
# Monitoring Report No. 19

**Finvoy Road**

**Knockans**

**Co. Antrim**

AE/05/161

Ronan McHugh

**Site Specific Information**

*Site Name:* Finvoy Road, Co. Antrim.

*Townland:* Knockans

*SMR No:* Ant 022:027

*State Care* No

*Grid Ref:* C 9566 1938

*County:* Antrim

*Excavation License No:* AE/05/161

*Planning Ref / No:* 2005/0249/O & D/2005/0250/O

*Date of Monitoring:* 8th December 2005

*Archaeologist Present:* Ronan McHugh

*Brief Summary:* The evaluation was undertaken on the site of an access laneway which is intended to serve a development of a single dwellinghouse and garage. The laneway is located in close proximity to the recorded site of a souterrain (Ant 022:027) A single test trench measuring 40 metres x 2 metres was excavated along portion of the proposed laneway to evaluate the potential impact of the proposed development on any archaeological material present.

*Type of monitoring:*

Excavation of a test trench by mechanical excavator equipped with a grading bucket under archaeological supervision

*Size of area opened:* 80 $m^2$

*Current Land Use:* Grazing

*Intended Land Use:* Means of access to a residential development

## *A*ccount of the monitoring

*Introduction*

The evaluation was undertaken on the site of a proposed access laneway designed to serve the development of a dwelling and associated garage at Finvoy Road, Knockans, Co. Antrim. The access laneway opens onto the east side of the main Ballymoney – Finvoy road (B62), at a location within 50 metres of the site of a recorded souterrain (Ant 022:027), which is to the west of the road (Fig 1). The precise location and full extent of the souterrain are not known and, as souterrains are regularly found in association with a wide variety of Early Medieval sites (Edwards 1990, 29), archaeological evaluation was required to assess whether the development of the access laneway in such proximity to the souterrain site would have an adverse impact on hidden archaeological remains.

The site is located in a relatively flat, trapezoidal field of well-drained grazing land (Fig 1). The route of the laneway will extend approximately eastwards from the western edge of the field, across a gentle south-west facing slope. The northern edge of the proposed laneway has already been delineated by a wire-and-post fence that extended from the hedgerow defining the western boundary of the field, up to the site of the proposed dwelling. The stipulated width of the access laneway was 4 metres (north-south). The evaluation was confined to the area of the laneway site in closest proximity to the recorded site of the souterrain (Fig 2).

*The Evaluation*

The evaluation was carried out on the 8th December 2005. In accordance with the terms of excavation licence AE/05/161, a single test trench measuring 40 metres east-west x 2 metres north-south was excavated along the centre of the proposed laneway (Fig 2). It ran parallel to the wire-and-post fence at a distance of 1 metre to the south of the fence. The western edge of the trench was located as close as was practicable to the western boundary of the field (Plate 1). The excavation was carried out by a back-acting mechanical excavator equipped with a grading bucket under the supervision of the licensed archaeologist.

A thin sod (Context 101) was removed along the length of the trench to expose a mid-brown sandy loam topsoil (Context 102) which varied in depth from 0.2 – 0.35 metres. The topsoil

contained small nodules of quartz and flint while the presence of a number of rounded basalt boulders within the soil matrix is probably attributable to upcast material from the development of the B62 in the 1960's. Immediately beneath the sod layer, approximately 37 metres from the west edge of the trench, a dark, north-south running linear feature, lined with angular flagstones (Context 109) had been cut into the topsoil. This feature was identified as the modern conduit for a water-mains pipe, and was consequently not disturbed during the excavation.

Underlying the topsoil was a layer of sticky orange and gray iron-panned clay (Context 103), which contained evidence of recent agricultural activity. At least five stone-lined field drains and the remnants of a possible field wall were associated with this layer (Fig 3). The westernmost field drain (Context 104) was recorded at 3.6 metres from the west of the excavation trench. It had a maximum width of approximately 0.2 metres and was filled by mainly rounded stones and pebbles (Plate 2). The maximum recorded depth of this drain was 0.3 metres. A small fragment of 20$^{th}$-century machine-produced pottery was recovered from this feature. The exposed portion of the drain was relatively complete, although the drain itself was no longer functioning.

Three further drains (Context 105, 106, 107) were recorded between 10 and 18 metres from the western edge of the trench. These were all comprised of similar rounded pebbles as the westernmost drain (Context 104) and the dimensions were broadly similar. These three drains had been disturbed at various places along their lengths (Fig 2). No cultural material was found in association with any of these three drains.

The largest of the stone-lined field drains (Context 108) occurred approximately 33 metres from the west edge of the trench. It had a maximum width of 0.9 metres and was composed of significantly larger stones than the other drains. The largest exposed stone had a maximum length of 0.8 metres, width of 0.5 metres and height of 0.3 metres. Inspection of this drain showed that it was still functioning.

In addition to the five field drains, there was a sixth feature stratgraphically related to the iron-panned clay layer (Context 103), which was also probably relict of modern agricultural activity at the site. A mound of unevenly dumped angular and rounded basalt boulders (Context 110) extended north-south across the excavation area approximately 23 metres from the west edge

of the excavation trench (Plate 3). This feature had a maximum width of 1 metre and height of 0.4 metres. Spreads of similar boulders were noted in the iron-panned clay soil (Context 103) for up to 2 metres to the east and west of the feature (Context 110). A fragment of a plastic container confirmed a relatively modern date for the feature, which possibly represented the remains of an earlier field boundary. The earliest OS maps for Antrim did not show field boundaries and, while no boundary definitively corresponding with this feature (Context 110) is depicted on any of the subsequent editions, local tradition recalls that the field was formerly divided into "three or four" smaller fields by a series of north-south running boundaries which have since been removed (G. Gaston pers. comm.). The seemingly random deposit of the stones comprising the feature (Context 110) and the presence of spreads of boulders similar to its constituent boulders within the soil on either side is consistent with the suggestion that the feature discovered during the excavation (Context 110) had either been significantly disturbed or possibly represented a spoil-heap created during an episode of field clearance, perhaps associated with the removal of the earlier boundaries.

The depth of the iron-panned clay layer (Context 103) varied between 0.3 and 0.7 metres across the excavation trench and it produced few artefacts. A sherd of probable 18$^{th}$-century creamware and a fragment of 20$^{th}$-century machine-produced modern pottery were recovered from this soil (Context 103). Stratigraphically beneath the iron-panned soil layer (Context 103) was a layer of tenacious orange clay with weathered basalt inclusions, which was the subsoil (Context 111). There were no archaeological features associated with this stratum.

*Conclusion*

The evaluation was carried out in the area of the proposed development closest to the probable site of the souterrain. After evaluating the test trench, no archaeologically significant features or artefacts were discovered, suggesting that there is no surviving archaeological material associated with the souterrain on the site of the proposed laneway. It is therefore unlikely that the development of the access laneway will have any archaeological impact.

**Archive:**

Finds: 3 sherds of pottery. Held by CAF.

*Photographs: 3 d*igital images included in report. Originals held by CAF.

*Plans / Drawings: 3* drawings included in report. Originals held by CAF.

Signed:_____

Date:_____

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Gary Gaston, agent for the developer, for his comments on the recent history of the site.

## References

Edwards, N. 1990. *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Ireland*, London.

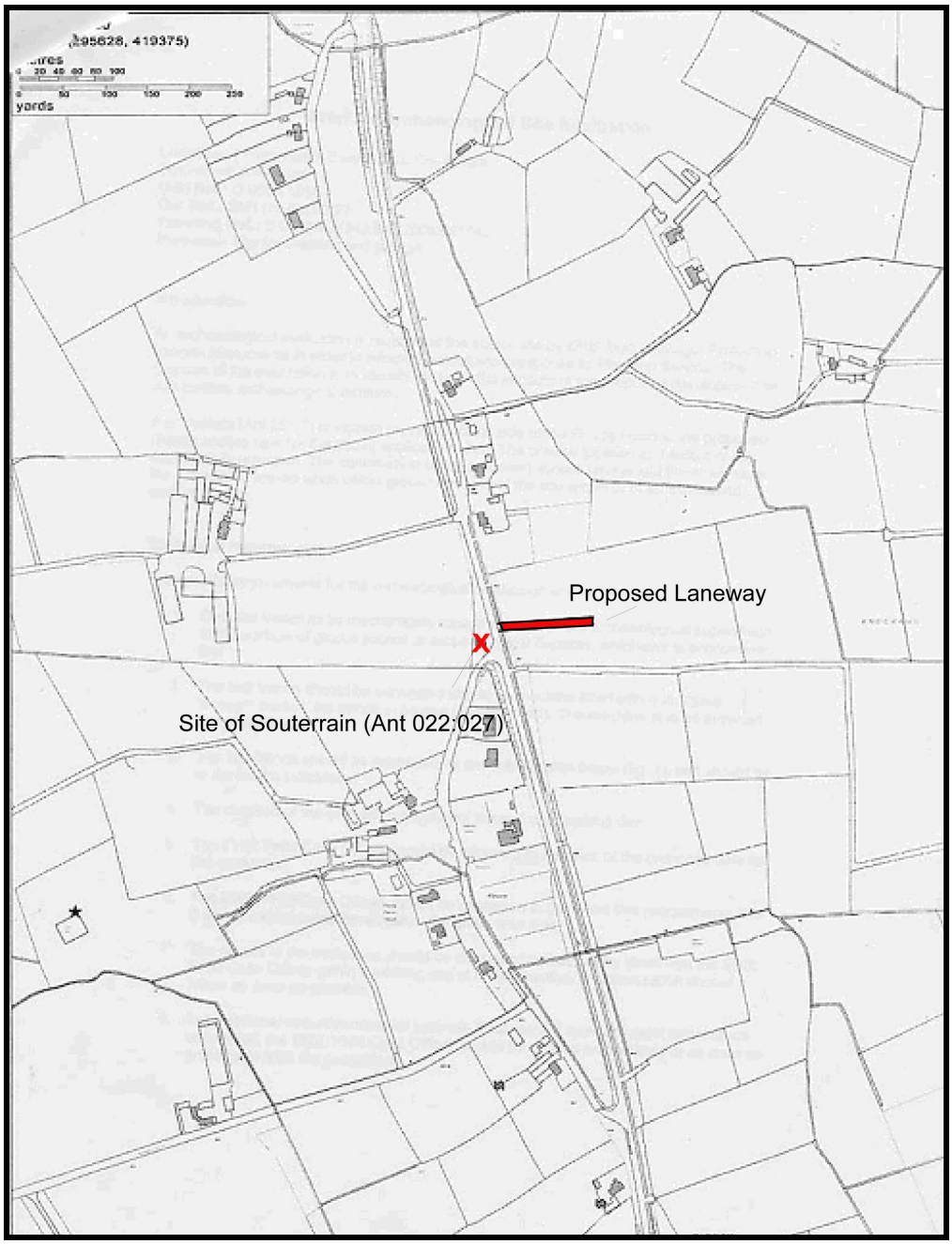


**Fig 1.** Location map showing respective position of recorded site of souterrain and proposed access laneway (From map furnished by PHM).

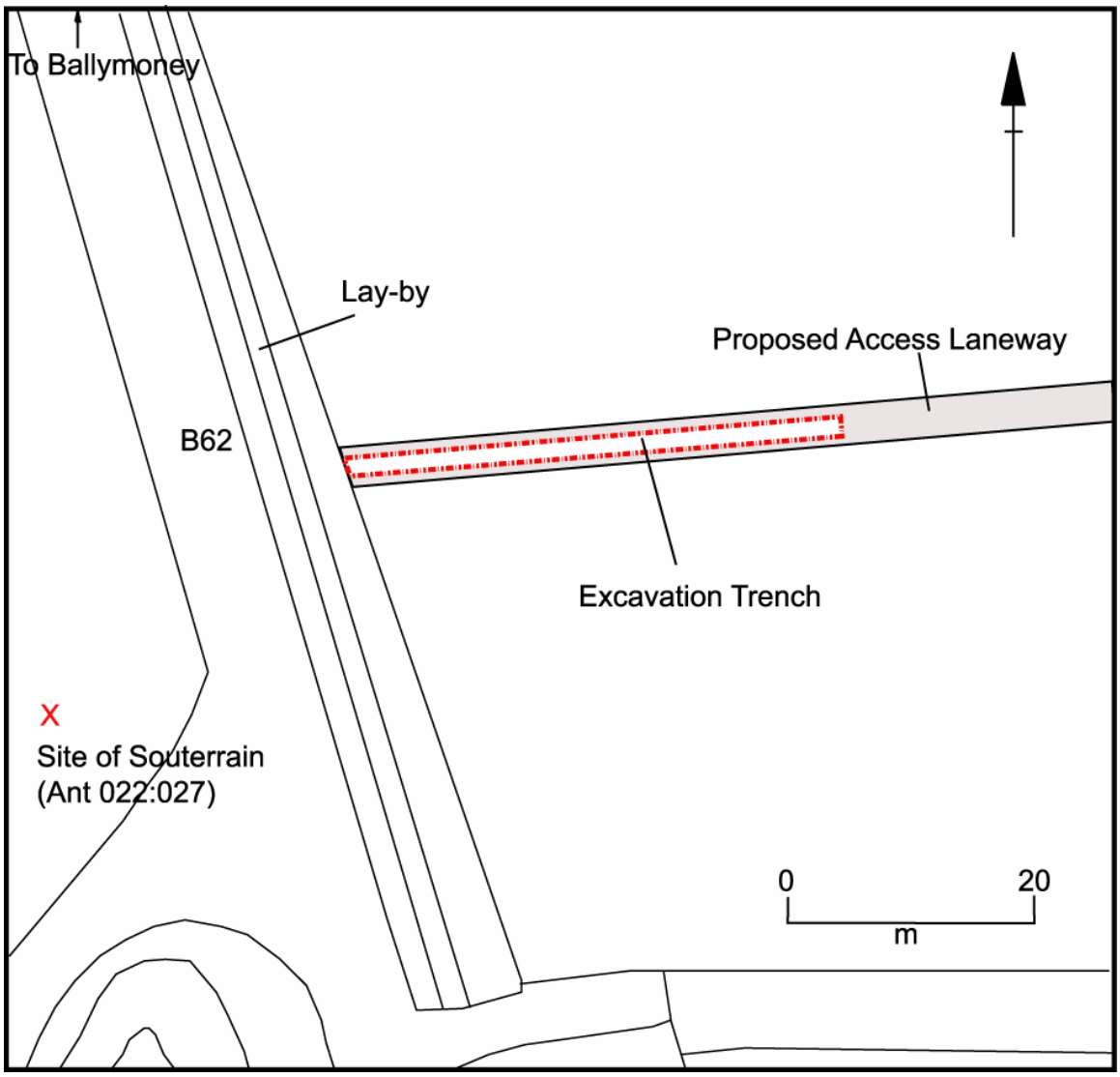


**Fig 2.** Location of excavation trench and proposed access laneway.

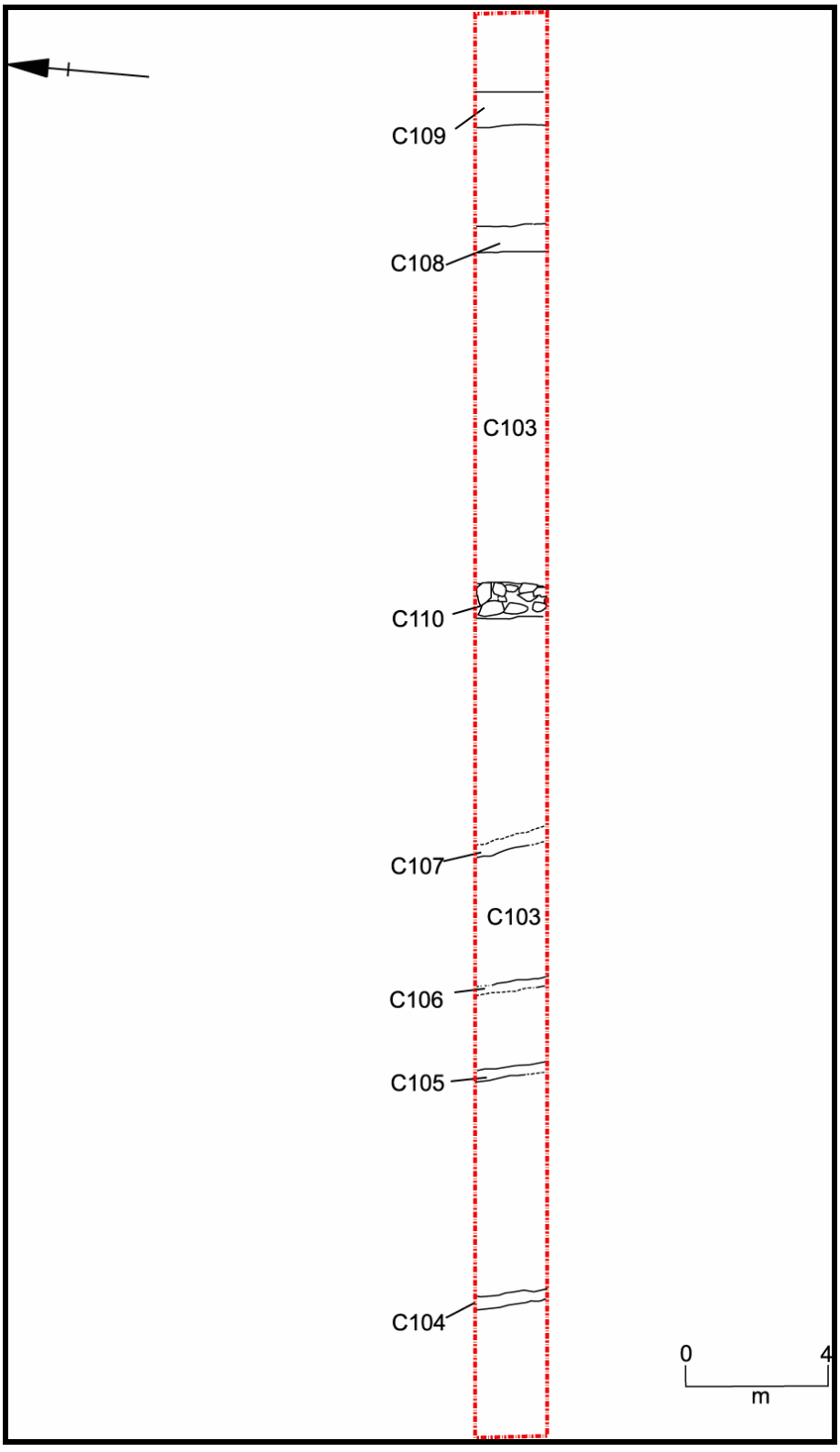


**Fig 3.** Excavation trench after excavation of sod and topsoil.

**Plate 1.** West end of trench following excavation (Facing west). The hedge defining the western boundary of the field and the wire-and-post fence defining the northern edge of the access laneway are clearly visible.

**Plate 2.** Field drain (Context 104) (Facing east).

**Plate 3.** Probable field boundary (Context 110) (Facing north).