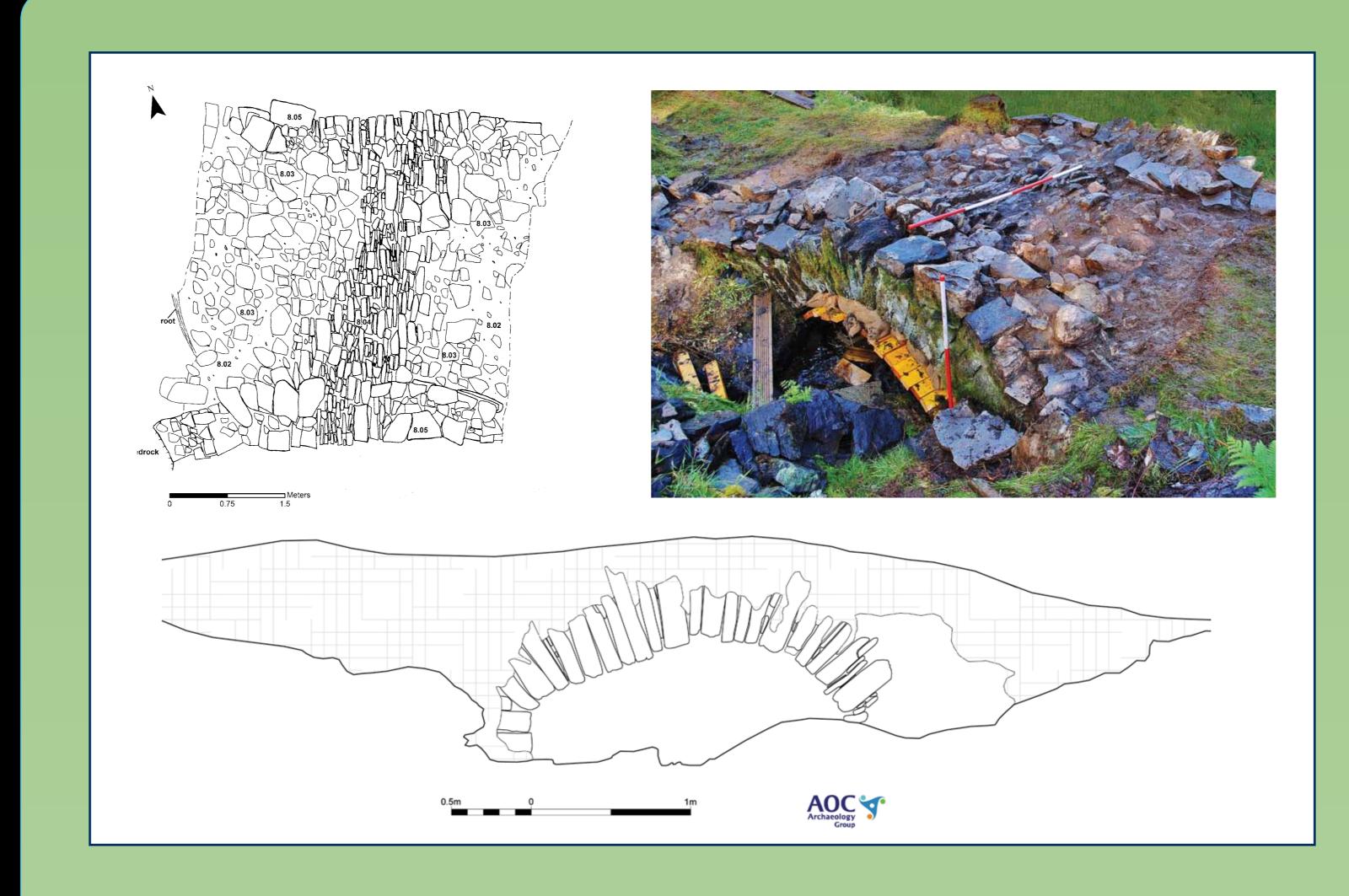
Achlain Bridges

General George Wade began construction of the military road network in the Highlands between the years of 1725 and 1733. He built over 400km of road and about 40 bridges, linking the barracks of Fort William, Fort Augustus, Inverness and Ruthven. The network was greatly extended by Major William Caulfeild between 1740 and 1767. In 1769, Thomas Pennant wrote of the work, noting that "these roads, by rendering the Highlands accessible, contributed much to their present improvement and were owing to the industry of our soldiery... [forcing their] way through rocks supposed to be unconquerable."

The road that linked the garrison at Fort Augustus to the barracks in Bernera, Glenelg, was built by Major Caulfeild between 1748 and 1753 for travel by troops, supply carts and artillery. The road is shown on Roy's Military Survey of Scotland (1747-55) and, although much is now overlain by modern roads, three small bridges can be found on Scotland's national forest estate at Achlain in Glen Moriston (NH 281 121), part of a surviving section of road now designated as a scheduled monument.

Prior to a programme of consolidation and repair, laser scan surveys of the bridges were undertaken by AOC Archaeology in order to inform conservation methodology and enhance the historic environment record.

The subsequent excavation and recording of the bridges by Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services was undertaken in order to record the character of the bridge surfaces prior to any changes required during conservation work.



The overall aims of the archaeology programme were to record any archaeological deposits and structural features associated with the bridges that would be uncovered during conservation work. Here the exposed upper surface of the arch voussiers of the central bridge can be seen recorded on plan and in the photograph documenting the work in progress (view facing N). The elevation depicts the north face of the bridge.



The three single-span humped-back bridges at Achlain were consolidated and expertly repointed with lime mortar by Graeme Brown Stone Masons Ltd under the direction of Krystyna Pytasz from Addison Conservation + Design. This is a detail of repointed voussiers from the south face of the central bridge.



The core of the arch comprised upright voussiers pinned and locked together with small slabs and packed with sand and gravel at the surface. The voussiers and smaller pinning slabs were also clearly visible in the underside of the structure, with gaps evident where slabs had fallen out. The stone masons supported the arch with a steel frame, timber and sandbags, realigning slipped voussiers and repining them from above.



To celebrate the completion of the project and restoration of the bridges, a small company of redcoats resumed their patrol. The resulting photographs were picked up by the local press and really helped the story make an impact. This bridge (and the 3D view of the laser scan below) is the westernmost of the three.

