The N6 Ballinasloe–Athlone Road Scheme is part of the major inter-urban route connecting Dublin and Galway and stretches from the townland of Tulrush, immediately south-east of Ballinasloe, to the townland of Monksland, immediately west of Athlone.

Archaeological works on the route of the scheme began in September 2006 and were completed in August 2007. Archaeological works were carried out in two phases on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Galway and Roscommon County Councils by Valerie J Keeley Ltd (VJK Ltd). Phase 1 involved prospecting for previously unrecorded archaeological features by machine-excavating trenches at regular intervals throughout the road corridor. Phase 2 involved other investigations at sites of known or probable archaeological, cultural and architectural heritage. Phase 2 also included the full excavation of ten prehistoric, early medieval and early modern date sites and these were fully excavated during the Phase 2 works. Post-excavation work on finds and samples from these sites was completed in May 2008.

In brief:

1. Water-wheel paddle
   Water-wheel paddle from mill at Kilbegly.
   (Photo: Studio Lab)

2. Water-wheel hub
   Broken water-wheel hub under excavation.
   (Photo: K Beachus, Jacobs Engineering)

3. Lignite bracelet
   Lignite bracelet fragment from Kilbegly.
   (Photo: Studio Lab)
prehistoric

A burnt mound is an outdoor cooking site consisting of a water-filled trough (or troughs). Hot stone was used to heat the water and this was dug out and discarded after use, forming the mound. A number of such sites, and their associated features, were found along the route of the road in the townlands of Ardagawna, Cullaghmore, Taduff East, and Kilbegly.

The mound at Ardagawna was a simple trough and, slightly upslope to the north, the site of a mound was identified. The mound at Cullaghmore had two troughs, one of which contained burnt stone. The site was probably used for longer or more intensively than the mound at Ardagawna. Two mounds were found close together in the townland of Kilbegly, and discarded after use, forming the mound. The mound at Ardagawna contained burnt animal bone. This site was probably used for longer or more intensively than the mound at Ardagawna.

Two sherds of prehistoric pottery and a small fragment of a grave. A cluster of pits and other cut features, one containing the skeleton of a young adult, were found in the townland of Ardagawna. The earliest archaeological remains along the route of the scheme are represented by the digging of a ring-ditch, which was more than 1,200 years old. A number of such sites, and their associated features, were found along the route of the road in the townlands of Ardagawna, Cullaghmore, Taduff East, and Kilbegly.

By far the most interesting site found during the excavations was that of an early medieval milling complex, which was among the best preserved examples in Europe.

Work on site is a daunting archaeological puzzle to piece together. Specific details of medieval milling technology and carpentry are not the focus here.

Taduff East and Ardagawna both had well-preserved outdoor cooking sites consisting of a water-filled trough, where water was heated with heated stone for the mound. The mound at Ardagawna was a simple trough and, slightly upslope to the north, the site of a mound was identified. The mound at Cullaghmore had two troughs, one of which contained burnt stone. The site was probably used for longer or more intensively than the mound at Ardagawna. Two mounds were found close together in the townland of Kilbegly, and discarded after use, forming the mound. The mound at Ardagawna contained burnt animal bone. This site was probably used for longer or more intensively than the mound at Ardagawna.

Two wooden wheel paddles and a bell-shaped wheel-house remain in situ, but the water wheel has been destroyed. The earliest archaeological remains along the route of the scheme are represented by the digging of a ring-ditch, which was more than 1,200 years old. A number of such sites, and their associated features, were found along the route of the road in the townlands of Ardagawna, Cullaghmore, Taduff East, and Kilbegly.

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