6 The Archaeological Investigations

The programme of archaeological works took a typical staged approach and was designed to test and then investigate the archaeological potential of the route. The initial stages included a desk-based study followed by a walkover survey of the road line. This identified 44 visible features; the vast majority were clearly structures of 19th and 20th century date and these were concentrated at the south end of the route within the proposed core area (Illus 3). The potential for invisible sub-surface archaeological features was tested in two ways. Engineers' test pits were monitored at intervals of 75m and the southern 3km of the route was monitored during topsoil stripping. Nothing of interest was noted in the test pits and only one undated pit was identified during the topsoil strip.

Seven of the sites identified during the survey were selected for further evaluation as they were either of potentially early date (pre-19th century) or might conceal earlier features (Illus 3). Three of these sites were then subject to more substantial excavation on the basis of the evaluation results.

6.1 Shieling huts and circular stone features: Sites 3–6 (centred on NM 6675 9005)

6.1.1 Survey

A group of sites was recorded on a south-east facing hillside beside a small stream, the Allt Dail an Dubh-asaidh, on the north side of the Mointeach Mhór (Illus 4). The hillside contains pockets of deeper soil, now largely covered in bracken, in amongst extensive rocky outcrops partly covered in heather (Illus 5). There are more extensive areas of deeper soil along the stream, also bracken-covered. The structures were located in these areas of deeper soil; they included a small enclosure, the footings of six small sub-rectangular buildings (Sites 3A–E and 6C) identified as shieling huts, and three circular stone features 2–3m in diameter and of uncertain function (Sites 6A, 6B and 6D). The shieling huts measured up to 3m by 4m and were defined by low turf and stone banks spread to 1.5–2m wide and up to 0.4m high.

The ruin of a 19th-century building (Site 5) was situated on level ground between Sites 3 and 6. It was 3m wide by 16m long and subdivided into three rooms. This structure is marked as a sheepfold on the First Edition OS map surveyed in 1873. However, the walls at the north end were up to 2m high and built from well-fitted faced stones. It appears that the structure was a building (farmstead?) that later was reused as a sheepfold. To the north of the building there was an area of cultivation rigs that was probably contemporary with the building. The cultivation remains covered an area 30m by 90m and comprised rigs 1.5–2m wide. By 1873, they had been abandoned and a stone dyke (Site 4) had been built across the rigs.

6.1.2 Evaluation

Four structures were investigated further. Evaluation trenches were cut through examples of shieling huts (Sites 3A and 6C) and two of the circular stone features (Sites 6A and B).

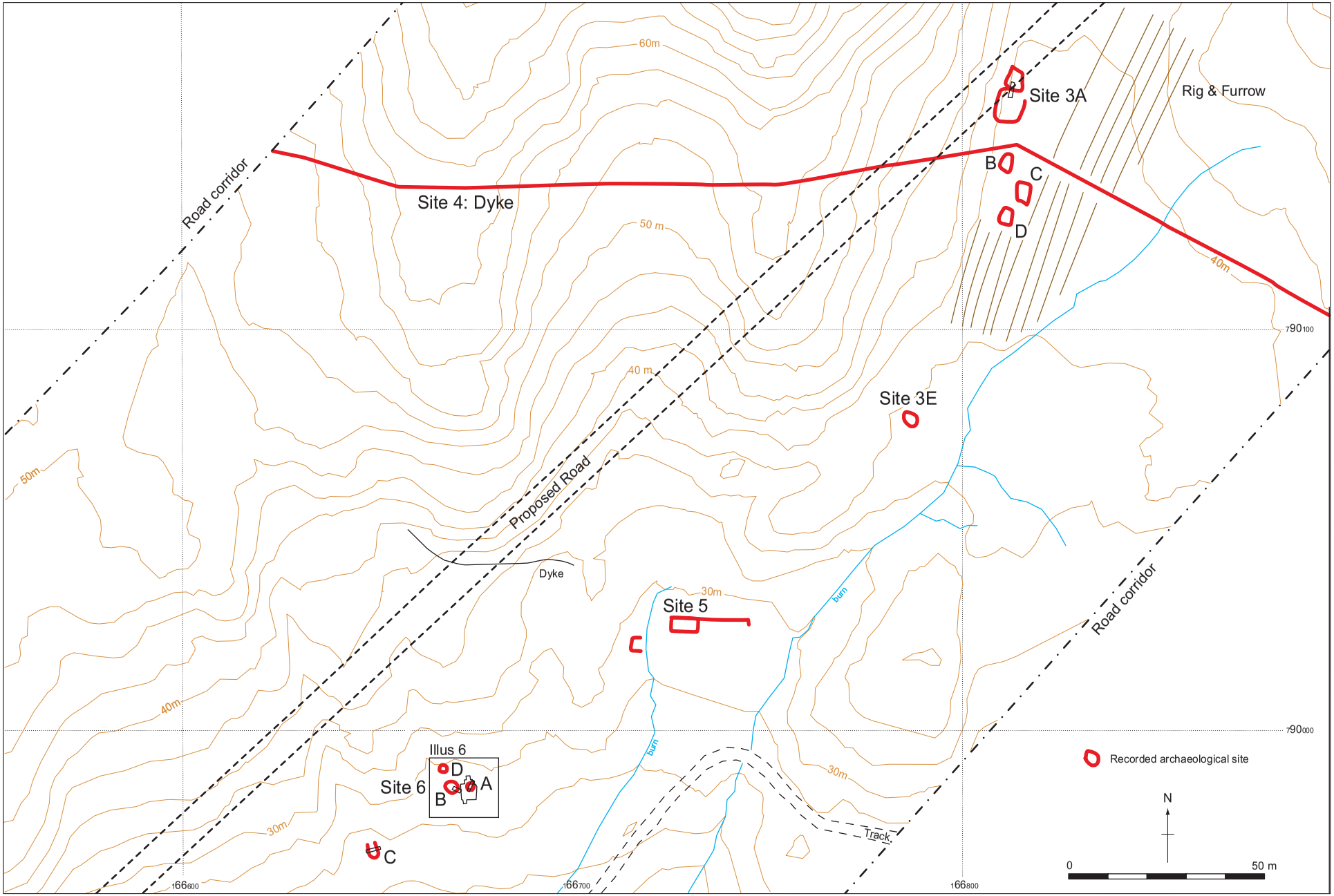
The evaluation trenches across the two shieling huts exposed the footings of turf and stone walls. No traces of any occupation deposits were seen above the natural subsoil nor were any artefacts retrieved. The size and shape of the structures indicated that they represented remains of shieling huts and the absence of artefacts suggested an 18th-century or earlier date (19th-century structures elsewhere along the road line contained abundant pottery, glass and metalwork).

The two circular stone features (Sites 6A and 6B) were found to be sitting on and within the upper layer of turf and topsoil (Illus 6). No artefacts were retrieved and their date and purpose remained uncertain. The two examples of rings of stones (Sites 6B and 6D) are similar to features recorded during a survey of the Tangaval peninsula by University of Sheffield (Branigan & Foster 1995). Here they have been interpreted as weights to hold down a temporary tent-like shelter for a herdsman. This interpretation could not apply to the third site (6A), which is a circular area of flat stones. An alternative interpretation for this, and the other two rings, is that they are bases for peat stacks – fuel for the occupants of the shieling huts or the farmstead.

During the excavation of the trench across Site 6A, a thin lens of charcoal was encountered, 0.25–0.35m below the ground surface; the charcoal deposit was apparently not associated with the stone structure seen on the surface. A sample was taken from the deposit for radiocarbon dating (AA-41068/GU-9251) and produced a 15th century AD date and, on the basis of this result, an excavation was carried out to further investigate its context.

6.1.3 Excavation (Illus 7)

The deposits within the excavated area were 0.4–0.6m deep down to bedrock and natural sand



Illus 4 Contour map showing the location of Sites 3–6 with evaluation and excavation trenches

Illus 5 View of Site 6 from the south-west

(context 663). In the north-eastern part of the trench there was a thin deposit of patchy black sandy silt with abundant charcoal (context 662) on top of bedrock and sealed by a layer of black friable peat underlying a deposit of sandy silt. A shallow oval pit or scoop (context 653) was cut into the sandy silt layer. The cut of this pit was not clear and its outline was best defined by its basal deposit of charcoal in a matrix of dark brown silty clay (context 654).

The pit was sealed by a deposit of mid yellowish-brown sandy silt (context 657) with sparse sub-angular cobbles and rare charcoal flecks throughout. A few fragments of charred hazelnut shell were retrieved from a sample taken from the deposit. The layer underlay a spread of dark brownish-grey silty clay with charcoal flecks (context 650). This deposit was 0.09m deep and filled a shallow depression. No artefacts were retrieved from the layer, but small fragments of burnt bone and hazelnut shell were retrieved from a sample. The sample also produced a small quantity of oat grains. Context 650 was cut by an oval pit (context 651); the lower fill of this pit (context 608/652) was the charcoal-rich deposit recorded during the evaluation and dated to the 15th century AD. In addition to charcoal, that deposit (context 608/652) also contained a few oat grains. The upper fill of the pit comprised light brown silty sand (context 664).

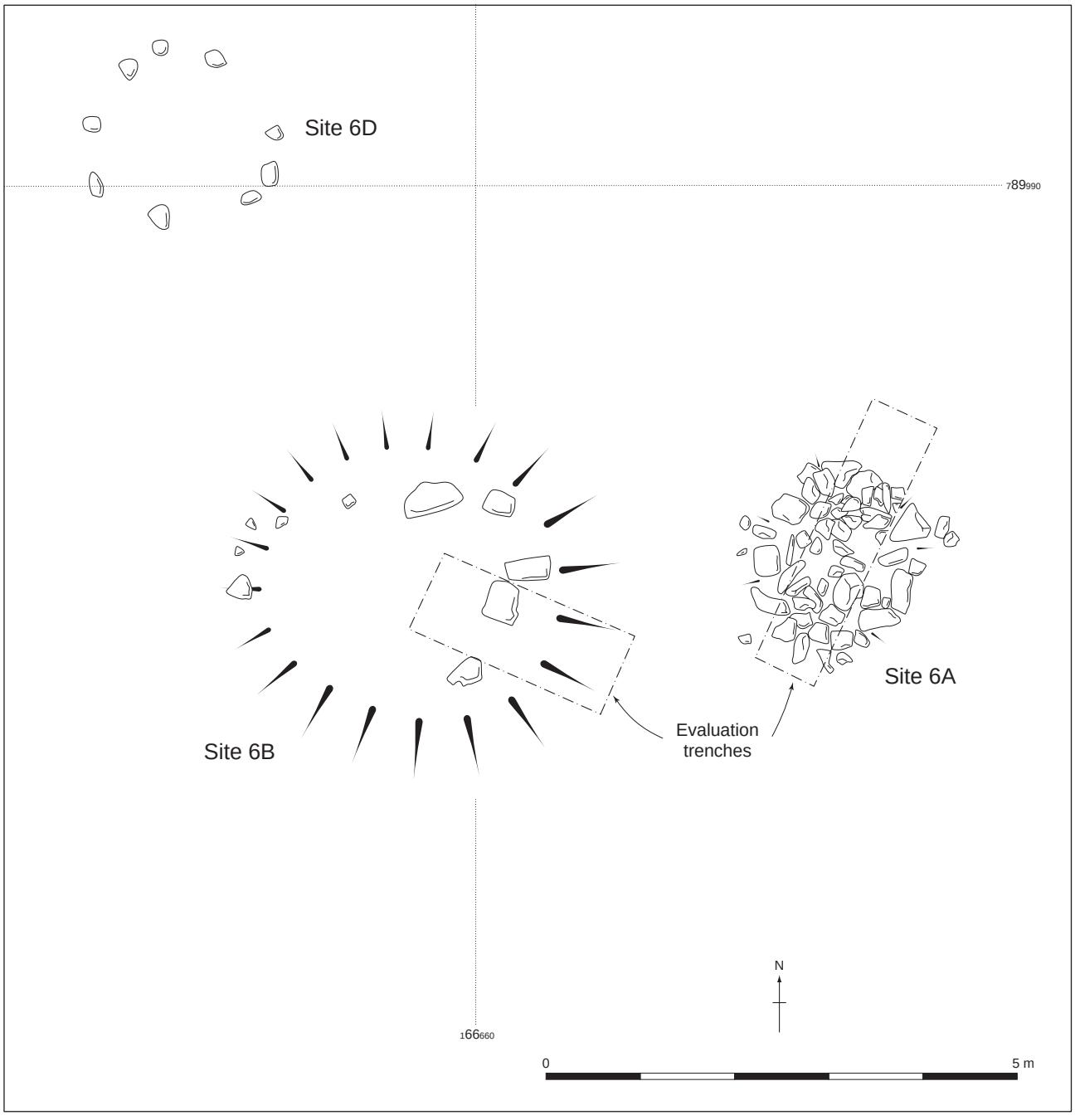
To the west of the pit, also overlaying context 650, was a linear stone feature (context 655), running roughly north to south. It comprised a row of flat stones 0.2–0.5m across. The feature petered out towards the southern edge of the trench, but continued northwards into an area of natural tumbled stones and boulders where it seemed to end. The exposed part of the feature measured some 6m north–south. It was covered by turf and topsoil and underlay the surface circular stone feature (Site 6A).

A further three radiocarbon samples were submitted for dating. These had been taken from the basal charcoal deposit (context 662), the fill (context 654) of the lower pit (context 653) and from the spread (context 650). This spread was cut by the upper pit (context 651/608), from which the radiocarbon sample had been taken during the evaluation. The results are presented in Table 1 and Illus 8.

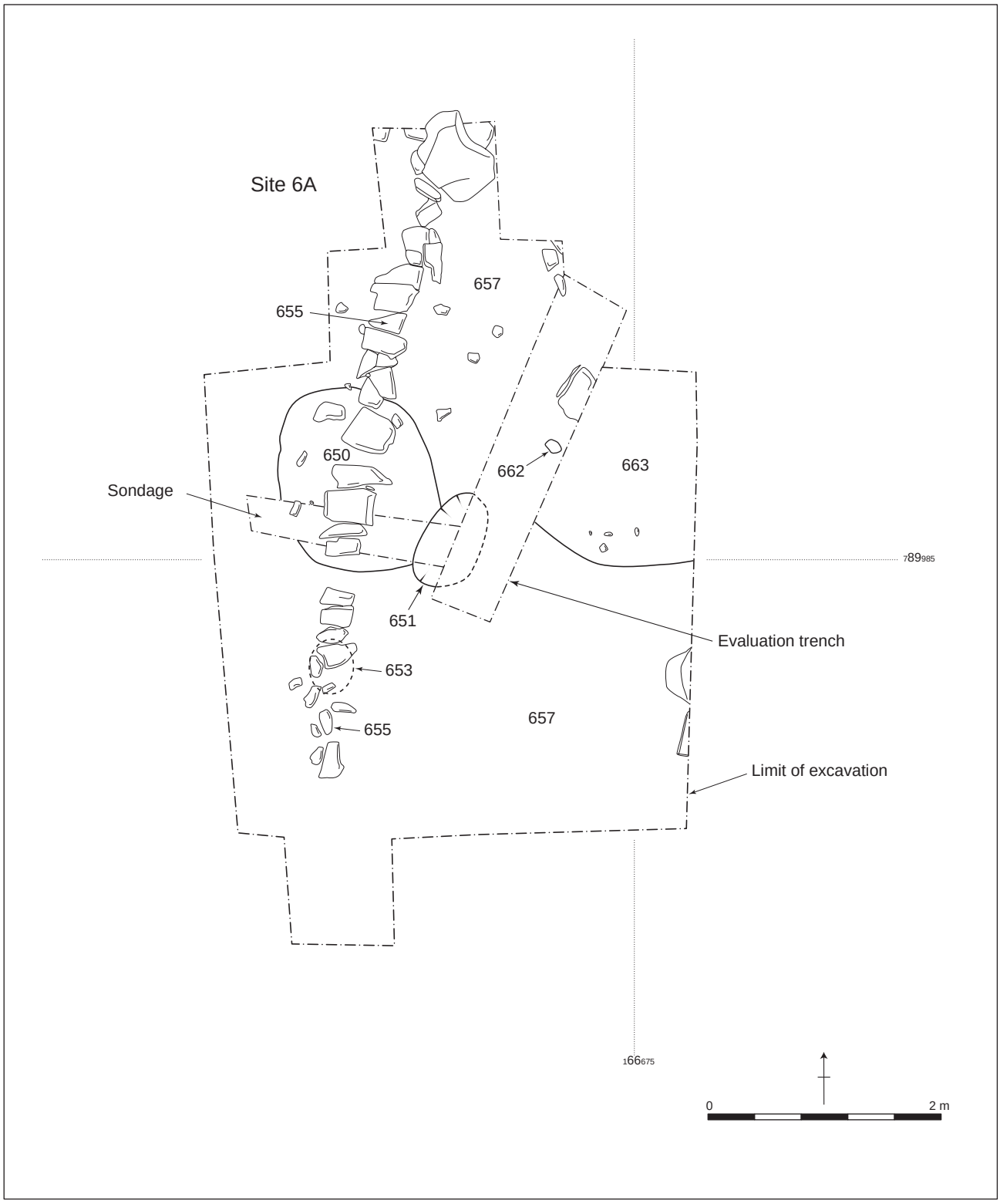
The date from the basal deposit (context 662) indicates that there was activity in the area during the Bronze Age. However, no features were recorded within the trench that could be associated with this deposit. The layer of peat that sealed the Bronze Age remains must have formed over the site during the following 2000 years before activity again resumed in the early medieval period. The three later dates

Table 1 Radiocarbon determinations of samples from Site 6A

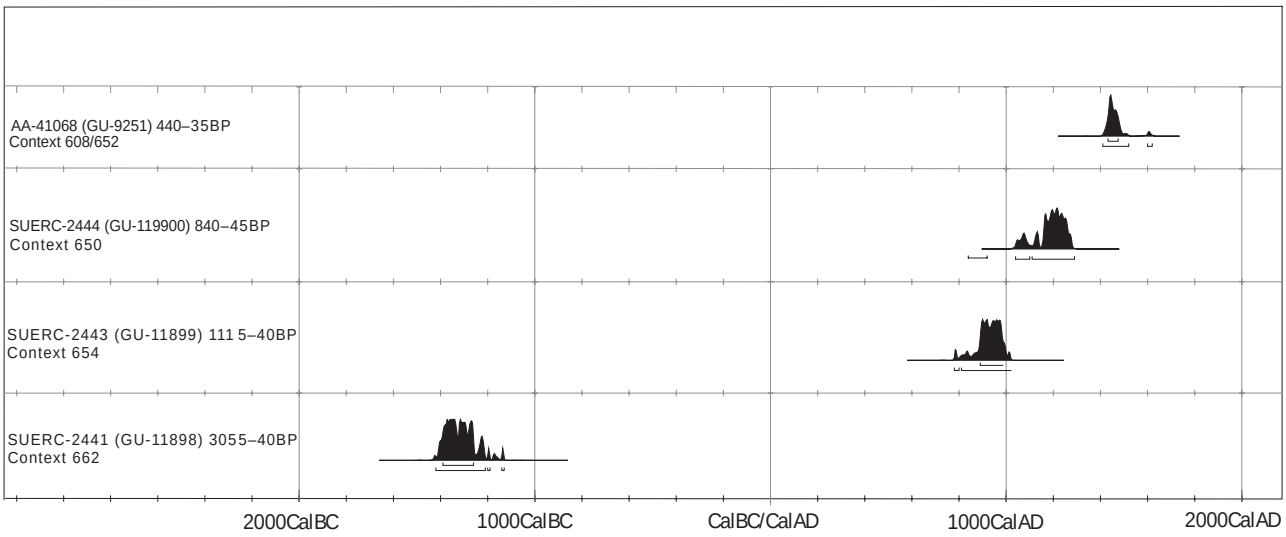
Lab code	Context	Material	Lab age BP	δC13	1 sigma cal	2 sigma cal
SUERC-2441 (GU-11898)	662	*Quercus*	3055 ± 40	–25.6‰	1390–1260 BC	1420–1210 BC (93.0%) 1200–1190 BC (1.2%) 1140–30 BC (1.2%)
SUERC-2443 (GU-11899)	654	*Corylus*	1115 ± 40	–23.5‰	AD 890–985	AD 780–800 (1.8%) AD 810–1020 (93.6%)
SUERC-2444 (GU-11900)	650	*Quercus*	840 ± 45	–25.7‰	AD 1160–1260	AD 1040–1100 (11.2%) AD 1110–1290 (84.2%)
AA-41068 (GU-9251)	608/ 652	*Quercus*	440 ± 35	–26.0‰	AD 1435–65	AD 1418–88



Illus 6 Plan of Sites 6B and 6D



Illus 7 Plan of the excavated features on Site 6A



Illus 8 Calibrated radiocarbon determinations from Site 6A

indicate that there were episodes of activity throughout the medieval period. Apart from the pits, the only feature that could be associated with this activity was the linear stone feature (context 655), which could have been contemporary with context 651, the late medieval pit. The circular stone features are clearly later than the 15th century AD but it is not known by how long a period.

6.1.4 Reuse of temporary sites from prehistory

The results of the excavation show that the area was used in the middle Bronze Age. The nature of the remains give us no clues as to the nature of the activity at this time and it is not even certain that the dated feature is the product of human activity. The next evidence of activity in the area was dated to the ninth and tenth centuries AD. Again the evidence is limited, but a series of stratified features produced dates indicating that the site was in continuous use or repeatedly re-visited through the medieval period. The presence of oat grains in the medieval deposits suggests that food was prepared and consumed at the site but positive evidence for the reason behind this is not available. The deposition of a substantial volume of mineral sediment over the post-Bronze Age peat soil in the medieval period requires explanation and suggests that we may have dug through the highly dispersed remains of unsubstantial turf and timber structures, essentially a stack of turf shieling huts, spanning the medieval period. The line of stones could then be interpreted as a wall foundation.

In this case, the adjacent shieling hut (Site 6C) is simply the most recent hut to be built on the site and, together with the huts at Site 3, represents the continued use of a summer shieling in the area into the post-medieval period. If this interpretation is accepted then the presence of a 19th century farmstead marks a significant change of land use from summer grazing to permanent settlement. However, this change appears to have been short-lived as by the later 19th century the building had been converted into a sheepfold and the area reverted to pasture. This land use has continued up to the present day.

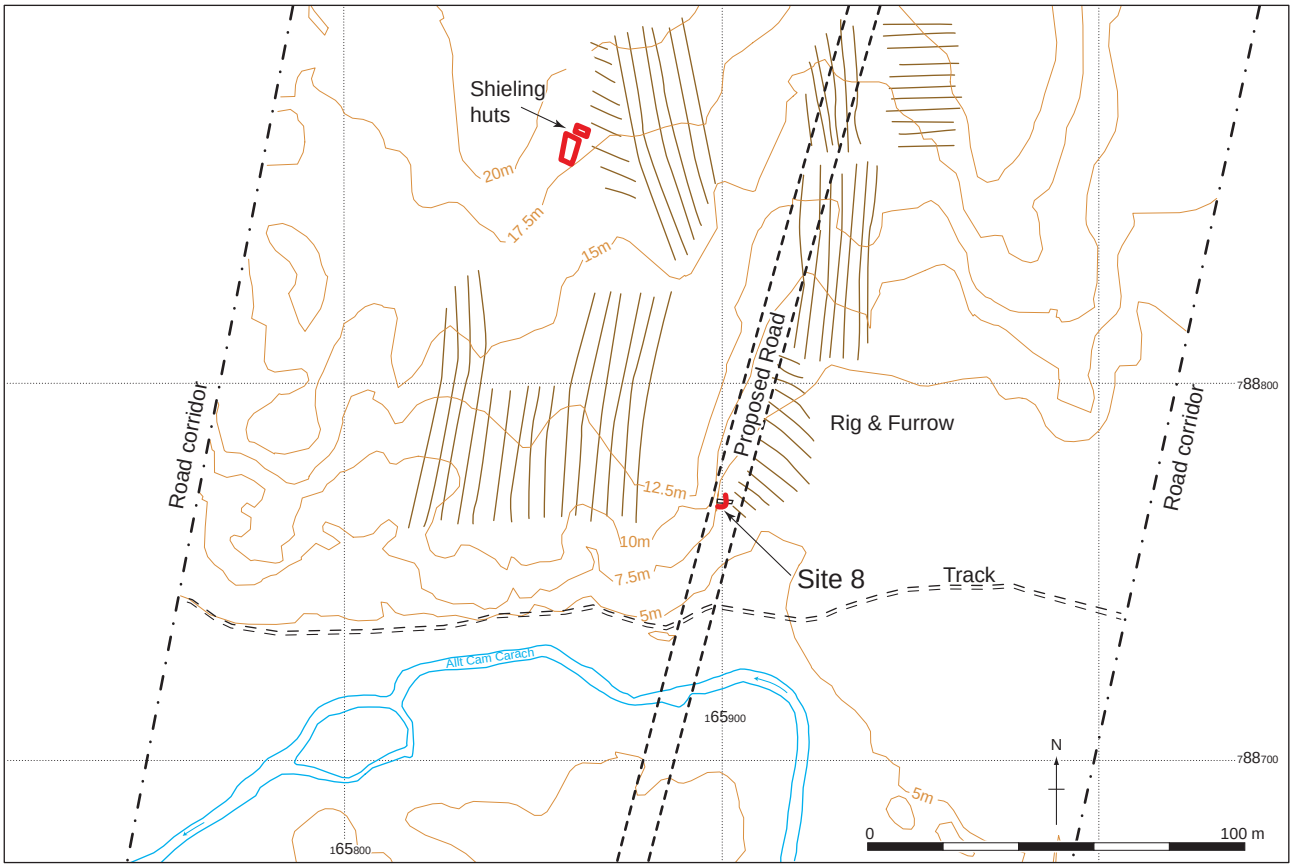
6.2 Shieling huts and cultivation rigs: Site 8 (centred on NM 659 888)

6.2.1 Survey

The site was located on rocky ground on the west side of Mointeach Mhór, some 50m to the north of Allt Cam Carach. It comprised an extensive complex of cultivation rig remains covering an area of some 100m by 200m (Illus 9). At the north-west of this area there were turf and stone footings of a sub-rectangular shieling hut measuring 8m by 4.5m overall. A small rectangular annexe 1.5m by 3.5m was situated immediately to the north. A third structure was situated at the south-eastern limit of the cultivated area. It was defined by a discontinuous line of stones along the edge of a platform, 2.5m by 4 m, set up against a vertical rock face (Illus 10). Of the three structures, only this one was directly in the line of the new road.

6.2.2 Evaluation

To investigate this platform further, an evaluation trench was cut across the feature. A charcoal layer was exposed at the base of the trench, 0.55m below the surface, and was dated to the Bronze Age (AA-41069/GU-9252). On the basis of this date, further excavation was carried out.



Illus 9 Contour map showing placement of Site 8

6.2.3 *Excavation*

A 4m by 5m trench was opened up against the foot of the rock face, centred on the evaluation trench. The stratigraphy of the site can be grouped into five structural phases; of these the lower four were dated by radiocarbon (Table 2 and Illus 11).

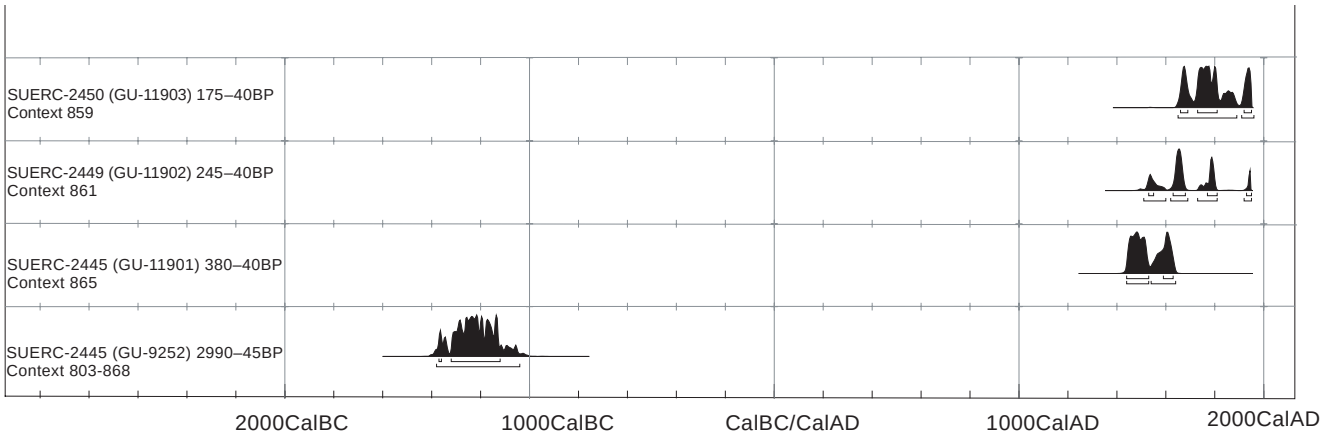
Phase 1: Basal occupation deposit (Illus 12a)

The basal deposits in the trench comprised two areas of dark brownish-grey silty sand (context 868, with concentrations of charcoal overlying mid yellow to brown sand; context 864, natural subsoil). Context 868 was the same sediment as context 803, which was sampled during the evaluation and dated to between the 11th and 14th centuries BC. One quartz flake was retrieved from this context but there were no features associated with it. A general layer of yellowish-brown silty sand with occasional fragments of charcoal sealed the occupation deposits. It was interpreted as a deposit formed by natural processes, probably hillwash from the slope to the north.

Illus 10 (left) View of Site 8 before excavation, from the north

Table 2 Radiocarbon determinations of samples from Site 8

Lab code	Context	Material	Lab age BP	δC13	1 sigma cal	2 sigma cal
AA-41069 (GU-9252)	803 = 868	*Quercus*	2990 ± 45	–26.3‰	1366–1129 BC	1386–1049 BC
SUERC-2445 (GU-11901)	865	*Pomodieae*	380 ± 40	–23.2‰	AD 1440–1530 (48.9%) AD 1590–1630 (19.3%)	AD 1440–1530 (55.1%) AD 1540–1640 (40.3%)
SUERC-2446 (GU-11902)	861	*Corylus*	245 ± 40	–27.5‰	AD 1530–50 (6.6%) AD 1630–80 (39.0%) AD 1770–1810 (18.9%) AD 1930–50 (3.8%)	AD 1510–1600 (18.9%) AD 1620–90 (42.6%) AD 1730–1810 (28.2%) AD 1920–50 (5.7%)
SUERC-2450 (GU-11903)	859	*Corylus*	175 ± 40	–27.1‰	AD 1660–90 (12.5%) AD 1730–1810 (43.0%) AD 1920–50 (12.7%)	AD 1650–1890 (79.3%) AD 1910–60 (16.1%)



Illus 11 Calibrated radiocarbon determinations from Site 8

Phase 2: Lower structure (Illus 12b)

On top of the hillwash were the remains of a structure that comprised the base of a straight wall (context 866) set at a 45-degree angle against the rock face. This wall appeared to be a windbreak forming a shelter open to the south. It enclosed a deposit of dark brownish-grey silty sand with charcoal and grains of hulled barley (context 865). A sample of charcoal taken from context 865 was dated to the 15th or 16th century AD. A layer of stony brown silty sand (context 863), thought to be levelled wall material from the shelter wall, covered the wall footing and deposit.

Phase 3: Middle structure (Illus 12c)

On top of the levelled wall material were the remains of a smaller structure. It was defined by wall footings comprising a curving band of angular to sub-angular stones (context 862), which formed an area 1.5m by 2.5m against the rock face with an entrance to the north. The wall enclosed a layer of dark brown clayey silt (context 861), which contained some charcoal and grains of hulled barley; it is interpreted as the occupation deposit associated with the structure. A radiocarbon date for this structure derives from a charcoal sample taken from the occupation deposit. The calibrated date is not very precise due to the shape of the calibration curve at this point; the probability density is distributed over four distinctive peaks between AD 1530 and 1950 at 1 sigma probability (Illus 11). However, consideration of the date of stratigraphically related samples indicates that it is not likely to date to the 20th century or the 16th century. It is therefore most likely that the date of the structure lies within the two middle peaks and dates to the 17th or 18th century AD.

Phase 4: Upper structure (Illus 12d)

Immediately on top of the middle structure were the remains of a third construction of similar shape and style of construction. It was defined by the remains of a wall comprising a curving line of angular to sub-angular stones (context 852). The structure occupied the same spot, but enclosed an area of 8m^2, twice that of the previous structure. As before, the entrance was at the north. At the north end of the structure there was a small patch of mid brown sandy loam with a high concentration of charcoal (context 859). Inside and partly over the wall, there was a layer of mid brown sandy silt (context 856) markedly less stony than the layers above. This

*Illus 12 Plan of Site 8: (**a**) phase I: basal occupation deposit; (**b**) phase II: lower structure; (**c**) phase III: middle structure; (**d**) phase IV: upper structure.*

deposit was thought to be decomposed turfs from the walls of the structure.

The structure was dated from a sample of charcoal taken from context 859. Again the calibrated radiocarbon date indicates a wide date range between AD 1660 and 1950, with the probability distributed over four peaks (Illus 11). However, as before, a 20th century date can be ruled out, suggesting the structure dates to the 17th, 18th or 19th century AD.

Phase 5: Late features

The remains of the three structures formed a platform up against the rock face.

In the middle of this platform was an oval deposit of dark greyish-brown sandy silt (context 857) filling a shallow hollow. This was sealed by an area of packed stones (context 854) with a stone spread (context 853) to the north, forming the upper level of the platform. These stones were covered by turf and topsoil (context 851). The stone spread seems to be a rough surface created up against the rock shelter but not associated with any surviving superstructure. This phase was given an upper age limit by finds retrieved from the top of the stones that comprised fragments of at least three glass vessels. These were all dated to the 20th century, not earlier than the 1920s (A Cox, pers comm).

*6.2.4 **Lithics** by C Wickham-Jones*

A small lithics assemblage (36 pieces) was retrieved from Site 8. It largely comprised quartz flakes and chunks and one quartz core. Some of these may be natural, but it is more likely, given the presence of worked quartz, that they all either result from local knapping or have been brought on to the site as potentially useful. The quartz is a tabular, vein quartz that is presumably eroding out somewhere in the locality. One large chunk has been used as a core indicating that some quartz working took place on, or near to, the site. There are 18 quartz flakes, most of them broken. Breakage is probably a result of the friable nature of the raw material and may have taken place during knapping. Many of the flakes are of a good size and they would have been quite suitable for use.

In addition, two pieces of flints were retrieved. One is a broken bifacial point; the other a small broken flake. The assemblage also contains one flake of bloodstone that must have come from Rùm. Rùm bloodstone was used across a wide area of the west coast of Scotland from the Mesolithic onwards.

The lithics assemblage was retrieved from contexts associated with all five phases, but mainly from contexts 856 and 863 (Phases 2 and 4). It is not thought that the lithics assemblage dates from the 16th to 20th centuries AD and must therefore have been re-deposited in all but the earliest (Bronze Age) sediments. The two sediments that produced the majority of the lithics are both interpreted as decomposed turfs that originated as collapsed wall material. It is probable that the turfs used to construct the walls were taken from the adjacent ground and this contained prehistoric lithics. This suggests that the minor Bronze Age deposits encountered beneath the post-medieval shelters are only part of a more extensive occupation site that has been disturbed by turf cutting.

6.2.5 Reuse and expansion over time

The radiocarbon dates from this site show a similar pattern of use as that of Site 6A. The early occupation phase was dated to the Middle Bronze Age, roughly contemporary with the early phase at Site 6A, followed by a gap of over 2000 years before activity again resumed in the medieval period. The direct evidence for the Bronze Age phase was limited to two areas of charcoal-rich sediment with no associated structures and only one struck quartz flake. However, there is indirect evidence for more substantial Bronze Age activity in the immediate vicinity through the lithics that were retrieved from the turf walls of later structures. It is assumed that the use of this site in the Bronze Age was determined by the shelter provided by the rock face, as it clearly was in the later phases. However, it may also be noted that the sea-level displacement curve for Arisaig (Shennan *et al.* 1995) indicates that the site was close to the sea shore at the time, overlooking a large shallow inlet of brackish water that later evolved into the Mointeach Mhór. Proximity to the bay with its natural resources – such as bird life, fish and shellfish – may have been another important location factor although there is no direct evidence for this in the archaeological record.

The lack of objects associated with the stack of late medieval and post-medieval structures supports the suggestion that the site was not part of a permanent settlement but is likely to have been used as a temporary shelter, possibly by people herding livestock. It may be contemporary with the two other small structures nearby, although these were not investigated and remain undated. The cultivation rigs in this area are assumed to be of 19th century date, as they are elsewhere along the road line.

6.3 Rectangular turf structure: Site 10 (NM 6583 8835)

6.3.1 Survey

The structure was located 420m to the south of Site 8 on a low sand ridge at the western edge of Mointeach Mhór, probably a fossil beach ridge. It measured 3m by 7.5m internally within turf banks 1.2–1.8m wide and up to 0.6m high. It was aligned north to south with an entrance to the east. A square hollow 5m by 5m located 5m to the north could possibly have been

created when the turfs were cut for the construction of the building. The building was located on the west side of a large rectangular area of improved ground, 75m by 200m, depicted on the first edition OS map surveyed in 1873. The CFA survey identified a second structure just to the east, but this was not seen during the subsequent fieldwork. However, a second rectangular turf structure 4m by 6m was recorded 70m to the south.

6.3.2 Evaluation

A trench was cut across the south wall of the building, exposing a well-defined turf wall with the individual turfs still visible. The wall was 1m wide and 0.45m high. A possible occupation layer of white sand with dark patches was recorded inside the building, above the natural white sand. Six pottery fragments were retrieved from the floor level of the building. These were identified as fragments of fine earthenware and a stoneware bottle. They were dated to the late 19th century or, more probably, the early 20th century. The site was interpreted as a late 19th-century turf building and, as a result, no further investigation was carried out.

6.4 Township: Site 15 (centred on NM 658 878)

6.4.1 Survey

This site comprised eight buildings with associated banks and cultivation remains situated to the west of Kinloid overlooking Mointeach Mhór. It formed part of a now-abandoned settlement depicted on the first edition OS map and named Achraig. Three of the structures were depicted on the map as roofed buildings. The other five buildings were not mapped. Four buildings were selected for evaluation to test for the presence of earlier (pre-19th century) settlement on the site.

6.4.2 Evaluation

Four buildings were selected for evaluation. In order to increase the possibility of identifying earlier components of the township, three of the buildings were examples of those not depicted on the first edition OS map and were believed to pre-date the map. A trench was cut across the walls of each of the structures to evaluate the date and nature of these sites. Two of the four structures were defined by turf and stone walls, the other two were built with dry-stone walls. The structures were interpreted as the remains of small heavily robbed enclosures and buildings. The finds assemblages from the sites were of early to mid 19th-century date. No evidence was obtained for settlement pre-dating the 19th century.

6.4.3 Watching brief

The area was closely watched during the topsoil stripping prior to the construction of the road to record any early remains of the township not visible on the surface. A number of 19th-century glass and ceramic finds were recovered from the topsoil and two features were recorded: a large field bank seen during survey and an oval clearance cairn. The field bank comprised a single homogeneous deposit of earth with no evidence for a prolonged or complex history. Two small pits were also recorded, 0.3 and 0.5m in diameter and 0.1–0.2m deep. The larger and shallower pit contained a primary fill with fragments of charcoal and burnt bone. The bone fragments were too small for identification and none of the pits contained any datable artefacts. The watching brief did not yield any evidence of an earlier phase of the township pre-dating the 19th century.

6.5 Rectangular building: Site 26 (NM 6599 8693)

6.5.1 Survey

This structure was located on the south-west side of a small knoll some 500m to the north of Arisaig village. It comprised the footings of a rectangular building aligned north-east to south-west that measured 3m by 7.7m internally, with a rectangular structure immediately to the north-east, possibly a lean-to structure built up against the east gable of the building. The building was not recorded on any maps so it was selected for evaluation to determine its nature and date.

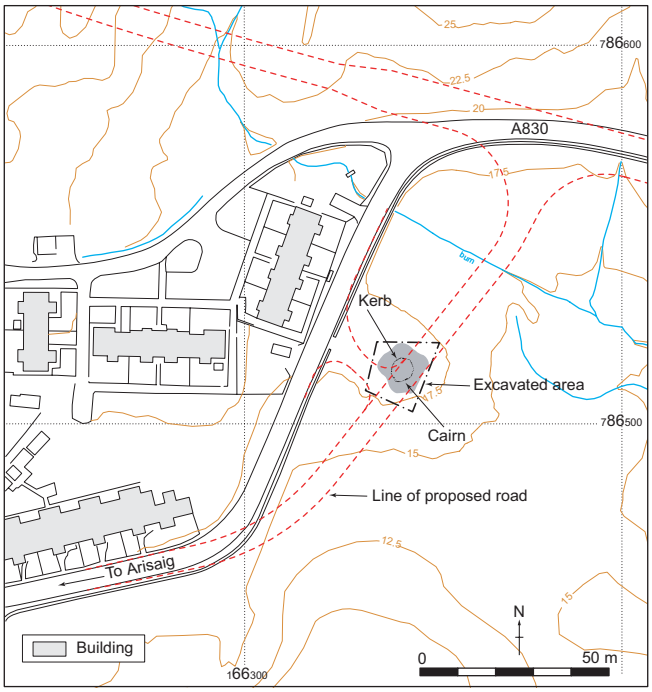
6.5.2 Evaluation

Two trenches 1m by 4m were excavated within the site. One trench was located across the interior of the building, with the other trench cutting across the north-east wall and into the smaller structure.

The walls were dry-stone random rubble construction with a brown sand and gravel floor in the larger building and a roughly paved floor in the structure to the east. A couple of roof slate fragments were retrieved from the building but, unlike Site 15, the structure produced no glass or ceramic fragments. The site was believed to be an isolated early 19th-century building. It is not depicted on the first edition OS map and is therefore likely to have been demolished prior to 1870.

6.6 Kerb cairn: Site 41 (NM 6634 8651)

The cairn was located during walkover survey along the road corridor carried out early in 2000 by the



Illus 13 Contour map showing location of Site 41

CFA. It was located 20m east of the old A830 as it entered Arisaig from the east (Illus 13). The feature appeared as a grassy mound 12m in diameter and 1m high. The nature of the monument was clarified at the time through a small hand-excavated trench that confirmed that the mound comprised small stones. The cairn was believed to be a funerary monument as the location made it less likely to be made from field clearance. This interpretation was confirmed during an evaluation carried out by Headland Archaeology at the end of 2000, which identified the remains of a robbed out cist in the centre of the structure and a boulder kerb on the north side of the cairn. As a result of the evaluation results, a programme of full excavation was carried out during July and August 2001.

6.6.1 Excavation

A trench measuring 30m by 30m was excavated, centred on the cairn. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were identified in the area around the cairn. Bedrock was found to lie directly below topsoil in many places and the cairn itself was constructed on top of an outcrop of bedrock (Illus 14).

The first stage of construction comprised a 6m diameter kerb cairn (Illus 15). The kerb was built

Illus 14 Site 41: view of cairn after turf removal, from the south-west

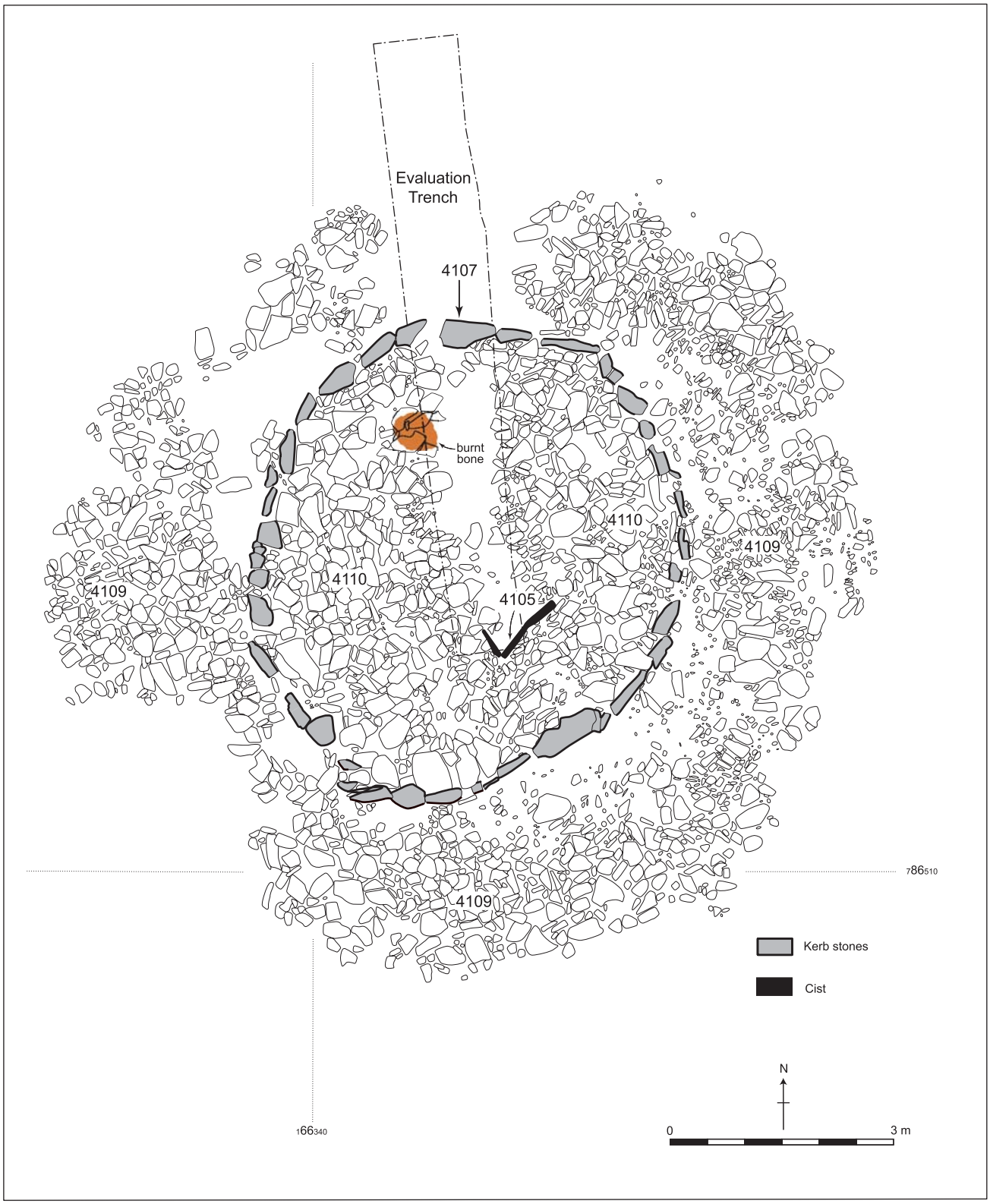
Illus 15 Site 41: ring of kerb-stones, viewed from the north

from large upright boulders supported on the inside by a layer of similarly large stones (context 4110). The remains of the robbed out cist (context 4105), identified during the evaluation, were fully exposed and found to measure approximately 1m in length and 0.45m in width, although this may not represent the original size of the feature given that only two sides survived. No human remains or artefacts were retrieved from within it. The cist was supported by the basal layer of stones (4110) and was thought to be contemporary with the erection of the kerb (Illus 16).

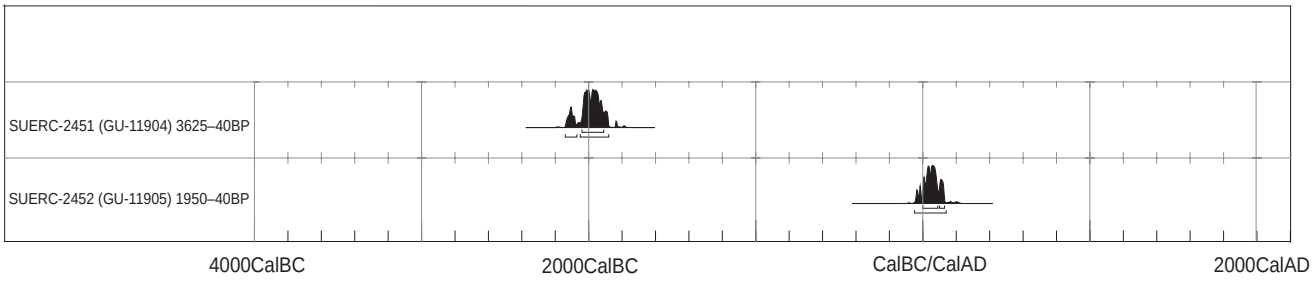
A small deposit of cremated human bone was identified 3m to the north of the cist. It was recovered in an area measuring some 0.5m by 0.5m, within the basal layer of cairn stones (4110). The bones had not been interred in any cist-like structure but it is possible that they were deposited in an organic container that has totally decayed. The bone appears to have been deposited at the time of the cairn's construction although it is impossible to confirm that stones were not moved to allow its insertion at a later date. Analysis of the remains suggested that they were from one adult individual (D Henderson, pers comm). A sample of the bones was dated by radiocarbon (SUERC-2451/GU-11904) and returned an Early Bronze Age date between 2140 and 1910 BC (Table 3 and Illus 17).

Above the basal layer of cairn stones was a layer of large voided stones (context 4102) within dark red-brown silty sand. These were all located on the interior of the kerb. Around the exterior of the kerb, natural subsoil was overlain by a layer of stones (context 4109) within dark brown silty sand, which formed a concentric band around the kerb, roughly 2.5m in width. This layer abutted the boulder kerb and had clearly been deposited after its construction.

The whole cairn was overlain by a layer of smaller stones (context 4101) in a matrix of light yellow-brown silty sand (Illus 18), forming a significant mound measuring some 12m in diameter and at least 1m in height (Illus 19). Fifteen small sherds and crumbs of prehistoric pottery were recovered from one location in the south-east quadrant. There are traces of comb-impressed decoration on several sherds and they have tentatively been identified as part of a Beaker (A MacSween, pers comm). In the north-west quadrant of the cairn, a spread of charcoal (context 4103) was identified overlying layer 4101. It measured some 1.0m by 0.6m and was only 7mm deep. Its origin was unclear and no small finds were retrieved from the feature. A sample of the charcoal was dated by radiocarbon (SUERC-2452/GU-11905) to the period between 50 BC and AD 140 (Table 3 and Illus 17).



Illus 16 Site 41: plan of kerb and robbed out cist with basal layer of stones



Illus 17 Calibrated radiocarbon determinations from Site 41

Table 3 Radiocarbon determinations of samples from Site 41

Lab code	Context	Material	Lab age BP	δC13	1 sigma cal	2 sigma cal
SUERC-2451 (GU-11904)	Find 2	Burnt human bone	3625 ± 40	–26.1‰	2040–1910 BC	2140–2070 BC (12.7%) 2050–1880 BC (82.7%)
SUERC-2452 (GU-11905)	4103	*Alnus*	1950 ± 40	–26.8‰	AD 1–90 (58.5%) AD 100–30 (9.7%)	50 BC to AD 140

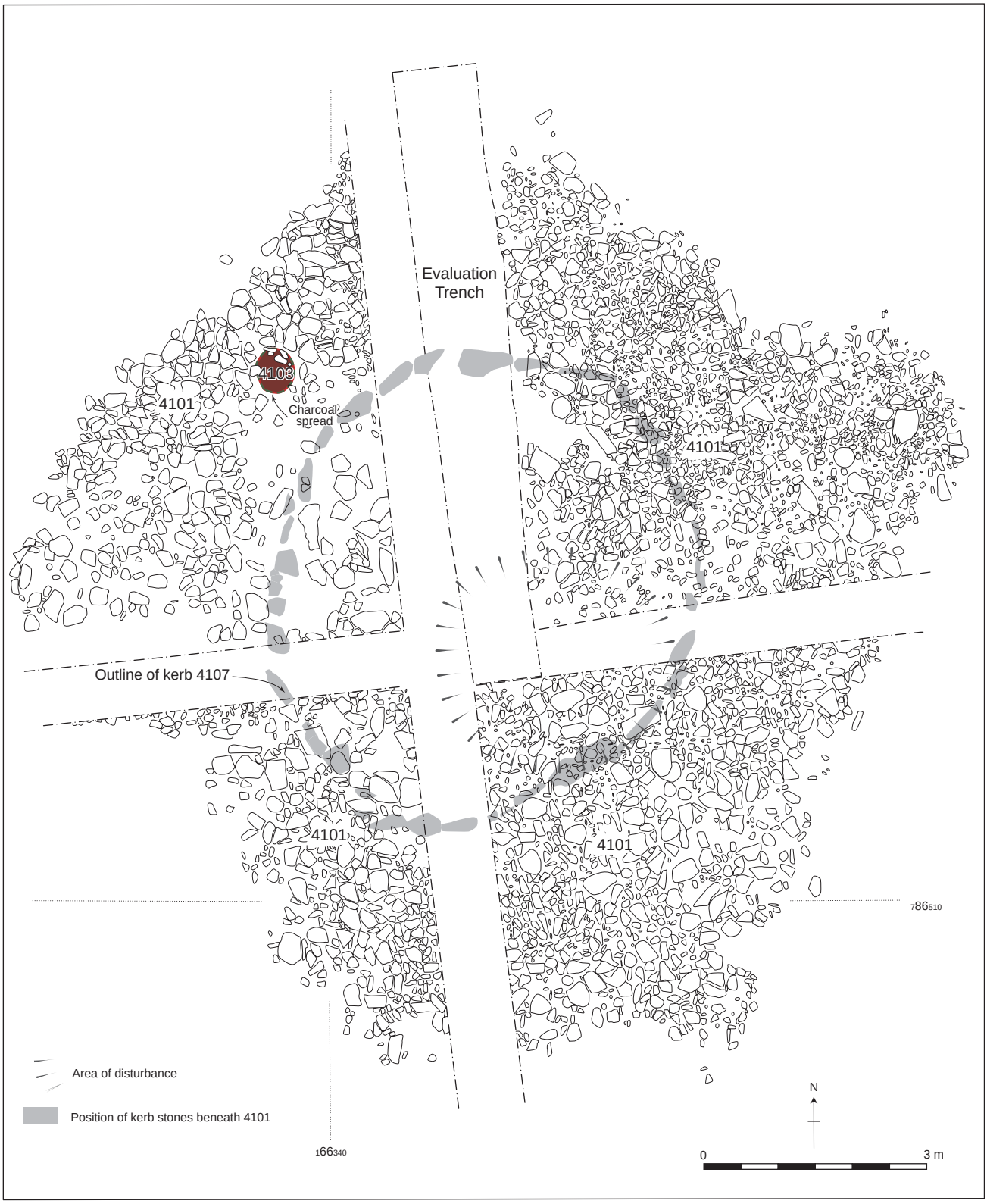
The centre of the cairn was dug into at some time after it had reached its final form. This left a depression measuring 4m in diameter and 0.3m deep at the present-day ground surface. Whenever this robbing occurred, the result was partial destruction of the cist and complete removal of its contents.

6.6.2 History and use

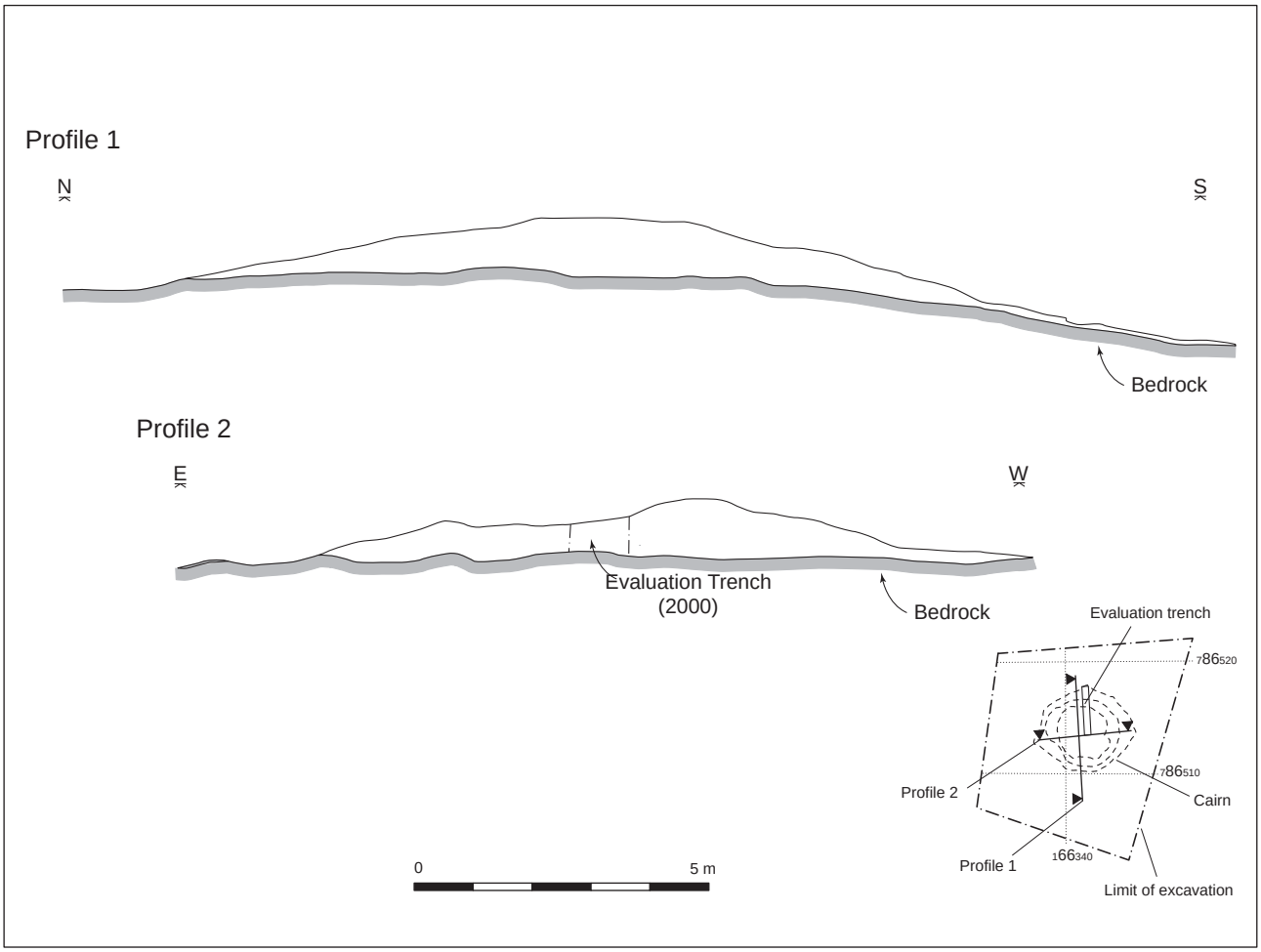
This monument is a new example of a small Bronze Age kerb cairn, a type of funerary monument now familiar in the west of Scotland (Lynch & Ritchie 1977). There are three other unexcavated cairns in the Arisaig area that may be similar monuments (Illus 2). The nearest cairn lies some 200m to the south: it is a kerb cairn of similar dimensions, 15m in diameter and 1m high, but it is badly robbed (NMRS no NM68NE 7). One kilometer to the south lies a much larger cairn, 30m in diameter and 1.2m high (NMRS no NM68NE 6). The third cairn is situated 2.2 km to the south (NMRS no NM68SE 5); it measures only 5m in diameter and is 0.5m high so may not be a funerary cairn like the others.

The recorded structure and stratigraphy of the cairn allows for more than one interpretation of the constructional sequence and history of the cairn. The cist, although not central to the kerb, is apparently a primary feature. The band of stones outside the kerb was clearly placed there after the kerb was built but it does not totally obscure the kerb. It could therefore either be an original element of the cairn or an addition. The upper layer of smaller stones is assumed to be an addition and may represent the gradual accumulation of field clearance stones rather than a formal element of the funerary cairn. The interpretation is supported by the smaller size of the stones and the irregular extent of the deposit.

The dating of the original construction of the cairn is dependent on the interpretation of the small cache of cremated human bone within the lowest level of the kerb cairn. If the bone is assumed to have been deposited during the original construction (and there is no evidence to the contrary) and does not represent a token deposit of the curated remains of an ancestor, it can be used to date construction to around 2000 BC. This is perfectly acceptable when compared with dates from similar monuments (Lynch & Ritchie 1977). The presence of a few small fragments of probable Beaker in a stratigraphically late context on the edge of the cairn raises the possibility that the monument is in fact significantly earlier. If the pottery represents the fragmentary remains of the grave goods from the disturbed cist, it would suggest a construction date several centuries earlier in the third millennium BC. In this case the cache of human bone would have been a secondary burial into the kerb cairn. It is equally probable that the fragments of probable Beaker are derived from another source – possibly another burial nearby – and they were disturbed and unintentionally deposited on the cairn during later field clearance. In this context, it is interesting to note the Iron Age date obtained from the patch of charcoal on the surface of the cairn. This suggests that the formation of the cairn, including the deposition of field stones, was essentially complete by this time and it may be used as evidence for sustained cultivation of the land around the cairn during later prehistory. The land surrounding the cairn remained in cultivation until the recent past and is now improved pasture.



Illus 18 Site 41: cairn after removal of topsoil



*Illus 19 Site 41: sections of the kerb cairn from (**a**) the north (Profile 1) and (**b**) the east (Profile 2)*