

# what we found

## in brief:

Some of the finds from sites north of Dundalk.



1. Iron knife  
Early medieval iron knife from **Faughart Lower**. (Photo ADS Ltd)



2. Iron knife  
Early medieval iron knife with handle from **Faughart Lower**. (Photo ADS Ltd)



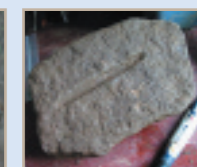
3. Lead ingot  
Lead ingot from **Faughart Lower**, possibly cast on-site.



4. Glass bead  
Early medieval glass bead from **Faughart Lower**. (Photo ADS Ltd)



5. Neolithic pottery  
Decorated Neolithic pottery from **Aghnaskeagh**.



6. Ingot mould  
Ingot mould found during excavations at **Faughart Lower**.



7. Bone comb  
Fragment of a bone comb from **Faughart Lower**.



8. Quernstone  
Granite quernstone, part of a deliberate backfilling to the souterrain at **Faughart Lower**.

# background



The low knoll converted into an early medieval settlement at **Faughart Lower**. (Photo StudioLab)



Archaeologist excavating a burial at **Faughart Lower**. (Photo ADS Ltd)

The **A1/NI Newry-Dundalk Link** is 14 km with 5.7 km of link roads. It starts from Cloghoge roundabout in **Co. Armagh** near Newry in Northern Ireland and extends to the Ballymascanlon roundabout near to **Dundalk, Co. Louth**.

The archaeological work for this scheme was undertaken by **Archaeological Development Services Ltd (ADS Ltd)** on behalf of the **Road Service of Northern Ireland**, the **National Roads Authority** and **Louth County Council**.

Although this area has been extensively studied for its

standing Neolithic remains, the wealth of finds uncovered through the advance archaeological works was spectacular. One archaeological site followed another from **Dundalk to Drumad**, representing a period from the 4th millennium BC until around AD 1000. The Northern Ireland section did not reveal significant archaeological remains.

The two main archaeological periods identified were Neolithic and early medieval. The Neolithic showed extensive settlement through four rectangular buildings and a Long Cairn (also known as a court tomb). The early medieval revealed souterrains, or underground passages, and a massive banked and ditched (multi-vallate) enclosure containing more than 870 human burials.

**A1/NI NEWRY DUNDALK LINK,**  
Counties Armagh and Louth



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Counties Armagh and Louth



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# archaeological DISCOVERIES

## front cover images

**LEFT:** Archaeologist excavating a long-cist at **Faughart Lower**.  
**RIGHT:** Archaeologists excavating the Neolithic building at **Plaster**.  
**MIDDLE:** Aerial view of site at **Faughart Lower** after excavation. (Photo StudioLab)



# neolithic

## long cairn at aghnaskeagh

The recorded monument at **Aghnaskeagh** was 'unclassified' before excavation. A mass of collapsed cairn stones were carefully removed to reveal about 40% of the Long Cairn (the rest lies untouched outside the road lands). The roughly 'A' shaped monument was built with a drystone kerbing and central gallery walls without the use of 'megaliths,' or large stones. It was sited on a natural terrace overlooking Dundalk to the south. Inside the central gallery plenty of deposits of cremated human bone were recovered. The northern side of the monument was originally a large hollow which was later filled with stones and acted as an external ceremonial surface upon which was a flat, circular setting of stones, perhaps to

support a large wooden object, possibly an 'altar'. Cut into this surface were several pits and cists, some of which contained cremated bone.

The kerb for the monument appears to have been rebuilt once. Left untouched - perhaps out of respect? - was a circular side chamber set within the monument's bulk.



Archaeologists recording the **Aghnaskeagh** Long Cairn. (Photo ADS Ltd)

# neolithic

## buildings at plaster



Neolithic building uncovered during excavations at **Plaster**. (Photo ADS Ltd)

### Neolithic buildings at Aghnaskeagh and Plaster

A group of three rectangular Neolithic buildings, found close to a stream at **Plaster**, were between 5 m by 4 m and 7 m by 6 m. One of the structures was built with a deep slot trench, vertical plank lining and packing stones. The other two were built with a slight slot trench and wattle walls. At **Aghnaskeagh** the building was rectangular with a slot trench and planked walls. Storage pits and pottery were found at both these sites, while several human cremation burials in rock filled pits were found at the Aghnaskeagh settlement.

### Cooking or cremation or both?

Neolithic or possibly early Bronze Age activity was sited next to a stream at **Faughart Lower**. Three unusual arrangements of a circle of shallow 'cremation-type' pits around a central hearth were uncovered. In one these a substantially complete pottery vessel was recovered. Next to one of the monuments an arc of stake-holes may indicate a windbreak or part of a hut. Several pieces of burnt bone recovered from some of the pits appear to be human. Other pits showed no evidence for burial and may have been used for cooking. The combination of cooking pits, buried pottery vessels, buildings and cremations on sites of this period was also seen on the **M1 Dundalk Western Bypass**.



Prehistoric Pits uncovered during excavations at **Faughart Lower**. (Photo ADS Ltd)

# early medieval

## settlement and burial at faughart lower

### Souterrain at Drumad

On the slopes of Feede Mountain a recorded, granite built souterrain was found within the road lands at **Drumad**. However, the underground passage has been avoided by construction works and preserved.

### Enclosed settlement at Faughart Lower

Overlooking the main route from **Dundalk** to the **Cooley Peninsular**, an enclosed settlement was uncovered at **Faughart Lower**. The site started as a double ditched enclosure dating from the fourth to the sixth centuries AD. As the site gained wealth and power, it expanded to become an 'ecclesiastic cashel,' or stone fort, up to 80 m in diameter containing at least 872 burials. The final 'cashel' wall was more than 3 m wide at the base and survived up to 1 m high in

places. Burial appears to have begun as a high status 'family' plot, perhaps in the fifth–sixth century AD. At some stage after this, the domestic settlement may have been replaced by an ecclesiastic site and burial ground serving an extensive local population until the end of the tenth century AD.

As the site expanded, some enclosure ditches were backfilled, re-dug, lined with stone and eventually had walls built on top of them. The early phases did not seem to include human burial but later a small area - about 15 m by 15 m - was set aside for a concentration of superb stone lined and capped 'long-cist' graves. As burial continued, the graves became more 'stone lined' and eventually there was a mass of simple earth-cut graves.



View inside the preserved souterrain at **Drumad** with plant roots hanging from the ceiling.



Detail of skeleton uncovered at **Faughart Lower**.



Curving length of souterrain at **Faughart Lower**.

# early medieval

## settlement and burial at faughart lower

The site also contained two souterrains. The first of these underground passages was a 'double ender' with a constricted entrance at one end and an exit into the outer enclosure wall. Due to high bedrock, part of the 40 m long chamberless souterrain may have been 'hidden above ground', inside one of the inner enclosure banks. As the souterrain was built across two earlier, backfilled ditches it eventually started to subside and was re-lined in places. Finally, it was completely backfilled. The backfill included a plough share, several ring pins and what appears to be deliberately placed pieces of rotary quern-stones.



The flooded base of a well sunk through one of the backfilled ditches at **Faughart Lower**. (Photo StudioLab)

The second potential souterrain was short (3 – 4 m), possibly with a small chamber at one end. Built entirely within a previously backfilled ditch, it had collapsed and been deliberately filled.

A notable feature was a well dug through another one of the backfilled ditches. 'Holy Wells' are often associated with cemeteries, and there is one at the nearby ecclesiastic site at **Faughart Upper**. However, since both wells were sunk adjacent to hundreds of graves, the water quality may not have been perfect.

Across the site were found more than 1000 sherds of souterrain ware pottery and some highly decorated glass beads. A lead ingot recovered may have been cast on-site as an ingot mould was also recovered. Masses of discarded, crushed sea shells suggest a dye extraction process.

Due to extensive disturbance by recent agriculture, no trace of any building was found. The stones from the Faughart Lower souterrain were numbered and donated to Dundalk Institute of Technology for study and possible re-construction.

The Faughart Lower site must have had extensive links with the important Early Medieval ecclesiastic site at Faughart Upper less than two kilometres away.