The A1/N1 Newry-Dundalk Link is 14 km with 5.7 km of link roads. It starts from Cloghoge roundabout in Co. Armagh near Newry in Northern Ireland and extends to the Ballymascanlon roundabout near to Dundalk, Co. Louth. The archaeological work for this scheme was undertaken by Archaeological Development Services Ltd (ADS Ltd) on behalf of the Road Service of Northern Ireland, the National Roads Authority and Louth County Council.

Although this area has been extensively studied for its standing Neolithic remains, the wealth of finds uncovered through the advance archaeological works was spectacular. One archaeological site followed another from Dundalk to Drumad representing a period from the 4th millennium BC until around AD 1000. The Northern Ireland section did not reveal significant archaeological remains. The two main archaeological periods identified were Neolithic and early medieval. The Neolithic showed extensive settlement through four rectangular buildings and a Long Cairn (also known as a court tomb). The early medieval revealed souterrains, or underground passages, and a massive banked and ditched (multi-vallate) enclosure containing more than 870 human burials.

In brief:

1. Iron knife
   Early medieval iron knife from Faughart Lower. (Photo ADS Ltd)

2. Iron knife
   Early medieval iron knife with handle from Faughart Lower. (Photo ADS Ltd)

3. Lead ingot
   Lead ingot from Faughart Lower; possibly cast onsite.

4. Glass bead
   Early medieval glass bead from Faughart Lower. (Photo ADS Ltd)

5. Neolithic pottery
   Decorated Neolithic pottery from Auvergne.

6. Iron knife
   Iron knife found during excavations at Faughart Lower.

7. Bone comb
   Fragment of a bone comb from Faughart Lower.

8. Quernstone
   Granite quernstone, part of a deliberate backfilling to the souterrain at Faughart Lower.

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Long Cairn at Aghnaskeagh

The recorded monument at Aghnaskeagh was unexcavated before 1980. A mass of collapsed cairn-stones were carefully removed to reveal about 40% of the Long Cairn – the rest lies untouched outside the road lands. The roughly ‘A’ shaped monument was built with a drystone kerb and central gallery walls, without the use of megaliths, or large stones. It was sited on a natural terrace overlooking Dundalk to the south. Inside the central gallery plenty of cremated bone was found, which was later filled with deposits of cremated human bone. Several pieces of copper were recovered from some of the pits that appear to be human. Other pits showed no evidence for burial and may have been used for cooking.

Archaeologists recording the Long Cairn at Aghnaskeagh (Photo StudioLab)

Neolithic buildings at plaster

A group of three rectangular Neolithic buildings found close to a stone at Faughart Lower were between 3 m by 4 m and 3.5 by 4 m. One of the structures was built with a deep basin trench and stone-lined and flanked by stone. The other two were built with a slight stone-lined trench and wall. At Faughart Lower the building were more rectangular with a wide stone-lined and stone-lined. The stone walls around them were some 2m wide and were topped by a cist graves. As burial continued, the graves became more ‘stone lined’ and eventually there was a mass of collapsed cairn stone.

Faughart Lower site at Faughart Lower (Photo StudioLab)

The site also contained two souterrains. The first of these underground passages was a double ender with a cist grave at one end and a wall out into the outer enclosure wall. Due to high bedrock, part of the 40 m long chambered souterrain was built across an area of bedrock and had been avoided by construction works and preserved. The second potential souterrain was shorter (3 – 4 m) and was completely backfilled. The tiled incline led to a small chamber at one end, and was deliberately built into the outer enclosure wall. A notable feature was a well dug through another of the backfilled ditches. The water quality may not have been perfect. Across the site were found more than 1000 sherds of souterrain ware pottery and some highly decorated glass beads. A lead ingot recovered may have been a small coin as well as a lead ingot, perhaps a dye extraction process. Due to extensive disturbance by recent agriculture, little of any building was found. The second potential souterrain at Faughart Lower was numbered and possible re-construction.

Curving length of souterrain at Faughart Lower (Photo StudioLab)

The Faughart Lower site must have had extensive links with the important Early Medieval ecclesiastic site at Faughart Upper. However, these underground passages was a ‘double ender’ part of the 40 m long chambered souterrain was built across an area of bedrock and had been avoided by construction works and preserved. The second potential souterrain was shorter (3 – 4 m) and was completely backfilled. The tiled incline led to a small chamber at one end, and was deliberately built into the outer enclosure wall. A notable feature was a well dug through another of the backfilled ditches. The water quality may not have been perfect. Across the site were found more than 1000 sherds of souterrain ware pottery and some highly decorated glass beads. A lead ingot recovered may have been a small coin as well as a lead ingot, perhaps a dye extraction process. Due to extensive disturbance by recent agriculture, little of any building was found. The second potential souterrain at Faughart Lower was numbered and possible re-construction. The site also contained two souterrains. The first of these underground passages was a double ender with a cist grave at one end and a wall out into the outer enclosure wall. Due to high bedrock, part of the 40 m long chambered souterrain was built across an area of bedrock and had been avoided by construction works and preserved. The second potential souterrain was shorter (3 – 4 m) and was completely backfilled. The tiled incline led to a small chamber at one end, and was deliberately built into the outer enclosure wall. A notable feature was a well dug through another of the backfilled ditches. The water quality may not have been perfect. Across the site were found more than 1000 sherds of souterrain ware pottery and some highly decorated glass beads. A lead ingot recovered may have been a small coin as well as a lead ingot, perhaps a dye extraction process. Due to extensive disturbance by recent agriculture, little of any building was found. The second potential souterrain at Faughart Lower was numbered and possible re-construction.