what we found

in brief:
Some of the findings from the scheme.

1. Well
Well uncovered at Bushfield or Maghernaskeagh.

2. Glass bead
Glass bead uncovered during excavations at Parknahown. (Photo ACS Ltd)

3. Glass bead
Glass bead on bronze wire found at Parknahown. (Photo ACS Ltd)

4. Bone necklace
Bone necklace found with a female burial at Killeany. (Photo ACS Ltd)

background

During 2006 archaeological work has been ongoing on this large motorway scheme which, when constructed, will form part of the Trans-European Network and fulfil commitments given as part of the National Development Plan. The 41 km of motorway with 11 km of side roads, starts at Portlaoise, and extends as far as Borris-in-Ossory in the west and Cullahill in the south.

The route extensively tested by Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd (ACS Ltd) has revealed more than 90 previously unknown archaeological sites. Testing techniques consisted mainly of ‘central strip testing’ - cutting a 2m wide strip down the centre of the motorway by machine, with off sets every 15 m and 20 m and extending across the entire width of the route. Detailed geophysical testing, a form of ground probing radar, was also carried out by Earthsound Archaeological Geophysics Ltd along various sections of the scheme. High definition aerial surveys were also completed the testing strategy. To date 95 archaeological sites have been discovered, which range from the Neolithic Period (circa 4000 BC) up to and including a 17th century house with cobbled yard, well and stables.

However, it should be emphasised that these archaeological sites should not be viewed individually, but rather as forming a previously hidden archaeological landscape, created by ancient people who lived and died within County Laois, during the past millennia.

All of the archaeological work discussed was carried out by ACS Ltd on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Laois County Council.

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neolithic site/setting/landscape
Maghernaskeagh

A small round 7 m diameter central structure with a central post-hole was discovered at Derrynagriff. The central post-hole contained a small round perforated worked disc which had been roughly shaped and smoothed. It is possible that this small structure had some ritual significance. A small amount of early Neolithic pottery was also recovered from the site.

Out of the numerous neolithic site descriptions, only a few were provided in the Neolithic period. However, it is important to note that where neolithic sites and landscapes have been discovered, they are not in isolation, but lie in close proximity to Bronze Age settlements and early medieval remains. Indeed there does appear to have been a high presence of Bronze Age and early medieval sites, perhaps indicating the significance of a place throughout various times.

bronze age

rural/setting/industrial - culliborough - cooldinn - tineore

The evidence for settlement is further demonstrated by the remains of a 17th century stone house, the remains of which have also been found close to the Stradey Site.

To the east of the main ritual site and across the existing country road, a third site of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age date was found providing further evidence for activity in this area. Culliborough is one of the few known Bronze Age sites on the island which provides a tantalising glimpse of an agricultural landscape which last lasted for more than 4,000 years. A small settlement site at Culliborough provided evidence for a Bronze Age/Early Iron Age period. This consisted of two overlapping circular enclosures each with a central post-hole. This central post-hole contained a water well and suitably placed seating. This consisted of two overlapping circular enclosures each with a central post-hole. This central post-hole contained a water well and suitably placed seating. This consisted of water well and suitably placed seating.

bronze age

rural/setting/industrial - culliborough - cooldinn - tineore

More than 40% of the archaeological sites discovered on the scheme appear to be Bronze Age in date. At Culliborough a number of these sites appear to form part of an archaeological complex from that period. This complex consists of a large bowl site, 17 m in diameter with 23 post-holes, including a central post-hole. Three may have held large hand woven woollen looms which could have formed a sacred space for weavers/woolly flocks. Culliborough is another circular structure 50 m by 74 m in diameter. Further clusters of circular structures to the west may indicate settlement close by.

All settlements of this type also contained large numbers of artefacts, including spearheads, dartheads, flint knife fragments and other blade tools. Indeed, some settlement sites contained large quantities of charcoal, which would have been used for fuel. Other sites contained large numbers of stake holes, which would have been used for boundary markers or for similar purposes. The presence of these artefacts suggests that the settlement sites were used for a variety of purposes, including for settlement, industrial activity and ritual purposes.

Aerial view of the Bronze Age house uncovered at Derryvorrigan.

A small sub-circular 7 m diameter structure with a central post-hole was discovered at Derrynagriff. The central post-hole contained a small round perforated worked disc which had been roughly shaped and smoothed. It is possible that this small structure had some ritual significance. A small amount of early Neolithic pottery was also recovered from the site.

A small settlement site at Culliborough provided evidence for a Bronze Age/Early Iron Age period. This consisted of two overlapping circular enclosures each with a central post-hole. This central post-hole contained a water well and suitably placed seating. This consisted of water well and suitably placed seating.

iron age

industrial - demnallingagh - kilcotton

Fulachta fiadh (wet kilns) are a type of small bellows furnace used by iron age communities in Ireland, which were conjoined furnaces, their shape similar to a figure of eight. Often these furnaces provided evidence for the location of an iron age settlement, but could also have been used for other purposes, such as charcoal production. The evidence for smelting is further suggested by the presence of large quantities of charcoal, which would have been used for fuel. Other sites contained large numbers of stake holes, which would have been used for boundary markers or for similar purposes. The presence of these artefacts suggests that the settlement sites were used for a variety of purposes, including for settlement, industrial activity and ritual purposes.

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early medieval site/setting/cemetery

Many settlements discovered on the scheme appear to date from this period. The early medieval site at Parknahown has a large fence, providing evidence for early medieval occupation. It is also possible that this site was occupied by later medieval communities, as it provides evidence for a variety of purposes, including settlement, industrial activity and ritual purposes.

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bronze age

rural/setting/industrial - culliborough - cooldinn - tineore

A very fine Bronze Age structure within a large circular enclosure was uncovered at Tomen, while a stone hut and a Bronze Age cremation were also discovered in the adjoining fields.

Aerial view of the Bronze Age house uncovered at Derryvorrigan.

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late medieval settlement

Additional testing at Bushfield or Picklowbridge has revealed the remains of a 17th century stone house, the foundations of which are now consolidated. It is also possible to make out red sandstone clinked paving and lines well, with stone surrounds. Local information has placed this site as a pilgrimage route, and it is possible that the well in question may have earlier origins. The well in question may have earlier origins.

Circle of stones and remains of structure as found during the excavation at Bushfield.

Aerial view of the archaeological complex uncovered at Coolfin.

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