background

The N2 Carrickmacross Bypass, Co. Monaghan, consists of an 8.1 km road realignment to the east of Carrickmacross.

This part of Monaghan lies within a drumlin belt, so the landscape is dominated by steep hills, swampy bottoms and inter-drumlin lakes with few rivers passing through the landscape at ground level.

Advance archaeological testing and mitigation works were carried out on the scheme in 2003 by Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd (IAC Ltd) on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Monaghan County Council.

South County Monaghan is an area of predominantly early medieval ringfort and crannóg (lake dwelling) sites and Carrickmacross is recorded as the site of an early medieval monastery. Less evidence for prehistoric occupation exists in the area, although Neolithic and Bronze Age sites are known.

Carrickmacross remained little affected by the Anglo-Norman invasion, and by the 14th century AD the MacMahons, the Gaelic lords of this part of Monaghan, had established forts nearby.

in brief:

1. Neolithic building
   Aerial view of Neolithic houses uncovered at Monanny (Photo Studiolab)

2. Neolithic building
   Archaeologist excavating the threshold of Neolithic Building 2 at Monanny (Photo IAC Ltd)

3. Stone axehead
   Stone axehead found during excavations at Monanny (Photo Clare Maher)

4. Monanny Building
   Reconstruction of sub-rectangular building detail of Monanny Building 3 (Figure Niall Roycroft)

Some of the findings at Carrickmacross.

1. Neolithic building
   Aerial view of a Neolithic building at Monanny (Photo Studiolab)

archaeological DISCOVERIES

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neolithic buildings at monanny

Three Early Neolithic buildings, dated by thousands of pottery sherds to 4000 – 3700 BC, were located at Monanny.

The site lying on a small esker was dominated by one of the streams in the area that eventually flowed to the sea. The buildings display subtly different architecture, but all were rectangular with walls internally faced with vertical oak or ash planks placed in a slot trench bordered post-holes. The standard construction was a frame of posts set in the slot trench, braced by corner and intermediate posts. The bulk of the walls probably of turf II. The post-holes of the buildings were deep, but have been detailed in the slot trenches, all of which formed part of post-holes. This was followed by packing stones and then a further layer of earth. Through repairs and rebuilding use, the upper slot trench fills had been of similar plan to Building 1 but later clearly extended to the east. The excavation was via a series on the northern side and access by the small room was from the large room. Building 1 measured 13 m by 7 m and was partly divided into two rooms. The walls consisted of a slot trench, regular posts placed with small, partially deviated spits which probably supported the oak posts.

Contents of the slot trench included a large amount of fire debris, including burnt post (Monanny). An early medieval monastery was built at Carrickmacross in the land of the 'Fir Fearnmhaighe' (Figure Niall Roycroft). Archaeologists excavating the double ditch at Lisanisk (Figure IAC Ltd.).

early medieval ringfort at lisanisk

Building 1 at Monanny measured 13 m by 7 m and was partly divided into two rooms. The walls consisted of a slot trench, regular posts placed with small, partially deviated spits which probably supported the oak posts.

The ringfort was an early medieval fort with strong defences. A height and must fall. Evidence for the 1647 battle of Lisanisk is apparent in the double ditch at Lisanisk. The fort was excavated by a team of archaeologists in collaboration with the Ulster Museum. The site was surveyed and recorded by N. Cusack and P. MacNamara. The site was located adjacent to the monastic settlement at Carrickmacross.