

M3

# The M3 Clonee to North of Kells Road Scheme

## Archaeology Research Framework

National Roads Authority & Meath County Council, July 2005





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# *Background*

Meath County Council and the National Roads Authority plan to commence construction of the approved M3 Clonee-North of Kells Road Scheme in 2006. The route commences at Clonee on the border between Dublin and Meath with link roads to Dunboyne, Dunshaughlin, Navan and Kells. It joins the existing N3 north of Kells near the border between Meath and Cavan. It is approximately 60km long but with a significant quantity of additional link roads, covering a total of approximately 700ha.

Archaeology is an important part of all national road developments in Ireland. A Code of Practice for archaeology and national road schemes was agreed between the Department of Arts Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands and the National Roads Authority in 2000. Since 2001, the NRA and the Local Authority national road design offices have employed their own Project Archaeologists, to manage the archaeological implications of national road schemes.

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# Introduction

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# 1

Extensive archaeological work has now taken place on the whole of the planned M3 route, including desktop survey, field survey, geophysical survey, aerial survey and extensive test excavation. The archaeological investigations carried out to date have revealed approximately 160 new sites along the whole route. The next phase of work will involve further investigations in the form of topsoil assessment, including metal detection surveys and test pit excavations, and full excavation of these sites.

These investigations will generate a significant corpus of new data. Meath County Council and the National Roads Authority are committed to the dissemination of all significant excavation results for the public benefit. The Authority recognises that the publication of archaeological results is a key aspect of the mitigation of the impacts of road construction, while also being a contribution by a State agency to the cultural life of the Irish people as a whole.<sup>1</sup> However it is recognised, and it has been highlighted in the recent 2020 Archaeology Foresight consultative forum, that the lack of knowledge creation from the growing body of such data is one of the major challenges facing the archaeological profession in Ireland today.<sup>2</sup> In order to meet this challenge on the M3 project the next phase of investigations will be carried out under an overarching research framework.

<sup>1</sup> *Jerry O'Sullivan 2003 Reporting, Publication & Dissemination, Archaeology and the National Roads Authority, Monograph Series No. 1.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid; The Heritage Council's Unpublished Excavations Survey 1930-97; 2020 Archaeology: Knowledge creation through partnership, Draft for Consultation February 2005.*

## Research Potential

# 2

Previous research had demonstrated the high potential for new monuments all along the M3. Geophysical survey along the route of the M3 then spectacularly illustrated the potential for new sites. These included sites previously unidentified; or unidentifiable by other forms of non-invasive investigation. The test trenching confirmed and clarified the results of the previous investigations but most significantly, also identified numerous new sites that had not been identified by the non-invasive techniques.



**Metal detection survey as part of topsoil assessment at Dowdstown**



**Examining a palaeoenvironmental core on the M3**

In other words, the diverse methodologies adopted in the M3 archaeological investigations complemented each other, and used together have given a good understanding of the potential archaeological resource.

The next phase of work will include topsoil assessment, involving metal detection surveys and test pit excavations, and these will no doubt provide further information on the sites identified. However, it is only through excavation and post excavation that the significance of many of the approximately 160 sites may be understood. Nevertheless, the results to date have indicated sites that have the potential to significantly contribute to major areas of research.<sup>3</sup> For example, the settlement sites of probable early medieval date located in the broader landscape around the Hill of Tara will provide information about the use and occupation of the landscape away from the sacred space on the Hill itself. A large number of prehistoric sites, have been found west of Navan and south of Kells in areas with relatively little previously recorded prehistoric sites. The identification of these landscapes will therefore change our distribution of prehistoric occupation in Meath.

Clearly, the M3 Clonee-North of Kells road scheme is not an archaeological research project. The sites being investigated have not been chosen to answer particular research questions. Neither are they a completely random sample of sites through the county, because road developments usually deliberately avoid upstanding monuments and also have to adapt to various topographical and other environmental constraints. Yet it is perhaps because of this that they have had a tendency to uncover previously unidentified monument types that are changing the face of Irish archaeology. Thus the next phase of work on the M3 has enormous potential to contribute to archaeological research.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *The M3 Clonee-North of Kells Motorway, Archaeological Information Series, NRA and Meath County Council, July 2005.*

<sup>4</sup> *O'Rourke forthcoming Travels Through Time, Archaeology and the National Roads Authority, Monograph Series No. 2.*

Therefore, it is considered important that the M3 archaeological investigations adopt a broad-based research design. It is proposed below that all site investigations - while posing the routine research questions adopted by all professional archaeologists (e.g. ‘what is the character, date, function and occupation history of this site?’) - will also be carried out within a research framework. This will enable overviews, integrating diverse strands of evidence and creating an integrated understanding of sites and the relationships between them. The research framework described below provides this, and is also flexible enough to respond appropriately to archaeological discoveries.



**Stone foundations of circular building, possibly 17th century, Rath Hill**

## Aim

## 3

The aim of the M3 Archaeological Research Framework is to transform the data generated on the M3 archaeological investigations from ‘information’ to ‘knowledge’ which will be achieved with the following strategy:

1. The newly uncovered archaeological data will be placed in its archaeological, palaeoenvironmental and historical context.
2. The research potential of the information generated will be maximised.
3. The integrated results will be widely disseminated.



**Plano-convex flint knife recovered from topsoil near a possible round house at Boyerstown 3**



**Medieval worked antler and a bone pin fragment from Castlefarm**

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# Strategy

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- 1 The newly uncovered archaeological data will be placed in its archaeological, palaeoenvironmental and historical context.**

*Archaeological Context*

- The archaeological findings from the excavated sites on the line of the road will be compared and contextualised through detailed, research based landscape analysis.
- The findings will be integrated into a wider archaeological landscape study due to be undertaken by the National Roads Authority and the School of Archaeology, U.C.D. through a Newman Post Doctoral Fellowship in Landscape Archaeology.

*Palaeoenvironmental Context*

- The archaeological investigations will be complemented by local palaeoenvironmental studies directly linked to sites excavated.
- The palaeoenvironmental potential of the study area will be achieved where possible by reconstructing patterns of environmental change, including those caused by human impact, in the region over the past 9,000 years.

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### *Historical Context*

- A general historical background to the areas traversed by the whole route will be prepared.
- A detailed historical analysis of specific areas where archaeological sites of historic date are identified along the route will be carried out.
- A specialist survey of historical placenames will be commissioned.

## **2 The research potential of the information generated will be maximised**

All responsible recovery of archaeological data is informed by basic research principles and a collaborative approach to the creation of knowledge. To that end, the ongoing research of the various contributors will be internally communicated and co-ordinated to ensure that the maximum potential is extracted from the results of the work. In addition external professional input and feedback will be actively sought to ensure that any gaps in existing knowledge that could potentially be explored through the M3 investigations will be identified.

## **3 The integrated results will be widely disseminated.**

**Professional Archaeology** - The results of the work will be communicated to professional archaeologists and the wider academic community at regular intervals throughout the project.

**Public Archaeology** - To ensure the widest possible appreciation of the archaeological work the public will be kept fully informed of the research and excavation work.

# Implementation

# 5

Meath County Council and the NRA will implement the Research Framework in partnership with the archaeological consultancies carrying out the fieldwork on the scheme and the researchers appointed to carry out the studies.

The Research Framework will be further developed and implemented and will be regularly and independently reviewed and evaluated against its aims. External independent archaeological scholars will be sought to act as mentors to monitor the implementation of the Research Framework. The reviewers will provide advice directly or source and recommend suitable expertise in specialised areas.

A series of priority questions identifying important gaps in existing knowledge that could potentially be explored through the M3 investigations will be developed in collaboration with research bodies and these questions will inform the investigation strategy.



**Archaeologist recording features at Rath Hill**

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Achieving the aim of the Research Framework:

**1 Place the newly uncovered archaeological data in its archaeological, palaeoenvironmental and historical context.**

- An archaeological research project will be carried out in tandem with the archaeological excavations.
- Historical research projects will be carried out in tandem with the archaeological excavations.
- A palaeoenvironmental research project will be carried out in tandem with the archaeological excavations.

**2 Maximise research potential of the information generated**

- At the beginning of the next phase the project team will meet to present and discuss the aims of the research framework to ensure that their work is informed by the research framework from the outset.
- The ongoing results of each of these research projects will be communicated to all members of the team at regular intervals throughout the phases of the project. Seminars and workshops will be held to ensure that the Excavation Directors and the Archaeological, Historical and Palaeoenvironmental Researchers are informed by each other's work to maximise the potential of each study.
- The ongoing results of the projects will be communicated to external professional archaeologists at regular intervals throughout the phases of the project and feedback will be actively sought.

### 3 Maximise the knowledge creation from the information generated through wide dissemination.

#### *Professional Archaeology*

- An M3 archaeology information pack will be provided to the archaeological community, which will outline the background of the project, the results to date and proposed future work. Updates will be provided on a regular basis, in the form of inserts especially designed to build this information pack into a preliminary publication.
- A dedicated M3 web site will provide illustrated project updates throughout the project – [www.m3motorway.ie](http://www.m3motorway.ie)
- All sites under investigation will be open to visits from archaeologists. Open days will be held on a regular basis at key sites along the scheme for archaeologists and professionals from other related disciplines.
- The full technical reports of the work to date will be available for download on the M3 web site.
- As soon as possible after the completion of excavation and post excavation the final results will be published. In these publications the results of the excavations will be integrated with the results of the archaeological, historical and palaeoenvironmental studies to ensure that they are placed in a broader context, with an overview of the sites compared and contextualised. The results will be synthesised on a thematic basis.
- The ongoing and final results will be presented at archaeological seminars and conferences.

### *Public Archaeology*

- A dedicated M3 website will provide illustrated project updates throughout the project.
- Short illustrated booklets will provide progress updates to the public throughout the project.
- Open days will be held on a regular basis at key sites along the scheme for the general public, including local schools.
- The final results will be presented at a public seminar.
- The final results will be published in a non-technical public oriented form as soon as possible following completion of the project.



**Archaeologists testing a mound  
at Collierstown 1**



**Archaeologist recording a buried  
cremation in an urn at Collierstown 2**

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# Conclusion

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The M3 archaeological investigations will aim to properly investigate all archaeological sites, using a range of multidisciplinary techniques, as part of the mitigation strategy. The aim of the work to date, as well as that now being carried out, has been oriented to gain maximum information to inform research. Undoubtedly, these investigations will generate new discoveries that will contribute to our understanding of past societies, both in a local and wider context. The aim of the research framework therefore is to ensure that the data generated on the M3 archaeological investigations will be transformed from ‘information’ to ‘knowledge’.

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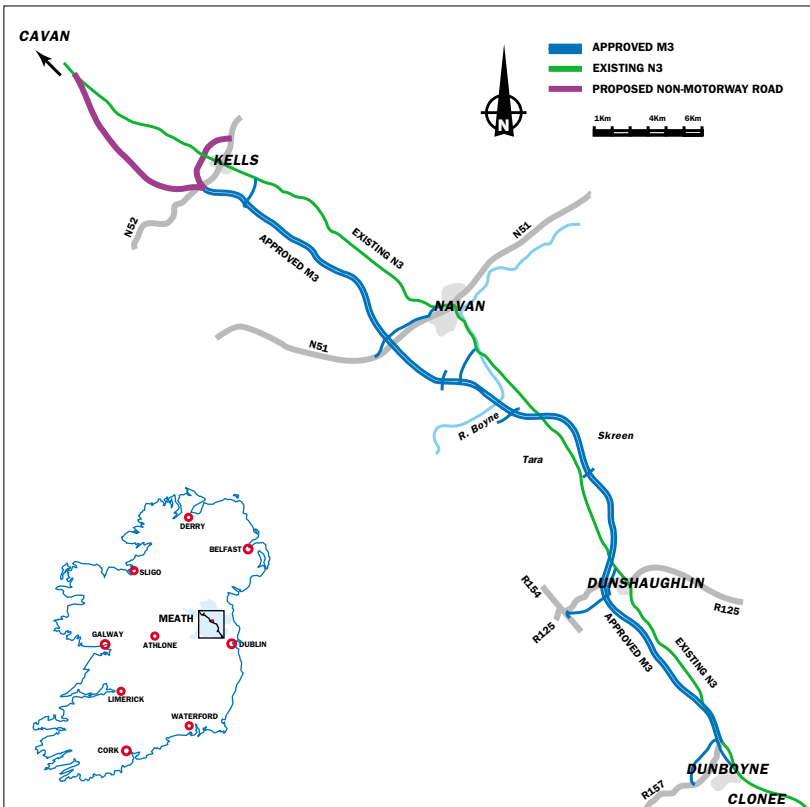
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Approved M3 Route





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**NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN**  
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