what we found

in brief:

Some of the finds from the scheme.

1. Timber trough base
   Timber work platform uncovered at a fulacht fiadh in Ballyclogh North.
   (Photo IAC Ltd)

2. Bronze ladle or patera
   Front of bronze ladle or patera found at Ballynapark.
   (Photo IAC Ltd)

3. Flint flake
   Flint flake found at Coolbeg.
   (Photo IAC Ltd)

4. Neolithic pottery
   Neolithic pottery found during excavations at Ballyvaltron.
   (Photo IAC Ltd)

backdrop

The 16.3 km long N11 Rathnew to Arklow Road Improvement Scheme is between the northern limit of the Arklow Bypass and the southern limit of the recently constructed Newtownmountkennedy dual-carriageway.

Initial paper research was carried out to ensure that known archaeological features and landscapes in the area could be avoided as far as possible by the road planners and designers so that the road would have minimal impact on the local heritage.

Extensive geophysical surveys conducted along the route by Earthsound Archaeological Geophysics and Substara Ltd, were closely followed by the excavation of centerline and offset test-trenches. During this work in June and July 2005, 61 sites were identified by the geophysical survey and test-trenching works and were recommended for resolution through excavation.

Excavation started towards the end of January 2006 and were completed by the end of July 2006. All of the on-site test-excavation and resolution works were undertaken by Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd (IAC Ltd) on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Wicklow County Council.

Most of the sites excavated along the route were fulachta fiadh or burnt mounds, generally regarded as cooking sites dating to the Bronze Age. The large prehistoric to early historic settlement and ritual complexes uncovered by the adjacent N11 Newtownmountkennedy to Ballynabarny Road Scheme were not echoed within the present development area, probably demonstrating that the lands south of Rathnew were not as conducive to intensive settlement in the past.
The earliest settlement evidence along the route relates to a Recorded Monument at Coolbeg (tumbled and isolated at a field corner, part of which was within the area of the townland). Flints had been recovered from fieldwalking carried out as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment for the scheme as well as from earlier fieldwalking and archaeological investigations at this site continued through the present field observation and excavation phases. The finds from initial studies were in date from Mesolithic through to Bronze Age finds. They demonstrated the presence within the area of a society engaged in hunting, gathering and fishing, prior to the introduction of the more settled farming practices of the Neolithic. Evidence of later prehistoric settlement was recorded at Coolbeg, Ballinaclough, Ballynapark, Coolcork and Ballyvaltron, which, together with the earlier Mesolithic activity, represents the remains of a Neolithic house. Internal evidence of large perimeter post-holes probably defined by large uncertainty, part of which had been burnt. The roof was supported by roof tiles of post slabs from a pit under the 1.4 m thick flag. At Ballinaclough, significant prehistoric activity in the area but could not be related to any clearly defined structures. Possible Neolithic house uncovered at Balloypoe, a rectangular structure defined by large perimeter post-holes probably representing the remains of a Neolithic house/enclosure formed by post slabs near to the late 18th century. Evidence of Bronze Age settlement at sites in the area but no other associated material or artefacts were recovered with the object. The ladle was immediately sent to the National Museum of Ireland for conservation work. Other finds from the excavations included the blade portion of a bronze socketed axehead, a gun money half crown of May 1698, a half-century coin dating from the reign of Henry VIII to Elizabeth I, three 16th-century coins dating from the reign of Henry VIII to Elizabeth I, three 16th-century corn-drying kilns were excavated at two adjacent sites in the area. Three Early medieval/early medieval sites were also investigated in Coolbeg but that appear to provide the farming landscape recorded on the first edition Ordnance Survey mapping. These included late Iron age sites and early medieval sites.

Ongoing Work Specialist examination and study of the excavation archive is ongoing including palaeobotanical and environmental analysis and radiocarbon dating along with preparing of site plans, mapping and written documentation of the material. The post- excavation phase of the works will result in the general compilation of the excavation reports, which in turn will lead into full publication of the excavation results.

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