

Archaeology Excavation Grant Web report

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Title of report	Modelling and Contextualising Ireland's Earliest Burials: geophysical and geomorphological surveys
Summary of report	<p>In 2001 in advance of a pipeline scheme, two or possibly three cremations in pits dating to the Early Mesolithic period were excavated at Hermitage, near Castleconnell, Co. Limerick. Several artefacts dating to this period were also recovered. Later research on the material suggested that these cremations may have been part of a funerary complex - or even cemetery - at Hermitage. If so, Hermitage would represent one of only a few Early Mesolithic cemeteries recorded in Europe, and potentially the only known Mesolithic cremation cemetery. This project aimed to further assess the archaeological potential of Hermitage.</p> <p>Two geophysical surveys, each some 5 hectares in extent, were undertaken to further investigate this possibility. A conductivity survey was commissioned to map variations in the geology at the site, and magnetometry was carried out to identify deposits which may be archaeological in origin (see image of survey in progress). Soil samples were taken in an auger survey across the site to help identify environmental material such as pollen, microfossils, and perhaps material suitable for radiocarbon dating. The combined surveys and auger results have identified a range of target areas suitable for future excavation and geoarchaeological work at Hermitage.</p>
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