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EXCAVATIONS and SURVEY at COATS HILL, NEAR MOFFAT, 1990-1

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Abstract

This report describes the results of the survey and sample excavations of small cairns, annular structures and other remains on Coats Hill, near Moffat. The difficulties of assessing the dates and functions of certain of the structures are discussed. The project formed part of the archaeological studies for the North Western Ethylene Pipeline (NWEP) Project for Shell Chemicals UK Ltd, which wholly funded the archaeological work and the publication of this report.

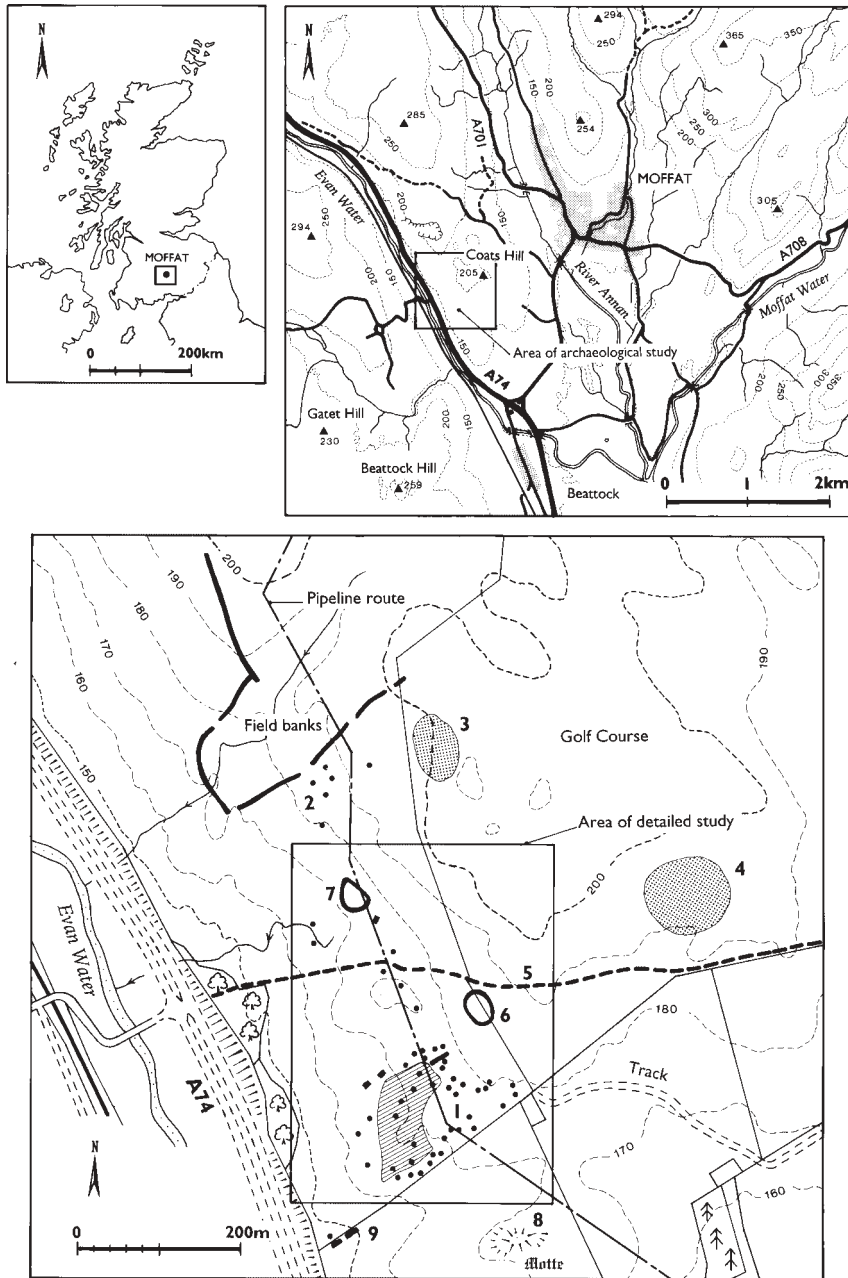
Introduction

This report describes the results of archaeological survey and sample excavations carried out by the Centre for Field Archaeology, University of Edinburgh, during 1990-1 on a range of archaeological features at Coats Hill, near Moffat, Upper Annandale (NT 071 043, Illus 1). This fieldwork formed part of the archaeological studies commissioned by Shell Chemicals UK Ltd in advance of the construction of the North Western Ethylene Pipeline between Grangemouth and Stanlow, in Cheshire.

The study area lies mostly between the 160m and 180m contours on the relatively gently sloping, upper west-facing slopes of Coats Hill (Illus 1 & 2), currently maintained as rough pasture. The landscaped grounds of Moffat Golf Course lie in the field to the east of the study area, with improved grassland present to the south (Illus 2). The lower slopes of Coats Hill fall away more steeply down to the narrow valley floor of the Evan Water, which forms part of the Clydesdale - Annandale communication route through southern Scotland. This natural corridor has seen heavy modern development, not restricted to the valley floor but including the slopes of the flanking hills where, due to the lack of land improvement, upstanding archaeological monuments are extensively preserved (such as around Beattock Hill, Gatet Hill and Stanshiel Rig, which lie less than 2 km to the south of Coats Hill, Illus 1; Feachem 1973, 340-2, fig 7; RCAHMS 1997, 57-74).

Working Methods

Fieldwork at Coats Hill was phased, reflecting the staging of pipeline planning and construction. The presence here of a motte, cairnfield and enclosed settlement (Illus 1, Sites 8, 1, 6) had long been known (Christison 1891, 220, 237; RCAHMS 1920, nos 394-5, 418; RCAHMS 1997, nos 1253, 202, 713), and the area was, therefore, highlighted as archaeologically sensitive at the initial desk-based data collection stage which preceded fieldwork. Non-archaeological constraints upon the choice of pipeline corridor route, principally the nature of the local topography and the presence of Moffat Golf Course, meant that complete avoidance of the cairnfield (Site 1) was not possible. Rapid reconnaissance and mapping of the earthworks were subsequently undertaken in an attempt to record the nature and extent of the remains. This was conducted initially within a 40m wide corridor along the pre-



Illus. 1 – Locations maps, including map showing distribution of monuments referred to in the text. 1, Cairnfield subject to detailed survey; 2-4, small cairns; 5, drove road; 6-7, enclosed settlements; 8, motte; 9, rectilinear foundations.



Illus. 2 – Photograph showing the Coats Hill landscape, looking south, showing cairns and annular structures (Site 1) as low mounds in the fore- and middle-ground, and the motte (Site 8) in the background.

ferred pipeline route but, as the complexity of the site was realised, a wider area was encompassed for detailed mapping to enable a better evaluation of the site and the planning of alternative pipeline routes through the complex, to minimise damage to it. Illus 1 shows the route of the pipeline as planned - as constructed, a pipeline alignment was followed which avoided Site 7.

After the final pipeline route had been agreed, excavation was undertaken of a representative sample of the features present within the construction corridor. This work was undertaken in November 1990 and February-March 1991, in often severe weather conditions with snow-covered and / or frozen ground. At this time detailed recording and a photographic survey of the cairnfield and associated monuments were undertaken. Finally, topsoiling of the pipeline swathe across the site was monitored in Summer 1991 during the construction phase of the project. Damage to archaeological sites within the construction corridor was avoided as far as possible by the laying of temporary surfaces on machine running tracks, and by the narrowing of the construction corridor from its standard width of 20m.

Field Survey

Field survey demonstrated that the cairnfield (Site 1, Illus 1) was considerably more complex and extensive than had been realised by previous researchers. At least four distinct structural components can be detected within the cairnfield, with examples of constructional sequence visible. In addition, two enclosed settlement sites were demonstrated to lie within the general area of the cairnfield (Sites 6 & 7).

Furthermore, it was evident that the field survey, by concentrating according to its remit upon the immediate vicinity of the preferred pipeline corridor, had not recorded the full extent of surviving archaeological remains potentially associated with the cairnfield. Fieldwork conducted in advance of other major development proposals at about the same time, namely Scottish Power's Anglo-Scottish Interconnector power line (by CFA; *Discovery Excav Scot* 1991, 10) and the proposed A74-M74 road upgrading (by Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division; *Discovery Excav Scot* 1993, 16), located further sites both downslope from the cairnfield and in the improved land to the south of the site. Finally, the recorded distribution of cairns and current patterns of land use combine to indicate that land improvements to the east and south of the study area have most probably removed former components of the cairnfield in these directions.

That the cairnfield lies within a landscape rich in the remains of sites of apparently varying antiquity, poses interesting questions as to the chronological and functional inter-relationships of its elements with these other monuments. The following sections provide summary descriptions of the suite of monuments present, based upon the results of field survey and previous accounts. The general distribution of the monuments is illustrated on Illus 1, with a detailed plot of the surveyed cairnfield (Site 1) presented as Illus 3. Fuller details are provided in archive reports (Ralston & Armit 1990; Armit & Dunwell 1992) deposited in the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS).

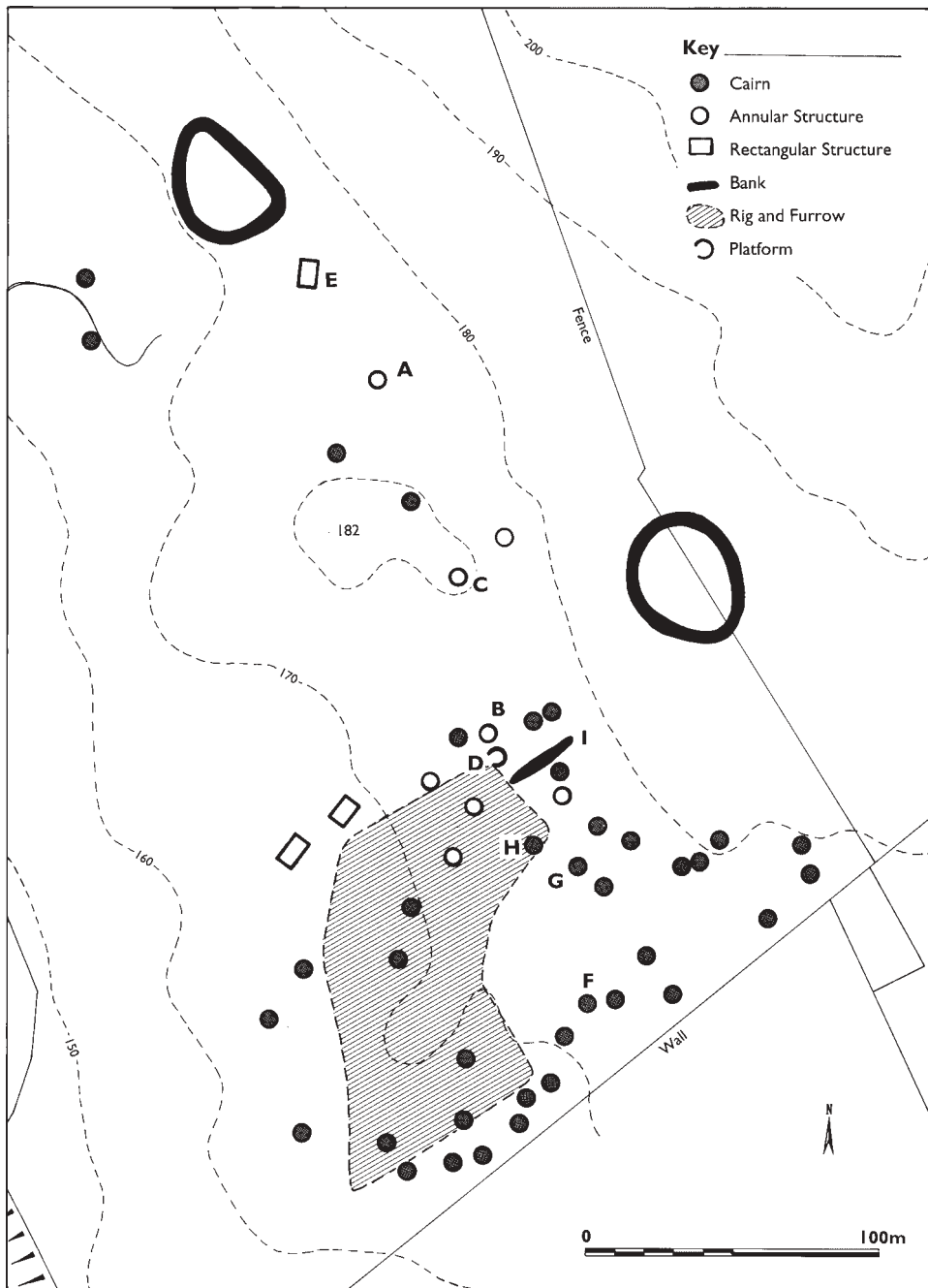
Cairnfields and associated features (sites 1-5)

Previous published accounts of the cairnfield (NT 071 043; Site 1, Illus 3) do not provide a consistent or complete impression of its various components. Christison (1891, 220, fig 2) recorded an arrangement of small stone heaps with no recognisable pattern a short distance to the north of Coats Hill motte (Site 8, Illus 1), and near a settlement (Site 6, Illus 1). RCAHMS (1920, 144; no. 418) catalogued the presence of about 5 clearance cairns, with others visible in the bracken nearby. Welsh (*Discovery Excav Scot* 1972, 20) subsequently identified what he interpreted as two oval huts, discontinuous stretches of parallel rubble banks and a number of stony mounds. Subsequent field visits recorded in NMRS (Ref: NT 00 SE 32) led to the identification of approximately 25 clearance cairns, several of which appeared to have been destroyed with the construction of a previous pipeline (ie Site 3, within the golf course), but no huts; the presence of rig-and-furrow cultivation marks and lynchets was also noted.

Detailed survey along the route of the NWEP pipeline in fact revealed the survival of almost 40 small stone cairns in the unimproved field west of the golf course. These varied in size up to 7m across and 0.6m high, and clustered at the southern end of the field. Most of this cluster appeared loosely to define a sub-rectangular plot occupied by rig-and-furrow cultivation marks, orientated south-west to north-east and with a wave amplitude of 5m and a relief of no more than 0.2m. The extent of this rig-and-furrow cultivation could not be established with any certainty as the marks were visible only in certain light conditions and from certain angles. A single linear stone bank (I, Illus 3), running parallel to the alignment of the rig and furrow, occurred within the cairn cluster.

Within the northern part of this cluster lay several annular or oval features defined by a low stony bank, the largest with external dimensions of c. 7.5 m by 7 m. A further isolated structure of similar form was located c. 120 m to the north (A, Illus 3). The majority appeared to contain dumps of cleared stone, and it was thus unclear prior to excavation whether they were structures or disturbed cairns.

Immediately to the north of the cairn cluster, in a prominent location on the summit of a knoll, lay a significantly more substantial stone cairn with a hollow centre (C, Illus 3). Elsewhere, three arrangements of stone alignments appeared to indicate the presence of either rectilinear foundations or linear clearance heaps; one of these (E, Illus 3) was excavated. Other rectilinear foundations of likely post-medieval date have been recorded in the vicinity (Site 9, Illus 1; Site 7, *infra*).



Illus. 3 – Detailed plan of the Site 1, distinguishing the various types of features recorded, and identifying excavated elements (A-I).

Further discoveries of cairns in the vicinity of the surveyed area, both during the current project and by other researchers, indicate that the cairnfield was extensive and would benefit from more wide-ranging survey. To the north of the study area a group of six stone cairns was identified on the pipeline route (NT 070 047; Illus 1, Site 2). It was near to these that a group of four small cairns was recorded within the grounds of Moffat Golf Course, during the construction of a gas pipeline (NT 071 047, Illus 1, Site 3; *Discovery Excav Scot* 1976, 27; RCAHMS 1997, no 200). Up to 12 further cairns have been reported further east within the golf course (NT 074 045, Illus 1, Site 4; Scott-Elliot 1967, 105-106; RCAHMS 1997, no 199); quantities of dumped stone previously recorded at this location indicate the removal of further examples, and probably reflect wider destruction caused by landscaping for the golf course. Site 1 most probably once extended southwards into the improved grassland field, beyond the dyke marking its surviving southern limit, although no remains of it now occur here; a substantial heap of stones north of the motte may well contain material cleared from former cairns.

A drove road (Site 5, Illus 1) is recorded on both William Crawford's map of 1804 and the first edition Ordnance Survey coverage of 1857 (Dumfriesshire, sheet 16, 1861) as running from Evan Water to Moffat via Coats Hill. Its route as mapped intersects Site 1, although no surface traces of it could be detected.

Settlements (sites 6-7)

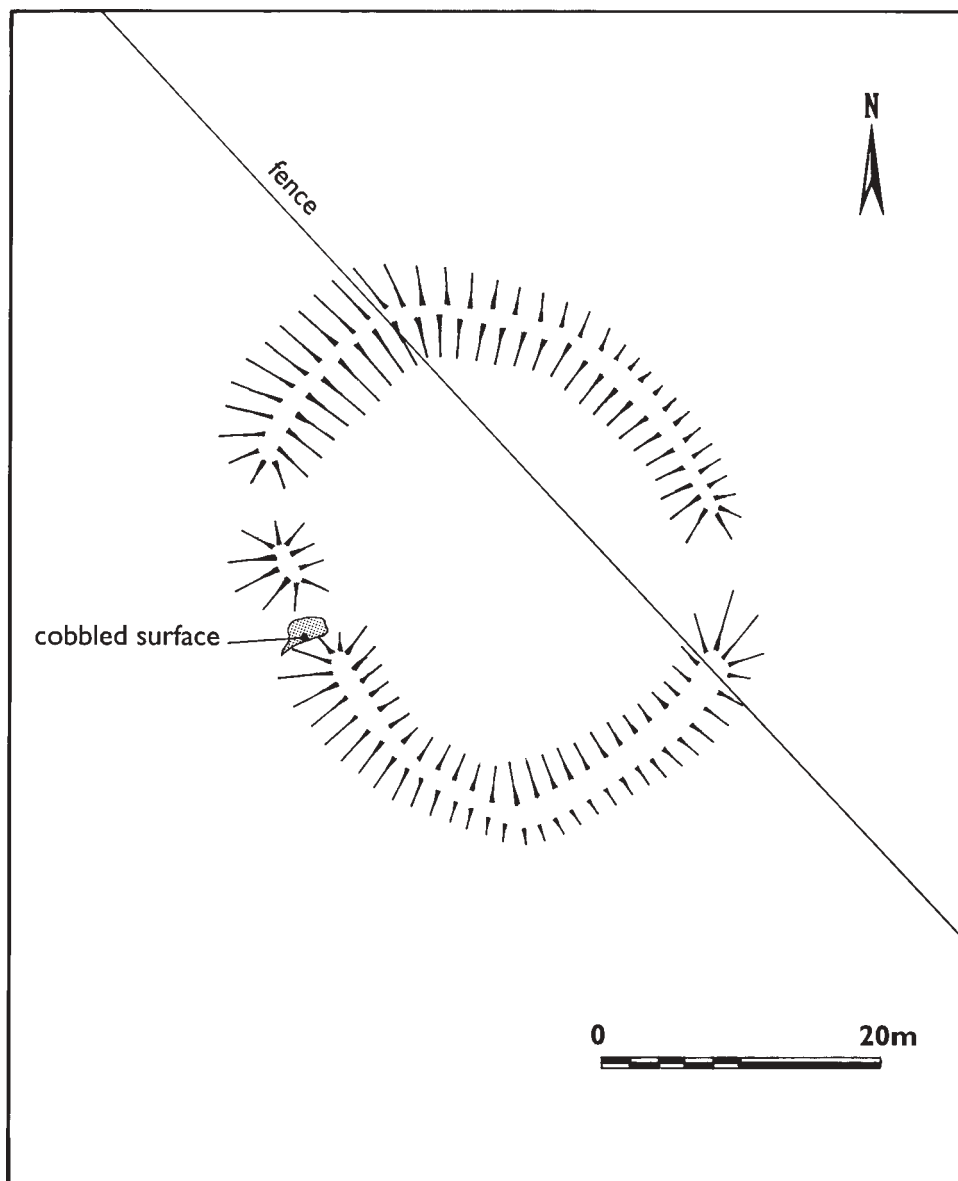
Two small enclosed settlement sites of later prehistoric character lie only c. 160 m apart within the cairnfield, at around the 180m contour (Illus 1, Sites 6-7). Such settlements (formerly referred to as "birrens" or "burians") are present in considerable numbers in south central Scotland, and appear to represent a regional settlement tradition in the late first millennium BC and early first millennium AD (see Jobey 1971; RCAHMS 1997). Several are known in the hills of Upper Annandale (see eg Feachem 1973; RCAHMS 1997, 57-74). Excavations at a limited number of these sites in Dumfriesshire - in Eskdale at Boonies (Jobey 1975) and Long Knowe (Mercer 1981), and in Annandale at Woodend (*Discovery Excav Scot* 1995, 17-8) - have demonstrated prolonged occupation within the enclosures in sequences of timber roundhouses. The chronological relationship between the two Coats Hill settlements can only be a matter of speculation. The pipeline was routed to avoid these sites.

The southern settlement (Site 6; NGR: NT 071 044; RCAHMS 1997, no 713; Illus 4) has been known of since the middle of the 19th century, when it was recorded as a fort on the Ordnance Survey first edition 6-inch coverage (Dumfriesshire, sheet 16, 1861: also Christison 1891, 237; RCAHMS 1920, no 394). It is oval in form, bounded by a degraded stone wall, and with an entrance to the west. The earthwork straddles the boundary between the unimproved land and the golf course, and in the latter area is markedly less well preserved.

Site 7 (NGR: NT 0702 0456; RCAHMS 1997, no 722; Illus 1) was first identified during field survey conducted for the NWEF project. It lies on a west-facing terrace and is overlooked by steep slopes to the east and north. Although much disturbed and obscured by secondary constructions, sufficient is visible to indicate that its original form was an oval stone-walled enclosure, c. 30 m across, the wall now reduced to foundation level. Much of the eastern half of the enclosure is obscured by rectilinear constructions and platforms most probably related to a secondary, medieval or later, settlement. The north-eastern enclosure wall has been mutilated by the passage of a track (not the drove road referred to above) immediately juxtaposed with, and perhaps respecting the position of, the secondary settlement.

Excavations

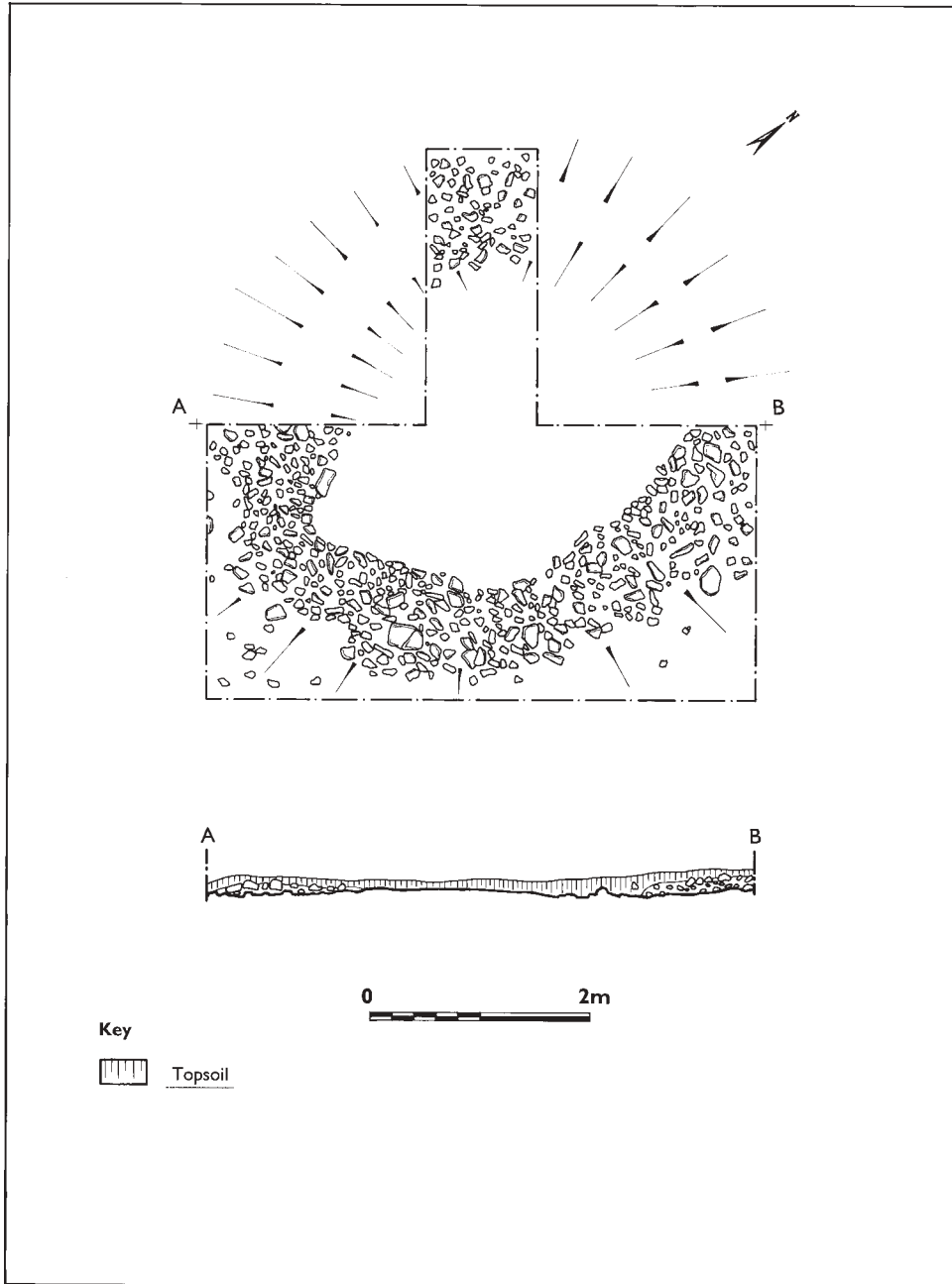
Nine elements of Site 1 (Illus 3) present on the route of the pipeline were examined, revealing three annular structures (A-C), a scooped platform (D), a possible rectilinear foundation (E), three clearance cairns (F-H), and a linear clearance bank (I). Some of the excavated features proved to be of different character than had been proposed from surface survey (C, D). Full details are in an archive report (Armit & Dunwell 1992) and the site records, which are deposited in the NMRS.



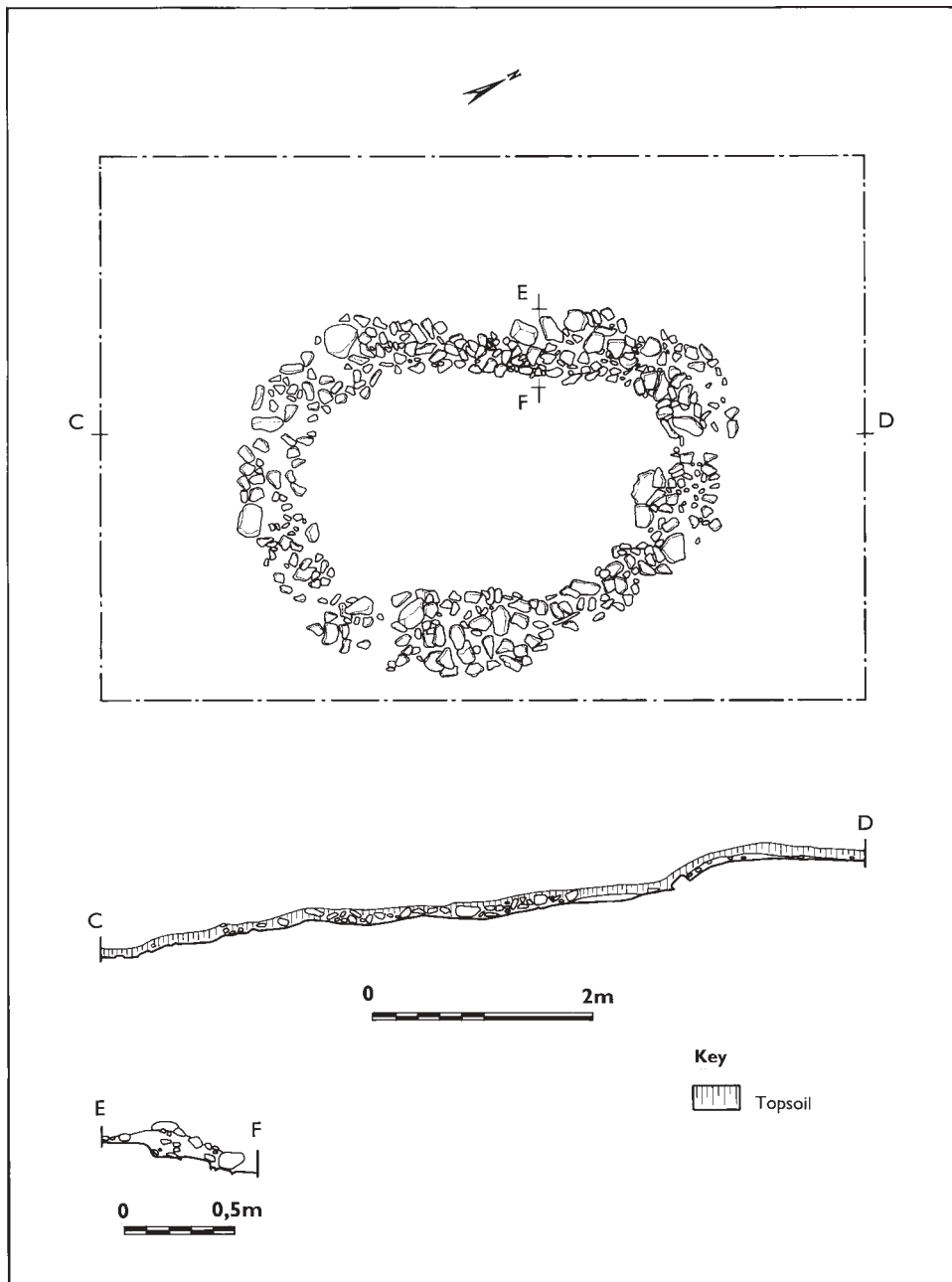
Illus. 4 – Plan of enclosed settlement (Site 6).

Annular structures

Structure A (Illus 5) was clearly recognisable from surface traces as a small annular structure, as it had not been obscured by the later dumping of cleared stone. Approximately two-thirds of this structure was investigated. Removal of topsoil and turf revealed an unbroken bank of small cobbles, 0.6 - 1 m wide and standing to no more than 0.15 m high, enclosing an area measuring c. 3.4 m by 2.8 m. No deposits or features were present to indicate that the structure had been occupied or roofed; topsoil lay directly over subsoil in the enclosed zone. In addition, there were no spreads of stones around the



Illus. 5 – Plan and section of Structure A.



Illus. 6 – Plan and sections of Structure B.

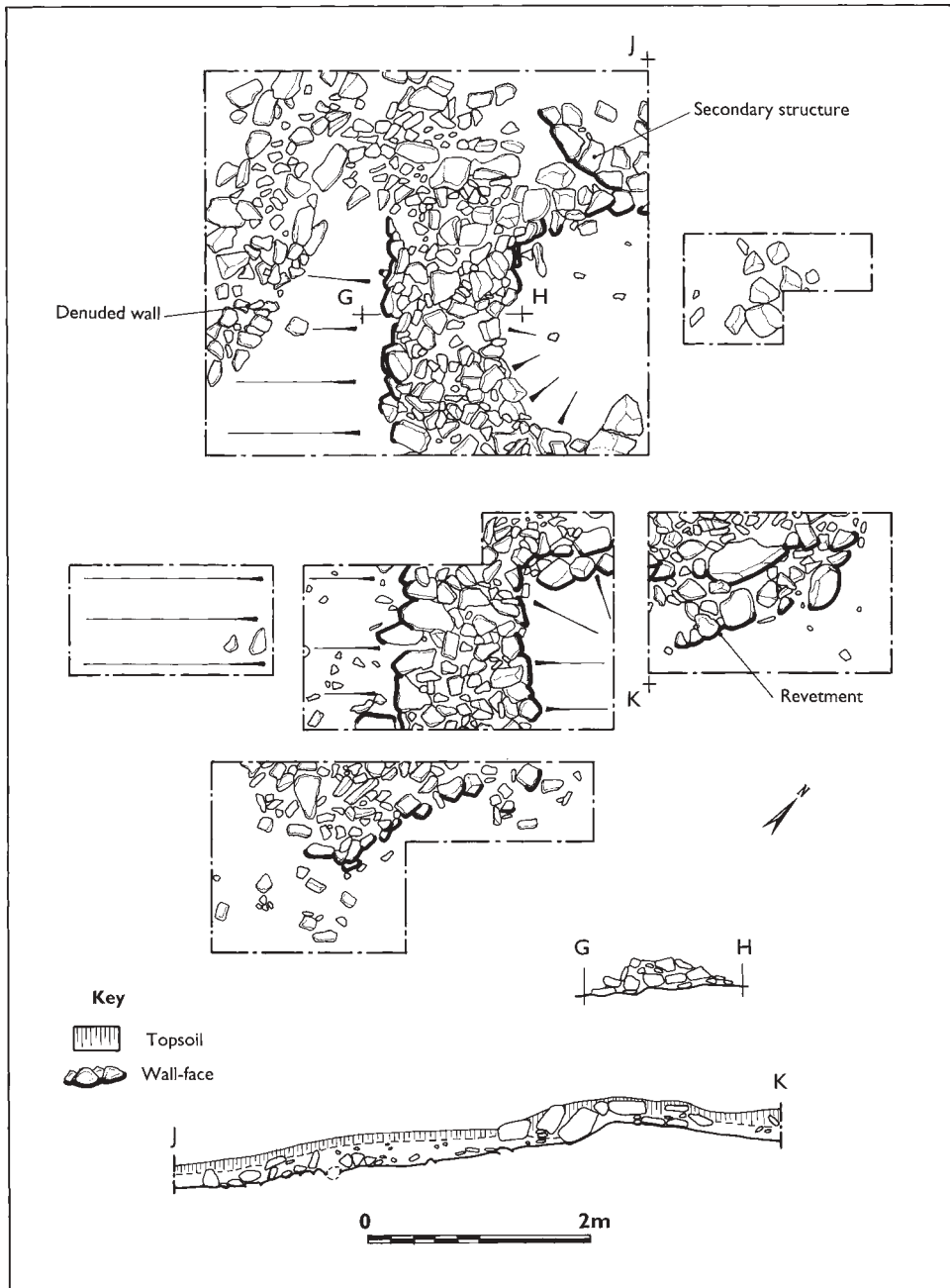


Illus. 7 – Photograph of Structure B, from south-west.

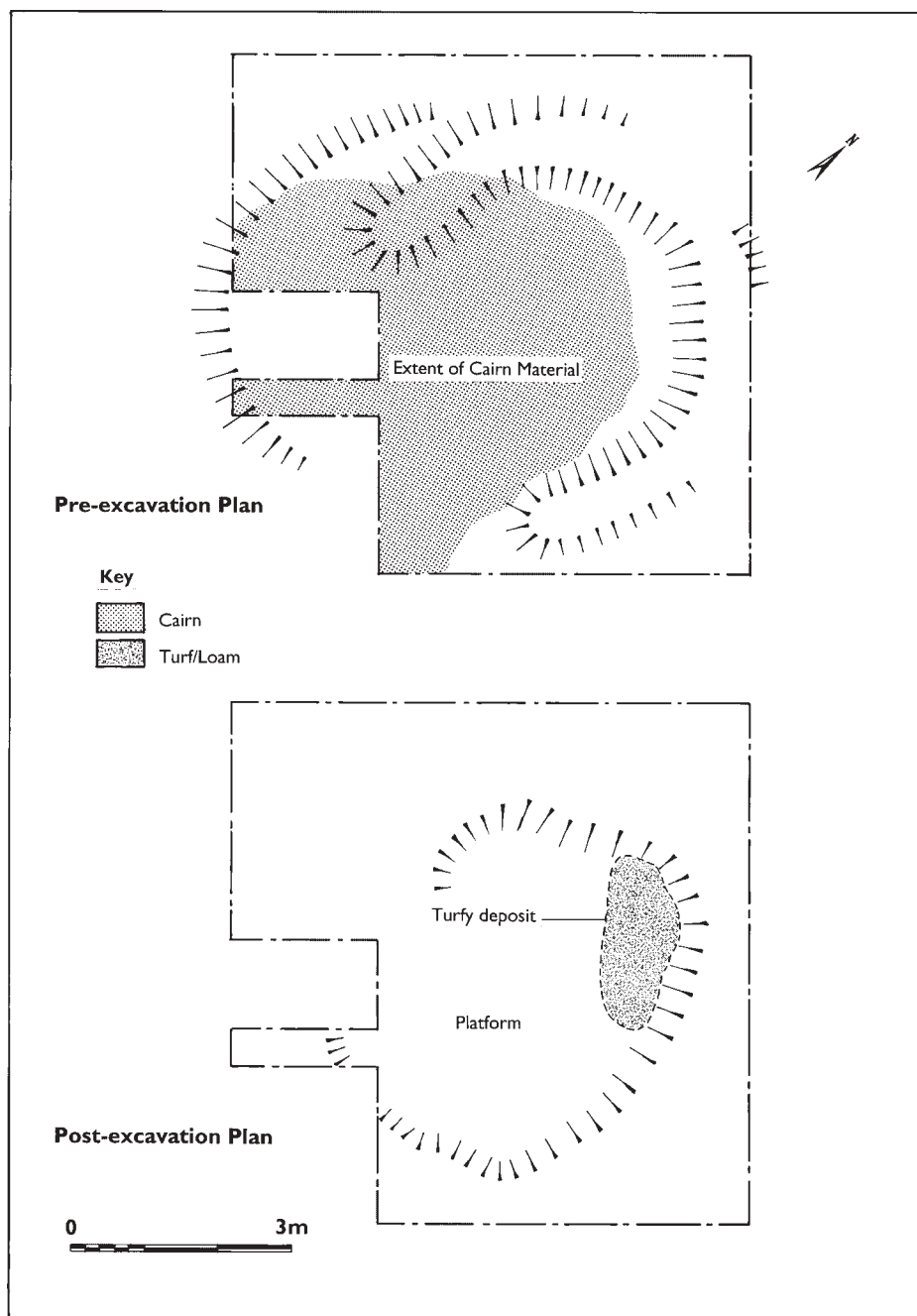
bank to suggest that it had ever been more substantial. Sections excavated through the bank revealed no trace of an old ground surface sealed beneath it. No artefacts were recovered from this structure.

Structure B (Illus 6 & 7) appeared from surface traces as a low penannular banked feature containing loose stone. It was fully excavated, revealing two phases of activity. The first phase comprised a small oval enclosure similar in character to Structure A. A shallow scoop, no more than 0.3 m deep, had been cut into the hillside, reducing the gradient of the slope but without creating a level platform. The edges of the scoop were lined with a continuous stone bank to enclose an oval area c. 3.5m north-south by c. 2m. This bank appeared to be preserved almost intact, apart from the western, downslope side, which is visible in the foreground on Illus 7, and results from trampling over the bank (by humans or livestock?), rather than a deliberate break. The structure did not appear to have been provided with an entrance. Internal primary deposits were restricted to isolated flecks of yellow and grey clay on the subsoil surface. The second phase of activity comprised the use of the structure as a repository for cleared stone. No artefacts were recovered from this feature.

Structure C (Illus 8) lay on the summit of a pronounced knoll between Structures A and B. It appeared from surface traces as a substantial stone cairn, measuring 9m by 7m and up to 0.6m high, with a hollow centre. Excavation principally revealed an apparently P-shaped rubble-built structure, c. 6m long north-west to south-east, incorporating a sub-circular enclosure a little over 2m across internally. The walls of this curious structure survived to c. 0.3 m high, and appeared to represent a single build, although the eastern wall of the enclosure had been stabilised by the addition of an external revetment. There was no evidence of a ground surface sealed beneath the walls. The northern wall of the enclosure proved to be substantially denuded, and thus it could not be determined



Illus. 8 – Plan and sections of Structure C.



Illus. 9 – Plans of scooped platform D; the upper recording surface topography and the extent of secondary cleared stone identified; the lower showing the extent of the scooped platform.

whether an entrance had been present here. The only remains within the enclosure comprised loose stone, representing either collapsed walling or field clearance material. Traces of other features were identified in the trenches - a stony band, possibly denuded walling, ran obliquely past the west end of Structure C; an arc of stones, possibly forming the external face of a denuded structure, had been cut into the north-west part of Structure C, and was thus secondary to it. No finds were recovered from this trench.

Platform

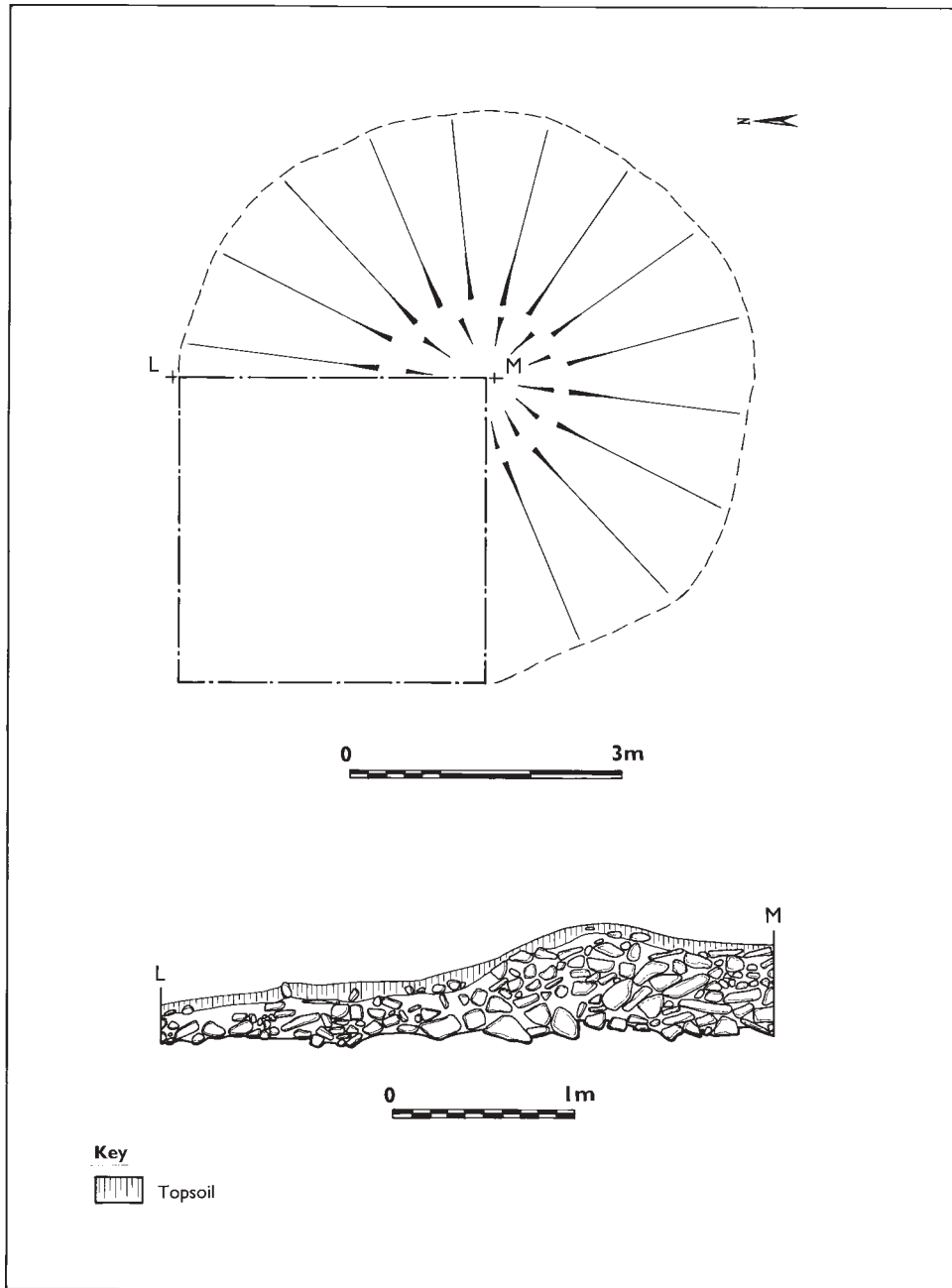
Platform D (Illus 9) was identified during field survey as a robbed cairn, c. 7m in diameter. Excavation of this feature revealed two phases of activity. The first comprised the scooping of a small platform into the hillside. This platform was of sub-rectangular form, measuring c. 4.5m by 3.6m, with a back-scarp up to 0.5m deep. Its surface was not level, but it sloped less steeply than the surrounding hillside. A low annular bank of earth and stone ran around the top of the scoop, and was largely responsible for the misinterpretation of the monument from surface traces. The only primary deposit present above the subsoil floor of the platform was a patch of stones within a silty clay soil (possibly decayed turf), set against the back-scarp of the platform. There was no further evidence of structural remains on the platform. A spread of cleared stone dumped across the platform, and spilling downslope from it, represents a secondary use of the structure unrelated to its original function. No artefacts were recovered from this trench.

Structure (possible)

Structure E (Illus 10) was visible from surface survey as an arc of stones. Excavation in fact revealed three fragmentary, parallel stone alignments, from c.2.5m to 5m long and up to 0.4m high,



Illus. 10 – Photograph showing part of possible structure E, from south-west.



Illus. 11 – Plan and section of cairn F.

possibly representing walling - at one point two courses were present. All alignments were contained within the topsoil. No anthropogenic deposits were present in association with these remains. Residual traces of a buried ground surface were preserved beneath the stones, but were too fragmentary to allow sampling. A sherd of glazed pottery was recovered from the topsoil. The quality of survival of these remains was too poor to allow any convincing interpretations of age and function to be made, although an explanation as the denuded foundations of a rectilinear building is plausible.

Small cairns

Cairn F (Illus 11) appeared from surface survey as a circular mound, 6.5 m in diameter and 0.35 m high, with a slight hollow on its summit. Investigation of its north-west quadrant revealed a stone heap, up to c. 0.5m high and lacking any internal order or structure, and bonded by a rooty topsoil. There was no evidence of an old ground surface sealed beneath the cairn. No artefacts were recovered from this trench.

Cairn G appeared from surface traces as a low mound measuring 5m by 3m by 0.5m high. Excavation of a quadrant revealed a disordered heap of stones. Again, neither a buried soil nor artefactual remains were encountered.

Cairn H appeared from surface traces as an area of low stony hummocks measuring approximately 5.5m by 4.5m overall and up to 0.3m high, and was identified by field survey as a disturbed stone cairn or annular structure. Excavation confirmed the first possibility as the correct interpretation - the main stone pile within the spread appeared to be the surviving rump of a disturbed clearance cairn. No buried ground surface was present beneath this feature. A stone with three parallel grooves incised into it (Illus 13) was found in the disturbed debris of the cairn.



Illus. 12 – Photograph showing section of linear stone bank I, from south-east.

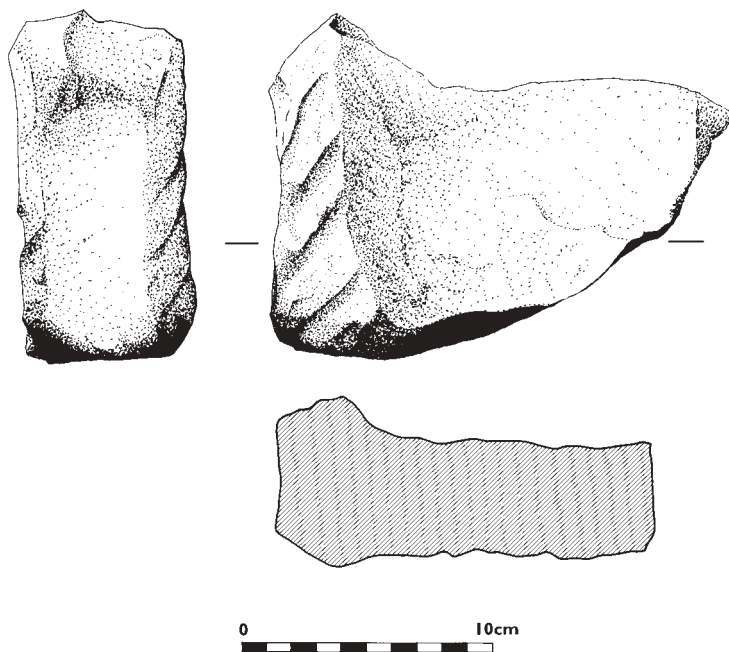
Linear clearance bank

Bank I (Illus 12) extended for 23m, and was 2m wide and up to 0.3m high. A trench 1m wide was excavated across it c. 5m from its south-west end. The bank was revealed to be composed of rubble bonded by topsoil. The rubble lay directly upon the subsoil surface, with no trace of a buried soil between the two. On this evidence the bank can be interpreted most convincingly as a band of cleared stone.

Finds

Three artefacts were recovered during fieldwork on Coats Hill. These have been declared as Treasure Trove and allocated to Dumfries Museum. The catalogue entries for finds 2 and 3 were produced by Ann Clarke.

- 1) Rim-sherd of brown glazed pottery, 19-20 centuries AD. From the topsoil, Structure E.
- 2) Angular, fractured stone: L 170mm; W 130mm; 70mm (Illus 13). Three parallel grooves, 40mm x 5mm x 2mm, run diagonally across one face; traces of a fourth groove are present. The incisions do not appear to be decorative, and are too regular to be the result of plough-scoring; they probably reflect the use of the stone for sharpening metal blades. From the disturbed debris of cairn H, within topsoil.
- 3) Whetstone: L 129mm; W 26mm; Th 12mm. Fine-grained sandstone. Oval in plan and rectangular in cross-section. Both faces have been worn quite flat. Possibly a modern form of whetstone. Found during topsoiling of the pipeline corridor; no structural associations.



Illus. 13 – Grooved stone from cairn H.

Discussion

The datable elements of the suite of monuments on Coats Hill reflect intermittent occupation extending over approximately two millennia: the two enclosed settlements (Sites 6 & 7) can be broadly dated by regional parallels to the last centuries BC and first centuries AD; the motte (Site 8) belongs to the medieval period, around the 12th century AD (RCAHMS 1997, 188); and the rectilinear structures (eg Site 7) can be classified loosely as medieval or later rural settlement (cf Foster & Hingley 1994; Hingley 1993). The proximity (and in one case, Site 7, sequence) of settlements of varying antiquity on Coats Hill presents significant difficulties in interpreting the likely context and associations of the more ephemeral remains that lie between them. This is accentuated by the lack of material recovered from the trenches by which the dates, and in some cases functions, of these features might be deciphered. However, the publication of RCAHMS' (1997) study of Eastern Dumfriesshire just before this paper was completed proved timely, and allows Coats Hill to be considered within a regional context.

Rig-and-furrow cultivation and cairnfield

The rig-and-furrow cultivation marks arguably form the least contentious element of Site 1. Whilst their precise character and extent defied accurate recording, due to their poor quality of preservation, a medieval or later date seems highly likely. The majority of the stone cairns cluster in the immediate vicinity of the rig-and-furrow cultivation marks, and those excavated need represent no more than dumps of cleared stone. It could be argued, therefore, that the cairnfield and rig-and-furrow together represent a single episode of medieval or later cultivation in marginal land. A medieval date for a cairn overlying rig cultivation has been demonstrated at New Kinnord, Aberdeenshire (Edwards 1980), and traces of stone clearance are often found around rig-systems (eg Eastern Dumfriesshire; RCAHMS 1997, 59).

However, the cairns on Coats Hill extend over a much wider area than could be demonstrated for the rig-and-furrow cultivation, and this may suggest differing origins for at least some of the cairns. The clearance of stone for agricultural and funerary purposes can be traced back to the neolithic period, and it is possible that the rig-and-furrow merely re-used an area originally cleared long ago. There has been much discussion of the origins of cairnfields in south-western Scotland (eg Scott-Elliot 1967, Yates 1985, RCAHMS 1997, 43), and there are good reasons to believe that many are likely to be prehistoric, probably Bronze Age in date, unless demonstrated otherwise. Factors which have influenced this belief include their complementary distributions with burial cairns and burnt mounds (RCAHMS 1997, 60), the lack of later settlements amongst them (S Halliday, pers comm) and discoveries of Bronze Age funerary remains in components of cairnfields (although this is relatively uncommon; Yates 1985, 218-9; Scott-Elliot 1967). A large cairnfield examined recently at Fall Kneesend, Upper Clydesdale (*Discovery Excav Scot* 1993, 89) revealed both prehistoric funerary and clearance functions for the cairns, and indicate that composite cairnfields exist. On this basis, not all the cairns on Coats Hill need simply be the result of field activity.

In summary, there is a reasonable possibility that the Coats Hill cairnfield at least partly reflects medieval or later land use, but this is tempered by the lack of datable excavated

evidence and the heterogeneous origins of cairnfields as revealed by other excavations in the vicinity. There is, in the end, no reason why the Coats Hill cairnfield cannot reflect more than one episode of clearance.

Annular structures

The close correspondence in size and morphology, and close spatial association, of the annular structures suggests that they can be considered as a group of broadly contemporary features. Sufficient information was obtained from the excavations to demonstrate that they are stratigraphically earlier than stone cairns where the two coincide. As such, this suggests that they are medieval or earlier in date. Beyond this, however, there is little that can be stated confidently about the absolute date and function of these enigmatic features. No artefacts were recovered from the excavated examples, and no material suitable for radiometric dating was encountered. There was insufficient evidence of occupation debris, internal features or collapsed building debris to suggest that they represent the remains of inhabited, roofed structures. Furthermore, none of the excavated structures was demonstrated to have been provided with an entrance. Despite their surface appearance, therefore, they cannot be explained as either hut circles or funerary ring cairns. Although they lie in close proximity to a former drove road (Illus 1, Site 5) there seems little to commend the structures as shieling huts - which in any case are rare in the region (RCAHMS 1997, 72-3). That Structure B had been placed within an artificial shallow scoop set into the hillside argues against its interpretation as a dump of cleared stone which had been robbed in antiquity and latterly added to by further clearance material. The excavated structures in each case appeared too regularly formed to be explained as disturbed cairns (cf element H, an irregular spread of stone which was interpreted as a damaged cairn).

The structural simplicity and lack of evidence for occupation point to an association of the annular structures with non-domestic, agricultural activity. It is unlikely that they were ever small enclosed cultivation plots, such as the plantiecrues of the Northern Isles (cf Fenton 1978, 103; Hunter 1996, 96-102), as there was no depth of soil within the enclosed zone. Many such small annular enclosures in the English Border Counties have been interpreted as 'stack stands' (after Ramm *et al* 1970, 54-60), built to store winter fodder and protect it from unseasonal consumption by livestock. Stack stands are characteristic of the 18th and 19th centuries AD, and commonly occur in groups of two to five in close association with farm steadings. They can be difficult to distinguish from surface traces alone (cf Neighbour 1992, 8), and few definite examples were noted by RCAHMS (1997, 31) in Eastern Dumfriesshire. The structures on Coats Hill seem to be of earlier date than this, and seem rather small for such a purpose, although a storage function is possible.

Platform

The primary function of the platform is not clear. The absence of a level surface, structural foundations or occupation debris mean that an interpretation as an element of an unenclosed platform settlement of Late Bronze Age / Early Iron Age date (eg as excavated recently in Upper Clydesdale at Lintshie Gutter; Terry 1995) can be discounted. The use of the structure as a charcoal burner's platform can similarly be dismissed due to the absence of a pitstead or any carbonised remains; such platforms on occasions appear to have re-used unenclosed platform settlements in Western Scotland (Rennie 1997). In the absence of any

positive evidence for its date and function, an origin as a non-domestic, agricultural feature is perhaps as specific as one can be about this enigmatic feature. Given that the platform was re-used as a dumping ground for field clearance material, a medieval or earlier date seems likely.

Conclusions

The suite of archaeological monuments recorded on the western flank of Coats Hill can be regarded as a palimpsest of activity extending back at least to the first millennium BC, and quite possibly beyond. Later prehistoric, medieval, and medieval or later settlement forms are represented. In addition to these features there is evidence of probably medieval or later cultivation rigs, a cairnfield of uncertain date(s), and medieval or earlier annular structures and a platform. It would be convenient, although unwise, simply to associate the more ephemeral remains with the demonstrable periods of settlement - each of the structural forms excavated on Coats Hill could thus relate to a separate phase of activity on the hillside.

The above comments are not intended to be a cause for pessimism about the opportunities for understanding such palimpsests. Rather the variety of monuments present, and their inter-relationships, mark Coats Hill as a surviving fragment of an important archaeological landscape. It is only through further examination of such sites that their context and associations will become clearer. Linear developments, such as the NWEP pipeline, can thus often be of benefit to archaeologists, in that their construction leads to less commonly researched monument forms being examined at the expense of more well known site types, which tend to be avoided at the design stage. As part of the NWEP project several less popular targets for research excavations were examined - such as a post-medieval field system at Crookedstane, Upper Clydesdale (Dunwell *et al* 1995) and a post-medieval farmstead at Chapel Farm, Moffat (Alexander *et al* 1992). Field survey can provide important information on the regional patterns of such less well understood monument types (eg RCAHMS 1997), yet the limited amount of excavated and published data restricts what can be said with confidence. It is only through the examination of the wide range of elements of archaeological landscapes that we will begin to understand the extent to which all the pieces fit together, and thus to address more holistically what is important and worthy of protection from future development.

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