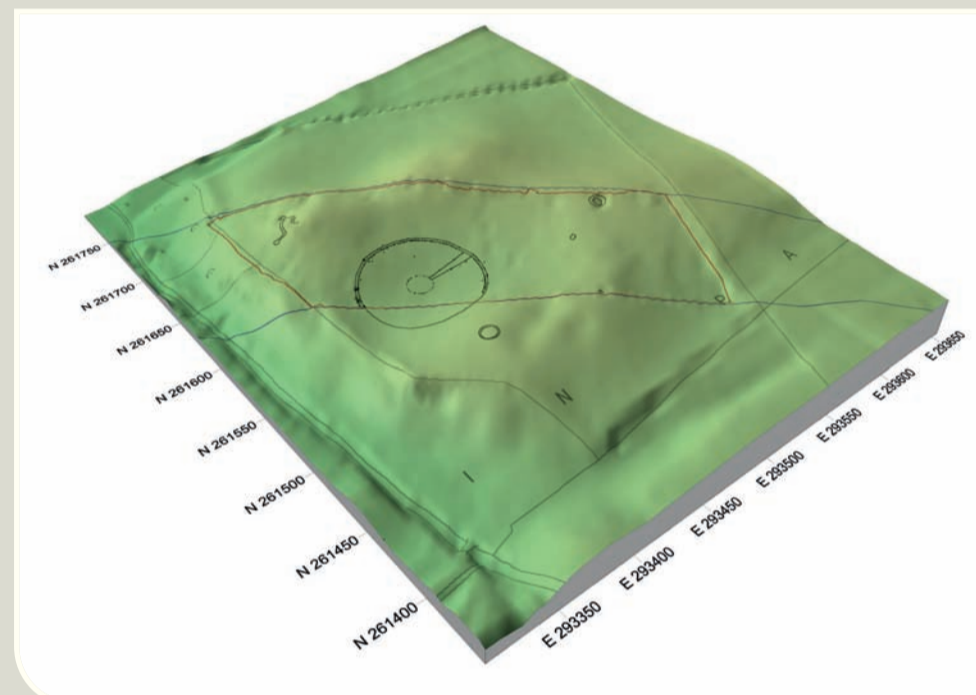


archaeological DISCOVERIES

background

The M3 Clonee–North of Kells Motorway Scheme is about 60 km long and archaeological excavation of 167 sites along the route was undertaken between 2005 and 2007. The archaeological work was undertaken by Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd (ACS Ltd) and Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd, on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Meath County Council.

Archaeological, historical and palaeoenvironmental research and specialist analysis is ongoing in preparation for detailed publication of the full results. In the meantime updates on this work are presented on a dedicated website: www.m3motorway.ie.



Digital terrain model created using an aerial topographic survey by BKS Surveys Ltd overlaid with a pre-excavation plan of the enclosure, souterrain and ring-ditch by ACS Ltd. Also shown is a projection of the part of the enclosure preserved outside the roadtake and a ring-ditch newly identified through geophysical survey by ArchaeoPhysica. (Image: ACS Ltd)



Polished stone macehead fragment. (Photo: John Sunderland)

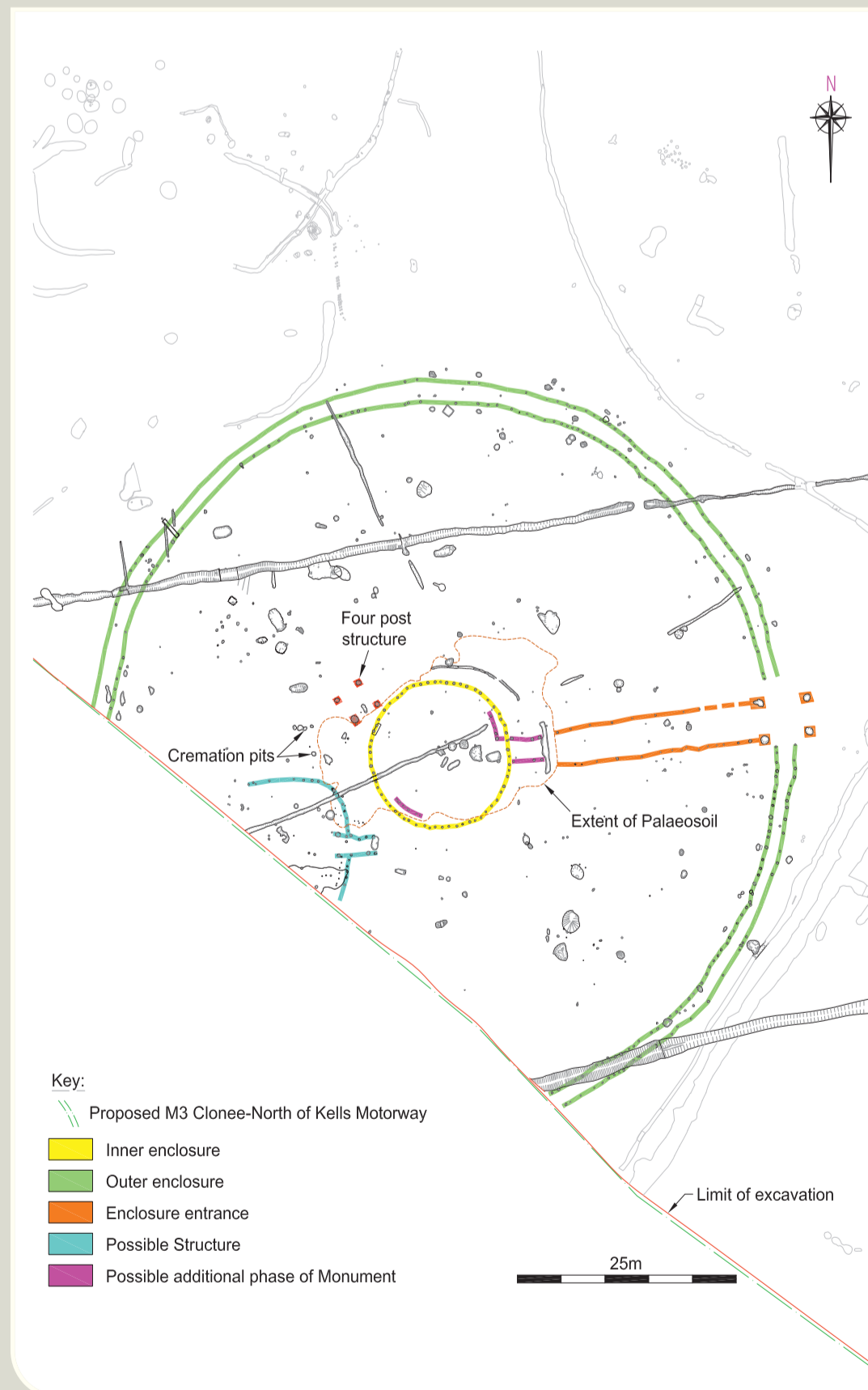
lismullin iron age post enclosure



Elevated view of part of the outer enclosure mid-excavation. (Photo: John Sunderland)



Megalithic art on prehistoric kerbstone re-used as souterrain chamber capstone. (Photo: John Sunderland)



Post-excavation plan of post enclosure. (Drawing: ACS Ltd)

A rare post-built ceremonial enclosure dating to the early Iron Age (sixth to fourth century BC) was discovered and excavated at **Lismullin**, Co. Meath, by **ACS Ltd**.

A number of other phases of archaeological activity were also identified on site, dating from the early Neolithic to the medieval period. A broken polished stone macehead was recovered in association with pottery and cremated human bone from a series of Neolithic–Bronze Age pits.

During the early medieval period a souterrain, or underground structure, with a passageway and two chambers, was constructed. Interestingly, during the excavation of the main chamber it was discovered that the capstone was a decorated megalith. It was likely to have been taken and adapted for re-use during the early medieval period from its original position as a kerbstone in a prehistoric passage tomb.

The Iron Age enclosure represented the main focus of archaeological activity on the site. There were three main elements to the enclosure: an outer enclosure comprising a concentric double ring of posts, forming a ring 80 m in diameter; a central inner enclosure of a single ring of posts, 16 m in diameter; and an east-facing entranceway comprised of an avenue of widely spaced posts.

The posts were quite small (0.15–0.29 m in diameter) and widely spaced (at 0.4–1 m intervals) and only survived to a depth of 0.2–0.3 m. Even allowing for the fact that the site had been heavily reduced by ploughing it is likely that the posts were of low height and used to visually demarcate a circular space rather than secure it.

It is currently interpreted that the enclosure was built during a single main phase of construction and would have had a relatively short period of use. However, extensive radiocarbon dating is being undertaken to confirm this interpretation. Nevertheless, it seems to continue a tradition of ritual activity in the immediate area which stretched as far back as the early Neolithic.

The post enclosure was located specifically to occupy the lowest point of a natural bowl-shaped depression in the landscape. This placing of the monument and the nature of the posts being widely spaced and of low height suggests that the enclosure was deliberately placed to allow the activities taking place inside it to be visible from the surrounding ridge.

The post enclosure uncovered at **Lismullin** provides us with a rare glimpse at ritual activities during a period of Irish archaeology (Iron Age) that is still relatively enigmatic.