what we found

in brief:

Some of the findings in and between Ballina and Tonybaun.

Between April and July 2003, the topsoil removal of the 4.7km route of the N26 Ballina to Bohola (Stage I - Ballina to Tonybaun) road scheme was carried out and monitored by Mayo County Council archaeologists to reveal and resolve any unknown archaeology.

The work was carried out on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Mayo County Council. Archaeological testing adjacent to two enclosures and a standing stone site also took place in advance of the main construction contract. The excavation of a cillín commenced in March 2003 and was completed in early September 2003.

1. Corn-drying kiln
   'Bowl' of the corn-drying kiln excavated at Drumreevagh.

2. Medieval burial
   Possible late medieval burial in the cillín at Tonybaun.

3. Votive stones
   Votive stone recovered from the cillín at Tonybaun.

4. Pit furnace
   Stone-lined bowl-shaped pit furnace uncovered adjacent to the cillín at Tonybaun.

5. Queen stone fragment
   Queen stone fragment recovered from the cillín at Tonybaun.

For more information please contact:

Archaeology Section
National Roads Authority
St. Martin’s House
Waterloo Road, Dublin 4
Tel: +353 1 660 2511
Fax: +353 1 668 0009
Email: info@nra.ie
Web: www.nra.ie
Two hundred and forty-eight burials were recovered from the site - 181 children and 67 adults. Radiocarbon dates from the earliest burials ranged from 1562-1806 AD. A leacht/altar/penitential station probably dating to the Early Christian Period was also uncovered from within the burial ground. Several rounded votive stones and quartz pebbles were found from within and around the vicinity of this structure. Fragments of 23 rotary quern stones, a stone crucible fragment and a large amount of furnace bloom were also recovered from the burial ground. Over 200 flint and chert flakes and two stone axes were found in soil levels on and around the site. In June 2005, the remains uncovered in the cillín at Tonybaun were reburied in the local Ballinahaglish Cemetery, Knockmore, after a local service. The remains were interred in three large caskets and an engraved memorial stone has been erected at the side of the new road adjacent to the site of the cillín while an engraved headstone has been located at the new grave plot.

Cillín

The site of a cillín (i.e. a burial ground mainly used for the internment of unbaptised children) was known at Tonybaun (RMP MA039-107), however, prior to the excavation its date was unknown. A geophysical survey of the area surrounding the burial ground was undertaken to detect any archaeological features which may have been associated with the burial ground.

Corn-drying kiln

A medieval kiln corn-drying kiln was uncovered at Drumreevagh on a south-eastern facing slope of a large drumlin less than 100m to the south-east of the enclosure (RMP MA039-079). The stone-bed kiln was keyhole-shaped and cut into the natural. The base was sub-circular in plan. The fire was extended from the base in an east-south-easterly direction. The base was found to be 1.4m culminating at the fire spot. It is clear from the archaeological evidence that a fire was lit at the mouth of the fire that the flames from which would have been sent along the fire and into the building chimney. This would have provided a constant low heat to dry the grains to be suitable for grinding.

A burnt mound dating to the Bronze Age was discovered during monitoring of topsoil removal at Carrowntreila. The site was located at the base of a peaty hollow which was surrounded on three sides by low drumlins. It consisted of a mound of heat fractured stone and charcoal. This covered two pre-mound deposits, a construction layer and a portion of the original sod. Beneath the several features were cut into the natural bedrock clay. These contained a fire pit, a possible well and two troughs. Outcrops between these two troughs were a group of 98 stake-holes. Analysis of the stake-hole patterns in correlation with soil identification, revealed a number of likely temporary structures and windbreaks associated with the troughs.

Stone-lined bowl-shaped pit furnace uncovered adjacent to the cillín at Tonybaun.

Stone altar in the cillín excavated at Tonybaun.

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Possible late medieval burial in the cillín at Tonybaun.

Quern stone fragment recovered from the cillín at Tonybaun.