1. background
The N8/N73 Mitchelstown Relief Road measures approximately 4.5km. It exits the existing N8 at Cloonlough, bypassing Mitchelstown to the west, and rejoins the N8 near the R513 junction, north of Mitchelstown. The route passes through the townlands of Cloonlough, Stagpark and Mitchelstown.

A programme of archaeological investigation was undertaken in advance of construction in order to identify and fully excavate any sites of archaeological potential along the route. These investigations consisted of an initial geophysical (magnetometry) survey across the accessible areas of the scheme carried out by Margaret Gowen & Co. The magnetometry survey recorded magnetic variations from beneath the sod that helped archaeologists identify locations of archaeological potential. This was followed by a programme of advance archaeological test trenching across the entire scheme which revealed a total of five areas of archaeological significance. These areas were fully excavated by Eachtra Archaeological Projects Ltd., on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Cork County Council.

2. prehistoric
Domestic dwellings
Excavations in Mitchelstown revealed the foundation imprint of three houses.

House A comprised a shallow slot-trench foundation, with an internal ring of nine post-holes which would originally have supported timber and wattle walls plastered with daub. There was also evidence for an internal partition wall. A patch of burnt clay marked the location of a hearth. Based on the nature and form of the house structure it was interpreted as a domestic dwelling with the potential for accommodating five to 15 people. House B was located c. 275m south of House A. It survived as a slot-trench foundation with an internal ring of nine post-holes. No hearth was identified within this structure, suggesting that it could possibly have been used as a livestock shed. Both houses cut through an earlier house foundation.

House C survived as a ring of 11 post-holes, with a hearth located near its centre.

Fulachta fiaidh
The remains of a fulacht faidh were also discovered in Mitchelstown.

A high concentration of pits, post-holes and stake-holes were uncovered at Stagpark. No discernable pattern was evident, which made interpretation of the archaeological significance of these features difficult. Two sherds of probable Bronze Age pottery were recovered from the site. A single cremation pit was identified partially filled with burnt bone fragments. Several other possible cremation pits were also identified. A nearby cluster of eleven stake-holes were interpreted as a possible funerary pyre.

3. miscellaneous sites
Aerial view of two circular settlement structures uncovered in the townland of Stagpark. (Photo Eachtra Archaeological Projects Ltd.)

Excavations at Stagpark also revealed a nearby corn-drying kiln. The kiln was stone-lined and key-hole-shaped. A wide shallow pit was identified at the north-eastern end of the kiln flue. Burnt seed, bone and ash were recovered from the kiln.

4. early medieval sites

For more information please contact:
Archaeology Section, National Roads Authority St. Martins House, Waterloo Road, Dublin 4.
Tel: +353 1 660 2511 Fax: +353 1 668 0009 Email: info@nra.ie Web: www.nra.ie
Published 2005