

A9 Berriedale Braes

Project newsletter



Rock excavation work



Ryan MacLean, Site Agent, RJ McLeod (Contractors) Ltd

Welcome

Welcome to the second edition of our A9 Berriedale Braes project newsletter.

The construction team has made good progress over the summer months following a period of warm weather.

Excavation work on the new road alignment started in early July with larger scale construction plant on site to remove substantial

quantities of rock. The preparatory works for the installation of the piled retaining wall have been completed and the installation of the piles is underway.

We thank the local community for their continued patience and co-operation during the construction of this key project.

**Ryan MacLean, Site Agent,
RJ McLeod (Contractors) Ltd**



Michael Matheson, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity visits site to see progress to date



Aerial view of Berriedale Braes

Progress update

The main compound was installed in the spring and the entrance to the site from the A9 has been upgraded to allow construction traffic access.

Installation of infrastructure for temporary telecoms service diversions was undertaken in June with the services transferred in August 2019. This allows services such as broadband and telephone to be re-routed during the construction works and the redundant cables removed, prior

EARTHWORKS

to relocation to their final positions alongside the new road.

The operation to construct the new road requires the removal of approximately 50,000m³ of rock. To avoid impact while the adjacent coastal bird colony are nesting, alternative measures to drilling and blasting, involving larger scale construction

plant have been used. A bulldozer has been able to extract the majority of the rock to date, assisted by an excavator to remove the more difficult sections.

Piling work is required to construct a retaining wall, which is key to the project in order to mitigate the risk from long-term erosion of the existing steep coastal slope. We have completed the formation of the pile platform which provides safe access for the piling rig.



Rock excavation work

Looking ahead

Through autumn and into winter the team will be focusing on the following activities:

- Completion of the main earthwork operations
- Installation of the piled retaining wall
- Installation of rock anchor fixings to stabilise the rock
- Drainage installation
- Road surfacing operations
- Landscaping works.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

During advance works for the project a series of archaeological investigations identified significant post-medieval and prehistoric archaeological remains dating to the Mesolithic period, probably 6,000-5,000 BC.

More than 10,000 ancient stone artefacts were identified which were made of flint, quartz and chalcedony spread across disturbed soil at the top of the Braes. A selection of the archaeological finds will be displayed for the public to view at the Dunbeath Heritage Museum in the coming weeks.



Some of the ancient stone artefacts retrieved on site



Graduate Engineer Rory MacDougall

Graduate engineer

We are delighted to welcome Rory MacDougall, aged 22, who has joined us as a graduate engineer. We first met Rory in 2017 on our summer placement whilst studying for his Masters Degree in Civil Engineering at Heriott Watt University.

From Wick in Caithness, Rory is responsible for establishing the position of the new road on the ground as well as quality assurance for the piling operation, a key part of constructing this improvement project. This area of the project is providing Rory with the opportunity to work on pile structures and providing further experience of civil engineering principles.

Rory said: "Coming from the local area the Berriedale Braes project is a great project to work on, especially as I wrote a mock dissertation in my third year at university on the Braes.

I have always had a keen interest in the built environment and in particular structures. Working for RJ McLeod previously was very enjoyable and I am relishing the opportunity to take responsibility and ownership for my own work which benefits my civil engineering experience."



Berriedale Church

Berriedale Church and Cemetery Association

We recently provided assistance to the Berriedale Church and Cemetery Association for their project to re-harl the church. Traditional Scottish lime harl is being used to ensure the building keeps its natural image.

Berriedale Church and Cemetery Association Treasurer Alexa MacAuslan said:

"Thank you for supporting the re-harling of Berriedale Church with a contribution from RJ McLeod. Your support is greatly appreciated and has meant that we now reached our target of just over £81,000 to re-harl the exterior of the church.

"The project will hopefully be completed by the end of September or beginning of October and we are looking forward to seeing the end results."

LOCAL CONTRACTOR INVOLVEMENT

■ RJ McLeod is delighted to continue using local contractors and suppliers and has appointed subcontract works to John Gunn & Sons for surfacing, GMR Henderson for rock crushing and processing, and CS Drilling for drill and blast works. This together with other local plant hire from Gow Groundworks and John Mackay will ensure our links to the local community remain strong.

Cabinet secretary visit

We were delighted to welcome Mr Matheson, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity to the site in August.

Mr Matheson toured the site to see for himself the progress being made to construct this key improvement. During the visit Mr Matheson was shown the piling work currently underway as well as observing the methods being used to excavate the rock. We explained to Mr Matheson that our preferred method for removing the rock would be to drill and blast at the rock, however we take cognisance of the environmental landscape in which we work in and so we are employing more conventional

methods such as dozing, ripping and pecking to remove the rock in order to avoid disturbance to the nearby coastal bird colony during breeding season.

During the visit Mr Matheson also viewed the findings from the archaeological excavations which show that this section of the A9 was once the site of a seasonal camp. Numerous flints and other small tools were found which are believed to have been used for hunting, working with animal hides and other daily tasks. Together with the remains of small shelters and fires, it is believed by the archaeologists that these artefacts provide information on the earliest

humans living in Caithness.

Mr Matheson said: "The finds unearthed here at Berriedale Braes are truly fascinating and provide a rare glimpse into Scotland's ancient past. Indeed, the archaeologists believe the finds are all that remain of some of the earliest traces of humans to have lived in the area and provide evidence of life in the far north of Scotland thousands of years ago. The discoveries, which could have remained uncovered had works not progressed on the A9 Berriedale Braes project, underline the importance of the value we place on meeting our environmental obligations as we plan and construct essential new infrastructure."



Mr Matheson gets a glimpse of Mesolithic life in Caithness

MONTHLY CHARITY DONATION

For each month worked and with no lost time incidents, RJ McLeod make a financial donation to a local charity or good cause, chosen by the workforce. Over the last three months, recipients have included Dunbeath and District Centre, Caithness Rural Transport and Dunbeath Primary School Parent Council.

FURTHER PROJECT INFORMATION

For more information on the project please visit:

transport.gov.scot/projects/a9-berriedale-braes-improvement-scheme

Considerate constructors

The site is pleased to be registered with the Considerate Constructors Scheme (www.ccscheme.org.uk).

The scheme aims to provide contractors with a Code of Considerate Practice which has been developed to encourage best practice beyond statutory construction industry requirements.

