

Remains of Giant Deer discovered at Newrath Little

The remains of three separate giant Irish deer (*Megaloceros Giganteus*) were found during archaeological monitoring of construction topsoil stripping on the M3 Clonee–North of Kells Motorway.

These remains were discovered in marl underlying a peat bog on the Kells Bypass section at Newrath Little. They consisted of: Specimen. 1: a skull complete with antlers; Specimen. 2: a fragment of skull with attached single antler; and Specimen. 3: a fragment of antler. They were found by an archaeologist monitoring a tracked excavator at a depth of approximately 2–2.5m. The remains were immediately removed to ACS Ltd Site Office where identification and analysis began.

Preliminary Analysis

A preliminary inspection of the remains was carried out at ACS Site Office by Rachel Slaone, animal bone specialist. The remains were confirmed as giant deer and at this point were designated Specimen 1, Specimen 2 and Specimen 3. These remains represent a minimum of two animals.

Specimen 1 represents the most complete remains with the left antler still perfectly attached to the skull. The right antler also survives in tact but broken off from the skull.

Specimen 2 consists of a right antler attached to the partial remains of a skull.

Specimen 3 consists of an antler fragment.

Preliminary Discussion

As the specimens from Newrath Little comprise or include antlers, they all represent stags. Skulls and antlers dominate the assemblage of giant deer in Ireland and there is an acknowledged overrepresentation of male animals in retrieved skulls and antlers as well as post-cranial elements. It is believed that this represents a genuine pattern of death assemblage rather than being due to any collector's bias (Monaghan 1995, 172; Barnosky 1985). In addition to this, considering that most of the antler and bone remains of giant deer have been retrieved from bogs (Monaghan 1995), it has been suggested that stags may have had similar habits to red deer in that they segregated from the females during winter (Barnosky 1985, 340).

It is further suggested that the stags were likely to visit lakeshores and valley bottoms during the cold winter months where many died from malnutrition (*ibid*). Remains of giant deer are not found in upland areas suggesting that they inhabited plains rather than hills.

Giant deer bones are known from more than 400 locations in Ireland (Monaghan 1995, 171). The majority are found in late-glacial marl deposits of the Woodgrange (Allerød) Interstadial, underlying gravels of the Younger Dryas, and with ¹⁴C dates of 11,400-10,600 BP (Lister 1994, 72; Woodman *et al* 1997; Stuart *et al* 2004). The finding of giant deer remains is not without precedent on NRA Motorway Schemes in Ireland. In August 2004, giant deer remains were discovered in a bog along the route of the M8 Rathcormac/Fermoy Motorway Scheme. The findings were reported by Penny Johnston *et al* in the NRA's archaeological magazine Seanda Issue 1. The article can be accessed online at <http://www.m3motorway.ie/Publications/>

Bibliography

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Plate 1: Specimen 1 Intact antlers and skull (John Sunderland)



Plate 2: Side profile of Specimen 1 (John Sunderland)



Plate 2: Specimen 2 intact antlers and skull (John Sunderland)



Plate 3: Side profile of specimen 2 (John Sunderland)



Plate 3: Specimen 3 antler fragment (John Sunderland)