archaeological investigations

The archaeological testing of the N6 Kinnegad to Kilbeggan scheme involved centreline test trenching site specific testing, geophysical survey, topographical survey and wetland survey as well as architectural assessments of various vernacular buildings. The archaeological testing of the 38km route was carried out by Eachtra Archaeological Projects Ltd., and CRDS Ltd., between June and September 2004.

Centreline test trenching was conducted along the route and a total of 77 previously unidentified sites were uncovered. The vast array of archaeological sites and features uncovered included over 30 burnt mounds some of which had possible ditches, 35 burnt pits and hearths, a pit with prehistoric pottery, three iron working sites, two trackways (one timber and one brushwood), a cillín, a prehistoric complex, a late medieval field system, two lime-kilns and two post-medieval buildings.

A programme of site specific test trenching was carried out on 31 potential archaeological sites which were identified in the Environmental Impact Statement. Carried out for the scheme. In addition, topographic and geophysical surveys were undertaken on some of these sites. Only one site proved to be archaeological. This site at Clonfad was located adjacent to a church and graveyard. This site is listed in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP032-08P) and consists of an early Neolithic site founded by St. Finian of Clonard in the sixth century AD.

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An interesting metalworking site was also identified at Monganstown.

1. archaeological investigations

2. archaeological excavations

Excavations of the various sites uncovered during testing were carried out between October 2004 and May 2005 by CRDS Ltd., Eachtra Archaeological Projects Ltd. and Valerie J. Keeley Ltd. A total of 52 sites proved to be archaeological with burnt mound/ditch/field sites predominating. The archaeological works were carried out on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Westmeath, Meath and Offaly County Councils.

There were three large-scale excavations, which included two ecclesiastical enclosures at Clonfad and Ballykilmore and a prehistoric complex at Demense or Mearsparkfarm.

3. prehistoric

A prehistoric complex was excavated at Demense or Mearsparkfarm, near Kilbeggan. A settlement area consisting of a structure, hearth area, numerous pits and linear ditches were uncovered. It is thought that this site may prove to be a Neolithic farmstead. Artefactual material recovered included flint knives, scrapers, an arrowhead and worked antler. A single crouched inhumation was also found interred in a simple pit and also thought to date to the prehistoric period.

4. early medieval

clonfad

The site at Clonfad appears to represent an early medieval monastic enclosed settlement defined by a large outer enclosing ditch and a smaller inner ditch. A range of features discovered within the enclosure included numerous pits, kilns, furnaces and material related to metalworking activity. Also an in situ inhumation burial was uncovered. Several finds were recovered such as decorated bone combs, bone needles, stickpins, iron shears and various other metal implements.

ballykilmore

Another ecclesiastical enclosure was uncovered at Ballykilmore, south of Tynelapass, which was reused as a cillín burial ground (i.e. a burial ground mainly used for the interment of unbaptised children). It consisted of a large enclosure ditch, which enclosed a graveyard and the stone foundations of a church. To date over 1,200 burials have been recovered which were buried over several hundred years. Finds include a bone bead, blue glass bead, worked antler, metal arrowhead and blades. There is also evidence that predates the ecclesiastical remains, which includes several post-holes, fragments of burnt and unburnt animal bone and a thumbnail scraper.