

Showcasing the Finds

Gráinne Leamy, assistant project archaeologist with Donegal County Council National Roads Design Office, previews a forthcoming exhibition of the N15 Bundoran–Ballyshannon Bypass finds.

Archaeological works carried out in advance of the construction of the new 10.5 km-long N15 Bundoran–Ballyshannon Bypass in south Donegal revealed some unexpected discoveries. A range of sites was found, dating from the Neolithic (4000–2500 BC), Bronze Age (2500–500 BC), Iron Age (500 BC–AD 500), medieval (AD 500–1500) and post-medieval (1700 and later) periods. Archaeologists working on the scheme with Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd found some ancient sites that were previously unknown, as well as rediscovering the location of sites that had long fallen from memory in the local area. An exhibition of the artefacts found during the excavations opened on 7 December 2006 in Donegal County Museum in Letterkenny. Donegal County Council National Roads Design Office co-ordinated the exhibition in conjunction with Judith McCarthy, curator of the museum, who liaised with the National Museum of Ireland regarding the loan of artefacts.

Artefacts from various sites are on display at the County Museum, including: a British Army issue ‘Brown Bess’ musket dating to around 1800, a large quern-stone and pottery from a 17th-/18th-century house at Rathmore and Finner; flint tools from an area of prehistoric activity at Ballynacarrick; and medieval pottery, glass beads and metal artefacts from the site of a church and cemetery at Ballyhanna.

The exhibition aims to place the artefacts within the scientific context of archaeological excavation and post-excavation analysis, rather than simply presenting a display of finds. In particular, it focuses on the Ballyhanna skeletons. Dr Eileen Murphy of Queen’s University, Belfast, conducted the osteoarchaeological examination of a sample skeleton from the assemblage and assisted Donegal County Museum technical staff in displaying it.

Display panels and photographs have been used to outline the various stages of the N15 Bundoran–Ballyshannon archaeological project, from the Environmental Impact Assessment through to post-excavation analysis. Local schools will be invited to visit the museum and learn about some of the wonderful archaeological sites and artefacts discovered on the N15 project.



Fig. 1: Late 12th-/early 13th-century Anglo-Norman arrowhead. This was found embedded in the spine of one of the skeletons in Ballyhanna cemetery.



Fig. 2: Cross-inscribed strap handle from a medieval everted-rim ware or crannóg ware vessel, found within the foundations of a church at Ballyhanna cemetery.



Fig. 3: Medieval copper-alloy bell from Ballyhanna. The bell was probably made locally but was miscast; it is unlikely that it was ever used.



Fig. 4: English silver ‘long cross’ penny of Edward I or II, minted in Canterbury sometime after AD 1302. This coin has been clipped around the edges, an illegal practice that incurred very heavy penalties. Found within grave deposits at Ballyhanna.