The N11 Gorey-Arklow Link road project entails building a dual carriageway to bypass the town of Gorey replacing the existing N11 between the village of Clogh in County Wexford and the Arklow bypass in County Wicklow.

Being 23 km long, the scheme represents a substantial slice through what revealed itself to be an exciting archaeological landscape. An intensive investigation strategy consisting of desk-based archaeological assessment and a walkover survey was undertaken to assess the impact of the scheme on the archaeological heritage. The development was designed to avoid all the known archaeological monuments identified within the scheme’s proximity. This archaeological assessment was further informed by both a geophysical and an underwater survey. In January 2005, Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd undertook test excavations to ensure the investigation and preservation of sites along the route. As a result, a total of 53 previously unknown sites were identified. That summer, on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Wexford County Council, archaeological excavations were carried out by Valerie J Keeley Ltd to ensure the investigation and preservation of sites in advance of road construction. Analysis of the results is ongoing, but it is clear that the work yielded a diversity of archaeological evidence dating from the 19th century AD to the fifth millennium BC. These discoveries are enabling archaeologists and historians to build upon the existing knowledge of man and the environment in this part of Ireland.

In brief:

1. Prehistoric pit
   - Archaeologist excavating a prehistoric pit and stake-holes at Killybegs.

2. Medieval house
   - Medieval house uncovered at Moneycross. (Photo John Sunderland & Valerie J Keeley Ltd)

3. Burnt mound
   - Trough from one of the burnt mounds excavated at Raheenagurren.

4. Flint arrowhead
   - Prehistoric flint arrowhead found during excavations at Raheenagurren.

For more information please contact:
Archaeology Section
National Roads Authority
St. Martins House
Waterloo Road, Dublin 4
Tel: +353 1 660 2511
Fax: +353 1 668 0009
Email: info@nra.ie
Web: www.nra.ie

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Site at Ask where archaeologists excavated a number of features on the slopes of Ask hill.

Multi-period site at Moneylawn Lower following test excavations with the low earthen bank of the ringfort visible.
Hunter gatherers - Wexford's first inhabitants

Mesolithic

Mesolithic site was excavated in the townland of Kilmuckridge where evidence of the site was apparent on a small scale with the remains of a burnt mound. The site appears to be a small settlement.

neolithic

Newgrange excavations revealed the presence of a burnt mound. This mound has been dated to the Neolithic period and was thought to have been used as a burial chamber for early inhabitants.

bronze age

Several sherds of Beaker pottery were recovered from one of the smaller pits while the remains of a single roof structure were found at the site. The presence of a burnt mound on the site suggested a Neolithic occupation.

At Rosslare West, Beaker pottery was also present, suggesting a later occupation. The site contained a burnt mound, a hearth, and a large collection of flint tools, indicating a later Neolithic occupation.

The earliest metal workers - Beaker activity at Frankfort

The earliest metal workers - Beaker activity at Frankfort

The site of Frankfort, located on the southwestern coast of Wexford, is one of the most important prehistoric sites in Ireland.

Investigation of the outer ditch revealed a large ring-ditch, which encircles an area about 24 m in diameter, containing Beaker pottery. This monument was identified as a site for intensive archaeological study.

Bronze Age Landscape

The Bronze Age landscape is characterised by the presence of various monuments, including ring-ditches, cairns, and burial cairns.

Some of the most notable are the ring-ditches, which were used for defensive purposes. They were circular in shape and enclosed a group of pits, one of which contained cremated bone and a decorated female cross-shaped mirror. The mirrors date to the eighteenth century and are the finest example of this type of artefact found in Ireland.

At Ask Hill, a small ring-ditch measures 24 m in diameter and cremated bone was found deposited in a shallow pit. A cobbled surface, a hearth and a large collection of flint tools were also present.

The number of previously unknown burnt mounds in the region of the new road scheme was at least 10, indicating a large-scale settlement. These mounds are typically round in shape and were used as burial chambers in the Bronze Age.

Bronze Age Urbanisation

Some of the most notable urban settlements in Ireland were located in the Wexford area.

The site of Frankfort was one of the most significant, with evidence of intensive metalworking activity. The site contained a large collection of flint tools, indicating a later Neolithic occupation.

Bronze Age Art

The Bronze Age art is characterised by the use of mirrors and other decorative objects. Mirrors were often found in association with cremated bone and were used as grave goods.

The most notable find was a large, ornately decorated mirror found in one of the pits. The mirror is of a type known as the “Medway Type” and is one of the finest examples found in Ireland.

In summary, the Bronze Age in Wexford was characterised by intense metalworking activity, the presence of burnt mounds, and the use of mirrors as grave goods. These findings highlight the importance of the Wexford region as a centre for early metalworking in Ireland.