
7 Lambsdale Leans ('site 2' on **Illus 1**)

by *Alistair MacLaren*

7.1 Introduction

Before excavation, the Lambsdale Leans site (NGR ND 051548) appeared as a grass-grown mound, about 7ft (2.1 m) high and an irregular oval on plan, measuring about 75ft (22.9 m) in length by a maximum of 55ft (16.8 m) transversely (**Illus 12** and **13**). Towards the eastern and western ends of the mound, the tops of several, potentially large, stones were visible protruding through the surface which was uneven and pitted with rabbit-holes. Probing suggested that the upper levels, at least, of the mound consisted largely of sand, and at the western end, where a strip of turf had been removed, sand could be seen with a 2½-inch-deep (0.06 m) layer of burnt material running through it.

The contour survey – and the pattern of the excavation cuttings (**Illus 13**) – was based on a line roughly marking the long axis of the mound, which was aligned

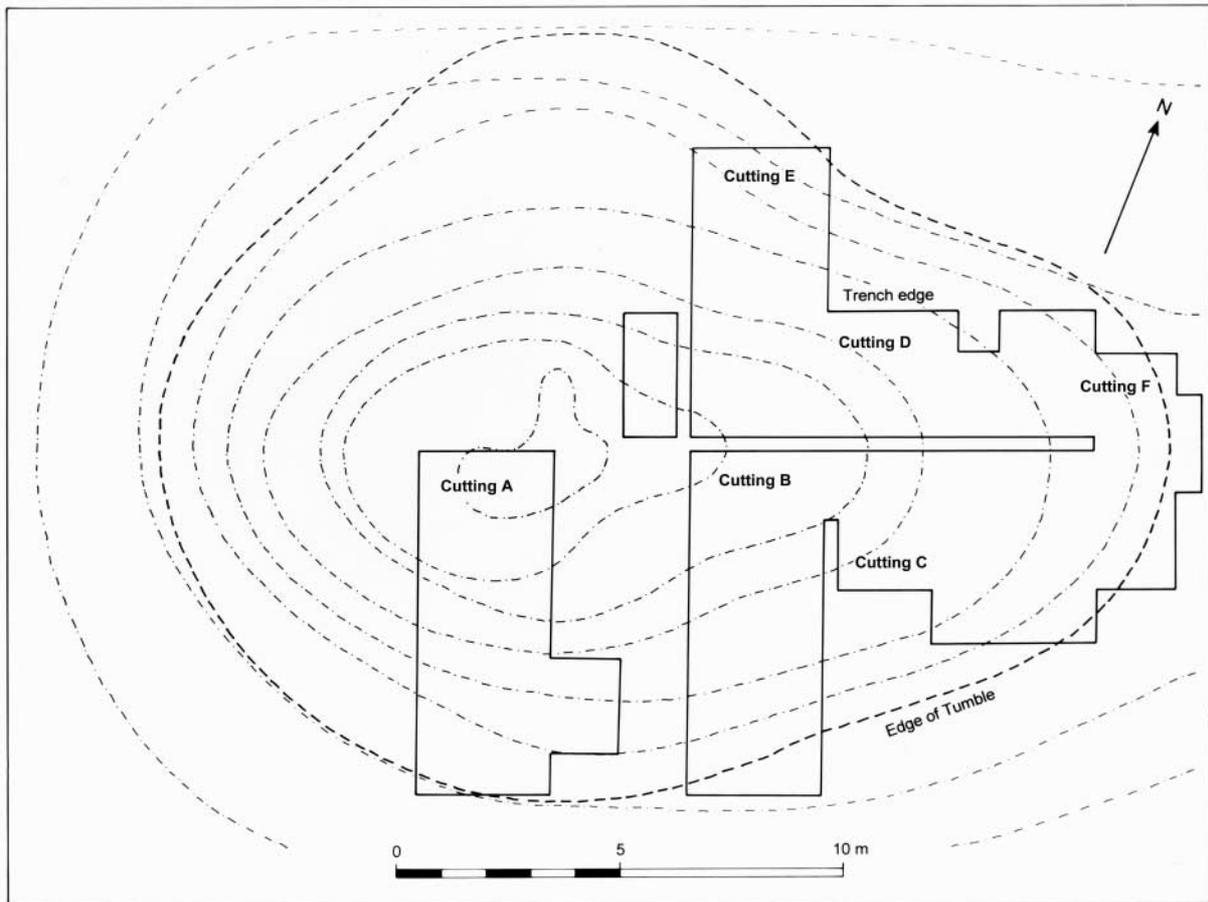
on a magnetic bearing of 80° (69.5° True in 1955). In the three weeks which were spent on this site, in spite of the loss of seven days to severe rain, and interruption by showers on three other days, enough stripping was done, mainly in the eastern half of the mound (some 1400 square feet [130 square metres approx.]), to reveal that it was largely composed of a mixture of sand and earth, in which there was evidence of stone structures associated with layers of burning, which suggested two occupation floors. The partial skeletal remains of two adult females were recovered, together with a few sherds of pottery.

7.2 The excavations (**Illus 13, 14** and **15**)

The pattern of excavation trenches was laid out in order to provide a longitudinal section of the mound



Illus 12 Lambsdale Leans mound: general view from the east



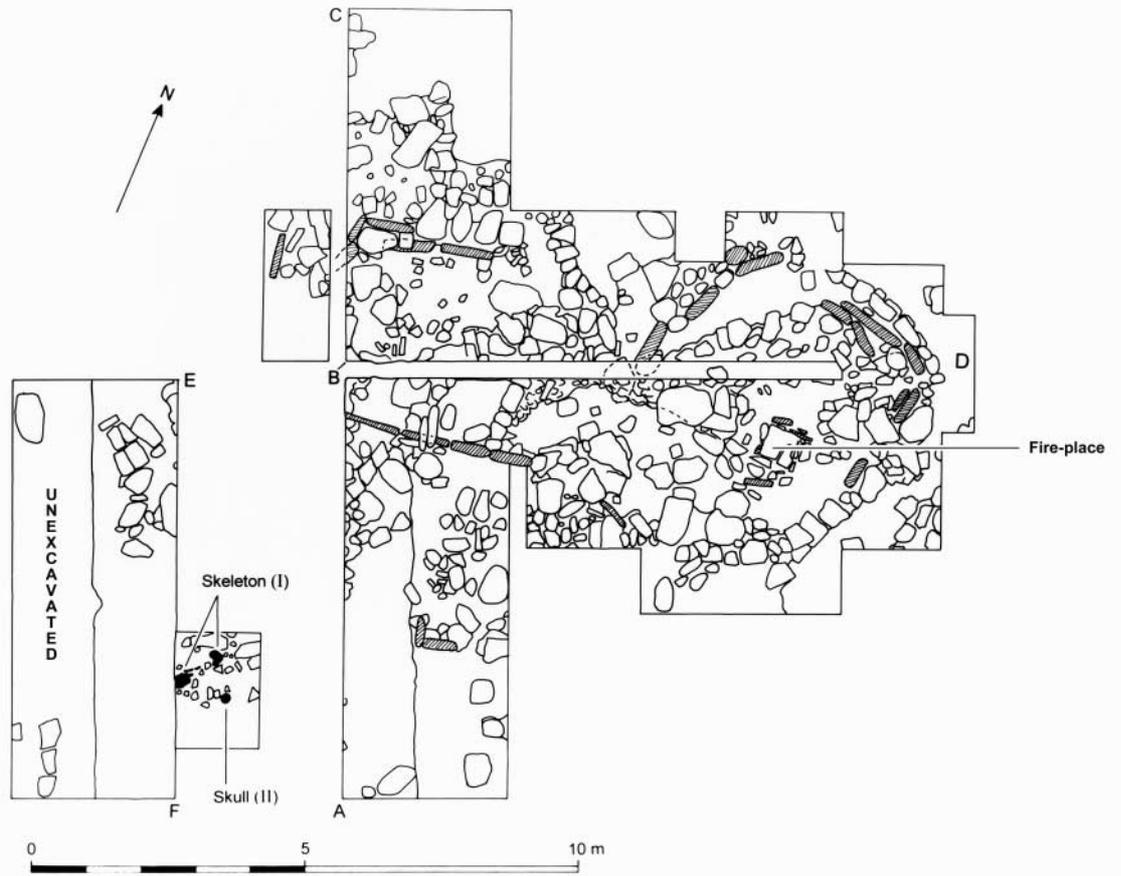
Illus 13 Lambsdale Leans mound: contour survey and trench plan (vertical interval of original survey: 1ft)

and, running towards it from each side, a series of cross-sections. They were examined in alphabetical order (see [Illus 13](#)), and their layout was developed in order to expose stone structures as they became visible within the body of the mound.

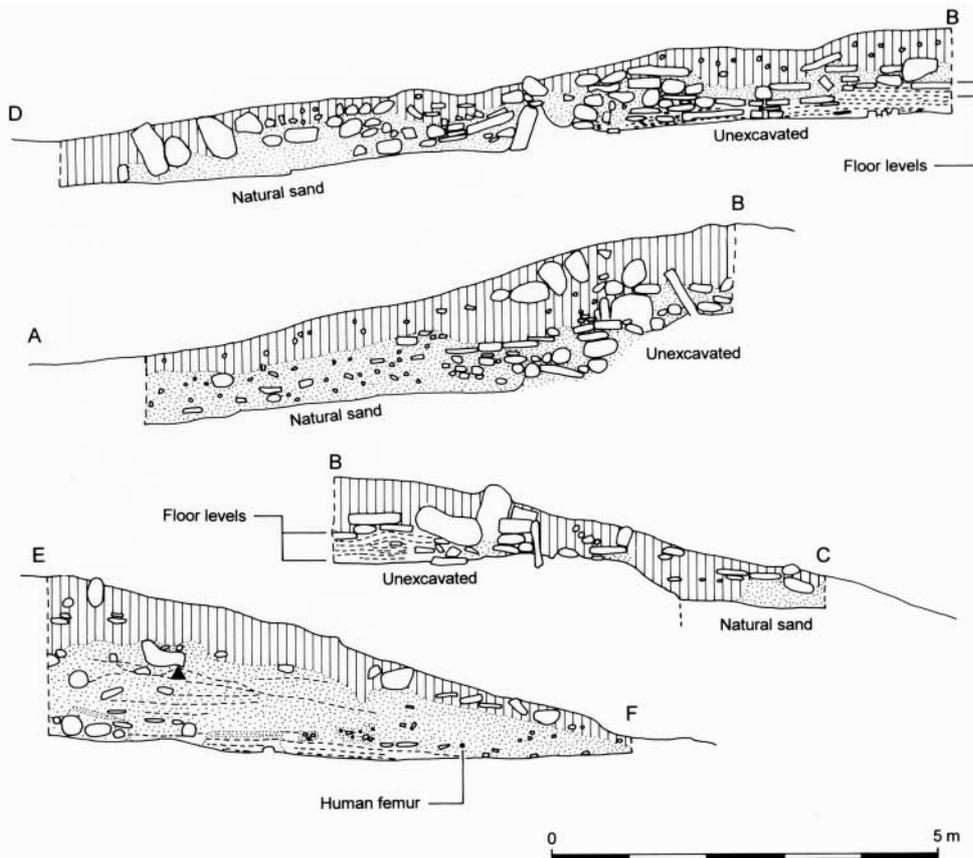
The first cutting (A) was put into the southern side of the mound at its broadest and highest point. The drawing of its east face ([Illus 15](#): section E–F; see also [Illus 16](#)) shows that it consisted largely of sand and earth incorporating some stones, most of them apparently set at random, and all of them situated towards the inner (north) end of the cutting. The sandy mixture had, running through it, several lines of burnt material, the heaviest at lower levels, and about 7ft (2.1 m) in from the southern end of the cutting, and low down, human bones were exposed. The cutting was later extended to uncover the upper parts of two femora with part of the pelvis articulated ([Illus 18](#)), and the lower end of the vertebrae, and parts of a skull (all lying supine), with nearby, and at a slightly higher level, the remains of another skull. The skeleton [*Ed.*: oriented NE–SW] had several flat stones ranged round it, but there was no trace of a coffin or cist, and no attendant grave-goods. The skeletal remains were examined by Dr L H Wells, at that time on the staff of the Anatomy Department, University of Edinburgh, and his report appears below ([Section 9](#)).

The second cutting (B) was of the same dimensions (20ft by 10ft (6.1 m by 3.1 m)) as those of cutting A and running parallel to it 10ft (3.1 m) to the east ([Illus 15](#): section A–B). The outer (southern) 10ft (3.1 m) of this cutting was found to consist mainly of sand and soil, but the inner 15ft (4.5 m) contained a lot of stones, including flat slabs disposed in such a way as to suggest, if not establish, the presence of a floor or occupation-level running into the very heart of the mound, its outer limit about 2ft 6in (0.75 m) below the surface; and there were indications of a lower occupation-level, founded on the undisturbed natural sand beneath.

At this stage, that is three days into the excavation (with one whole day lost to torrential rain), I decided against removing any more of the northern two-thirds of cutting B in favour of extending eastwards to follow the features already exposed, and on the fourth day cuttings C and D were deturfed. This showed the upper occupation-level of cutting B to extend to the east, and also exposed what appeared to be the foundations of a sub-circular structure, not definitely associated, which in turn was extending farther to the east. Two days later, additional cuttings were made on the north (cutting E) and on the east (cutting F). In cutting F, the eastern arc of the sub-circular structure was completed and, in cutting E, what appeared to be



Illus 14 Lambsdale Leans mound: plan of the unfinished excavations



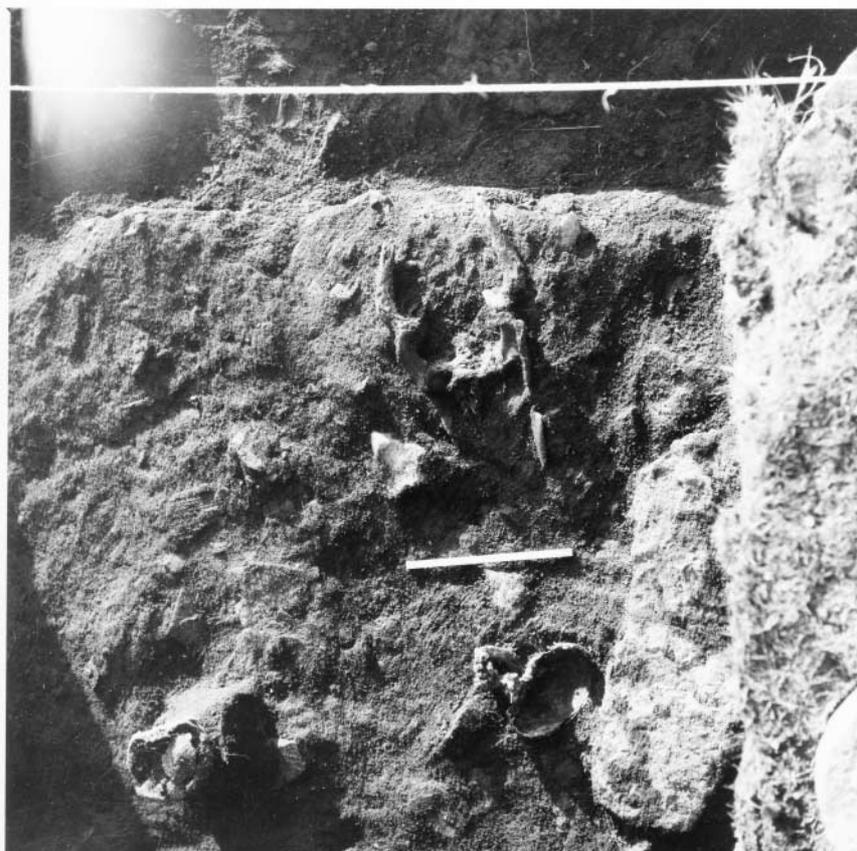
Illus 15 Lambsdale Leans mound: sections



Illus 16 Lambsdale Leans mound: section-face of Cutting A



Illus 17 Lambsdale Leans mound: the 'lower' stone structure



Illus 18 Lambsdale Leans mound: human remains. The skeleton (Lambsdale I) is on the right and the skull (Lambsdale II) on the left

part of the northern side and north-western angle of the rectangular structure first uncovered in cutting B was exposed.

It was at this point that the weather broke, and between 11 and 25 October seven full days were lost to persistent heavy rain, while three others were showery, leaving only four days uninterrupted. Progress was so severely delayed that it became clear that there would not be time to do further excavation, and I decided to do what more I could to clean up what I had already done, and leave the lower levels undisturbed.

7.3 The 'lower' stone structure

In the easternmost cutting (F) an arc of stones was found to be resting on the natural yellow sand (*Illus 17*; see also *Illus 15*: section D–B). It consisted mainly of flat slabs laid horizontally in two courses to form an outer kerb. Inside this kerb were set large flat slabs placed vertically and all sloping outwards. This setting was traced in cutting D, but in cutting C it merged with a jumble of stones, which there was not time to explore (*Illus 14*, area of cuttings C, D and F). The area defined by this outer wall was covered by the remains of a rough paving incorporating several flagstones laid flat. The remains of a fire-place (see *Illus 14*) consisted of a rectangular hearth-stone

accompanied by slabs set on edge and protruding some 3in (0.08 m) above the level of the hearth itself. All these stones were cracked and showed signs of having been subjected to heat.

7.4 The 'upper' stone structure

[*Ed.*: NB that no stratified sequence could be established relating the two sets of structures in Cuttings B–F to each other or to the burials in Cutting A: 'lower' and 'upper' appear to be working references to the way in which the structures were encountered during the excavations, though see section B–D on *Illus 15*]

What remained of this structure formed an irregular rectangular pattern and consisted of a series of large uprights with rounded stones ranged outside them (*Illus 14*, area of cuttings B and E). The area inside was a rough floor, composed of flagstones laid flat, and overlain by a dense accumulation of burnt material in alternate yellow and black bands.

7.5 Small finds, bag numbers

1. Four sherds from cutting A, top burnt layer (see the solid triangle in section EF, *Illus 15*, for position) (Section 8, pottery nos. 1–4)

2. Sample of burnt material from cutting B (no longer extant)

3. Sherds, unstratified, from cutting B (Section 8, pottery nos. 7–12, 14 & 15)

4. Sherds of pottery and one of glass, unstratified, from cutting C (Section 8, pottery no. 13)

5. Sherds, unstratified, from cutting E (Section 8, pottery nos. 5–6)