what we found

in brief:
Some of the findings from the scheme.

1. Zoomorphic penannular brooch
   Zoomorphic penannular brooch found during excavations at Parknahown. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)

2. Flint knife
   Flint knife found during excavations at Derrinsallagh. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)

3. Decorated bone comb
   Decorated bone comb found during excavations at Parknahown. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)

4. Bronze Age pottery
   Decorated Early Bronze Age Pottery found during excavations at Parknahown. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)

5. Kiln
   Post-medieval lime kiln uncovered during testing at Derryvorrigan. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)

background

This scheme, 4km of motorway and 1km of side roads, runs from Portlaoise to Borris-in-Ossory in the west and extends as far south as Cullahill. Certain areas of the scheme had been identified in the Environmental Impact Statement as having a potential for revealing archaeological remains.

The entire scheme was archaeologically tested by Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd. (A.C.S. Ltd.) throughout 2005, investigations and resolution are currently on-going. Site investigations involved testing in advance of construction using a centre line trench with offset trenches at regular intervals. The testing was preceded by detailed aerial and targeted geophysical survey from a map to a close proximity to the major rivers and tributaries of the Nore, Gully, Erkina and Goul.

This intensive testing to date has revealed many archaeological sites from the prehistoric period. These sites date from the Neolithic period and extend through the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, spanning a period between 4000 BC-500 AD. A considerable number of archaeological sites also date to the early medieval period, as well as to the later medieval and post-medieval periods.

The archaeological work is being undertaken by A.C.S. Ltd., on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Laois County Council.

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neolithic

RITUAL ACTIVITIES

During testing in Parknahown a quantity of prehistoric pottery dating from the Neolithic period was revealed. The pottery had been placed in a small pit and several other small pits or postholes were present in close proximity. The site had possibly been used for more likely a ritual site during the Neolithic when the Early Irish put down their roots and made a mark on the Irish landscape.

The townland of Shanboe, beside an existing road, has a quantity of sites. These sites are one of the most common site types discovered on large road schemes. These low mounds, many of which have been practically ploughed out, consist of heat-cracked stones and charcoal rich soil. The heat-cracked stones were discarded after being placed in the pits and may have been utilized as a source of flint. The significance of these sites is evident from the existing ringforts within this area of County Laois. The existence of many kilns and furnaces excavated together with pits and other archaeological features suggest that this area had a significant role to play in the early medieval period.

SETTLEMENT

A number of human archaeological remains are to be found on the townland of Parknahown. In addition to the existing ringfort, within this area of Derrinsallagh, a number of large ringforts and enclosures have been identified during the testing phase. The site would appear to have been rebuilt on at least three occasions. The heat-cracked stones still remain of central glass, which will be subject to environmental analysis. Other archaeological features on this site include several post-holes, which form the enclosures, have a width and a depth of about 50 cm and above a height of up to 1 m. The site with its large ringfort would have had a very high degree of visibility within the landscape. The site would appear to be part of an early medieval landscape in this area of County Laois.

One of these sites is a very fine corn-drying kiln now fully excavated together with pits and other archaeological features. The existence of these sites suggest that this area had a very significant role to play in the early medieval period. The site would appear to have been rebuild on at least three occasions. The heat-cracked stones still remain of central glass, which will be subject to environmental analysis. Other archaeological features on this site include several post-holes, which form the enclosures, have a width and a depth of about 50 cm and above a height of up to 1 m. The site with its large ringfort would have had a very high degree of visibility within the landscape. The site would appear to be part of an early medieval landscape in this area of County Laois. The existence of many kilns and furnaces excavated together with pits and other archaeological features suggest that this area had a significant role to play in the early medieval period.

early medieval

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

Archaeologists excavating skeletons under a poly tunnel at Parknahown, where are there are several known and recorded standing ringforts and enclosures, have revealed several skeleton sites dating from the early medieval period during the testing phase. The largest of these sites is a series of very large enclosures. The area was excavated initially by a large team excavation as an area over an area in diameter. The ditches, which form the enclosures, has a width and a depth of over 3 m. The site would appear to be part of a number of different phases of construction. At each phase the site was rectified and a limited area was excavated. As a result, very fine bird headed pendant brooches, large decorated dish pots, bone and flint beads, glass beads and many more domestic items. Decorated Early Bronze Age pottery was also revealed suggesting that this archaeological site may have been involved in the Neolithic period.

A small ringfort was also excavated outside the boundary of Parknahown. The small ringfort dates possibly from the late medieval period and may have been utilized as a farm building.

FURTHER WORK

The following phase of archaeological work will commence at this site. The archaeological resolution will be followed by artefact and environmental analysis and radiocarbon dating. The human and animal bones will also be subject to specialist analyses. Full publication of the remains will follow.

bronze age

FULACHTA FADH

A series of large Fulachtia fadach, low mounds of charred stones, together with burnt stelkhae for Middle and a possible structure have been excavated at Derrinsallagh. One of these sites is a series of large ringforts and enclosures, which form the enclosures, have a width and a depth of about 50 cm and above a height of up to 1 m. The site with its large ringfort would have had a very high degree of visibility within the landscape. The site would appear to be part of an early medieval landscape in this area of County Laois.

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