



archaeological DISCOVERIES

background

The N7 Nenagh-Limerick High Quality Dual Carriageway will extend north-eastwards from the N7 Limerick Southern Ring Road for 27.8 km before connecting with the N7 Nenagh Bypass in County Tipperary. The Nenagh Bypass will be upgraded to a dual carriageway as part of the scheme. The road is being developed by the National Roads Authority and Limerick County Council in conjunction with North Tipperary County Council.

Test trenching of the route was carried out by **Aegis Archaeology Ltd** and **Judith Carroll & Co. Ltd** in 2006. Excavation of the 150 archaeological sites identified, undertaken by **Aegis Archaeology Ltd**, **Headland Archaeology Ltd**, **TVAS (Ireland) Ltd** and the **Archaeological Services Unit Ltd (UCC)**, was completed in July 2007.



Early medieval enclosure at **Ballywilliam**. (Photo: AirShots Ltd)



Possible 17th-century fortification at **Castlecragra**. (Photo: AirShots Ltd)



Flint arrowhead found at **Kilnacranra**. (Photo: Headland Archaeology Ltd)



Bronze Age house at **Carrigatogher** (Harding). (Photo: Headland Archaeology Ltd)



Stone-lined cereal-drying kiln in **Carrigatogher** (Ryan). (Photo: Paul O'Keefe)



Medieval enclosure at **Ballintotty**. (Photo: Markus Casey)

prehistoric

The rolling pasturelands of north Limerick and Tipperary through which the new road passes are bounded to the south-east by the Silvermine Mountains and to the north-west by the Arra Mountains and the River Shannon. There is considerable evidence for prehistoric activity throughout this region from the Mesolithic period onwards. Excavations on the N7 have added significantly to this knowledge. Over 130 stone axeheads were found in **Tullahedy**, west of Nenagh, where investigations on a natural gravel mound revealed structural evidence for an enclosing palisade and two houses dating to the Early Neolithic period.

Continuity of settlement in this area is suggested by the discovery of 10 Bronze Age habitation sites in **Carrigatogher**, **Ballywilliam** and **Ballynahinch**. A total of 16 houses were excavated, most of which were situated on south/south-east facing slopes and constructed of circular slot-trench foundations and numerous post- and stake-holes. Artefacts recovered included chert and flint arrowheads, flint blades and large quantities of Bronze Age pottery. Cremation burials were located in close proximity to these sites, as were many of the 37 *fulachta fiadh*/burnt mounds that were excavated.

early medieval

Considerable variations in size, complexity and function were noted between seven early medieval enclosures

discovered on the scheme. A circular enclosure in **Rich Hill** was interpreted as a possible animal pen, whereas three inter-cutting enclosures in **Kilnacranra** clearly represent a succession of important settlements on the lower slopes of the Kilmastulla river valley. Evidence for cereal processing and/or metalworking was recorded at six of the enclosures. Artefacts retrieved included quern-stones, whetstones, a copper-alloy pin, blue glass beads, pottery and numerous iron objects.

medieval

Excavations in **Ballintotty**, east of Nenagh, revealed a multi-phase site consisting of two enclosures. Numerous quern-stones and the presence of cereal-drying kilns within both enclosures, coupled with an absence of habitation evidence, suggests that this site served a primarily industrial purpose associated with either nearby Ballintotty Castle or the hall-house recorded during excavations on the Nenagh Bypass in 1998.

post-medieval

A subcircular enclosure in **Castlecragra** showed evidence for possible internal and external palisade trenches. Metal detection survey recovered 16th and 17th-century coins, buttons, lead shot and possible side-arms fragments. This site was probably a military fortification and may represent an important discovery for the archaeological identification and interpretation of small-scale conflict sites from this period in Ireland.