

what we found

in brief:

Some of the finds from the scheme.



1. Timber trough base
Timber work platform uncovered at a *fulacht fiadh* in **Ballyclogh North**.
(Photo IAC Ltd)



2. Bronze ladle or patera
Front of bronze ladle or patera found at **Ballynapark**.



3. Flint flake
Flint flake found at **Coolbeg**.
(Photo IAC Ltd)



4. Neolithic pottery
Neolithic pottery found during excavations at **Ballyvaltron**.
(Photo IAC Ltd)

background

The 16.3 km long **NII Rathnew to Arklow Road Improvement Scheme** is between the northern limit of the Arklow Bypass and the southern limit of the recently constructed Newtownmountkennedy to Ballynabarny dual-carriageway.

Initial paper research was carried out to ensure that known archaeological features and landscapes in the area could be avoided as far as possible by the road planners and designers so that the road would have minimal impact on the local heritage.

Extensive geophysical surveys conducted along the route by **Earthsound Archaeological Geophysics** and **Substara Ltd**, were closely followed by the excavation of centerline and offset test-trenches. During this work in June and July 2005, 61 sites were identified by the geophysical survey and test-trenching works and were recommended for resolution through excavation.



Archaeologist carrying out surveying on the scheme.
(Photo IAC Ltd)

Excavation started towards the end of January 2006 and were completed by the end of July 2006. All of the on-site test-excavation and resolution works were undertaken by **Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd (IAC Ltd)** on behalf of the **National Roads Authority** and **Wicklow County Council**.

Most of the sites excavated along the route were *fulachta fiadh* or burnt mounds, generally regarded as cooking sites dating to the Bronze Age. The large prehistoric to early historic settlement and ritual complexes uncovered on the adjacent **NII Newtownmountkennedy to Ballynabarny Road Scheme** were not echoed within the present development area, probably demonstrating that the lands south of **Rathnew** were not as conducive to intensive settlement in the past.

NII RATHNEW TO ARKLOW ROAD IMPROVEMENT SCHEME, County Wicklow



NII RATHNEW TO ARKLOW ROAD IMPROVEMENT SCHEME, County Wicklow



© Ordnance Survey Ireland & Government of Ireland permit number EN 0045206.

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

archaeological DISCOVERIES

front cover images

LEFT: Archaeologists recording trough of a *fulacht fiadh* uncovered at **Ballinameesda Upper**. (Photo IAC Ltd)
RIGHT: Wicker lined trough uncovered at **Ballyclogh North**. (Photo IAC Ltd)
MIDDLE: Remains of circular palisade uncovered at **Coolbeg**. (Photo IAC Ltd)



prehistoric

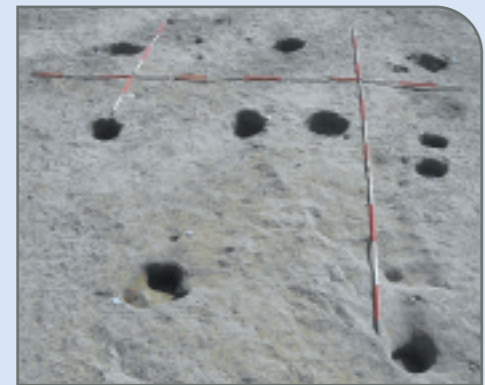
The earliest settlement evidence along the route relates to a Recorded Monument in **Coolbeg** townland and consisted of a flint scatter, part of which lies within the area of the roadtake. Flints had been recovered from field-walking carried out as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment for the scheme as well as from earlier field-walking episodes. Investigations at this site continued through the present test-excavation and resolution phases. The flints from initial studies seem to range in date from Mesolithic, through to Neolithic and Bronze Age times. They demonstrate the presence within the area of a



Barbed and tanged arrowhead found at **Coolbeg**. (Photo IAC Ltd)

society engaged in hunting, gathering and fishing, prior to the introduction of the more settled farming practices of the Neolithic.

Evidence of further prehistoric settlement was uncovered in **Ballymoyle, Ballyvaltron, Coolcork** and **Ballinaclough**. At **Ballymoyle**, a rectangular structure defined by large perimeter post-holes probably represents the remains of a Neolithic house. Internal post-holes would have taken timbers that supported the roof. Up to 900 pieces of flint debitage from a silt layer under a *fulacht fiadh* in **Ballynapark** indicates significant prehistoric activity in the area, but could not be related to any clearly defined structures.



Possible Neolithic house uncovered at **Ballymoyle**. (Photo IAC Ltd)

prehistoric



Archaeologists excavating *fulacht fiadh* at **Ballyclogh North**. (Photo IAC Ltd)

Neolithic pottery was recovered from post-holes to the north-west of a *fulacht fiadh* in **Ballyvaltron** and may represent the truncated remains of another house structure. Hearths, pits and post-holes together with prehistoric pottery, some decorated, supplied evidence of Bronze Age settlement at sites in **Coolcork** and **Ballinaclough**.

Many of the excavated *fulachta fiadh* incorporated fine, timber-lined, cooking troughs. Some of the timber linings have already been analysed as being of alder. At **Ballyclogh North**, a timber platform was present, consisting of nine split-oak planks held in place by pegs.



Close up of wicker lined trough uncovered at **Ballyclogh North**. (Photo IAC Ltd)

Another *fulacht fiadh* in the same townland contained a wooden platform and a cobbled stone surface, probably working areas adjacent to and surrounding the cooking trough. Two arcing channels through the cobbled area probably supplied water to the site and stake-holes in the base of the channels indicated that the water flow may have been regulated.

Another adjacent *fulacht fiadh* incorporated a sub-oval trough, with a double wicker lining. Three pieces of worked oak in the base of the trough displayed clear tool-marks. An adjacent pit, possibly a roasting pit, produced sherds of decorated prehistoric pottery.

early medieval/ medieval

A very significant find was uncovered while topsoil stripping a *fulacht fiadh* in **Ballynapark** townland. This was an eighth-ninth century bronze ladle or patera, an object type that people would probably be familiar with from the wine strainer of the **Derrynaflan** hoard. Such objects can be found in Viking female graves, river crossings, bogs and hoards.

The present find was embedded into the upper surface of a light grey coloured marl that directly underlay boggy ground. Though the ladle was located close to the burnt spread of a *fulacht fiadh*, it was not



Back view of bronze ladle or patera found at **Ballynapark**.

directly related to the site and no other associated artefacts were recovered with the object.

The ladle was immediately sent to the National Museum of Ireland for conservation work.

Other finds from the overlying boggy soil in the area of the site included the blade portion of a bronze socketed axehead, a gun money half crown of May 1690, two hammered 16th-century coins dating from the reigns of Henry VIII to Elizabeth I, three 17th to 18th century Williamite/Georgian copper coins and four miniature forged iron horseshoes.

early medieval/ medieval

Corn-drying kilns were excavated at two adjacent sites in **Coolbeg**. These were 'figure of eight-shaped' and are commonly dated to the medieval period. Provisional study of the fills has revealed high concentrations of carbonised cereal remains. Further examination and analysis will provide data on the cereal types being processed. Some of the kilns were located outside a ditched enclosure of uncertain date. The enclosure was sub-circular in plan and surrounded a smaller circular structure.

Post-medieval agricultural features were also investigated in **Coolbeg** townland that appear to predate the farming landscape recorded on the first edition Ordnance Survey mapping. These included field boundaries, agricultural furrows and lazy beds.

Ongoing Work

Specialist examination and study of the excavation archive is on-going, including artefact and environmental analysis and radiocarbon dating along with processing of site plans, mapping, photography and written documentation of the sites. This post-excavation phase of the works will result in the compilation of preliminary and final excavation reports, which in turn will lead into full publication of the excavation results.



Circular structure uncovered during excavations at **Coolbeg**. (Photo IAC Ltd)



Archaeologists excavating a site along the scheme. (Photo IAC Ltd)