

# 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 prehistoric circular structures uncovered at **Caltragh**. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)

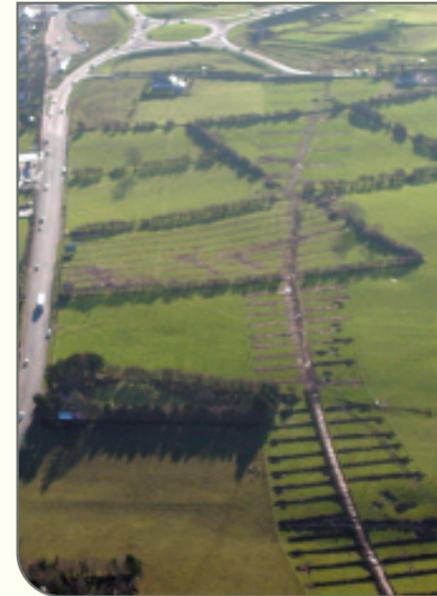
5. Causewayed enclosure  
Aerial view of the archaeological features uncovered on the ridge at **Magheraboy**. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)

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

# background

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.



Aerial view of test trenching carried out on the scheme. (Photo Markus Casey)

There were three main zones of archaeological activity along the route; the ceremonial henge 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.



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# archaeological DISCOVERIES

## front cover images

LEFT: Aerial view of test trenching carried out on the scheme. (Photo Markus Casey)

MIDDLE: Medieval enclosure or ringfort at **Magheraboy**.

RIGHT: Excavation of the northern ditch of the henge enclosure uncovered at **Tonafortes**. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)



# the tonafortes henge ceremonial enclosure

In the townland of **Tonafortes** at the southern end of the scheme, a large, circular enclosure measuring some 84m in diameter, was delineated by a wide ditch with traces of both an inner and outer bank. It is low-lying, within view of the summit of **Knocknarea Mountain** and the court tomb known locally as **Queen Maeve's** cairn.

The road development impacted on a tiny portion of the enclosure, and only this area was excavated. Results from the excavations have revealed that the henge was built in the Late Neolithic period between 2460-2140 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.



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

# caltragh prehistoric settlement

In a small valley in the townland of **Caltragh**, midway along the N4 route, a number of archaeological features dating to the Neolithic and Bronze Age were discovered spanning a period between c. 4000-500 BC.

Archaeological excavations revealed the remains of a stone wall over 100m in length forming an arcing open

enclosure facing onto an area of bogland, which would most likely have been open water at the time the wall was built. The discovery of a number of small, polished stone axes and some decorated animal bone within the fabric of the wall all suggest a Neolithic date between 4000 BC and 2500 BC.

# caltragh prehistoric settlement

Evidence of burial practices consisted of a small pit containing a deposit of cremated human bone and an associated grave-good deposit of flint flake tools.

Evidence of human cremations during the later Bronze Age was also unearthed when two more burial pits were discovered, each lined by stakes, set presumably to mark the burials. Each pit contained the cremated remains of an adult individual. Analysis of the burnt bone from one pit determined to be those of a woman, who died aged between 40 and 50 years old. She was buried with the remains of her stone bead necklace. Another large pit on the northern edge of the valley contained the cremated remains of a juvenile, probably between 13 and 16 years old at the

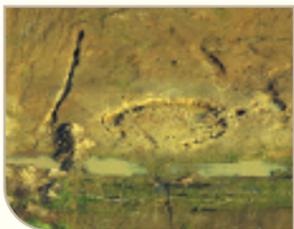
time of his/her death. A saddle quern and grinding stone were deposited in the burial pit. These three burials have been dated to the latter half of the second millennium BC.

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'. Pits had been dug along the interior walls of the buildings and were found to contain a number of saddle querns. These three structures have been dated to c. 1600 BC.

Eight burnt mounds were discovered on the old Caltragh lake edges, dating from between 2500 BC to 800 BC. These may have been used as cooking places or for industrial activity.



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



Aerial view of one of the prehistoric circular structures uncovered at **Caltragh**. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)



One of the Bronze Age structures uncovered at **Caltragh**.

# the archaeology of magheraboy

The earliest feature on a prominent ridge at **Magheraboy**, on the outskirts of **Sligo** town, is a large causewayed enclosure, dating to the Early Neolithic period, about 4,000 BC. Also present on the same ridge is evidence of Iron Age settlement, dating to about 400 BC, while occupation in more recent times is attested by a medieval ringfort, constructed between AD 600 and AD 800. These sites were unknown prior to the archaeological investigations carried out for the road construction.

## The Early Neolithic causewayed enclosure

Built between 4000 BC and 3800 BC and centred on the summit of a large elongated ridge, and measuring over 1.7 hectares in area, this huge enclosure was delineated at its northern and southern sides by the remains of a palisade trench. Packing stones supported the upright posts which were once set into it and would have formed a fence c. 2m in height, outside of which were a series of interrupted ditches.

This type of enclosure is found in Britain and Continental Europe and while other large Neolithic enclosures are known in Ireland the discovery of such a causewayed enclosure is rare. While no universal explanation has been accepted for their function, they

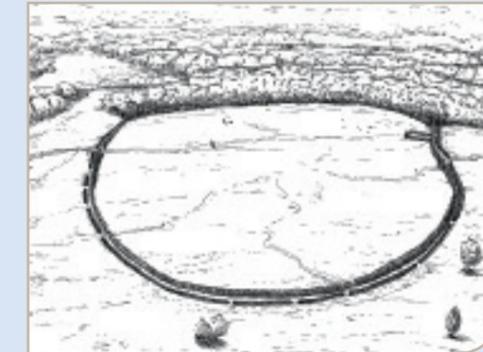
are viewed as ceremonial centres/meeting foci or perhaps cattle enclosures.

A range of Early Neolithic artefacts such as flint arrowheads, pottery and a deposition of quartz crystals were excavated from the outer ditch fills, as well as a broken porcellanite axe. The archaeological evidence from the excavations indicate that artefacts were placed into the ditches repeatedly, covered up with soil and then re-dug to place more objects. Between 40 and 50 pits were found and excavated within the enclosure. All produced Early Neolithic artefacts, including flint tools such as blades and scrapers, and pottery dating from the same period.



Aerial view of the archaeological features uncovered on the ridge at **Magheraboy**. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)

# the archaeology of magheraboy



Reconstruction drawing of the **Magheraboy** causewayed enclosure. (Figure A.C.S. Ltd.)

## Iron Age activity at Magheraboy

A number of Bronze Age pits were also found on the ridge. A small, circular structure, radiocarbon-dated to the Iron Age was discovered on the western part of the ridge. Measuring approximately 4m in diameter with a small entrance at the north east, it was constructed by means of placing horizontal timber planks in a circular bedding trench upon which the walls of the hut would then have been built.

## Early medieval settlement at Magheraboy

A medieval ringfort, 40m in diameter, was located close to the highest part of the ridge, within the interior of the much larger Neolithic causewayed enclosure. The ringfort was surrounded by a U-shaped ditch and inner stone wall. The ringfort interior had evidence of occupation in the form of houses.



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