

what we found

in brief:

Some of the findings in and around Mitchelstown.



1. New and mysterious pottery
Early Bronze Age faced bowl found at Mitchelstown 2. (Photo John Sunderland)



2. Cordoned urn
Early Bronze Age cordoned urn found at Mitchelstown 2. (Photo John Sunderland)

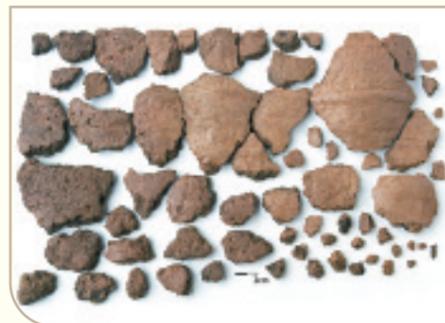


3. Settlement structures
Close up aerial view of one of the two circular settlement structures uncovered at Mitchelstown 1.

background



Aerial view of test trenching carried out on the route of the scheme.



Early Bronze Age cordoned urn found at Mitchelstown 2. (Photo John Sunderland)

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. 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.

N8/N73 MITCHELSTOWN RELIEF ROAD,
County Cork



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For more information
please contact:

Archaeology Section
National Roads Authority
St. Martins House
Waterloo Road, Dublin 4

Tel: +353 | 660 2511
Fax: +353 | 668 0009
Email: info@nra.ie
Web: www.nra.ie

archaeological DISCOVERIES

front cover images

LEFT: Close up aerial view of one of the two circular settlement structures uncovered at Mitchelstown 1.
RIGHT: North-east facing of the stone lined key-hole corn-drying kiln uncovered at Stagpark.
MIDDLE: Early Bronze Age faced bowl found at Mitchelstown 2. (Photo John Sunderland)



bronze age

settlement at mitchelstown 1

Excavations at **Mitchelstown 1** revealed the foundation imprint of three Middle Bronze Age houses.

House A had a shallow slot-trench foundation, with an internal concentric ring of at least nine post-holes, which would originally have contained roof supports.

The house would have been sub-circular in shape, roughly 9 m in diameter, with walls of wattle and clay daub and with a conical thatched roof.

The house had a 1 m wide entrance to the west and inside, a patch of burnt clay marked the location of a hearth. Internally it was of a size and shape to have been a domestic dwelling with the potential to accommodate a family or families of five to 15 people.



Early Bronze Age tub-shaped bowl found at **Mitchelstown 2**. (Photo John Sunderland)

House B was about 1.6 m further south. It was of similar construction but slightly larger (about 10 m in diameter) but appeared not to contain an internal hearth. The evidence suggested that both houses cut through an earlier house foundation.

House C survived as a ring of at least 11 post-holes and was, in almost all respects, similar in form to Houses A and B. It had a central hearth with surviving ash. Charred seeds from the site revealed ancient barley and some wheat. The site has been radiocarbon-dated to about **1350 BC**, placing it in the Middle Bronze Age.



Aerial view of two circular settlement structures uncovered in the townland of **Mitchelstown 1**.

fulachta fiadh

bronze age cooking sites?

The remains of a burnt mound were discovered at **Mitchelstown 2** on a site at the base of an east-facing slope, next to the Gradoge River. Though heavily truncated, the mound of heat-shattered sandstone was clearly that of a *fulacht fiadh*, a site type formed by the process of heating water by submerging fire-heated stones into a water-filled trough or pit. The rapid transfer of heat from the stones to the water causes the stones to shatter. Once discarded, these heat-shattered stones form the 'burnt mounds' identifiable by archaeologists.

What the heated water was used for is still a matter of debate. Although typically referred to as cooking sites, these *fulachta fiadh* or burnt mounds may also have functioned as sauna/sweat houses, baths, leather

processing sites, clothes dyeing areas or even early beer making plants. Charcoal from the Mitchelstown 2 site was radiocarbon-dated to about **1540 BC**.

A small *fulacht fiadh* was excavated at **Stagpark 2** in association with a sizable trough and several isolated pit features to the west. A number of stake-holes and post-holes were located at three of the four corners of the trough suggesting that it had originally been timber lined, with the timbers pegged into position by stakes. It is estimated that the burnt mound associated with this site may originally have been 150 m² in size. While no date was retrieved, the site is considered to be Bronze Age (2400 to 600 BC).

At **Stagpark 3**, the badly truncated remains of two *fulachta fiadh* were uncovered. Two inter-cutting pits (surrounded by a number of stake-holes) and a rectangular trough underlay the larger of the burnt mounds. Four stake-holes were recorded in the base of the trough along with a small, decayed piece of timber. The smaller mound sealed a number of pits and post-holes, which showed no discernable pattern. The mound was associated with two apparent troughs, one of which contained a single piece of struck flint. These sites were both radiocarbon-dated to about **1640 BC**.

bronze age



Early Bronze Age ceramic spoon found at **Mitchelstown 2**. (Photo John Sunderland)

New and mysterious pottery

Near the burnt mound/*fulacht fiadh* at **Mitchelstown 2**, 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 had a flat stone on which rested three largely intact and upright vessels. **Vessel 1** was a small urn related container - a type common to other sites within Ireland. **Vessel 2** was a tub-shaped pot with two closely spaced semi-hemispherical lugs on either side of the container. **Vessel 3** was a handled



Early Bronze Age faced bowl found at **Mitchelstown 2**. (Photo John Sunderland)

and footed face-mask cup. Specialists who examined them, concluded that it was clear that the lugs (ears), handle (nose), impressed circles (eyes) and feet (legs or arms) were a stylised, and possibly comical, representation of a human.

The pit also contained a remarkable **ceramic spoon** which, with its other rare contents, were radiocarbon-dated to about **1800 BC** (Early Bronze Age).

Vessels 2 and 3 have no parallels in Ireland and are considered to be 'unusual even within a wider European Bronze Age context'. How or why these finds came to be deposited at Mitchelstown 2 is uncertain and will be the subject of much academic debate.

multi period site

at stagpark 1

At an elevated site at **Stagpark 1**, a high concentration of 58 stake-holes, 12 post-holes and 33 pits were revealed over an area measuring 50 m north-south by 60 m east-west. No discernible structures were noted, which made interpretation of the site difficult. Based on the sequence of radiocarbon dates retrieved, the site appeared to represent the remains of sporadic settlement spanning across the **Early Bronze Age**, the **Late Bronze Age** and the **Iron Age**.



Archaeologists working on a series of large pits uncovered at **Stagpark 1**. (Photo Eachtra Archaeological Projects)

medieval corn-drying kiln



North-east facing of the stone lined key-hole corn-drying kiln uncovered at **Stagpark 2**.

Excavations at **Stagpark 2** also revealed a nearby corn-drying kiln. The kiln was stone lined and keyhole shaped. A wide, shallow pit was identified at the north-eastern end of the kiln flue. Burnt seed, bone 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**.