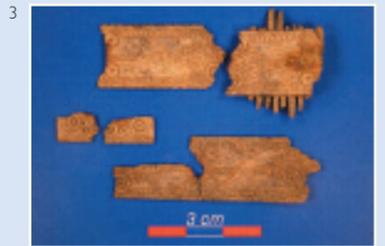


what we found

in brief:

Some of the findings from the scheme.



1. Zoomorphic penannular brooch
Zoomorphic penannular brooch found during excavations at **Parknahown**. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)
2. Flint knife
Flint knife found during excavations at **Derrinsallagh**. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)
3. Decorated bone comb
Decorated bone comb found during excavations at **Parknahown**. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)
4. Bronze Age pottery
Decorated Early Bronze Age Pottery found during excavations at **Parknahown**. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)
5. Kiln
Post-medieval lime kiln uncovered during testing at **Derryvorrihan**. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)

background

This scheme, 41km of motorway and 11km of side roads, runs from **Portlaoise to Borris-in Ossory** in the west and extends as far south as **Cullahill**. Certain areas of the scheme had been identified in the Environmental Impact Statement as having a potential for revealing archaeological remains.



Aerial view of test trenching carried out as part of the archaeological testing of the scheme. (Photo Narrowcast)

The entire scheme was archaeologically tested by **Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd., (A.C.S. Ltd.)** throughout 2005, investigations and resolution are currently on-going. Site investigations involved testing in advance of construction using a centre line trench with offset trenches at regular intervals. This testing was preceded by detailed aerial survey and targeted geophysical survey. River banks in close proximity to the major rivers or tributaries of the **Nore, Gully, Erkina** and **Goul** were subjected to a metal detection survey.

This intensive testing to date has revealed many archaeological sites from the prehistoric period. These sites date from the Neolithic period and extend through the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, spanning a period between 4000 BC-500 AD. A considerable number of archaeological sites also date to the early medieval period, as well as to the the later medieval and post-medieval periods.

The archaeological work is being undertaken by **A.C.S. Ltd.**, on behalf of the **National Roads Authority** and **Laos County Council**.

**M7 PORTLAOISE TO CASTLETOWN/
M8 PORTLAOISE TO CULLAHILL MOTORWAY SCHEME,**
County Laois



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archaeological DISCOVERIES

front cover images

LEFT: Osteoarchaeologist excavating a skeleton uncovered at **Parknahown**.
RIGHT: Archaeologist recording a feature uncovered during excavations at **Parknahown**.
MIDDLE: Selection of beads, pins and bone comb found during excavations at **Parknahown**. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)



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neolithic

RITUAL ACTIVITIES

During testing in **Parknahown** townland a quantity of prehistoric pottery, dating from the Neolithic period were revealed. The pottery had been placed in a small pit and several other small pits or postholes in close proximity have been fully excavated. While these pits do not appear to form a structure they may have been part of a settlement or more likely a ritual site during the Neolithic when the first farmers in Ireland put down their roots and made a mark on the Irish landscape.

Within the early medieval ringfort at **Derrinsallagh** a quantity of flints and pottery dating from the Neolithic period were revealed suggesting that this early medieval site had earlier beginnings in the prehistoric period.



Chert arrowhead uncovered during excavations at **Shanboe**. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)

bronze age

FULACHTA FIADH

A series of *fulachta fiadh*, low mounds of burnt stone, together with pits, troughs, stakeholes for windbreaks and a possible structure have been excavated at **Shanboe**. These sites are one of the most common site type discovered on large road schemes. These low mounds, many of which have been practically ploughed out, consist of heat-cracked stones and charcoal rich soil. The heat-cracked stones were discarded after being placed in the pits and troughs where they would have heated water; which was used for cooking or semi-industrial purposes. These sites can range in size from small mounds of approximately 5m x 5m to larger archaeological sites extending up to 30m in diameter with a height of up to 1m. A very fine chert arrowhead was discovered in close proximity to one of the larger *fulachta fiadh* excavated here.

early medieval

SETTLEMENT

A number of known archaeological remains lie within the townlands of **Parknahown** and **Derrinsallagh** as is evident from the existing ringforts within this area of **County Laois**. Testing on the scheme has revealed an unknown ringfort in **Derrinsallagh**, beside an existing road. This present road actually cuts the ringfort in half and the ditch of the ringfort still exists under the road. This ringfort consists of a ditch 1.50m in depth and 2.50m - 3m in width, and encloses an area approximately 40m in diameter. The stones from a collapsed stone wall lie within the enclosure ditch. Few archaeological features were discovered within the ringfort but close to the north a very fine corn-drying kiln has been excavated. This corn-drying kiln would appear to have been rebuilt on at least three occasions. The stone-lined kilns still retained remains of



Corn drying kiln uncovered during excavations at **Derrinsallagh**.

cereal grains, which will be subject to environmental analysis. Other archaeological features on this site consist of several ditches and pits. A series of post-holes to the south west of the ringfort appear to form a structure 4m x 3m and sub-circular in shape, which was possibly associated with the ringfort.

Three other archaeological sites in **Derrinsallagh** were discovered during the testing phase. These three sites are relatively close to the large ringfort and may have formed part of an early medieval landscape in this area of **County Laois**.

One of these sites is a fine corn-drying kiln now fully excavated together with pits and other archaeological features. The existence of many kilns and furnaces together with the ringfort suggest that this area had a significant role to play in the early medieval period.



Aerial view of ringfort under excavation at **Derrinsallagh**. (Photo Hawkeye)

early medieval

The townland of **Lismore** has also provided evidence of settlement. A very fine portion of a quern stone, used for grinding grain into flour, was discovered on this site.



Portion of a quern stone found during excavations at **Lismore**.

Parknahown, where there are several known and recorded upstanding ringforts and enclosures, again revealed several settlement sites dating from the early medieval period during the testing phase. The largest of these has a series of very large enclosures. The outer two enclosures, separated by a large bank, enclose an area of over 60m in diameter. The ditches, which form the enclosures, have a width and a depth of over 2m. The site would appear to have been subject to several different phases of construction. At each phase the site was enlarged and enhanced quite

significantly. The final phase of construction consisted of the two circular ditches separated by a bank. This bank it is estimated may have stood up to 2m in height. The site with its cemetery would have had a very high degree of visibility within the landscape. During testing human remains had been revealed and to date up to 180 skeletons have been uncovered in a small cemetery, located in the north/eastern section of this site. These skeletons are currently being excavated under the supervision of an osteo-archaeologist, who specialises in human remains, with a team of experienced archaeologists.



Archaeologists excavating skeletons under a poly tunnel at **Parknahown**.

early medieval



Skeleton with stone 'ear muffs' uncovered during excavations at **Parknahown**.

One skeleton had stone 'ear muffs' which were placed either side of the head to keep it in place. Archaeological artefacts such as blue glass beads and a shroud pin, suggest this cemetery dates to the early medieval or medieval period. Other archaeological artefacts recovered from this large site include a decorated bone comb, a very fine bird headed pennanular brooch, ring pins, decorated stick pins,

bone needles, glass beads and many more domestic items. Decorated Early Bronze Age pottery was also recovered here suggesting that this archaeological site may have had its origins in the prehistoric period.

A small stone structure was also excavated within the townland of **Parknahown** this small structure dates possibly from the late medieval period, and may have been utilized as a farm building.

FURTHER WORK

During the testing phase a wide range of archaeological sites were revealed such as the large enclosure at **Killeany**, where a possible Iron Age site was revealed. This consists of a large enclosure 130m diameter. The ditch which forms this enclosure is 3.5m in width and has a surviving depth of 1.2m. Archaeological excavation will commence at this large site in the near future and continue at other locations on the scheme throughout 2006.

The archaeological resolution will be followed by specialist work on the excavation archives. This will include artefact and environmental analysis and radiocarbon dating. The human and animal bones will also be subject to specialist analysis. Full publication of the excavation results will follow.