

**N18 Ennis Bypass
and N85 Western Relief Road**

Site AR109, Ballaghboy, Co. Clare

**Final Archaeological Excavation Report
for Clare County Council**

Licence No: 04E0055

by Markus Casey

Job J04/01

(NGR 136800 177129)

1st August 2006

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Summary

Site name: N18 Ennis Bypass and N85 Western Relief Road, Site AR109, Ballaghboy, Co. Clare

Townland: Ballaghboy

Parish: Doora

Barony: Bunratty Upper

County: Clare

SMR/RMP Number: N/A

Planning Ref. No: N/A

Client: Clare County Council, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare

Landowner: Clare County Council, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare

Grid reference: 136800 177129 (OSI Discovery Series, 1:50,000, Sheet 58. OS 6" Clare Sheet 34)

Naturally occurring geology: Sandy boulderclay

TVAS Ireland Job No: J04/01

Licence No: 04E0055

Licence Holder: Markus Casey

Report author: Markus Casey

Site activity: Excavation

Site area: 637m²

Sample percentage: 100%

Date of fieldwork: 11th February 2004

Date of report: 1st August 2006

Summary of results: An excavation was undertaken with the intention of resolving potential archaeological features discovered during earlier testing. No evidence of archaeological features, deposits or artefacts was, however, found.

Monuments identified: None

Location and reference of archive: The primary records (written, drawn and photographic) are currently held at TVAS Ireland Ltd, Ahish, Ballinruan, Co. Clare.

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<i>Report edited/checked by: Graham Hull ✓01.08.2006</i>
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Report J04/01v

Introduction

This report documents the final results of an archaeological excavation of deposits that proved to be natural in origin (Site AR109) on the route of the N18 Ennis Bypass and N85 Western Relief Road at Ballaghboy, Co. Clare (NGR 136800 177129) (Fig. 1). The excavation forms part of the Ennis Bypass Archaeological Contract 6.

A preliminary archaeological report for this site was produced in June 2004 (Casey 2004).

The National Monuments Act 1930 (as amended) provides the legislative framework within which archaeological excavation can take place and the following government publications set out many of the procedures relating to planning/development and archaeology:

Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (DAHGI 1999a)

Policy and Guidelines on Archaeological Excavation (DAHGI 1999b)

Code of Practice between the National Roads Authority and the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands (NRA/MAHGI 2001)

Project background

As part of the National Roads Authority scheme for upgrading the N18 Limerick to Galway Road, Clare County Council, in consultation with NRA Project Archaeologist Sébastien Joubert, requested a series of archaeological investigations along the route of the proposed Ennis Bypass and a Western Relief Road. The proposed scheme has an overall length of 21km and involves the construction of a 13.8km eastern bypass of Ennis from Latoon, north of Newmarket-on-Fergus, to Cragard, north of Barefield. The Western Relief Road is 7.1km long and is to link Killow and Claureen (Fig. 1).

A number of sites of archaeological interest were known to lie on the route of the new roads and the mitigation strategy agreed by the Project Archaeologist and the national licensing authorities for these sites was preservation by record, i.e. full archaeological excavation. Further sites, without surface expression, were located as the result of intensive test trenching along the course of the road (03E1291 Hull 2003 and 03E1293 Roger 2004). As preservation *in situ* was not a reasonable option, the resolution strategy for these new sites was also preservation by record.

The archaeological excavation and post excavation work were funded by Clare County Council through the National Roads Authority and part-financed by the European Union under the National Development Plan 2000-2006.

Location, topography and geology

The site was located in the townland of Ballaghboy, parish of Doora, barony of Bunratty Upper and lay approximately 3km east of Ennis town centre (the O'Connell Monument) and was centred on NGR 136800 177129 (Figs 1 and 2).

The site lay in an area of poorly drained rough grazing divided by overgrown drystone walling into fields of partly cleared hazel scrub. The area under investigation lay immediately south of a low natural hillock (Plate 1).

The excavated area lay at approximately 10m above Ordnance Datum (OD).

Topsoil 0.06-0.15m thick overlay the natural geological deposits of sandy boulderclay.

Archaeological background

As part of the environmental assessment process for the road scheme, Clare County Council commissioned desk-based and walkover surveys that formed part of an Environmental Statement (Babbie Pettit 2000) and an archaeological study for the Environmental Impact Statement (Doyle 1999). A total of 36 sites of known or potential cultural heritage significance were identified along the entire route of the proposed Ennis Bypass and Western Relief Road.

Earthwork and geophysical survey were undertaken on potential archaeological sites and invasive testing and excavation took place in 2002 and 2003 on some of the above ground sites affected by the proposed road (Aegis 2002, IAC 2003, Geoquest 2002, Earthsound 2003).

A systematic programme of testing along the new road route, involving the mechanical excavation of a central linear trench with offsets, took place in Summer/Autumn 2003. Twenty-two previously unknown sites, including cremation cemeteries, burnt stone spreads, enclosures and brick clamps were found (03E1291 Hull 2003 and 03E1293 Roger 2004). Monuments dating from the Bronze Age to the modern period were found.

Earlier phases of archaeological intervention on newly constructed stretches of the N18 (Dromoland to Carrigoran), to the immediate south of this road project, have demonstrated that the locality has a rich range of prehistoric and later monuments (99E0350 Hull and Tarbett-Buckley 2001).

Recent archaeological work on the BGE Gas Pipeline to the West in the neighbourhood of the new road route has tended to support the picture of continuous human activity in Co. Clare from the Neolithic and even becoming intensive from the Bronze Age. A number of burnt stone spreads and burnt mounds were excavated near the route of the new road in the summer of 2002 (MGL 2002).

Archaeological deposits were found during testing (03E1293 Roger 2004). Two pits were uncovered on flat ground immediately south of a hillock. A piece of glazed green pottery of late medieval date was recovered from one of the pits. The fill was a dark silt with frequent charcoal. A curvilinear feature was found on top of the hillock. This feature averaged 1.2m in width and was cut into a reddish brown boulder clay. Two small sections were excavated across this feature, which was shown to be 0.25m in depth and had no inclusions within the fill. This feature was recorded as being a field boundary that formerly enclosed the top of the hillock.

A potential archaeological site, AR110 (04E0056, Casey 2006), was excavated 650m to the south as part of the Ennis Bypass project. This proved to be a single pit with a charcoal rich fill, dated to the medieval period.

Excavation aims and methodology

A licence to excavate was granted to Markus Casey by the National Monuments Section of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, in consultation with the National Museum of Ireland, on behalf of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The licence number is 04E0055.

The aims of the excavation were to:

- 1) Preserve by record all archaeological deposits and features within the excavation area
- 2) Produce a high quality report of the findings

The fieldwork took place on the 11th February 2004 and was directed by Markus Casey, supervised by Richard Oram and assisted by Frank Mulcahy.

The excavated area measured from 16m to 23m north to south by 34m to 40m east to west (total area 637m²). Topsoil and overburden were removed by a 15 tonne, 360°, tracked machine, operated under direct and continuous archaeological supervision. The digger was fitted with a 6 foot toothless bucket.

All features were hand-cleaned then fully excavated.

A full written, drawn and photographic record was made following procedures outlined in the TVAS Ireland Field Recording Manual (First Edition 2003).

Excavation results (Plates 2 and 3)

The thin (0.06m-0.15m) layer of peaty topsoil lay directly on top of the natural sandy boulderclay.

No trace of the features uncovered during the course of the test excavations was found. Despite deepening the excavations to facilitate the search for the remains previously uncovered, no archaeological deposits were found.

Several natural depressions, reaching a maximum of 0.33m deep, within the surface of the boulderclay contained dark peaty fill. These depressions were all natural features of no archaeological significance. It is possible that the features described as two pits and associated ditches (Roger 2004) were destroyed during backfilling after the trial excavations.

Finds

No artefacts were recovered during excavation of site AR109.

Samples

No bulk soil samples were taken from the site, as no archaeologically significant deposits were recorded.

Discussion

The excavation of Site AR109, Ballaghboy, Co. Clare has shown no features, objects or levels of archaeological or historical significance.

It is possible that the features observed during testing were destroyed during backfilling after the trial excavations.

Archaeological potential off the road CPO

The potential archaeological deposits found during earlier testing (03E1293, Roger 2004) have been resolved in their entirety within the road CPO. No evidence for archaeological deposits was apparent immediately off the road CPO.

Publication plan

A summary of the findings of the excavation has been submitted to *Excavations 2004*.

Copies of this final excavation report will be deposited with the Clare County Museum and the Local Studies Library, Ennis, Co. Clare

A summary article, describing the findings of this road project has been published in the local journal *The Other Clare* (Hull and Taylor 2005).

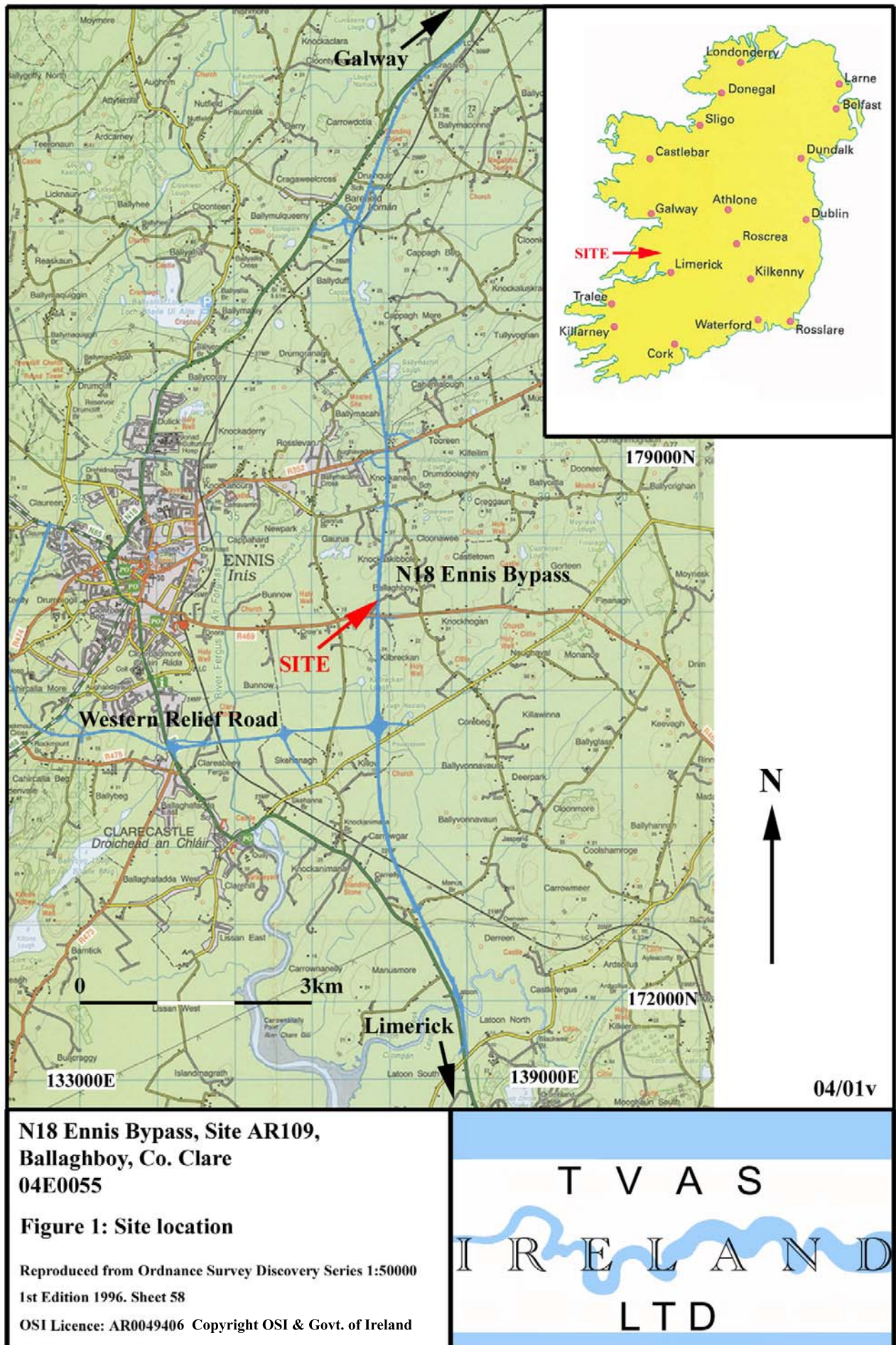
An illustrated information brochure describing the findings of this road project has been published by Clare County Council.

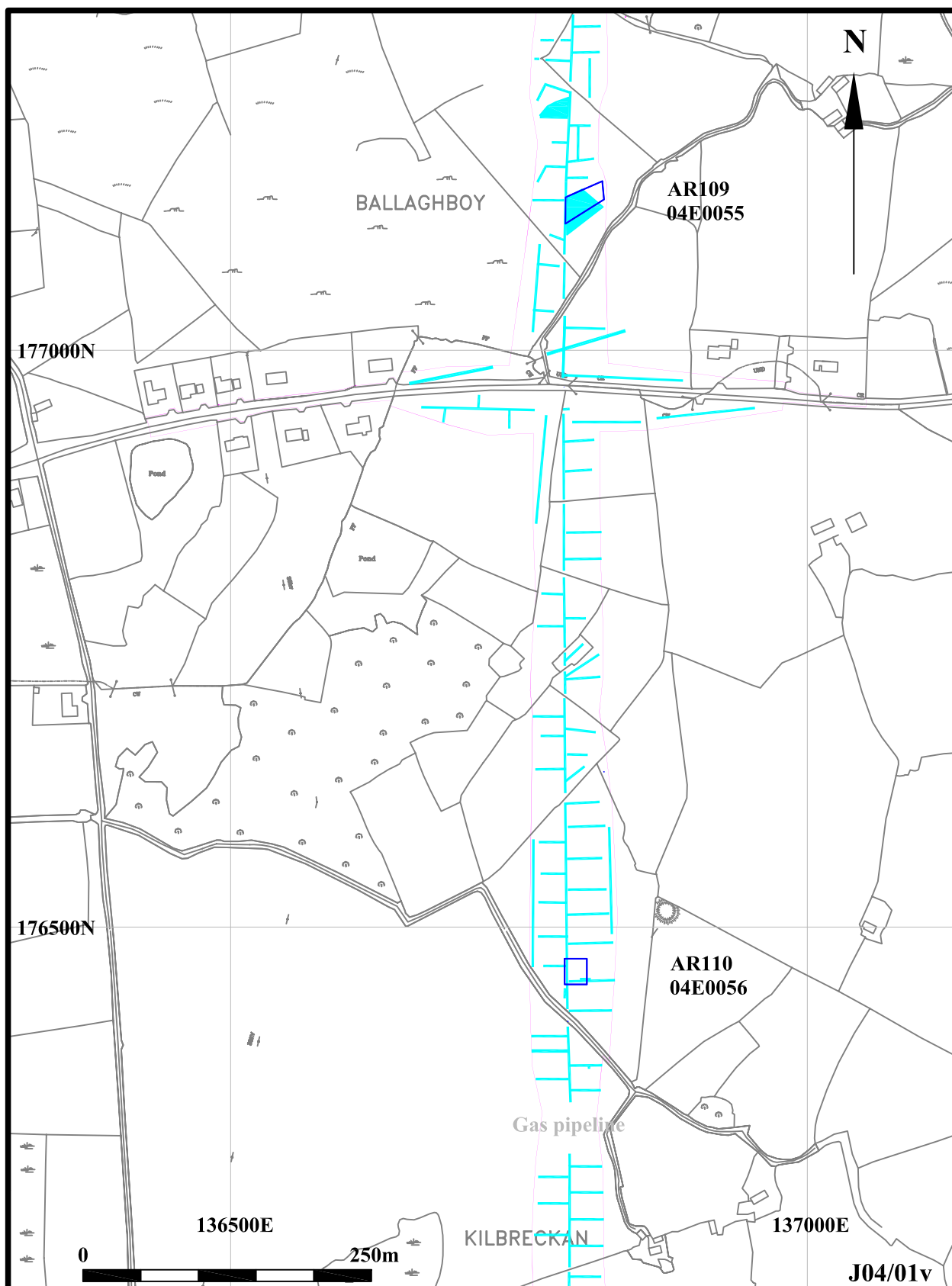
The stated aim of the National Roads Authority with regard to archaeological publication is clear, (O'Sullivan 2003) and it is anticipated that the negative results of this excavation will be disseminated as a small component of a monograph dedicated to the archaeology of the Ennis Bypass. Publication is expected to take place in 2006/7 at the latest.

Markus Casey
For TVAS Ireland Ltd
1st August 2006

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N18 Ennis Bypass, Site AR109, Ballaghboy, Co. Clare

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Figure 2: Location of site in local landscape, showing test trenches (03E1293)

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Plate 1. Aerial view of site looking west



Plate 2. View of site after stripping showing natural boulderclay. Looking east



Plate 3. Area of peaty fill within natural boulderclay close to the base of the hillock. Scale 1m. Looking north