

archaeological DISCOVERIES

background

Between 2000 and 2003, archaeological testing and excavations were carried out by **Mary Henry Archaeological Services Ltd** and **Archaeological Consultancy Services (ACS Ltd)**, in advance of construction of the 4.5 km N4 Sligo Inner Relief Road on behalf of **National Roads Authority, Sligo County Council** and **Sligo Borough Council**.

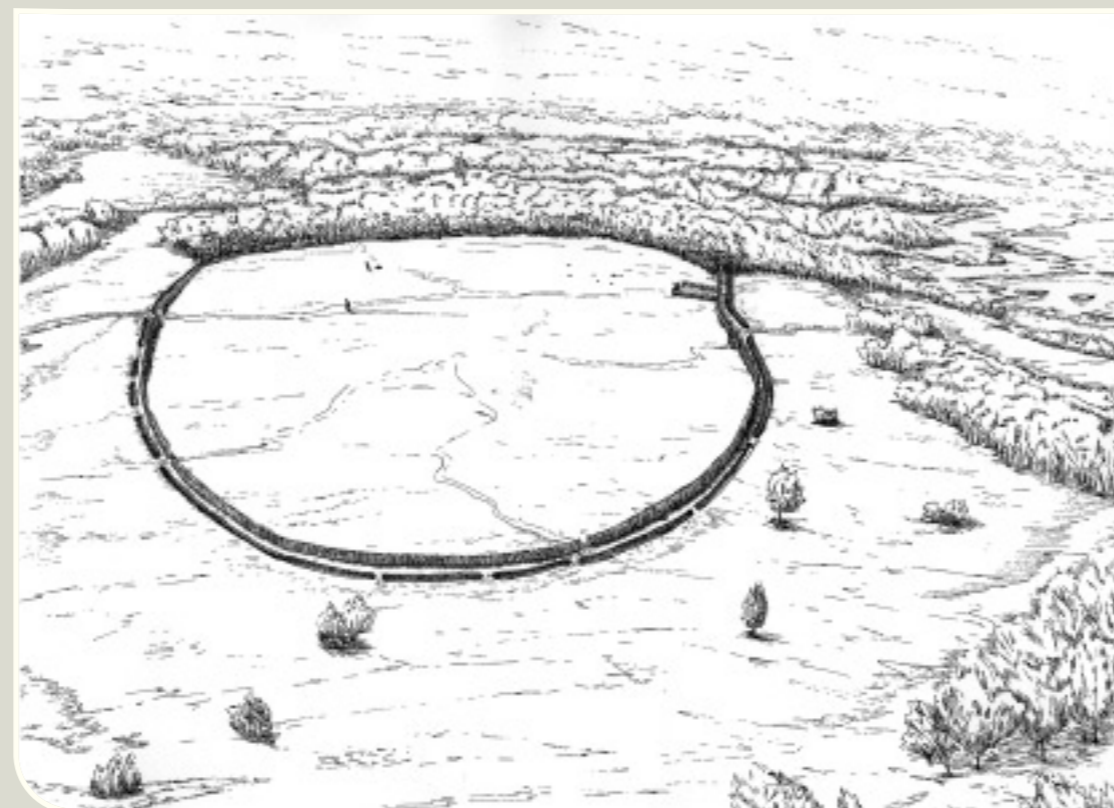
Most of the 30 sites excavated, with the exception of an early medieval ringfort, were prehistoric in origin, predominantly Neolithic and Bronze Age in date. Of these, a single site can be clearly interpreted as settlement—three Bronze Age round houses in the townland of **Caltragh**, though a probable Iron Age hut was identified at **Magheraboy**. Spreads of burnt mound material and *fulachta fiadh*/burnt mounds account for 17 of the sites excavated, while a causewayed enclosure, a ceremonial enclosure, a drystone-walled enclosure, six cremations, a possible megalithic tomb and two clusters of Late Neolithic pits accounted for the remainder.



Aerial view of test trenching and henge at **Tonafortes**. (Photo: Markus Casey)



Selection of quartz from the causewayed enclosure at **Magheraboy**. (Photo: Jonathan Hession)



Reconstruction drawing of the causewayed enclosure at **Magheraboy**. (Drawing: John Murphy)

magheraboy causewayed enclosure

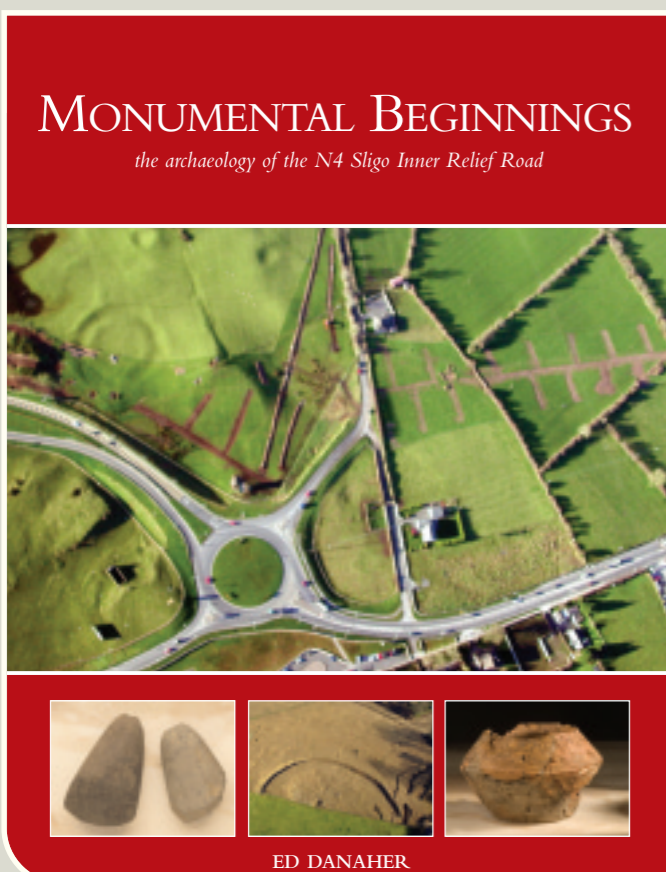
The earliest feature on a prominent elongated ridge at **Magheraboy**, on the outskirts of Sligo town, was a large causewayed enclosure, dating to the Early Neolithic period. The late fifth/early fourth millennium BC dates for the construction of this monument do not have any parallels in either Ireland or Britain, and one has to look towards western and eastern Europe for contemporary monuments. Measuring over 1.7 ha in area, the **Magheraboy** causewayed enclosure was delineated at its northern and southern sides by the remains of a palisade trench. Packing stones supported the upright posts that were once set into it and would have formed a fence c. 2 m in height, outside of which were a series of interrupted ditches. A range of Early Neolithic artefacts, including flint arrowheads, pottery, a deposition of quartz crystals and a broken porcellanite axehead were recovered from the ditches. The interior of the site contained 55 pits.

measuring c. 84 m in diameter. It was low-lying, with a view of the summit of Knocknarea Mountain and the court tomb known locally as Queen Maeve's cairn.

The road development impacted on a tiny portion of the enclosure and only this area was excavated. Results from the excavations have revealed that the henge was built in the Late Neolithic period between **2460–2140 BC**. The large enclosing ditch, which was up to 6 m in width and 2 m in depth in places, was transversed by an entrance causeway into the enclosure.

monograph publication

The launch of *Monumental Beginnings: the archaeology of the N4 Sligo Inner Relief Road* written by Ed Danaher took place in Sligo on 6 December 2007. This represents the first publication in the new NRA scheme-specific monograph series. The monograph brings together the results of the 30 excavations along the route, specialist analysis, radiocarbon dating and research. A CD-ROM at the back of the monograph contains the final excavation reports and all of the specialists' reports



Monumental Beginnings: the archaeology of the N4 Sligo Inner Relief Road



Aerial view of Neolithic causewayed enclosure and medieval ringfort excavated at **Magheraboy**. (Photo: ACS Ltd)

tonafortes henge

In the townland of **Tonafortes**, a wide ditch with traces of both an inner and outer bank delineated a large circular enclosure