In the summer of 2003 archaeological works connected with the construction of the N15 Bundoran-Ballyshannon Bypass commenced. Test excavations were targeted at a number of potential archaeological features identified during the course of the Environmental Impact Assessment carried out in 2001. Intensive archaeological testing was carried out along the length of the route to identify any other archaeological features or complexes not visible above ground. The outcome of the extensive archaeological work was the identification and full excavation of a number of archaeological sites along the route of the bypass. The archaeological works were carried out by Irish Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd (IAC Ltd) on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Donegal County Council.

Discoveries ranged from wooden trackways south of Bundoran, to the remains of a post-medieval house in Finner: ‘Torvehall Scandinavian settlement and ritual activity dating to some of the earliest periods of human settlement in Ireland, the discoveries included the remains of a forgotten medieval church and graveyard on the banks of the Erne River in Ballyshannon; one of the frequently found burnt mounds, dating predominantly to the Bronze Age, and a probable Iron Age linear earthwork south of Bundoran.

Wetland settlement in Magheracar townland

A scatter of prehistoric chart artefacts and debitage was discovered in Magheracar bounded on the west by the floodplain of the Drowes River that flows out to south-east of Bundoran town. Excavations did not reveal any associated structures though a shallow pit containing a quantity of burnt animal bone may date to the same period of activity. What we found in brief: Some of the findings from Bundoran to Ballyshannon.

1. Medieval church and burial site
Archaeologist excavating a skeleton uncovered at the Ballyhanna church site. (Photo IAC Ltd)

2. Holy well
Tubber pack holy well during excavation. (Photo IAC Ltd)

3. Holy well
Tubber pack holy well during excavation. (Photo IAC Ltd)

4. Holy well
Tobershannon holy well during excavation. (Photo IAC Ltd)

5. Early medieval trackway
View of the brushwood trackway uncovered at Magheracar. (Photo IAC Ltd)

6. Medieval pottery
Cross decorated medieval bowl handle uncovered at the Ballyhanna church site. (Photo IAC Ltd)

7. Building
Post-medieval building uncovered at Rathmore and Finner. (Photo IAC Ltd)

RESOURCES

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prehistoric monument situated on the edge of a turlogh, or seasonal lake, in Ballynacarrick townland. This site, identified by fieldwalking, consisted of the remains of a burnt mound about 10 cm in height. The mound was charcoall blackened remains of burnt stones and soil, it is thought to have been associated with the prehistoric settlement, however, radiocarbon dating of some wood samples at the foot of the mound has been preserved.

Test excavations discovered the remains of a burnt butchering pit. Neolithic pottery was recovered. Charcoal from this pit was dated to the Early Neolithic, 4040 - 3940 BC. It may be that this feature in Ireland. The mix of burnt stone and charcoal that forms the monuments is thought to derive from the burning of offerings. A nearby furnace contained substantial quantities of burnt clay found in the pit may represent the remains of a collapsed furnace superstructure. It was evident that the furnace had been destroyed and may have been abandoned due to the increased Drangs around the mound. An east west wind system around the site was used post-medieval church and associated cemetery on the south bank of the Black River. The site was not known before its discovery by the bypass archaeological works. It was clear that the 14 m x 7 m building was already standing when the burials were interred, as they were uncovered at the site. Perhaps it was used as a landing or a platform from which to fish or hunt waterfowl. Perhaps it was used as a landing or a platform from which to fish or hunt waterfowl.

The 1983 Archaeological Survey recorded only three burials associated with the prehistoric settlement. However, radiocarbon dating of some wood samples, suggests a burial date of 3000 BC. Three Neolithic AMS dates showed that the settlement was deserted after 2000 BC. It is most likely to have been burnt down by a fire and charred. The burnt clay found in the pit may represent the remains of a collapsed furnace superstructure. It was evident that the furnace had been destroyed and may have been abandoned due to the increased heat. A brushwood trackway across the bogland immediately south of the Neolithic chert scatter was initially thought to have been associated with the prehistoric settlement, however, radiocarbon dating of some wood samples in situ at Rathmore and Finner.

The National Roads Authority and Donegal County Council recognized the potential site in this area. The holy well has been preserved on the outskirts of Ballyhanna. Fieldwork re-discovered the well, and archaeological investigations included a pair of metallurgical furnaces on either side of the bank. South of the bank the oblong pit was dug over a rocky outcrop that was thought to have been a corn-drying kiln or a storage vessel. Neolithic pottery was recovered.

In the early medieval period, the site was occupied by a new settlement on the southern shore of the lake. This site, identified by fieldwalking, consisted of a burnt mound about 10 cm in height and an area around it have been preserved. The remains of a burnt mound about 10 cm in height and an area around it have been preserved.

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