



archaeological DISCOVERIES

1. archaeological investigations

The archaeological testing of the **N6 Kinnefad to Kilbeggan** scheme involved centreline test trenching, site specific testing, geophysical survey, topographical survey and wetland survey as well as architectural assessments of various vernacular buildings. The archaeological testing of the 38km route was carried out by **Eachtra Archaeological Projects Ltd.**, and **CRDS Ltd.**, between June and September 2004.

Centreline test trenching was conducted along the route and a total of 77 previously unidentified sites were uncovered. The vast array of archaeological sites and features uncovered included over 30 burnt mounds some of which had possible troughs, 35 burnt pits and hearths, a pit with prehistoric pottery, three iron working sites, two trackways (one timber and one brushwood), a cillín, a prehistoric complex, a late medieval field system, two lime-kilns and two post-medieval buildings.

A programme of site specific test trenching was carried out on 31 potential archaeological sites which were identified in the Environmental Impact Statement carried out for the scheme. In addition topographic and geophysical surveys were undertaken on some of these sites. Only one site proved to be archaeological. This site at **Clonfad** was located adjacent to a church and graveyard. This site is listed in the Record of Monuments and Places (WM032-089) and consists of an early monastic site founded by St. Finian of Clonard in the sixth century AD.



Aerial view of centreline test trenching carried out on the scheme. (Photo Markus Casey)

3. prehistoric

mearsparkfarm

A prehistoric complex was excavated at **Demesne or Mearsparkfarm**, near Kilbeggan. A settlement area consisting of a structure, hearth area, numerous pits and linear ditches were uncovered. It is thought that this site may prove to be a Neolithic farmstead. Artefactual material recovered included flint knives, scrapers, an arrowhead and worked antler. A single crouched inhumation was also found interred in a simple pit and also thought to date to the prehistoric period.

monganstown

An interesting metalworking site was uncovered at **Monganstown**. Two large charcoal pits were uncovered as well as seven pits directly related to iron-working activities. Several other pits and post-holes were also identified which may represent the remains of a structure which covered an early 'forge'.



Possible shaft furnace from a metalworking site uncovered at **Monganstown**. (Photo Eachtra Archaeological Projects Ltd.)

2. archaeological excavations

Excavations of the various sites uncovered during testing was carried out between October 2004 and May 2005 by **CRDS Ltd.**, **Eachtra Archaeological Projects Ltd.** and **Valerie J. Keeley Ltd.** A total of 52 sites proved to be archaeological with burnt mound/*fulacht fiadh* sites predominating. The archaeological works were carried out on behalf of the **National Roads Authority** and **Westmeath, Meath and Offaly County Councils**.

There were three large-scale excavations, which included two ecclesiastical enclosures at **Clonfad** and **Ballykilmore** and a prehistoric complex at **Demesne or Mearsparkfarm**.

An interesting metalworking site was also identified at **Monganstown**.



Aerial view of excavations at **Ballykilmore**. (Photo Valerie J. Keeley Ltd.)

4. early medieval

clonfad

The site at **Clonfad** appears to represent an early medieval monastic enclosed settlement defined by a large outer enclosing ditch and a smaller inner ditch. A range of features discovered within the enclosure included numerous pits, kilns, furnaces and material related to metalworking activity. Also an *in situ* inhumation burial was uncovered. Several finds were recovered such as decorated bone combs, bone needles, stickpins, iron shears and various other metal implements.



Bone comb uncovered from excavations at **Clonfad**. (Photo Valerie J. Keeley Ltd.)

ballykilmore

Another ecclesiastical enclosure was uncovered at **Ballykilmore**, south of Tyrrelspass, which was reused as a cillín burial ground (i.e. a burial ground mainly used for the interment of unbaptised children). It consisted of a large enclosure ditch, which enclosed a graveyard and the stone foundations of a church. To date over c. 1200 burials have been recovered which were buried over several hundred years. Finds include a bone bead, blue glass bead, worked antler, metal arrowhead and blades. There is also evidence that predates the ecclesiastical remains, which includes several post-holes, fragments of burnt and unburnt animal bone and a thumbnail scraper.



Close up of skeleton uncovered at **Ballykilmore**. (Photo Valerie J. Keeley Ltd.)



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