M3 Clonee–North of Kells Motorway Scheme
County Meath

Archaeology Section, National Roads Authority, St. Martin’s House, Waterford Road, Dublin 4.
Tel: +353 1 660 2511 Fax: +353 1 668 0009 Email: info@nra.ie Web: www.nra.ie

A spectacular discovery of the remains of four wooden fish baskets radiocarbon-dated to the Late Mesolithic period (c. 5000 BC) was made during archaeological excavations at Clowanstown, Co. Meath, carried out by ACS Ltd.

The baskets were associated with what is currently interpreted as the remains of a possible mooring or fishing platform located on the edge of a lakeshore, subsequently covered over by a raised peat bog. Later activity on the site included Neolithic burnt mounds with finds of polished stone axeheads, leaf-shaped projectile points, scrapers and polished stone pendants.

The conical-shaped fish baskets were made of narrow (2–8 mm in diameter) one to two year old stems, identified by Headland Archaeology Ltd as alder, birch and rosaceae. Pollen cores analysed from the surrounding area by Birmingham University have shown that these wood species were growing locally during the Late Mesolithic period.

Background

The M3 Clonee–North of Kells Motorway Scheme is about 60 km long and archaeological excavation of 167 sites along the route was undertaken between 2005 and 2007. The archaeological work was undertaken by Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd (ACS Ltd) and Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd, on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Meath County Council.

Archaeological, historical and palaeoenvironmental research and specialist analysis is ongoing in preparation for detailed publication of the full results. In the meantime updates on this work are presented on a dedicated website: www.m3motorway.ie.

For more information please contact:
Archaeology Section, National Roads Authority, St. Martin’s House, Waterford Road, Dublin 4.
Tel: +353 1 660 2511 Fax: +353 1 668 0009 Email: info@nra.ie Web: www.nra.ie
Published 2008 © Ordnance Survey Ireland & Government of Ireland patent number EN 0045206.

Dr Maria FitzGerald has identified that the Clowanstown baskets were made by a weaving technique known as open twining in which pairs of wefts are passed around fixed vertical elements called warps. The four baskets recovered are classified as open-twined baskets based on the way the weft rows are placed at intervals along the warps. This technique is more commonly seen in fabric weaving and its use in the making of the baskets indicates that these weaving practices had been in use in Ireland for much longer than had previously been thought.

Recording

Following careful excavation and subsequent micro-excavation in the laboratory the baskets were extensively recorded and photographed. This included a highly detailed 3D digital laser scan using specialist non-contact laser scanning equipment, carried out by Liverpool Conservation Technologies, which scanned the basket remains to an accuracy of +/- 0.1 mm. This created an extremely accurate 3D computer model of the baskets that can now allow study to continue without any risk to the original remains.

Conservation

Currently the baskets are undergoing an extensive and specialised conservation programme, which is being carried out by Arch Con Labs and Margaret Gowen & Co Ltd in consultation with the National Museum of Ireland. They are being conserved in the peat layer on which they were originally discovered and once fully stabilised will eventually be freeze-dried by the National Museum conservation department. This process will enable the baskets to be preserved for future study and exhibition.