

what we found

in brief:

Some of the findings in and around **Dundalk**.



1. Early medieval brooch
6th-7th century AD penannular brooch from **Newtownbalregan**. (Photo StudioLab)



2. Tateetra souterrain
Detail of the **Tateetra** souterrain northern galleries. Note the large passage size and the (removed) capstones.



3. Early medieval altar
Early medieval altar re-used as a capstone in the **Tateetra** souterrain.



4. Cist burials
Large cist showing multiple interments and pottery vessel at **Carn More**.



5. Souterrain
Intact souterrain gallery uncovered at **Newtownbalregan**. (Photo StudioLab)

background



Early medieval enclosed settlement uncovered at **Balrigan**.

The work was undertaken by **Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd.**, and **Aegis Archaeology Ltd.**, on behalf of the **National Roads Authority** and **Louth County Council**. The route is located on low, undulating land at the head of **Dundalk** harbour overlooked by **Slieve Gullion**, the **Gap of the North** and the **Cooley Mountains**.

Archaeological investigations were carried out on the **M1 Dundalk Western Bypass** from 2002-2005.

Due to the intensity of recent agricultural landuse around **Dundalk**, there were relatively few recorded monuments in the immediate area. The nearby **Cooley peninsula** has a spectacular and visible archaeological heritage.



Recording the souterrain chamber uncovered at **Newtownbalregan**. (Photo StudioLab)



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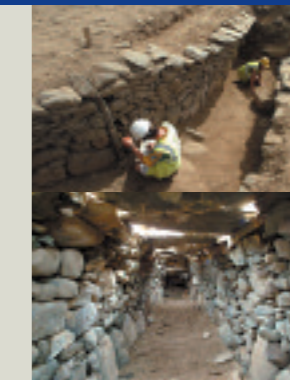
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archaeological DISCOVERIES

front cover images

LEFT TOP: Recording of souterrain uncovered at **Newtownbalregan**. (Photo StudioLab)
LEFT BOTTOM: Intact souterrain gallery uncovered at **Newtownbalregan**. (Photo StudioLab)
RIGHT TOP: Aerial view of the **Balrigan** site including the river confluence. The curving henge bank and ditches are located in the foreground. (Photo StudioLab)
RIGHT BOTTOM: Large cist showing multiple interments and pottery vessel at **Carn More**.
MIDDLE: 6th-7th century AD penannular brooch from **Newtownbalregan**. (Photo StudioLab)



prehistoric

Archaeological works on the route of the motorway showed the lowlands around **Dundalk** to be rich in archaeology. The two most significant prehistoric sites comprised a henge and a cist-barrow cemetery.

The whole **Balregan** complex lies at the confluence of the Castletown and Kilcurry rivers. This important river confluence is currently less than 1 km from the tidal limit at the head of **Dundalk** harbour, but in the Bronze Age would have been much closer to the sea.



Large cist showing multiple interments and pottery vessel at **Carn More**.

Situated 110m to the south of a second (smaller) confluence, the **Carn More** cist and barrow cemetery focused on a type of cist-cairn. This monument centred on a large burial pit, over which was built a form of 'altar', containing a life-size, granite, animal sculpture, a large stone on edge exposing shallow cups and two sets of decorative kerbing. A stone cairn was then placed over this.

prehistoric



Aerial view of main enclosure at **Balriggeran** showing entrance, cemetery, four and nine post structures. (Photo StudioLab)

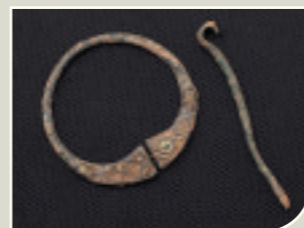
Seven stone lined cists were uncovered in a ring of 8-10m radius around this central area. Beyond this was a triangle formed by three pot placements in un-lined pits. A subsequent phase saw the positioning of two, granite 'boulder burials' and a large granite capstoned cist containing multiple interments. These three granite-based monuments formed a triangle roughly half the size, but on the same axes, as the pot placement triangle. In total nine complete bowl and vase 'food vessel' pots and a broken but mostly complete encrusted urn were recovered from the cist-cairn monument; dating it to 1900-1700 BC. Other finds consisted of a twisted bronze pin, a probable dagger or sword pommel and several decorated or worked stones.

The **Carn More** site also contained an 18m diameter ring-barrow with a disturbed, stone built, central chamber as well as two, small 5m diameter ring-barrows with central cremations. All three barrow monuments revealed a considerable amount of stone in their backfilled ditches, suggesting drystone walling may have been used to contain raised, internal mounds.

At **Donaghmore**, a third small 'ring barrow' was excavated. Here the surrounding trench was filled with charcoal and charred timbers. If the timbers represented a form of retaining structure or dais/platform, the whole structure had clearly been burnt and may therefore represent a funeral ritual rather than a burial monument.

Domestic activity in the Bronze Age was uncovered on six sites showing small-scale, relatively 'temporary' occupations of huts and cooking areas. Buildings were both circular and rectangular but none were larger than 3-4m across. All of these sites were located within a few hundred metres of burnt mounds, or areas where burnt mounds could be located. It is therefore possible these hut sites were used as temporary accommodation by those operating burnt mounds, located away from the damp zones.

early medieval



6th-7th-century AD penannular brooch from **Newtownbalregan**. (Photo StudioLab)



45m long souterrain under excavation at **Newtownbalregan**. (Photo StudioLab)



Early Medieval altar re-used as a capstone in the **Tateetra** souterrain.

A double ditched, enclosed settlement was uncovered at **Balriggeran**. The main enclosure was 90m across externally and 50m across internally, containing a cemetery of 49 individuals, formal entranceways and an extensive industrial area. Evidence for buildings was limited to four-post and nine-post structures so it is likely the main residential buildings were on sill or beam foundations. Balriggeran was located on a low knoll, with protective wetland on two sides. At the lip of this basin a subsidiary ringfort was excavated, containing a 20m long W-shaped souterrain (i.e. an underground passage). Over 1000 sherds of souterrain ware pottery came from these sites.

A second ringfort with an internal diameter of 45m was discovered at **Newtownbalregan**. Within the enclosing ditch a fine 6th-7th century AD, copper-alloy penannular brooch and a series of highly decorated glass beads were found.

Outside the enclosure a mostly intact 45m long souterrain was uncovered. This structure contained six galleries, three light alcoves, a drophole, two corbelled chambers with associated airshafts, a strong internal door braced by two cross bars and a re-used prehistoric decorated stone. The stone had been placed so it could be lit obliquely from a formal lighting alcove.

A third souterrain was uncovered at **Tateetra**, totalling 75m in length. The entrance was through a chamber, secured by a door framed with massive, granite stones. Internally the door could be secured by a cross brace. From the entrance chamber two galleries lead off. The southern was small, restrictive and curved, leading to a corbelled chamber. From this chamber, a drophole lead to a further gallery containing a light alcove, sump and terminal chamber.

early medieval



Detail of the **Tateetra** souterrain northern galleries. Note the large passage size and the (removed) capstones.

To the north of the entrance chamber, the passage broadened and deepened to 1.5m wide and 1.7m high. At a right angle at the end of this passage was a second gallery, entered through a door supported on massive, squared, granite jambs and braced by an internal pair of cross beams. A large airshaft emerged from the end of this gallery.

A fascinating aspect of the **Tateetra** souterrain is the lintel capstones. The site is situated on a bank overlooking the Castletown river, opposite the henge excavated at **Balregan**. The Balregan henge was part of a very large archaeological complex comprising many stone circles, cairns and other monuments. These stones had been sourced for use in the souterrain. Huge, weathered stones were split and laid out next to each other. One piece had an elegant 'megalithic art' lozenge motif dating to c. 1800 BC. Two stones were also of early medieval date. The first is a possible altar marked with five Greek crosses the second was a large slab cut with a simple Latin cross.

medieval

The medieval period was represented by a motte and bailey fort. Located on **Fort Hill**, the motte consisted of a series of 14th-century defensive earthworks. These earthworks consisted of an inner 'motte' defined by a very deep V-shaped ditch containing a circular building, possibly a tower and a huge 'post-hole', possibly a beacon socket. The 'bailey' area was roughly rectangular, containing an internal partition and a probable cesspit. Fort Hill ties in with the unrest of the Bruce Invasions, where attacks came down through the Gap in the North from AD 1315, culminating in the nearby Battle of Faughart, where Edward Bruce was killed, in AD 1318.



Aerial view of the **Fort Hill** motte. (Photo StudioLab)