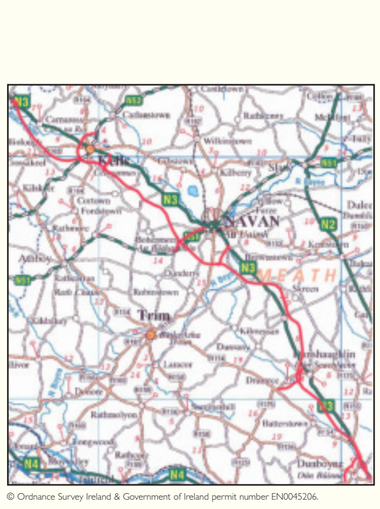
National Roads Authority
An tÚdarás um Bóithre Náisiúnta

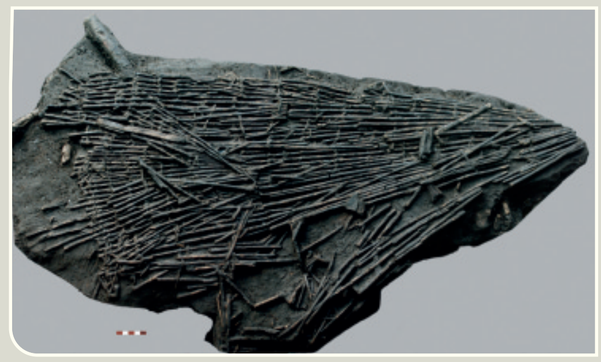


archaeological DISCOVERIES

background

The M3 Clonee–North of Kells Motorway Scheme is about 60 km long and archaeological excavation of 167 sites along the route was undertaken between 2005 and 2007. The archaeological work was undertaken by **Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd (ACS Ltd)** and **Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd**, on behalf of the **National Roads Authority** and **Meath County Council.**

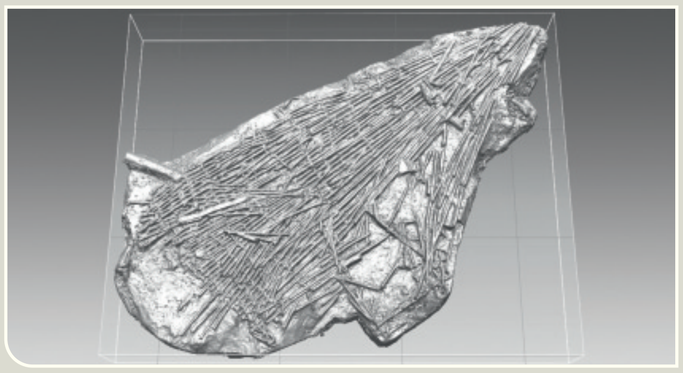
Archaeological, historical and palaeoenvironmental research and specialist analysis is ongoing in preparation for detailed publication of the full results. In the meantime updates on this work are presented on a dedicated website: **www.m3motorway.ie.**


Fish basket preserved in peat matrix for conservation. (Photo: John Sunderland)

catch of the day: clowanstown mesolithic fish baskets


Pawel Wolff and Joanna Kurkowicz illustrating one of the fish baskets. (Photo: Studio Lab)


A modern day example of a similar fish basket in use by Bamba tribesmen during their sacred ritual fishing festival held at Antigo Lake each year in Mali, West Africa. (Photo: Alain Buu)


Laser scan of a fish basket. (Image: Liverpool Conservation Technologies)

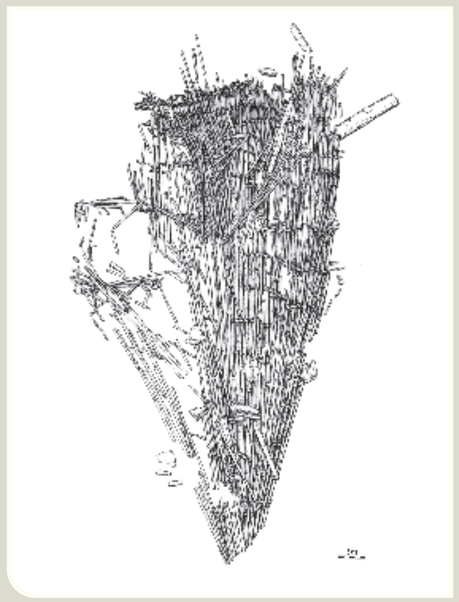


Illustration of one of the fish baskets. (Drawing: ACS Ltd)


Conservator Kasia Bernaciak conserving one of the fish basket fragments. (Photo: John Sunderland)

A spectacular discovery of the remains of four wooden fish baskets radiocarbon-dated to the Late Mesolithic period (c. **5000 BC**) was made during archaeological excavations at **Clowanstown**, Co. Meath, carried out by **ACS Ltd.**

The baskets were associated with what is currently interpreted as the remains of a possible mooring or fishing platform located on the edge of a lake shore, subsequently covered over by a raised peat bog. Later activity on the site included Neolithic burnt mounds with finds of polished stone axeheads, leaf-shaped projectile points, scrapers and polished stone pendants.

The conical-shaped fish baskets were made of narrow (2–8 mm in diameter) one to two year old stems, identified by **Headland Archaeology Ltd** as alder, birch and rosaceae. Pollen cores analysed from the surrounding area by **Birmingham University** have shown that these wood species were growing locally during the Late Mesolithic period.

basketry

Dr Maria FitzGerald has identified that the **Clowanstown** baskets were made by a weaving technique known as open twining in which pairs of wefts are passed around fixed vertical elements called warps. The four baskets recovered are classified as open-twined baskets based on the way the weft rows are placed at intervals along the warps. This technique is more commonly seen in fabric weaving and its use in the making of the baskets indicates that these weaving practises had been in use in Ireland for much longer than had previously been thought.

recording

Following careful excavation and subsequent micro-excavation in the laboratory, the baskets were extensively recorded and photographed. This included a highly detailed 3D digital laser scan using specialist non-contact laser scanning equipment, carried out by **Liverpool Conservation Technologies**, which scanned the basket remains to an accuracy of +/- 0.1 mm. This created an extremely accurate 3D computer model of the baskets that can now allow study to continue without any risk to the original remains.

conservation

Currently the baskets are undergoing an extensive and specialised conservation programme, which is being carried out by **Arch Con Labs** and **Margaret Gowen & Co. Ltd** in consultation with the **National Museum of Ireland**. They are being conserved in the peat layer on which they were originally discovered and once fully stabilised will eventually be freeze-dried by the National Museum conservation department. This process will enable the baskets to be preserved for future study and exhibition.

transport21 progress in motion
NDP National Development Plan 2007 - 2013
EUROPEAN UNION STRUCTURAL FUNDS

For more information please contact:
Archaeology Section, National Roads Authority, St. Martins House, Waterloo Road, Dublin 4.
Tel: +353 1 660 2511 **Fax:** +353 1 668 0009 **Email:** info@nra.ie **Web:** www.nra.ie

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