To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area
- To remove by hand any overburden in order to expose the archaeological deposits
- To excavate, sample and record any features or to propose arrangements for their safeguarding, where possible.

## 2. Planning background

The archaeological watching brief was conducted on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2011, as per Highland Council Planning Reference SL-07-186.

The watching brief was a requirement as the proposed development lies within a wider area where important prehistoric and historic remains are recorded and there is a potential for associated finds and features of interest to be discovered during site works.

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<sup>1</sup> Birch 2011

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government 2010

### 3. Site location, geology and topography

- 3.1 The site proposed for development is located at grid reference NG 2860 4095, to the south of Harlosh on the Feorlig peninsula on the west coast of the island of Skye. Running south from the main A863 road, the peninsula extends into Loch Bracadale, while Harlosh Island is located immediately to the south (Figure 1).
- 3.2 The underlying geology of the peninsula is basalt, which has given rise to relatively fertile soils that have provided a focus for settlement over a considerable period of time. Much of the Feorlig peninsula, especially around the development site, comprises undulating green fields that are generally set-aside for pastoral activities. Immediately to the north of the development site a small hill rises to 37 metres above Ordnance Datum and is ringed by rock outcrops. The development site is located at an altitude of approximately 22 metres OD. The shoreline around the peninsula includes long sections of low-lying reefs, while to the northwest of the development site is a good landing bay (Camas Bàn).

### 4. Archaeological and Historical Background

- 4.1 The fertile soils of the Feorlig peninsula have attracted settlement over a significant period of time; settlement that is displayed by a wide range of archaeological sites and monuments. At



Figure 1: General site location



the northeast end of the peninsula are the remains of two large chambered cairns, of probable Neolithic age, while a smaller, more denuded cairn is located around 0.5km to the south. The remains of prehistoric settlement relating to the Iron Age is represented by *Dun Feorlig*, a broch located on the east coast of the peninsula<sup>3</sup>, and *Dun Neill*, a multi-phased dun and fort situated on a rocky knoll on the coast around 380 metres southwest of the development site<sup>4</sup>. Both sites are Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

- 4.2 The use of the wider landscape during the historic period is represented by the remains of *Ardmore Chapel* and graveyard located around 250 metres to the southwest of the development site<sup>5</sup>, which is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and a wide range of structures of post-medieval date. These include the former settlement of *Balmore*<sup>6</sup>, which is spread around the area immediately to the west and northwest of the development site. On the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition six inch Ordnance Survey map (Inverness-shire, Isle of Skye 1881, Sheet xxvii), this crofting township is represented by fourteen roofed and six unroofed buildings, while on the current edition of the Ordnance Survey 1:10560 map (1969) the settlement is shown with three roofed, two partially roofed and thirteen unroofed buildings.

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1 Desk Based Assessment

- 5.1.1 A desk-based assessment was conducted prior to commencement of the evaluation in order to assess the archaeological potential of the area based on previously recorded sites and any historical documentation.

The drawings of the area, as supplied by the client, were checked in detail against the Ordnance Survey 1:25000 Map, the Highland Council's Historic Environment Record (HHER), the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS), the Highland Council Archives and Historic Scotland's records of scheduled monuments and listed buildings. Online aerial photographs were checked and the map collections of the National Library of Scotland (NLS) were studied. Other literary sources were also consulted.

### 5.2 Archaeological evaluation

- 5.2.1 The purpose of the archaeological watching brief was to efficiently identify and record any features or finds of archaeological interest prior to development, in order to minimise any delays or disruptions to the project or to propose appropriate mitigation in the event that significant features of interest are uncovered.
- 5.2.2 The site topsoil clearance of the entire development area was conducted under constant archaeological supervision using a mechanical excavator with 4-ft wide flat edged bucket (Figures 2 - 4). Following machine excavation, the clearance area was cleaned back using a draw-hoe to allow for the identification of archaeological features.

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<sup>3</sup> HER MHG4851

<sup>4</sup> HER MHG4848

<sup>5</sup> HER MHG40714

<sup>6</sup> HER MHG27628

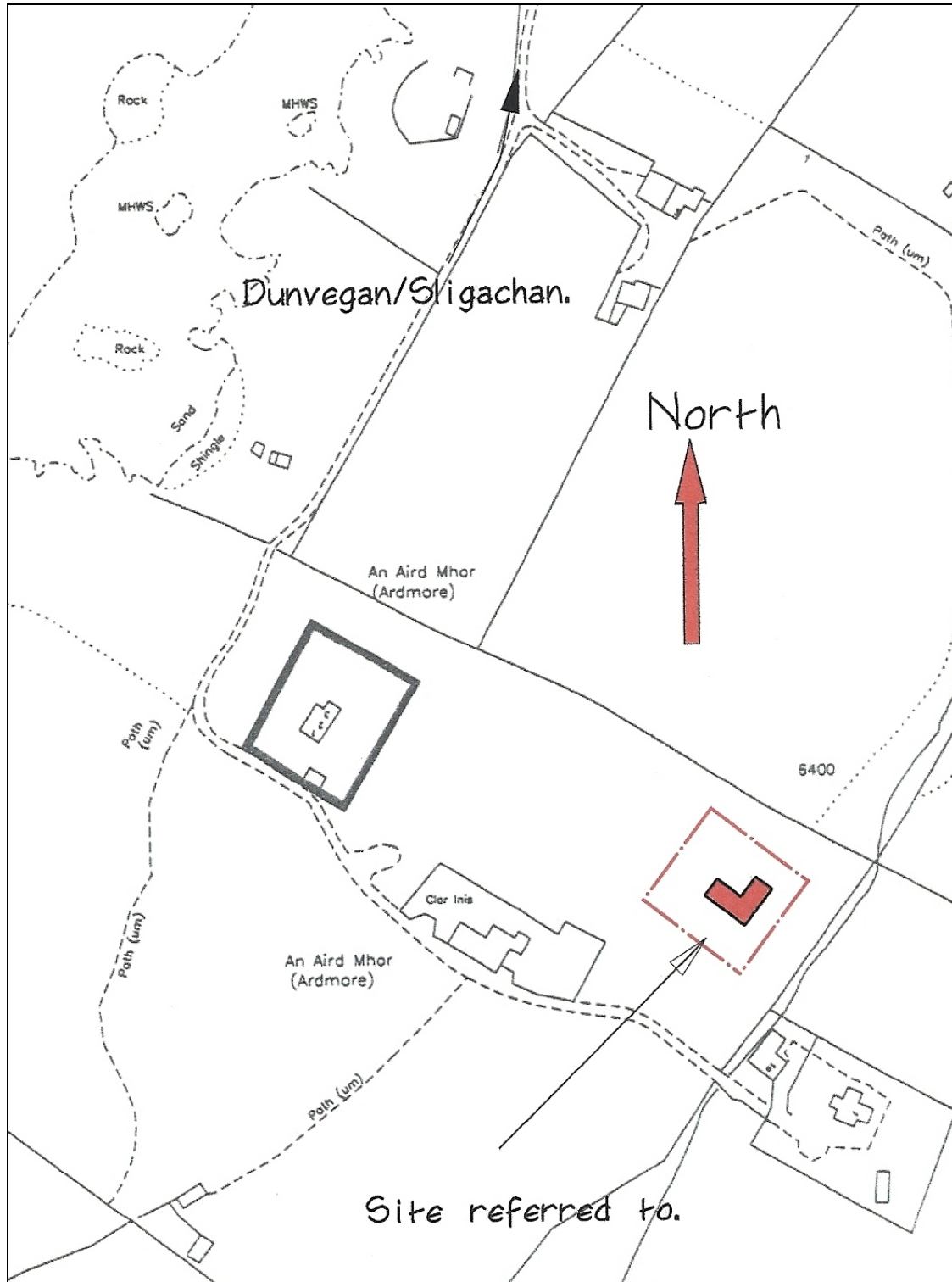


Figure 2: Site plan supplied by the client.

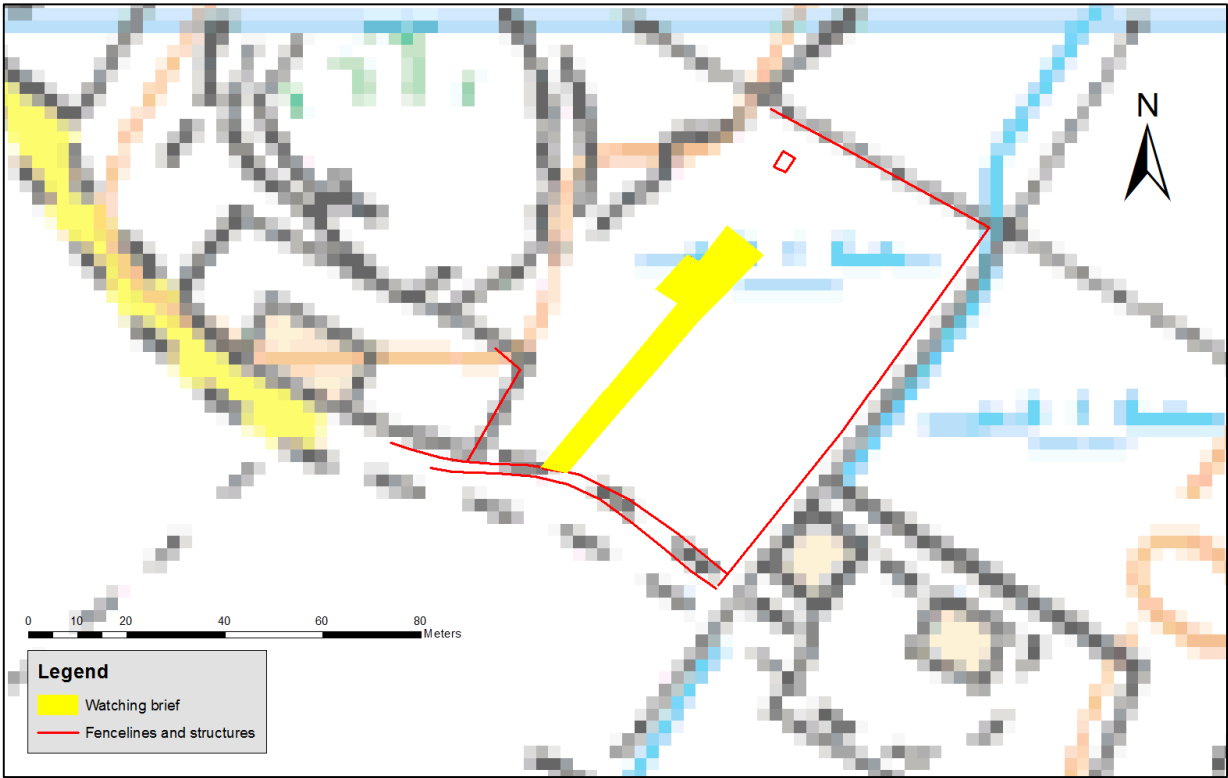


Figure 3: Watching brief area.



Figure 4: Aerial view of the watching brief area.

### 5.3 Site Recording

- 5.3.1 The site and any archaeological features or finds were plotted using ArcPad software with GPS technology with sub-metre accuracy on a handheld Windows Mobile-based computer.

### 5.4 Photography

- 5.4.1 The development site was recorded using high resolution digital photography throughout the watching brief in order to record the evaluation as well as any features or finds of interest.

### 5.5 General

- 5.5.1 All archaeological work was undertaken in accordance with the brief for archaeological work<sup>7</sup> and *Development Guidance* from the Highland Council Historic Environment Team<sup>8</sup> and to the standards and guidance as set out by the *Institute for Archaeologists' Code of Conduct*<sup>9</sup> and Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief<sup>10</sup>.

## 6. Results

### 6.1 Desk-based assessment

#### 6.1.1 Historical mapping

The following historical maps were consulted online<sup>11</sup>:

##### **First Edition OS Six-inch to the mile map**

The 1877 map shows buildings spread throughout the area surrounding the development site. In addition, the remains of a chapel site and graveyard are situated to the south-west of the development site.

##### **Second Edition OS One-inch to the mile map**

The 1896 map again shows a scatter of buildings in the area surrounding the development site.

#### 6.1.2 Highland Historic Environment Record

The Highland Historic Environment Record<sup>12</sup> was consulted online and there were no events or archaeological discoveries reported within the site boundaries. However, there are three entries in the vicinity of the development site:

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<sup>7</sup> Highland Council 2007

<sup>8</sup> Highland Council 2010

<sup>9</sup> IfA 2008

<sup>10</sup> IfA 2010

<sup>11</sup> NLS 2011

<sup>12</sup> HHER 2011

**MHG27628 Ardmore, Harlosh Crofting Township NG 2850 4100**

A crofting township, which comprised fourteen roofed and six unroofed buildings at the time of the Ordnance Survey in 1877. Three roofed, two partially roofed and thirteen unroofed buildings are shown on the 1969 OS map.

**MHG4847 Ardmore Chapel Chapel NG 2835 4082**

On the summit of a small hill to the south of the Balmore (or Ardmore) township is the site of a chapel and burying ground. The foundations of two rectangular buildings can be traced lying almost parallel to each other. The smaller building comprises the chapel with the possible footings of an altar visible at the eastern end. The other 'building' is a disused graveyard; no graves survive as, according to local tradition, they were removed many years ago for reburial at Kilmuir, Dunvegan.

**MHG4848 Dun Neill Dun NG 2814 4075**

This is described as a dun overlying the scant remains of a fort on a cliff girt coast rock. The dun is oval measuring 24m x 12m with the wall 2.8m thick at the eastern end where parts of both the inner and outer faces can be seen. Parts of other walls can also be seen. The entrance passage lies on the north-eastern side; the access route to it has one step of a stair remaining in situ.

**6.2 Watching brief**

6.2.1 Weather conditions: dry and sunny.

6.2.2 The site was on gently sloping ground with a southeast aspect situated below a low, basalt rock escarpment. The site lay under dense bracken with low-lying boggy ground at the lower southeast end of the site (Plates 1 and 2). Below the turf there was one stratum: context 101, a dark brown loam. The sub-soil beneath context 101 was a clay-like material, mixed in colour with mixed basalt rock, with some large clasts (Plate 3). The trench depth varied from 0.10m at the top of the site to 0.35m at the lower end of the slope; the depth was created by slope-wash, which covered an iron pan deposit of variable thickness. It was difficult to achieve a clean finish to the surface of the excavation trenches due to the medium to large-sized stone clasts within the interface of the deposit.

6.2.3 There were no archaeological features uncovered within the watching brief area. There were no artefacts of archaeological significance recovered.

6.2.4 To the north-east of the development area, a small, ruinous, sub-rectangular, stone bothy or byre was noted (Figure 4). It is aligned north-east/south-west and measures approximately 5m x 4.2m. The walls stand to a maximum of 0.6m and have a spread of 0.8m. The structure is covered in deep stands of bracken, moss and rushes.

**7. Discussion**

7.1 There were no significant archaeological features or finds uncovered during the watching brief. The lack of even the usual topsoil 'midden' type material, other than two pieces of modern ceramic and glass, suggests the site has not been subject to cultivation.





**Plate 1: View NE over the site as the site stripping commenced.**



**Plate 2: View SSW over the site during site stripping of the main house site.**





**Plate 3: View SW showing the variability in sub-soil colour on part of the stripped house site and access track.**

## **8. Conclusions and recommendations**

- 8.1 As no significant archaeological features were uncovered during the watching brief, it is recommended that no further work is necessary. The final decision, however, rests solely with the Highland Council Historic Environment Team.

## **9. Reporting**

- 9.1 This report will be disseminated to the contractor/developer, Highland Council Historic Environment Team and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.
- 9.2 A digital report will be submitted with digital copies of the site photographs and georeferenced site plans in ESRI shapefile format. West Coast Archaeological Services will retain copyright of this report.
- 9.3 A summary of the watching brief will be submitted for publication in Archaeology Scotland's annual journal, *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*. An OASIS entry has been completed.

## 10. References

Birch, S. 2011. *New House to NE of Clar Inis, 3 Ardmore, Harlosh, Dunvegan, Isle of Skye: Written Scheme of Investigation*. WCAS report 016/ARD/11

Highland Council 2007. *Brief for archaeological work at: New House to NE of Clar Inis, Ardmore, Dunvegan, Isle of Skye (SL-07-186)*.

Highland Council 2010. Development Guidance accessed at <http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/conservation/archaeology/developmentguidance.htm>.

HHER 2011. Highland Historic Environment Record accessed at <http://her.highland.gov.uk/home.html>

IfA 2008. *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief*. Reading: Institute for Archaeologists.

IfA 2010. *Code of Conduct*. Reading: Institute for Archaeologists.

NLS 2011. National Library of Scotland. [Http://www.nls.uk](http://www.nls.uk)

Scottish Government 2010. Scottish Planning Policy accessed at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/300760/0093908.pdf>



## Appendix 1: Index of Contexts

ARD11: Index of Contexts										
No.	Type	Description	Over	Under	Fill of	Filled by	Cut by	Finds	Feature	Interpretation
101	Deposit	Dark brown loam varying in depth over the site from 0.08 - 0.25m	102	Turf						Top-soil
102	Deposit	Clay-like matrix varying in colour with mixed basalt rock inclusions		101						Sub-soil

## Appendix 2: Index of Photographs

ARD11: Index of Photographs				
No.	Direction Facing	Description	Taken By	Date
1	NNW	View over plot during start of excavations	SB	04/07/2011
2	ENE	Excavator stripping the area of the house site	SB	04/07/2011
3	SE	Excavator stripping the area of the house site	SB	04/07/2011
4	SSE	Excavator stripping the area of the house site	SB	04/07/2011
5	NE	The location of the stone and turf bothy	SB	04/07/2011
7	SE	Close view of natural subsoil after stripping of topsoil	SB	04/07/2011
8	SW	Machine-stripped house site and access road	SB	04/07/2011
9	SW	Machine-stripped house site and access road	SB	04/07/2011
11	NE	Looking along stripped access track to house site	SB	04/07/2011
12	NE	Looking along stripped access track to house site	SB	04/07/2011
13	NE	Looking along stripped access track to house site	SB	04/07/2011
15	SSE	View over access to house site at junction with track	SB	04/07/2011
16	SE	View over access to house site	SB	04/07/2011
17	ESE	View over central area of access to house site	SB	04/07/2011
18	E	View over N end of access track to house site	SB	04/07/2011
20	NE	View over N end of access track and house site	SB	04/07/2011