
3 Loch Shurrery ('site 1' on **Illus 1**)

by Alistair MacLaren

3.1 Introduction

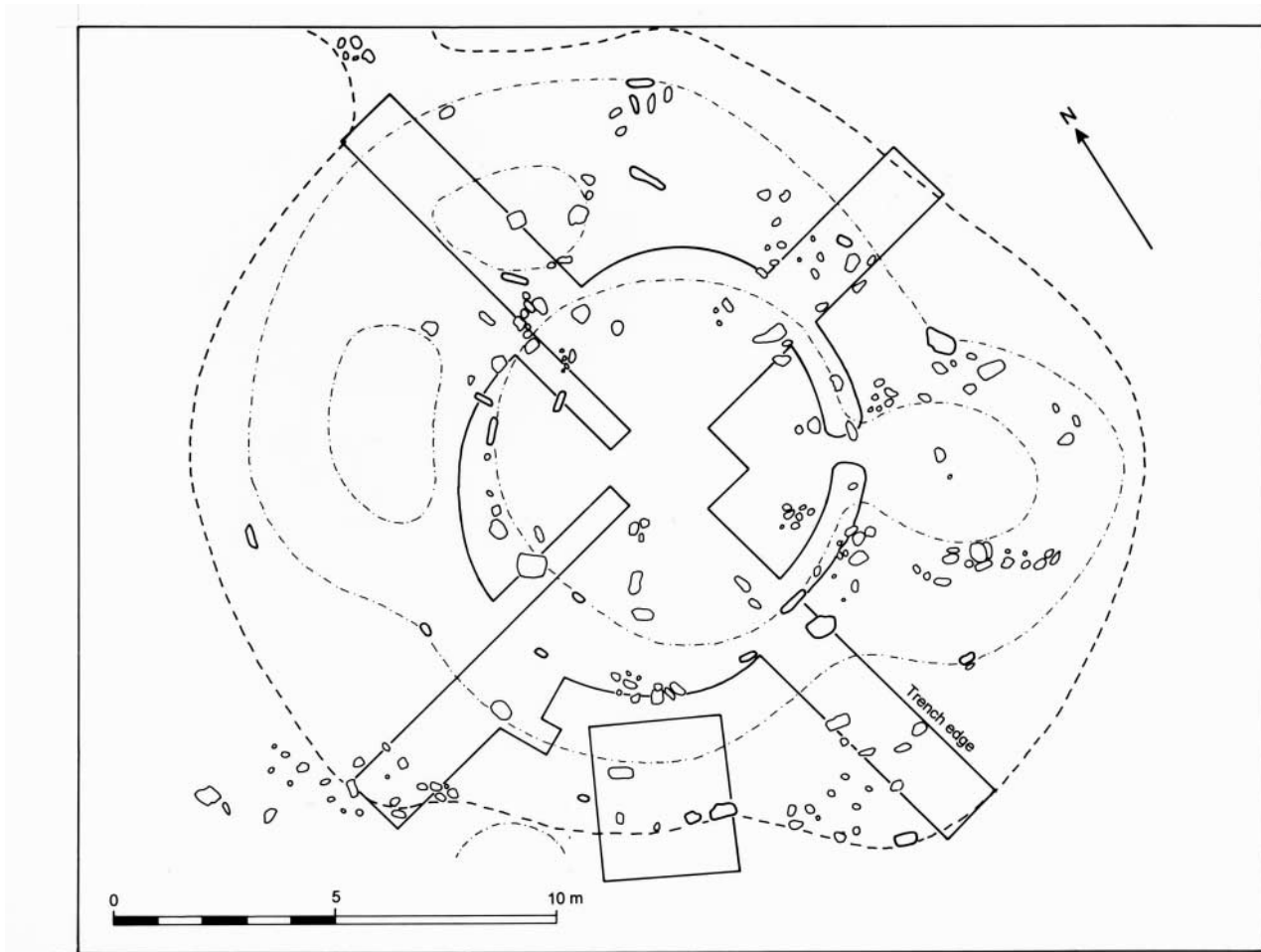
Before excavation, the hut circle at Loch Shurrery appeared as a low, grass-grown collection of stones spread over an irregular area measuring about 80ft (24.4 m) from north-west to south-east by about 60ft (18.3 m) transversely, and some 3ft (0.9 m) in greatest height. It was situated within a few yards of the inner face of the dam at the northern end of the loch (NGR ND 043568). The central area was hollowed, and some of the stones that could be seen protruding through the turf suggested the inner face

of a wall surrounding a circular area about 30ft (9.1 m) in diameter. The position of an entrance was not visible.

The apparent centre-point of the central area was taken as the principal survey-point, and from it a contour survey and plan of the visible remains was made before excavation began. The excavation was based on four radial cuttings, each 5ft (1.5 m) wide, which met at the centre-point to provide a section and cross-section (**Illus 3, 4, 5 and 6**). The south-western quadrant of the central area was cleared first, followed by the north-eastern



Illus 3 Loch Shurrery hut circle: general view from the east



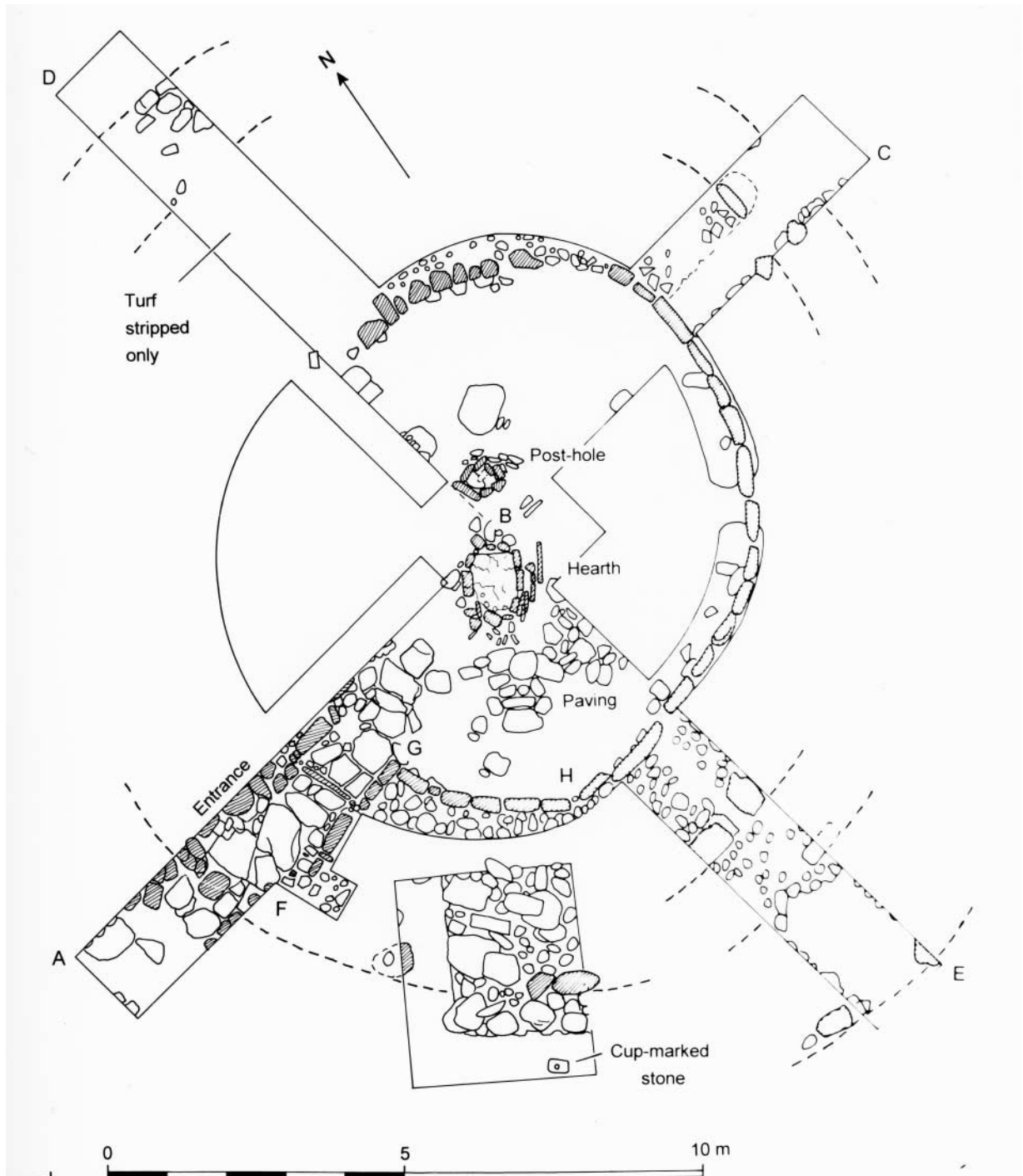
Illus 4 Loch Shurrery hut circle: contour survey and trench plan (vertical interval of original survey: 1ft)

quadrant; and, finally, a square was taken out at the centre, and a narrow curving trench was made in order to expose the inner face of the wall round its south-east arc. The turf was stripped from the north-western quadrant, but no further clearing was done, and most of the south-eastern quadrant was left undisturbed.

3.2 The wall (Illus 5, 6 and 7)

The four cuttings made through the wall (three radial cuttings and the square cutting on the south-west) showed that it was constructed of a mixture of random rubble (average size 9in by 12in (0.23 m by 0.30 m)) and soil, which rested on a thin foundation of flat slabs and rough cobbling. This core material was retained by an inner and outer face, and had a thickness of about 8ft (2.4 m) over all. Some 4ft (1.2 m) outside the outer face, there was slight evidence of what may have been a second outer face; this could indicate that, for stability, the wall had been built with an internal strengthening revetment, or could suggest a rebuild (Illus 7). The suggested inner and outer faces are indicated with dashed lines on Illus 5 and 6.

The inner face of the wall was revealed for three-quarters of the circuit and, round the north-eastern and south-eastern arcs, was found to consist of a series of substantial blocks founded on a thin base of flagstones and having the gaps between them filled with earth and small stones (cf. Illus 9 and 10). There was no trace of a second course of large facing-stones and no suggestion that the face was carried any higher in the form of coursed flagstones. The south-western arc of the inner face was different (Illus 6: section H–G): from the inner south corner of the entrance towards the south-east, the face was built entirely of flagstones laid horizontally and surviving to a maximum height of 1ft 6in (0.46 m) in five shallow bonded courses, individual flagstones measuring up to 1ft 8in (0.5 m) in length and between 3in (0.08 m) and 6in (0.15 m) in thickness. The amount of core material that survived in this sector suggested that the face of the wall was originally at least 3ft (0.9 m) high. The reason for the change in construction used on the south-western arc may have been associated with the entrance, where bonded coursing had also been incorporated (Illus 6: section G–F); and this could suggest that the entrance and adjacent sections of the wall were the first parts of the circle to be built.



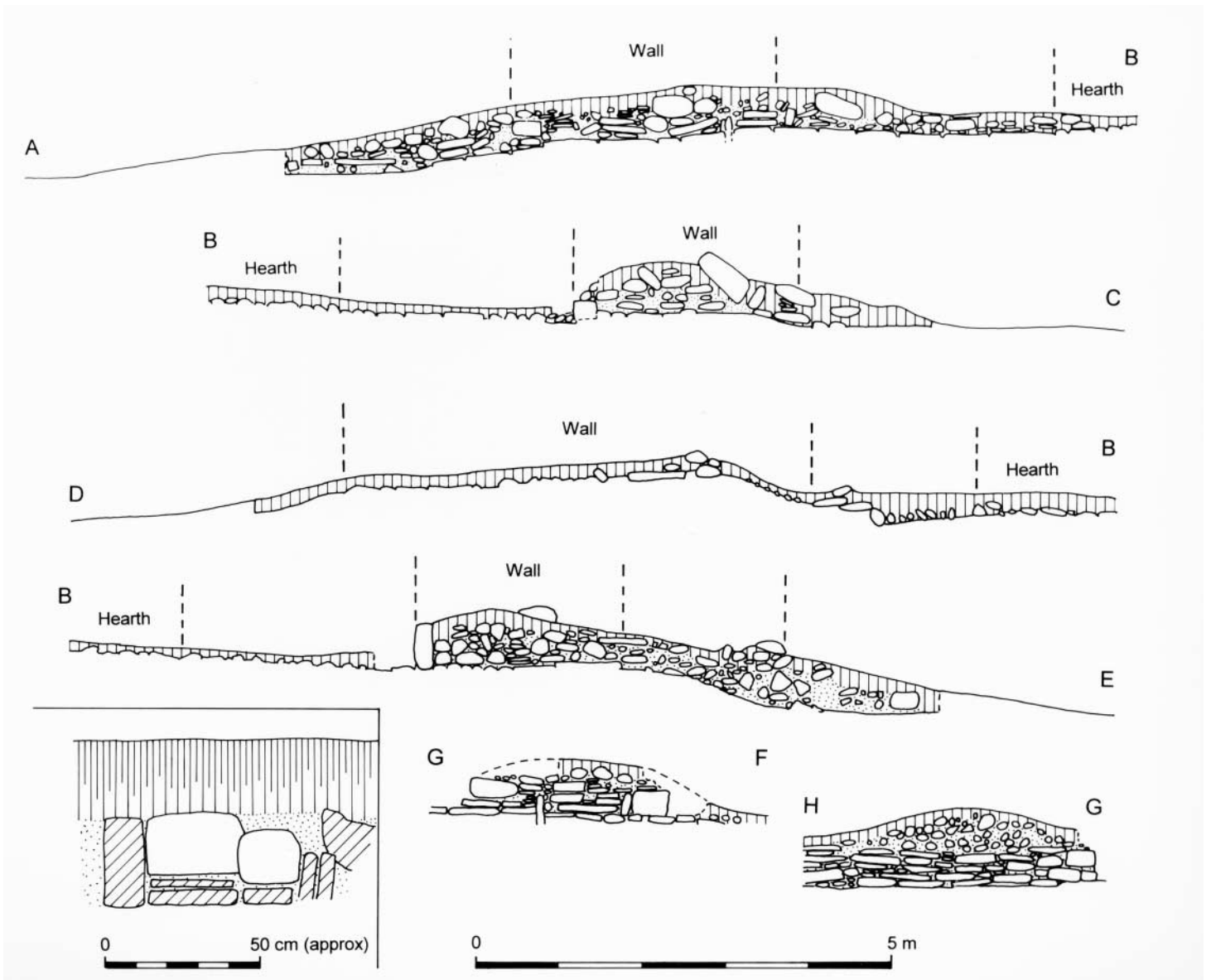
Illus 5 Loch Shurrery hut circle: main plan

3.3 The entrance (Illus 5 and 8)

The entrance, facing west-south-west, had an average width of 4ft (1.2 m). Except for two shallow courses of flagstone forming the base of the inner corner, and one large slab immediately to the west, practically all of the northern lining-wall of the passage had been robbed or dislodged. The southern side of the passage, however, remained fairly intact to a height of 1ft 6in (0.46 m) (Illus 6: section G–F). Its wall was based on a solid flagged foundation, and its inner corner was formed by a single large block

(1ft 7in (0.48 m) by 1ft 9in (0.53 m) by 8in (0.2 m)), which rested on the lowest course of the flagstone. To the west of it, the wall was carried outwards as a stretch of up to four shallow courses, and at the outer corner there was another substantial block (1ft 4in (0.41 m) long and 11in (0.28 m) high).

The side-walls were checked at a point some 3ft 6in (1.07 m) from their inner ends, leaving a 7in (0.18 m) projection on each side for the door to bear against. Just inside the check, a single thin slab (3ft (0.91 m) long and up to 3in (0.08 m) thick) was firmly set on edge transversely across the passage to form a sill



Illus 6 Loch Shurrery hut circle: sections and elevations (inset: a sketch of the central 'post-hole')

rising 7in (0.18 m) above the floor (*Illus 8*). The floor was paved with large heavy slabs, the interstices filled with small cobbling. This paving extended into the interior of the hut for a distance of 5ft (1.5 m). One sherd of pottery was found resting on the paving of the passage 2ft (0.6 m) outside the sill-stone, but was unfortunately not identifiable as to form or date (see *Section 4*, No. 1).

3.4 The internal area (*Illus 5, 9 and 10*)

The interior as excavated, which measured 28ft (8.5 m) by about 26ft (7.9 m) across, is considered to have been disturbed, but sufficient flagstones remained in position to support the interpretation that the floor was originally composed of paving bedded on a 3in (0.08 m) layer of rough cobbling set into the natural clay subsoil. [*Ed.*: the assumption

being that what survived in the entrance and the south-western quadrant was originally representative of the whole interior]. Situated just off centre there was a sub-rectangular hearth consisting of a paved area measuring 3ft 4in (1.02 m) by 2ft 2in (0.66 m), which was defined by a kerb of thin slabs set on edge; the hearth floor was covered by a layer of burnt material mixed with small stones (*Illus 11*). Two samples of the charcoal were submitted for radiocarbon dating in 1997 (see *Section 5*). Both fragments were of Alder (identifications by Dr Mike Cressey). The determinations produce calibrated ranges (at 2-*sigma*) of 346 – 4 cal BC and 341 cal BC – cal AD 1.

Situated 2ft 6in (0.76 m) north-north-east of the hearth there was a post-socket, consisting of a polygonal hole sunk some 9in (0.2 m) into the ground, paved with a double layer of flat stones (up to 2in (30–50 mm) thick) and lined with sizeable stones (up to 1ft 8in (0.5 m) by 9in (0.23 m) by 10in (0.25 m): see



Illus 7 Loch Shurrery hut circle: cutting across the wall

Illus 6 inset). One of the lining-stones had originally been a saddle quern (**Section 3.5**, no. 5). Some burnt material and a few small packing-stones were recovered from it.

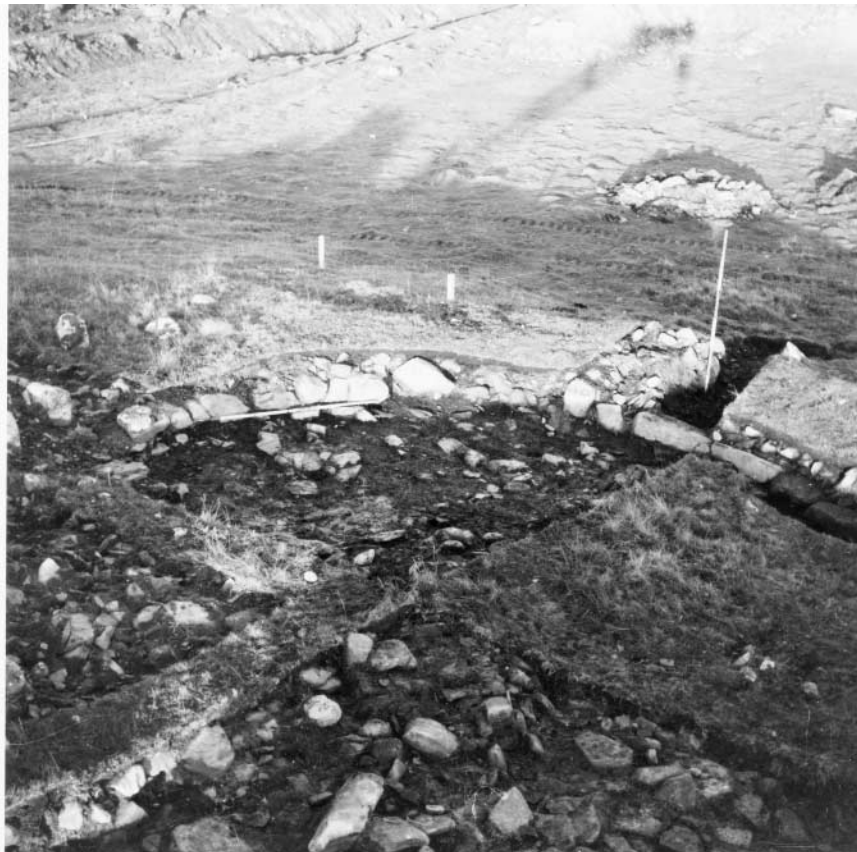
3.5 Small finds

1. Sherd from paving of entrance passage (**Section 4**, pottery no. 1)
2. Two sherds from surface of wall foundation in the South cutting immediately outside the outer face (**Section 4**, pottery nos. 2 & 3)
3. Wood fragments from hearth (see **Section 5**)
4. Burnt stone from wall core north of entrance (**Section 4**, 'pottery' no. 4)
5. Saddle quern from the post-socket near the hearth
6. Stone bearing a single cup-mark from wall tumble outside wall in South-West cutting

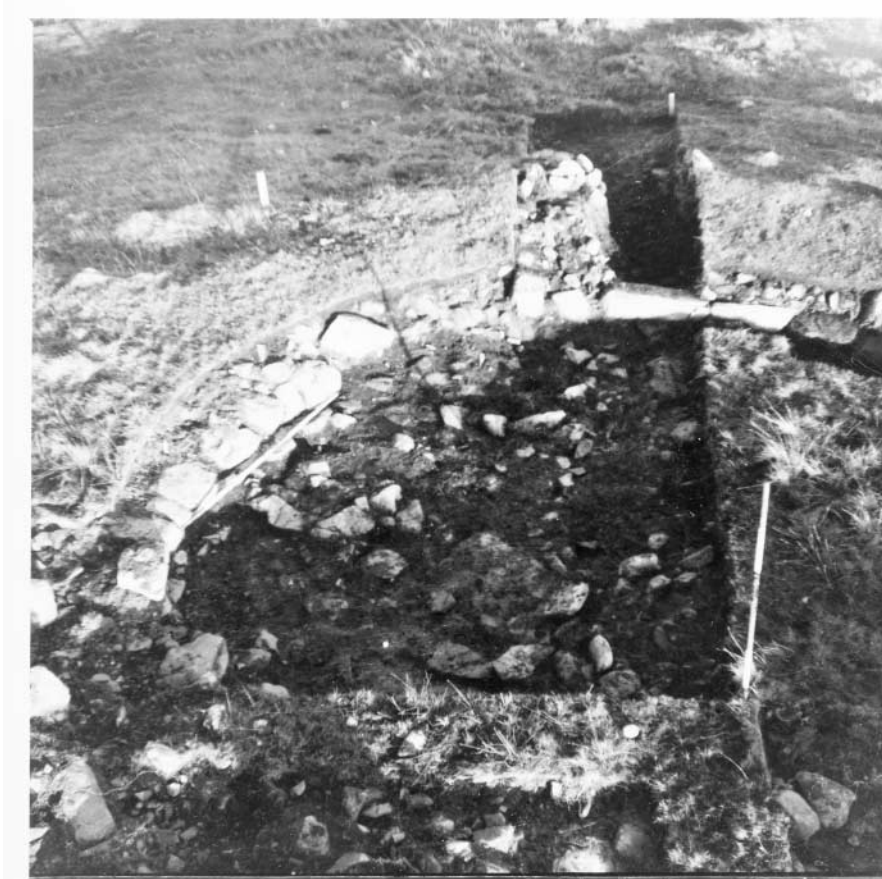
[*Ed.*: Items 5 and 6 were no longer extant in 1996 when post-excavation work restarted, so little more can be said about them. The excavator was of the opinion that the position of the small cup-marked stone (**Illus 5**) among the external wall-tumble suggests that it had served as core material and was of no other significance to the builders of the hut circle than just a handy bit of rubble to fill the space between the inner and outer faces. The saddle quern had definitely been re-used. It may support a date earlier than the later first millennium BC for some of the activity on the site, if the dating evidence for the quern transition (**Caulfield 1980**) is accepted, but see **Armit 1992**, 192 and **Section 6.2**]



Illus 8 Loch Shurrery hut circle: the entrance



Illus 9 Loch Shurrery hut circle: interior looking north-east



Illus 10 Loch Shurrery hut circle: interior, north-eastern quadrant



Illus 11 Loch Shurrery hut circle: the hearth