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FINAL REPORT  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION  
*FULACHT FIADH*  
HILL OF RATH 2, Co. LOUTH  
NORTHERN MOTORWAY  
GORMANSTON to MONASTERBOICE  
00E0948



FINAL  
COPY

Valerie J. Keeley Ltd  
Archaeological Consultancy  
February 2003

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION  
*FULACHT FIADH*  
HILL OF RATH 2, Co. LOUTH  
GORMANSTON to MONASTERBOICE  
NORTHERN MOTORWAY  
00E0948



Project Director: Valerie J. Keeley Ltd  
Project Archaeologist: Kieran Campbell

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## SUMMARY

This report details the final results of the archaeological excavations undertaken at Hill of Rath Site 2, Co. Louth, on the route on the Northern Motorway, Gormanston to Monasterboice, on behalf of Meath County Council. The excavation was conducted by Kieran Campbell under Licence No. 00E0948, for Valerie J. Keeley Ltd., as part of the archaeological work preceding the construction of the Northern Motorway in Co. Louth. Hill of Rath Site 2 was identified during licensed archaeological monitoring of topsoil stripping along the route. The site most likely represents the remains of activities associated with a *fulacht fiadh*, and is therefore of probable Bronze Age date.

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

**Figure 1**      Site location on route of Northern Motorway, Gormanston to  
Monasterboice

**Figure 2**      Plan and section of Feature 1

## INTRODUCTION

This report details the final results of the archaeological excavations undertaken at Hill of Rath Site 2, Co. Louth, on behalf of Meath County Council. Archaeological monitoring of the initial programme of topsoil stripping preceding the construction of the Northern Motorway, Gormanston to Monasterboice was recommended in *Archaeological Assessment, Environmental Impact Study, Northern Motorway, Co. Meath* (Valerie J. Keeley Ltd. 1998, 16). Two features of archaeological potential were identified on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2000 during archaeological monitoring of topsoil stripping conducted by Kieran Campbell, under Licence No. 00E0282, for Valerie J. Keeley Ltd. (Valerie J. Keeley Ltd. 2002). The site was subsequently excavated over two days (30<sup>th</sup> June and 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2000) under Licence No. 00E0948, held by Kieran Campbell.

The archaeological brief for the site included the following measures; to fully excavate all archaeological features discovered in the area, to record all archaeological features or deposits which became apparent during excavation, and to compile a report detailing all of the above.

## SITE LOCATION

*Townland:* Hill of Rath  
*Parish:* Tullyallen  
*Barony:* Ferrard  
*County:* Louth  
*NGR:* 305254 278515  
*O.S. 6" Sheet:* Louth 21

The site was situated on fairly level low-lying ground (71.22m O.D.) at the base of a long slope from high ground (139m O.D.), with Balgatheran and Coolfore townlands to the north west. The site consisted of two archaeological features located on either side of an open field ditch in which there was strong flow of water running from west to east. This ditch was part of the field boundary which forms the dividing line between the townlands of Hill of Rath and Balgatheran to the north.

Feature 1, a deposit of burnt stone, was partially exposed when the bank and hedge on the south side of the field ditch was removed as part of the ground clearance for the motorway. The feature was located on a machine-cut slope 2m from the stream running in the ditch. The slope was created to enable vehicles to cross the stream.



This small-scale machine work was not monitored as the monitoring archaeologist was not informed of the fact that it was taking place. The archaeological deposit was subsequently noted by the monitoring archaeologist. The level of the exposed archaeological deposit was up to 1.2m below the top of the field bank, a portion of which survived nearby. It is estimated that Feature 1 may have been truncated by up to 0.4m by the machine works.

The second feature, Feature 2, was located 25m north of the field boundary and was therefore technically in the townland of Balgatheran (NGR 305239 278541). This deposit was uncovered on subsoil following the stripping of topsoil in the field.

## **EXCAVATION**

### ***Feature 1***

When first uncovered Feature 1 was recorded as a deposit of burnt stones in a grey silt with charcoal inclusions, measuring 0.9m north-south by at least 1.1m east-west (001 on Fig. 2). The deposit appeared to continue eastwards under spoil and unstripped ground. It was thought likely that further deposits would be uncovered when the site was archaeologically investigated. However, excavation revealed the extent of the deposit at 1.1m by 0.8m and that it was the fill of an ovoid cut 0.21m deep (Fig. 2). The excavated fill was a greyish black silt with charcoal inclusions and frequent burnt stones (up to 50mm size). The shallow concave cut into the gravel and clay subsoil represented only the base of the feature, which may have had an original depth of 0.6m. No other archaeological deposits or features were noted in the vicinity of Feature 1 during the investigation.

### ***Feature 2***

Feature 2 consisted of a kidney-shaped deposit of compact grey clay with abundant charcoal inclusions. The deposit measured 0.3m by 0.2m and was 0.2m deep, but no definite cut was identified.

## CONCLUSION

It is likely that the pit (Feature 1) filled with burnt stones and located beside a stream, represents the remains of activities associated with a *fulacht fiadh*, and is therefore of probable Bronze Age date. The name of these sites is derived from references in Early Irish literature to cooking sites for deer, which were used by the Fianna (Mitchell and Ryan 1997, 220). A variety of uses have been proposed, however the principal interpretations are as cooking sites and saunas (Buckley 1990, Barfield and Hodder 1987, Brindley 1989-90). The common elements on *fulachta fiadh* sites include a trough in which water was heated using fire-baked stones. The fire-shattered stones were discarded once beyond use, and are frequently found as a mound of burnt material. Troughs may be clay, wood or stone-lined, ranging from simple pits to more elaborate forms. Generally, they date from the Early to Late Bronze Age, particularly the latter. However, the shape and small size of Feature 1 suggest that it was not a trough. The pit had been damaged by machine excavation and its original dimensions are not known. Nor is it possible to say if ground clearance in the immediate vicinity of the pit had removed other deposits, for example, a levelled burnt mound. No burnt stone deposits were observed on the stripped surface of the subsoil, which extended to the limits of the road take, 20m to the east and 55m to the west.

Both Features 1 and 2 comprise part of the broader pattern of activity uncovered in this area during the pre-construction phase of the Northern Motorway. Pits of various sizes, usually sub-circular in plan and filled with burnt mound material, commonly occur in the vicinity of troughs on *fulachta fiadh* sites, but, as with the sites themselves, their purpose is unclear. Similar pits were found on other *fulachta fiadh* sites on this road scheme: at Mell 1 (00E0946), Mell 4 (01E0067), Mell 5 (00E0945), Newtown Monasterboice 1, 3 (00E0796) and Hill of Rath (00E0535).



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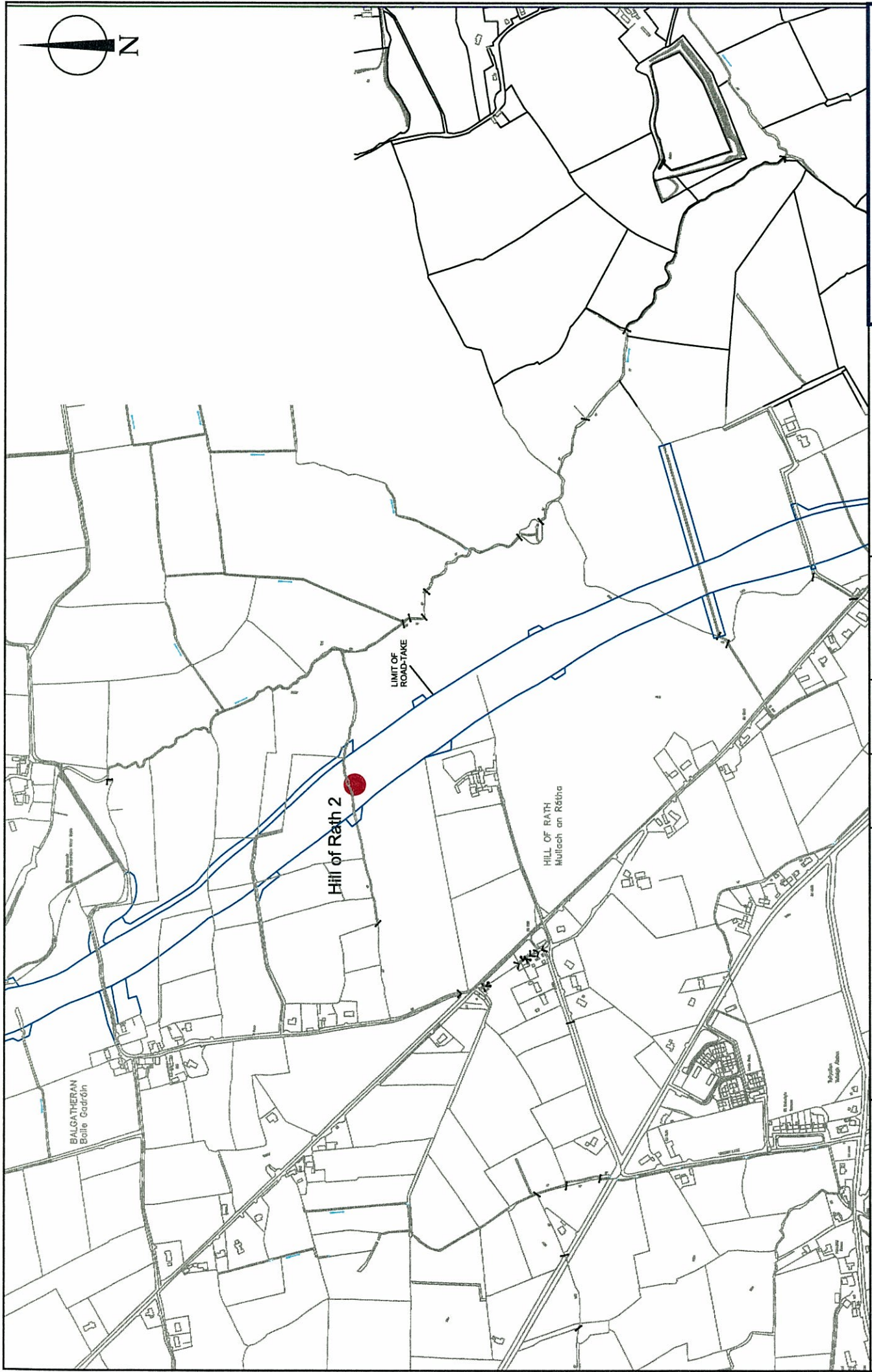
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**Title**  
HILL OF RATH - SITE 2  
SITE LOCATION ON ROAD

**Notes**

**Job/Exc No.**  
00E0948

**Date**  
18/01/02

**Compiled by**  
JM

**Scale**  
1:10000

**CAD reference**  
FIG1-zsite/location.dwg

**Drawing No.**  
FIG 1

**Client**  
MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL

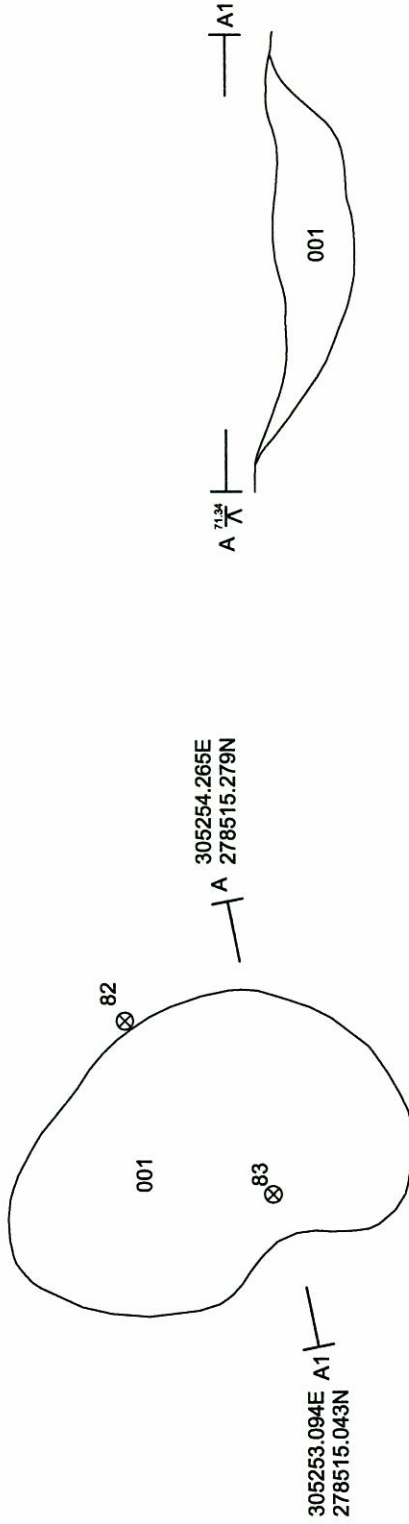
**Project**  
NORTHERN MOTORWAY, GORMANSTOWN TO MONASTERBOICE



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**Title**  
HILL OF RATH 2  
PLAN and SECTION of 001

**Notes**

**Job/Exc No.**  
00E0000

**Date**  
20/09/01

**Compiled by**  
JM

**Scale**  
1/20

**CAD reference**  
FIG2.dwg

**Drawing No.**  
FIG 2

**Client**  
MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL

**Project**  
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