

3 THE EXCAVATION

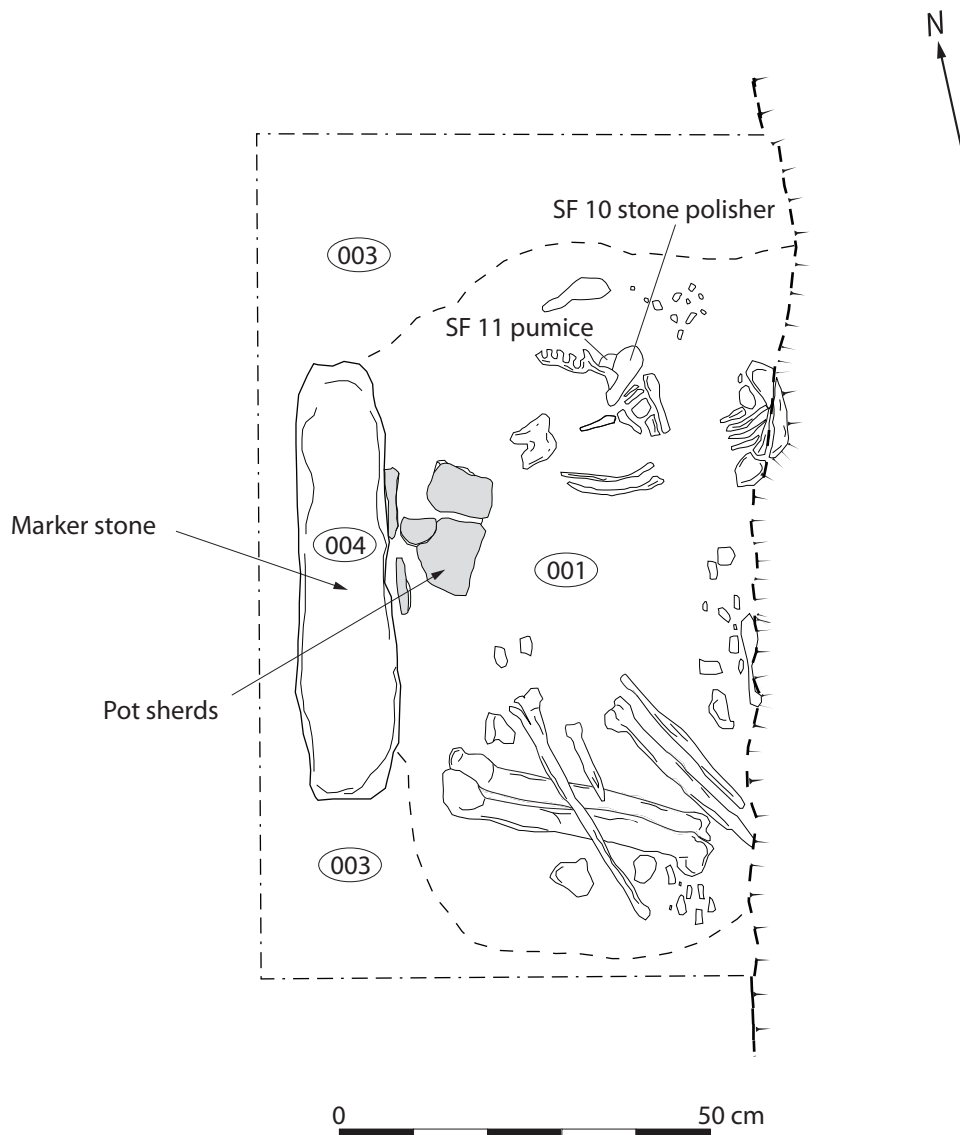
3.1 Aims

The aims of the excavation were to recover human remains and other archaeologically significant artefacts from the site, to mitigate against any further loss of information through erosion by the acquisition of a detailed archaeological record and to establish the date and character of the site within both its immediate environs and wider context.

3.2 Results

Three discrete areas of human remains were identified at first, but with further investigation it

became clear that they represented a north–south-aligned burial (Sk 1 = SF 12) which was somewhat disturbed and partially articulated. At the northern end of the trench a mandible was uncovered, adjacent and at right angles to articulated cervical and thoracic vertebrae (including the atlas and axis), a sternum and a fragment of scapula. Ribs, a clavicle and vertebrae were also recovered from this area although disarticulated from the other remains. A tibia with articulated patella overlay an articulated leg (tibia, fibula, patella and femur) in an extreme flexed position. At the south end of one femur, and corresponding with the end of the tibia, almost an entire articulated foot had survived intact, including the tarsal, metatarsal and most of



Illus 2 Plan of burial

the phalanges. Hand bones (carpal bones, metacarpals and phalanges) were found scattered in an area between the two previously mentioned groups. At the east edge of the cliff face, a clavicle and several ribs were recovered in a damaged state and a vertebra was found lying adjacent to an ulna and radius with elbow articulation. No bones from the pelvis or the remainder of the skull were present.

A polished pebble (SF 10) and a smoothed, worked piece of pumice (SF 11) were recovered from the posterior of the mandible (see [Ballin-Smith](#) below). The ribs and vertebrae to the west of the mandible (see [illus 2](#)) were overlaid by a broken pot (SF 13) ([illus 4](#)) which was found lying on its side and broken into many pieces on the west side of the burial, adjacent to a large stone (Context 004). Water running down the stone had percolated through the pot, severely degrading the fabric in the process, especially on its lower side. However, the rim was noted to be in good overall condition and a large proportion of the pot was present (see [MacGregor](#) below).

The burial was situated in an area of dark brown to black, moderately firm silty sand (Context 001) with organic inclusions, up to 0.05m thick, that was associated with Sk 1 and was seen as a stain within the windblown sand below. The layer formed a rectangular shape, aligned north-south around the burial, cut on the east side by the eroding cliff edge and defined to the west by a large marker stone

(Context 004) ([illus 2](#)). No trace of an associated cairn or cist was found.

The burial Sk 1 and dark layer (Context 001) were partially covered by a loose, light-greyish brown sandy topsoil (Context 002), up to 0.3m thick, which contained several disarticulated human bones including fragments of scapula, a humerus, a femur, vertebrae, fragments of broken pelvis and other fragments. Some of the bones were stained darker, suggesting that they had been dug out from the burial in Context 001 below and then re-deposited into the topsoil above. It is very likely that these remains had been disturbed by whoever had excavated around the marker stone, as they had been returned to the ground in the same location but in a random fashion and re-covered with topsoil.

Prior to excavation the condition of the site was recorded by photographic and written record. The dimensions of the marker stone were recorded (0.58m long by 0.14m wide and protruding 0.30m from the turf) and the area around the stone was examined. As Dr MacLeod had previously noted, the area immediately around the marker stone had clearly been disturbed (ie dug into) at some time. The turf where it remained to the north, south and west of the stone was thinner than the surrounding area, and had sunk 0.2m below the height of the adjacent ground surface, suggesting it had been recently cut and then redeposited.