

what we found

in brief:

Some of the findings from the scheme:



1. Artefacts

Selection of artefacts from **Borris**.

(Photo:VJK Ltd)



2. Axehead

Stone axehead from ringfort at **Borris**.

(Photo:VJK Ltd)



3. Handle

Decorative bone handle from **Borris**.

(Photo:VJK Ltd)



4. Mounts

Copper-alloy 'Marigold' mounts from **Borris**.

(Photo:VJK Ltd)

background

The route of the M8/N8 Cullahill–Cashel Road Scheme is 39.5 km long and lies in the valley of the River Suir between the Silvermine Mountains to the west and the Slieveardagh hills to the east.

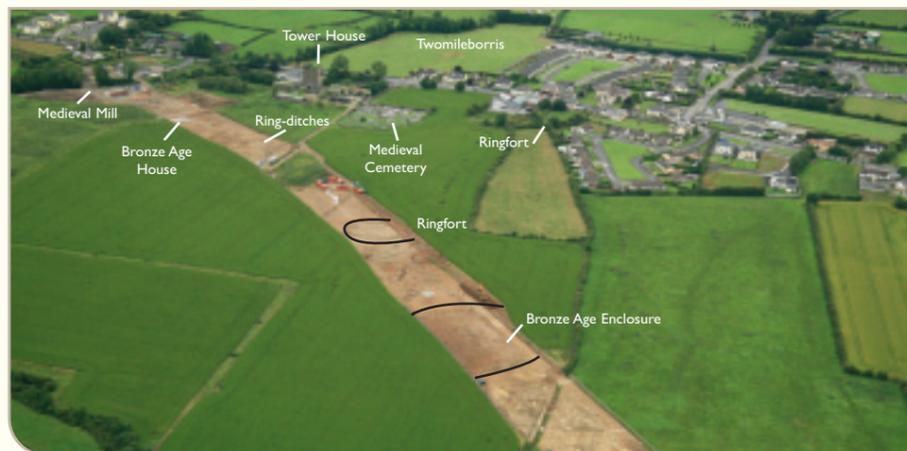
The route, commencing in County Laois, runs in a south-westerly direction passing through the counties of Kilkenny and Tipperary. Several areas of settlement and historic towns are located in proximity to the proposed route including Glashare, Urlingford and Twomileborris. This road represents a slice through a

landscape that is mainly lowland in character and where the location of human settlement has been determined by the presence of extensive raised bogs.

A programme of test excavations in 2005 and 2006 and subsequent monitoring of construction works identified 46 previously unknown archaeological sites along the route. Full archaeological excavation of these sites was carried out between 2006 and 2007.

The sites investigated yielded a diversity of archaeological evidence dating from the third millennium BC to the 19th century AD. These discoveries have expanded our knowledge of the development of society and landscape in this part of Ireland.

Archaeological works were carried out by **Margaret Gowen & Co. Ltd** and **Valerie J Keeley Ltd** on behalf of the **National Roads Authority**, **Kilkenny County Council**, **North Tipperary County Council** and **South Tipperary County Council**.



Overall shot of enclosures. (Photo: Studio Lab)

M8/N8 CULLAHILL–CASHEL ROAD SCHEME, Counties Tipperary and Kilkenny



M8/N8 CULLAHILL–CASHEL ROAD SCHEME, Counties Tipperary and Kilkenny



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archaeological DISCOVERIES

front cover images

LEFT: Bone spindle whorl from enclosure at **Ballydavid**. (Photo: NRA)
RIGHT: Early Neolithic leaf-shaped arrowhead. (Photo:VJK Ltd)
MIDDLE: Skeleton at **Borris** mid-excavation. (Photo:VJK Ltd)



early prehistoric

No evidence of our hunter-gatherer ancestors or the first Neolithic farmers was uncovered on this road scheme.

Evidence from pollen cores taken from the Littleton Raised Bog Complex suggests that the bogs were

expanding from the middle of the Neolithic period and that at this time the landscape was dominated by hazel woodland. This suggests that until the Bronze Age the area was only very sparsely settled. Perhaps it was not attractive or suitable for settlement but it could have been used for hunting. A leaf-shaped Early Neolithic arrowhead found in topsoil on one of the excavated sites may have been lost during one such hunting expedition.

bronze age

A wooden trackway found at **Longfordpass North** has been dated to the Late Bronze Age.

Trackways were used to provide access across boggy areas and possibly helped facilitate seasonal hunting and gathering.

The presence of 27 *fulachta fiadh*/burnt mounds found on this scheme reflect the lowland nature of the route. One example from **Islands**, Co. Kilkenny, had a rectangular trough (1.7 m long) lined with roundwoods.

A roundhouse (6 m in diameter) was discovered in **Fennor**, South Tipperary. Fifteen sherds of Bronze Age pottery, including two decorated sherds, were retrieved from a single post-hole, one of a pair defining the probable entrance. A flint scraper and three other stone tools were retrieved in the vicinity of the house.



Recording of timber trough at **Islands**, Co. Kilkenny. (Photo: NRA)

Another roundhouse excavated in **Borris** was defined by a curvilinear wall slot (6.5 m in diameter), it had an east-facing entrance with an annex or porch feature. The location of internal roof supports was indicated by



Sub-rectangular ring-ditch at **Borris**. (Photo: AirShots Ltd)

post-holes. Several pits were identified in the vicinity of the house, including one example that contained a flint scraper.

In **Ballydavid**, to the west of Littleton, a large oval ditched enclosure (internal diameter 125 m) was discovered. The site was located on a knoll that sloped steeply towards the east. A considerable amount of animal bone and antler was retrieved from the fills of the ditch. One bone had been worked to make a spindle whorl while a piece of antler showed evidence of cut marks. The remains of an undecorated vessel dating to the Middle Bronze Age was recovered from the base of the ditch.

Another large ditched enclosure was identified on low-lying ground in **Borris**, adjacent to Twomileborris. It measured approximately 100 m in diameter. Access to the interior of the enclosure was by way of a narrow east-facing entrance flanked by a pair of post-holes. A fragment of human skull was found in the base of the ditch to the north of the entrance. A cluster of six pits and 12 post-holes was revealed in the centre of the enclosure. Two cremation burials, a pit containing stake-holes and a deposit of cattle bones were also found within the enclosure.



Bronze Age house at **Borris** post-excitation. Members of the excavation team demonstrate how the house could comfortably accommodate seven people (and a dog). (Photo: AirShots Ltd)

Two Bronze Age pit cremation cemeteries were found on two adjacent ridges in **Borris** close to Twomileborris, the easterly one comprised 18 pits containing deposits of cremated bone while the other one comprised nine pits containing cremated bone and 12 pits which had no cremated bone. Downslope from the latter site (and close to the roundhouse described above) two circular ring-ditches were excavated, they were both just under 5 m in diameter. The fill of their shallow ditches contained small quantities of cremated bone and charcoal. A third sub-rectangular ring-ditch was found nearby. It enclosed a central cremation pit.



Oval ditched enclosure at **Ballydavid**. (Photo: AirShots Ltd)

early medieval

An early medieval settlement complex was uncovered at **Twomileborris**—at least three phases of enclosure are represented on this site.

The earliest enclosure was oval in plan and had an east-facing entrance defined by a number of large post-holes. The ditch fills contained residues of iron working.

This early enclosure was replaced by a ringfort that was defined by a circular ditch (32 m in diameter) with a north-east-facing entrance. Numerous features were present in the interior of the ringfort including four roundhouses defined by post-holes, curvilinear wall slots and drainage gullies. A bowl furnace and a number of shallow pits, one of which contained an iron knife and a pair of whetstones, were also found. The ditch fills contained animal bone, several iron knives, a glass bead, a bone comb fragment, a rotary quern-stone fragment, several bone pins, a stone gaming board and metallurgical waste.



Enclosure complex, **Borris Townland** (Photo: AirShots Ltd)



Grain-drying kiln at **Gortmakellis**, enclosed by ditches, in the environs of an overgrown ringfort. (Photo: AirShots Ltd)

In turn, the ringfort was cut by the construction of a large sub-rectangular ditched enclosure (65 m wide and 50 m long). This enclosure entirely enclosed both earlier enclosures and geophysical survey suggests that its construction was part of an extensive re-organisation of the agricultural landscape in this area.

Also identified within the various enclosures was a cemetery containing 19 graves, one of the individuals was buried with a copper-alloy ring-pin. Other features included three roundhouses, two cereal-drying kilns and an iron-smithing hearth.

At **Gortmakellis**, near Cashel, a grain-drying kiln was discovered close to an upstanding ringfort. The kiln was enclosed by ditches that formed an unusual figure-of-eight-shaped enclosure. The kiln would have been used by the farmer who lived in the ringfort to dry the cereal crop after harvesting to ensure that it did not rot during the winter. Kilns like this were located outside ringforts to minimise the risk of fire.

late medieval

The modern village of **Twomileborris** is built on the site of an Anglo-Norman borough.

Excavations to the south of the village uncovered extensive prehistoric and early medieval remains (see above). Activity contemporary with the late medieval borough was also found. These comprise a series of parallel ditches, which probably defined individual property boundaries, a large stone-lined keyhole-shaped grain-drying kiln and a complex of iron-working furnaces and hearths. A pit containing 61 silver coins of probable 14th-century date was also discovered. The remains of a medieval vertical watermill were found on the east bank of the Black River. On the opposite bank the foundations of a small rectangular (7 m by 6 m) earthen-walled building were uncovered. The building had a number of phases of use the latest of which was as a smithy.



Recording of lime kiln at **Borris**. (Photo: AirShots Ltd)



Archaeologists excavating late medieval and post-medieval ditches and pathway. (Photo: AirShots Ltd)

A post-medieval lime kiln was also excavated at **Borris**. These structures are found dotted throughout the landscape and were used for calcinating broken limestone to make powdered lime for use in industry, construction and agriculture and generally date from the 18th and 19th centuries.



The remains of a medieval vertical watermill at **Borris Townland**. (Photo: AirShots Ltd)