



Highland Archaeology Services Ltd
Bringing the Past and Future Together

Lairg Wind Farm



Watching Brief Report

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Watching Brief Report

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Summary

A watching brief was carried out during site stripping and construction work at Lairg Wind farm site to identify and record any archaeological features affected by the work. Despite careful routing of the access road to keep clear of archaeology as far as possible, a group of field clearance cairns could not be entirely avoided. Where this occurred, removal was undertaken under close archaeological supervision. However no buried soil levels, burials or other features could be identified.

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Acknowledgements

Fieldwork was carried out by John Wood this report was edited by Lachlan McKeeggie and Pete Higgins. Modern Ordnance Survey mapping is reproduced by permission of Landmark Information Group under Licence 100043217.

Site Location

The wind-farm site lies about 1km south of Tomich near Lairg in Sutherland and comprises open heather-covered moorland. Three turbines are to stand on Cnoc na h-Inghinn at a height of between 250 and 300m above sea level. An access road was constructed to serve these which also included the cabling for control equipment.



Figure 1 General Location

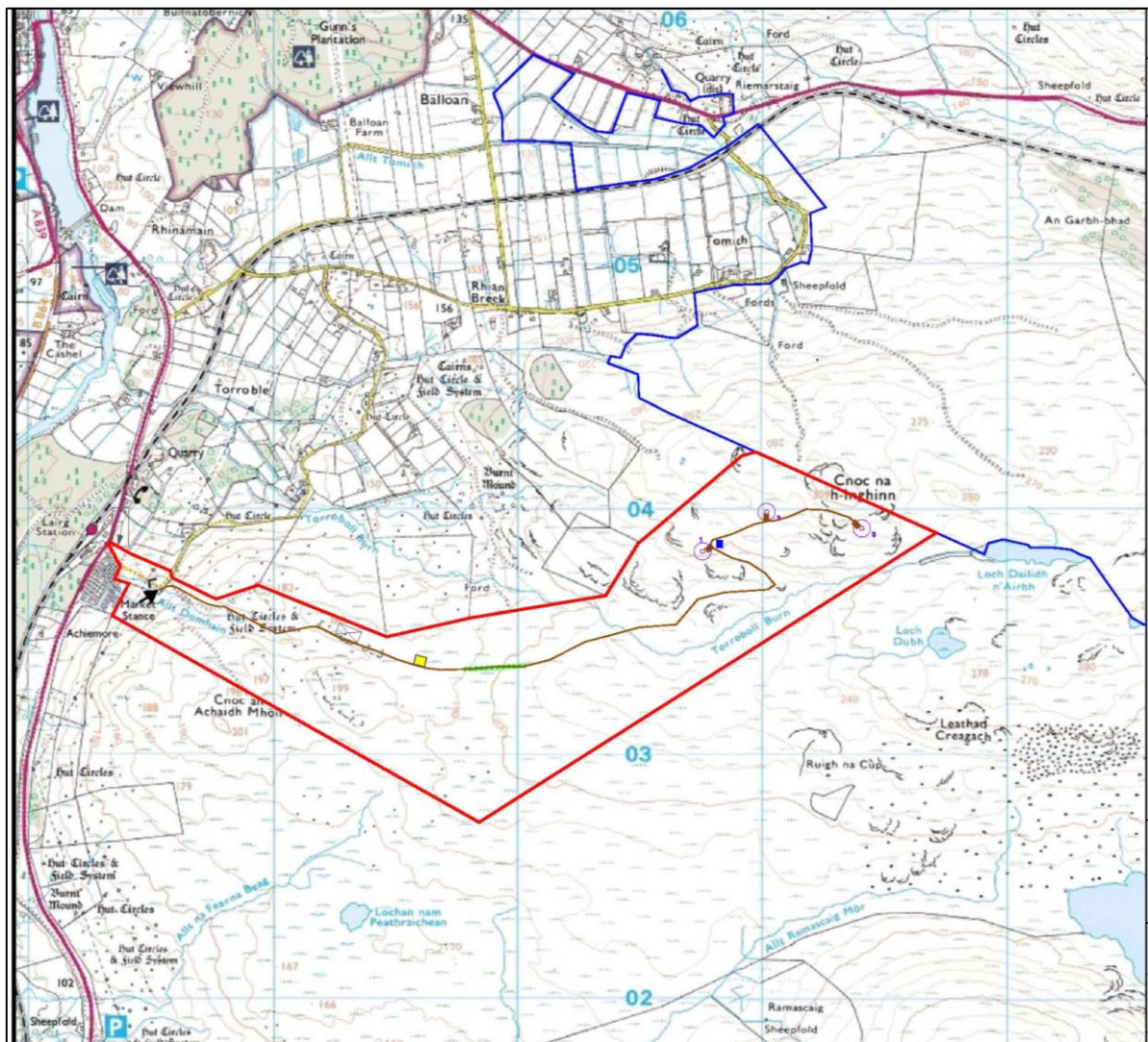


Figure 2 Scheme outline and watching brief location

Method

Desk-based assessment and walk-over surveys had been conducted previously as part of the extended environmental assessment procedure for this project, starting with the initial anemometer mast in 2004¹. This recommended a watching brief in the vicinity of three sites which lie close to the access road.

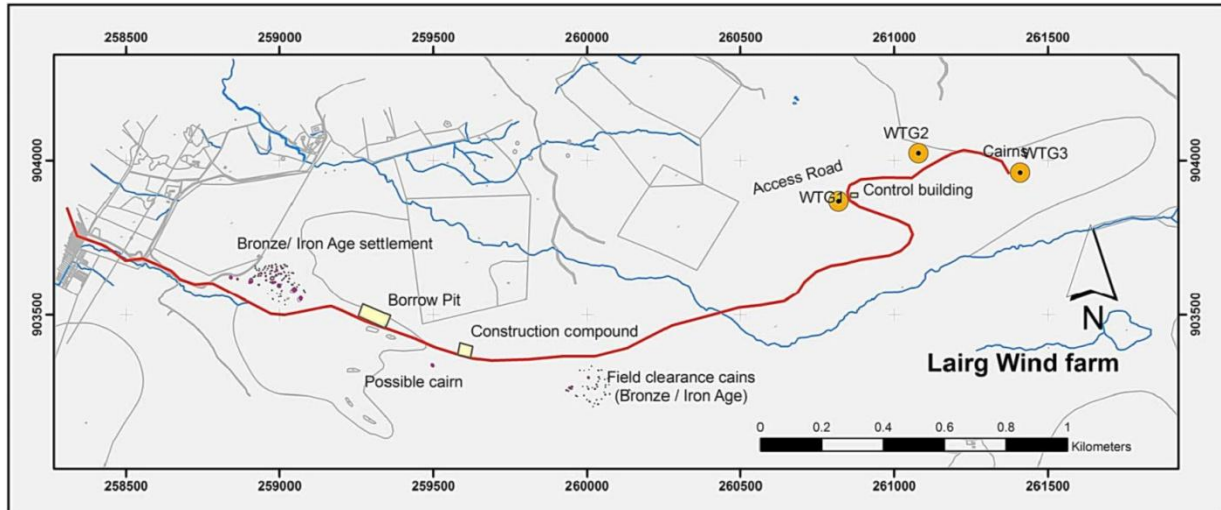


Figure 3: General plan for track showing locations of archaeological features.

The watching brief covered the removal of topsoil and overburden from two sections close to identified features close to the access road as shown below (Figure 3) as well as three other sight visits to monitor and inspect the planned route and exposed areas for the track.

A Promark 3 DGPS unit was carried and chainage points were plotted for reference, operating in mobile mapping mode using real-time satellite-based correction (WAAS / EGNOS/GLONASS). This typically offers accuracy of 1-2m in open conditions with a clear view of the sky, as here. The results were then corrected against the Ordnance Survey mapping.



Figure 4: Work Underway

¹ Wood 2004a, Wood 2004b, Wood 2005 (See Bibliography)

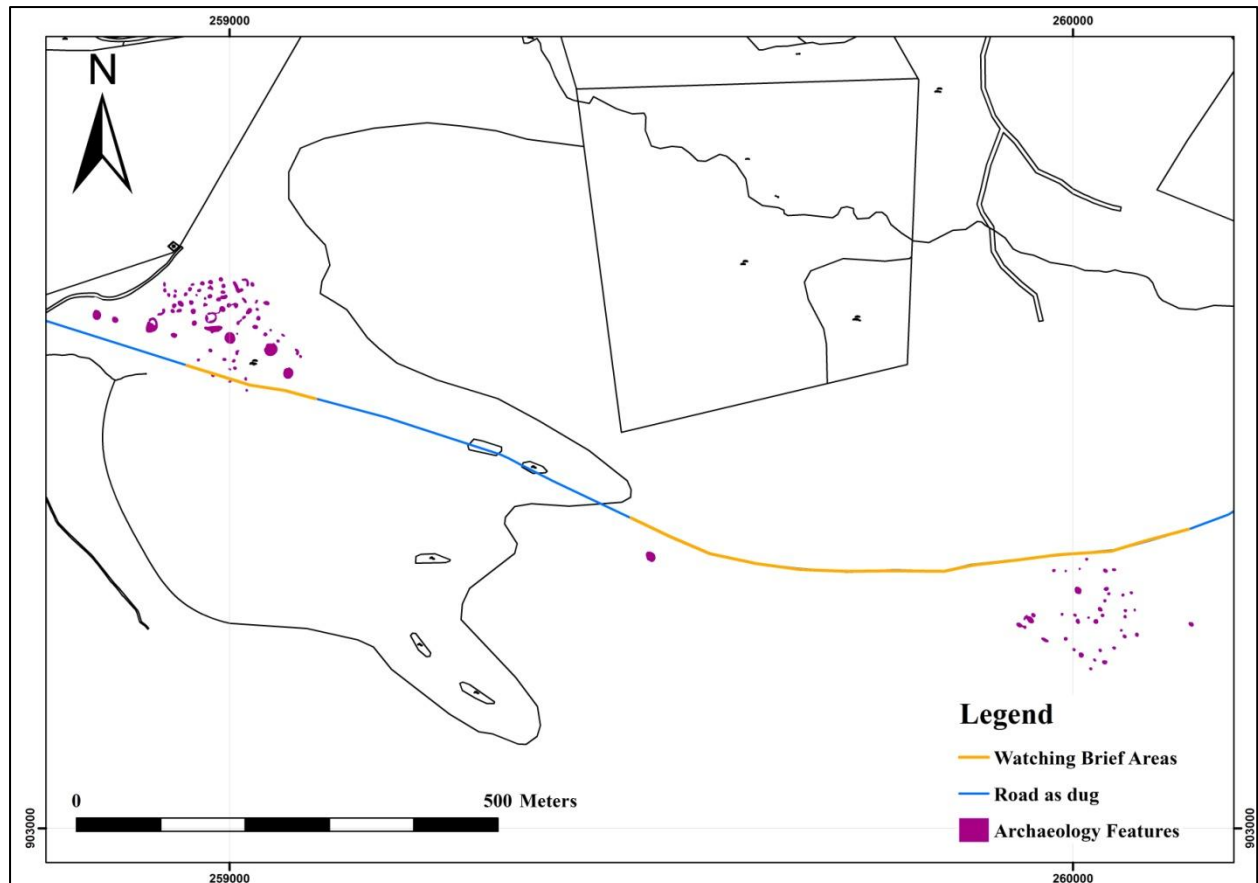


Figure 5: Plan showing areas closely monitored for watching brief

Results

Site visits were undertaken in 2010 and 2011 to monitor work on the track where it passed close to features. Details for each feature are given below.

Site name Allt Domhain (Hut circle, Torroble)
NMRS No: 5072
HHER ID: MHG11973
Co-ordinates: NC 5891 0361
Site type Hut circles; Field clearance cairns and field system

Notes by the Ordnance Survey in 1976 state that: 'This is a settlement of six stone-walled hut circles (A-F) (four additional huts (C-F) were found) in association with a field system. The situation is the S-facing flank of a hill. The field system occupying three hectares comprises mainly stone clearance heaps; there are also, occasional, ill-defined lynchets and vestiges of field walls or banks which delineate cultivation plots varying in size from 45.0m by 20.0m to 15.0m by 10.0m. The huts, peat-covered and in the main much reduced, are broadly similar'.

This site was considered in the scoping exercise, which noted that its full extent might not have been established. The area was surveyed by the present writer using DGPS equipment in 2005. The 6 huts were all located, as were a large number of field clearance cairns. There may also have been some later settlement here or at least seasonal uses, as some rectangular or sub-rectangular buildings seem to be present. There also seemed to have been active peat cutting in the general area and this may explain some of the features identified by the Ordnance Survey as lynchets and field walls. The heather cover on site and the natural outcropping of rock also made it impossible to be sure that all anthropogenic features had been recorded at that stage. The 2005 survey concluded

There will certainly be buried evidence in and around this area and the access route should therefore be re-routed to avoid this as much as possible. Any disturbance within 100m of the nearest visible feature should be monitored by means of an archaeological watching brief.

The access road was diverted to keep away from this as far as possible, but owing to the presence of the valley to the south, room for manoeuvre was limited and it could not be altogether avoided. As a result were the track passed close to the south side of this site six clearance cairns were encountered and excavated under archaeological supervision.

All cairns were found to consist of local stone and be sitting on orange sand iron rich stony subsoil with no sign of buried soils.

CC1: 0.4m high and flat topped,

CC2: 0.6m high, spread slightly and to the East of CC1

CC3: 0.4m high built around a natural group of angular boulders 0.4m in a hollow.

CC4: 0.6m high built against angular rock set in subsoil 0.75m across.

CC5: Voided

CC6: 0.65m high and cut by north edge of trench

CC7: 0.4m – 0.7m high

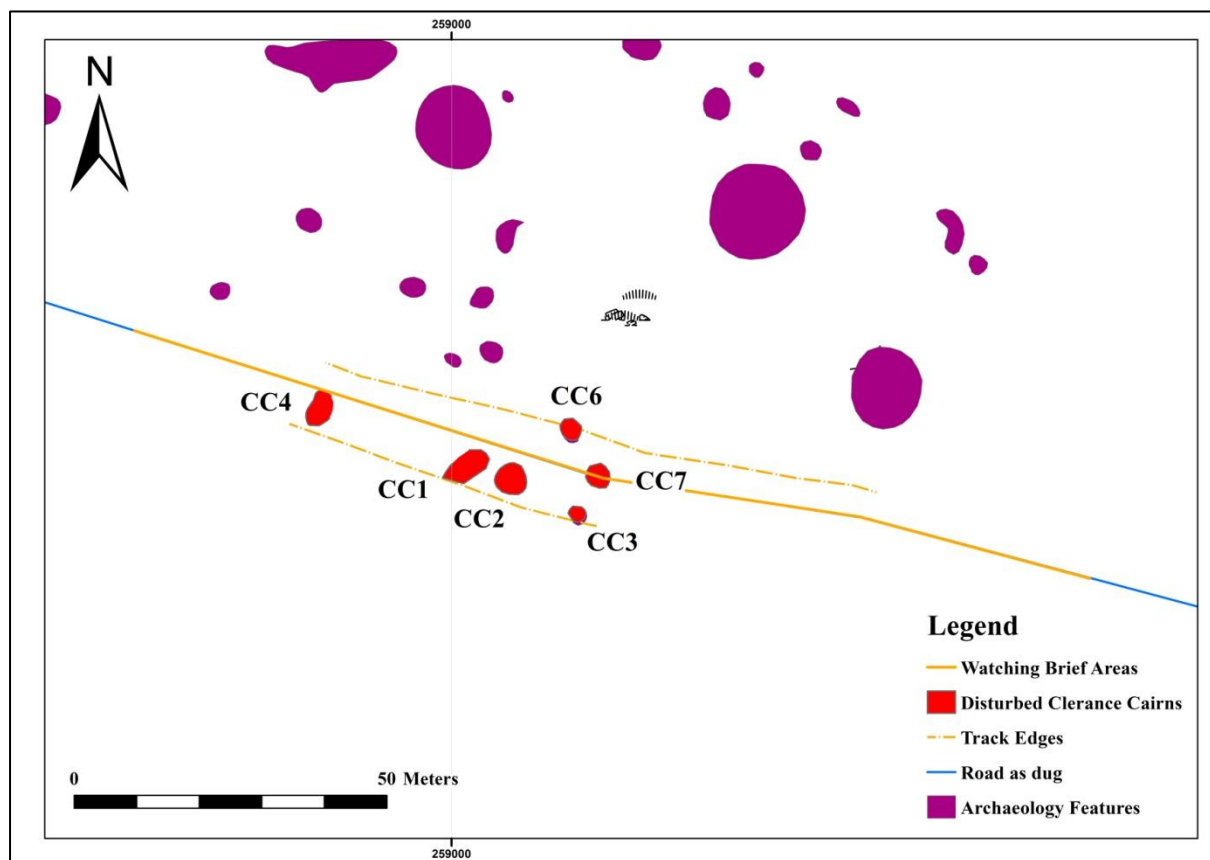


Figure 6: Plan showing disturbed Clearance Cairns

Site name Cairn east of Cnoc an Achaidh Mhòr
Survey No New site 1
Co-ordinates NH 59497 03335
Site type Cairn

This oval cairn was identified during the 2005 survey. It measures approximately 10m x 13m., and is of uncertain date. The access road was diverted to avoid this and a watching brief was maintained on stripping in this area. No buried archaeology was recorded nearby.



Figure 7 New Site 1

Site name Field clearance cairns east of Cnoc an Achaidh Mhòr
Survey No New site 2
Co-ordinates NH 60015 03265
Site type Field clearance cairns

Notes This is a group of field clearance cairns similar to those commonly found in association with Bronze Age / Iron Age roundhouses or ‘hut circles’. However, no houses could be identified at this site during the 2005 survey or subsequently. The access track was re-routed to avoid this site and a watching brief was maintained during operations in this area. No buried archaeology was recorded here.

There were no further archaeological artefacts or features noted.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The windfarm site comprises exposed heather moorland with peat basins and outcrops of bedrock, over 250m above sea level. Those features identified during previous work were avoided where possible and a watching brief maintained on areas close to them. In the course of this where the track passed close to the south side of Allt Domhain cairn field six cairns were disturbed. Although they were removed under close archaeological supervision no additional archaeological evidence was recovered. The other area watched was found to be clear of remains and no further work is recommended.



Figure 8: Cairn during excavation

Bibliography and References

Wood J 2004a *Rapid Archaeological Survey of Proposed Anemometer site, Lairg, Sutherland, Highland* Archaeology Services report no. HAS0493, Cromarty

Wood J 2004b *Lairg Windfarm ES Scoping Report* Archaeology Services report no. HAS041201, Cromarty
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