what we found
in brief:

Some of the findings at on the Sligo Inner Relief Road.

1. Henge
   Excavation of the northern ditch of the henge enclosure uncovered at Tonafortes. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)

2. Henge
   Aerial view of the henge uncovered at Tonafortes. (Photo Markus Casey)

3. Neolithic stone-walled enclosure
   Neolithic stone-walled enclosure uncovered at Caltragh.

4. Circular structures
   Aerial view of one of the post-medieval circular structures uncovered at Caltragh. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)

5. Causewayed enclosure
   Aerial view of the archaeological features uncovered on the ridge at Magherboy. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)

6. Ringfort
   Medieval ringfort at Magheraboy, showing the stones of the collapsed stone wall lying within the outer ditch.

Between 2000 and 2003 archaeological testing and excavations were carried out by Mary Henry Archaeological Services Ltd., and Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd. (A.C.S. Ltd.) in advance of construction of the 4.5km N4 Sligo Inner Relief Road and County Extension on behalf of the National Roads Authority, Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council.

The excavations revealed evidence of settlement stretching back some 6,000 years into the Early Neolithic period. Sites discovered ranged from large ceremonial enclosures dating to the Neolithic and Bronze Ages to settlement sites of houses and associated burials dating from the Middle Bronze Age through Iron Age settlement evidence, a medieval defended farmstead and post-medieval urban settlement.

There were three main zones of archaeological activity along the route, the ceremonial large enclosure and environs at Tonafortes dating to the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age; a Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement at Caltragh and an Early Neolithic causewayed enclosure at Magheraboy with later activity.
In the townland of Caltragh at the southern end of the scheme, a large circular enclosure measuring some 100m in diameter was detected by a belt of stones and small causeway. In a trenching, within view of the southern end of Knocknarea Mountain and the square towered hollow way known as Queen’s Pass, the road development impacted on a tiny portion of the enclosure and this area was excavated. Results from the excavations have revealed that the henge was built in the Late Neolithic period between 2460 BC and 2140 BC. The large enclosing ditch, which was up to 6m wide and 2m deep in places, was transversed by an entrance causeway into the enclosure. The entrance causeway was lined by a series of horizontal timbers, with an entrance defined by a four-posted porch. This had been dug along the interior walls of the building and would have formed a number of stake holes. The entrance causeway was destroyed at the southern end of the valley containing the cremated remains of a juvenile, probably between 13 and 16 years old at the time of death. A saddle quern and grinding stone were deposited in the entrance causeway. These bunals have been detected in the latter half of the second millennium BC.

Three circular structures were discovered on the lower slopes of the northern edge of the valley each formed by a series of post-holes, with an entrance defined by a four-posted porch. This had been dug along the interior walls of the building and would have formed a number of stake holes. These three structures were destroyed by a road constructed between AD 600 and AD 800. Evidence of burial practices consisted of a small pit containing a deposit of cremated human bone and an associated grave good deposit of flint tools. The earliest feature on a prominent ridge at Magheraboy is a large causewayed enclosure dating to the Early Neolithic period about 4000 BC. It is attested by a medieval ringfort, constructed between AD 400 and AD 450. These sites were unknown prior to the archaeological investigations carried out for the road construction.

The Early Neolithic causewayed enclosures evidence from the excavations indicate that artefacts were placed into the ditches repeatedly covered up with soil and redeposited as passing farm implements. Between 48 and 58 pits were found and excavated within the enclosure. Analysis of the burnt bone from one pit determined to be those of a woman aged between 40 and 50 years old. Bone from one pit determined to be those of a woman aged between 50 and 60 years old. Bone from one pit determined to be those of a woman aged between 50 and 60 years old. Evidence of burial practices consisted of a small pit containing a deposit of cremated human bone and an associated grave good deposit of flint tools. The earliest feature on a prominent ridge at Magheraboy is a large causewayed enclosure dating to the Early Neolithic period about 4000 BC. It is attested by a medieval ringfort, constructed between AD 400 and AD 450. These sites were unknown prior to the archaeological investigations carried out for the road construction.

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The earliest feature in a small bowl on the outskirts of Caltragh is an Early Neolithic structure dating to the Early Neolithic and Late Neolithic periods. These three structures have been dated to the Iron Age period. The earliest feature on a prominent ridge at Magheraboy is a large causewayed enclosure dating to the Early Neolithic period about 4000 BC. It is attested by a medieval ringfort, constructed between AD 400 and AD 450. These sites were unknown prior to the archaeological investigations carried out for the road construction.

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A number of short Iron Age pits were also found in the ridge. A small circular structure of earth and stone was deposited in the outer ditch. Analysis of the burnt bone from one pit determined to be those of a woman aged between 40 and 50 years old. Bone from one pit determined to be those of a woman aged between 50 and 60 years old. Evidence of burial practices consisted of a small pit containing a deposit of cremated human bone and an associated grave good deposit of flint tools. The earliest feature on a prominent ridge at Magheraboy is a large causewayed enclosure dating to the Early Neolithic period about 4000 BC. It is attested by a medieval ringfort, constructed between AD 400 and AD 450. These sites were unknown prior to the archaeological investigations carried out for the road construction.

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