The N8/N73 Mitchelstown Relief Road is about 4.5 km long. It exits the existing N8 at Cloonlough, bypassing Mitchelstown to the west, then rejoins the N8 near the R513 junction north of Mitchelstown. The route offered archaeologists an amazing glimpse at 4,000 years of human settlement in the Mitchelstown/North Cork area.

Investigation began well in advance of construction, in order to identify and fully excavate any sites of archaeological potential along the route. Potential sites were identified by a geophysical (magnetometry) survey carried out by archaeological consultants Margaret Gowen & Co Ltd across the scheme’s accessible areas.

By recording magnetic variations from beneath the sod, archaeologists were guided to locations of potential interest. A programme of advance archaeological test trenching across the entire scheme followed. Eachtra Archaeological Projects, on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Cork County Council, identified a total of five areas of archaeological significance, which were fully excavated. Two sites were located in Mitchelstown townland and three in Stagpark townland.

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Excavations at Mitchelstown 1 revealed the foundation of an important site called Mitchelstown 1 Bronze Age houses. Aerial view of two circular settlement structures uncovered in Mitchelstown 1 (Photo John Sunderland)

bronze age settlement settlement at mitchelstown 1

The remains of a burnt mound were discovered at Mitchelstown 2 on a site that has been described as a Bronze Age cooking site. Modern and mysterious pottery. Now the lugs or handles on the site may have originally been 150 m in size. No date was retrieved, the site is considered to be Bronze Age (1800 BC).

fulachta fiadh bronze age cooking sites

Aerial view of two simple settlement structures excavated at Mitchelstown 1 (Photo John Sunderland)

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bronze age settlement at stagpark 1

The house was rectangular in shape, with a flat roof, and was thought to be Early Christian. The radiocarbon results suggested a medieval date of about AD 1375.

multi period site at stagpark 1

At an elevated site at Stagpark 2, there were 15th and 16th-century remains of medieval corn-drying kiln. The site was surrounded by a late medieval ditch, and a high concentration of charcoal and ash were recorded in the kiln, which was within a small rectangular enclosure paddock. While first thought to be Early Christian, the radiocarbon results suggested a medieval date of about AD 1375.

medieval corn-drying kiln

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fulachta fiadh

Bronze Age houses. Aerial view of two circular settlement structures uncovered in Mitchelstown 1 (Photo John Sunderland)

Bronze Age houses. Aerial view of two circular settlement structures uncovered in Mitchelstown 1 (Photo John Sunderland)

Now and mysterious pottery near the house where the fulachta fiadh was a small pit where a cluster of mysterious pottery vessels some of which have never been seen before were discovered. The base of the pit held a flat stone on which rested three largely intact and upright vessels. MVP 2 was a small circular vessel – a type common to other sites within rural Ireland. MVP 2 was a bit larger jug, with four clearly spaced and transversely aligned lugs around the upper half of the container. MVP 2 was a rounded ceramic spoon which was a bit longer than MVP 2, and had a slightly curved handle. These two finds were both radiocarbon dated to about 1400 BC.

bronze age

New and mysterious pottery near the house where the fulachta fiadh was a small pit where a cluster of mysterious pottery vessels some of which have never been seen before were discovered. The base of the pit held a flat stone on which rested three largely intact and upright vessels. MVP 2 was a small circular vessel – a type common to other sites within rural Ireland. MVP 2 was a bit larger jug, with four clearly spaced and transversely aligned lugs around the upper half of the container. MVP 2 was a rounded ceramic spoon which was a bit longer than MVP 2, and had a slightly curved handle. These two finds were both radiocarbon dated to about 1400 BC.