3 The stratigraphic evidence

3.1 Trench A (the house)

An oval house appeared as a slightly elevated ring of boulders, built on a level knoll of bedrock towards the south-east corner of the enclosure (Illus 4). It measured 11m by 9m internally and was constructed on the flattest and driest part of the natural platform, its east wall being built on a break of slope.

3.1.1 Phase 1: site preparation

The platform was prepared for the construction of the house by the removal of turf and subsoil to bedrock. Only a very thin granular soil, about 10mm thick, remained below some of the house walls and towards the north part of the interior of the house.

3.1.2 Construction

The oval or sub-circular prehistoric house, measuring 13.5m by 10m externally over walls 1m thick, had been built on a level platform on a gently sloping hill (Illus 5). Four vertical pillars, each over 0.75m high and roughly rectangular in section, were positioned in a diamond-shaped arrangement, approximately 4–6m apart in the centre of the house. The south pillar lay 1–2m outside the general alignment. Three of the pillars had been well packed with smaller stones set on edge around their bases while the west stone, which was much larger, was underpinned and secured by small stones. Other boulders connected the south and west pillars to the surrounding house wall, to create two internal recesses. Later stone robbing and wall collapse removed any evidence (if it ever existed) of recesses from the vicinity of the north and east pillars.

Before its walls were built, a Y-shaped drain was dug into the deeper subsoil in the north part of the house (Illus 6). The longest arm (9.3m) of the drain ran from a point near the west pillar. It curved towards the north pillar and then continued east in a straight line exiting 3.8m beyond the wall of the house. It was 0.2m deep, 0.4–0.6m wide and was capped by flat stones. Many of the capstones were broken or had been removed in antiquity. Beneath the wall on the east side of the house the edges of the drain were built of coursed stone to a depth of about 0.4m, but beyond the house the drain continued as a single line of stones placed end to end on top of the sloping bedrock.

The shorter arm of the drain lay immediately to the north of the first, running from a point close to the west pillar to join the longer section near the north pillar. It was 1.8m in length and was of a comparable width and depth to the other drain, but was of superior construction. It had a capping of eight horizontal slabs laid side by side, which replaced a layer of

Illus 6 Drains and the north-east pillar of the house, viewed from the south-west. Scales 0.5m and 2m

Illus 7 The interior of the house with its paved entrance in the foreground, viewed from the east. Scales 1m and 2m

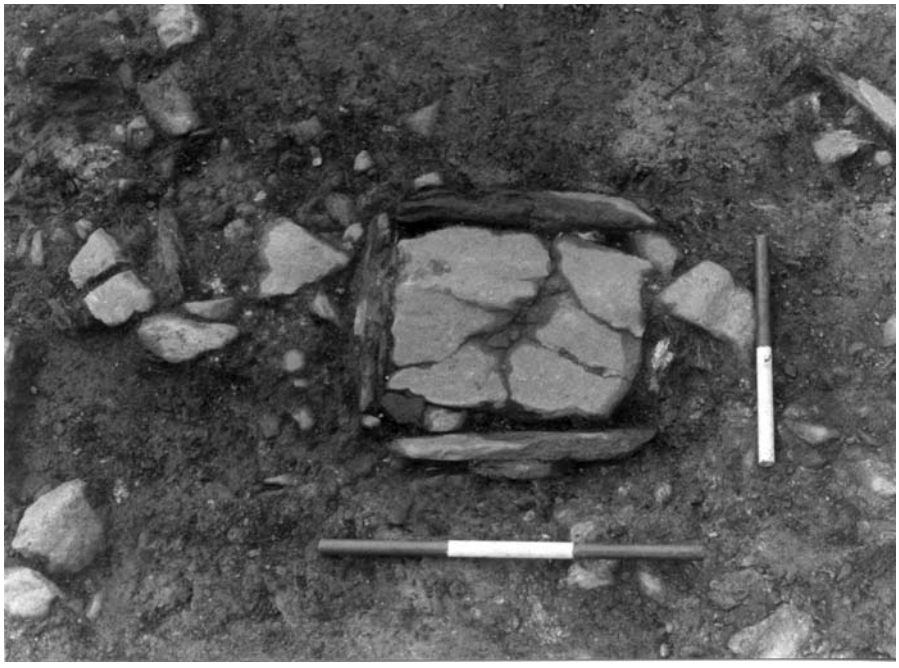
earlier slabs beneath. The drain was deeper at its west end due to the construction of a sump. A second sump at its east end marked its junction with the other drain.

The house entrance was located in the south-west corner of the building, and faced the opening through the enclosure dyke. It was demarcated by three tall boulders on its north-west side and by two boulders to the south. It was about 1m wide and 2m long and was paved with three large, flat stones, with smaller stones infilling the gaps. Several different rock types were used for the pavement including pink sandstone, quartz and steatite blocks (Illus 7). A curved screen or porch, built of four large stones to the immediate south and west of the entrance, extended the paving a further 3m until it was lost in wall tumble. It is possible that this entrance extension functioned as an annex to the building.

Once the boulders and paving stones were in place, the entrance masonry and walls of the house were constructed. The walls had either been pierced by simple recesses built into the thickness of their masonry, or by later stone robbing. Only a core of silty subsoil and small stones survived either side of the entrance to indicate where the house walls had been. Wall collapse and stone robbing had reduced most of the north and west sides of the building to its foundations of small rubble.In the north-east corner of the building, a 2.5m length of wall survived in a reasonable condition to a height of 0.7m and a width of about 1m. Its inner and outer faces were formed of large boulders while its wall core was constructed of small stones, loose earth and some worked steatite in the upper levels. Its southern end overlay the drain. The only other stretch of house wall to survive was a

Illus 8 The collapsed east wall of the house, viewed from the south. Scales 1m and 2m

Illus 9 Stone box in the floor of the house with its lid in place. Scales 0.2m and 0.3m



Illus 10 Stone box without its lid. Scales 0.2m and 0.3m

4.3m length in the south-east. This fragment had been constructed directly onto the bedrock and comprised two rows of boulders with a core of small rubble. The wall was approximately 1m wide at this point and survived to a height of 0.3–0.5m. A large boulder linked the south pillar with this fragment of wall to form a rectangular recess 2.5m long and 1.0m wide. Five stones, packed with smaller stones, formed a low kerb to the recess, although its eastward return towards the house wall was largely absent. The continuation of the wall north-eastwards was identified as an arc of tumbled stones lying 0.45m outside the house footprint. The wall had fallen over and was resting on the sloping bedrock. This fragment of wall had been 9m long and at least 0.8m high prior to its collapse (Illus 8).

The only other early feature of the building was a

small, square, stone box (Illus 9; Illus 10) set into the subsoil below the floor of the house. It occupied a central position in the building, 2m from each of the pillars except the southern one. The box was constructed of vertical slabs resting on a stone base, luted with blue clay. It measured 0.24m by 0.24m and was 0.18m deep; its sides protruding slightly above ground level. Although shattered, its stone lid did not appear to have been a perfect fit and was probably removable. On the evidence of peat charcoal identified within it (Section 4.3), the box is interpreted as a container for retaining smouldering peat embers for relighting fires on the nearby hearth.

3.1.3 Phase 3: the use of the house

The occupation of the house was indicated by a series of five hearths, their accompanying ash deposits interleaved with very shallow clayey floor deposits (Illus 11). The earliest hearths were revealed only as burnt, circular areas of subsoil, 0.6–0.8m in diameter, lying to the immediate south-east of the stone box in the centre of the house. Both hearths had thin yellow patches of clay around their perimeters, and fragments of burnt stone or thin lenses of red and black ash within them. Partially overlying one of these hearths was another, better preserved one. Although irregular in shape, it was the same size as the earlier hearths and survived as a patch of burnt subsoil and stone. This in turn was replaced by another hearth which had a prepared base of blue-grey clay, and which lay slightly further west. It was 0.7m in diameter but only 77mm thick and did not show any signs of burning. Interleaving with this and the underlying hearth was a blue-black charcoal deposit with traces of iron pan.

Overlying these hearths was yet another one, 0.9m in diameter. Its centre of yellow/orange clay-ash was surrounded by thin lenses of black and grey ash, and patches of buff/yellow and blue/grey clay (Illus 12). Lying on top of all the hearths was a thin, discontinuous lens of red ash, clay and stone. This was most noticeable in the south-west part of the floor. On the north-east side, lenses of red ash and stone alternated with yellow clay patches at the east end of the drain.

Capping the hearth deposits and the red ash was a thin black horizon of ash and charcoal, which represented floor deposits or perhaps the burnt roof of the building. These shallow deposits were confined to the slightly hollowed central area of the building, between the four pillars, and towards its north-east side. The remainder of the centre of the house was either bedrock or hardened, stony subsoil that was devoid of occupation deposits (Illus 13).

3.1.4 Phase 4: abandonment

At some stage the house was abandoned and became roofless. This allowed the formation of a silty soil/subsoil with iron staining to a depth of about 0.5m in the west of the house. It was shallower to the south and north. It contained some ash but was stonier close to the house walls. Where the house wall had collapsed in the east, the subsoil was replaced by a granular iron pan which had developed over the exposed bedrock and between the wall stones. A collapse of the house wall, which filled the kerbed recess, probably occurred during this period.

3.1.5 Phase 5: reuse

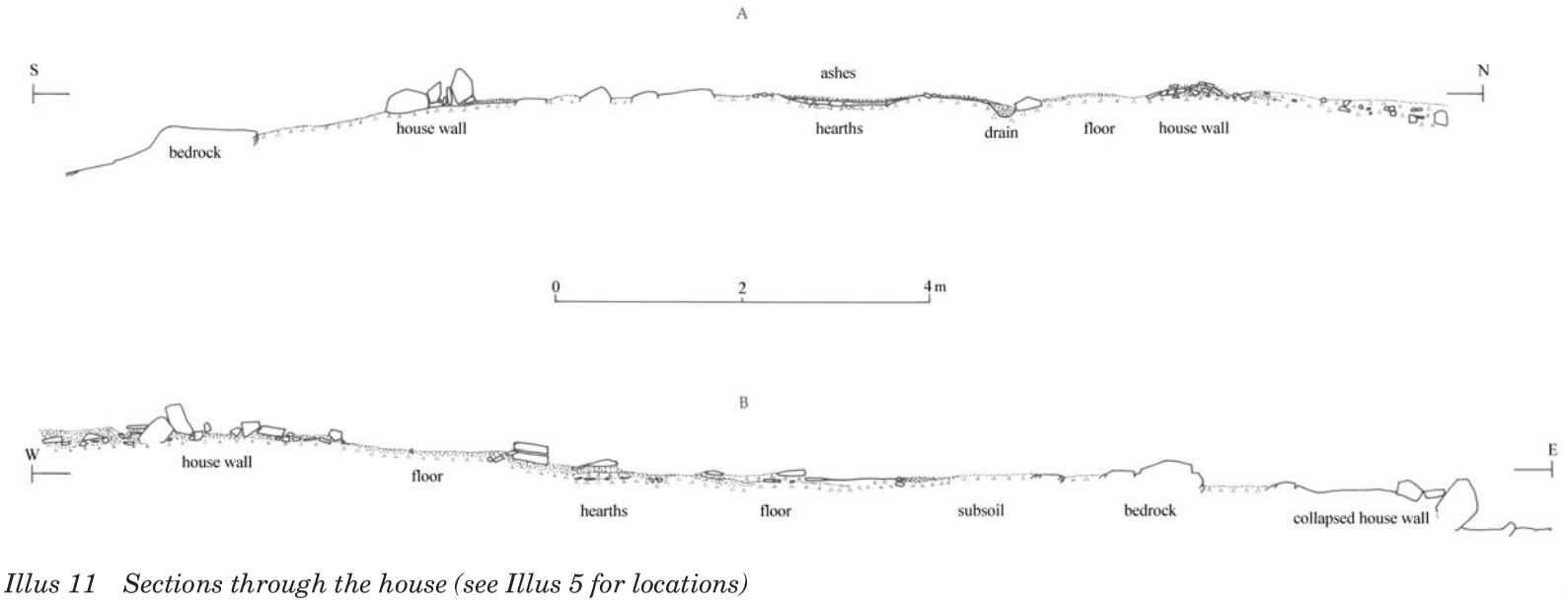
During the development of the iron pan and soil, the site was temporarily reoccupied and an attempt made to construct a shelter within the remains of the house. Only three isolated features belong to this phase, a post-hole, a curved wall and a shallow feature. The wall, which lay to the west of the centre of the earlier building, was built of seven large flat stones forming a single-faced wall, one or two stones high and 1.6m long. Two additional stones to its immediate south might also have been part of this wall. An irregular, shallow depression, 2.5m to the south-east of the wall, measured 0.68m by 0.9m. It was partly lined with stone and was filled with a mixture of subsoil and earth. To the west, and cutting the abandonment deposits, was a circular, flat bottomed post-hole, 0.22m in diameter and 0.18m deep. As with the previous feature, it was filled with darker subsoil with small stones around its edges. There were no other deposits associated with this phase.

3.1.6 Phase 6: second abandonment

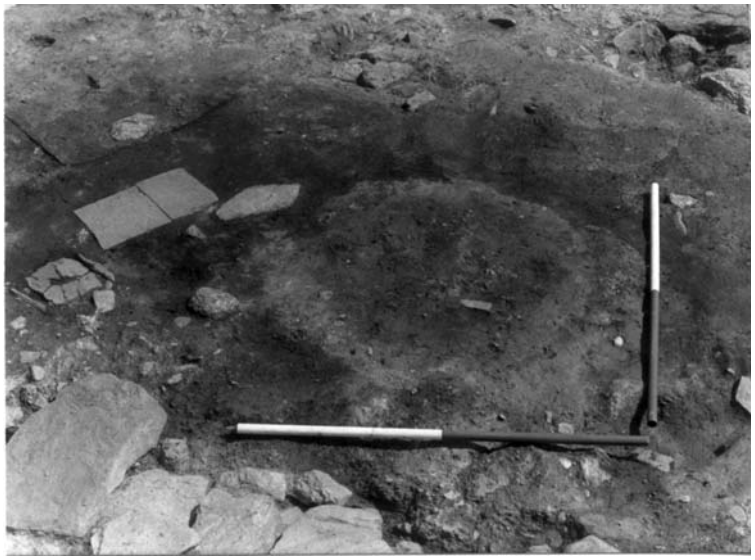
A stony subsoil with iron pan developed across the whole site to a depth of 0.2m. The prehistoric house entrance became filled with earthy subsoil and a large stone from the continued collapse of the house walls.

3.1.7 Phase 7: modern features (Illus 16; Illus 17)

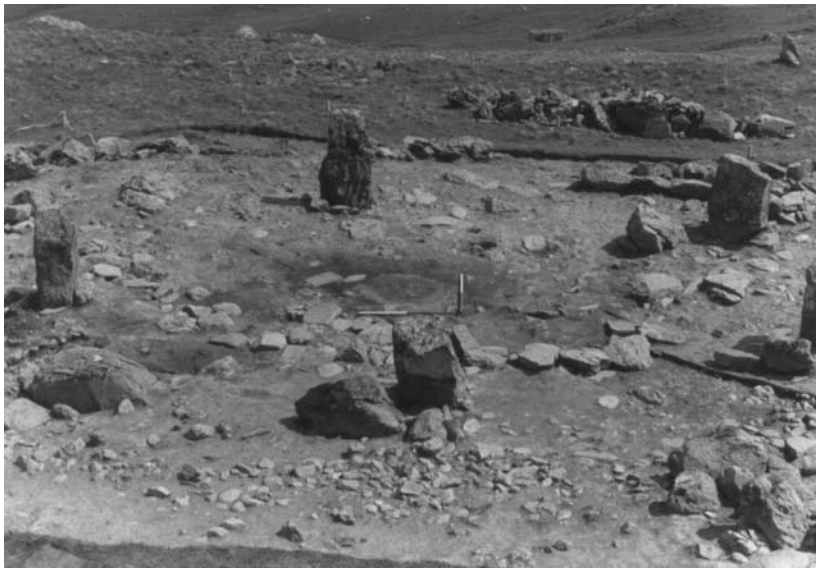
Soil accumulated across the site and masked the features of the prehistoric house. This soil had been artificially deepened to over 0.3m for use within a sub-rectangular *planticrub*, which was built in the centre of the prehistoric house. It is most likely that during the construction of the *planticrub*, which was 0.8m high, stone was robbed from the walls of the house. The *planticrub* measured 8.2m by 7.7m and was constructed around the pillars of the prehistoric house for support. A gap in the west wall of the *planticrub* may have marked its entrance. Abandonment of this structure led to its partial collapse and the development of topsoil which was later disturbed by rabbit burrowing.



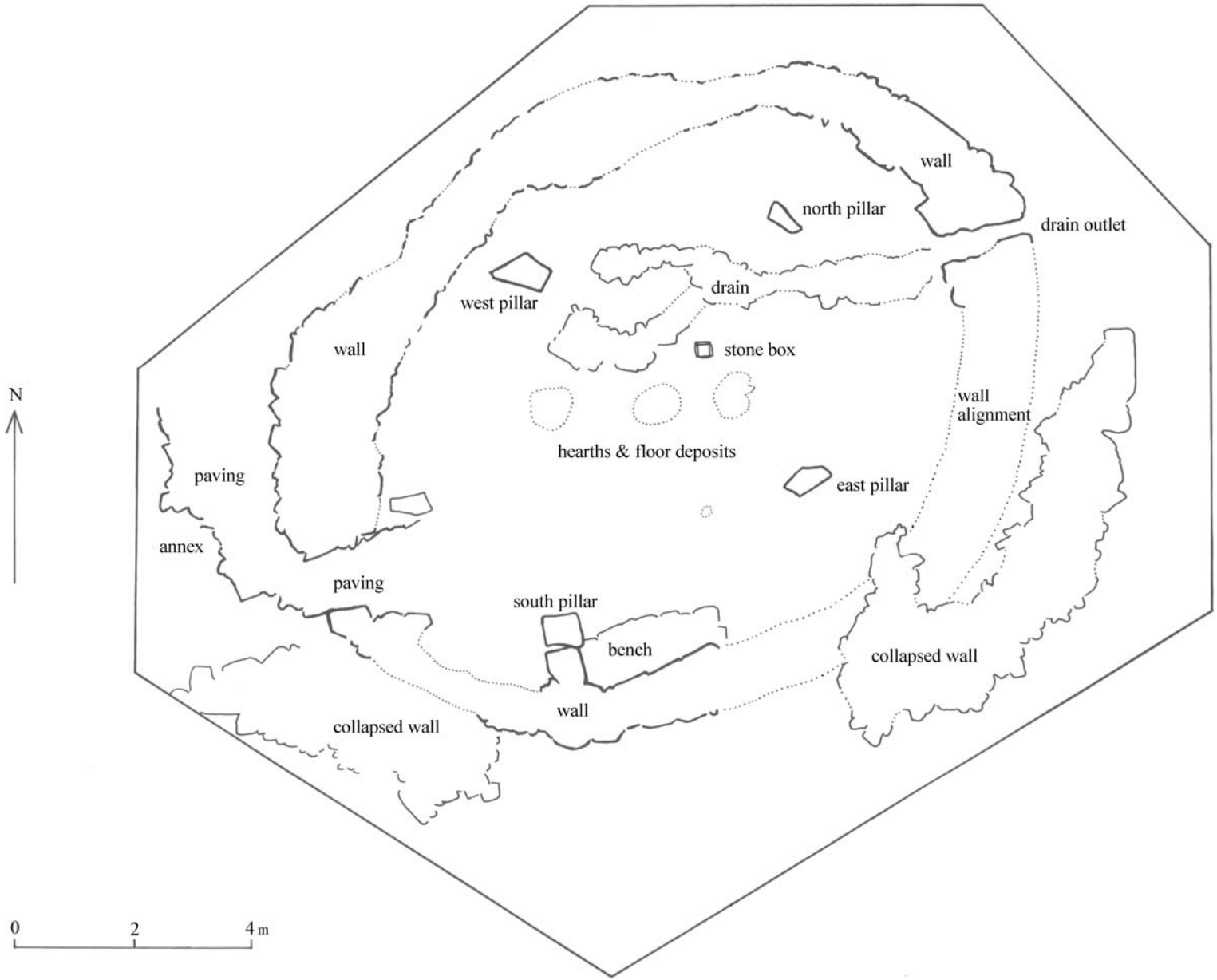
Illus 11 Sections through the house (see Illus 5 for locations)



Illus 12 The late hearth in the floor of the house with the stone box to its left, viewed from the north-west. Scales 1m

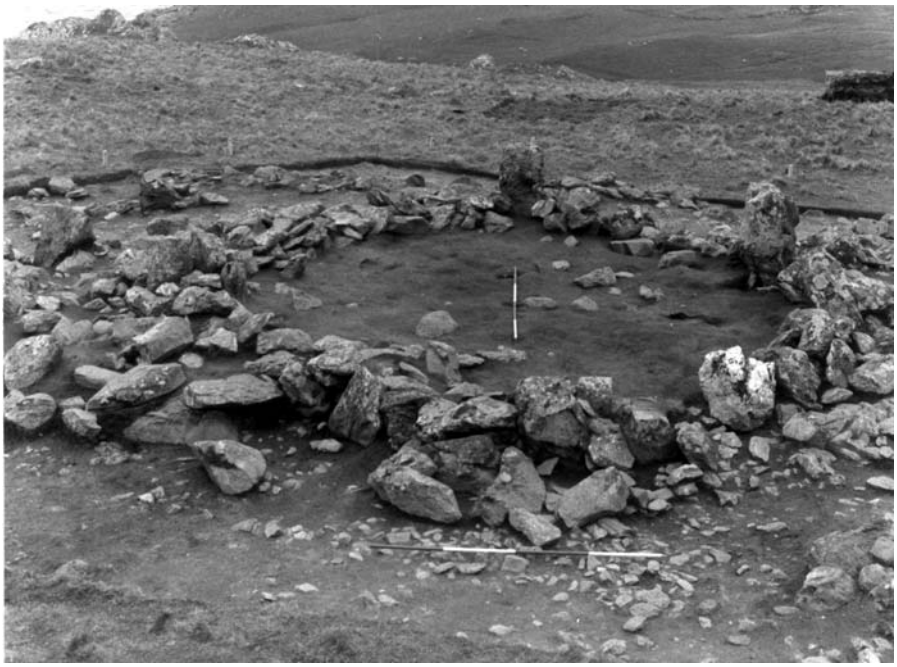


Illus 13 The floor of the house between the pillars, showing hearth and drains, viewed from the north. Scales 1m



Illus 14 Principal features of the prehistoric house

Illus 15 View, from the north, of the house on its platform. Scales 2m

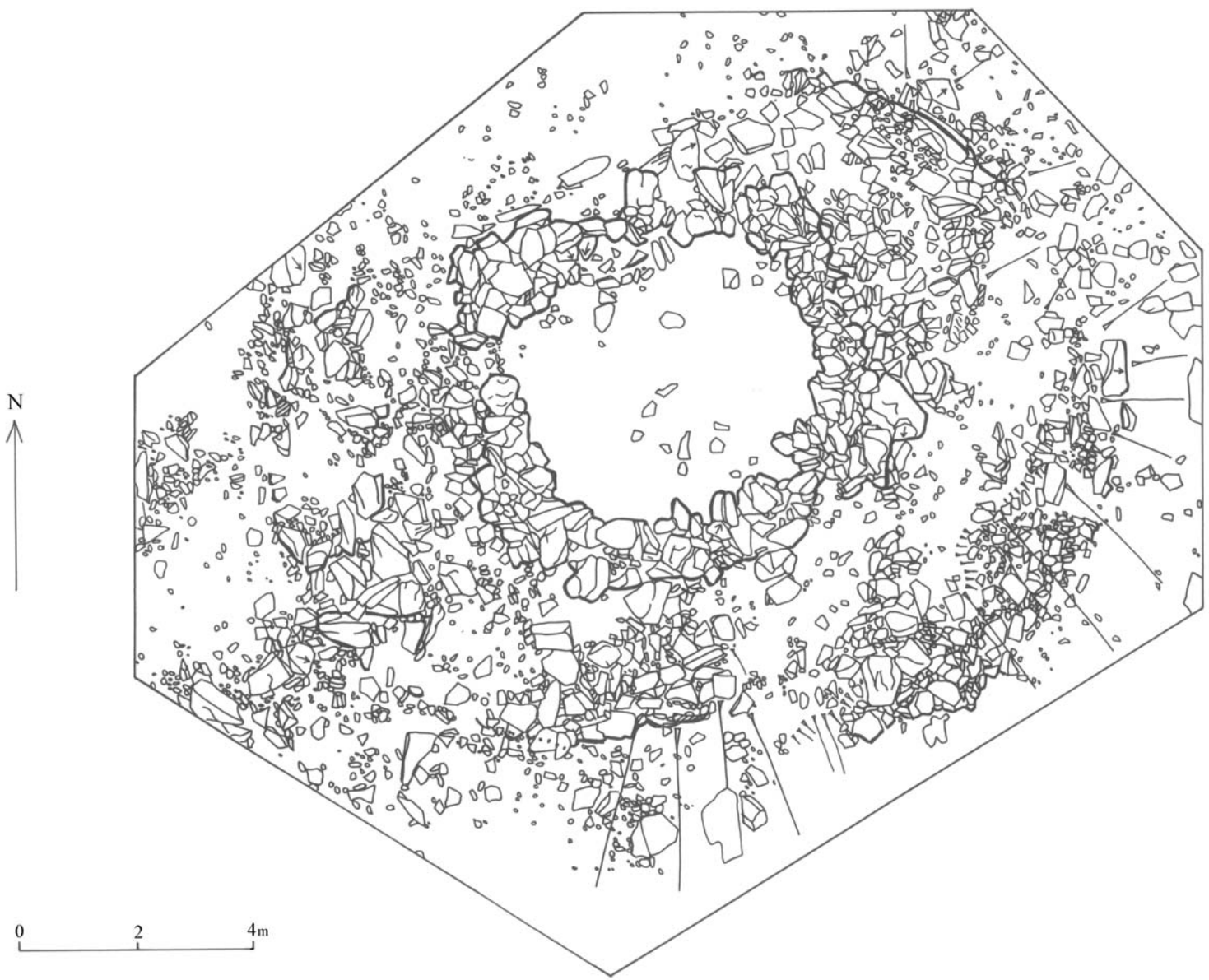


Illus 16 The planticrub after the removal of turf and topsoil, viewed from the east. Scales 2m

3.2 Trench B (Illus 3; Illus 18)

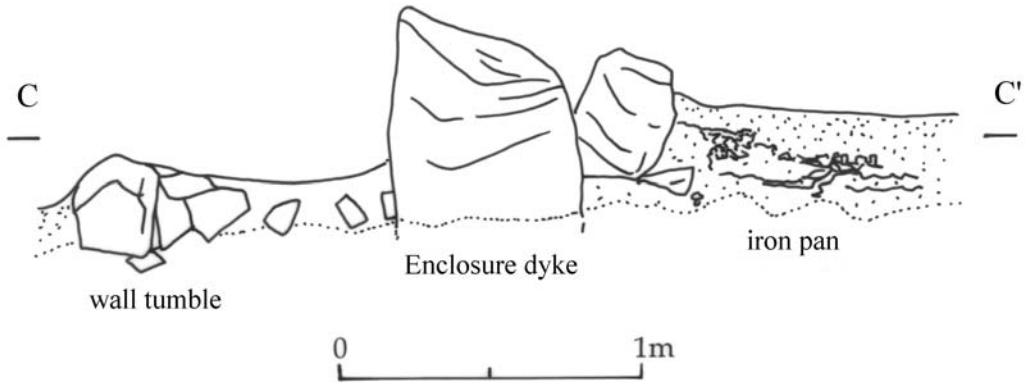
Against the inside face of the north wall of the enclosure was a D-shaped structure, measuring approximately 10m by 9m. A trench, 5m square, was placed across the junction of this structure with the field dyke. Turf and a highly organic silt-loam were removed but the soil proved to be waterlogged below a depth of 0.25m. The enclosure dyke was already in ruins and had not been rebuilt when the D-shaped structure was added. This structure comprised large boulders with an infill of small angular blocks of stone.

The wall of the D-shaped structure showed above the turf as a single line of stones, but on excavation this proved to be the bottom course of its outer face, which was set on edge. The inner face of the wall, although disturbed, was constructed of horizontal coursed stone. No internal stratigraphy survived within the structure and there were no finds associated with it.



Illus 17 Plan of the planticrub within the remains of the house

Illus 18 Trench B during excavation of the enclosure dyke and the D-shaped structure, viewed from the west. Scale 2m



Illus 19 Section through the enclosure dyke in Trench C

3.3 Trench C (Illus 3; Illus 19; Illus 20)

A 2.5m length of enclosure dyke was exposed to the south-east of the house. The dyke was around 1m wide, and constructed of two rows of large boulders. Smaller stones had been used for support, and to fill gaps between the boulders. Much of the dyke, apart from the basal stones, had collapsed to the east, suggesting that the wall was once somewhat higher than its surviving 0.54m.

A layer of iron pan, 0.2m thick, had developed against the west side of the dyke. It had also infiltrated the subsoil within and beneath the dyke, and obliterated any pre-dyke soils and therefore any evidence of agriculture in the trench.

3.4 The platform

The flat area at the southern end of the platform, where there was a break in the enclosure dyke, was investigated by augering. The purpose of this exercise was to locate stones from the dyke which might have lain below the turf and to explore past land use activities. Six 20m transects were established across this area and stones from the dyke were encountered in four of them, at a maximum depth of 0.5m. Access through the dyke had most likely been in the extreme south-west corner of the platform where there were no stones. The results of this analysis showed that the silty subsoil was 1.5–2m in depth (Section 4.2).

Illus 20 Trench C, viewed from the south-east, showing the extent and thickness of the iron pan beneath the 2m scale