

Smiddy Wood, Applecross
Post-felling Archaeological Evaluation



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for

Applecross Landscape Partnership Scheme

Smiddy Wood, Applecross: Post-felling Archaeological Evaluation

1.0 Background

This evaluation, consisting of a desk-based evaluation and rapid walk-over survey, covers the recently felled areas of Smiddy Wood. It is proposed to remove all the stumps of the felled trees and replant certain areas while also leaving areas of open grassland. The aim of this evaluation is to identify any archaeological features on the ground or areas of potential archaeological interest and to propose mitigating action to be taken to avoid damage.

As the felled area is already crossed by one footpath, this evaluation also provides an opportunity to propose potential presentation and interpretation of archaeological or historical sites.

2.0 Archaeological Background

In 2003 the author was by Scottish Woodlands Ltd to carry out an archaeological evaluation of areas of existing and proposed forestry on the Applecross Estate, in advance of a programme of felling of mature 20th century coniferous plantings with replanting of certain areas. This evaluation took the form of a desk-based assessment of all available archive material and archaeological databases, followed by a walk-over survey, carried out on 3/4.12.03 and 11/12.1.04. Within the Smiddy Wood area (Area 17 in that report), the following archaeological features were identified:

- 17.1 Achichork Township** at NG 7160 4452. The site of the former township of Achichork, as recorded on the 1810 estate map and cleared soon after, to be replaced by improved fields. It originally straddled the stream, which now runs through a stone culvert. The stones from the buildings were probably used in the construction of dykes. The site is marked by a large old tree standing off the line of the beech avenue along the road, within the present coniferous plantings. Ploughing for the trees has brought up some stones which may be the remains of foundations
- 17.2 Achichork Township Enclosures** centred on NG 7195 4447. A group of irregularly shaped enclosures, recorded as the Achichork fields in 1810 and still as improved ground in 1880 although outwith the fields laid out after the clearance of the township. The enclosing dykes of rough boulder and rubble construction, still survive under the trees.
- 17.3 19th Century improved fields: dykes** centred on NG 4164 4448. Dykes constructed to enclose the improved fields after the clearance of the township. The E-W dyke is in poor condition, but the two NW-SE dykes are in good condition and have been left clear of trees.
- 17.4 19th century forestry dykes** centred on NG 7162 4420. Dykes running over the hill to Langwell and the Allt Breugaireachd, enclosing both areas of rough open ground and plantations as recorded on the 1880 map
- 17.5 Beech Tree Avenue** from NG 7158 4452 to NG 7183 4462. The row of beech trees between the road and the plantation is as recorded on the 1810 estate map, and therefore pre-date the construction of the road, originally running along the south boundary dyke of the Sardle parks.

The 2004 evaluation concluded:

There may be little of archaeological interest in the site of the former township, but it is recommended that care be taken during tree felling to minimise ground disturbance in this area, and that it be left as open ground in any replanting scheme, both for the benefit of archaeological investigation and for the interest of local historians and visitors. Similarly, where possible, the dykes, sites 2, 3 and 4 should be protected from damage during felling and during replanting by the usual exclusion corridors. At present the Smithy Woodland walk passes through this plantation, and if it follows the same route in the future, it may be of interest to provide open views of the township site and the enclosures (site 2)

Of the five sites listed above, site 17.2 lies within the still extant forestry to the SE of the felled area and site 17.4 lies partially within the felled area and partially within the standing forestry. Sites 17.1, 17.3 and 17.5 are entirely within the felled area and are re-evaluated below.

3.0 Historical Background

The main archaeological site within the evaluation area is Achichork, a pre-Clearance township. This is one of five townships around Applecross Bay named on early maps. Of these five, three have Norse names and two Gaelic, and it is possibly noteworthy that the two Gaelic-named townships, of which Achichork is one, are located at the upper edge of the good, sheltered arable ground. This might suggest that the better ground around what is now the home farm was colonised by Norse settlers and the less favoured land of Keppoch and Achichork was either retained by a pre-Norse population or only brought into use when Gaelic had again become the dominant language.

Achichork, (Gael: ‘field of oats’) is located on a narrow level terrace. The building cluster and corn lands are first depicted with some degree of accuracy on Roy’s military survey of the 1750s. Achfork (sic) is shown as a group of buildings just outside red lines depicting modern (mid-18th century) enclosures. As this is a representation rather than an accurate portrayal, it is difficult to equate these enclosures exactly to later boundaries, but it appears to indicate that all or part of the fields of the former township of Sardle are already enclosed. Planted lines of trees are indicated along the top of the bank between the Sardle fields and the shore. These would appear to be among the earliest plantings on the estate, and some of these trees may still be standing. No areas of planted woodland are indicated on Roy’s map.

The earliest surviving estate map, undated but probably drawn around 1810 or slightly later, after the accession of John Mackenzie, sixth laird, who introduced new ideas of estate management, show the township of Achichork as a tight cluster of eleven buildings straddling the stream, with two further buildings in the enclosed ground to the east and three to the west. Beyond and attached to the enclosed field to the east the map indicates the dykes of five irregular enclosures and what appears to be two small buildings. The land around the township group is shown as unimproved. To the SW are enclosures and improved ground which would appear to be associated with the township of Langwell, but part of these is named as Achichork Park, suggesting that the Achichork arable ground originally extended SW around the flank of the hill. North of the township, the dykes enclosing the Sardle fields are lined with an avenue of trees.



1. Roy's Military Survey of 1750s. Red lines indicate enclosures



2. Estate Map, c. 1810. Achichork township is right of centre

The removal of tenants from the townships around Applecross Bay to make way for estate improvements probably took place soon after 1810. A second estate map, undated but possibly drawn in 1857 when the estate was sold to Lord Leeds, still records the old township names, but these are likely to be only the names given to blocks of fields, as no buildings are

shown. At Achichork, the only feature shown is a dyke line which appears to run SW up the hill. The avenue of trees running up the stream is also clearly visible



3. Estate map c. 1857, dating to after clearance of townships.

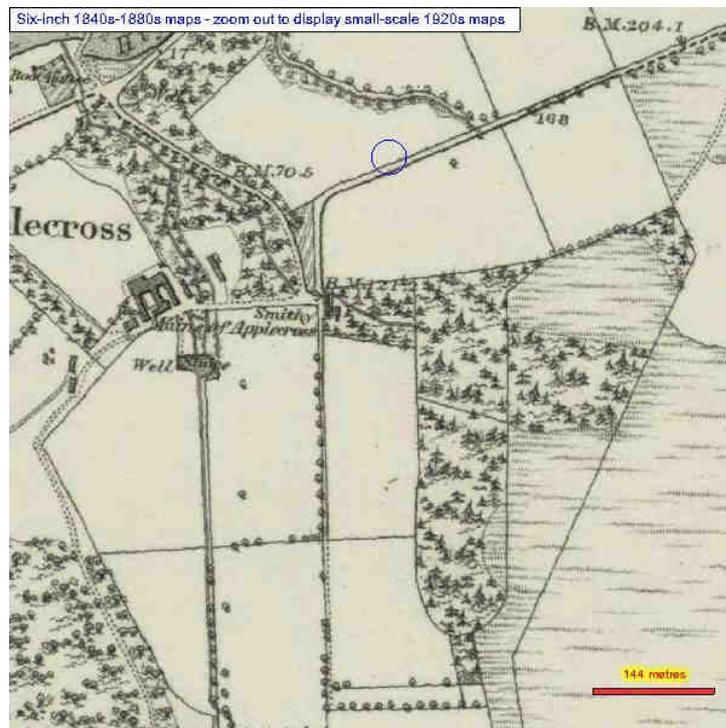
The farm buildings at the Home Farm were completed during the time of Thomas seventh Mackenzie laird, who died in 1827. In 1892 the farm was described as consisting of 164 acres of arable land under cultivation and 70 acres of former cultivation now in permanent pasture. It is assumed that the majority of the former populations of Borrodale, Langwell, Achachork and Keppoch were resettled in Milton and Shore Street.

The road from Applecross over the Bealach nam Bo was completed in 1822, one of the last to be built under the Highlands Roads and Bridges scheme. This runs immediately to the north of the beech avenue which formed the original field boundary and cuts through the Achichork township area.

In 1857 the estate was sold to the Duke of Leeds and again in 1864 to Henry Lord Middleton. He undertook a major programme of building roads and tracks, improving land, erecting fences and developing the deer forest. As no detailed maps cover the period between 1810 and 1880 it is not possible to date improvements made during this period and recorded on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map.

This map shows the two rectangular improved fields south of the road, with forestry plantations to the south and extending down to the smithy. A track runs SW from the road to the SE corner of the two fields. The stream which formerly flowed through Achichork township is not depicted although it is shown north of the road. A watercourse is shown running west to the smithy. There is also a boundary depicted crossing the long, N-S oriented plantation.

It is thought locally that the decision to convert the two good fields to trees was made with the introduction of tractors, which could not plough on the steep slopes formerly worked with horses. This would date this plantation to probably post 1940.



4. Ordnance Survey 1st edition, 1880.

4.0 Site Description

The felled areas of what is known as Smiddy Wood include the strip south of the road formerly occupied by the two rectangular improved fields and the area to the east of the old smithy. Both areas are on a marked slope, with few level areas. The largest level platform is the strip of ground immediately south of the road. A few mature beech trees survive south of the road at the east end of the felled area and the SW area is rapidly being colonised by gorse. Otherwise the ground is covered by stumps and brashings, with rushes taking hold between the strips of brashings. The original ground surface is therefore almost entirely obscured, including the site of Achichork village.

5.0 Gazetteer of Archaeological Sites

The following sites were noted during a rapid walk-over survey, carried out in dry and sunny conditions on 16.7.09:

1. **Retaining wall** from NG 7145 4445 to NG 7184 4462
The road, built in 1822, would appear to have dug into the natural hillslope and would have required a retaining wall on the upper side. The present retaining wall, however,

is later as it has been built around telegraph or electricity poles. These have now been removed to ground level but the stumps remain in the wall. This probably represents a first, small-scale widening of the road. The walling is not keyed into the bridge, which is in the 1822 style and is probably original. Where stones have tumbled from the wall they reveal subsoil rather than topsoil, indicating that there has been little slippage of ploughsoil down the slope.

2. **Beech Avenue** from NG 7158 4452 to NG 7183 4462
This is site 17.5 in the first forestry evaluation. Felling of the coniferous plantation now emphasises the limited number of surviving trees, likely to date to before 1810. These are grouped at the east end of the felled area. These are now also probably reaching the end of their lifespans and are vulnerable to proposals to widen the road further. They are, however, effectively the 'gateway' to Applecross, forming a welcoming contrast to the stark landscape of the Bealach. (Photo 1)
3. **Achichork Township** at NG 7160 4452
The 2003 evaluation noted: *The site is marked by a large old tree standing off the line of the beech avenue along the road, within the present coniferous plantings. Ploughing for the trees has brought up some stones which may be the remains of foundations.* At that time the ground surface was relatively visible under the standing trees; it is now obscured by brashings and rushes. The large old tree is now a dead trunk. (Photo 2)
4. **Trackway** from NG 7185 4460 to NG 7178 4445
This is the track running SW up from the public road to give access to the forestry and which forms a part of the Smiddy Wood walk. It is shown on the 1st edition OS map and probably dates to the early coniferous planting. There are no visible constructed features.
5. **Drystone Dyke** from NG 7173 4558 to NG 7178 4544
This is the eastern of the two dykes running SSE up the hill from the road and forming a continuation of the dyke below the road. It is not recorded on the 1810 map but is as shown on the 1875 OS map. It is in relatively good condition, of drystone construction with rough capstones. (Photos 3-5)
6. **Drystone Dyke** from NG 7164 4453 to NG 7166 44 40
This is the western of the two dykes running SSE up the hill from the road and forming a continuation of the dyke below the road. It is in good condition at the top of the slope but poor below and the lower 20m appears to have been deliberately robbed. (Photos 6-8)
7. **Watercourse, culvert** from NG 71633 44474 to NG 71646 44460
A section of culverted watercourse, which begins immediately east of the drystone dyke (site 6), crosses under this dyke and runs towards the road bridge. The water emerges from the culvert to run uncovered for the last 3m through a stone-lined channel. This channel is not straight but contains a small curved section on the west side which may be a baffle to slow down the flow or may be the remains of piers of a

previous bridge. Although the bottom of the watercourse is obscured by weed, there are suggestions of cobbling. (Photos 9-14)

The culvert is broken at one point west of the wall, where a shallow ditch runs down from the lower tank (site 8) suggesting that the break was deliberate.

What is shown as a natural stream on the 1810 map, running through the township of Achichork and through the higher enclosures associated with the township, is not recorded above the road on the 1st edition OS map, indicating that the culvert was built before 1875 and is possibly contemporary with the laying out of the improved fields.

8. **Water tanks** at NG 71661 44455

At the upper end of the built culvert (Site 7) are two water tanks, pipework, and diggings to expose the culvert, all enclosed within a recent post and wire fence which was probably erected during felling operations. The main, upper, tank is constructed partly of stone slabs and partly of breeze blocks with corrugated sheeting as a lid while the lower tank is iron with a stone slab lid. This smaller tank is attached to two pipes: the upper is lead attached to ceramic and runs into the ground to the west and the lower is ceramic with an iron stopcock and appears to drain into the open ditch leading to the break in the culvert. Around the tanks are scattered fragments of stone slab and above them, diggings have exposed two sections of the culvert. The upper section is dry and the water now flows in from an underground source to the west of the lower diggings. (Photos 15-18)

The function of these tanks is unclear but they may have fed a trough, now removed, for animals. They are not old and there should be some local memory about their use.

9. **Drystone Dyke, trackway** from NG 7145 4437 to NG 7178 4445

The remains of a dyke line which originally ran along the top, south boundary of the two north fields, terminating beside the smiddy cottages. It is almost obscured by earth in places and has probably been robbed of stone along the east section, but is more visible although dilapidated along the west section (Photos 19-20). Parallel to the dyke, but not visible along its eastern section, is a trackway which may be a continuation of site 4 and appears to be indicated by a double line on modern mapping (Photos 21-22)

10. **Turf and Rubble Dykes** at NG 7153 4432

This dyke is most visible within the unfilled section of Smiddy Wood, where it can be seen to be constructed of, at times, massive boulders and earth, running approximately E-W. (Photos 23-24) Where it enters the felled section, it joins a N-S running boundary which, running north, crosses the drystone dyke (site 9) but is obscured by gorse and other growth. South of the junction the N-S boundary is marked by a substantial bank. (Photos 23-27)

The style and location of the E-W dyke suggest that it is a pre-improvement boundary dyke and it is likely to have formed the boundary between Achichork and Langwell or Sardle township lands.

The N-S boundary appears to correspond to the forestry boundary, an elongated U-shape, as recorded on the 1875 OS map. It is possible that this is following an earlier line. The eastern side of this is marked by a deep ditch, this is still within the unfilled area.

11. Watercourse from NG 7145 4437 to NG 7153 4432

What appears to have been a natural watercourse, straightened and diverted to run down to a stone lined channel and culvert adjacent to the smiddy cottages. The watercourse emerges from the ditch forming the east side of the U-shaped forestry enclosure and is joined by another ditch or cut channel running from the SE. Where it emerges into the felled section it is deeply cut but eroded and obscured by vegetation until about 10m above the cottages, where it enters the stone-lined channel which takes it to beside the north gable and thus into a culvert under the road.

The work involved in diverting the watercourse and constructing the channel would suggest that the water was possibly required for the smithy and could be collected from the channel as required. This feature is shown in the 1875 OS map, as is the smithy.

12. Dyke, boundary from NG 7145 4413 to NG 7753 4413

The south boundary of the felled forestry area is a dilapidated drystone dyke, formerly a field boundary as shown on the 1875 OS map and part of the 19th century improvements filed layout.

6.0 Analysis of Sites

Chronology: Of the twelve sites identified within the felled area, three date to the pre-improvement period, seven to the 19th century and two to the 20th century as follows:

- 18th century, pre-improvement: sites 2, 3, 10
- 19th century, period of improvements: sites 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12
- 20th century: sites 1, 8

Site type: The majority of these sites are field boundaries or trackways associated with land management and water management features. The notable exception is the site of the former township of Achichork (Site 3)

State of preservation: The sites range from visible features in the landscape to either obscured by regenerating vegetation or removed by improvements such as field clearance and ploughing as follows:

Good preservation and visibility: sites 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12

Poor preservation, low visibility: sites 2, 9

Obscured by vegetation: sites 10, 11

Removed by improvements: site 3

Interest and potential for interpretation and presentation: the majority of sites are probably of minor historical interest to the public. The exception is Achichork township, site 3 which, although no visible features survive stands as an example of the thoroughness of removal of the Clearance townships in the area. The beech avenue, site 2, is an interesting feature of early improvements.

7.0 Recommendations for Mitigation and Management

These recommendations are based on Forest Enterprise's 'Forests and Archaeology' guidelines.

Removal of stumps and brashings: Stumps within or on archaeological features, particularly the area of site 3, Achichork township should be left in the ground to rot naturally rather than cause further damage to potential sub-surface features or deposits by uprooting them. This will also apply to stumps of trees growing on or immediately adjacent to linear dykes and water features, sites 7, 9, 10 and 11. Brashings should be removed from the sites without causing damage to the ground surface.

The designation of areas for replanting should avoid the archaeological features. Standard recommendations on the dimensions of areas to be left unplanted around individual sites or groups of sites should be adhered to. Generally an area 20m in diameter is adequate around an individual structure such as the footings of a building, and a corridor 5m in width along the route of a dyke or other linear feature. Settlements, field systems and other groups of features should be treated as one site, and the exclusion zone left unplanted should extend beyond the outermost features of the site. The relationship between sites should be considered

The archaeological features lying within areas fenced for regeneration are more in danger of being obscured by increasing undergrowth, particularly, in this case, gorse, which is already a problem on the western part of the felled area.. Periodic monitoring and clearing of growth from sites is recommended, with priority given to Achichork township.

The visibility of sites should be taken into consideration in the design of replanting. Viewpoints overlooking Achichork from the Smiddy Wood walk, for example should be left unimpeded by trees.

8.0 Recommendations for Access and Interpretation

As mentioned above, the majority of sites are of minor historical interest except as elements in an historical landscape. However, in terms of a pre-improvement or clearance landscape, there are sites more complex, better preserved (at present) and potentially more accessible to presentation and interpretation at Keppoch, where the footings of houses survive in an open landscape, or at Torgarve where extensive pre-improvement enclosures exist within the forestry. A improved agricultural landscape is more visible in an unaltered form around the home farm.

The potential for interpretation of these sites lies in their accessibility from the existing Smiddy Wood walk. Careful design in replanting, as recommended above, will ensure that the features remain visible and historical and archaeological notes can be added to a trail leaflet. This should allow both for distant views and for closer examination. An extension path leading down to Achichork would allow access to that site without requiring visitors to walk along the road.

It is recommended that the beech avenue, site 2, be replanted to return to its original 18th century extent, particularly to ensure that new trees are growing before the remaining original trees die. This should not be done until any road widening work is completed. A pathway leading east from Achichork, behind the beech avenue, could complete the loop back to join the Smiddy Wood walk.

9.0 Smiddy Wood, unfelled areas.

It was noted during this re-evaluation of Smiddy Wood that a number of archaeological sites are located within the area of the wood as yet unfelled. Good practice during felling is reiterated, particularly the locating and marking out of sites before felling, extraction methodology to minimise damage to sub-surface features or deposits, leaving the stumps to rot naturally and the immediate removal of brushings. Identification and marking could be carried out by members of Applecross Archaeological Society.

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2.8.09

Appendix 1: Bibliography and Data Sources

The following data sources were consulted during this evaluation

- Highland Historic Environment Record (HER), held by the Archaeology Unit within the Department of Planning and Development at Highland Council
- National Monuments Record for Scotland (NMRS) held by the RCAHMS in Edinburgh
- Early maps held by the Map Library within the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh
- 1810 and 1837 estate maps held by the Applecross Estate

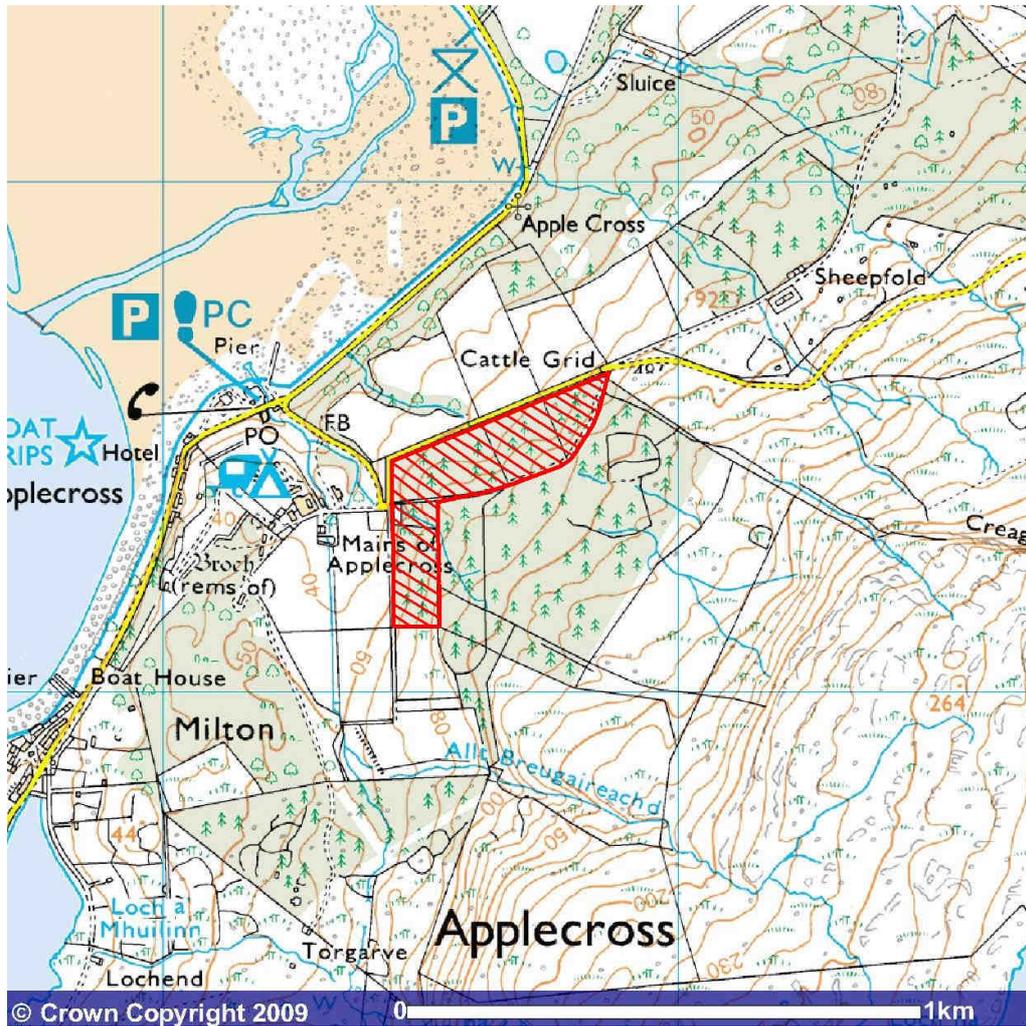
The following publications provided background information to this evaluation

Alston, D. 1999: *Ross and Cromarty: A Historical Guide*
Beaton, E. 1992: *Ross and Cromarty, an Illustrated Architectural Guide*
MacKenzie, I. 1999: *A'Chomraich: A Glimpse of History*
Statistical Account of Scotland: Parish of Applecross, 1791
New Statistical Account of Scotland: Parish of Applecross

Appendix 2. Photographic Record (digital)

Photo no.	Site no.	Description	Viewpoint
1	2	Beech avenue: four of the remaining trees of the 18 th century planting at far end of felled area	From S
2	3	Achichork township: area of former township on level ground in front of road line	From S
3	5	Upper part of drystone dyke, collapsed section showing profile of dyke	From S
4	5	Upper part of drystone dyke	From S
5	5	Dyke descending slope and continuing on same line on north side of road	From SW
6	6	West drystone dyke, section at top of slope on good repair	From E
7	6	West drystone dyke descending slope, passing through area of Achichork township and continuing on same line on north side of road	From SE
8	6	West drystone dyke, section at top of slope on good repair	From W
9	7	Open watercourse running to road bridge	From S
10	7	Open watercourse exiting culvert	From N
11	7	West bank of watercourse, narrowing section representing former bridge pier or water baffle	From E
12	7	West bank of watercourse, curve of walling in narrowing section	From SE
13	7	Watercourse, narrow section and possible cobbled area	From N
14	7	Watercourse, detail of narrowing walling	From N
15	8	Water tanks, general view	From NW
16	8	Smaller water tank and outflow pipes	From S
17	8	Larger water tank, east end constructed of stone slabs	From S
18	8	Section of culvert exposed by digging SE of tanks	From NW
19	9	E-W drystone dyke, remaining lower courses	From N
20	9	Drystone dyke adjacent to path of Smiddy Wood walk	From E
21	9	Trackway adjacent to drystone dyke	From W
22	9	Trackway adjacent to drystone dyke	From W
23	10	Turf and rubble dyke, surviving section within unfelled area	From S
24	10	Turf and rubble dyke, surviving section within unfelled area	From W
25	10	Dyke emerging from unfelled area	From SW
26	10	N-S dyke, probably forestry boundary, at junction with E-W dyke	From W
27	10	Artificial bank forming south part of N-S boundary dyke	From N
28	11	Watercourse descending to smith cottage through stone-lined channel	From SE
29	11	Watercourse passing north gable end of cottage in stone and concrete channel	From E
30	11	Watercourse passing north gable end of cottage in stone and concrete channel	From W

Plan 1. Location of felled area of Smiddy Wood, Applecross



Plan 2. Location of archaeological features within felled area of Smiddy Wood.

