



archaeological DISCOVERIES

1. background

The N8/N73 Mitchelstown Relief Road measures approximately 4.5km. It exits the existing N8 at Cloonlough, bypassing Mitchelstown to the west, and rejoins the N8 near the R513 junction, north of Mitchelstown. The route passes through the townlands of Cloonlough, Stagpark and Mitchelstown.

A programme of archaeological investigation was undertaken in advance of construction in order to identify and fully excavate any sites of archaeological potential along the route. These investigations consisted of an initial geophysical (magnetometry) survey across the accessible areas of the scheme carried out by Margaret Gowen & Co. The magnetometry survey recorded magnetic variations from beneath the sod that helped archaeologists identify locations of archaeological potential. This was followed by a programme of advance archaeological test trenching across the entire scheme which revealed a total of five areas of archaeological significance. These areas were fully excavated by Eachtra Archaeological Projects Ltd., on behalf of the National Roads Authority and Cork County Council.



Aerial view of archaeological test trenching carried out on the route of the scheme. (Photo Eachtra Archaeological Projects Ltd.)

3. miscellaneous sites

A high concentration of pits, post-holes and stake-holes were uncovered at Stagpark. No discernable pattern was evident, which made interpretation of the site difficult. Two sherds of probable Bronze Age pottery were recovered from the site. A single cremation pit was identified partially filled with burnt bone fragments. Several other possible cremation pits were also identified. A nearby cluster of eleven stake-holes were interpreted as a possible funerary pyre.



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

4. early medieval sites

Excavations at Stagpark 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 recovered from the kiln.



Stone lined key-hole corn-drying kiln uncovered at Stagpark. (Photo Eachtra Archaeological Projects Ltd.)

2. prehistoric

Domestic dwellings

Excavations in Mitchelstown revealed the foundation imprint of three houses.

House A comprised a shallow slot-trench foundation, with an internal ring of nine post-holes which would originally have supported timber and wattle walls, plastered with daub. There was also evidence for an internal partition wall. A patch of burnt clay marked the location of a hearth. Based on the nature and form of the house structure it was interpreted as a domestic dwelling with the potential for accommodating five to 15 people. **House B** was located c. 1m south of House A. It survived as a slot-trench foundation with an internal ring of nine post-holes. No hearth was identified within this structure, suggesting that it could possibly have been used as a livestock shed. Both houses cut through an earlier house foundation, **House C**. This survived as a ring of 11 post-holes, with a hearth located near its centre.



Aerial view of two circular settlement structures uncovered in the townland of Mitchelstown. (Photo Eachtra Archaeological Projects Ltd.)



Close up aerial view of one of the two circular settlement structures uncovered in the townland of Mitchelstown. (Photo Eachtra Archaeological Projects Ltd.)

Fulachta fiadh

The remains of a *fulacht fiadh* were also discovered in Mitchelstown.

This site was located at the base of an east-facing slope, next to the Gradoge River. A substantial, though heavily truncated, burnt mound was identified associated with a number of small irregular pits a short distance to the west. One of the pits had a charcoal-rich fill within which were large fragments from three prehistoric pottery vessels. These vessels are thought to date to the Early Bronze Age.



Stone lined key-hole corn-drying kiln uncovered at Stagpark. (Photo Eachtra Archaeological Projects Ltd.)

A small *fulacht fiadh* was also uncovered at Stagpark 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.

The badly truncated remains of two suspected *fulachta fiadh* were uncovered at another location in Stagpark. The trough was rectangular in shape. A small heavily decayed piece of timber was located at the base of the trough. Post and stake-holes were also recorded in the four corners of the trough. 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.