
5 A Transect Across the Landscape: the Line of the A830 Improvements

The position of the new road line provided an opportunity to test the idea of a core settlement area in Arisaig surrounded by less-favoured land. The road line starts within the proposed core at its south end and then runs northwards out into an apparently 'blank' area where the archaeological potential might be predicted to be low. The project employed two approaches in the study of this landscape: site-based archaeological investigations of the physical remains of past human activity and palaeo-environmental investigations of peat deposits to understand human impact on a landscape scale. It was hoped that the two approaches would provide complementary information on how the landscape had been utilized and evolved through time.

It must be stressed that the nature of the project was necessarily opportunistic as the position of the sample transect across the landscape was determined entirely by the position of the new road. Consequently, it displays both the strengths and the

weaknesses inherent in a project of this type. On the one hand, the investigation of a road corridor provides an archaeologically random sample of the landscape. It forces the archaeologist to examine ground that would otherwise be passed over on the way to a more promising destination. In these circumstances, the potential for serendipitous discoveries is high as the archaeologist is less able to allow preconceptions to drive the design of the project. On the other hand, a road corridor is unlikely to provide a structured sample of a landscape and will not allow the archaeologist to examine the full range of habitats in an area. In the case of Arisaig, the road line runs parallel to and inland from the coast. As a result, it avoids both the narrow cultivated coastal zone dominated by windblown sand and the higher hills that lie inland. We therefore collected no new data on these habitats and this has limited our ability to understand the evolution of the landscape as a whole.

Illus 3 (opposite) Map showing site locations along the proposed A830 road placement (from Ordnance Survey maps © Crown copyright)

