

6 LAIGH NEWTON CENTRAL, by *Martin Carruthers & Kirsteen McLellan*

In 2005, an excavation area was located where previous evaluation trenches in 2003 had noted a cluster of three shallow pits and another pit close to the corner of a rectilinear feature (*illus 1*). Machine excavation of the 0.2–0.3m deep topsoil recovered a variety of unstratified finds including flint and chert flakes, some prehistoric pottery sherds and a fine blade of dark-green Arran pitchstone. Once the topsoil had been excavated, numerous archaeological features were visible above the underlying bands of sand and gravel. Most of the archaeological features comprised discrete features with no demonstrable stratigraphic relationships to each other. However, as with the western concentration of archaeological features, many apparently formed clusters making it possible to recognise probable spatial relationships between individual features (*illus 10*).

6.1 Structure E and associated features

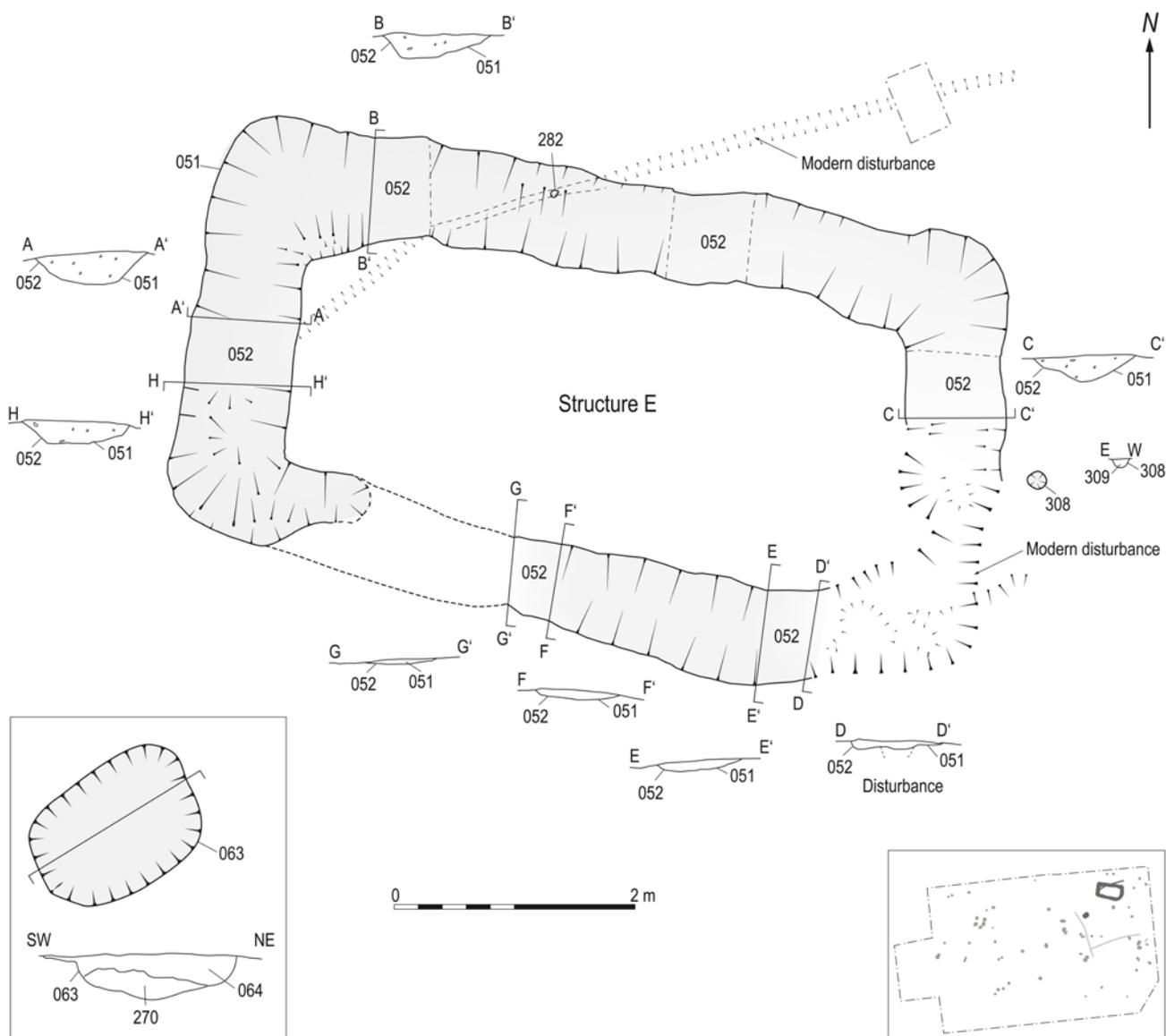
Structure E, first encountered during the 2003 evaluation, was located towards the north-east corner of the excavation area (*illus 10* and *11*) and was

defined by a shallow groove (051). This east/west-aligned rectilinear structure measured 5.1m in length and 2.3m in width. The corners were rounded and the groove varied in width and was generally flat-bottomed. Typically the outer slope was steeper and deeper than that of the inner in each section excavated. Varied preservation meant that depths varied dramatically from 0.28m in the better-preserved portions to just 0.05m in the most severely truncated southern part of the groove, where there was also a small gap. While the groove to the east of this gap merely petered out, due apparently to erosion, the groove to the west of this gap tapered to a rounded terminal. The only artefacts to come from the fill of the groove were several fragments of burnt flint and chert.

During the excavation of the north part of the rectilinear groove, a 0.10m wide and 0.14m deep stake-hole (282) was revealed just to the north of the centre of the groove, with an identical fill (283) to that filling the rectilinear groove. This stake-hole coincided with the course of a line of modern disturbance. No trace of further stake-holes was encountered in the groove.



Illus 10 Laigh Newton Central – feature distribution

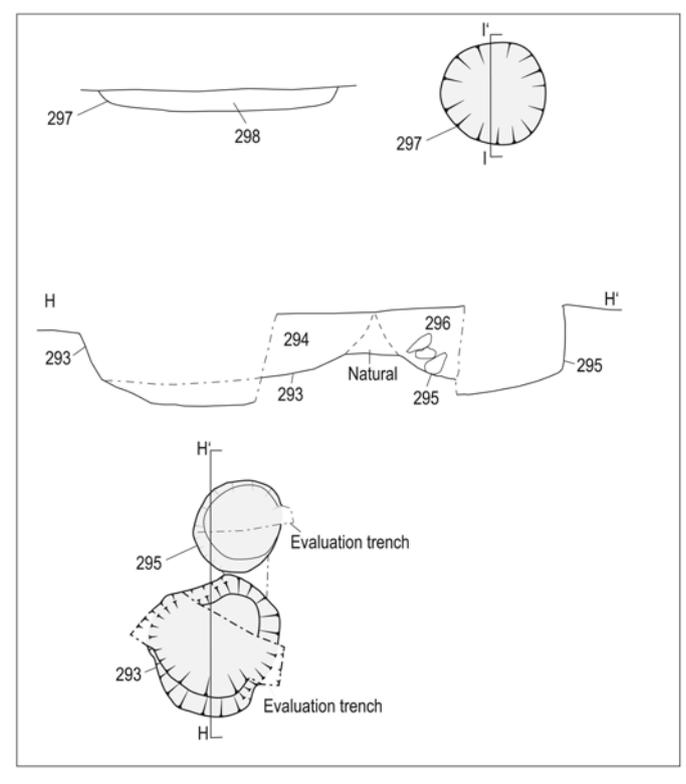
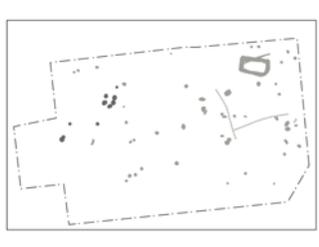
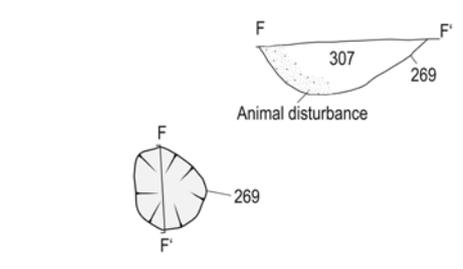
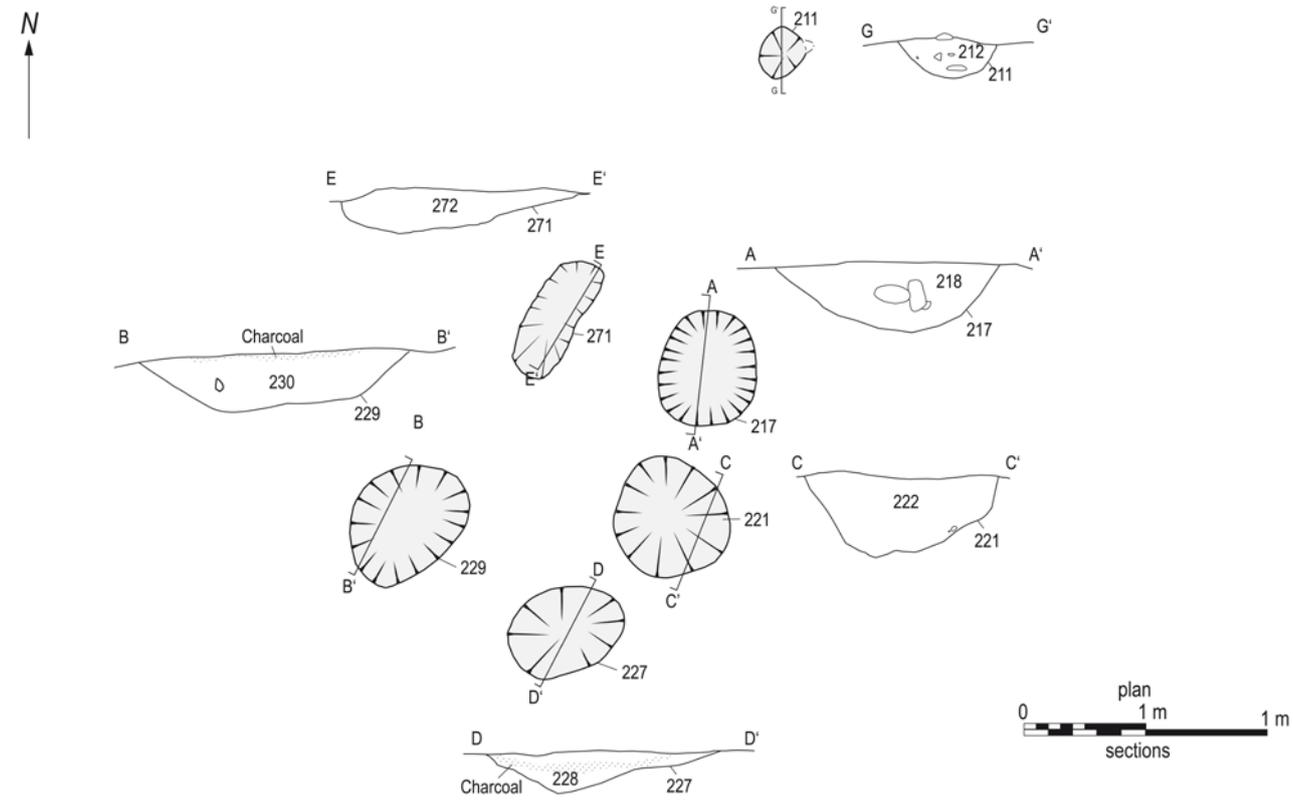


Illus 11 Structure E with feature details

Immediately to the east of Structure E lay a small circular pit (308). The feature lay c 0.25m to the east of the centre of the east 'gable' end of the rectilinear structure. It measured 0.22m in diameter and was 0.22m in depth with steep sides and a flat bottom, producing a U-shaped profile. The fill (309), a friable mid-brown silty-sand with pea-grit inclusions, contained no artefactual material.

A large rectangular pit (063), 1.7m long, 1.10m wide, lay 5m to the south-west of the rectilinear groove (illus 10 and 11). The pit had rounded corners and possessed a steep-sided but gently rounded bowl-shaped base, 0.4m deep in the centre. Two distinct fills were observed. An upper fill (064) of yellow-brown sandy-silt contained small sub-angular inclusions of charcoal flecks and some larger patches of charcoal 0.05–0.25m in thickness. Below this deposit was a layer (270) composed almost entirely of charcoal 0.05–0.35m

in thickness. The upper part of this fill layer comprised large charred fragments of round wood, apparently branches with clearly visible grain, bark and knots of branches arranged in a coherent north-west/south-east orientation as though laid in bundles. One fragment of branch appeared to be cut in two places with diagonal wedge-shaped chopping facets, possibly consistent with axe marks. The lower part of this fill was a dense mass of compacted charcoal with less obvious structure. The excavation revealed that the base of the pit had been affected by heat and reddened in places, indicating in situ burning, and there were several small, rounded cobblestones, apparently pressed into the natural sand subsoil, creating a possible lining. Only two small fragments of flint, one of which was burnt, and a small, heavily worn pottery sherd, were found in the upper fill (064) of this pit (see Ballin and Ballin Smith below).



Illus 12 Western pit clusters with details

6.2 Pit clusters

Some 30m to the west of the rectilinear structure was a cluster of pits (illus 12). These included five large sub-circular pits (229, 227, 221, 217 and 271),

of fairly consistent shape and size lying in close proximity to each other. A pit (213) of similar shape and dimensions lay to the north-east, while another cluster of three pits (293, 295 and 297), again of similar size and shape, lay to the south-west.

A concentration of charcoal containing fairly fine prehistoric pottery sherds was visible just off centre on the surface of pit 229. The fill (230) when half-sectioned revealed that the charcoal lay on the surface only and did not penetrate more than 0.03m in depth. In addition to the pottery present on the surface there were additional sherds about 0.15m further into the fill within the centre of the pit. These sherds were relatively large, some of them conjoining, from the base of what must have been a fairly large pot. There was also an increased incidence of charcoal in the vicinity of the pot, and several pieces of burnt flint (see [Ballin Smith, Ballin and Ramsay](#) below).

Pit 227 lay immediately to the east of pit 229. The fill (228) contained frequent charcoal inclusions, specks of burnt bone and some small pebbles. At a depth of 0.05m, a thin lens of more concentrated charcoal was apparent and spread right across the pit. Three sherds of prehistoric pottery were present in the upper part of the fill. Pit 221 was located to the north of pit 227 but contained no artefacts. Pit 217 lay immediately to the north of pit 221 and contained occasional chips and larger chunks of flint, some of which had been burnt. Several larger rounded stones were located towards the centre of its fill (218). Pit 213, to the north-east of this cluster, was an irregularly shaped feature, the fill (214) of which contained a base sherd of prehistoric pottery (see [Ballin Smith](#) below).

To the south-west of the main cluster of pits (229, 227, 221 and 217) was a cluster of three large pits, first identified during the 2003 evaluation. Two of the pits (293 and 295) were immediately adjacent to each other. Evaluation slots through the centre

of these pits were emptied prior to their full excavation. The western upper edge of pit 293 was found to just touch the eastern edge of pit 295 ([illus 12](#)). The fill (294) of pit 293 contained seven sherds of pottery and frequent charcoal fragments, with carbonised hazel nutshell fragments and flecks of burnt bone throughout. Pit 295 also contained sherds of prehistoric pottery, numerous burnt bone fragments and charred hazelnut shells, and a triangular flint scraper (see [Ballin Smith, Ballin and Ramsay](#) below). Pit 297 yielded two fragments of charred hazel nutshell.

6.3 *Miscellaneous pits and post-holes*

An incoherent pattern of small pits and post-holes (195, 211, 233, 235, 265 and 269) was loosely distributed across the excavation area ([illus 10](#)). Of these features, only a few were notable, such as a small pit (211) located just *c* 2.5m to the north-east of pit 217. This circular pit contained frequent charcoal fragments, several carbonised hazel nutshells, a flint blade and six sherds of fine and well-fired pottery, one sherd of which had an everted rolled rim (see [Ballin Smith, Ballin and Ramsay](#) below). The fill (304) of another pit (303) contained a small worn sherd of decorated prehistoric pottery. The fill (030) of another pit (029) to the south of the rectilinear groove structure contained barley cereal grains. The remainder of the features varied in shape and were filled with different shades of brown silty sand but contained no artefacts. Two modern field drains (041 and 191) were also observed ([illus 10](#)).