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An Archaeology of Iron Age Domestic Settlement in Northern Scotland

ANDREW C.W. BAINES

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philsophy in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Glasgow, September 1999

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Background to the Research Project

My interest in the archaeology of northern Scotland beagn in 1992, when I took part in excavations which formed part of an ongoing research project on the Dunbeath Estate, in the south eastern part of Caithness. Travelling along the east coast by train and road, towards a destination of which I had no prior knowledge, I was immediately struck by abrupt changes in the landscape, from the pastoral coastal plain of eastern Sutherland, across the barren upland landscapes of the Ord of Caithness, to the open, undulating plain of Caithness itself. This area is unique in Britain, and very distinct from the more familiar highland areas to the south and west.

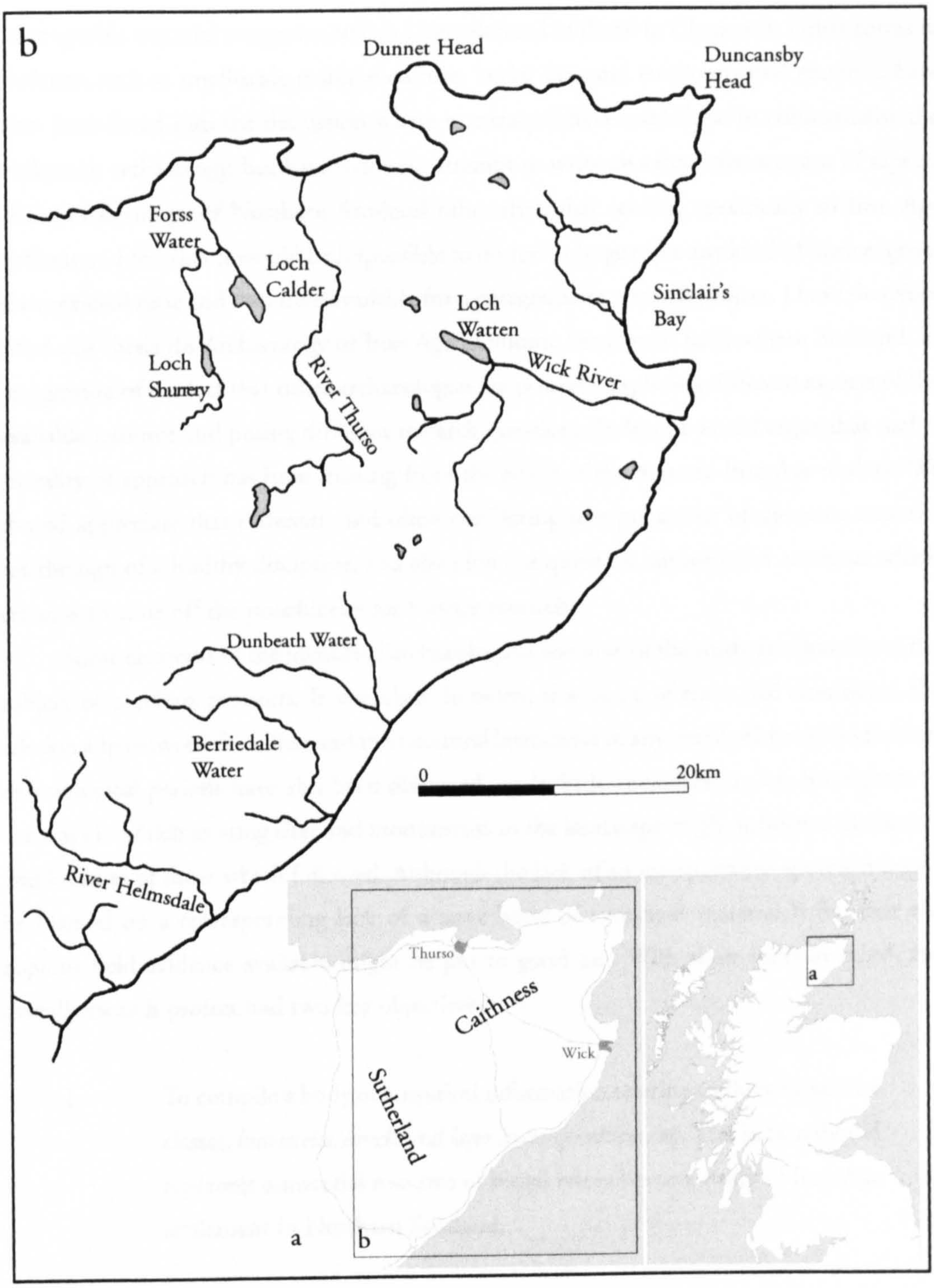
Although I have participated in the excavations at Dunbeath on five more occasions since my initial visit, a period during which I became familiar with much of Caithness and eastern Sutherland, I did not pursue any personal research with relevance to the area until 1994. Then, as part of an undergraduate course dealing with the wider archaeology of the North Atlantic, I wrote a short paper on the 'wags' of Caithness, an enigmatic group of prehistoric sites of which I had been peripherally aware during my previous visits to the area. As a desk-based project, this involved reading the work of A.O. Curle, who worked on the only two of these sites to have been excavated, during the earlier part of this century (Curle 1941, 1945, 1948). In the light of research I have pursued since, it is clear that this piece of work perpetuated many of the misunderstandings and inaccuracies which have dogged previous discussions of the 'wags', and that most of these problems stem directly from Curle's published accounts themselves. The germ of the research project presented in this thesis, as suggested to me by my supervisors Prof. C. D. Morris and Dr. Alex. Morrison, was an examination of the later Iron Age in Caithness. Initially, this was to be centred on the 'wags', and drew on my previous interest in them. Of especial interest were what I will call *aisled buildings*, the principal component of these sites. It seemed logical to turn first to the most completely excavated 'wag' site, the Wag of Forse, and I was fortunate that Curle's original excavation notebooks still exist, and are held by the National Monuments Record (NMRS), at the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) in Edinburgh. After some days spent on an initial reading of these notebooks, it became clear that they contained important information which has not appeared in print, and which in many respects contradicts Curle's published accounts. In particular, it is clear from these notebooks that a considerable depth of deposits was located at the site, representing a long history of settlement hardly hinted at by the rather confused published accounts. I have presented a full re-interpretation of the Wag of Forse and an assessment of its wider context elsewhere in this thesis (Chapter 4, Appendix 1), and it would be out of place to go into further detail here. Suffice to say here, it seemed wrong to interpret one part of the site alone, the aisled buildings, without considering

their relationship to other elements of the site, since the location of these later Iron Age buildings hardly seemed explicable without reference to earlier elements of the site. This would have involved the abstraction of these buildings from their context, one which seemed to offer the possibility of continued settlement in one particular place in the landscape over the entire Iron Age. Indeed, the continuity of occupation at Forse seemed to offer the possibility of defining a wider structural sequence for the Iron Age in northern Scotland. It also indicated that insights into the nature of long-term change in Iron Age settlement across the northern mainland might be gained by examining the relationship between similar sites elsewhere, and evidence for earlier activity which existed within their immediate landscapes. Processes of long-term change have not traditionally been a concern of accounts of the Atlantic Iron Age, most of which have tended to maintain strict divisions between chronological phases. These have been treated as so many independent 'layers' to be peeled away and treated as self-contained entities. To achieve an exploration of long-term change, I decided to broaden my chronological approach to encompass settlement forms dating to the earliest Iron Age (see section 1.3).

My initial research into where later Iron Age structures might be found had also indicated that their geographical range was not as restricted as first seemed to be the case. Rather than being confined to Latheron Parish in south eastern Caithness, a misapprehension which may originate in the RCAHMS *Inventory* for Caithness (1911b, xxxix), it became clear that aisled buildings might be found at least as far south as Glen Loth in Sutherland, if not further afield. Similarly, looking at the complexes of buildings which surrounded many of the excavated broch sites in northern and western Caithness, as well as a number of more amorphous sites, it became clear that on some sites there were fragmentary structures which might date to the later Iron Age. It seemed just as important to consider how these might relate to the histories of occupation within the landscapes in which they are set. Indeed, it soon became apparent that the north-eastern corner of the mainland formed a coherent region, in terms of its specific archaeology as well as its landscapes. I therefore decided to broaden the geographic area under study, and arrived at a definition of *Northern Scotland* which includes all of present-day Caithness, as well as a significant part of eastern Sutherland (Map 1.1).

1.2. Research Aims and Objectives

The research area outlined in section 1.1 is large, and it was clear from the outset that it would be necessary to be selective in choosing material for study. I therefore decided to confine my study to settlement archaeology of a period between, approximately, the early- to mid-first millennium BC and the mid-first millennium AD. This study was pursued using



Map 1.1 : *Northern Scotland.*

three specific material categories, which I have defined in detail in Chapter 5. Other forms of evidence, such as small-scale material culture, burial sites and environmental material, have been introduced into the discussion where necessary. I have used these to contextualise the settlement archaeology, but have made no attempt to write an exhaustive account of aspects of the archaeology of Northern Scotland other than that relating specifically to Iron Age settlement. I feel that it would be impossible to do such a huge topic any kind of justice, given the restricted time and resources available for a postgraduate research project. I have therefore titled this thesis *An* Archaeology of Iron Age Domestic Settlement in Northern Scotland, in recognition of the fact that other archaeologies are possible, exploring different aspects of the available resource and posing different research questions. Indeed, I would argue that such a plurality of approach has been missing from the study of the Atlantic Iron Age to date. We should appreciate that different, and often conflicting interpretations of the same material are the sign of a healthy discipline, and abandon the quest for authoritative accounts which attempt to close off the possibilities for further research.

Some elements of the identified archaeological resource of the study area have been the subject of previous accounts. It was clear, however, that none of these had considered the relationship between these sites and their cultural landscapes in any detail. Although individual chronological periods have also been discussed, again little consideration has been given to the ways in which existing sites and monuments in the landscape might influence the nature and location of those which followed. Although the lack of an interpretative approach might be blamed on a corresponding lack of a large body of excavated material, I felt that the copious field evidence available might be put to good use. With these ideas in mind, the overall research project had two key objectives:

i. To compile a body of empirical information relating to three broad site classes, *hut-circles*, *brochs* and *later Iron Age settlements*. This in turn should represent a material resource of broad relevance to a study of Iron Age settlement in Northern Scotland.

ii. To adopt an interpretative approach to this material, which attempts to trace key themes through this changing and superficially disparate archaeological resource. These themes are a) *changes within specific settled landscapes over time* and b) *the possible role of domestic architecture in the maintenance of social relationships played out across these landscapes*. They were selected in an attempt to cross-cut traditional chronological and typological boundaries.

The resulting written thesis has been structured in accordance with these research objectives. It is divided in to two main parts. Part 1, comprising Chapters 2 – 5, opens with a review of current and traditional approaches, both empirical and theoretical, to the study of the Iron Age in Atlantic Scotland. It then proceeds to outline an approach to the interpretation of the prehistoric agricultural landscapes of Northern Scotland and the possible function of domestic architecture within these, and to suggest a material sequence through which these themes might be traced. Part 1 concludes with a discussion of the categories of empirical evidence which will be drawn into the wider discussion. Part 2, comprising Chapters 6 – 9, consists of a discussion of each of the three study areas. These Study Area chapters contain both detailed tables, together with a general discussion of each material category, and an interpretative account of each of the individual local case study areas. The overall aim of the thesis is to present a social archaeology of Northern Scotland over the course of the Iron Age, and a broad-brushed approach has been adopted in accordance with the scope of this aim and the nature of the existing field resource. It was also intended to be of use to other researchers wishing to engage with this material in the field, and I have attempted to present the empirical basis of my interpretations as extensively as possible (see section 1.4).

1.3. A Note on Chronology

Temporal relationships between the various types of evidence which make up the overall material culture resource of the Atlantic Iron Age are, at the time of writing, still a matter of fierce debate, and no fully accepted general chronology yet exists. This problem is all the more acute within the Study Areas presented in this thesis. Here, a general lack of reliably excavated sites, and hence a dearth of absolute dates, has resulted in local chronologies which are weakly developed, if at all. One of the tasks I set myself in researching the Iron Age of northern Scotland was to define a local thematic and structural sequence through which its settlement archaeology might be ordered, and this is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. However, in order not to leave this sequence 'floating' in time, it would be useful here to outline a more general chronology of the Iron Age with which it is broadly consistent. For this, I propose to employ the tripartite chronology of the Atlantic Iron Age developed by Sally Foster (Foster 1989b, 16, Barrett & Foster 1991, Fig. 3.1). This is as follows:

Early Iron Age (EIA) : cal BC 800 – 400.
A 'pre-fully-developed broch' phase, characterised by large roundhouses, of both thick- and thin-walled type.

Middle Iron Age (MIA) : cal BC 400 – 200 cal AD.
A phase when the broch was the prevalent architectural form.

Late Iron Age (LIA) : cal AD 200 – 800.
A phase when brochs were no longer utilised in their original form, and when new structural types and settlement patterns appeared.

This chronological scheme is partly derived from radiocarbon dates (Foster 1989b, 19 – 25), and if this were its sole basis it would be of little application to the area discussed in this thesis, where absolute dates are scarce (see Appendix 3). Those which do exist relate largely to the earlier part of the Iron Age sequence. However, it is also evident that Foster's chronology has its roots in a clear structural sequence, centred around the dominant middle Iron Age structural form, the broch. This is of distinct relevance to the present discussion. Many of the domestic buildings discussed in this thesis can be directly interpreted in terms of this chronology, and the three site classes discussed here equate broadly to the three phases outlined above. It has, however, been necessary to modify the scheme somewhat to account for the rather vague nature of the material resource from northern Scotland. This applies to both ends of the chronological scale. Hut-circle sites in the north can be dated to at least as early as the Second Millennium BC, traditionally the Bronze Age. In this thesis I am concerned with identifying relationships between sites which cross-cut chronological boundaries, however, and the discussion of earlier Iron Age sites will therefore be extended to the totality of identified hut-circle settlement. Following Foster, I will refer to the period during which the majority of brochs were constructed and occupied as the middle Iron Age. However, Foster differentiates between a Late Iron Age I and Late Iron Age II, on the basis of a differentiation between continued use of broch sites, with some *de novo* establishment of roundhouses, and the development of polycellular structures. This distinction is based largely on evidence from Orkney, and it is almost impossible to identify within the settlement evidence from the northern mainland, given the lack of a detailed absolute chronology. I have therefore abandoned the distinction between LIA I and LIA II, and have referred to all settlements which post-date the initial construction and use of broch sites as *later Iron Age.* This does not imply that I reject the differentiation *per se*, simply that it cannot be maintained within the current study on the

basis of the available evidence. In cases where finer chronological detail is discernible, I have discussed this on its merits on a site by site basis. It should also be noted that, in view of the fact that this chronological scheme is not accepted by all Atlantic Iron Age researchers, I have placed the terms *early, middle* and *late*, where they refer to the Iron Age, in small case throughout.

1.4. A Note on Fieldwork and Illustrations

The local case study areas, which make up much of Chapters 7 – 9, contain a large number of sites and monuments. It was my aim to visit and record as many of these as possible, and all of those within the core areas on which the bulk of the discussion is based. The fieldwork for this thesis was based on site descriptions and locations derived from an exhaustive search of NMRS records. It was carried out over six weeks between 1996 and 1998. This was the maximum time it was possible to spend in the field, given the funding restrictions on a postgraduate project such as this. I therefore realised from the outset that time constraints would render impracticable the production of detailed survey plans in the field if sufficient sites were to be visited. Fortunately, most of the sites discussed in detail in this thesis have also been visited at least once by Ordnance Survey and Royal Commission surveyors, and field plans were available of many of them. These have been re-drawn and reproduced where relevant in Part 2. Plans were also available in published excavation reports and survey volumes. Again, these have been re-drawn for use where appropriate. The conventions used in re-drawn site plans are depicted in Figure 1.1. A number of existing plans were produced during the nineteenth century, especially those of broch sites along the east coast of Caithness (see section 8.3.1). It was my judgement that, although these provide an invaluable record of features which are no longer visible, their standards of accuracy are unlikely to meet those which are now the norm in archaeology. I therefore felt that re-drawing these would introduce a spurious impression of accuracy, and they have been presented in their original form. I also felt that a small number of very complex plans, in particular Figure 7.15, 7.16 and 8.19, would either lose important detail if re-drawn using the conventions depicted in Figure 1.1, or would be unnecessarily confusing. These illustrations have therefore been included in their original form.

This thesis contains a considerable amount of textual interpretation of the nature of relationships between monuments and their landscapes, and I felt that the best way to illustrate this would be photographically. Chapters 7 – 9 therefore contain a large number of photographs, which have been annotated for greater clarity where I felt it was necessary. In addition, each of these chapters is illustrated with a series of maps, showing the location of sites both within the study area as a whole, and within the individual local case study area.

These maps are based on data derived from the Ordnance Survey's *Digimap* digital map resource. Sites have been placed on these using eight-figure National Grid References (derived from NMRS records), using the GIS software package *Mapinfo Professional 4.1.* Those maps which show the location of sites within the local study areas are the subject of numerous references within the relevant chapters, and are therefore presented loose in a folder at the back of the thesis for ease of reference.

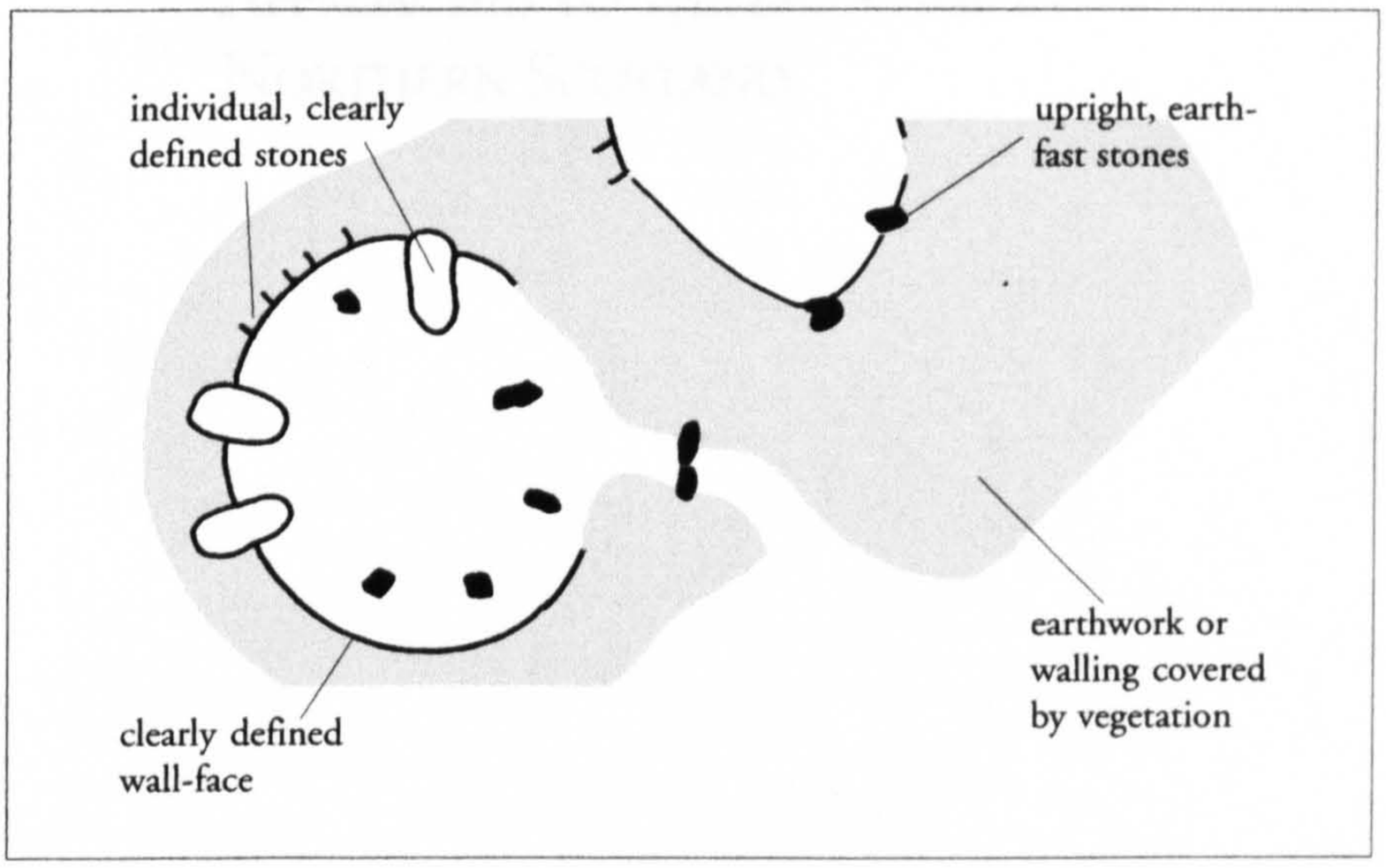


Figure 1.1 : Conventions used in site plans, Chapters 7 - 9.

Part 1

Approaches to the Iron Age in Northern Scotland

Chapter Two

The Iron Age in Atlantic Scotland : A Review and Critique

2.1. Introduction

The Iron Age in Britain is conventionally defined as beginning with the appearance of iron artefacts in the archaeological record, and ending with the Roman conquest of the southern part of the island. It is one of the enduring ironies of the Scottish Iron Age, and of that of the Atlantic Province in particular, that it steadfastly resists definition in these terms. Iron artefacts do not figure highly in the domestic artefact assemblages which characterise the Atlantic Iron Age, and the assemblages themselves appear to owe little to those found further south (Harding 1990, 6). Furthermore, the Atlantic province appears to have been little affected by the Roman incursions, and prehistory extends unbroken into the early centuries AD, at which point the Picts first appear in written sources. Even then, it is far from certain that this represents a significant social upheaval in the north. Although this thesis consists largely of a series of regional and local studies within the larger context of the Atlantic Iron Age, any programme of research into prehistory will have to contend with the weight of previous work which has defined its terms and produced its classifications. For this reason, in this chapter I will explore the way in which the present conception of the Scottish Atlantic Iron Age has come into being, in order to assess critically the theoretical and empirical background against which local studies must be set. The material categories which we use to analyse and interpret any given body of archaeological material, are the product of particular, historically situated intellectual processes within the discipline of archaeology itself. In order to subject such categories to critique, therefore, it is as important to be aware of the historical context of their production, as it is to attempt to relate them in their present form to past social processes. This is particularly germane to the context of this thesis, as it will become clear in the chapters which follow that any research into the Iron Age in northern Scotland unavoidably involves an engagement with pre-existing material categories.

In attempting to meet the ends outlined above, then, in this chapter I will first attempt to review the history and intellectual development of the study of the British Iron Age, and to relate the Atlantic Iron Age to this wider context. Through a critical approach to this task, I will attempt to define the principal theoretical components which make up the concept of an 'Atlantic' Iron Age, in order that these may be made explicit, and in some cases challenged, through the more locally specific studies which form the later parts of the thesis. This Chapter is not an attempt to write a detailed material account of the study of the Atlantic Iron Age; I will discuss relevant empirical issues in context, as they arise in later chapters.

2.2. The Idea of the Iron Age in British Prehistory

2.2.1. Review

It is well-known that the roots of the concept of a separate Iron Age lie in the 'Three-Age System', put forward by C.J. Thomsen in 1836 (Cunliffe 1974, 1). This was developed for the specific purpose of ordering artefacts held within museum collections, and it would be superfluous to discuss it in any depth here. The concept of such an ordering system was further developed, and given greater chronological precision, with the introduction of the Hallstatt/La Tène classifications, developed for central Europe on the basis of stylistic variation in material from sites in the Alpine region during the later nineteenth century (Collis 1984, 23). This was introduced to Britain as a means of dealing with the growing number of finds, garnered without any real concern for their context, from southern British sites, and in particular the barrows of eastern Yorkshire (Cunliffe 1974, 1). It is clear that from the outset the Iron Age found its terms of reference within the limited context of portable material culture, specifically the presence of decorated metal objects, and that this found its intellectual expression in an approach which owed more to art history than to what we would now recognise as archaeology.

Settlement studies did come to the fore within Iron Age archaeology during the latter half of the last century, including Pitt-Rivers' much lauded excavations at the hill-fort of Winklebury, and at the open sites of Woodcuts and Rotherley (Pitt-Rivers 1887, 1888), and this process continued without interruption into the early twentieth century. With the consequent explosion in the amount of available settlement evidence, it became clear that an independent system of classification was required in order to deal with the British material which, while apparently showing continental affinities, was different enough to warrant separate treatment (Harding 1974, 5). This was provided most effectively by C.F.C. Hawkes in a series of papers, beginning with the seminal *Hillforts* (1931) and culminating with the publication of his revised and developed scheme in *The A.B.C. of the British Iron Age* (1959). Hawkes proposed that the patterns of change evident in the material record of the Iron Age could be accounted for by a series of invasions, involving large-scale population movements from the continent. Although not without its critics, the most vociferous being F.R. Hodson (1960, 1964) who emphasised cultural continuity in southern Britain from the Bronze Age, Hawkes' scheme was enormously influential, and was widely adopted.

The A.B.C. scheme proposed to explain change in the British Iron Age was underpinned by two distinct, but linked, theoretical movements which characterise much of the archaeology of the first half of this century: invasionism and culture-history. The invasionist hypothesis proposed that major changes in prehistoric material culture were brought about primarily by an influx of new settlers on a regional basis. Its primary implication is that prehistoric cultures

are inherently conservative, and are resistant to change unless stimulated by outside forces. Invasionism was at one time extremely pervasive within British archaeology, leading Clark (1966) to write of an 'invasion neurosis' which blinded prehistorians to the possibilities of indigenous innovation in material culture. Before cultural change can be attributed to outside influence, however, it must first be established that there is a direct, reflective relationship between ethnic or political groupings and material culture, a point to which I will return shortly.

Although there is at least some textual corroboration for aspects of Hawkes' scheme, in particular the Belgic invasions which he suggested gave rise to the Iron Age C culture from around 75 BC, there is no essential relationship between such population movements and material culture change in the modern world. There was evidently a prior theoretical connection between population groups and material culture which legitimised the invasionist hypothesis. This can be found in culture-history, and in particular the work of V. Gordon Childe from the 1920s onward. Childe's central contention was that social units, which he termed *peoples*, will find material expression in discrete artefact assemblages, containing distinctive and recurring stylistic *traits*, which are recognisable archaeologically. As a Marxist, Childe's concern was to introduce an explicitly socio-political dimension into archaeology, specifically in relation to the role of economic factors in determining social institutions, and he was unequivocally opposed to the idea that his archaeological cultures could be directly equated with racial or ethnic groupings (McNairn 1986, 49). However, Childe's distinctive theoretical position was established over the course of a number of years, and through several published works, and was not explicitly set out until quite late in his career. It was, therefore, almost inevitable that others, perhaps lacking Childe's subtlety and originality of thought, should establish a crude equation between material culture assemblages and racial and ethnic groupings. Indeed, similarly facile, although more sinister, associations between archaeological construct and social and ethnic reality marked the earlier use of the organisational techniques of typology to suggest evolutionary differences between societies at different technological levels. It may be suspected that the nineteenth century ideas of social evolution which informed such ideas were also present, if largely unrecognised, in an archaeology which viewed indigenous cultures as resistant to changes not imposed by outside forces, presumably, therefore, borne by more advanced societies.

The debate which raged over the centrality of invasion in promoting change within the British Iron Age was largely superseded, in the south at least, by the New Archaeology of the 1960s and 1970s. This rejected simple, monocausal explanations in favour of a more broad-based approach, which attempted to introduce detailed consideration of environmental and economic factors as driving forces behind change in prehistory. At least two of the major

currents within the new archaeology, explicit model-building and systems theory, were applied to southern British Iron Age material. D.L. Clarke (1972), for instance, attempted an exhaustive re-interpretation of Bulleid and Gray's published excavations of the so-called Glastonbury Lake Village, in order to derive a complex model of society at the site. Similar, although perhaps more lasting, have been the attempts of Barry Cunliffe (1984) and Martin Jones (1984a, b) to model the environmental and social relationships between the hillfort of Danebury, Hampshire and its supposed hinterland, and by extension to model such relationships for much of south-western Britain during the Iron Age (see Figure 3.1). More recently, there has been a further paradigm change in archaeology, and the diverse approaches loosely grouped under the banner of 'post-processual' archaeology have begun to call into question many of the central ideas of the New Archaeology, especially those which have sought to generalise and compartmentalise diverse human practices . This new paradigm has not been adopted across the range of period specialisms in British archaeology, however, and has been most readily embraced by researchers in Neolithic and Bronze Age studies. The general perception appears to have been that the broadly interpretative approaches of post-processualism are more suited to the apparently overtly ritual nature of much of the material culture of these periods, and are superfluous to those which are textual in nature, or whose material remains appear primarily domestic. This has certainly been the case in Iron Age studies, where so-called processualism was prevalent until the early 1990s. More recently, however, researchers have begun to recognise the value of interpretative approaches in examining Iron Age material (e.g. Barrett 1981, 1989, 1999, Hingley 1990a, 1995, 1996, Hill 1993, Sharples & Parker Pearson 1997, Parker Pearson 1999), particularly since it has become evident that the divide between the domestic and the ritual, and the economic and the social, is far less clear-cut than was once thought.

2.2.2. Critique

I have followed briefly the trajectory of southern British Iron Age studies up until the present, a this has exerted a dominant influence over the period in Britain as a whole. I want now to go on to review critically the main theoretical currents which have underlain its development and, in the following sections, to explore the effects, or otherwise, which these have had on the study of the Scottish Atlantic Iron Age.

A fundamental concept, established very early on in the study of British prehistory, has been the idea that there is a straightforward relationship between human practices, of whatever kind, and material culture. Initially, this took the form of a rather crude evolutionism, perhaps understandable given the prevalence of Darwinian ideas within late nineteenth century science generally. This proposed that artefacts could be arranged in typological sequences, from the

crudest to the most complex, and that it followed naturally from this that such ascending progressions were indicative of an increasing degree of civilisation, and in the most extreme examples actual physical evolution. Although the overtly Darwinist component of late nineteenth century archaeology does not feature as strongly in that of the earlier part of this century, I would argue that it is none the less an implicit part of the invasionist hypotheses which dominated the Study of the British Iron Age. In order to insist upon population influx as a mechanism of cultural change, and therefore to submit that cultures lack any impetus towards indigenous modification, I would argue that it is also necessary to hold the belief that the incoming culture must be superior in some way to the indigenous one. If this were not the case, there would seem to be no way in which the latter might be displaced or compelled to change, and no reason for the adoption of an exotic culture in situations of peaceful diffusion. Of course, the argument is a circular one, as invasionism must at some stage rely upon cultural innovation for the origination of traits which are then transferred by population movement. The source of such innovation, at least where the archaeology of Europe is concerned, has traditionally been the Near East.

There seems little point in rehearsing the arguments for and against invasionism in any more detail here, as the battle appears conclusively won in the favour of the latter. However, the fundamental theoretical issue at stake here persisted; that is, that material culture may be seen as a direct index of human practices. Thus, both the dominant paradigms of culture-history and the succeeding New Archaeology avoided the complexity of the relationship between human social practice and its material residues, although the latter was particularly refined in its theoretical approach to the analysis and prediction of material culture patterning. This led to what Moore (1986, 93) has termed *reflectionism*, the idea that material culture simply falls into pre-determined patterns which issue naturally from human ideologies or world-views. Attempts to argue this point in explicitly theoretical terms, such as the so-called 'ethno-archaeology' (Binford 1962), have, however, failed to establish its applicability in anything other than the most basic and trivial contexts.

Although I would agree with some of the critics of certain aspects of post-processual archaeology, that a number of the approaches adopted have been lacking in intellectual rigour, perhaps the greatest asset of many others has been their willingness to explore the *active* role of material culture within social practice. Thus, artefacts, food and other produce, architecture and other material things do not merely *reflect* the processes which give rise to them, rather they are actively involved in the playing out and reproduction of social life. The corollary of this, then, is that we cannot simply analyse material culture patterning as though it was a mere record of past human activity, but that we must actively interpret our archaeological resources in order to give them meaning. Indeed, it follows from this that the meaning of

material culture is never self-evident. Meaning must always be bestowed by interpretative practice (Barrett 1994a). This applies to the past, as it does to the archaeological present, and it is therefore necessary to consider the interpretative contexts of which particular material residues were both the condition and outcome.

Recently, opinion has been somewhat divided over the epistemological status of interpretation in archaeology. On the one hand, it has been pointed out that if material culture is seen as carrying no authentic meaning, requiring acts of interpretation to render it meaningful, then there can be little point in attempting to define the primary context within which such meaning was conferred, as it will always have been possible to draw out a range of interpretations, depending on the perspective of the interpreter (*ibid.*). This approach owes much to hermeneutic accounts (e.g. Ricoeur 1981), which emphasise the independence of a text of its author, material culture being seen as analogous to text for the purposes of archaeology (Moore 1990, Tilley 1991). It also draws on the work of Bourdieu and Giddens, who both emphasise the active role of social practices in the constitution and reproduction of social life. On the other hand, it has been argued that the interpretative contexts through which social life is maintained and recreated are informed by shared cosmologies, which influence the form and range of possible interpretations (e.g. Parker Pearson & Richards 1994a). This debate is important, since it concerns how specifically we can reconstruct social life, but I would argue that the contrast between the two approaches has been overdrawn. It has perhaps arisen partly as a result of a concentration on field monuments, such as the Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual complexes of southern Britain. Here, the material context of interpretation appears reasonably clear cut, since distinct and in many cases separate phases of construction and other activity can be defined. The primary debate therefore concerns whether the archaeological interpretation concerns simply the kinds of social practice which may have taken place, or whether it reveals something specific about the conceptual schemes which may lie behind the creation of the material. Most archaeological material does not, however, take this form; we are routinely presented with a series of incomplete and overlapping material contexts, not a single, incontrovertible one, in the form of deeply stratified deposits or long sequences of re-use. An example relevant to the present study would be the complex series of modifications and reconstructions common to many broch sites, which would appear to resist interpretation in terms of simple sequences. It is difficult, therefore, to define a single material context which we wish to interpret, and we are confronted in many cases with both the material context of social action and its outcome. I would argue that the interpretative context which is important is that of the archaeologist, and that it is therefore legitimate to explore the ways in which the possible courses of social action which have produced the archaeological 'record' led to one particular material outcome and not another. This is

important if we are to understand how changes in the material record came about. Furthermore, it is arguable that human practices in the past which should concern archaeologists involve primarily the social rather than the individual, and that we are therefore dealing not with entirely free interpretative acts, but those guided by shared sets of beliefs about the world which were worked through in practice to produce broad similarities in material culture. This would seem to represent the best hope of understanding the social context of groups of monuments such as the brochs, whose similarity of form has in the past been explained in terms of otherwise unconnected social phenomena (see section 2.3.1). It is enough to note here that the interpretative approach has recently been established within British Iron Age archaeology, although much of the work so far has been of a rather exploratory nature, expressed in a number of shorter works and edited volumes (e.g. Hill & Cumberpatch (eds.) 1995, Parker Pearson et al. 1995, Gwilt & Haselgrove (eds.) 1997), and as yet lacks the widespread debate and development which is a feature of studies in earlier prehistoric periods.

2.3. The Scottish Atlantic Iron Age

2.3.1. Review

In this section, I will review the origins of development of the study of the Iron Age in Atlantic Scotland, against the background of the more general situation in Britain which I have outlined above. I will then go on to offer a critique of this, and in particular to assess the influence, or otherwise, of developments elsewhere in British archaeology on the Scottish situation.

Although a large amount of Iron Age material in northern Scotland was excavated during the nineteenth century, including a number of brochs and other sites in Caithness and Sutherland (Rhind 1853, Anderson 1890, 1901, MacKay 1892, RCAHMS 1911a, b), the true chronological status of much of this was in considerable doubt, despite a number of promising early accounts (Piggott 1966, 1). This is unsurprising, given that northern Scottish Iron Age material has long resisted definition in terms based on material from elsewhere in the British Isles (Harding 1990, 6). Indeed, early accounts were often spectacularly wide of the mark in proposing a chronological context for material later shown to be Iron Age (e.g. Laing 1866). The most influential early contribution to the definition of the Atlantic Iron Age, as it is understood today, was that of Joseph Anderson, whose 1881 Rhind lecture series both effectively summarised the contemporary state of fieldwork, and was instrumental in establishing the broch as the monument type which embodied the Iron Age in the north and west of Scotland, a position it has held without challenge ever since (Anderson 1883). Despite

the continued excavation of individual sites, the intellectual impetus of Iron Age study in Scotland declined during the early years of the present century, and was not revived to any degree until the work of Childe in the 1930s, following his appointment to the University of Edinburgh in 1927.

Childe's *The Prehistory of Scotland* (1935) was the first to examine the wider British and European context of the Scottish Iron Age (MacKie 1965, 93). In essence, Childe's contention was that the brochs of the north and west of Scotland may be taken together with the more irregularly shaped 'duns' of other parts of the highlands, together with distinctive assemblages of bone artefacts, as a cultural unit which he termed the *castle complex*, as distinct from the *Abernethy complex* consisting of the well-known vitrified forts of eastern Scotland, together with a number of supposedly La Tène artefacts (Childe 1935, 236). Childe saw southern British affinities with both of these groups of material culture, and in keeping with the main body of his work his interpretation was a distinctly cultural one, with discrete material assemblages and distributions of material linked directly to population movement or the diffusion of ideas. It has since become clear that Childe's idea of a castle complex is not supported by the evidence. The suggestion that the brochs were built as impregnable keeps appears reasonable, in view of their monumental architecture. However, Childe's argument that they represent the strongholds of an invading elite, situated so as to dominate a subject population, is not supported by the empirical evidence. Over the greater part of northern Scotland and the Northern Isles, for instance, broch sites are far too numerous and closely spaced to represent the homes of a minority ruling class. Recent studies (Swanson 1988, Fojut 1982, Armit 1988, 84) have begun to demonstrate a convincing association between broch sites and agricultural land, and it now appears that they are more likely to have been monumental domestic buildings than military installations. Indeed, the supposed defensive qualities of the broch structure itself have been challenged (Mercer 1985, 98), and there is no evidence that warfare was ever pursued as widely or on a sufficient scale, within the small-scale agricultural society which produced the brochs, to justify the kind of military infrastructure conceived by Childe. He also argued that the period during which the putative broch-building elite retained their dominant status had been brief, and that they were soon absorbed by an indigenous population represented by the 'crude' secondary buildings found on many sites in the north (Childe 1935, 204). The basis of this claim, the chronological relationship between supposedly 'primary' and 'secondary' elements on Broch sites, has recently been effectively challenged (Foster 1989b).

Although the empirical details of Childe's approach were soon challenged, its essential theoretical basis was not. The next major theoretical contribution to the Scottish Iron Age was that of Stuart Piggott, who in *British Prehistory* (1955) proposed a scheme for the division of Iron Age Scotland into four major areas, the Atlantic, Solway-Clyde, Tyne-Forth and North-Eastern, which he later termed 'provinces' (1966, 3). Piggott's scheme was essentially an extension of Hawkes' southern classification, and Feachem (1966) subsequently sub-divided the four Scottish provinces into 22 separate regions, which again fit within the southern scheme. Although it is unnecessary to outline Piggott's classification in detail here, as it is perhaps best expressed diagrammatically (Figure 2.1), it is none the less important, given that the Atlantic province in particular, within which the present study is contained, has remained the dominant unit of analysis up until the present. What is also important is that the culture-history element remains, and indeed is strengthened in Piggott's scheme. Childe, as a Marxist, always maintained a socio-economic element within his work, for example emphasising the advantages of the adoption of iron tools in settlement expansion and suggesting the presence of gender-based labour divisions reflected in material culture differences (1935, 191). Although his approach may be criticised with regard to its rather naïve, reflectionist understanding of the relationship between cultures and the societies which produced them, it is none the less

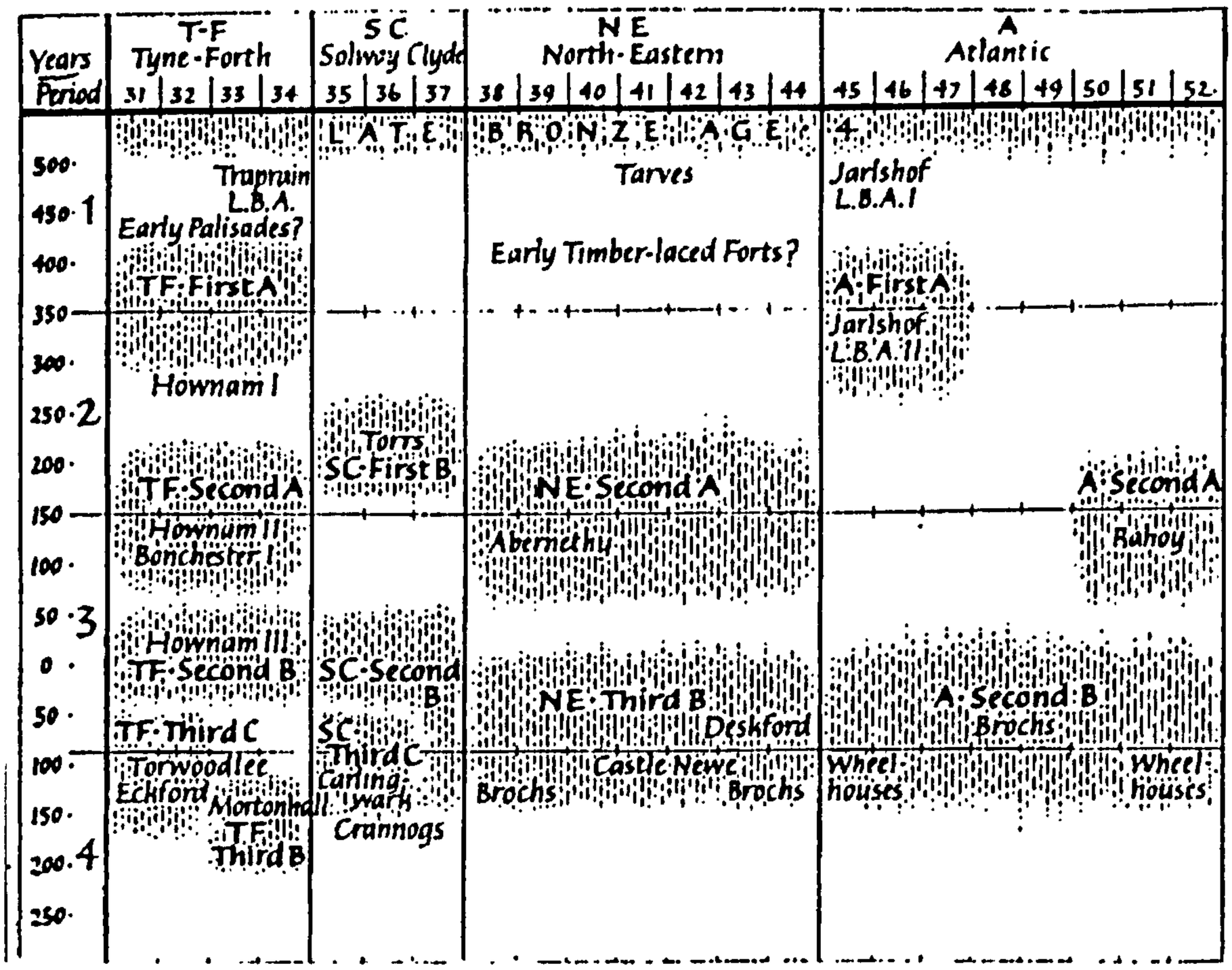


Figure 2.1 : Piggott's scheme for the Scottish Iron Age (1966, Fig. 2).

clear that Childe saw material culture as an active element in human social life. He also saw cultures as definite spatial units, without chronological or evolutionary implications (McNairn 1980, 65). Such insight appears to be lacking from Piggott's account of the Scottish Iron Age, especially in its later (1966) form, and while we read of continental and southern British 'proto-types' and 'origins' for Scottish material, very little discussion is given over to the exact mechanism by which such cultural traits might have been translated over such large distances. This may, in part, have been due to the fact that invasionism had become somewhat unfashionable, but had not been supplanted by an alternative. In any case, population movement as an explanation for change in the Scottish Iron Age was soon to be revived.

The larger scale theoretical developments outlined above were accompanied by an increase in the amount of empirical information available, especially within the Atlantic area, where the rather moribund subject of broch studies had been revived during the late 1940s and 1950s. Important excavations were carried out by Hamilton at Jarlshof (1956) and Clickhimin (published 1968), Shetland, and theoretical discussion of these sites once more found its way into the archaeological literature. Sir Lindsay Scott, in a paper (1947) now belatedly recognised as a seminal contribution to broch studies (Barrett 1981, Mercer 1985, 97, Hedges 1990, 19), used innovative local landscape studies to argue for an explicitly agricultural, rather than defensive, context for the brochs. Scott went on to argue, on empirical grounds, that the monolithic concept of the broch tower should be re-assessed, that many would not have possessed the full range of traits, such as scarcements and intra-mural stairs, assumed to form part of the cultural repertoire of the broch-builder, and indeed that the great majority would have been of far more modest proportions than the best-known examples, such as Mousa, Dun Telve and Dun Carloway (Scott 1947, 34). Indeed, Scott, following Childe, was concerned to view the broch phenomenon as one aspect of a wider context of stone-built domestic architecture in the highlands and islands, which also included the duns and wheelhouses (Scott 1948). Although his ideas were expressed within the prevalent culture-history paradigm, with broch culture derived from the southern British Iron Age B (*ibid.*, 33), they did not meet with widespread approval. Indeed, the report of the discussion which followed Scott's presentation of his paper, and which forms an appendix to its published form in the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, shows that Angus Graham, in particular, disagreed strongly. Graham (1947), taking a statistical approach in an attempt to deal with the totality of known evidence, re-asserted the traditional view of the broch as a distinct cultural entity, which could be conceived in terms of a set of standard features, and reduced

differences to supposed deviations from this 'norm'. Unfortunately, Scott's radical challenge was not taken up. Subsequent researchers, most notably Alison Young (1956, 1962), maintained the traditional, cultural, approach which saw this complex and regionally variant architecture as simply reflecting various invasive population movements (Armit 1996, 12).

This brings us to the work of Euan MacKie, probably the best known and most important contributor to the study of the Iron Age in Scotland over the past thirty years. MacKie's key 1965 paper in *P.P.S.*, *The Origin and Development of the Broch and Wheelhouse Building Cultures of the Scottish Iron Age*, contains the outline of an approach which was further developed in a second paper in the Glasgow Archaeological Journal in 1971. MacKie's argument took its theoretical lead from the traditional view of the broch phenomenon. *Contra* Graham (1947, 90), however, MacKie explicitly set out to establish broch origins using the 'evidence of distribution and the development of a structural typology', and to explicitly re-assert the distinctiveness of broch architecture. MacKie's approach was, none the less, explicitly cultural in nature. In establishing evidence for pre-broch occupation at a number of sites within the Atlantic province, he drew upon southern British parallels for material culture traits in order to establish earlier Iron Age dates, and saw the wide distribution of the distinctive broch architecture as indicative of close cultural relationships across the Atlantic province (MacKie 1965a, 100). In order to demonstrate these relationships, MacKie developed both a complex typological scheme by which the brochs as a monument class might be defined; he also proposed a hypothetical developmental sequence from the so-called *semibrochs* of the western Highlands to the true brochs, followed by cultural transmission to the remainder of the Atlantic province, a position opposed to that of Hamilton, who favoured the reverse route (1966, 126). I will discuss the problems of structural typology in more detail in Chapter 5, and will concentrate here on the theoretical basis of his argument, and the way in which it has influenced subsequent debate. I would suggest that there are two key elements to MacKie's argument, which is grand in scale and generalising in nature. Firstly, that the brochs can be regarded as a single, typologically distinct, and formally conservative monument type; secondly, that this architectural conservatism and distinctiveness may be seen as an expression of a particular culture, and that variations within this supposed homogeneity may be put down to evolutionary developments over time, rather than to distinctive local practices. In order to support the second part of the argument, MacKie also attempted, with limited success, to define a distinctive material culture associated with the brochs, and supposedly derived from southern Britain, including specific metal and bone artefacts, and a pottery typology derived partly from his excavations at Dun Mor Vaul, Tiree (MacKie 1974).

MacKie's model of broch origins and development was widely accepted through the 1960s and 70s, and was further developed and challenges rebuffed through a series of publications (MacKie 1965b, 1969, 1971, 1983), including reports of the excavations at Dun Mor Vaul (1974), Dun an Ruigh Ruaidh, Loch Broom (1980) and Leckie broch, Stirlingshire (1987). Initially, at least, MacKie's ideas were accepted, although doubts were raised by Clarke (1971) as to the validity of the link between broch material culture and southern precursors, and became the accepted view of the broch phenomenon. During the early 1980s, however, as a result of the impetus of a number of younger researchers into the study of the Atlantic iron Age, a range of more serious objections was offered. Probably the earliest, and certainly one of the most radical was John Barrett's 1981 paper in *P.S.A.S.*. In one of the earliest examples of contextual, interpretative archaeology, Barrett argued that the questions asked of Atlantic Iron Age material had thus far been misconceived, and that what was important was not the point of origin of broch material culture, nor its supposed cultural affinities, but the way in which this specific material culture was both structured by, and helped to structure, the social context within which it was produced. In the specific case of the brochs, he argued that they should be seen as a material resource through which an agricultural society negotiated and reproduced complex kin relationships. In general, however, Barrett's challenge was not taken up. Most of the new studies instead concentrated on the erosion of the empirical basis of the traditional view of the brochs. Excavations published between the 1970s and 1990s, such as Crosskirk, Caithness (Fairhurst 1984) and Bu (Hedges 1987), Pierowall (Sharples 1984) and Howe (Ballin Smith (ed.) 1994), Orkney, began to demonstrate that the concept of the broch may not, after all, have been a late import into Atlantic Scotland. As an alternative, it became possible to view the local origins of the brochs in a series of thick-walled round-houses in Caithness and Orkney during the earlier part of the first millennium BC (Mercer 1996), and even to push the beginnings of broch construction well back into its latter half (Fairhurst 1984, 166). The work of Hedges (1987) on the re-interpretation of the broch of Gurness, Orkney, followed by that of Foster (1989a, 1989b), also began to challenge the accepted view of the development of individual broch sites, moving away from the idea of an isolated, defensive tower which later changed in function, and became surrounded by a series of secondary domestic buildings, towards that of an integrated '...defended village with tower...' (Hedges 1990, 31). The artefactual and typological basis for the recognition of an invasive material culture has also been criticised (Lane 1987, Topping 1987).

MacKie's response to these new ideas has, in general, been to maintain a modified version of his earlier hypothesis (e.g. 1991, 1994). In response, the thrust of much recent work has been decidedly iconoclastic, seeking to stand in opposition to MacKie, and it is unfortunate that a convincing new synthesis has failed to develop. This is particularly so, given that I would argue that certain of MacKie's recent arguments, specifically his reservations regarding Hedges' re-interpretations of the internal layout of the Orkney brochs of Gurness and Midhowe (MacKie 1992), and his recognition of widespread similarities in Iron Age material cultures, are valid and deserving of greater consideration. The broch new wave has confined itself to an empirical challenge to accepted ideas, rather than attempting a really radical critique of their theoretical foundations. Indeed, that it has been possible to hold such conflicting viewpoints on the basis of the same set of evidence should perhaps have alerted the Iron Age archaeological community earlier to the possibility that a fresh approach might be needed.

Recently, if belatedly, elements of the interpretative approach have begun to seep through into the study of the Atlantic Iron Age. Beginning with the work of Foster (1989a, b) and Barrett and Foster (1991), and continuing into more recent works (e.g. Hingley 1995, 1996, Parker Pearson *et al.* 1995), the emphasis has largely been on the social role of architecture, an issue I will discuss in Chapter 3. This is unsurprising, given that architectural forms, most obviously the ubiquitous broch, have been dominant in defining the subject as it presently stands. However, I would suggest that even in more recent accounts the monolithic typologies, which are a legacy of the culture-history approach which has dominated much of the study of Scottish prehistory, have been allowed an undue influence over the discussion. Parker Pearson *et al.* (1995, 59), for instance, use chronological evidence from Dun Vulan, South Uist and Scalloway, Shetland to uphold MacKie's broch classification, in the process contributing to the broad definition of widespread types on the basis of local material, which has done so much to suppress the exploration of variation in the Atlantic Iron Age in the past. A recent general survey of the subject (Gilmour & Cook 1998) has emphasised the local variation throughout the Atlantic province. That a more localised approach might be more profitable in exploring how regional similarities in material culture are created out of local practice, has been suggested by the empirical material made available by a series of regional surveys (Mercer & Howell 1980, Mercer 1981, 1985, Batey 1984, Morrison 1996). The focus of research has, in general, remained on the individual monument, and there have been few really detailed studies exploring the processes of landscape change over the course of the Iron Age.

2.3.2. Critique

The early development of the Iron Age in Scotland followed very much the same pattern as that in southern Britain, although in a somewhat belated fashion. This should not surprise us, given that the same influential figures, most notably Childe and Piggott, were involved in the definition of its salient features. Many of the criticisms which I have already offered in relation to the southern Iron Age are, therefore, equally valid here. It is striking, however, that most of the wider theoretical developments of the 1960s and 70s appear to have largely bypassed the Atlantic Iron Age. There have been few abstract models offered to explain its material culture, despite the concerns of Clarke (1980), and most of the studies of this period have leaned heavily on ideas of population movement to explain material culture change. Indeed, the structural typologies of the 1960s and 70s, in particular, have been a pervasive influence over many of the recent debates. One of the most important effects of this has been that the focus of much recent research has remained squarely on the classification and interpretation of the 'broch'. The broader category of 'Atlantic Roundhouses' has been introduced in order to draw other architectural forms into the debate (Armit 1990a), but this has not been universally accepted. This rather narrow perspective has resulted in a certain parochialism, in that the Atlantic Iron Age has not figured, until recently, in theoretical approaches to British prehistory.

I would identify two main areas in which this limited outlook has hindered the development of the subject. Firstly, the culture-history approach which underlies the traditional view of the broch phenomenon has relegated architecture and architectural change to a mere reflection of cultural re-alignments; isolated defensive towers took on a secondary function as settlements, once the suggested dangers which gave rise to them passed. In arguing for a primary domestic context for broch settlements, recent accounts have left in place the distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' phases at these sites, without explicitly considering the theoretical implications which this has. 'Secondary' seems to equate to 'less interesting', and the social context of architectural change has not been explored until very recently. Secondly, the focus of research has, with one of two notable exceptions (e.g. Fojut 1982) remained very much at the level of the single site, or on the generalities of site classification. There have been few detailed attempts to explore the ways in which sites operated within complex settlement landscapes, and were part of the reproduction of social life through time as well as across space. Finally, if there is a general comment to be made about the Atlantic Iron Age, it would be that its history has been marked by reification (Berger & Luckmann 1966, 106), the assumption that categories imposed by humans, in this case archaeologists, on the world have a natural, pre-classificatory existence. Thus, the patterns and classifications identified within the material record of the Atlantic Iron Age have been treated as though they had an existence which is independent of their formulation by

archaeologists. This has allowed archaeological categories to be re-described as 'cultures', and in the process to be invested with a meaning for people in the past which has not been argued in relation to social practice. This is exemplified by the study of the broch, which has been considered almost entirely in isolation, with scant regard for its routine social or landscape context. Without a concept of the way in which material patterning results from social action, the practice of archaeology is tautological. This problem has, however, begun to be addressed in recent work, and the first steps have been taken towards an archaeology of social life in Atlantic Scotland.

2.4. Summary

It has been my intention, in writing this chapter, to subject the development of the study of the Iron Age in Atlantic Scotland to a critical analysis from a largely theoretical standpoint, and to set the main theoretical currents identified against their wider context within the study of British prehistory. I have not been concerned with an empirical review of the subject, as empirical material will be drawn into the chapters which follow in order to contextualise the local studies contained therein.

There are, however, certain general points regarding previous theoretical approaches to the subject which emerge from the foregoing discussion, and which have informed the present thesis. The first of these concerns the need for detailed local studies within Scottish Atlantic archaeology. The subject has been dogged by monolithic schemes almost from its inception, and recent debate has concerned competing views which have obscured the importance of local variation within the material evidence. I will argue in this thesis that we need to move away from this generalising tendency, as it is only through an understanding of the way in which material culture was brought into play through localised practices that we can hope to understand how wider material and social formations were created and reproduced. This is the essence of an interpretative approach. As a corollary, I would argue that we need to break with the tyranny of rigid classifications, especially that of the 'broch', as the imposition of inflexible, reified categories has been the main instrument by which difference within the material record has been suppressed. Although I will argue in Chapter 6 that the use of classifications is unavoidable when we think about archaeological material, in the case of the Atlantic Iron Age they have been applied with little critical consideration. This has had two deleterious effects. Firstly, structures have been conceived as having an authentic, 'primary' meaning, form and function which is merely diluted by 'secondary' use, and there has been little consideration of the role of material culture, and material culture change, in the transformation of society over time. I will address this problem through the case studies which form the second part of the thesis, in particular in attempting to understand the

transitions between the traditional dividing lines drawn across the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age in the Atlantic province as a whole. Secondly, rigid classifications have been a means through which sites have been abstracted from their wider context, and there have been few detailed examinations of Iron Age landscapes in the region, and consequently little understanding of how the locations of sites drew on pre-existing developed landscapes, and of how they might have related to one another across social space. Again, I will address this issue through a series of detailed local landscape studies. This chapter has touched on the concept of an 'interpretative' archaeology in general terms. In Chapter 3, I will go on to outline an interpretative approach to specific later prehistoric landscapes.

Chapter Three

Interpreting Field Systems

3.1. Introduction

Beginning with the work of pioneers like Sir Cyril Fox and O.G.S. Crawford (e.g. Fox 1923, Crawford 1929) during the early decades of this century, a distinct 'landscape archaeology' has emerged in Britain (Thomas 1993, 19). Traditionally, this has been concerned with the empirical recording of sites and monuments as an adjunct to the process of excavation, but more recently the landscape has been seen as an object of enquiry in itself. Landscapes have also been a central concern of recent trends in archaeology and anthropology, and have formed the subject of a number of important collections of papers (Bender (ed.) 1993, Hirsch & O'Hanlon (eds.) 1995, Ashmore & Knapp (eds.) 1999). One of the outcomes of recent work has been a realisation that landscapes should not be conceptualised as mere arrangements of otherwise unconnected objects in neutral physical space. Rather, their meanings are actively created and re-worked through situated social practices. As I have argued in section 2.3, a slavish concentration on the restricted context of the site, to the detriment of an appreciation of wider contexts, has been a chief failing of the study of the Atlantic Iron Age. The purpose of this chapter is to outline an interpretative approach to prehistoric agricultural landscapes. It will then go on to suggest ways in which this might be used to explore the field archaeology of the study areas presented in Part 2 of this thesis.

3.2. A Social Archaeology of Agricultural Landscapes

3.2.1. Approaches to Landscape Archaeology

Traditional approaches to landscape study in archaeology, perhaps in response to the development during the earlier part of this century of techniques such as aerial photography, have tended to conceptualise landscapes as distributions of monuments in space, according to purely physical determining agents. These typically include geographical factors, such as altitude, access to suitable agricultural land and water supplies, and empirically recognisable social pressures, such as the presence of other settlement centres and assumed territorial boundaries. This 'processual' approach tends to encourage a rather abstract conception of landscapes, as bounded, two-dimensional spaces, viewed in plan view 'from above', within which all points and places can be viewed simultaneously. Human action then becomes quantifiable through methods such as *central place theory* (Hodder & Orton 1976, Chapter 4) and *catchment area analysis* (e.g. Higgs & Vita-Finzi 1972), within which the essential temporality of human practice is either obscured, or conceived in narrowly economic terms.

The tendency towards abstraction reached its apogee with the emergence of the New Archaeology, with its dogma of law formation and model building. The modelling of human interaction across space is well illustrated within Iron Age archaeology by the model advanced

by Cunliffe (1984) and others to account for the landscape contexts of the southern British hillforts and other settlement forms (section 2.2.1). It leads to a situation where the 'bird's eye' view of settlement archaeology may be represented in a purely diagrammatic form (Figure 3.1).

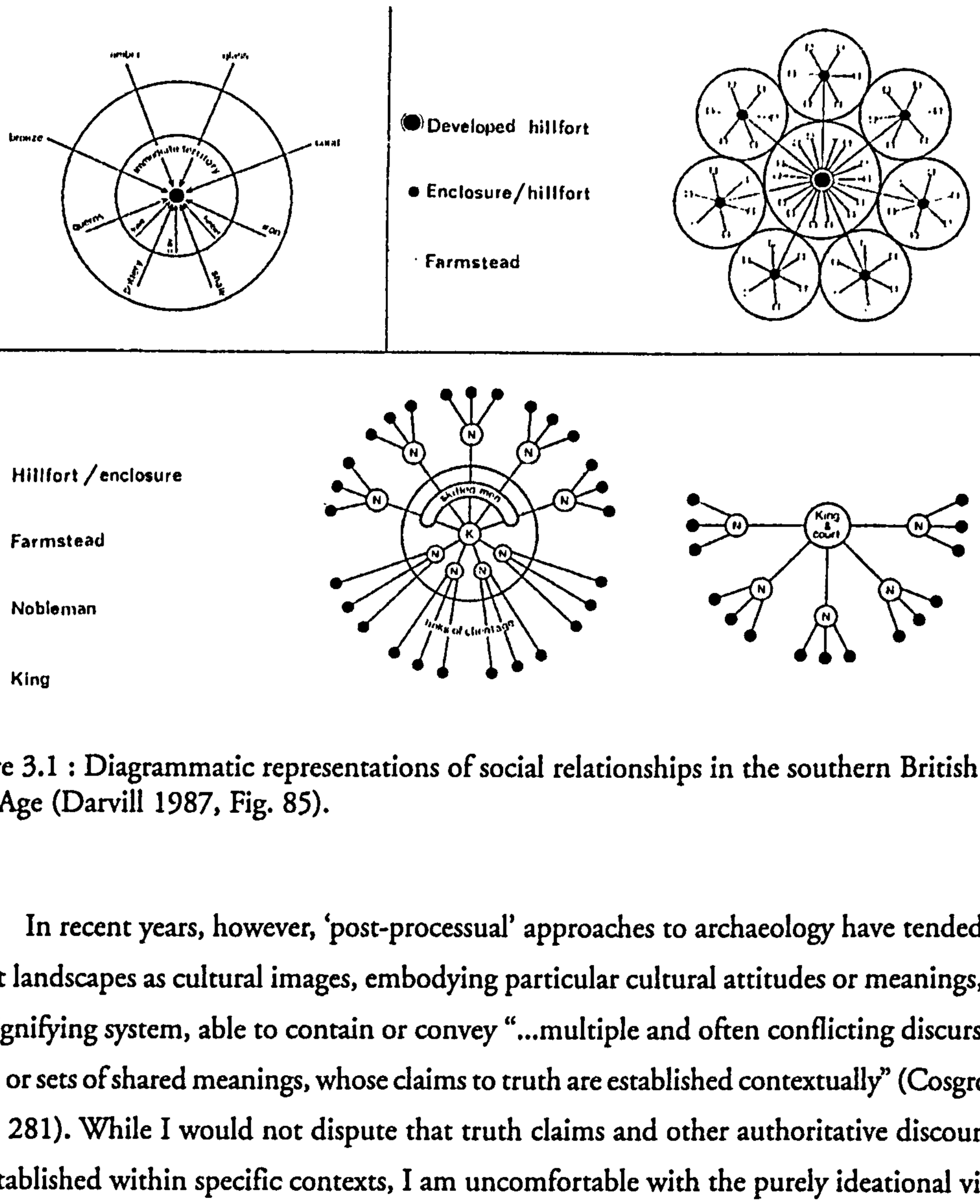


Figure 3.1 : Diagrammatic representations of social relationships in the southern British Iron Age (Darvill 1987, Fig. 85).

In recent years, however, 'post-processual' approaches to archaeology have tended to depict landscapes as cultural images, embodying particular cultural attitudes or meanings, or as a signifying system, able to contain or convey "...multiple and often conflicting discursive fields, or sets of shared meanings, whose claims to truth are established contextually" (Cosgrove 1993, 281). While I would not dispute that truth claims and other authoritative discourses are established within specific contexts, I am uncomfortable with the purely ideational view of landscapes which some post-processual accounts appear to favour.

In an important paper, Ingold (1993, 154) rejects the dualism implicit in competing processual and post-processual approaches, between landscapes as purely material on the one hand and purely ideational on the other. Instead, he introduces the concept of a 'taskscape' (*ibid.* 157), by which I understand him to mean the network of human activities spread out through time and space, through which social life is carried forward in practice. Ingold further characterises landscape as "...the taskscape in its embodied form..." (*ibid.* 152). The landscape

is not simply a cultural formation imposed or inscribed upon preexisting, neutral space, but a material form which arose alongside social practice. Landscapes are reworked and renegotiated on a daily basis by the people who live in and around them. These routine practices leave material traces, which are constantly being reinterpreted, and reincorporated into ongoing projects of social action. The landscape can never be considered to be 'empty', as it always contains the material traces of past actions which may be given meaning either through traditional associations, or original acts of interpretation and appropriation. Thus, the landscape is neither an idea which exists purely in the mind of the social actor, nor a product of his or her actions. Landscapes are material formations which are constantly being interpreted and changed by those for whom they form the venue for daily life. In turn, the status of landscapes as a form of material culture introduces the possibility of interpretation by the archaeologist. The purpose of landscape archaeology should not be to identify static meanings of whatever kind. Rather we should adopt an interpretative approach which attempts to understand the kinds of social relationships which might be both sustained and changed through routine practice across the landscape.

It is this concept of the landscape which I want to adopt here. Like other aspects of material culture, landscapes should be understood as both the condition and the outcome of social practice. In the following chapters, I want to move away from a consideration of the material traces of the Iron Age within the study area in purely topographic and statistical terms, for instance in relation to absolute altitude or distances from water sources. I would argue that this divorces the material from its immediate context and introduces a level of abstraction which may mask meaningful differences, discernible at a more local scale. Similarly, I do not wish to abstract the evidence from its physical context in an attempt to present it as a pure embodiment of social formations. Instead, I wish to examine the range of evidence for human practice within some Iron Age landscapes in northern Scotland, in order to explore the ways in which these landscapes developed and changed through time. I feel that this represents an attempt to preserve the essential temporality which is integral to the concept of landscape outlined above; rather than simply peeling back successive archaeological landscapes as discrete, two-dimensional layers, I feel that we should attempt to look at the ways in which these material formations, and the social practices which both maintained them and made sense of them, may have extended and changed through time.

A primary aim of this thesis is to explore the themes which may extend between the changing landscapes of the Iron Age. Of course, a degree of realism is necessary when undertaking a programme of research which relies chiefly on field evidence. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, the available field resource is constituted in terms of a series of preexisting, and inescapable, categories. There are few excavated sites within the area under discussion in this

thesis. Some categories of evidence, most notably the aisled buildings, which I will argue belong to the later Iron Age, have not been precisely dated at all. There is, therefore, little prospect at present of constructing fine-grained chronological schemes. Indeed, the chronology of the Atlantic Iron Age as a whole is incompletely understood. It is therefore unavoidable that the chronological approach adopted here is rather coarse-grained. As I will argue in Chapters 7 –9, this approach nonetheless allows some insights into processes of change which cross-cut traditional chronological boundaries.

3.2.2. The Social Significance of the Cultivated Landscape

It was clear, at the outset of the programme of research presented in this thesis, that the vast majority of the sites examined were likely to be domestic in character. A considerable number of these later proved to be associated with field systems. The discovery of ancient field systems was one of the main benefits of the burgeoning technique of air photography (Crawford 1923, Bowen 1975, Pickering 1979). In England in particular, the archaeology of early agriculture has become almost a discipline in itself, with a considerable literature (e.g. Bowen 1961, 1978, Fowler & Evans 1967, Bradley 1978, Fleming 1978, 1988, Fowler 1981). There have also been some accounts dealing explicitly with ancient agriculture in Scotland (Halliday *et al.* 1981, Feachem 1973, Barrett *et al.* 1976, Graham 1957, Mercer 1980, Papers in Foster & Smout (eds.) 1994, RCAHMS 1994). However, the implications which the appearance of enclosed field systems in the north might have for changes in social life in prehistory (cf. Bradley 1978, Fleming 1988, Barrett 1994b, 1999) have remained largely unexplored.

There is a lack of accounts dealing specifically with the social implications of agricultural systems in the Highlands. However, there are works drawing on evidence from other parts of the British Isles, which nevertheless have a more general relevance. In particular, I want to concentrate here on an argument first developed by Barrett (1994b), which concerns the implications of the inception of enclosed farming practice for processes of change in social life. There are two main thrusts to this argument. The first concerns the idea of *tenure*, a concept outlined by Ingold (1986). According to Ingold (*ibid.* 133), tenure '*...is a mode of appropriation*, by which persons exert claims over resources dispersed in space' (author's italics). Ingold also introduces a rather abstract concept of 'dimensionality' to his discussion of tenure. He characterises systems of land tenure practised by agriculturalists as 'two-dimensional', that is exercised over areas of the ground surface, as opposed to 'zero-dimensional' tenure (of places, sites or locations) or 'one-dimensional tenure' (of paths or trackways), which are characteristic of hunting and gathering societies (*ibid.* 147). Barrett (1994b, Chapter 6), has outlined the implications of this argument for the practice of agriculture in southern Britain during the later second millennium BC. He argues that the emergence of an enclosed

agricultural landscape around this time, and hence the beginnings of two-dimensional tenure, represents the point at which social control over areas of the land surface became paramount. This is opposed to the traditional assumption that land enclosure began with the emergence of cultivars during the Neolithic.

The second major component of this argument concerns the nature of the agricultural regimes practised within such enclosed landscapes. Drawing on the work of Boserup (1965), Barrett distinguishes between *long fallow* and *short fallow* agricultural systems. As the term suggests, long fallow systems involve land being left for long time spans to regenerate between periods of cultivation, perhaps with a partial return to the wild. Long fallow systems require little long-term investment, either in agricultural technology or in the maintenance of fertility. In contrast, short fallow agriculture involves the maintenance of the fertility of the land over the long term by manuring and even multi-cropping. They also involve a commensurate increase in technological investment, such as the adoption of traction ploughing. A corollary of such long-term strategies is the closing down of "...access to both land and co-operative labour to within a more tightly drawn community whose members were able to sustain their tenurial claims over a specific area of land from one generation to the next..." (Barrett 1994b, 145). Thus, communities who recognised a more open relationship to generalised landscapes, where access to land was always available on the understanding that fertility would be regained over time through abandonment, may be replaced by those who maintained a relationship to specific areas of land over time. Clearly, changing patterns of land tenure are also likely to have been accompanied by changing social strategies, as the maintenance of rights of access to areas of enclosed land grew in importance in both the long- and the short-term. As Goody (1976) has demonstrated, it is inevitable that an increasing permanence of agricultural practice will be accompanied by a commensurate importance being accorded to systems of inheritance.

This argument proposes a specific relationship between the inception of land enclosure and systems of long-fallow cultivation, and is sufficiently general in its scope to serve as the basis of a discussion of the landscapes under discussion in this thesis. However, in its published form it is employed to account for specific landscapes in the south of Britain. It is important to point out that the Highland landscapes discussed here comprise a somewhat different empirical resource. Nowhere in the areas discussed here are there prehistoric field systems on the scale of the 'Celtic' fields of Wessex (Bowen 1978), or the coaxial 'reaves' of Dartmoor (Fleming 1988). These field systems are often continuous over vast areas of the landscape, and frequently appear to have linked spatially distant communities. As I will argue in Chapters

6 – 9, however, it is certainly the case that the practice of enclosed agriculture in northern Scotland began some time prior to the second- and early first-millennia BC. The arguments outlined above, which stress the implications of changing agricultural practice for social life for the communities in which they occur, are undoubtedly of direct relevance.

The problem most likely to be encountered in the landscapes of northern Scotland concerns the identification of different agricultural systems. Although there is much complexity in the surviving evidence, which I will address in detail in the local case studies presented in Chapters 7 – 9, I would suggest that there are essentially two contrasting agricultural regimes which can be recognised in the available field evidence. Broadly speaking, these are defined by clearance cairns and field enclosures respectively. While there is a small general literature on prehistoric agriculture in northern Scotland (e.g. Graham 1957, Feachem 1973, Halliday *et al.* 1981), there have been few detailed local studies (but see Fairhurst & Taylor 1971, Barclay 1985, McCullagh & Tipping 1998). It has been argued that cairnfields do not necessarily represent evidence of agriculture (Halliday *et al.* 1981, 62), and the presence of human burials under small cairns in some of the landscapes discussed here to some extent bears this out. However, considerable numbers of small cairns lie scattered around many of the hut-circle settlements of the north. It is difficult to accept that the majority of them do not represent the remains of prehistoric cultivation. Although Fowler (1981, 18) argues that the identification of cairnfields as a category of archaeological field evidence does not distinguish them *functionally* from enclosed cultivation systems, I would disagree. Aside from empirical differences in the location of areas of clearance cairns and field plots, which I will argue in Chapters 7 – 9 may be interpreted in terms of functional variation, there are clear utilitarian differences between the two categories of cultivation traces. The presence of large numbers of small cairns within a cultivated landscape clearly diminishes the area available for agriculture. This is especially so if the extent of the cultivated area is limited, and it would clearly be more efficacious to place cleared stone on boundaries around the edges of field plots. However, should it be possible to relocate the cultivated area, the maintenance of cultivable land over the long term would not be an issue. In this case, it seems more likely that cleared stone would be placed in small piles near to the location in which it was found. Cultivation implements in use during the later second- and first-millennium AD in highland Britain are likely to have been relatively simple (Fenton 1963, 265-8, Rees 1979), and may even have been used without animal traction (Mercer 1998). Nonetheless, the restricted spaces of cairnfields would appear particularly unsuitable for any form of traction ploughing. They are therefore unlikely to have been associated with short fallow agricultural regimes based on the long-term maintenance of land fertility through manuring and crop rotation. This interpretation would appear to be strengthened by the marginal location of many

cairnfields in relation to enclosed field systems. The maintenance of consistent land boundaries over time has been demonstrated by excavations within the study areas (Barclay 1985, Mercer 1996), and the frequent presence of lynchets in field systems suggests that it may have been widespread. Taken with the stone-free nature of many identified field plots, this evidence strongly suggests that short fallow cultivation systems were also in operation. It should be borne in mind that most identified field systems are likely to represent the outcome of a considerable history of use and modification, rather than unitary systems laid out in a single phase (cf. Barber & Brown 1984).

It is not my intention here to deny the complexity which must have characterised land use in the study area during later prehistory, as it does other prehistoric and historic periods alike. Indeed, one of the aims of this thesis is to demonstrate how a local scale of view can reveal complexities which might otherwise go unrecognised. Neither do I intend to propose a developmental relationship between long fallow and short fallow cultivation systems *per se*. Rather, I would argue that it is possible to distinguish in the field between the two. Having done so, it might then be possible to begin to interpret the social significance which this has for the settlements with which they are associated.

3.3. Domestic Architecture and the Cultivated Landscape

One of the central threads running through interpretative approaches to archaeology since the beginning of the 1980s, has been a concern with the social use of space. Central to this has been an understanding that architectural spaces should not be considered as mere containers for otherwise independent action, but are constantly re-worked and reinterpreted within the context of social practices. A central concern has been to move away from the 'bird's eye view' approach fostered by model-building approaches to archaeology from the 1960s, and to understand that human practices which have a spatial dimension must also have an essential temporality. This may operate in the short-term, as with movement through the ritual landscapes of Neolithic Britain (e.g. Barrett 1994, Chapter 1, Tilley 1994), or over the long-term operation of the systems of inheritance and land-enclosure discussed in the first part of this chapter. An important strand in this general spatial approach concerns the interpretation of domestic architecture, which has been an issue for both anthropologists (e.g. Moore 1986, Bloch 1995) and archaeologists (Kent (ed.) 1990, Richards 1990, 1991, Hingley 1990a, Barrett 1994a, Parker Pearson & Richards (eds.) 1994.). Indeed, approaches to domestic architecture have been one of the most important elements of the study of the Atlantic Iron Age in recent years (Reid 1989, Hingley 1996). These approaches are underpinned by the idea that the house forms one of the principal contexts in which abstract concepts underlying social realities are played out in practice (Bourdieu 1977).

Most often, British prehistorians have expressed a concern with defining linkages between areas of practical experience which are traditionally represented as being conceptually separate, most notably places of the living and places of the dead (Richards 1990, 1993, Thomas 1993). These separate domains operate as expressions of common "...social classification and cosmological themes" (Richards 1990, 121). Perhaps the best known, and most influential, of post-processual approaches to the interpretation of the domestic domain is Hodder's (1990) account. Hodder argues that the house may have functioned as a metaphor for more deeply-seated oppositions between the natural and the cultural, the wild and the domesticated. Hodder's argument has rightly been criticised for its structuralist leanings, as it assumes that these oppositions have an existence prior to, and independent of, the practices through which they are brought into being. However, it has at least succeeded in highlighting for archaeologists just how important domestic buildings may have been in routine maintenance and reproduction of society. Indeed, one of the most important contributions of archaeological studies of domestic architecture has been to demonstrate the ways in which social relationships established through interpretative practice in one particular context, in this case the house, may be carried forward, re-established and re-worked in another. In Barrett's (1994a, 92) terms, domestic architecture "...is fixed at the intersection of a number of interpretive (sic) regimes which extend beyond the settlement".

This thesis is not a theoretical study, and the ideas outlined thus far in this chapter are now widely accepted. My primary aim is the interpretation of a body of *empirical* material which relates to domestic landscapes in northern Scotland. However, the idea that domestic architecture may serve as a locus for the maintenance and reproduction of social relationships, which might then be carried forward to be played out over a wider landscape is clearly germane to our subject. The precise nature of domestic architecture within the study area presented in this thesis is discussed in detail in Chapters 7 – 9, and it would be out of place to explore this in any depth here. It would, however, be appropriate to discuss briefly the likely role of this domestic architecture in the social relationships which may have secured the access to the kinds of agricultural landscapes discussed above.

I have already identified a basic difference between long fallow and short fallow cultivation systems, and have suggested that the appearance of the latter in prehistory will have been accompanied by changes in the social institutions through which both long- and short-term rights of access to the land were negotiated. In particular, it is likely that the maintenance of the land over time required by short fallow agriculture will have involved more formalised systems of inheritance (Goody 1976), as it became more important to secure rights over it in the long term. It must also have been necessary to maintain, on a short-term basis, relationships within the community through which more extensive systems of inheritance

were mediated. It is no doubt the case that differences in status between individuals must have been played out through the routines of the agricultural landscape as a whole. This will have involved differences between those obliged to work and those to direct, those required to provide produce and those to receive it, and in the particular tasks undertaken by individuals. Inequalities will also have been maintained through rights to reside in particular buildings, and particular places. Ingold's argument concerning the nature of human landscapes, outlined in section 3.2.1, indicates that the presence of ancestral traces in the landscape, and the ability of specific individuals or groups to appropriate and control access to these, will have been important in maintaining rights of access to the land. Nonetheless, it is also manifestly the case that the domestic domain, as the 'principal locus for the objectification of generative schemes' (Bourdieu 1977), will have been central to the maintenance of interpersonal relationships and objectified differences in status on a daily basis. Thus, the architecture of the house itself may have become a dominant material resource which people drew upon when situating themselves in relation to others, both in concrete social situations, and in more abstract moments of reflection during routine activities. Bloch (1995), in particular, has shown how the elaboration of the house over time can serve to represent the permanence of the relationship between communities and particular places.

I am aware that the discussion in this section of the chapter has thus far been rather abstract, and it would be useful to ground it at this point in some recent approaches to the archaeology of the Atlantic Iron Age. Hingley (1996) has argued for the development of what he terms 'substantial houses' in northern Scotland from the first millennium BC, and especially the boundary they represent between the domestic domain and the outside world. The idea of the 'substantial house' cross-cuts traditional typological divisions, between hut-circles, brochs and wheelhouses, and concentrates instead on monumentality as a symbolic and social resource. Hingley suggests that the elaboration of the house during the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age may have been connected to the need to construct a dualism between the natural and the cultural as a result of "...the wild reasserting itself at the expense of agricultural resources ..." (ibid. 188). While there is some evidence for a climatic deterioration during the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age (section 6.2.2), I will argue in Chapters 7 – 9 that in some areas there is evidence for nascent architectural elaboration in houses which are associated with long fallow agricultural practice. It therefore seems likely that the domestic domain was already being chosen as a medium through which to emphasise the boundary between the domestic and the outside world. I would therefore favour Hingley's further argument, and those of others (Barrett 1981, Sharples & Parker Pearson 1997), that increasing monumentality in the domestic domain might provide a resource through which the permanence and stability of the social group itself might be reproduced. Although domestic

architecture was already being selected for emphasis in hut-circle settlements of the first millennium BC, it was through the architecture of the brochs that it achieved its most powerful embodiment. This seems to have been at a time when the enclosed agricultural landscape was firmly established. The brochs seem to have been the first domestic buildings which were externally *monumental* in the fullest sense of the word, and it may be that they arose as a means by which dominant groups might maintain their presence within the landscape as a whole. The buildings themselves form a very physical reminder of the presence of the domestic interior within the exterior world of the cultivated landscape.

These recent accounts stress the role of domestic architecture in the maintenance of social networks which reproduce power relationships over the wider landscape. In general, they offer monumentality, visual impact and situation as the means by which this was achieved. As I will demonstrate later, all of these are constituents of the way in which architecture worked within the landscapes of the Iron Age in northern Scotland. These effects, in the main, are concerned with the way in which domestic architecture may have worked on an external *landscape*. One of the primary functions of any house, however, is to serve as a venue for particular practices and routines which are physically separate from those which go on outside its walls. Although the contrast between domestic and public spheres of social action may have been somewhat overdrawn (Holy 1996, 52), it remains the case that the former are open to a more restricted range of participants than the latter. However, as accounts which have attempted to shift the focus of enquiry away from a concentration on the public and the ceremonial have been at pains to point out (Conkey & Gero 1991), the maintenance of relationships between those who are in daily contact on a more intimate level may be as important to the long-term reproduction of society. Again, accounts of the Atlantic Iron Age in recent years have tackled these issues. Foster (1989a, b) has demonstrated, through an analysis of spatial patterning in Orkney broch sites, how the use of architecture within the settlement itself may have operated to progressively close off spaces as its centre, the broch itself, was approached. Presumably, these inner spaces were accessible to restricted numbers of people at any one time, and it may have been that access itself may have been a way in which inequalities were maintained. In an earlier paper Reid (1989) argued that the internal spaces of later prehistoric roundhouses in northern Britain themselves represented a formalisation of spaces which had previously been more fluid, between a domestic focus on the hearth and peripheral areas given over to storage, sleeping and other activities. The radial arrangements which he cites as evidence of this, chiefly derived from the wheelhouses of the

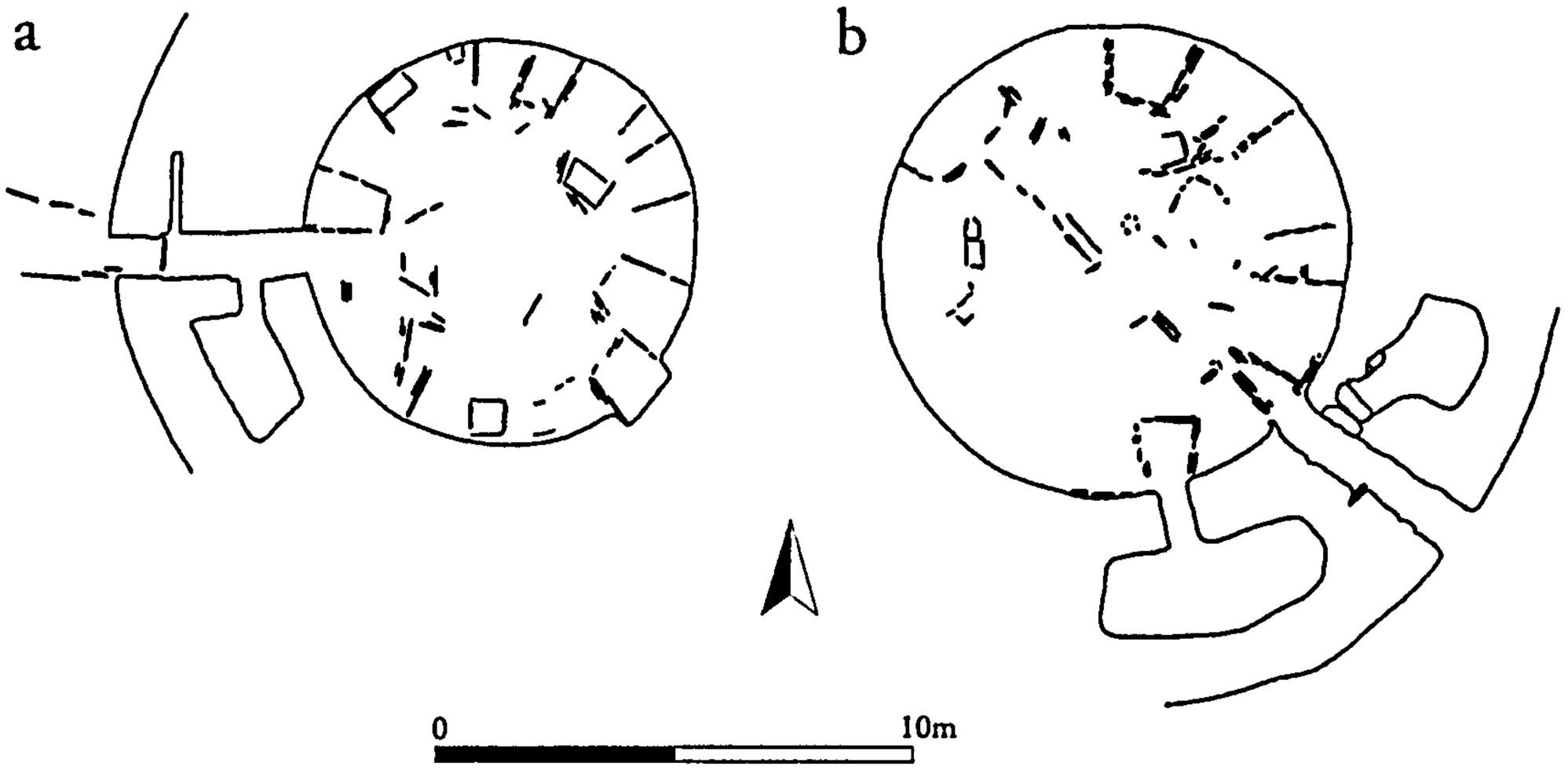


Figure 3.2 : Radial partitions at Caithness broch sites, a) Skitten (after Calder 1948, Fig. 4), b) Crosskirk (after Fairhurst 1984, Illus. 28).

Western Isles and the brochs of Orkney, may just as frequently be found within the sites of the study areas considered in this thesis (Figure 3.2). One of its aims will be to trace changing architectural emphases, between the domestic and the non-domestic, and internal and external monumentality, through the architecture of the Iron Age in northern Scotland.

3.4. Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I have attempted to outline an approach to the archaeology of landscapes which eschews the traditional division between the physical and the conceptual landscape. In many ways, this division is an expression of the dichotomy which has grown up over recent years between processual and post-processual archaeologies, although it should be noted that the former is a term often employed by proponents of the latter. In order to combat this, I would favour an approach which recognises that landscapes, like any other aspect of material culture, contain no intrinsic meaning. Meanings must be read into landscapes through the interpretative acts of people moving in and around them. This applies as much to the archaeologist as it does to individuals in the past. Indeed, without a facility for interpretative acts, which we share with the people who created prehistoric landscapes, there would be little hope for an archaeology which attempts to make sense of them in a quest to write an account of the past. Central to this approach, however, is an appreciation of the physicality of the traces of the past, and I am resistant to the notion of landscapes as pure ideas. Rather, landscapes should be viewed as material cultures which were created *alongside* routine social practices,

being neither purely the mapping out of otherwise independent social entities, nor a mere resource on which a transcendent consciousness might act. If the latter view were adopted, there would be little value in the collection of empirical data, which lies at the heart of the practice of archaeology. A corollary of this view, of course, is that the traces of past actions were always part of the present of those who lived out their lives around them. These traces must have been continually reworked within routine social life, both in terms of the meanings which were ascribed to them, and also through practices which affected them physically, through processes of addition and destruction.

I have also tried to show how this concept of landscapes might be put to use within the specific context of this thesis. In section 2.3, I argued that concepts of 'primary' and 'secondary' occupation on Iron Age sites do little justice to complex historical processes. Similarly, the physical landscapes of the Iron Age in northern Scotland should not be viewed as successive *layers*, which can be peeled apart to reveal their independent characteristics. Rather, I have argued that we should attempt to cross-cut traditional chronological divisions, in attempt to show how the physical traces of human activity in the landscape were re-worked and supplemented by successive generations over time. I have also argued that we should attempt to understand how networks of social relationships, which were played out across the landscape, may have been negotiated within the spaces of the domestic domain.

I recognise, however, that it is one thing to propose such a scheme on the rather abstract level presented here. It is quite another to bring these themes to bear on a body of empirical evidence, the stated aim of this research project. In dealing with this empirical resource, therefore, it is necessary to posses the concept of a sequence into which it may be ordered, so that changes and interrelationships over time might be studied. I have offered a starting position for a solution to this problem in this chapter, with the introduction of the themes of the social significance of the cultivated landscape and the role of domestic architecture. These will be followed through the remainder of the thesis. My task now is to introduce a sequence through which change in these aspects of material culture might be explored in relation to the Iron Age of northern Scotland, a task which will be attended to in Chapter 4.

Chapter Four

Constructing a Sequence for the Later Iron Age

4.1. Introduction

4.1.1. The problem

The study of the Scottish Atlantic Iron Age is largely synonymous with the study of the broch, to the exclusion of other types of evidence. Although this situation may be blamed in part on a lack of good available material, it also derives from traditional interpretations, which have portrayed the broch as the zenith of Iron Age architectural and cultural development. A consequence of this has been a lack of interest in the full settlement sequences at broch sites, and specifically in complexes of surrounding buildings, which in many cases were demonstrably occupied into the later Iron Age. The primacy which broch studies have been accorded has also resulted in a failure to consider a wider range of evidence for Iron Age settlement, manifested in a dearth of studies of other sites and structures which may have comprised the cultural landscapes of the period. This problem is especially grave in relation to the northern mainland of Scotland, which, despite having more known broch sites than any other region, has seen very few specific studies of the Iron Age in general, and next to no detailed consideration of the potential evidence for later Iron Age settlement represented by this resource.

It has been recognised recently, both that broch-building may have occurred over a much longer time-span than was previously suspected (Hedges 1987, Fairhurst 1984, Armit 1991), although this is still disputed (MacKie 1998), and that the buildings which surrounded the brochs have important implications for the character of settlement on these sites, particularly of their settlement history after the brochs themselves fell into disuse. It has also been recognised that settlement sites dating to the first millennium AD existed away from the established settlement foci represented by the brochs (Ritchie 1977, Hunter 1986, 1990, Morris *et al.* 1989). These new insights have resulted from the reinterpretation (Hedges 1987) and excavation (Hedges *op cit*, Morris *et al. op cit*, Hunter 1986, Ballin Smith (ed.) 1994, Parker Pearson & Sharples 1998) of sites in the Northern and Western Isles, and the existing archaeological resource of the northern Mainland has remained underdeveloped. Indeed, Foster (1989b, 199) exhibits some pessimism as to the possibility of identifying later Iron Age settlement on excavated broch sites in Caithness.

Even a cursory examination of many excavated northern broch sites in the field will reveal material evidence of long settlement histories. Although greater numbers of material remains have survived these excavations than in most contemporary work, one of the principal obstacles to the use of this material has always been the nature of the written record associated with it. As I have discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, the great majority of the excavated sites in northern Scotland were the product of an extraordinary burst of antiquarian energy during the latter part of the nineteenth century. These were published in scant detail, if at all.

In addition to the publication problem, the antiquarians showed little concern with the totality of evidence on the sites they excavated, and were content to concentrate on the broch buildings which formed the focus of most. This set a precedent for work carried out in more recent times. At both Skitten (Calder 1948) and Crosskirk (Fairhurst 1984), for example, opportunities were missed to concentrate on surrounding buildings, which may have greatly enhanced our understanding of the Iron Age sequence in the north. It would, however, be unfair to lay the blame for this at the door of the excavators. The research priorities which pertained when these excavations were carried out, together with the imminent threat to the sites themselves, mitigated against an interest in settlement sequences away from the brochs themselves. The chief aim of this chapter, then, is to explore the problems inherent in constructing an archaeological sequence for the later Iron Age of northern Scotland on the basis of existing material, and to argue that sufficient evidence exists for a tentative solution to this problem to be attained. It will also explore ways in which this might be used to understand the role of material culture in processes of social change.

4.1.2. Sequence, typology and the Atlantic Iron Age

A structural sequence for the later Iron Age in northern Scotland must have at least some general applicability to a range of sites within the area under study here. It is also necessary to establish first both the nature, and the validity, of such sequences. The initial problem here lies in distinguishing between the concepts of sequence and of typology, as applied by archaeologists to material formations. Typology might be defined as the arrangement of archaeological material into discrete *types* (for a critical review see section 5.2). This process is invariably based on stylistic variation, and assumes that changes in this material culture will be *gradual* and *evolutionary* (e.g. Renfrew & Bahn 1991, 104). Although they are invariably constructed in the absence of absolute dates, typological schemes have clear chronological implications, and are often employed as a dating method by proxy. This can be contrasted with the identification of empirical *sequences* of change in material culture, which lack evolutionary or developmental implications. It may be noted that typological schemes differ from simple material sequences in one important respect: they have an inherent *explanatory* function. This results from two assumptions; that material culture will change in an evolutionary way, and that such changes will necessarily involve an increasing degree of complexity and efficiency. As I have argued in Chapter Two, such schemes have been commonplace in Scottish Iron Age archaeology. They are inherently value-laden and ethnocentric.

The above comments notwithstanding, however, one of the fundamental tasks of any programme of archaeological fieldwork is to arrange its material into some kind of order. Despite recent critiques of the foundations of archaeological fieldwork (e.g. Hodder 1997), such processes of ordering are inevitable, in whichever gradation of the interpretative spectrum we choose to illuminate them. Placing archaeological material into sequences is essential if we are to understand long-term processes of change, an ambition which many would advance as a defining feature of archaeology, and which separates it, for example, from anthropologies which seek to explore synchronic cultural formations. As Tilley (1996, 3) argues, archaeology should be about the role of material culture in historical process which encompass social reproduction and change over the long term. Indeed, it is probable that the very act of categorisation and description of material culture formations inevitably involves temporal ordering, as this is one of the primary features of the wider human discourse of which archaeological writing is a part (Ricoeur 1981).

The problem, then, concerns not the sequencing of archaeological material *per se*, but the relationship, implicit or otherwise, which we propose between our temporal categories and the past. In Chapter 2, I argued that traditional archaeologies of the British Iron Age, and those of the period within Scotland in more recent times, have been characterised by an approach which has often been termed 'culture-history'. This involves the assumption that there is a straightforward relationship between recurrent patterns of material associations, or archaeological 'cultures', which reflect the nature of past human social groups. Differences in material cultures are cast as the self-evident consequence of higher level social change affecting the nature and distribution of 'cultures'. These typically include population movement, invasion and social evolution. The role which the material resource *itself* might have played within processes of social change is hardly considered. As I have already argued, archaeology should take account of the active role of material culture in the processes of social reproduction and change, as this represents our best hope of a genuine archaeology of social life.

Interpretative approaches in archaeology have become quite widely accepted. However, paradigm shifts in the discipline have seldom been as iconoclastic as their authors would have us believe, and traditional material categories have tended to play a larger part in structuring new interpretations than is sometimes recognised. This is demonstrably the case in the Scottish Atlantic Iron Age. Traditional approaches to the subject have been characterised by the construction of grand typological schemes, which have then been employed to generalise over the Atlantic Province as a whole, at the expense of local variation. This in turn has led to a somewhat sterile debate concerning the geographical origins of the broch, when I would argue that one of the real problems which we need to address concerns the processes through which such an ostensibly uniform architectural form as the broch was maintained by societies

spread over a such an extensive and rather heterogeneous geographical area, a point first raised more than fifteen years ago (Barrett 1981). Although I suspect that most current researchers accept this criticism, it remains the case that current debates have a tendency to drift towards similarly generalising interpretations of the broch or, as Armit (1990a) would have it, the Atlantic Roundhouse, which are now couched in social rather than typological terms. Thus, a debate over whether brochs represent an expression of the isolationism of competing but otherwise equal households or of social differentiation (Armit 1997, Sharples & Parker Pearson 1997), which has been treated as though it had general relevance, draws on specific, localised material culture patterning.

The archaeology of the later Iron Age in Scotland illustrates perfectly the fallacy of cultural archaeology. The 'problem' of a search for an unequivocally 'Pictish' archaeology has taxed archaeologists since it was first proposed more than forty years ago (Wainwright 1955). A number of solutions have been advanced as to the likely character of a Pictish archaeology (e.g. Feachem 1955, Ritchie 1974, Alcock 1980, 1982, Foster 1996, Ralston & Armit 1997). While it has always been recognised that the Picts were almost certainly a political rather than an ethnic grouping, and are therefore likely to have been heterogeneous in both their language and material culture (Wainwright 1955, 12, Alcock 1987), this has not prevented a more general search for wider regularities within the archaeology of the first millennium AD in Scotland. Since the recognition of structures dating to this period, archaeologists have struggled with the notion that apparent political unity should have produced such a wide range of settlement forms. On reflection, this may be due, in part, to the retention of elements of the culture history approach within Scottish archaeology; as a 'people' the Picts should have a corresponding material *culture.* Clearly, such a viewpoint ignores the difference between a history of political relationships over wide areas and an *archaeology* of the localised practices which were instrumental in structuring larger scale social formations. There has been insufficient consideration of the idea that the changes in social relationships which allowed the formation of wider political groupings may have been borne out of diversification of practice on a local scale. Indeed, such large-scale political formations were not necessarily those whose importance was recognised as being paramount at a local level. Again, one of the chief aims of this thesis is to explore the possibilities of localised practice in relation to the material record in northern Scotland.

The most recent attempt to impose a regularity on the archaeology of the later Iron Age in Scotland has been the concept of 'cellularity'. I would not dispute that there is a general thematic shift from the construction of monumental, unitary structures such as the brochs to the use of a more subdivided architecture. However, as Ralston & Armit (*ibid.*) note, domestic architecture is unlikely to have been homogeneous over large and disparate

areas. Indeed, the individual forms of supposedly Pictish buildings are widely variant, a point often emphasised by combination illustrations (e.g. *ibid.* fig. 12.3, Ritchie 1974, fig. 1, see figure 4.1). The perceived 'cellularity' of many of these structures often rests on the fact that they represent the latest phases of occupation of the surrounding buildings at broch sites. The central point is that structures with widely differing architectures are often grouped together, frequently with buildings such as those at Forse, which form part of wider complexes taken out of context in order to demonstrate similarity. Although I would not deny that there appears to have been a general move away from overtly monumental domestic architecture during the First Millennium AD, it would seem realistic to view this archaeology in terms of a number of regional traditions.

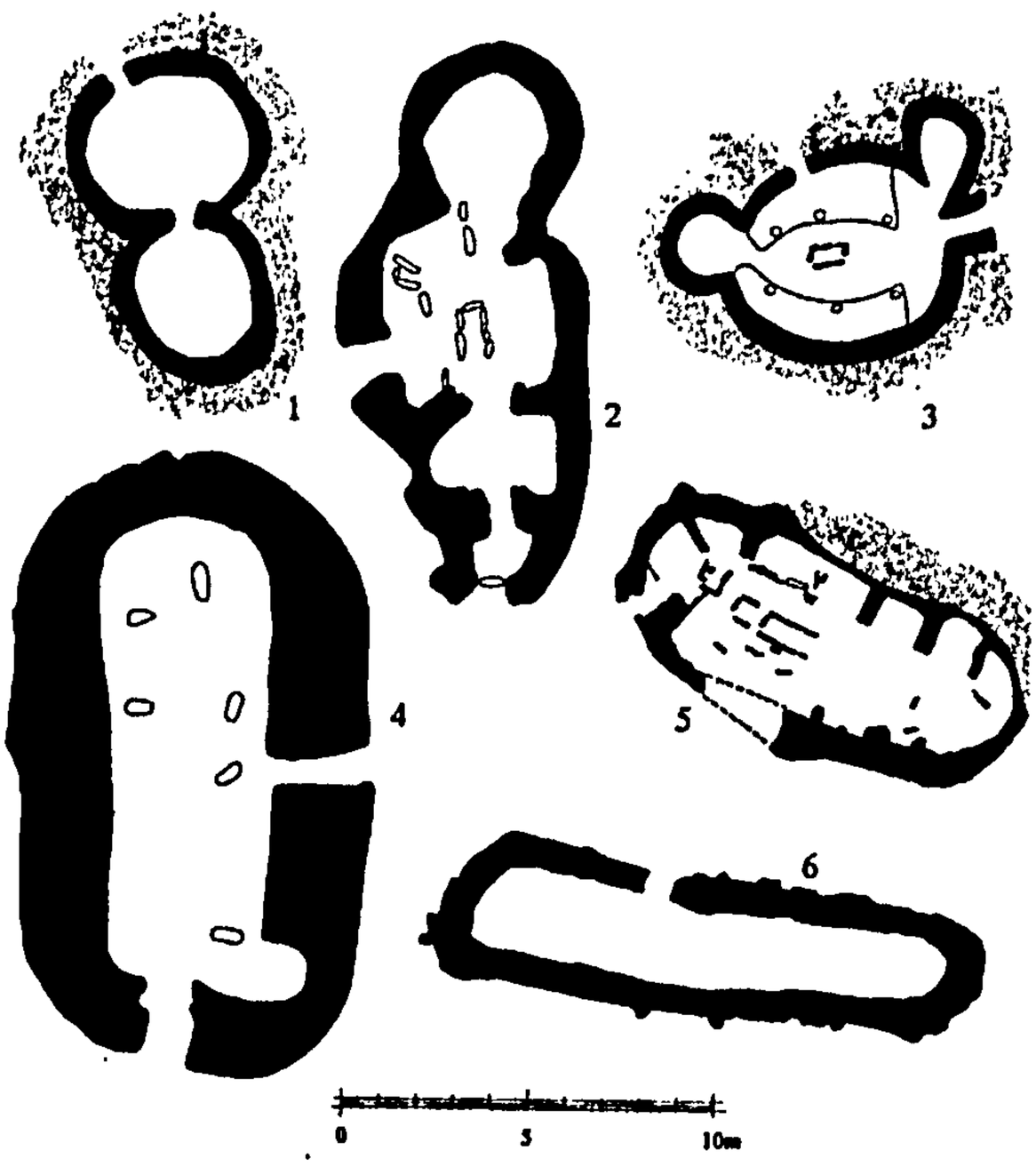


Figure 4.1 : 'Pictish' buildings (Ralston & Armit 1997, Figure 12.3).

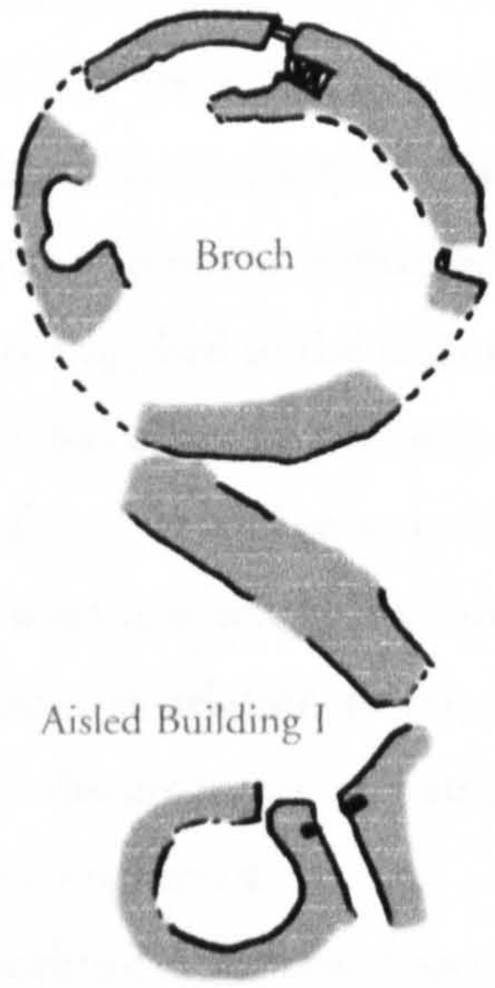
In the Picts, then, we have a known social entity which seems to have found little or no expression at the level of domestic architecture. This is despite a degree of similarity in certain aspects of material culture, such as carved stones and prestige metalwork, which may have figured in practices which actively contributed to the maintenance of wider social relationships. The 'Picts' seem never to have been a 'culture' with a uniform material expression in the traditional sense, despite a wider political unity. If this is accepted, there are no grounds

for the reverse argument, that the recognition of widespread similarities in domestic architecture must necessarily indicate the unconscious expression of a self-evident social or political culture. In the following section, I will go on to suggest an alternative approach to the interpretation of the role of domestic architecture during the Middle and later Iron Age.

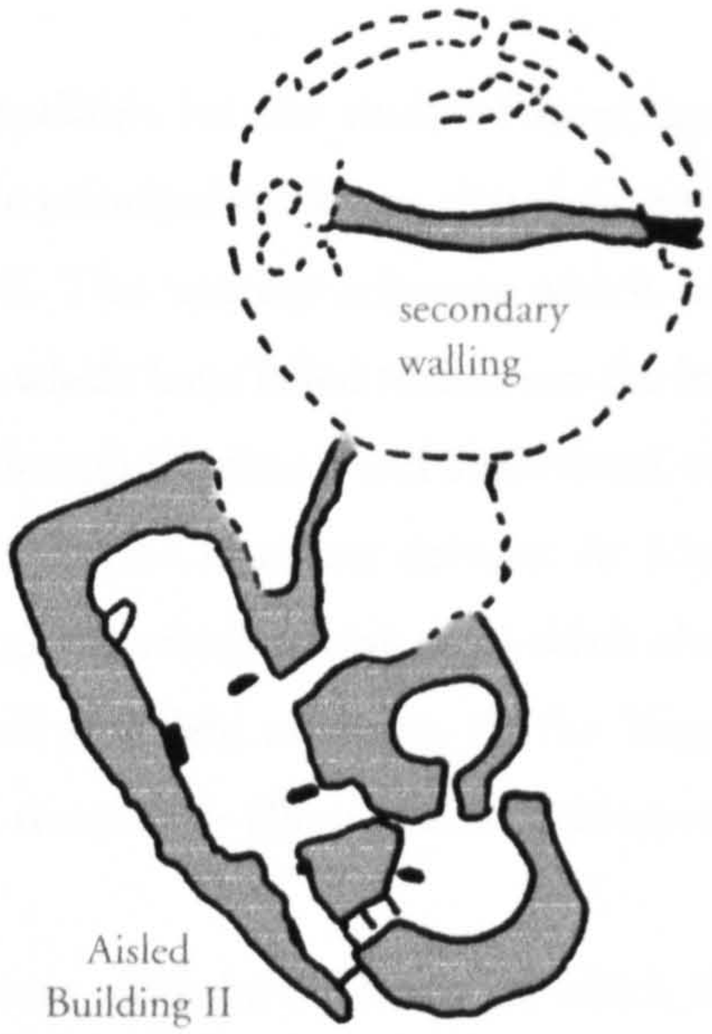
4.2. A Thematic Approach to the Later Iron Age in Northern Scotland

During the middle Iron Age, which on the basis of present evidence lacked the formal political institutions of the 'Pictish' period, social relationships are likely to have been maintained on a localised, face-to-face basis. For this reason, we need to begin a study of middle Iron Age settlement archaeology by attempting to understand local material culture sequences, and the ways in which these structured, and were structured by, changing social situations. Of course, this does not preclude the study of wider social formations, but merely argues that we should attempt to understand how these may have been the product of specific local practices. I have argued above that the diverse aspects of material culture should not be lumped together, and assumed to change uniformly according to entirely independent social factors. Such assumptions preclude a genuine understanding of the role of material culture in the maintenance and change of society over the long term. Within the specific context of the Middle and later Iron Age in Atlantic Scotland, they fail to account for the mechanism by which a homogeneous settlement archaeology was replaced by an apparently heterogeneous one in the absence of evidence for large scale population movements.

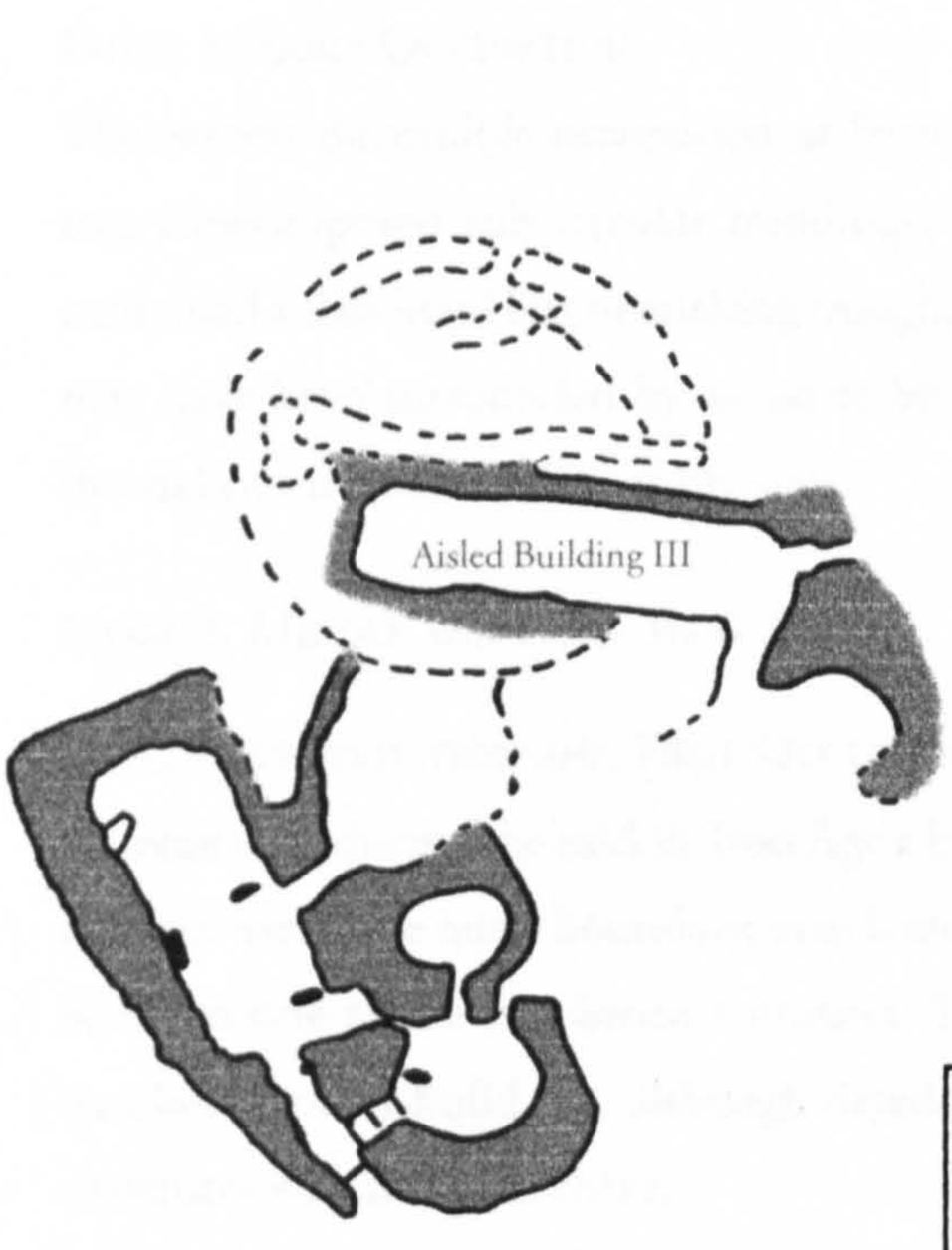
One of the main aims of the chapters which follow will be to outline and to understand specific local sequences within the Iron Age of the mainland of northern Scotland. I want here to advocate a thematic approach to the problems of change and continuity during this period. By concentrating on the twin themes of the role of domestic architecture in social practice, and the articulation of social relationships across wider landscapes, I hope to confront some of the inconsistencies outlined above. Rather than assuming that large scale material culture change necessarily represents social discontinuity, I will attempt to follow these themes through the changing Iron Age settlement archaeology of the study areas. In Chapter 2, I outlined an interpretative approach to the archaeology of agricultural landscapes and domestic architecture, and this forms the basis of the themes which will be pursued throughout this thesis. However, it is clearly necessary to have a general understanding of the likely character of changes in domestic architecture between the Middle and later Iron Ages in northern Scotland. The remainder of this chapter will therefore be concerned with this, through the material resource represented by the Wag of Forse.



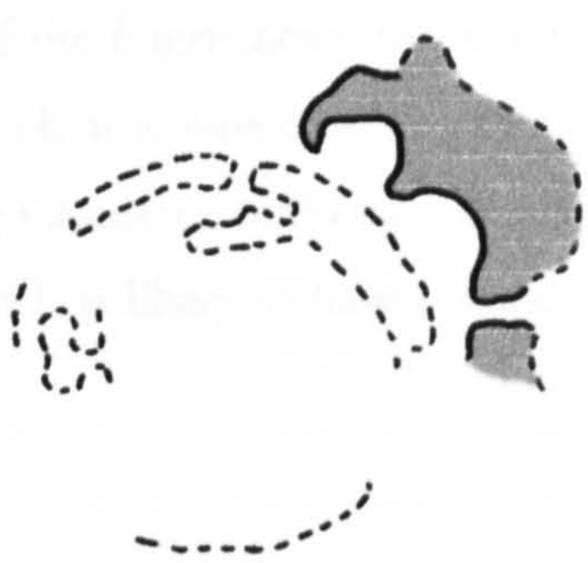
**Phase 2 :
Later Broch
First Aisled
Building**



**Phase 2 : Second
Aisled Building**



**PHASE 2 :
Later Aisled Buildings**



**PHASE 1 :
Late Occupation**

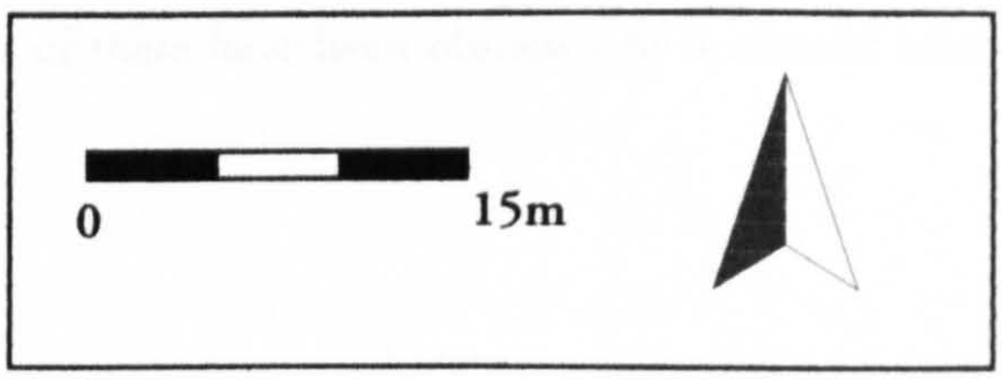


Figure 4.2 : A proposed sequence for the Wag of Forse.

4.3. The Wag of Forse

4.3.1. The Site Sequence

Although there is a great deal of material evidence available for the study of Iron Age in northern Scotland, the majority of this suffers from one principal weakness, that there are no established local sequences within which to frame it. The unitary schemes which have traditionally been applied to the Atlantic Province as a whole have failed to account for local variation, which has often simply been overlooked. Although Caithness and Sutherland were at the centre of early Iron Age research, they have not figured in recent debates. As I have argued above, what is required is a local thematic sequence, which allows us to think about patterns of change in relation to the mass of excavated and field evidence. At the Wag of Forse, sufficient documentary and structural evidence survives to allow a local architectural sequence to be constructed.

I have outlined a proposed site sequence for Forse, and the evidence on which this rests, in detail in Appendix 1, and will only discuss the main points where they are relevant to the general argument advanced here. The site sequence is summarised below, and in Figure 4.2 :

Phase 3. Early Occupation

The earliest discernible occupation at Forse consists of the fragmentary remains of at least two superimposed sub-circular buildings, one of which was paved and appears to have contained a slab-lined box or cooking trough, suggesting a domestic building. These structures may have been surrounded by an outer boundary, which is likely to have remained in use throughout the occupation of the site.

Phase 2. Middle and Later Iron Age

Broch Construction and First Occupation

At some time during the middle Iron Age a broch was constructed on the site. This continued to make use of the outer boundary, as at least one gateway through it was aligned so as to give access to one of the two broch entrances. The broch may also have been surrounded by a number of other buildings, although details of these have been obscured by a mass of later structures which overlie them.

Later Broch Occupation/First Aisled Buildings

While the broch was still visible as a discrete structure, and remained in use in at least some form, the first of a series of sub-rectangular buildings was constructed to its south, in association with a sub-circular house. This was later overlain by a further *aisled* sub-rectangular building, and two more adjoining houses, although the original sub-circular house continued in use. The broch interior was subdivided by a wall, apparently built from re-used structural material, indicating that it must have been reduced in height and had one of its entrances blocked during this phase. Nothing is known of activities carried out within the broch during this phase, and this episode of reconstruction cannot be related chronologically to the construction of the sub-rectangular buildings.

Later Aisled Buildings

A further sub-rectangular building was built into the broch, which is likely to have remained visible as a discrete structure. This made use of the same entrance orientation as the broch, suggesting that the gateway through the outer wall in this area remained in use.

Phase 1. Late Occupation

A pair of interconnected, sub-circular houses were built against the broch wall. The northern half of the broch interior may have continued in use as an enclosure or yard during this phase of activity.

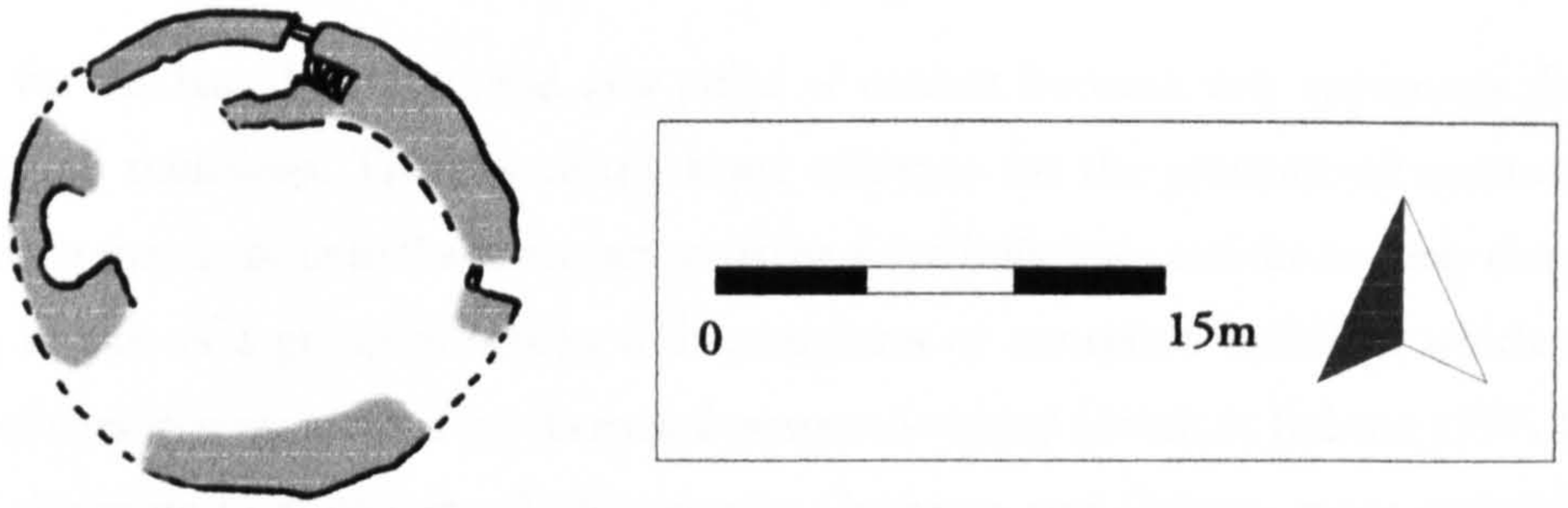
While the sequence outlined above involves a number of definite structural changes, which in turn suggest themes which might be incorporated within an exploration of similar material elsewhere in northern Scotland, there are also clear problems which affect its wider applicability. The first of these, and the most immediately obvious, is the lack of absolute dates associated with the site (see Appendix 1). Although this would not have been seen as too serious a problem during the 1960s and 1970s, when the construction of brochs was thought to have been a relatively short-lived phenomenon (MacKie 1965a, 1971), more recent work has begun to demonstrate that these buildings may span half a millennium or more. The construction of the broch at Forse, and as a corollary the structural phases which follow it, therefore occupies a 'floating' chronological context. In addition to this wider deficiency, there are also chronological weaknesses at an intra-site level. Although the site sequence which I have outlined above is reasonably secure, as it rests on identifiable structural relationships, there is no independént source of information on the duration of individual phases of activity at the site itself.

In one sense, as I will argue in Chapter 8, the floating chronology at Forse does not pose a serious problem. If 'broch-building' should be viewed as a long-term phenomenon, then there seems no reason to attempt to drive strict chronological divisions through the material sequences associated with the brochs. Surrounding buildings have been located in association with the great majority of excavated broch sites in Caithness and Orkney, from the chronologically earliest, such as Bu (Hedges 1987), Broch 1 at Howe (Ballin Smith (ed.) 1994, 37) and Crosskirk (Fairhurst 1984) to the latest, Broch 2 at Howe, which may still have been in use during the fifth century AD (Shepherd 1994, 273). Given their chronological ubiquity, it would be perverse to continue to view episodes of change taking place within surrounding buildings as separate, chronologically specific phenomena. We should view the construction, reconstruction and use of broch sites and their associated buildings not simply as chronological phases, but as social processes reproduced over time, and should attempt to understand how such material sequences were maintained.

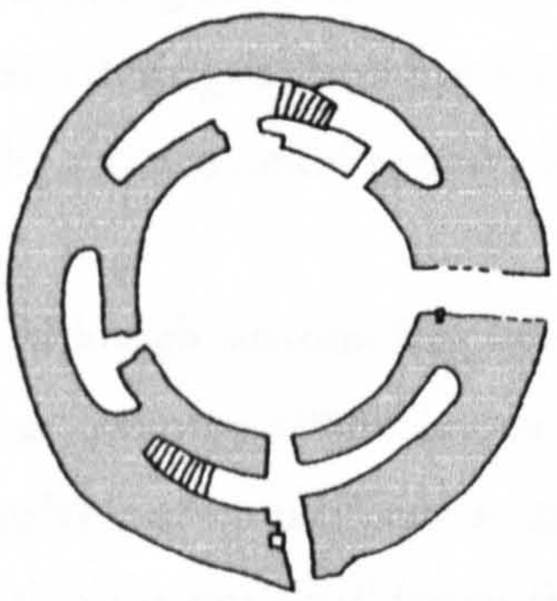
Having made this last point, of course, there is a problem inherent in the fact that one of the aims of this chapter is to establish, at least in part, the character of a later Iron Age archaeology for northern Scotland. It must be demonstrated that the appearance of sub-rectangular, architecture at Forse represents a change with wider chronological implications, rather than mere continuity within a specific site sequence. To this end, it is important to establish that the inception of aisled buildings at the site should be viewed as a significant architectural change. To achieve this, it is clearly necessary to draw on a number of other sites in the region, especially those which are closely dated. As this will incorporate other sites in Caithness, it unavoidably involves a recursive relationship between the suggested site sequence, derived from the Wag of Forse itself, and some of the other evidence which it will be used to interpret. However, such a dialectic between the specific and the general, between the theoretical and the empirical, lies at the heart of archaeological interpretation (Thomas 1996). Thus, although the sequence derived from the Wag of Forse will be used as a way into the interpretation of other sites in northern Scotland, material derived from these sites will impact on the Forse sequence itself.

4.3.2. The Wider Context

The Wag of Forse has been conventionally included within a wider group of 'wag' sites. As I will discuss in Chapter 7, most of these are discrete buildings, which are likely to have been newly established during the later Iron Age. Forse, by contrast, was the site of a broch for much of its history, and should be considered within its wider context as such. Indeed, this feature of its structural history is what renders the site central in the construction of a wider



Wag of Forse



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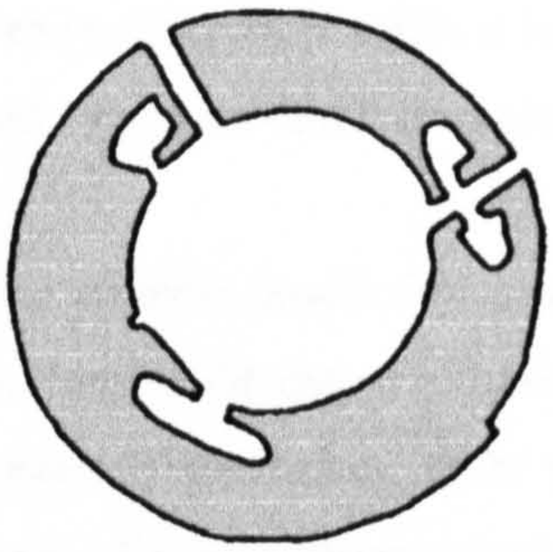
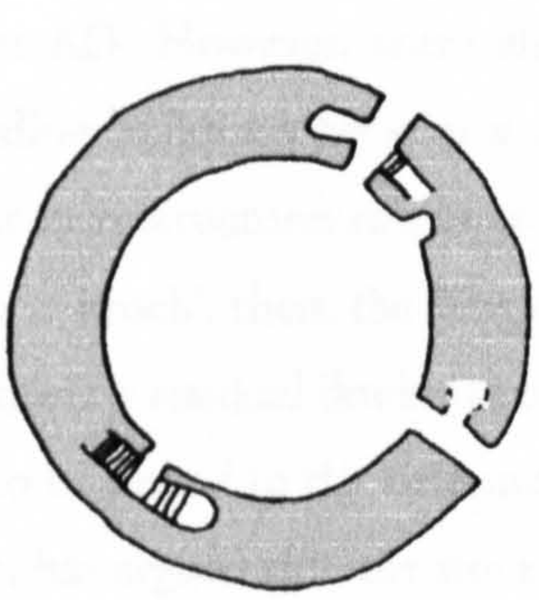
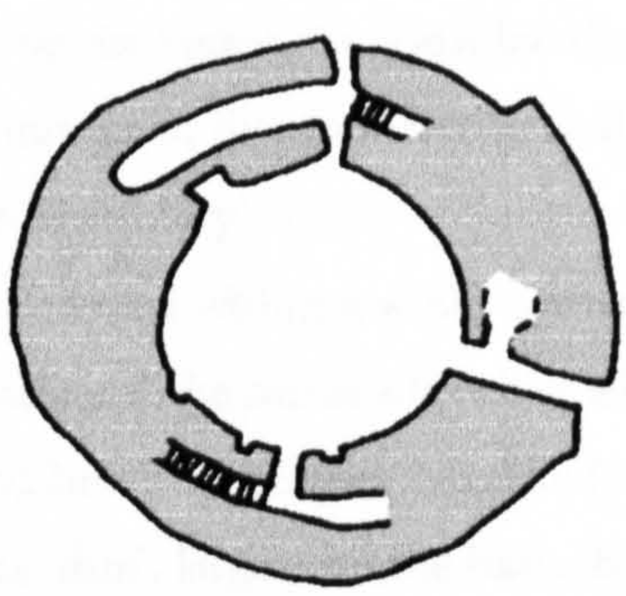


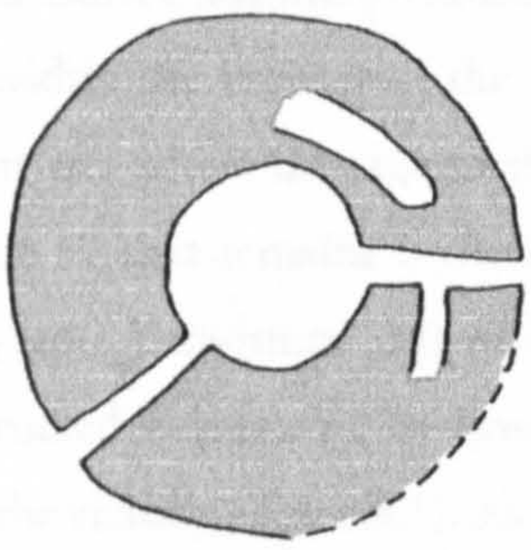
Kettleburn



Keiss Harbour



Keiss Road



Ness

Yarrows

Figure 4.3 : Comparative plans of excavated broch sites with that at the Wag of Forse.

scheme for the later Iron Age, and as a point of contact between two apparently diverse architectural traditions. There is clearly some evidence for the presence of surrounding structures at the site prior to the construction of the aisled buildings, and the site may therefore be seen as part of a group of brochs with complexes of associated buildings which are a feature of sites in some areas of northern and western Scotland (Armit & Ralston 1997, 185). Within the more local context of such sites in Caithness and Orkney, more especially at Crosskirk (Fairhurst 1984) and Howe (Ballin Smith (ed.) 1994), such complexes may have appeared during the mid- to later-first millennium BC, and appear to have grown in size and complexity during the later first millennium BC and the early centuries AD, at least in Orkney where the archaeological resource has been researched in greater detail than elsewhere in the North.

Although surrounding buildings are a feature of most broch sites in north eastern Caithness (Swanson 1988 Chapter 7, see Chapter 8), they would appear to have been neither as extensive nor as uniform as at many Orkney sites. Nevertheless, there appears little justification for not considering the broch settlements of the northern mainland against a background of settlement spanning the later part of the first millennium BC and the early centuries AD. However, there also appears to be no reason to consider the presence of surrounding buildings *per se* as a chronological indicator, due to effective challenges to the idea that such structures can be considered to be 'secondary'.

As a 'broch', then, the Wag of Forse can be viewed within a wider context. There are, however, a few residual doubts as to the identification of the site as a broch at all. This would appear to be linked to the strictures of established broch typologies. MacKie (1971, 16), for instance, has argued that the site is a kind of early 'dun', largely on the basis that it lacks the characteristic thick, double wall of the brochs. However, a detailed examination of the site soon demonstrates that a perception of the site as thin-walled is a superficial one, perhaps based on Curle's misinterpretation of the structures he encountered (Appendix 1). The only points within the interior of the Forse broch where the inner wall-face is visible are in the northern arc, where damage to the building caused by re-use has been extensive, and it is clear that all that remains is the outer skin of what was once a thick wall, incorporating a stairway and intra-mural cell which now exist as isolated structural elements. If the site is reconstructed in this way, its dimensions fit easily within the context of other similar broch sites in the vicinity (Table 4.1). As well as its dimensions, surviving structural features at Forse are also very similar to those of nearby excavated sites (Figure 4.3). All of these have twin entrances, one of which gives access to both a stairway and an elongated chamber within the wall.

		Internal diameter (m)	External diameter (m)
	Min	6.0	13.1
Area 2 brochs:	Max	11.4	20.0
	Mean	8.9	17.0
Wag of Forse:		9.6	16.8

Table 4.1 : Dimensions of the broch at the Wag of Forse, compared to other Area 2 broch sites.

Demonstrating that the central architectural feature at Forse is a broch is therefore comparatively straightforward, at least within a more liberal interpretation of the term (see section 5.3.2). It is also clear that the aisled buildings at the site belong to a late period in the history of the surrounding buildings, and actually went on to replace the broch itself. However, this does not in itself indicate that these structures date to the later Iron Age, as the longevity of broch construction and use suggests that some sites may have been abandoned prior to the construction of others. It is therefore necessary to demonstrate this, both in the context of the architecture at the site itself, and within a wider context of construction and use of similar structures.

Subsequent structural activity has greatly affected the broch at Forse, and Curle's excavations did not reveal its interior to any appreciable extent (see Appendix 1). However, excavations at other sites in the vicinity which are structurally similar, for instance the Keiss brochs (Fig 4.3, section 8.3.1), as well as further afield in north-eastern Caithness, appear to demonstrate that structural activity at these sites over very long periods was concerned with the reproduction and embellishment of the circular form of domestic architecture. This would appear to be true throughout the period during which the brochs were in use. The insertion of a sub-rectangular building into the fabric of the broch at Forse would therefore suggest that the maintenance of its circular form was no longer an important consideration, although the juxtaposition of the two may have been significant. Given that this concentration on circularity within the domestic domain appears as a widespread theme during the middle Iron Age, it seems likely that the breaking of this tradition at Forse relates to a more general move away from circularity in domestic buildings. Similarly, a concentration on well-defined structural forms within surrounding buildings is not evident during the initial period in which the brochs were in use. The introduction of such a specific architectural form as the aisled buildings at Forse again suggests a fundamental process of change.

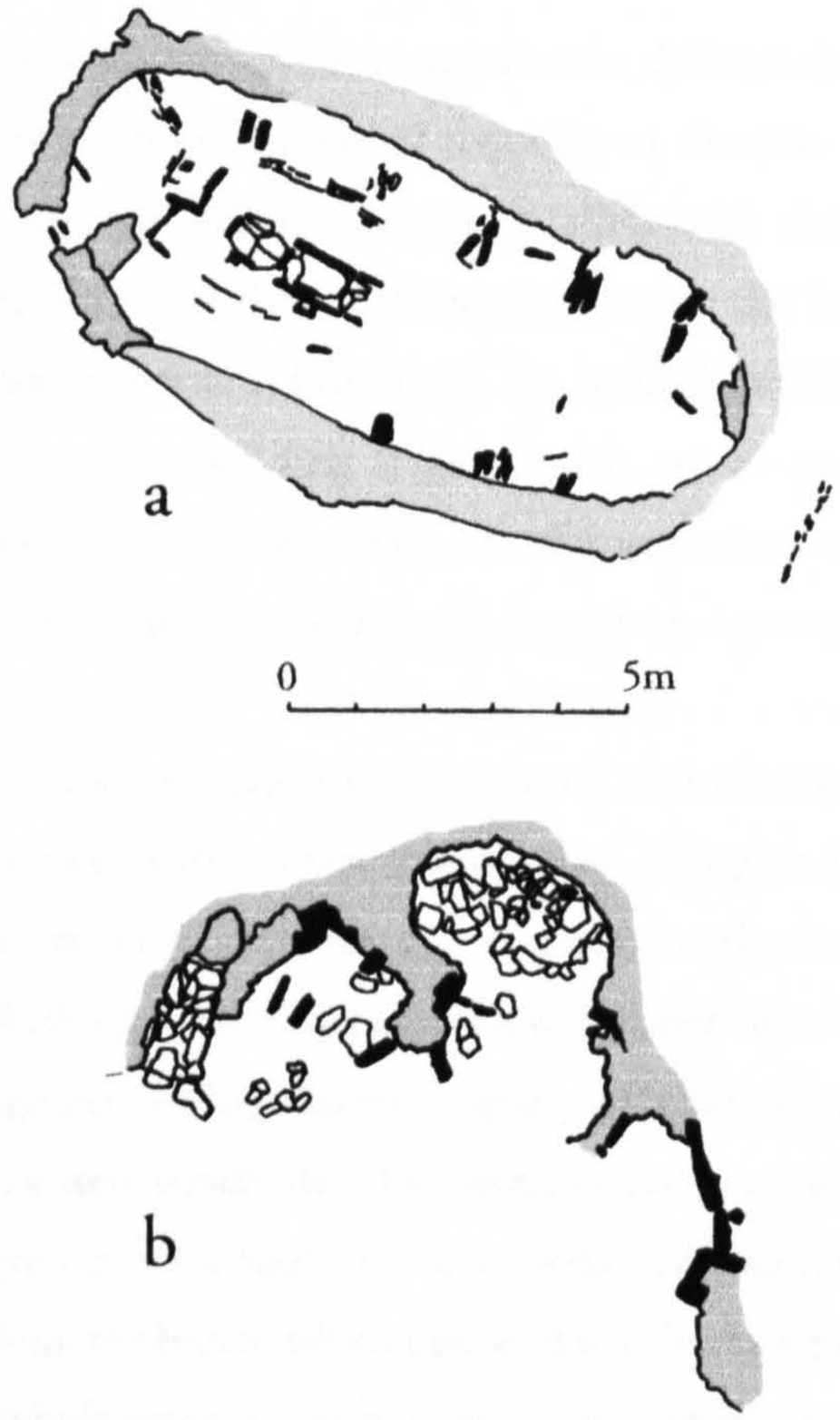


Figure 4.4 : Later Iron Age structures at HOWE - a: Stalled building, b: Stage 11 building set into existing structural material (after Ballin Smith (ed.) 1994, Illus 64, 74.)

Looking to a wider regional context, there are a number of sites within north-eastern Caithness which display similar characteristics to Forse, in that sub-rectangular or aisled architectural elements may be located within their later structural phases, including the brochs sites at Yarrows, Keiss White Gate and Nybster (see section 8.3.1). However, these share the problem with Forse that there are no associated absolute dates, other than a general middle Iron Age provenance. However, looking further afield it is possible to obtain some corroboration for the appearance of similar structures during the later Iron Age. Perhaps the best parallel comes from the Orkney broch site of Howe (Figure 4.4a), where a sub-rectangular building with 'stalls', created by upright slabs set perpendicular to its walls, appears to have been in use during the mid-first millennium AD (Ballin Smith (ed.) 1994, 97). This seems to have been the first new building at the site not to rely on the use of existing walling (*ibid.* 116). There are clear comparisons here to the situation at Forse. Although the sub-rectangular aisled buildings at Forse are larger in size than the Howe example, and make use of different

constructional techniques, they too appear to represent a definite choice made to impose a particular architectural *form* on the structural sequence at the site, rather than to rely on existing walling. There are also other apparent parallels with the situation at Forse. A fragmentary wall was inserted into the broch interior during the Late Iron Age at Howe, recalling a similar situation at Forse. Additionally, the 'stalled' building at Howe appears to have pre-dated a Late Iron Age building (Figure 4.4b), which may be compared, both structurally and in terms of its position within the site sequence, with the conjoined sub-circular houses, which I have argued represent the latest Iron Age use of the site (see Figure 4.2, Phase 1).

At Howe, then, we have at least some structural and chronological evidence for a sequence which is similar to that from Forse in a number of important respects. This would seem a more appropriate wider context for the structures at the latter than a generalised concept of 'cellularity' which appears to encompass a wide range of structures. There seems to be little structural homogeneity within this wider group of buildings, and no real uniformity in the way domestic spaces were subdivided. However, I would concede that during the later Iron Age in the north there may have been a move towards settlements where the architectural focus was moving away from the broch, which operated within the reproduction and external monumentalisation of a whole range of domestic practices, toward a situation where domestic spaces were becoming more subdivided. I would further suggest that the domestic practices which structured, and were structured by, this spatially fragmented architecture were also becoming more heterogeneous across the region, emphasising the need for a local scale of view.

The foregoing discussion has raised two main issues, both of which require attention for this thesis to be successful in its objectives. The first of these concerns the fact that, although there are certain general similarities over the Atlantic province in terms of its later Iron Age archaeology, chiefly concerning the subdivision of domestic architecture into smaller units, there is considerable local diversity within this. Indeed, the diversity is such that I would argue both that it resists interpretation in terms of unitary social processes, and that the structural differences which form the material component of social relationships are too wide for a single conception of a later Iron Age archaeology to be valid for the Atlantic province as a whole. Overarching generalising schemes, which have in any case bedevilled Atlantic Iron Age archaeology almost from its outset, are therefore unlikely to be of use in identifying an archaeology of the later Iron Age in known field monuments and existing published accounts. Given that wider social formations are always likely to have been negotiated at a local level, I would argue that we should look more closely at local material sequences for evidence of the

character of later Iron Age archaeology. Clearly, what constitutes a local archaeology is unlikely to relate in any meaningful way to modern administrative boundaries, and I would therefore argue that, as part of a move away from generalising schemes, we should consider the way in which societies operated within their local landscapes, and the effect which this is likely to have had on the architecture around which the routines of daily life were reproduced.

The second issue concerns the idea, which I have argued for throughout this thesis, that material culture does not represent a simple reflection of social structure. It can, however, be maintained that through interpretation we can suggest ways in which material forms were actively drawn into the reproduction of society, and propose the kinds of social relationships which may have been reproduced within particular material contexts. In looking at the architecture of the Iron Age in northern Scotland as *archaeologists*, then, I would argue that we need not be looking for abrupt differences which cut across the material record, for example in looking for a 'Pictish' as opposed to an 'Iron Age' archaeology, but instead should concentrate on a thematic approach which considers the way changes in aspects of material culture over time may have been incorporated within social reproduction and change.

4.4. A Suggested local Thematic Sequence

I have argued in this chapter that an interpretative approach to architectural changes in the later Iron Age of northern Scotland is likely to be more productive than a typological one. A thematic approach, concerning the social use of space within local landscapes, has been advocated over gross typologies of architectural form. Such an approach does not preclude the recognition of wider similarities in material culture patterning, but does dispute that these possess any explanatory power *in themselves*. Explanations for material culture patterning should always be sought in the way social relationships were maintained through routine practices at a local level. I have also suggested that the material sequence at one site, the Wag of Forse, might be seen as having been the product of localised practices which produced wider architectural similarities. It now remains to marry these two lines of argument, and to propose a thematic sequence for the later Iron Age, and the geographical area over which it appears reasonable to study it.

It would be disingenuous to claim that the evidence from Forse can be used to construct an objective model, against which it might be possible to test a range of other data. I was aware that the Wag of Forse formed part of a wider class of monuments (the 'wags') from the inception of the research presented here, and it was as the most likely of these to be of wider relevance that the site was chosen for special attention. Given this, it seemed logical to extend the area of study to that over which architecturally similar sites are located, on the understanding

that the introduction of rectangular buildings represents a meaningful change in the social use of architecture, rather than a mere superficial similarity. Early stages in this research also indicated that other excavated sites outwith the area traditionally associated with 'wag' sites (that is, south-eastern Caithness) might also encompass similar structural sequences. Given that these other sites have also helped to contextualise the Wag of Forse itself (contextual information which has been relied upon in this chapter), again I do not wish to claim that the process has been unidirectional, from a suggested sequence to its wider application. Rather, the process has been a recursive one, with ideas of the best interpretation of a range of material culture continually being modified by the nature of that material itself. This, I would suggest, is to be expected within an aware, interpretative archaeology. This said, the geographical areas considered for study, which are described in detail in the second part of the thesis, although entirely within the modern districts of Caithness and Sutherland, were those which contained material evidence in the context of which the evidence from Forse might have some relevance. They also appeared to be constrained by topographic factors, again explained in the second part of the thesis.

It became clear early on in the research process that the artefactual resource was of insufficient quality and magnitude to allow a meaningful study. Artefact studies have only been referred to in what follows where this was necessary in order to contextualise other lines of evidence. The evidence from the Wag of Forse suggested that, together with the wider grouping of material which form its context, it would be more productive to consider the twin themes of the social use of architecture, and the articulation of social relationships across wider areas through the consideration of settlement landscapes. I have discussed the wider significance of these themes in Chapter 3.

The sequence suggested by the archaeology at Forse may be summarised as follows:

1. Circularity in domestic architecture is likely to have been maintained throughout the earlier part of the Iron Age. The change from the middle to the later Iron Age may be characterised by a move from a predominantly circular domestic architecture to a rectangular building tradition. I will term these structures 'aisled buildings' (see section 5.3.3).

2. This change seems to represent a move from generalised architecture towards a more fragmented use of space, which may have been accompanied by an increasing division between the domestic and non-domestic areas of life.

3. There is likely to have been a parallel change from an external to an internal monumentality during the later Iron Age.

This sequence forms part of the background for the selection and discussion of the field monuments, which are the subject of the second part of this thesis. However, it was also my intention to consider these themes in tandem with patterns of continuity and change occurring over a longer time-scale. To achieve this, a wider view of the Iron Age in northern Scotland will also be required. Inevitably, this involves an engagement with the established monumental classifications and typologies which have been used to characterise this material over the years, a critical review of which is essential if a meaningful discussion is to be drawn from them. This forms the subject of Chapter 5.

Chapter Five

Classifying the Northern Iron Age

5.1. Introduction

In Chapter 2, I argued that one of the chief weaknesses of the study of the Iron Age in Atlantic Scotland has been an over-reliance on monumental structural typologies. In subsequent Chapters, I suggested that a more fruitful way to approach the archaeology of the period in northern Scotland lies with an interpretative approach, which aims to contextualise sites and monuments within their immediate landscapes. In this way, it may be possible to follow key themes through the changes which have occurred in this material culture resource over time, rather than looking for self-contained cultural entities requiring an exterior impetus for change. It would be naïve to suppose that a research project of the kind presented here, which relies heavily on the interpretation of field monuments, might be carried out without reference to a resource not already constituted by existing material categories. It is inevitable, when going into the field, that the material under study has been pre-classified. It is the intention of this chapter, then, to present a brief discussion of the processes of archaeological classification, as they impact on the possibility of a social archaeology of the Iron Age in northern Scotland which is based on field monuments. It will then proceed to a discussion of the classifications employed within the Study Areas presented in this thesis, in order that these might be set within a wider, thematic discussion.

5.2. The Process of Classification

A discussion of the processes employed to classify archaeological material into distinct categories is invariably included within general introductions to the subject (e.g. Greene 1983, 32, Renfrew & Bahn 1991 Chapter 4). It is therefore rather surprising that there are few works which attempt an explicit treatment of the categories employed by archaeologists, in ordering the material resource which forms the subject of their interpretations. The validity of such categories is invariably taken as self-evident. While there are numerous works which concentrate on refining the criteria via which items of material culture might be embraced or excluded, few authors give any consideration to the meaning and function of the classificatory exercise. One account which does attempt a study of processes of archaeological categorisation is that of Adams (1988). Adams identifies a subtle difference between the superficially interchangeable concepts of classification and typology. Classification involves the arrangement of objects into categories, or *classes*, which are then used to represent degrees of similarity or difference between the objects which comprise them. A corollary of this is that there must exist relationships of interdependence between the members of individual classes, and between classes themselves. Typology, on the other hand, is the act of placing objects into *types*. Each individual type bears no necessary relationship to any other, nor does it depend on another

for its existence. In Chapter 4, I argued that the classification process often bestows a chronological or developmental significance, whether explicit or not. If the definitions outlined by Adams are accepted, it is evident that the concepts of classification and typology are often unwittingly compressed by archaeologists into a single entity (cf. Klejn 1982). Thus, groups of material objects which may be considered together as classes, by virtue of a range of shared characteristics which appear to differentiate them from other groups within which these characteristics are different, are treated as though they were single objects. As a result, the range of variation within individual classes is obscured or seen as unimportant, as is the possible significance of relationships of similarity and difference to other classes. Such typologies also lack the fluidity of more general classificatory schemes. In claiming to represent the totality of possible interpretations of the evidence which they describe, they effectively deny the possibility of asking new questions of them. The classic typological schemes of the Scottish Atlantic Iron Age (MacKie 1965a, Young 1962) are exemplars of such an approach.

The pitfalls of reductionist typologies of the Atlantic Iron Age have been discussed elsewhere in this thesis (see section 2.3), and I will not rehearse these arguments here. The argument outlined above is, however, more generally relevant to the construction of categories of field monuments. Since the formation of the Royal Commissions, in both England and Wales and Scotland, site classification has been integral to the organisation of the identified field resource. The Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) have recently sought to standardise their classificatory output through the introduction of thesauri (RCHME 1995), which list standardised terms and definitions for the description of sites and monuments. However, the initial categories, within which are contained the bulk of recorded material, appear to have grown up in an *ad hoc* manner. The exercise would therefore appear to be largely one of rationalisation, on the basis of an existing, pre-classified resource. RCAHMS at present maintains no such thesauri, although it does employ a list of preferred terms. Classifications of monuments in Scotland are consequently even more evidently the outcome of a history of *ad hoc* decisions made in the field. These in turn will inevitably have been influenced by changing interpretations, often incompatible, within the wider discipline.

Before I outline the monument classes which have been used in this thesis, it is important to explore briefly the function of classification in archaeological fieldwork. There would appear to be two main reasons for ordering sites and monuments into classes:

i. The organisation of a known field resource for the purposes of administration, mapping, management or curation,
and
ii. The grouping of sites and monument *thematically*, according to criteria which may be structural/formal or chronological, for the purposes of further interpretation.

The chief sources of primary information upon which I have drawn in the studies presented in the second part of this thesis, and especially the National Monuments Record for Scotland (NMRS), are explicitly of the first kind. The NMRS database is not, for instance, able to answer queries based on chronological criteria, and its site categories employ varying degrees of abstraction in order to avoid formal interpretation. Nevertheless, NMRS categories, in common with almost all other monument recording systems, preserve the fossilised traces of old interpretative schemes, many of which are now redundant. I will examine this point at greater length in section 5.3, which deals with specific monument categories. There are, however, some general problems which follow from the tension inherent within classificatory devices which are the product of accreted layers of interpretation.

Perhaps the most obvious difficulty which arises from non-interpretative, objective classification schemes involves the degree of abstraction to which they must resort. Sites and monuments are described purely in terms of their form, dimensions or situation, in an attempt to remove interpretative bias. One of the real dangers of this kind of approach is that important sites become lost within a forest of terms, as aspects which are qualitatively unique can rarely be described in abstract terms. Given that categories based largely on abstract criteria are themselves underlain by an implicit assumption that there is a more or less constant relationship between the form of material culture and its function or meaning, I would argue that attempts to exclude interpretation in this way are essentially misguided. The net result of the use of abstract classes is to replace one level of interpretation with another. Function and meaning are not eliminated, they are simply deferred and become implicit, with an inevitable loss of explanatory depth. This results from the encasement of empirical data in a classificatory straightjacket, which cannot encompass its original breadth of variation. Gross formal similarities are retained at the expense of degrees of difference and variation. In order for such classifications to be of use, they must undergo a re-translation, with the original richness becoming lost in the process.

A second problem which often arises out of the act of monument categorisation is an unconscious shift between classification and typology. Collective terms intended merely as a description of a series of varied, but in some way related, items of material culture become a form of shorthand for a whole series of normative interpretations. Tilley (1999, Chapter 3), has recently examined the use by European and British archaeologists of the term *megalith*. Although interpretative approaches to megalithic monuments have undergone a series of paradigm shifts since the term was first coined during the mid-nineteenth century, the assumption that *megaliths* form a coherent group of monuments, which must be linked in some way, has remained unchanged. In the present context, the same might be said about the *broch*. Although there has been almost constant debate over the use, misuse and misappropriation of the term over the past thirty years, and over possible interpretations of the monuments themselves, the status of the term as a valid classificatory device remains uncertain. I will return to this point in section 5.3.2. Suffice to say here, that the term *broch* itself has become a metaphor for a specific discourse, which has excluded or marginalised both the possible meanings of variation within the group as a whole, and has obstructed interpretations of linkages which might exist between brochs and other sites and monuments. Indeed, it seems inevitable that inherently typological approaches, which by definition tend to decontextualise and isolate their subjects, will fail to identify relationships which might cross-cut rigid typological boundaries. The discourse itself is underlain by an assumption that the *broch*, however it is interpreted, must have an intrinsic and unitary meaning.

I am aware that, to this point, this discussion has been somewhat critical of current approaches to the classification of sites and monuments. In a study based largely on field monuments, an engagement with existing classifications is inevitable. However, it is always necessary, in presenting any programme of research to a wider audience, to work within an existing archaeological discourse in order that new interpretations are rendered meaningful. In the study presented here, then, it has been necessary to work within an existing set of categories defined in part by the terms *hut-circle* and *broch*, and also to present a new category of later Iron Age sites, comprising members of more diverse classes. I will go on to discuss these in detail in section 5.3. The purpose of the discussion presented above has not been to deny the value of grouping aspects of material culture. Indeed, it has been argued by Schutz (1967), among others, that the grouping of individual experiences, or *meaning contexts*, is necessary within any social situation. Only by such acts of *type formation* can objective interpretations of the subjective meanings projected by others be established as being substantively the same. Schutz argues that this is as true of the Social Sciences, within which I would include archaeology, as it is of routine social life. In archaeology, this process involves the interpretation of material forms as having been incorporated within certain types of

social context, within which they were both created and invested with meaning. The use of the term *type formation* within an archaeological context would be inappropriate, as I have tried to show in this chapter that the term *type* has rather different connotations within archaeology as a discipline. I will not continue to use it here. Rather, it seems more advisable to continue to use the concept of classification, while understanding that *classes* are not self-evident or closed, as is the case with archaeological *types*. Just as the grouping of individual experiences as instances of a particular category of social relationship is necessary to order the otherwise infinite flow of routine experience, so is the grouping of aspects of material culture in order to attempt to interpret its social role in the past. What is crucial, I would argue, is that in using such categories we do not do so thoughtlessly, assuming that their meaning is self-evident. As Tilley (*ibid.* 101) notes, archaeological classes can never be exhaustive, but should be points for discussion among may others. We should approach them reflectively, and attempt to understand, and make explicit as far as is possible the acts of interpretation on which they are based. This would seem to be the best hope for an understanding of the social context within which the material culture we study as archaeologists was created and used.

5.3. Classifications in the Iron Age of Northern Scotland

The discussion presented to this point has been rather abstract. In this section, I will outline in detail the material categories which I will make use of in the case studies which form the subject of Chapters 7 to 9.

5.3.1. Hut-circles

The term hut-circle, as a classificatory device, is almost as old as the formal classification of monuments in Scotland itself. Lists of these sites appear in the first two RCAHMS *Inventories*, for Sutherland and Caithness (RCAHMS 1911 a & b), under a more general category of 'domestic constructions'. At least two Sutherland hut-circle sites were also excavated at an early period (Curle 1911), although little useful information can be gleaned from the published report of this work. Curle's suggestion in this report that the term itself is rather pejorative, and does little justice to either the scale or the complexity of such structures, indicates that the term was already widely understood among the contemporary archaeological community. The small number of reports of excavated sites in the period between this early work and the present day invariably place a similar stress on the scale of these structures, if often implicitly. However, the term *hut-circle* itself continues in routine usage, and seems to have retained

much of its negative import. If this were not the case, it would not have been possible for accounts of the broch phenomenon from the 1940s onwards, to claim primacy for the brochs as the sole monumental domestic architectural form of the Atlantic Iron Age (Graham 1947, Scott 1947, MacKie 1965a, Hamilton 1966).

To understand why the role of hut-circles in Scottish later prehistory has often been underestimated, we can turn to the nature of the classification itself. The pejorative implications of the generic term are obvious, and it hardly needs emphasising that any structure described as a 'hut' is unlikely either to attract very much scholarly attention, or to appeal to a wider public. The far more impressive ruins of broch sites, such as those at Glenelg, Mousa, Dun Carloway and Dun Dornaigil, have always captured the imagination of academic and amateur archaeologist alike. Hut-circles, by comparison, have an extremely low profile within British archaeology. Although they often feature in general studies and survey reports, within which attention to them is unavoidable, there are few specific studies on either a local or regional basis (e.g. Fairhurst 1971, Howard 1981, Harris 1984, Barclay 1985, Mercer 1996). Hut-circles therefore remain a category largely confined to SMR databases and site inventories. That this may have as much to do with circumstances as with the nature of the surviving evidence is amply demonstrated by the situation in the south, where sites rather more evocatively referred to as 'roundhouses' have been the subject of numerous excavations. These include Bersu's seminal work at Little Woodbury (Bersu 1940) and on the Isle of Man (Bersu 1977), and Wessex sites such as Gussage All Saints (Wainwright 1979) and Winnall Down (Fasham 1985). There have also been reconstruction projects (Reynolds 1979). This imbalance is rendered the more ironic by the fact that southern roundhouses are often identifiable only from crop marks, and comprise only sub-surface features, whereas highland hut-circles can be upstanding, stone-built structures of some complexity (Figure 5.1). Nonetheless, the former feature widely in archaeological syntheses at all levels, and are fully incorporated into most interpretations of later prehistoric society. This may, at least in part, be due to the fact that, in the highlands at least, hut-circles are a largely upland phenomenon, and the consequent low intensity of land use and development has resulted in there being little perceived threat which might warrant intensive programmes of excavation or survey.

Hut-circles, then, remain a largely institutional classification, and have not been subject to the intensive scrutiny which brochs, for example, have undergone over the years. In some ways this is a fortunate situation when preparing a programme of research such as this, as there are far fewer layers of accreted interpretation to strip away when attempting to make sense of these sites. Suffice to say that recent excavated hut-circle sites have invariably revealed an architectural richness which is not hinted at by the generic term. There are also indications of this within the visible evidence at unexcavated sites, and a small number of accounts have

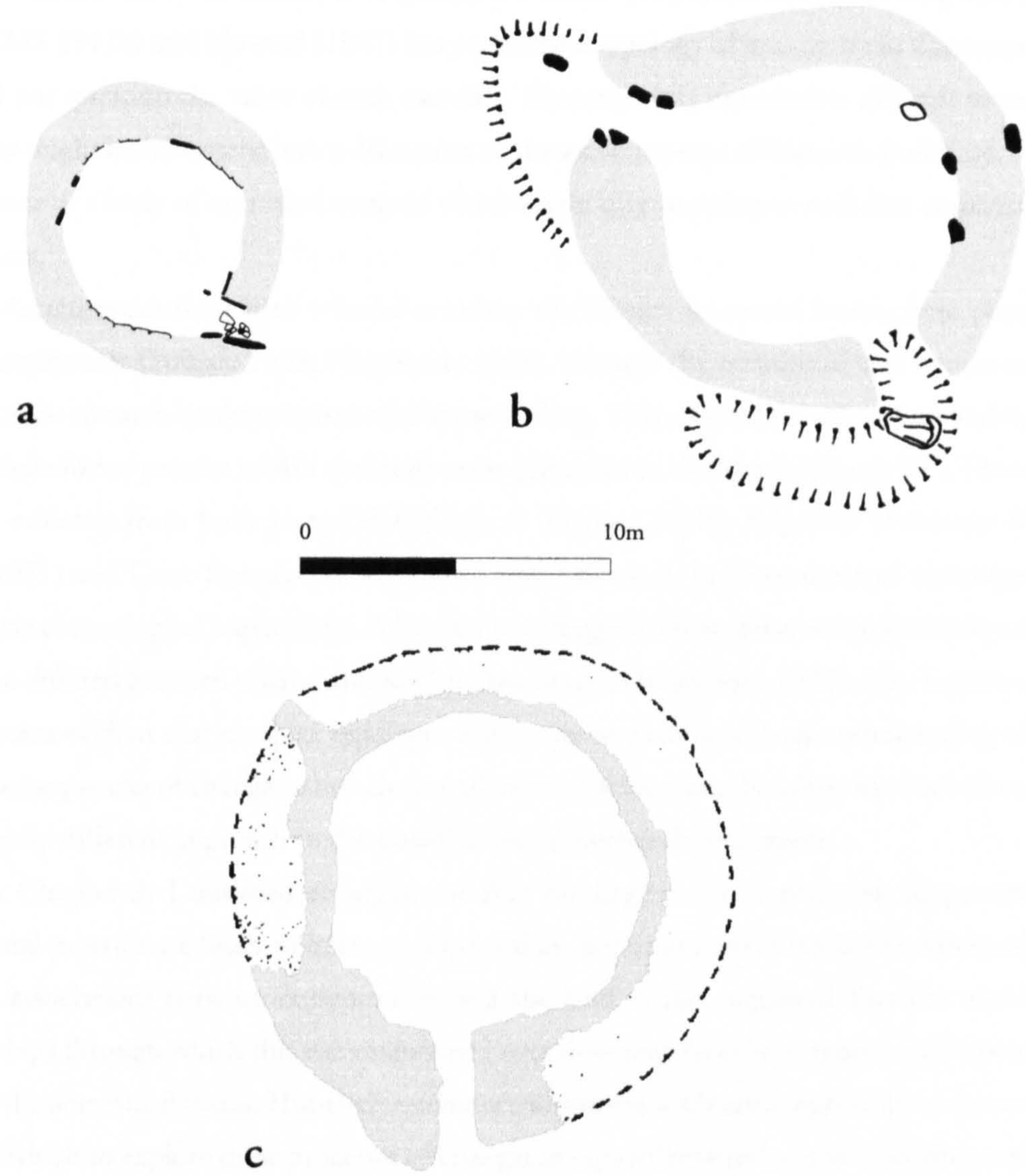


Figure 5.1 : Hut-circles in northern Scotland, a) Groat's Loch, Caithness, b) Ach an Fhionnfhuaraidh, Strath of Kildonan, c) Kilphedir V (after Armit 1997, Fig. 11).

attempted to explore this through the construction of rather elaborate typologies. Thorneycroft (1933, 1948) and later Harris (1984) devised classifications on the basis of field evidence from Perthshire and the southern Highlands. Mercer (1985, 62-65), following Curle (RCAHMS 1911b) and Howard (1981) has presented a typology of hut-circles in Caithness. I would not question the value of such exercises. However, it is nonetheless difficult to see how they might be integrated into a discussion of the social context of domestic buildings, in the absence of a body of excavated material which might give meaning to such fine empirical differences.

Recent excavations have revealed a variety of different structural forms, from post-built roundhouses (Pollock 1992, Neighbour 1998), through the remains of turf structures and stone-faced earth banks to substantial stone walling. There would appear to be a variety of hut-circle forms present within the study areas presented in this thesis (Figure 5.1). There is some evidence from both Lairg (McCullagh & Tipping 1998), Kilphedir (Fairhurst & Taylor 1971) and Cnoc Stanger (Mercer 1996) that differences in constructional technique might have chronological implications. It has also been suggested that constructional techniques may have differed between upland and lowland landscapes (Neighbour 1998). It is, however, by no means evident that complex typologies are in any way relevant to an understanding of long-term sequences of change in hut-circle settlement. I want here, therefore, to concentrate on a slightly different approach to the classification of hut-circle settlement.

In Chapter 3, I outlined an argument that the beginnings of enclosed, long-term agricultural practice are likely to have accompanied an important alteration in the nature of tenurial associations between communities and the land. I also suggested that the social relationships through which this was maintained over time may have been negotiated in part through the domestic domain. Hut-circle settlement within the study areas represents a resource through which to explore these processes of change; many settlements have both evidence of associated cultivation, and clear evidence of architectural variation. I therefore wish to abandon a narrowly typological approach to hut-circles. In its place, I want to extend the thematic approach outlined in Chapter 4, which attempts to trace a relationship between domestic architecture and its wider landscape context across the barriers set up by chronologically-based classifications.

I will retain the term *hut-circle,* as a classificatory term indicating broadly sub-circular, upstanding domestic structures which lack the monumentality of the brochs. However, the way in which these sites are approached within the study areas which form the second part of this thesis will not be based primarily on structural criteria. Mercer's suggested complex typology

for hut-circles in Caithness and Sutherland, in its developed form, contains 16 separate structural types (*op. cit.*, 64). The aim of this thesis is to examine later prehistoric architecture in the context of its specific local landscapes. For the purposes of the following discussion, therefore, a less abstract approach will be adopted, on the basis of the following criteria:

> *Group 1*: Hut-circle settlements lacking any clear evidence of associated cultivation.
>
> *Group 2*: Hut-circle settlements associated with evidence of cultivation in the form of small areas of clearance cairns, but lacking evidence of enclosure or long-term agriculture.
>
> *Group 3*: Hut-circle settlements associated with more complex evidence of cultivation, in the form of enclosures defined by walls, field banks and lynchets.

This classificatory scheme is similar to that employed by RCAHMS (1993, 6) for hut-circle sites in the Strath of Kildonan, but omits a stipulated minimum number of structures in order not to pre-judge a possible relationship between settlement size and land-use. Evidence for cultivation associated with settlements was prioritised over other aspects of the field resource, as I would argue that an understanding of processes of long-term change might be reached through a consideration of the relationship between settled communities and the wider agricultural landscape. That this approach would be likely to produce meaningful results was suggested from the outset by the available evidence from hut-circle excavations within the research area presented in this thesis. Although much of this will be discussed separately within individual Study Areas, there are certain aspects of these sites which would repay a brief discussion here. The most important of these is probably that at Kilphedir, in the Strath of Kildonan, Sutherland (Fairhurst & Taylor 1971). The excavators argue that the earliest structures on the site, I to IV, and the earliest phase of the elaborate hut-circle V, were associated with cultivation defined by clearance cairns only, towards the north-eastern part of the area examined. They suggest, on the basis of limited radiocarbon determinations, that agricultural occupation at the site began around 500 BC. They also argue that the four earliest structures do not represent a sequence of settlement, but a group occupation, although there is no real evidence for this. As a corollary, they argue for a break in occupation, after which hut-circle V was re-constructed in a much more massive form, perhaps during the second or first centuries BC, in association with more defined field plots enclosed by boulder banks. The evidence on which this suggested hiatus is based is, however, unclear, given that no radiocarbon dates were derived for any of the other hut-circles. I would argue that the suggested sequence, from

a settlement of up to five households supporting themselves in a comparatively small area of land with no evidence for prolonged cultivation, to a single group farming the land more intensively, does not account well for the excavated evidence. None of the less substantial buildings displayed any significant depth of deposited material, and the excavated hearths showed little sign of ash build-up. There is therefore little evidence for either long-term occupation or post-abandonment deposition within these structures. Given that at least two show evidence of reconstruction on the same site, but not of an identical ground plan, I would interpret the site as having been occupied on a periodic, non-intensive basis over at least the three to four hundred years suggested by the dating evidence. Abandonment of at least one house during this period, Structure I, was indicated by scrub growth within before it was blanketed by peat, suggesting that in this case at least environmental deterioration was not the primary reason. Towards the end of this periodic occupation, a more intensive agriculture may have developed, associated with permanent settlement of the area by a single, more architecturally complex building.

Although the dating evidence from Kilphedir does not define the beginnings of occupation at the site, it appears very likely that enclosed, settled agriculture was established in the area at some time prior to the second half of the First Millennium BC. This is likely to have followed a considerable period during which cultivation was less intensive, and occupation of the site itself may have been periodic. The inception of enclosed agriculture also seems to have been accompanied by an increase in architectural complexity, involving a monumental domestic building, within which there was an emphasis on the boundary between the internal spaces of the house and the outside world. The evidence from Cnoc Stanger (Mercer 1996) and Upper Suisgill (Barclay 1985) suggests that more intensive cultivation was being practised in northern Scotland prior to the first part of the first millennium, although the remains of domestic structures at both sites are fragmentary. At Lairg, just outside the study areas presented here, a substantial building, making use of considerable amounts of stone in its construction, seems to have been in use during the later first millennium BC (McCullagh & Tipping 1998, 57). This is likely to have been the latest of a series of less substantial domestic structures spanning much of the first and second millennia BC.

This excavated evidence suggests that a discussion of hut-circle settlement based around a thematic approach to long-term changes in both the cultivated landscape and the nature of domestic architecture might be more fruitful than the construction of typologies which concentrate on the physical forms of the buildings alone, and largely ignore their wider landscape setting. It would also seem applicable to the field resource of northern Scotland, where large numbers of unexcavated hut-circle sites survive within what are now marginal landscapes. Although precise details of the structure of these sites are not visible, it was clear

from the Ordnance Survey and RCAHMS site descriptions examined at the outset of this phase of research, that considerable evidence both for associated cultivation practices and architectural change might still be viewed in the field. It was also clear that groups of hut-circles, and sometimes individual buildings, had been allotted new NMRS numbers as and when they were discovered. In many cases it was necessary to group together, as single settlements, hut-circles which were recorded separately (see Tables in Chapters 7 - 9), on the basis either of their physical proximity, or their common association with field systems.

5.3.2. Brochs

The term *broch* derives from the Old Norse *borg*, meaning a defence or stronghold. Although it has since been appropriated by a very specific archaeological discourse, it is likely that the term has a long history of local usage in the Northern Isles and northern Mainland. In the Western Highlands and Isles, however, these buildings are referred to by the Gaelic *dun*, which has a similar meaning. This should not be confused with the archaeological use of the term, which has somewhat different implications, and is usually taken to mean a class of smaller defended sites, confined largely to the western part of the Atlantic province (Nieke 1990, 135). Although there were a small number of excavations at broch sites during the early period of antiquarian enquiry in Scotland, the genesis of the broch as an archaeological category rests with the work of Joseph Anderson. Anderson's Rhind Lecture series, published in 1883, represents the first coherent account of the broch as a class of monument. It also established a reliable later prehistoric context for these monuments for the first time. Anderson (1890) also went on to publish the first attempt at an inventory of known broch sites. Mainstream scholars accepted a definition of the broch as a high, impregnable defensive tower throughout the earlier part of this century, despite doubts raised by Scott (1947), with the most complete example, the well-known site of Mousa, Shetland, serving as a model for the class as a whole. However, it was not until the early 1960s, with the influential work of MacKie (1965a, 1971a), that this general classificatory approach began to be displaced by the construction of an explicit structural typology (see section 2.3). Although intended to demonstrate specific cross-cultural linkages in an attempt to represent the broch as a building form developed by intrusive population elements, the net effect of this approach has been to refine the concept of the broch to such a degree as to abstract it from its physical context. Although MacKie has produced chronological schemes, showing the spread of the broch and accompanying material culture from a supposed western origin, these are almost entirely statistical in nature, and frequently represented in diagrammatic form (Figure 5.2). Although

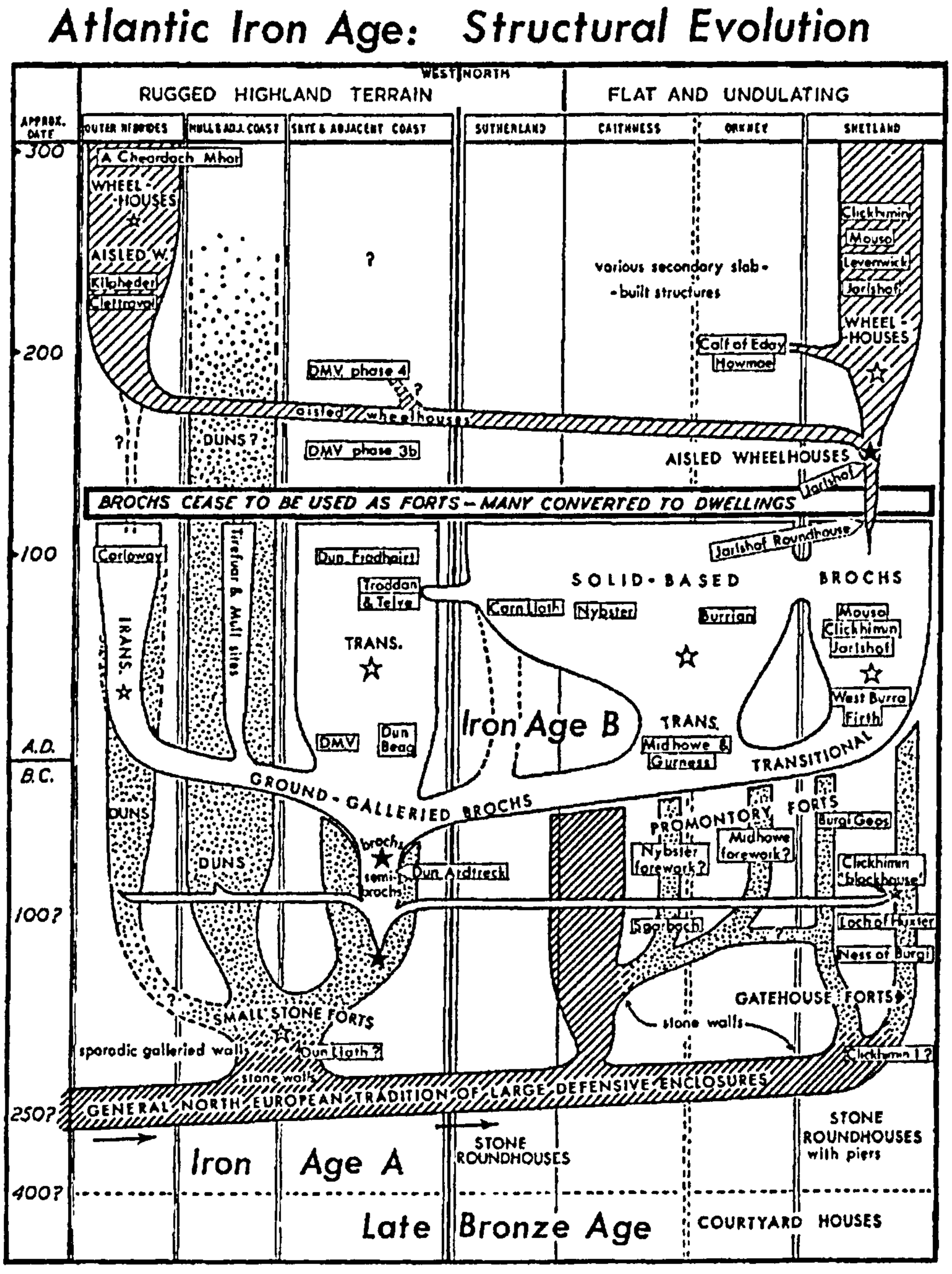


Figure 5.2 : MacKie's developmental scheme for the Atlantic Iron Age (from MacKie 1965, Fig. 8)

the arguments on which this schematic reasoning is based appear convincing at this level of abstraction, I would argue that they break down if examined at a local scale. Indeed, more recent accounts (Harding 1984, 1990, 160) have convincingly disputed the integrity of the broch typology itself. Although MacKie has conceded some of the points raised by critiques of his scheme, particularly with regard to the role of diffusion as opposed to local development in the broch phenomenon, he has also refined his criteria so as to exclude 'broch-like' buildings which do not meet its precise terms (e.g. MacKie 1989). Overall, I would argue that approaches to the broch phenomenon during the 1960s to 1980s exemplify typology. The broch has been represented as an idealised structural form which stands apart from all others, a criticism which I would apply both to MacKie's work and to many accounts which critique it.

This discourse has inhibited the development of a credible account of the meaning of variation within broch architecture. Unfortunately, it has also defined the terms of reference within which dialogue on the subject has been pursued. Thus, the laudable attempts of Armit (1990a, 1990c, 1997) and others to develop a more flexible classificatory scheme for Atlantic Iron Age buildings, as well as the accounts of others who have addressed this, have failed to escape the typological straightjacket. The concept of the *Atlantic Roundhouse* is undermined by sub-divisions which seek to limit variation, and hence reproduce the divisive effect of the original typology.

I wish to argue here that we might begin to approach this rather intractable debate by reviewing the concept of the broch, and adopting a less rigid, more inclusive definition, which emphasises general themes rather than the specifics of structure. Although it has been argued in the past that the brochs functioned primarily as defensive strongholds, more recent accounts have begun to explore the likelihood that they were monumental houses (Barrett 1981, Swanson 1988, Armit 1990, Hingley 1992, 1996). The excavated evidence from the area discussed in this thesis is of rather questionable quality, and is certainly insufficient to enable the kind of fine-grained approach which has been possible elsewhere, for example in the case of the recent excavations at Dun Vulan (Parker Pearson & Sharples 1998). Nonetheless, the available evidence is, in almost every case, sufficiently detailed to show that these buildings were domestic in nature (see Chapter 8). It would therefore seem reasonable to include the brochs within a thematic approach to long-term changes in domestic architecture. This provides both a way to avoid a rather arid debate over broch origins, and in the process to accord with recent approaches which have attempted to examine the active, day to day role of prehistoric monuments as *architecture*, rather than a passive reflection of otherwise unconnected social processes (see Chapter 3). This would seem particularly germane to domestic buildings which

are perhaps the most monumental in British prehistory. Indeed, sites within the study areas presented here would appear to have been the subject of periodic episodes of remodelling and embellishment, and a consideration of the social role of such activity should lead us away from a simplistic division between 'primary' and 'secondary' use.

As I have argued in Chapter 3, there is likely to have been an interrelationship between social life negotiated within the domestic domain and patterns of land use over a wider social landscape. However, with a few notable exceptions (Fojut 1982, Armit 1988), the intensity of classificatory debate has largely eclipsed detailed attention to possible relationships between brochs and their landscapes. In this thesis, I will attempt to demonstrate that landscapes contemporary with the brochs may be identified, at least in some areas of the northern mainland. I will also explore the possibilities of thinking about the relationship between brochs and their immediate physical landscapes in terms other than those which are explicitly determinist.

Of course, before these tasks can be undertaken, it is important to have a working definition of what is meant by the term *broch*, in order that the problems I have identified above are not perpetuated. To this end, I would argue that we need to abandon the quest for an exhaustive typology. Most approaches to the subject to date have attempted to account for all possible chronological and regional variation, either by excluding structures which do not meet exacting criteria, or by introducing an ever expanding range of sub-types. As an alternative, I wish to suggest that we return to an approach which is classificatory in nature, in the sense discussed in the first part of this chapter. In the discussions which follow, I will use the term *broch* to refer to a class of sites which encompasses a range of structural and chronological variation. For the purposes of this thesis, I will take the brochs to be a class of Iron Age buildings within which a concern with giving permanence and monumentality to the domestic domain can be identified. Brochs differ from the large hut-circles in the way in which they appear to have been constructed to formalise the use of internal spaces, which may have been more fluid in the hut-circles. They also involve the establishment of formal relationships of visibility and dominance over a wider landscape, a feature which does not appear to have been shared by hut-circle settlement. Although brochs were invariably constructed with features such as hollow double walls (MacKie 1965a, 103), elongated entrance passages and guard chambers, I will not use these to define the class as a whole. Rather, I wish to employ a more permeable classification, allowing the establishment of relationships of similarity and difference with other monuments, whether contemporary, preceding or succeeding. In this way, I hope to arrive at a more rounded, thematic account of long-term changes in social life in the Iron Age of northern Scotland.

Of course, in any programme of research which involves fieldwork, it is necessary to have a means of identifying sites of interest in the field. It would be useful at this point to introduce certain points regarding the recognition of brochs and broch sites. Although I have been critical of the typological approach to the study of the Atlantic Iron Age (see above and Chapter 2), it is practically impossible to move away from the idea of the broch as a meaningful category when working in the field. All primary information, both from the National Monuments Record and from other sources, will already have this classification built in, and it is therefore necessary to work with it. However, given that the broad categories within which NMRS material has been organised are likely to be *ad hoc*, and not directly tied to specific typologies, the problem is more likely to be one of inclusion than of exclusion.

An examination of the excavated sites within the study area demonstrates that there is considerable variation present, even on those sites which demonstrably contain brochs, and there are likely to be considerably greater differences between those sites more tentatively identified as such. Of the sites within the study areas identified by the NMRS as brochs, almost all were first recorded either in OS Name Books between 1871 and 1873, or in the 1911 *Inventories* within the overall category of 'Defensive Constructions'. During the compilation of this original list there were no explicit criteria for the classification of broch sites, identification as such being left to the discretion of the field surveyor, in this case A.O. Curle. At the time of writing, RCAHMS did not operate within explicit criteria for the identification of broch sites, although there is a standardised category 'BROCH' used as a keyword for NMRS database purposes. Swanson (1988) has since attempted to refine the criteria for the identification of broch sites in the field, and draws on such attributes as a visible 'mound-on-mound' profile (Figure 5.3) and evidence of upstanding masonry. On this basis, she has reduced the number of firmly identified broch sites in Caithness, with the omission of 21 of the *Inventory* sites and the addition of the Wag of Forse (see Chapter 4). Those sites excluded are those which either fail to display the requisite attributes, or those for which insufficient documentary of field evidence now exists. It is therefore likely that a number of sites which might have been identified as 'definite' brochs have been excluded due to damage, and in some cases total removal, resulting from recent agricultural or building practices. For the purposes of this study, I have largely accepted Swanson's identification criteria, although I would argue that there are good empirical reasons for including a number of sites which she discounts. These are discussed in the individual study areas (Chapters 7 – 9).

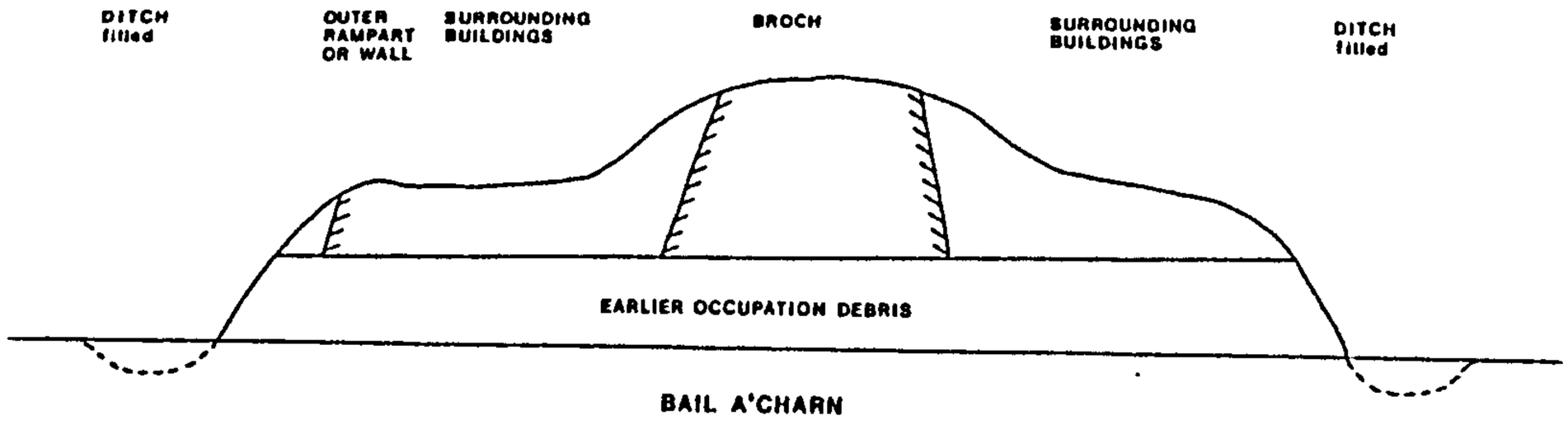


Figure 5.3 : Schematic sections through Caithness broch mounds, showing stepped or 'mound-on-mound' profile (Swanson 1988, Figure 31).

5.3.3. Later Iron Age Settlements

Within the study areas presented in this thesis, as in Atlantic Scotland as a whole, the identification of a coherent class of structures dating to the period after the brochs seem to have gone out of use is problematic. As I have argued in Chapter 4, this in many ways may be due to the assumption that a definitive domestic architectural form characteristic of the first millennium AD must exist. There is no real evidence that this is the case. Nonetheless, I have also argued here that an architectural form, the aisled building, does appear to be characteristic of the northern mainland during the later Iron Age. These sites can be recognised by the presence of at least one long, sub-rectangular building. These invariably possesses a series of upright pillar stones set a short distance from its inner wall-face, which are often found with a single *in situ* cap-stone, creating the 'aisled' effect characteristic of the class as a whole. Aisled buildings are often semi-subterranean in nature, being either built into the ground, or within pre-existing mounds of structural debris. These sub-rectangular buildings are generally found in association with conjoined circular houses (Figure 5.4).

There are no widely used classifications of later Iron Age buildings within the NMRS, or other SMRs and site inventories for the northern mainland. In researching such sites, then, it was necessary to examine a whole series of classes in order to identify likely sites. Of these, the most productive was the category *homestead*, within which almost all the known

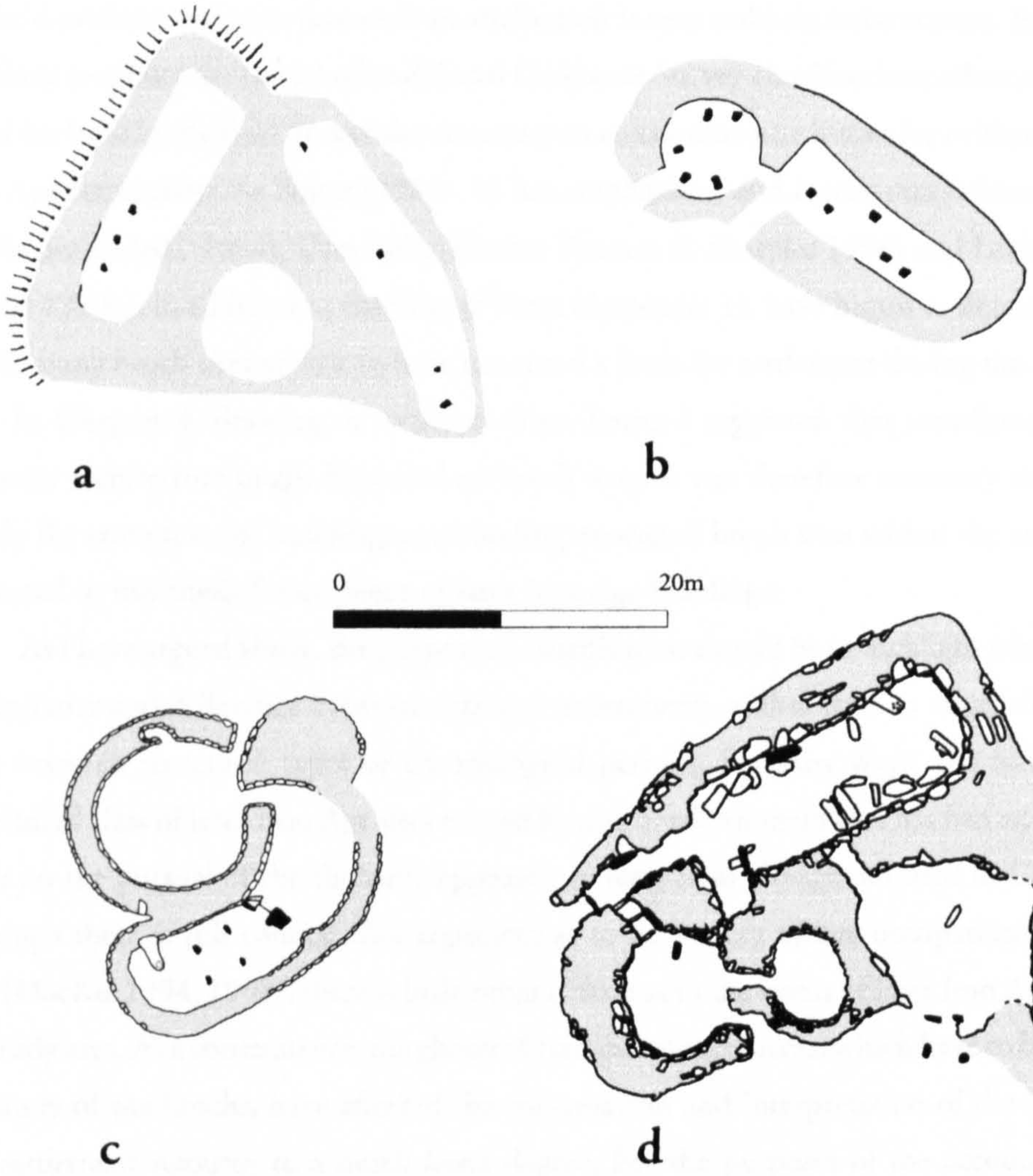


Figure 5.4 : Aisled buildings, a) Uaigh Bheag, Glen Loth, b) Preas Bhealaich, Morven, c) Langwell, d) Wag of Forse, Aisled Building II.

'wag' sites with aisled buildings are contained. This is not, however, a unitary class of site; although there is no official definition, numerous other structures are also classified as homesteads, including a number of the more complex hut-circle settlements and other structures which do not fit easily into other classes.

It was also necessary to explore an even less precise class of sites recorded simply as *mounds*, which contains field evidence too amorphous to be included elsewhere. A number of possible later Iron Age sites, notably those in the Loch Shurrery area (see section 9.3.2), were drawn from this class. At least two sites in Study Area 3 were classified as 'cairns', when

the field evidence suggests that such an attribution is very unlikely to be correct. Such errors are likely to reflect the failure of traditional Ordnance Survey classifications when applied on an *ad hoc* basis in the field. It was also necessary to re-examine broch sites for evidence of later Iron Age occupation. As Foster (1989a, b) has emphasised, and recent excavations at Howe (Ballin Smith (ed.) 1994), Dun Vulan (Parker Pearson & Sharples 1998) and Loch na Berie (Armit 1990b), in addition to the Wag of Forse (Appendix 1), have begun to demonstrate in detail, many broch sites appear to have remained a focus for settlement during the later Iron Age. In Chapter 4, drawing on evidence from Forse, I suggested that transformations of domestic architecture might be traced on broch sites. It was therefore necessary to examine closely the complexes of buildings surrounding excavated broch sites within the study areas presented in this thesis for evidence of later Iron Age buildings.

As I have argued above, the purpose of classification should be to highlight relationships of similarity and difference between sites and monuments, rather than to close off possible links between structural types or chronological periods. In many ways, the fact that no established class of later Iron Age sites existed for the northern mainland has had an enabling effect on the pursual of the thematic approach to long-term change outlined in Chapter 4. Although there is still considerable argument as to the nature of late occupation on broch sites (MacKie 1994, 1998), there is little other debate as to the status of later Iron Age sites in the study area. As a consequence, the ghosts of traditional arguments, which have so bedevilled the study of the brochs, have affected the construction and interpretation of the later Iron Age settlement resource to a much lesser degree. For the purposes of the accounts which follow, I have taken identifiable later Iron Age settlement to involve the construction of sub-rectangular, aisled buildings. As will become clear, however, these structures are largely identifiable within a specific range of landscape contexts. I therefore make no claim that this category of site exemplifies the period as a whole. Rather, I want to argue that aisled buildings may be taken as evidence for a specific range of changing social practices, which do not necessarily exclude the possibility of contemporary practice of a different nature.

5.4. Discussion

The purpose of this chapter has been to examine the categories of field evidence which will be used to explore the Iron Age landscapes of the study areas presented in the second part of this thesis. The three classes of site have been subject to varying degrees of prior analysis, and have been integrated into often competing accounts of the late prehistory of Atlantic Scotland. In order to make use of such categories of evidence to draw out aspects of the later prehistory of the north which are as yet unexplored, it is necessary to be aware of the way in which the

available resource has been constructed. A failure to engage in this would result in an account which contained the implicit traces of earlier arguments. In turn, this would inevitably cause interpretative tensions, and possibly even contradictions, which would undermine the strength of the arguments presented. In the foregoing discussion, I have attempted to outline the creation of the Iron Age field resource which exists today, and to make explicit as far as is possible the working definitions of the terms which will be used in the study areas. I have made no attempt at a generalised reclassification of Atlantic Iron Age settlement as a whole, as I would argue that it is at a local scale that a meaningful understanding of the archaeology period is likely to be found.

Part 2

The Study Areas

Chapter Six

An Introduction to the Study Areas

6.1. Introduction

This thesis is concerned with a discussion of the Iron Age archaeology of what I have termed 'Northern Scotland'. I have, however, been deliberately selective in the area in which I have carried out the fieldwork presented in the following chapters. In part, this process of selection was adopted in response to logistical considerations. It was my aim from the outset to visit all of the areas discussed in any detail, rather than to rely on published accounts of sites and landscapes alone. With this aim in mind, it was immediately obvious that it would be impossible to examine the landscapes of the entire northern Highlands, and consequently that the project would have to be confined to a restricted area. As I have explained in section 1.1, the project itself had its origins in an interest in the later Iron Age archaeology of south-east Caithness, and it therefore appeared logical to base the overall study area on this area. Furthermore, it was also apparent that the wider landscapes, of which south-east Caithness forms a part, are a coherent region which differs markedly from those adjoining it to the south and to the west.

As one moves northwards along the east coast from Brora, the coastal plain of the firthlands of Easter Ross and eastern Sutherland, which to the south is comparatively wide and fertile, becomes increasingly narrow. To the north of Helmsdale, between the Ord of Caithness and Berriedale, the uplands reach right down to the sea itself. Although travel along the coast into Caithness is now the normal route, surfaced roads were not constructed until the early nineteenth century (Watson 1989, 182). Prior to this, the uplands would have presented more of a barrier, and it is likely that in prehistory routes of movement would have been forced inland. It therefore seemed reasonable to take as the southern extent of the study area the point at which inland movement might become necessary, the major valley of the Strath of Kildonan and its southern arm Glen Loth. To the north of Glen Loth the coastal plain becomes increasingly narrow, and it disappears entirely to the north of Helmsdale, where the hills reach almost to the sea. To the north of the uplands, the landscape gradually eases into the rolling landscapes of the Caithness Plain, which make up the north-eastern corner of the Scottish mainland. There is another definite boundary between this gently undulating landscape, much of which has been cultivated since prehistory, and the more obviously 'highland' landscapes of northern Sutherland, which begin abruptly to the west of the coastal village of Reay. Again, this seemed a logical point at which the bound the area under study. The study area therefore comprises the entirety of modern Caithness, as well as those parts of eastern Sutherland which would appear to represent a continuation of its landscapes to the south. Although much of this area corresponds with modern administrative boundaries, the aim was not to rely on these, but to delimit the area under study by reference to what appeared to be a coherent series of landscapes, in order to explore the influence of

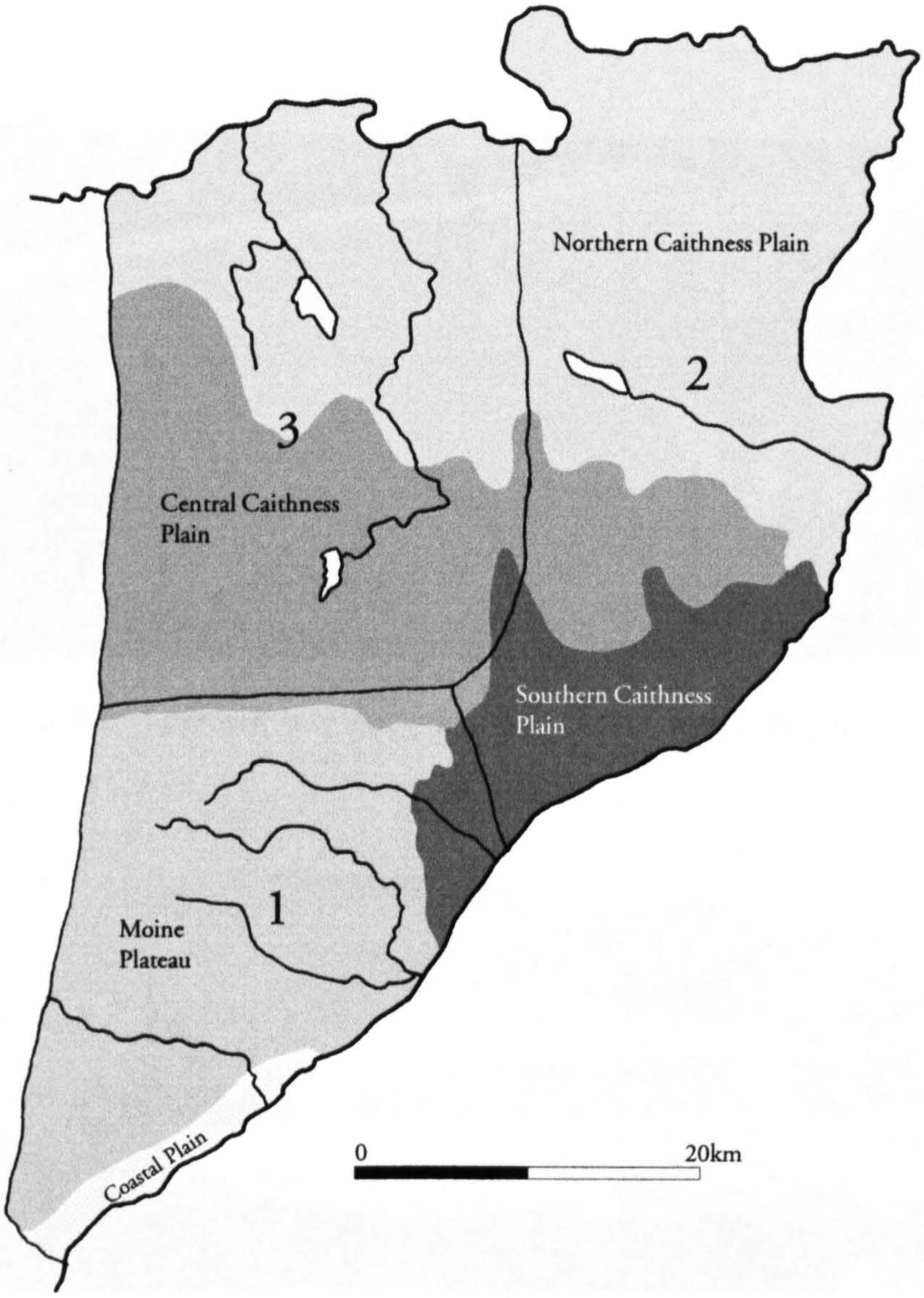
these on the character of their Iron Age archaeology. This was particularly important in sub-dividing the overall region into individual study areas, a point to which I will return in section 6.3. It should be noted here that the tern *Northern Scotland* in subsequent chapters will refer to the land area described above, rather than to the north mainland in general.

6.2. The Physical Landscape of Northern Scotland

6.2.1. Landscapes and Topography

There are two main landform regions in Northern Scotland, as defined for the purpose of this thesis (Map 6.1). By far the most extensive of these is the Caithness Plain, which comprises all of the county bar its south-eastern corner. This is a gently undulating table-land, overlying sedimentary rocks of the Old Red Sandstone (O.R.S.) series (Omand 1989, 17), which marine erosion has cut into a coastline comprising a series of spectacular cliffs rising to 60m. Futty and Dry (1977) divide the Caithness Plain into three areas, the Northern, Central and Southern Plains. All are comparatively low-lying (Plate 6.1), the landscape seldom rising above 200m above OD, but there are considerable differences in the character of the landscapes which they contain. Aside from extensive deposits of peat in its north-east corner and on the headland of Dunnet Head, much of the Northern Plain is covered by glacial tills, and it contains the majority of the modern agricultural land in Caithness. The Southern Plain also contains areas of arable land, especially at the coast and along some of the river valleys stretching inland to

Plate 6.1 : The undulating landscape of the Caithness Plain, from Ben Dorrery.



Map 6.1 : Landform regions in Northern Scotland & study areas (1 -3)

the east. It is, however, more dissected than the Northern Plain, with steep-sided straths carrying peaty rivers to the Moray Firth. On the flanks of these rivers there are considerable areas of marginal upland. The Central Plain presents a strong contrast to its neighbours, in that it is almost entirely peat-covered. There is little modern agriculture here, although there are a few restricted areas of improved land, for example around Westerdale and Dalemore, and in the Camster area (Plate 6.2). To the west, its peat bogs merge with the waterlogged

Plate 6.2 : Improved land along the River Thurso, near Dalemore.

Plate 6.3 : The hills of south east Caithness from the N, from left to right Scaraben, Smean, Morven & Maiden Pap.

Flow Country at the border between Caithness and Sutherland. The landscapes of the Caithness Plain are generally low-lying, with broad horizons and unrestricted views. There are, however, islands of upland at Ben Dorrery to the west, and in the Yarrows and Watenan area to the south east.

Study Areas 2 and 3 lie entirely within the Caithness Plain, although they are cross-cut its sub-divisions to different degrees, and therefore contain a different range of modern landscapes (section 6.3). Study Area 1, however, contains only small sections of the Southern and Central Caithness Plains, and lies largely within a second major landform region, the

Moine Plateau. This area of evenly weathered rock makes up much of Sutherland, including the entirety of its boundary with Caithness, and is characterised by wide expanses of peat and heather moorland. It is deeply dissected by river valleys, such as the Strath of Kildonan and the Langwell and Berriedale Waters. Much of Study Area 1 is also taken up by a range of hills which straddle the border between Caithness and Sutherland. To the south, the hills comprise largely intrusive granites (Ross 1982), which have weathered to form chiefly rounded summits (Ross *et al.* 1982), flanking The Strath of Kildonan and the south side of the Langwell Valley. To the north, the high ground which separates the Berriedale and Langwell Valleys comprises the more angular conglomerates of Morven and Smean, and the quartzite capped ridge of Scaraben, which together form an unmistakable skyline, visible from many places within the flat lands of the Caithness plain (Plate 6.3).

6.2.2. Past landscapes

Although the chronology of the Iron Age in Northern Scotland is not well developed, the range of sites and monuments discussed here broadly date to a period between the late second to early first-millennia BC and the mid-first millennium AD. The earlier part of this range, and especially the one or two centuries after 1000BC, has traditionally been presented as a period during which there was a climatic decline, involving an overall fall in temperature and increasingly wet conditions (Lamb 1981, 55, Turner 1981, 250). This deterioration in climate would appear to coincide with the abandonment of agricultural settlement in areas which would appear to have been marginal ever since (Cowie & Shepherd 1997, 166). Where sufficient evidence is available, this suggests that peat was beginning to cover former arable land over large areas of Atlantic Scotland during the later Bronze Age (Barrett *et al.* 1976, Barber & Brown 1984, Crone 1993), and in the past the relationship between peat growth and abandonment has been portrayed as a causal one (cf. Fairhurst & Taylor 1971). More recently, however, it has been appreciated that the relationship between environmental change and changing patterns of settlement is likely to have been complex, and that monocausal explanations are unlikely to account satisfactorily for the totality of the evidence (Cowie & Shepherd *ibid.*). Indeed, it now seems possible that climatic variations since 7000 BP have been relatively minor (Whittington & Edwards 1997, 14). There is at least one instance within the study areas presented here where abandonment demonstrably followed a disastrous natural event (Barclay 1985). Visits to early field systems also indicate that many became buried by peat encroachment after their abandonment. However, at Kilphedir, the abandonment of one of the early structures seems to have been directly followed by a re-colonisation by scrub vegetation, rather than the beginnings of peat growth (Fairhurst & Taylor 1971).

It seems likely that by the earlier centuries of the first millennium BC throughout Atlantic Scotland there was a shift away from open, unenclosed settlement, much of which was situated on marginal uplands, towards enclosed agricultural landscapes concentrated around the most productive land. Although it is unclear whether this change was predominantly the result of social or environmental processes (Armit & Ralston 1997, 193), I would argue that in many ways this is a moot point. Thomas (1990, 6) has argued that *all archaeology is cultural archaeology*, and that therefore that we cannot hope to understand changes in human settlement without first attempting to understand the processes through which the natural landscape becomes a cultural artefact. In the context of this discussion, whether or not climatic changes had an influence on the area available for agriculture towards the end of the Bronze Age, a primary concern of the archaeologist should be to attempt to understand the interpretative social actions through which people both had a part in creating and making sense of the changes in the landscapes in which they lived.

This last point is an important one in our present context, as knowledge of the environmental history of the study areas discussed here is not well developed, and makes little contribution to an overall understanding of the situation across Atlantic Scotland. At the time of writing, the results of only three separate environmental investigations were available in published form. On the basis of pollen diagrams from three sites in Caithness Durno (1958) suggested that a general growth of blanket peat had begun by at least the fourth millennium BC. The cores from which these samples were obtained lack radiocarbon dates, and for this reason Peglar (1979, 260) was unable to correlate a radiocarbon dated diagram from the Loch of Winless, in the Killimster area between Loch Watten and Sinclair's Bay, with Durno's results. Nonetheless, the two pollen diagrams are not contradictory, and Peglar suggests that Caithness has always been the least forested area of mainland Britain (*ibid.*, 261). It also appears that peat growth began well before the abandonment of the uplands of Caithness during the later Bronze Age. Peglar's results also revealed no conclusive human effect on the environment until around 2500 BP. However, samples from nearby Aukhorn Peat mounds also failed to identify agricultural activity in the area, which is clearly demonstrated by archaeological evidence. After 2500 BP, the pollen evidence suggests the presence of a mixed pastoral and arable economy. Very low amounts of tree pollen were also found in a core taken from a peat mound at Aukhorn, situated to the north east of the Loch of Winless, within marginal land to the north of Sinclair's Bay. Here, peat formation is likely to have begun as early as 8000 bp, and may have been accompanied by extensive burning (Robinson 1987). This suggests that human intervention may have been partly responsible for the initiation of peat growth. It may be significant that pollen derived from agricultural activity forms only a small proportion of the sample from Aukhorn (Robinson & Mercer

(forthcoming), 15) despite good archaeological evidence for cultivation at least from the mid- to late-first millennium AD in the vicinity of nearby Freswick Links (Morris *et al.* 1995). This suggests that a small domesticated component in the other samples discussed here may not necessarily indicate a dearth of contemporary agricultural practice.

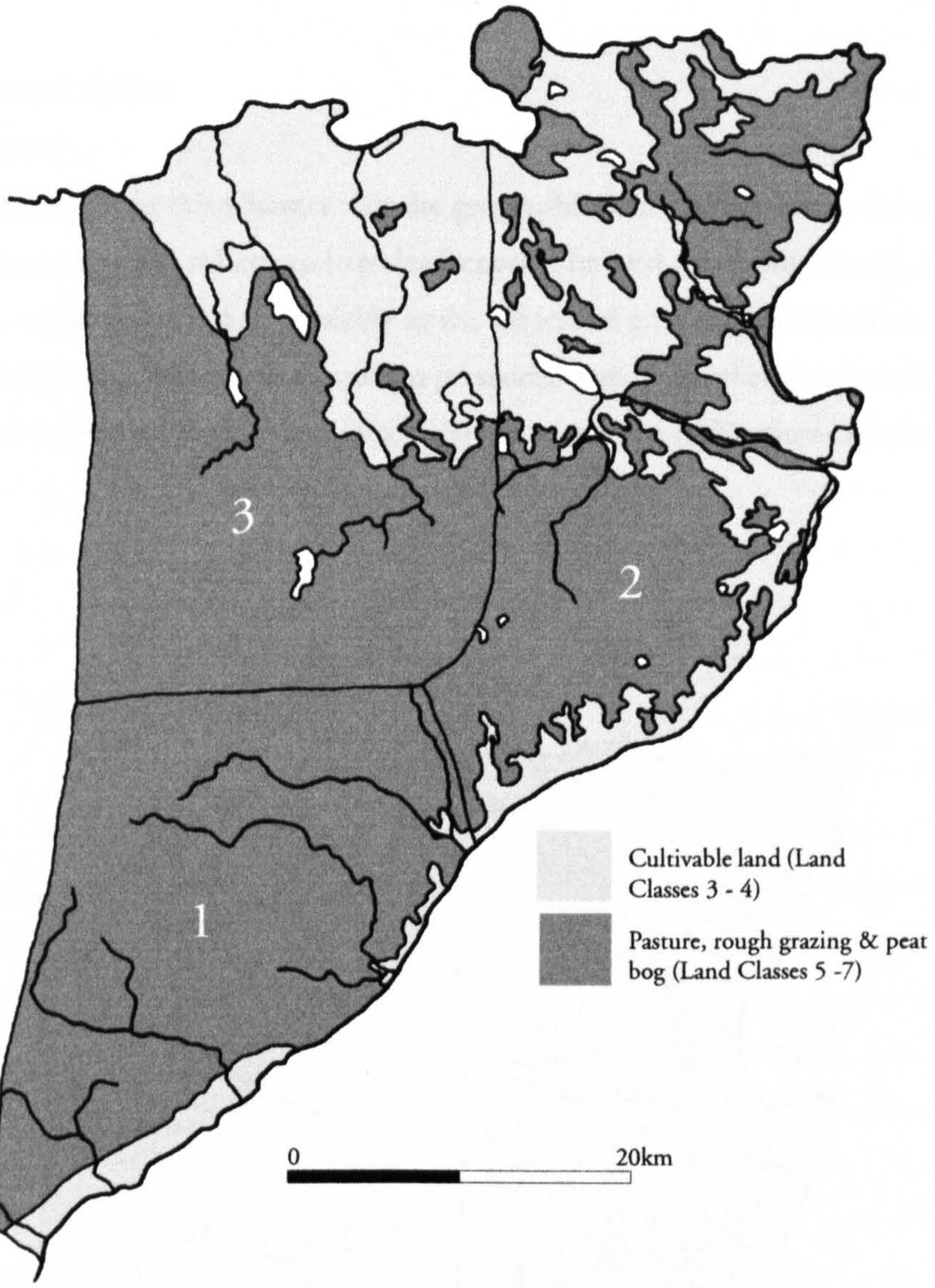
The pollen cores discussed above account for the 'off-site' component of the environmental record within the study areas (Edwards & Ralston 1997c, 256). There are also a small number of excavated sites at which relevant evidence has survived. These will be discussed in detail within the relevant local study areas, but a brief account would be useful here. Excavations both in the Strath of Kildonan (Fairhurst & Taylor 1971, Barclay 1985), to the south of the area discussed in this thesis, and on the north coast of Caithness (Mercer 1996), have demonstrated that climatic conditions allowed agriculture during the early- to mid-first millennium BC. Although agricultural practice on these sites has been dated to after the suggested climatic deterioration, they are all situated on more favourable land in sheltered locations, and it remains a possibility that cultivation became impossible in higher and more exposed areas around this time. Again, I would be wary of the assumption of a causal relationship between climatic deterioration and the abandonment of unenclosed, upland landscapes. Although cultivation may very well have become difficult, or even impossible in some areas, this change would have to be accounted for socially by those who were forced to cope with it. Indeed, a reduction in the area available for agriculture may have been to the advantage of groups or individuals with established rights of access to land which remained cultivable. Although environmental changes in the later-second millennium BC have been presented in catastrophic terms (Burgess 1989), this period appears to have been characterised by the emergence of enclosed agricultural landscapes across some areas of northern Britain (Cowie & Shepherd 1997, 166), which hardly seems indicative of the aftermath of an environmental disaster. This broad pattern of change appears to be identifiable within Northern Scotland, and I will return to this point in detail in Chapters 7 – 9. Here, I will suggest that its real importance lies in the social significance of changing agricultural practice (see also Chapter 3).

Indirect evidence of cereal agriculture was recovered from a remarkable series of broch excavations carried out in eastern Caithness by Tress Barry (Anderson 1901). The artefacts recovered included both rotary and saddle querns, twelve examples of the former coming from the Keiss Road broch alone (*ibid.* 138), in addition to smaller rubbing and grinding stones. Keiss Road broch also yielded a small amount of charred grain, as did earlier excavations by Sinclair at Dunbeath, where burnt grain recorded by Anderson (1890, 146) as bere and oats was found. While this information suggests that the brochs were set within an agricultural landscape, only in the case of the more recent excavations at Crosskirk have the botanical

remains been subjected to systematic analysis (Dickson & Dickson 1984). Here, six-row barley was clearly grown as a crop, and possibly also oats. It is also possible that flax was cultivated. In general, there is no evidence to contradict Swanson's (1988) argument that the brochs formed an integral part of contemporary agricultural landscapes. Evidence for cultivation during the later Iron Age within the study areas is scarce. However, the excavations at both the Wag of Forse (see Appendix 1) and Langwell (Curle 1912) both recovered a number of querns, one of which was built into one of the later structures at Forse. More recently, excavations at Freswick Links (Morris et al. 1995) have revealed evidence of cultivation, including possible enclosures, which has been radiocarbon dated to the mid- to late-first millennium AD.

6.2.3. The Modern Agricultural Landscape

There are considerable differences in the areas of land which are now suitable for cultivation within the three study areas (Map 6.2). By far the most extensive agricultural area lies within the northern Caithness Plain, where tills cover a wide belt of land between Wick and Thurso (Futty & Dry 1977, 5). Most of the larger modern farms are located in this area (Donald 1972), and the landscape is, in the main, set out in a regular pattern of rectangular fields. Many of these are still divided by traditional boundaries formed from upright flagstones. Although Caithness was, in the past, the most important area of the Highlands for grain production (Miller 1989, 100), much of land is now given over to pasture and the production of animal foodstuffs. However, the comparative intensity of agricultural practice in this northern part of the area discussed in this thesis will have had a significant effect on the survival of later prehistoric archaeology. Large areas of this agricultural land fall within Study Areas 2 and 3, and the effects of recent agricultural practice on the survival of Iron Age monuments here will be discussed in detail in Chapters 8 and 9. The Central Caithness Plain, comprises the southern parts of Study Areas 2 and 3, and part of the northern and western area of Study Area 1. The landscape here is largely one of blanket peat, draining into the Wick River to the east and the Thurso River to the north. There has been no large scale agriculture here, although there are a few scattered crofts in areas where the peat cover is reduced. Some land has also been reclaimed for agriculture, for example around Dalemore to the south of Westerdale and in the Camster and Achairn area (Department of Agriculture & Fisheries for Scotland 1968, 59), although much of this has now been abandoned or given over to stock grazing. To the south of the area discussed in this thesis, within the Southern Caithness Plain and the Moine Plateau, there is relatively little drift geology, other than areas of till in some of the valleys and in the area around Lybster on the east coast (Futty & Dry *ibid.*). Since the clearances of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, cultivation has



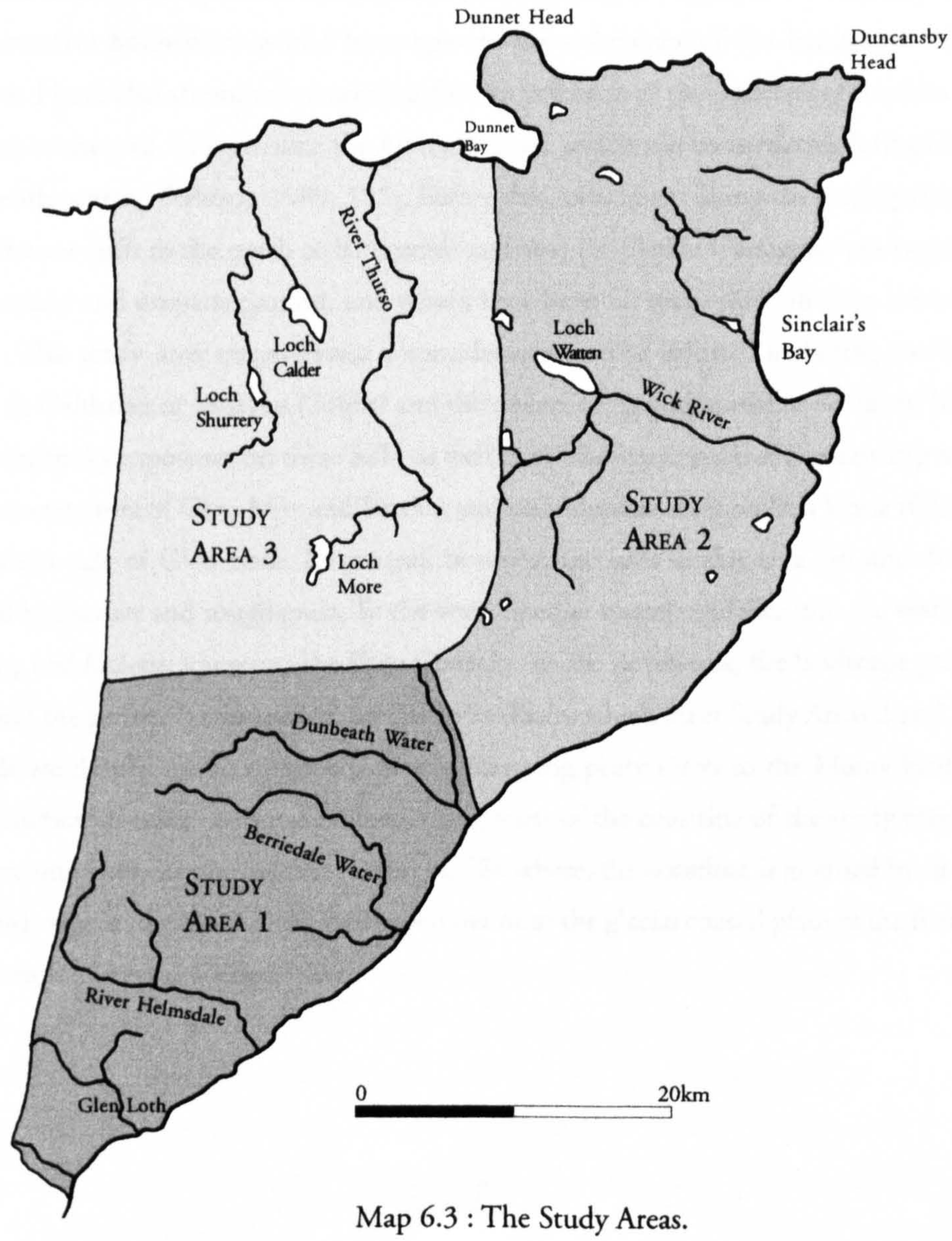
Map 6.2 : General distribution of cultivable land within the study areas (after Futty & Dry 1977, Fig 26).

been restricted to small farms and crofts along the flatter coastal fringe, and most of the straths have been abandoned. The uplands are given over largely to sheep grazing, and to sporting estates in the south of the area around Dunbeath and Berriedale. Agriculture to the south east of Study Area 1 is limited to the narrow coastal plain between Brora and Helmsdale. Much of Study Area 1 has therefore been uncultivated in recent history, and it might be expected that this will have created a positive bias in the survival of prehistoric sites and monuments. Indeed, differences in agricultural practice across the area studied as a whole will have affected the extent and nature of the archaeological resource available for study. This will be considered in more detail in Chapters 7 – 9.

6.3. The Study Areas

6.3.1. Rationale

I have argued thus far in this Chapter that the geographical area which forms the subject of this thesis has a measure of coherence to its landscapes. The land area represented is, however, very large. It would prove rather unwieldy as the subject of a unitary examination, both in terms of fieldwork and the written discussion presented here. It has therefore been necessary to define three individual Study Areas (Map 6.3). As in the case of Northern Scotland itself,



Map 6.3 : The Study Areas.

I have attempted to define these sub-divisions on the basis of natural features, rather than using modern administrative boundaries. This seemed to offer the best hope of writing an account of relevance to the influence of these landscapes on their respective archaeological resources in the past. The study areas are described in detail in the following sections.

6.3.2. Study Area 1 : South East Caithness and Eastern Sutherland

South east Caithness and Eastern Sutherland is defined as the area between the outflow of the Kintradwell Burn into the Moray Firth in the south-west, and the Burn of Houstry and its junction with the Dunbeath Water in the north-east. Inland, its western boundary is defined by the uplands to the west of Glen Loth and the Strath of Kildonan as far north as Upper Suisgill. This area includes parts of both Sutherland and Caithness, and was chosen for its likely relevance to an exploration of archaeological landscapes. Adherence to arbitrary modern administrative boundaries would have ignored the coherence of the landscapes which it encloses. I have also attempted to account for the influence of the presence of modern routes of access to the area. In particular, the A9 trunk road, which was constructed during the early nineteenth century (Watson 1989, 182). Before this, movement along the coast, particularly along the sea-cliffs to the north of Helmsdale and over the Ord of Caithness, was largely over rough tracks and unmade ground, and would have been far more difficult than it is today.

The study area encompasses a considerable area of upland, including the highest points in Caithness at Morven (706m) and the quartzite capped massif of Scaraben (626m). There are rocky exposures on these hills, as well as on the lower peak of Maiden Pap and the conglomerate tors of Càrn Mór and Smean, and considerable cliffs on Ben Uarie (623m) on the eastern side of Glen Loth. In general, however, the hills in this area are rounded, and cloaked in heather and rough grass. To the west, heather moorland fades into the vast area of peat bog and lochans known as the Flow Country. To the north-east, the landscape gradually eases into the gentler landscapes of the Caithness Plain, which form Study Areas 2 and 3. The uplands are deeply cut by Glens and Straths, carrying peaty rivers to the Moray Firth, into which numerous minor tributaries flow. Along most of the coastline of the study area, these river systems form the chief access to the sea. Elsewhere, the coastline is guarded by sheer sea cliffs, although to the south it begins to open out onto the glacial coastal plain of the firthlands of eastern Sutherland (Gillen 1986).

6.3.3. Study Area 2 : North East Caithness

North East Caithness was selected primarily with regard to its specific archaeology, as opposed to modern administrative boundaries. It therefore includes parts of the Caithness parishes of Latheron, Wick, Canisbay, Dunnet, Olrig, Bower and Watten. The most important archaeological resource is a series of excavated broch sites along the east coast, in addition to prehistoric landscapes around the lochs of Yarrows and Watenan, and in the Camster area. All of these form local case studies in Chapter 8.

The study area is situated entirely within the undulating landscapes of the Caithness Plain, and contains the major eastward flowing river system in Caithness, the Wick River. For the most part, the cultivated land is now given over to arable on soils derived from glacial tills, and enclosed grazing for sheep and cattle. There are extensive peat deposits in the north-eastern corner of the area, as well as an area of raised moorland and blanket peat at Dunnet Head (Futty and Dry 1977, 5). Generally, however, this landscape is wide and spacious, higher points within it commanding views over a green and gently rolling tableland. Towards the south, however, are important areas of upland, rising to 212m AOD at the Hill of Yarrows and 287m at Ben-a-chielt, within which the traces of past activity have not been subject to the destructive effect of modern agriculture. The southern part of the area is also more dissected than the north, with deep, steep-sided river valleys (*ibid.*). Here also are the outer reaches of the vast area of blanket peat and small lochans, known as the Flow Country, which makes up much of central Caithness and Sutherland. The eastern and northern coastline of the area includes the open and shallow Dunnet, Freswick and Sinclair's Bays, with considerable areas of wind-blown shell sand deposits (*ibid.*), but generally the coastal landscape is one of vertical rock cliffs with very limited access to the sea.

6.3.4. Study Area 3 : North West Caithness

North West Caithness takes as its eastern border the low range of hills, including the Hill of Olrig and Sordale and Spittal Hills, which divide the River Thurso from Loch Watten and the Wick River. It encompasses the major north flowing river systems in Caithness, the River Thurso and the Forss Water, as well as numerous smaller tributaries which feed them. The area also includes major inland bodies of water, Lochs Calder and Shurrery. Its western boundary comprises a range of low, rocky hills and lochan-strewn moorland which form a natural boundary between Caithness and Sutherland, and to the south it is bounded by the Flows of central Caithness, which separate it from Study Area 1. Like Study Area 2, most of the area lies within the low, undulating Northern Caithness Plain (Futty & Dry 1977, Figure 14), and its northern and eastern regions enclose perhaps the most intensively farmed landscapes of the northern mainland. Here, modern land-use involves both arable farming

and livestock husbandry, within a regular pattern of artificially drained rectangular fields, which here and there retain their traditional flagstone fences (Donald 1972). It is likely that much of this arable land has been reclaimed from blanket peat (Futty & Dry 1977, 33), and straightened and canalised streams testify to the continuance of this practice in recent times. The presence of a large number of broch sites within these landscapes suggests, however, that much of the area has been in cultivation since prehistory (Swanson 1988, Chapter 5).

Although much of the study area has been cultivated in recent times, there are also significant areas of upland to the south, where the prominent hills of Beinn Dorrery, Ben Freiceadain and Beinn nam Bad Mór represent the boundary with the moorland and peat bogs of the Central Caithness Plain. Similarly, upland landscapes are found around the lower hills of Creag Leathan and Beinn Ràtha, which represent the eastern extent of the mountainous landscapes of Sutherland. The Pentland Firth coastline of the area is predominantly rocky, with cliffs rising vertically to more than 30m, although this is broken by the sandy expanses of Murkle, Thurso and Sandside Bays.

6.4. The Structure of Chapters 7 - 9

Chapters 7 – 9, which form the remainder of Part 2 of this thesis, each contain an account of one of the three Study Areas. In turn, these chapters are broken into two main sections, which reflect the nature of the approach taken to the identified archaeological resources of the Study Areas. The research project discussed in this thesis has two main aims (section 1.2), to identify the settlement archaeology of the Iron Age within the study areas, and to pursue an interpretative approach to this within the context of its local landscapes, through two main themes. The first main section of each of the three chapters (sections 7.2, 8.2 & 9.2) therefore contains a series of tables identifying the Iron Age archaeology of the study area, according to the classifications outlined in section 5.3. These are accompanied by a general discussion of each of the three site classes, together with an assessment of the effect of recent practices on the nature and extent of the known archaeological resource. It was, however, recognised early in the research project that this kind of generalising account would be inadequate for the task of approaching the way in which these sites were incorporated into routine practice at a local scale, and in some cases might even obscure evidence of such localised practices. It became apparent that the best way to accomplish such an interpretative archaeology would be to visit as many of the identified sites as possible. This thesis contains details of almost 500 individual sites, however, and it would be beyond the scope of a project such as this to visit each of these in the field. It was clear that to adopt a sampling approach to this field resource in general, whether random or based on the perceived qualities of individual sites, would not be consistent with the aims of the research project. In order to achieve my

stated goal of exploring both the immediate landscape context of individual monuments, and the ways in which they might relate to surviving cultural landscapes of Iron Age date, I decided that the most productive approach was to select local case studies of restricted area, on the basis of the potential survival of later prehistoric archaeology. Within these, an attempt would be made, as far as was possible, to visit all of the landscapes identified. In some areas, individual sites were found to have been destroyed, and sometimes whole areas of the landscape were found to have been altered or made inaccessible by recent practices. In such cases, I was forced to rely on existing documentation held by the NMRS and within other printed sources. However, within each local study area, the great majority of the landscapes discussed were explored in detail, and the sites within them visited and recorded. Three local case studies were selected within each study area, in an attempt to explore the variety of landscapes contained therein and the influence of this on the archaeology of the Iron Age. In order to reflect this research process, the second major section of each study area chapter (sections 7.3, 8.3 & 9.3) contains a full discussion of each of the three local case study areas. I have presented a considerable amount of empirical information in these sections, in order to counter as far as possible the loss of fine detail which would result from generalisation. In this way, I have tried to show how wider social formations might result from localised practices.

Chapter Seven

Study Area 1

South East Caithness and Eastern Sutherland

7.1. Introduction

The area of landscape discussed in this Chapter was selected because it forms a coherent region, which differs significantly from the areas which it borders on all sides (section 6.3.2). The dissected, upland nature of the landscapes offered the possibility of a distinctive later prehistoric settlement archaeology, which might be observable through a study of monuments in the field. It seemed likely that the effects of modern land-use would differ markedly from those within the agricultural landscapes of north-east Caithness (see Chapter 8), and have contributed to the archaeological character of the area. Although the volume of published archaeological work is small in comparison to Study Area 2, there have been important contributions to the study of mid- to late first millennium BC settlement at Kilphedir (Fairhurst & Taylor 1971) and Upper Suisgill (Barclay 1985), in addition to one of only two excavated aisled buildings at Langwell (Curle 1912). There is also a major resource of unexcavated field monuments, which have been the subject of sporadic field survey (e.g. RCAHMS 1993) since the compilation of the RCAHMS Inventories during the early years of this century (RCAHMS 1911a, 1911b). Indeed, it was the latter which offered the greatest potential, and this chapter is chiefly concerned with an examination of field monuments within their local contexts, with the ultimate aim of understanding the changes in these cultural landscapes over time.

7.2. Landscapes and Domestic Architecture: An Overview of South East Caithness and Eastern Sutherland in the Iron Age

7.2.1. Hut-circles

In stark contrast to the two other study areas, a low intensity of modern agricultural practice in the uplands has contributed to the survival of many of the more ephemeral remains of prehistoric settlement, including numerous hut-circle settlements, many associated with traces of contemporary cultivation (Table 7.1, Map 7.1).

There are a total of 176 hut-circle settlements within the study area, comprising 493 individual structures (Table 7.1). Given the great extent and variety of this evidence, generalisations based on statistical information alone can serve only as a broad background for local studies, which form the second part of this chapter. However, the large number of hut-circle sites present within this study area, in contrast to the sparse distributions elsewhere,

(Pages 99 - 105) Table 7.1: Study Area 1, hut-circle settlements. The heading 'GROUP' refers to the hut-circle classes introduced in section 5.3.1.

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Height AOD (m)	No. Structures	Max Diam. (m)	Min. Diam. (m)	Group	Comments
1	Ach an Fhionnfhuaraidh 1	NC92SW 07/37	NC 9040 2380	140	2	12.0	8.0	3	Associated with lynchets and field banks, disturbed by post-medieval agriculture. 07 is associated with an earth house.
2	Ach an Fhionnfhuaraidh 2	NC92SW 35	NC 9061 2394	150	1	10.0		3	Associated with clearance cairns, lynchets and field banks. Cairns interspersed within field system.
3	Ach an Fhionnfhuaraidh 3	NC92SW 14/36	NC 9015 2420	130	6	12.0	5.5	3	Associated with clearance cairns, lynchets and field banks. Structure 14 'B' appears to show 2 phases of construction.
4	Achinnearin	NC92SW 16	NC 9030 2328	130	1	5.5		1	No associated cultivation, although the area has been disturbed by post-medieval agriculture, and a nearby earth-house (NC92SW 15) suggests former settlement complexity.
5	Achnaclyth 1	ND03SE 08	ND 0951 3382	140	1	7.5		1	No associated cultivation, although the area is disturbed by post-medieval agriculture.
6	Achnaclyth 2	ND03SE 09	ND 0950 3361	140	1	8.0		1	No associated cultivation.
7	Achnaclyth 3	ND03SE 16	ND 0969 3368	140	1	7.8		1	No associated cultivation.
8	Achnagoul	ND13SE 50	ND 1640 3290	130	2	10.5	8.0	2	Associated with a small group of clearance cairns.
9	Allt a'Choire Mhoir 1	NC91NW 01/06/16/24/25/26	NC 9155 1850	140	18	12.5	7.5	3	Complex, presumably multi-period settlement, extending along hill-spur. Associated with considerable area (35 hectares) of cultivation traces, comprising clearance cairns and boulder walls, although these are much disturbed by post-medieval activity.
10	Allt a'Choire Mhoir 2	NC91NW 05	NC 9171 1783	190	1	8.5		2	Associated with clearance cairns, defining plots average size 35 x 20m.
11	Allt a'Chriosduidhe 1	ND02SE 09	ND 0985 2440	150	2	9.0	5.0	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
12	Allt a'Chriosduidhe 2	ND02SE 08/25	ND 0990 2475	130	2	12.6	8.0	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns. 08 is massively built.
13	Allt a'Chriosduidhe 3	ND02SE 26	ND 0980 2486	130	1	12.5		1	No associated cultivation. Structure is massively built.
14	Allt Alla-choire	NC92NW 09	NC 9394 2556	220	1	8.0		1	No associated cultivation
15	Allt an t-Salainn	NC90NW 01/02	NC 9090 0755	90	6	11.0	6.5	3	Associated with field system comprising clearance cairns and lynchets, max. plot size 40 x 30m
16	Allt Bad a'Choilich 1	ND02SE 22	ND 0960 2390	150	2	10.5	9.0	1	No associated cultivation, although area is heavily overgrown with peat and heather. Associated with a sub-rectangular structure of similar construction.
17	Allt Bad a'Choilich 2	ND02SE 23	ND 0960 2420	150	3	9.0	8.0	1	No associated cultivation, although area is heavily overgrown with peat and heather.
18	Allt Bad an Fheoir	NC82SE 29	NC 8870 2280	210	1	11.8		1	No associated cultivation.
19	Allt Bad na Muislich 1	ND01NW 42	ND 0187 1933	150	1	10.0		3	Conjoined enclosure, associated with lynchet.
20	Allt Bad na Muislich 2	ND01NW 43	ND 0212 1949	150	1	12.0		3	Associated with clearance cairns, occasional lynchets and a possible field bank.

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Height AOD (m)	No. Structures	Max Diam. (m)	Min. Diam. (m)	Group	Comments
21	Allt Bad Ra'fin	NC92NW 01	NC 9000 2650	140	7	10.5	6.7	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns. Structure 'F' is associated with a souterrain, and is abutted by a sub-rectangular building which appears to overlie an earlier circular structure.
22	Allt Breac 1	NC91NE 70	NC 9514 1988	120	1	11.0		3	Associated with clearance cairns and lynchets.
23	Allt Breac 2	NC91NE 08/56/58/69	NC 9615 1905	100	10	11.0	8.0	2	Straggling settlement along 100m contour on W side of burn, associated with clearance cairns. Post-medieval agriculture encroaches on part of cultivated area.
24	Allt Breac 3	NC91NE 71	NC 9559 1988	90	1	11.0		1	No associated cultivation.
25	Allt Breac 4	NC92SE 15	NC 9552 2025	130	1	10.0		1	No associated cultivation, although surrounding area is stone-free.
26	Allt Breac 5	NC92SE 12	NC 9549 2004	110	1	7.0		1	No associated cultivation, although surrounding area is stone-free.
27	Allt Breac 6	NC92SE 11/13 & NC92SW 32	NC 9500 2020	120	7	13.0	8.5	2	Associated with clearance cairns. Area disturbed by post-medieval agriculture.
28	Allt Choll	NC90NW 26	NC 9339 0922	80	1	10.0		2	Associated with clearance cairns.
29	Allt Clais Raoin 1	ND13SW 37	ND 1330 3140	110	1				Possible hut-circle only.
30	Allt Clais Raoin 1	ND13SW 36	ND 1340 3150	90	1	8.0		2	Associated with a small group of clearance cairns.
31	Allt Coire Riabhaich	ND02NW 13	ND 0220 2920	230	4	8.5	7.0	1	No visible associated cultivation, although densely vegetated, boggy ground would make identification difficult.
32	Allt Conachreag		ND 0955 3522	160	2	9.0	8.0	1	No associated cultivation. Larger structure has a small, circular 'annexe'.
33	Allt Dail Bhaich	NC82SE 14	NC 8950 2100	150	3	9.0	7.0	2	Associated with clearance cairns.
34	Allt Dalhelemy	NC91NW 13	NC 9373 1938	130	1	9.0		2	Associated with clearance cairns.
35	Allt na Beiste	NC92NW 02	NC 9050 2710	150	6	10.0	4.0	3	Associated with scattered clearance cairns, cultivation terraces and short lengths of field bank.
36	Allt na h-Airbhe 1	NC91NW 29	NC 9070 1850	140	5	7.0	5.5	3	Associated with clearance cairns and lynchets, average plot size 30 x 20m.
37	Allt na h-Airbhe 2	NC91NW 27	NC 9042 1865	120	1	10.0		1	No associated cultivation evidence.
38	Allt na Larach Ruaidhe	ND01NW 27	ND 0294 1934	200	1	9.5		1	No associated cultivation.
39	Allt nan Tullachan	NC91NW 10	NC 9457 1532	220	2	12.0	11.5	2	Associated with clearance cairns.
40	Allt Tarsuinn 1	NC92SE 09	NC 9725 2149	170	1	8.0		1	No associated cultivation.
41	Allt Tarsuinn 2	NC92SE 14	NC 9724 2041	130	1	7.0		2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
42	Allt Tarsuinn 3	NC92SE 16	NC 9700 2060	180	2	10.0	8.5	2	Associated with clearance cairns.
43	An Glut	ND12NW 05	ND 1026 2790	170	1	13.5		2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
44	Ard-Achadh	ND12NW 21	ND 1079 2590	130	1	8.0		3	Associated with numerous clearance cairns and field banks, over approx. 6 hectares.
45	Askaig 1	NC82SE 18	NC 8590 2440	170	3	9.7	8.1	1	No associated cultivation, other than stone-free area around the site.

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Height AOD (m)	No. Structures	Max Diam. (m)	Min. Diam. (m)	Group	Comments
46	Askaig 1	NC82SE 17	NC 8690 2440	170	6	11.1	9.5	3	Associated with clearance cairns and lynchets. Small enclosure abuts structure 'A'
47	Bad an Achaid	ND02SE 07	ND 0835 2392	150	1	13.0		1	No associated cultivation, although the area is much disturbed by post-medieval agriculture. Nearby is a 'figure of eight' shaped 'homestead' containing an upright stone.
48	Bad nan Glac	ND13SW 01	ND 1190 3030	170	3	14.5	7.0	1	No associated cultivation
49	Badfleugh	NC91NW 04/18	NC 9160 1920	80	8	12.0	7.0	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
50	Badiepullacher	NC91NE 01/02/04/05/ 35/52	NC 9515 1905	110	11	12.0	5.0	2	Straggling settlement along W side of burn, associated with clearance cairns. Post-medieval agriculture encroaches on part of cultivated area.
51	Badnagie	ND13SE 45	ND 1560 3210	90	3	7.4	6.5	1	No associated cultivation.
52	Balcraggie Lodge	ND13SW 02	ND 1420 3020	110	4	10.5	8.5	2	Associated with clearance cairns, although the area has been disturbed by post-medieval agriculture.
53	Balvalaich	NC91NW 12	NC 9434 1991	150	2	11.7	8.0	2	Associated with clearance cairns.
54	Beinn Dubhain 1	NC92SW 12	NC 9399 2001	190	1	11.0		2	Associated with possible clearance cairns.
55	Beinn Dubhain 2	NC92SW 29	NC 9480 2040	150	2	12.0	9.5	3	Associated with lynchets and field banks, but without clearance cairns.
56	Beinn Dubhain 3	NC92SW 31	NC 9448 2035	160	1	10.1		3	Associated with lynchets and field banks, but without clearance cairns. Inside structure are traces of a later wall.
57	Berriedale	ND12NW 02	ND 1050 2570	130	2	8.5	6.1	3	Associated with scattered clearance cairns, field walls and a small enclosure.
58	Berriedale Water	ND02NE 02	ND 0888 2940	150	2	12.8	8.5	3	Complex 'homesteads', within an area of multi-period settlement. Associated with a length of buried field wall.
59	Bouilag Hill 1	ND03SE 06/12	ND 0930 3290	190	6	11.0	6.0	3	Associated with a boulder wall, defining an enclosure.
60	Bouilag Hill 2	ND03SE 07/14	ND 0975 3285	170	3	11.0	6.5	1	No associated cultivation.
61	Brae na h-Eaglaise 1	ND02SE 28	ND 0646 2304	130	1	7.0		1	No associated cultivation.
62	Brae na h-Eaglaise 2	ND02SE 29	ND 0662 2320	140	1	6.0		2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
63	Burn of Houstry	ND13SE 43	ND 1544 3350	100	2	7.0	5.5	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
64	Caen Burn 1	ND01NW 07/08/09	ND 0125 1895	120	9	13.5	7.0	3	Settlement clustered around the Allt an Dir, structures in groups of 3 and associated with clearance cairns and lynchets.
65	Caen Burn 2	ND01NW 21	ND 0200 1900	160	3	10.0	8.0	1	No associated cultivation, although ground is stone-free.
66	Caen Burn 3	ND01NW 10	ND 0140 1830	70	5	13.5	9.5	3	Associated with clearance cairns, and well-preserved field system comprising lynchets and boulder walls, average plot size 30 x 25m.

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Height AOD (m)	No. Structures	Max Diam. (m)	Min. Diam. (m)	Group	Comments
67	Caen Burn North	ND01NW 06/29/30/31/41	ND 0105 1860	80	6	12.0	6.5	3	Straggling settlement along NW side of the Caen Burn, associated with clearance cairns and boulder field walls, plot size 20 x 20m. 06 & 29 (possible) have associated earth-houses.
68	Carradh nan Clach 1	NC91SW 24/28	NC 9389 1253	130	3	7.5	7.0	3	Associated with clearance cairns, linear clearance and boulder walls.
69	Carradh nan Clach 2	NC91SW 09	NC 9340 1270	160	3	8.5	7.0	1	No associated cultivation, although much post-medieval disturbance.
70	Clais Rath Fhinn	NC91NE 50	NC 9880 1970	80	2	10.5	10.0	2	Associated with clearance cairns.
71	Cnoc Ascaig	NC82SE 31	NC 8734 2344	210	1	8.5		2	Associated with clearance cairns.
72	Cnoc Craggie Beag	NC91NW 35	NC 9090 1800	240	1			1	
73	Cnoc Fionn 1	ND12SW 24	ND 1075 2381	100	1	16.0		2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
74	Cnoc Fionn 2	ND12SW 08	ND 1040 2350	100	3	10.5	9.0	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
75	Cnoc na Maranaich		ND 1340 3290	140	1	9.0		3	Associated with large enclosure, approx. 94m in diameter.
76	Cnoc Sheangan	ND13SE 49	ND 1644 3311	150	1	6.0		2	Associated with a small group of clearance cairns.
77	Coille Bad Mheasain	NC91SW 20/21	NC 9380 1330	160	4	9.5	6.0	3	Associated with clearance cairns, lynchets and boulder walls. Steep ground restricts possible arable area.
78	Crackaig	NC91SE 12	NC 9504 1056	20	1	12.5		1	No associated cultivation, although much post-medieval disturbance.
79	Craggan Burn	NC92SE 05	NC 9881 2073	170	1	6.0		1	No associated cultivation.
80	Craig Halligarry	NC92SW 03/25	NC 9225 2020	120	3	13.0	6.5	3	Associated with clearance cairns, occasional lynchets and field banks.
81	Creag Druim nan Rath	NC92SW 04/05	NC 9075 2260	150	9	14.0	9.0	3	Associated with clearance cairns, lynchets and field banks, average plot size 25 x 20m. Structures furthest down slope (05) appear to be associated with cairns only.
82	Creag nam Maigheach 1	NC92SE 03	NC 9600 2220	220	2	9.5	8.5	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
83	Creag nam Maigheach 2	NC92SE 04	NC 9574 2200	230	1	8.0		1	No associated cultivation.
84	Creag nam Maigheach 3	NC92SE 10	NC 9620 2250	230	5	11.0	8.0	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
85	Cuag	ND13SE 44	ND 1557 3298	100	1	7.5		2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
86	Dail-a-Bhoich	ND03SE 05	ND 0960 3320	150	4	11.5	7.5	1	No associated cultivation.
87	Druim nan Comhrag	NC92NW 04	NC 9020 2600	140	6	11.3	7.0	3	Associated with scattered clearance cairns & at least one lynchet and bank.
88	Dun Burn 1	ND02NE 06	ND 0942 2542	180	1	10.5		1	No associated cultivation.
89	Dun Burn 2	ND02NE 10	ND 0975 2552	150	1	8.5		3	Associated with clearance cairns and lynchets, but no visible plots.
90	Dun Burn 3	ND02NE 08	ND 0986 2515	90	1	9.0		1	No associated cultivation.
91	Dun Burn 4	ND12SW 23	ND 1001 2464	110	1	7.5		1	No associated cultivation, although there is a platform/annexe to E.
92	Dunbrae	ND13SE 24	ND 1509 3054	40	1	5.0		3	Associated with clearance cairns, lynchets and stone banks.
93	Eldrable	NC91NE 73	NC 9857 1818	60	1	9.0		1	No associated cultivation, although area is disturbed by post-medieval agriculture.

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Height AOD (m)	No. Structures	Max Diam. (m)	Min. Diam. (m)	Group	Comments
									'Clubbed' entrance.
94	Eldrable Burn 1	NC91NE 18/66	NC 9760 1730	170	2	11.5	11.0	2	Associated with clearance cairns.
95	Eldrable Burn 2	NC91NE 43	NC 9780 1810	100	3	10.5	6.0	3	Associated with clearance cairns, lynchets, boulder walls and field banks.
96	Feith Shalach		ND 1050 3080	210	2	5.5	5.0	3	Associated with traces of field banks.
97	Glen Sleatdale 1	NC91SW 07/19	NC 9260 1280	170	6	11.0	9.0	3	Associated with clearance cairns, lynchets and a sub-circular enclosure, one plot 20 x 10m visible.
98	Glen Sleatdale 2	NC91SW 18	NC 9255 1252	160	1	10.5		1	No associated cultivation, although smooth ground suggests some clearance.
99	Gylable Burn 1	NC91NW 31	NC 9460 1730	200	3	10.0	7.0	2	Associated with clearance cairns.
100	Gylable Burn 2	NC91NW 30	NC 9490 1760	160	4	8.5	6.5	3	Associated with clearance cairns and lynchets, average plot size 40 x 20m.
101	Halligarry Burn 1	NC82SE 07	NC 8580 2080	180	2	12.0	8.7	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns. Structure 'A' has a possible associated earth-house.
102	Halligarry Burn 2	NC82SE 10	NC 8660 2040	170	2	13.5	13.0	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
103	Halmie		ND 1170 3340	140	3	14.0	12.0	3	Associated with scattered clearance cairns and faint traces of field banks. One of structures is partially excavated.
104	Houstry		ND 1485 3494	110	2	9.0	9.0	1	No associated cultivation.
105	Kildonan Burn 1	NC92SW 27/34	NC 9175 2215	140	2	11.5	9.5	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
106	Kildonan Burn 2	NC92SW 38	NC 9140 2210	140	12	12.5	6.0	3	Associated with clearance cairns, occasional lynchets and field banks, average plot size 20 x 15m.
107	Kildonan Burn 3	NC92NW 07	NC 9319 2507	190	1	8.6		1	No associated cultivation.
108	Kilearnan Hill	NC91NW 17	NC 9340 1860	70	4	12.0	8.5	3	Associated with clearance cairns and boulder walls.
109	Kilphedir 1	NC91NE 03/25	NC 9920 1940	100	7	12.0	9.0	3	Includes five excavated hut-circles. Associated with clearance cairns, lynchets and stone banks. One structure has a possible associated earth-house.
110	Kilphedir 2 (Allt Cille Pheadair)	NC91NE 28/29/33	NC 9950 1870	100	9	12.5	5.5	3	Associated with clearance cairns, linear clearance and lynchets, over an area of c. 15 hectares. Structure 'A' has an associated earth-house.
111	Kilphedir 3 (Allt Cille Pheadair)	NC92SE 01	NC 9880 2000	160	3	12.1	10.0	3	Associated with scattered clearance cairns and field banks. Structure 'A' appears to have been re-used, and partly overlain, by a later structure.
112	Kilphedir 3 (Allt Cille Pheadair)	NC92SE 06	NC 9927 2135	180	1	8.0		1	No associated cultivation.
113	Kilphedir 4 (Allt Cille Pheadair)	NC91NE 30	NC 9920 1980	100	3	9.5	9.0	3	Associated with clearance cairns, lynchets and field banks.
114	Kilphedir 5 (Allt Cille Pheadair)	NC91NE 34	NC 9940 1970	100	2	9.0	8.5	1	No associated cultivation.
115	Kilphedir 6 (Allt Cille Pheadair)	NC91NE 07	NC 9940 1993	120	1	6.0		1	No associated cultivation, other than stone-free area around the site.

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Height AOD (m)	No. Structures	Max Diam. (m)	Min. Diam. (m)	Group	Comments
116	Kintradwell	NC90NW 16	NC 9160 0740	50	3	14.5	12.0	2	Associated with clearance cairns, possibly disturbed by post-medieval agriculture. No evident field pattern.
117	Langwell	ND02SE 06	ND 0945 2216	90	1	14.1		1	No associated cultivation, although the area has been disturbed by forestry.
118	Langwell Tulloch	ND02SE 21	ND 0977 2249	100	1	10.0		2	Associated with clearance cairns.
119	Langwell Water	ND02SW 01	ND 0344 2494	160	1	indeterminate		3	Highly disturbed site, which may represent a hut-circle in association with an earth-house. Nearby boulder enclosure may represent associated cultivation.
120	Langwell Water 1	ND02SE 27	ND 0505 2335	140	1	10.5		1	No associated cultivation, other than stone-free area around the site.
121	Langwell Water 2	ND02SE 03	ND 0560 2322	150	2	8.0		3	Hut-circle and amorphous 'homestead' associated with earth-house. Associated with apparently contemporary boulder wall.
122	Langwell Water 3	ND02SE 11	ND 0600 2310	140	3	12.0	10.0	3	2 hut-circles and 'homestead' associated with earth-house. Associated with boulder walls and terraced hillside.
123	Langwell Water 4	ND02SE 14	ND 0800 2266	110	1	9.0		2	Associated with 2 clearance cairns.
124	Learable	NC82SE 21	NC 8984 2316	80	1	5.9		1	No associated cultivation, although the area has been disturbed by post-medieval agriculture.
125	Learable Hill 1	NC82SE 13	NC 8790 2390	170	8	11.8	5.8	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
126	Learable Hill 2	NC82SE 16	NC 8890 2340	160	4	11.0	8.0	3	Associated with numerous clearance cairns, linear clearance, terraces and a banked, sub-rectangular enclosure 29 x 23m.
127	Learable Hill 3	NC82SE 12	NC 8900 2410	170	4	9.5	5.6	3	Associated with numerous clearance cairns, linear clearance and two possible field, one measured at c. 110 x100m. Structure 'D' sits within an enclosure, 17 x 12.8m.
128	Leathad Breac	ND13SW 23	ND 1100 3410	160	1				
129	Loedebest 1		ND 1380 3212	100	1	10.0		3	Associated with 60m length of boulder walling.
130	Loedebest 2	ND13SW 22	ND 1230 3170	150	3	9.5	8.0	3	Associated with clearance cairns and a 20m length of boulder wall.
131	Lonmore	NC91SW 12	NC 9370 1010	130	4	9.0	5.5	3	Associated with clearance cairns and lynchets/field banks, average plot size 25 x 20m
132	Lothbeg 1	NC91SW 05	NC 9470 1070	70	6	12.5	8.0	3	Associated with clearance cairns, lynchets and possible field banks, average visible plot size 40 x 20m
133	Lothbeg 2	NC91SW 16/26/32	NC 9450 1120	130	4	11.0	6.5	2	Associated with clearance cairns and possible boulder wall.
134	Meur Na h-Earraige	ND12NW 22	ND 1020 2860	140	2	8.0	7.0	1	No associated cultivation.
135	Millery Burn 1	ND12NW 01	ND 1050 2500	120	5	12.0	7.0	3	Associated with numerous clearance cairns and field walls. Field system continues down-slope to the east (ND12NW 09).
136	Millery Burn 2	ND12NW 03	ND 1020 2500	140	2	12.0	10.0	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
137	Minera	ND13SE 20/21	ND 1580 3450	140	3	15.0	9.8	3	Associated with scattered clearance cairns and traces of field banks. 20 is cut by a recent field wall.
138	Morven Burn	NC92NE 01	NC 9991 2716	250	1	10.0		1	No associated cultivation.

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Height AOD (m)	No. Structures	Max Diam. (m)	Min. Diam. (m)	Group	Comments
139	Navidale	ND01NW 40/45	ND 0480 1710	100	4	10.5	8.5	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
140	Oulmsdale Burn 1	NC91NE 54	NC 9515 1712	190	1	10.5		2	Associated with clearance cairns.
141	Oulmsdale Burn 2	NC91NE 16	NC 9580 1740	150	4	10.5	8.0	3	Associated with clearance cairns and lynchets, average plot size 40 x 25m. Plots less obvious at edges of system, where clearance is more scattered.
142	Oulmsdale Burn 3	NC91NE 15	NC 9610 1740	140	3	9.5	9.5	2	Associated with clearance cairns.
143	Oulmsdale Burn 4	NC91NE 17	NC 9640 1720	160	3	14.5	10.0	3	Associated with clearance cairns, lynchets and boulder walls, plot size 40 x 15m. Clearance cairns around edges of cleared ground.
144	Oulmsdale Burn 5	NC91NE 14	NC 9620 1770	110	3	11.0	5.3	3	Associated with clearance cairns, lynchets and field banks, average plot size 25 x 20m. Even density of cairns.
145	Oulmsdale Burn 6	NC91NE 13/63	NC 9700 1810	90	6	10.0	6.3	3	Associated with clearance cairns, lynchets and boulder walls, plot sizes 30 x 30m & 30 x 15m. A complex of irregular fields, some divided by lynchets, lies at NW of system.
146	Ousdale 1	ND02SE 15	ND 0773 2019	130	1	12.5		1	No associated cultivation.
147	Ousdale 2	ND02SE 16	ND 0670 2060	210	3	8.0	6.5	3	Associated with clearance cairns and field walls, although plots are not visible due to peat cover.
148	Pollroy 1		ND 0727 3335	160	1			3	Associated with boulder walls, partially buried in peat.
149	Pollroy 2		ND 0730 3255	220	2	8.0	7.5	1	No associated cultivation.
150	River Helmsdale 1	ND01NW 26	ND 0020 1800	20	3	10.3	7.0	2	Associated with clearance cairns.
151	River Helmsdale 2	ND01NW 12/14	ND 0065 1785	30	2	12.0	11.0	2	Associated with clearance cairns. Settlement mutilated by road construction.
152	Skelabosdale 1	NC92SE 07	NC 9750 2150	180	2	11.5	10.5	1	No associated cultivation.
153	Skelabosdale 2	NC92SE 08	NC 9740 2170	190	3	10.0	9.0	1	No associated cultivation.
154	The Forkin	ND02NE 07	ND 0934 2583	170	1	9.0		1	No associated cultivation.
155	Tom na h-Iolaire	NC92SW 09	NC 9160 2110	180	4	11.0	8.0	3	Associated with clearance cairns and occasional lynchets.
156	Toremore	ND13SE 46	ND 1739 3040	60	1	17.0		1	No associated cultivation, although the area is highly disturbed by post-medieval agriculture.
157	Torr Mor	NC91NW 15	NC 9210 1900	110	3	13.4	10.5	3	Associated with clearance cairns, lynchets and boulder walls, average plot size 25 x 20m.
158	Torrish 1	NC91NE 22	NC 9755 1951	140	1	12.0		2	Associated with clearance cairns.
159	Torrish 2	NC91NE 24/42/57	NC 9735 1880	60	4	14.0	8.5	3	Associated with clearance cairns, linear clearance and occasional lynchets, average plot size 25 x 20m.
160	Torrish 3	NC91NE 60	NC 9810 1910	120	3	8.0	5.0	3	Associated with clearance cairns and occasional lynchets.
161	Torrish 4	NC91NE 21	NC 9700 1900	100	5	11.0	5.5	3	Associated with clearance cairns and occasional lynchets.
162	Torrish Burn 1	NC91NE 10	NC 9654 1877	60	1	8.5		2	Associated with clearance cairns.

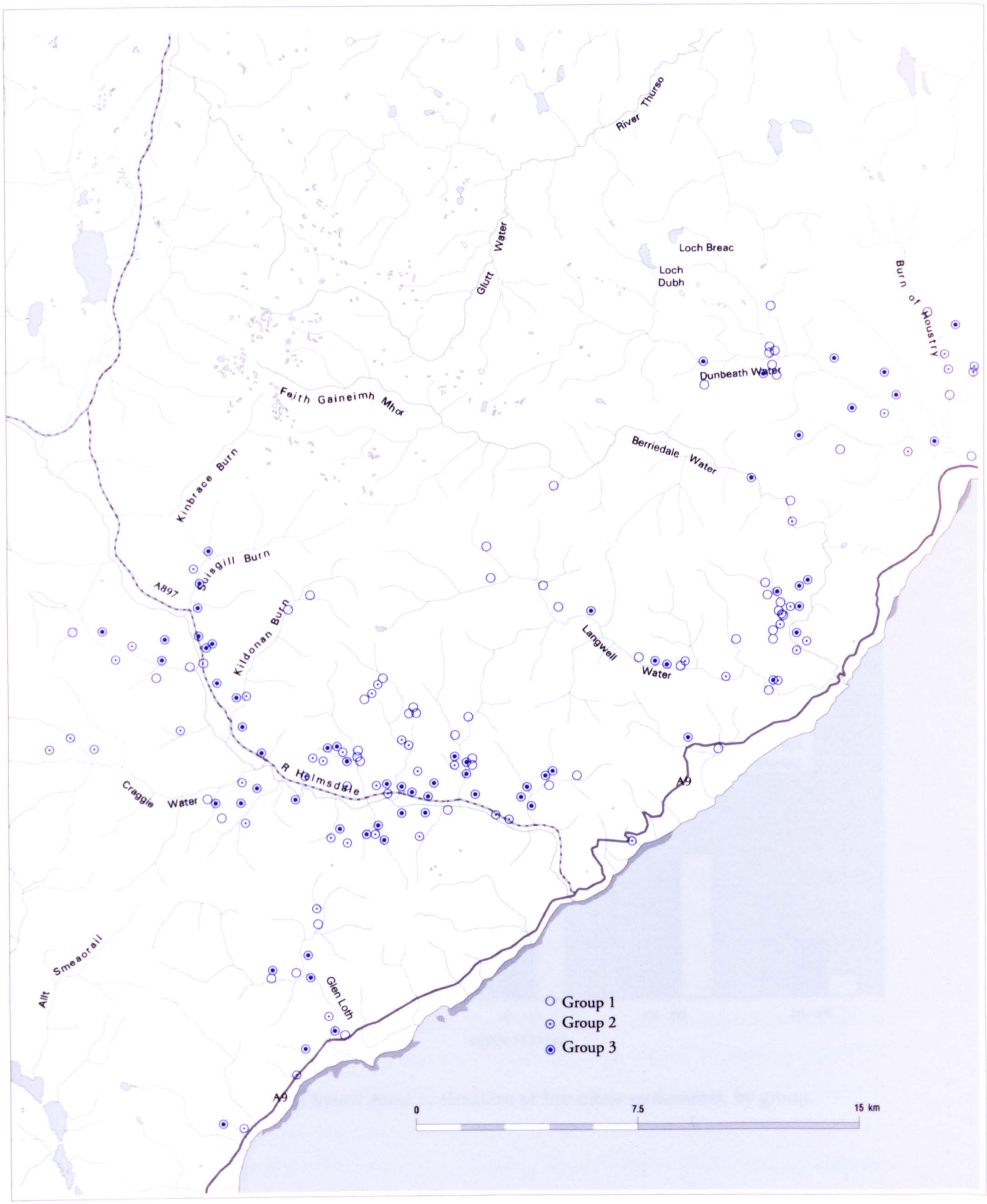
No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Height AOD (m)	No. Structures	Max Diam. (m)	Min. Diam. (m)	Group	Comments
163	Torrish Burn 2	NC91NE 11/12	NC 9650 1910	100	5	11.0	6.0	3	Associated with clearance cairns and occasional lynchets. Structure 'C' much smaller and slighter than others.
164	Torrish Burn 3	NC92SE 02	NC 9638 2271	230	1	9.5		1	No associated cultivation.
165	Torrish Lodge	NC91NE 67	NC 9790 1865	70	1	11.5		3	Associated with faint traces of boulder walls. 'Clubbed' entrance.
166	Tuarie Burn	NC82SE 15	NC 8510 2040	190	4	11.0	8.0	2	Associated with clearance cairns and linear clearance.
167	Tulach Bad a Choilich	ND12SW 06	ND 1040 2410	110	7	11.0	4.5	3	Associated with numerous clearance cairns, lynchets and field banks.
168	Turnal Rock	ND02SE 13	ND 0960 2250	90	3	13.5	7.5	3	Associated with scattered clearance cairns, lynchets and field walls.
169	Uaigh Bheag 1	NC91SW 17	NC 9410 1490	230	3	8.5	7.0	2	Associated with clearance cairns and stone-free ground.
170	Uaigh Bheag 2	NC91SW 29	NC 9414 1437	200	1	10.0		1	No associated cultivation, although much post-medieval disturbance.
171	Upper Suisgill	NC92NW 13	NC 9013 2516	140	1	9.0		3	Associated with scattered clearance cairns, lynchets and fragmentary field banks.
172	Wag 1	ND02NW 10	ND 0183 2582	200	1	9.5		1	No associated cultivation.
173	Wag 2	ND02NW 04	ND 0234 2508	190	2	8.0	6.0	1	No associated cultivation, other than stone-free area around the site.
174	Wag 3	ND02NW 03	ND 0203 2519	180	1	11.0		2	Associated with stone-free ground and a single clearance cairn. Appears to contain a secondary circular structure.
175	Wag Mor	ND03NE 06	ND 0830 3640	180	1				
176	Wagmore Rigg	ND02NW 07	ND 0006 2608	240	1	8.5		1	No associated cultivation. Single earth-fast stone within may be roof support similar to nearby 'homestead'.

does offer the possibility that some basic insights might be gained from a general approach. For the purposes of this discussion, the known hut-circle settlements have been divided into three groups, according to the classificatory scheme outlined in section 5.3.1. General information concerning the three groups of sites is given in Table 7.2.

		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Number of sites		56	51	66
	Maximum	250	130	210
Height AOD:	Minimum	20	20	40
	Mean	154	138	131
No. of	Maximum	4	11	18
Structures:	Minimum	1	1	1
	Mean	2	3	4
Diameter	Maximum	17	16	15
Of largest Structure	Minimum	5.5	6	5
in Settlement:	Mean	9.5	10.5	10.7
Diameter	Maximum	10.5	13	12
Of smallest Structure	Minimum	6	5	4
in Settlement:	Mean	7.8	8.3	7.4

Table 7.2: Study Area 1, characteristics of hut-circle settlements, by group.

This information suggests that the diameter of individual structures bears little relationship to the agricultural regime with which they are associated. This takes no account of the degree of monumentality present in individual buildings, as opposed to their absolute dimensions, but a statistical analysis of structural elements of these sites would involve an excessively abstract discussion. Specific aspects of hut-circle architecture will be addressed in context within the local case studies. There are, however, other general aspects which are likely to be meaningful, and therefore worthy of further discussion.



Map 7.1 : Study Area 1, location of hut-circle sites.

The first is elevation. Figure 7.1 demonstrates that very few hut-circle settlements fall below 100m AOD, with only 5 (less than 3% of the total) below the 50m contour. I would follow Howard (1981) and Mercer (1985, 63) in suggesting that this sparseness at lower altitudes relates more to recent agricultural practice than to the situation during prehistory. Throughout the study area, the coastal strip has seen the most intensive, and mechanised, cultivation. This comprises the flat firthlands of eastern Sutherland in the south, which seldom rise above 50m, and the coastal areas of southern Caithness, where the majority of modern farms are situated below the 150m contour. This area also contains the fishing villages of Helmsdale and Dunbeath, largely developed since the later years of the eighteenth century (Withrington 1982, 212, Miller 1989, 108), whose construction will inevitably have involved the loss of prehistoric settlement traces. Where hut-circle settlement does survive at lower elevations, it is generally on the steeper, marginal land which fringes the Sutherland coastal plain (e.g. Kintradwell (116)), or lies above the sea-cliffs of Caithness (e.g. Toremore (156)). The only settlement of any size which survives in this area lies to the north-east of Navidale (139), again in a marginal area.

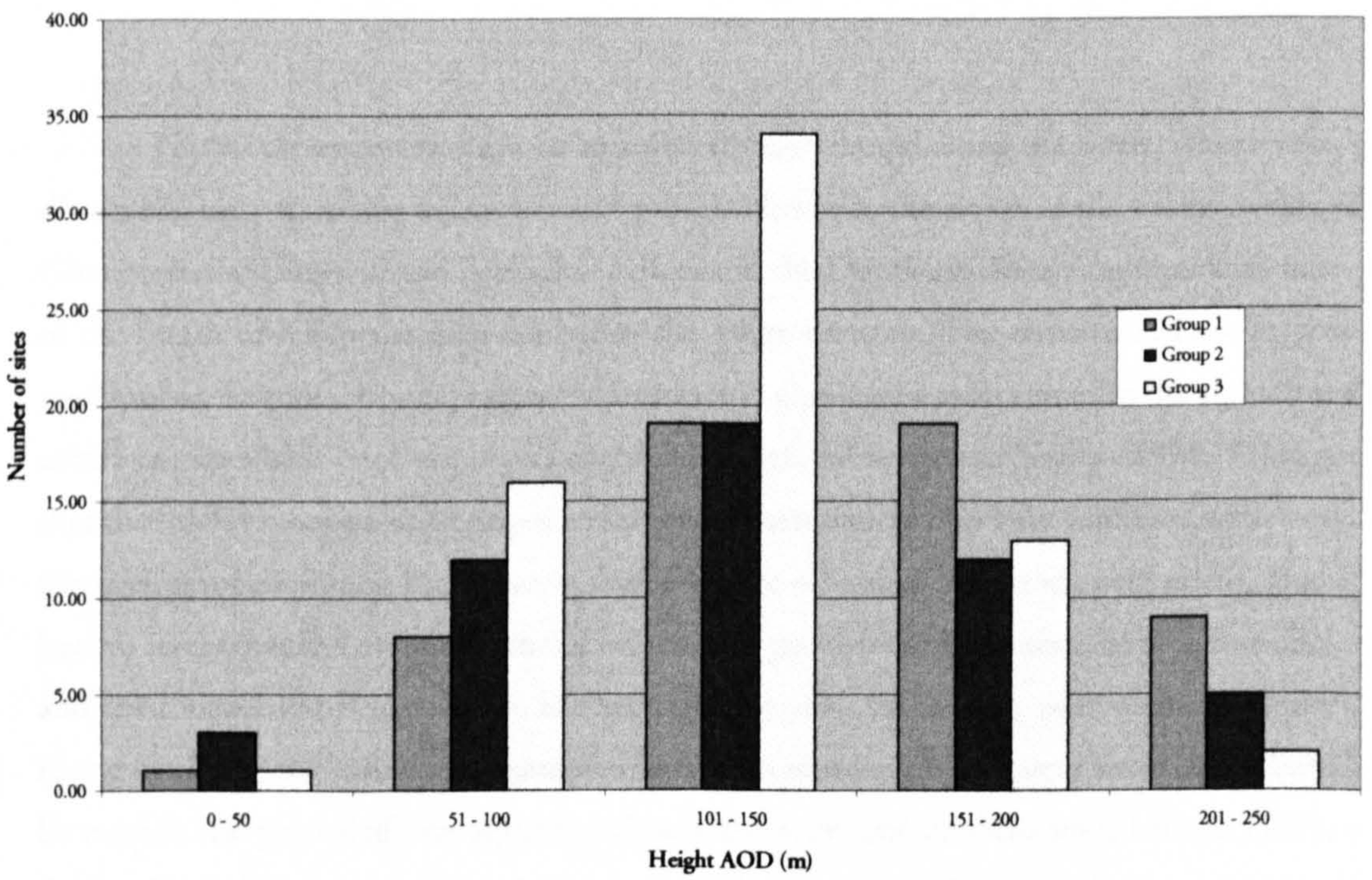


Figure 7.1: Study Area 1, elevation of hut-circle settlements, by group.

Plate 7.1 : Hut-circle overlain by post-medieval enclosure, Houstry. The area within the enclosure (left of picture) has been significantly reduced by ploughing

Hut-circle settlements are far more evenly distributed along the rivers, whose valleys dissect the uplands of the study area (Map 7.1). However, the floors of the lower reaches of Glen Loth, the Langwell and Berriedale valleys and the Dunbeath Water, together with much of the Strath of Kildonan, also fall below the 100m contour. The remains of late- to post-medieval settlements, which pepper the straths and glens, are a monument to the agricultural communities which once populated them. Although Fairhurst and Taylor (1971, 71) argue that the thickly wooded lower slopes and floors of these valleys may have inhibited settlement, forest clearance has long been accepted as a feature of earlier prehistoric settlement. It is at least as likely that the more ephemeral evidence of prehistoric settlement, such as hut-circles and their associated field systems, has been destroyed or overlain by post-medieval activity. Along the Burn of Houstry, for example, there are a number of hut-circle settlements, but all lie outside the post-medieval agricultural enclosures. At one of these sites, Minera (137), a field wall passes right over the enclosing bank of the hut-circle (Plate 7.1). Fairhurst (1971, 8) notes the presence of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments in the Strath of Kildonan, situated some 100m below the area where the majority of hut-circles are found, again suggesting prehistoric usage of the valley floor. Excavations at Upper Suisgill, in the Strath of Kildonan (Barclay 1985), revealed that cultivation traces lay buried beneath colluvial deposits, and it is

possible that similar processes have affected the survival of similar evidence situated beneath steep slopes elsewhere in the study area. It is, however, also likely that in many areas post-medieval drainage systems have rendered cultivable soils which would have been unusable in prehistory.

It is therefore probable, although unquantifiable, that hut-circle settlements, and associated field-systems, are under represented below the 100m contour. Clearance cairns placed around the edges of cultivation are more likely to survive than the more ephemeral traces of field systems, which would very quickly be ploughed away by later agriculture, and this may partially explain the slightly higher occurrence of Group 2 sites below 50m AOD. However, on marginal land above the 100m contour, it is likely that the degree to which sites have been disturbed is much reduced, and that where disturbance has occurred it will have affected the range of settlement more consistently. Problems in this area are likely to be related as much to recovery bias as to processes of destruction. Looking at the general distribution of hut-circle sites (Map 7.1), it is noticeable that the majority of the known examples lie along modern routes of access. In many cases, this is inevitable, given that there is likely to have been continuity in the use of access routes along the valley floors. However, it is also the case that in one area in particular, the uplands immediately to the south of the Dunbeath Strath, where the modern road from Dunbeath village to Braemore crosses moorland at elevations of up to 250m AOD, a number of hut-circle settlements are known (Map 7.9). It may be the case that undiscovered sites exist in similar parts of the study area which have no easy access. Indeed, a biased distribution is almost inevitable, given that, as with all of the areas discussed in this thesis, the basis of the known archaeological resource remains A.O. Curle's solo surveys of Caithness and Sutherland (RCAHMS 1911a & b), augmented by additions by the Ordnance Survey and occasional more detailed work. In areas where there have been recent detailed surveys, such as the area to the north of the Strath of Kildonan and the Dunbeath Water, the extent of known settlement has been increased. Although there is never likely to have been permanent occupation within the waterlogged fastness of the Flow Country, it is nonetheless probable that settlement here once extended further than is presently appreciated. This seems all the more likely, given that traditional drove routes once crossed the edges of the Flow Country to the north of the Dunbeath and Berriedale Straths (Sutherland undated, 56). Traditional routes of movement may have passed through this area in antiquity, and a perception of the inner straths and glens as marginal is likely to be conditioned by contemporary patterns of access and settlement.

These problems notwithstanding, there are certain useful observations which can be made concerning hut-circle settlement above the 100m contour. The region between 101 and 150m AOD contains the greatest number of known sites (Figure 7.1), within which Group 3 sites predominate, making up 47% of the total. Above 150m AOD, Group 1 sites predominate, and only reduce in number above 201m AOD. Even here, they make up the majority of known sites. Group 2 sites appear to decrease steadily in number above 150m AOD. This information suggests some tentative interpretations, which will be further examined in the light of the local case studies. Firstly, the occurrence of most Group 3 sites between 101 and 150m AOD may be interpreted as evidence that agricultural regimes involving enclosure of land, with a greater investment in the maintenance of its fertility (section 3.2.2), may have been concentrated in the most favourable and sheltered locations (cf. Cowley, forthcoming). This interpretation is lent further weight by the fact that greater numbers of Group 3 sites are also found between 51 and 100m AOD (Figure 7.1), where factors influencing the survival of all three Groups have presumably been similar. The primacy of Group 1 sites above 151m AOD suggests that agricultural practice involving less investment in the land predominated at higher elevations. It is possible that some Group 1 sites were not directly related to agriculture, and may have been seasonally occupied structures associated with more complex settlements at lower elevations.

These distinctions are also mirrored in the geographic location of the sites, especially in Glen Loth and the Lower Strath of Kildonan, and the Langwell and Berriedale Waters (Maps 7.5 – 7.8). Here, Group 3 sites are largely situated on the lower slopes above the main rivers, and within the lower reaches of their tributary systems. As RCAHMS (1993, 9) note, in the Strath of Kildonan Group 2 sites are most numerous within the side valleys and the inner reaches of the main rivers. Group 1 sites are often located furthest from the main rivers. They penetrate deep into the upland area which lies between the Strath of Kildonan and the Langwell Water, for instance, and are also located at the edges of the Flow Country, at the inner extremes of the Berriedale and Dunbeath Waters (Maps 7.8 – 7.9).

The information on the relationship between hut-circle settlements and both elevation and geographic location appears, ostensibly, to be interpretable in terms of the suitability for agriculture of the land in which they are set. There are, however, reasons for believing that the distribution is not merely the remnant of a synchronic settlement pattern. Although the three settlement groups display quite strong preferences with regard to elevation, the landscape situations they occupy are far from exclusive. Settlements of all groups have been located at every elevation (Figure 7.1). It might be argued that this reflects the failure of an imposed

classificatory scheme to account for a complex historical situation (section 5.2). This is an objection to which I would be sympathetic (see introduction to the study areas), and it is partly for this reason that I have attempted in this thesis to explore local variation through specific case studies.

This objection notwithstanding, I would also argue that this non-exclusive distribution is also a remnant of genuine historical processes. RCAHMS (*ibid.*) suggest that some of the settlements occupying the highest locations within the Strath of Kildonan may antedate a proposed environmental deterioration during the early first-millennium AD. This would seem to represent a useful explanation of the occurrence of Group 3 settlements at all altitudes, as small numbers have been located above 150m AOD. It may be the case that areas which were already marginal for the development of permanent agricultural settlement became completely unusable during the first millennium BC. There is some supporting evidence for this position. The mean settlement size within Group 3 falls off gradually above 50m AOD, and the maximum number of individual structures within a single settlement is drastically reduced above 150m AOD. It is possible, either that the land would not support large numbers of people above 150m AOD, or that these areas were not in occupation long enough for extensive communities to develop. There seems little prospect of differentiating between these two possibilities at a broad scale of analysis. Indeed, the distribution pattern is likely to be the consequence of very complex historical and social processes.

That historical processes have as much to do with the distribution of hut-circle settlement within the study area as environment and demography would appear to be illustrated by the distribution of Group 2 sites. In terms of their elevation, Group 2 sites seem to follow a similar pattern to Group 3, reaching a peak in numbers between 101 and 150m AOD, although nowhere as numerous here as the latter. Above 150m AOD, they show a similar decline in numbers, although they are slightly more numerous than Group 3 above 200m. What little chronological information we have regarding these sites, derived chiefly from the excavations at Kilphedir (Fairhurst and Taylor 1971, see Section 5.3.1), suggests that cultivation regimes based on simple field clearance may have preceded the establishment of more complex agriculture involving defined fields and enclosures, even in the most favourable areas. The majority of Group 3 settlements are associarted with scattered areas of field clearance cairns, often around the edges of their enclosures. This suggests that the known distribution of Group 2 settlement may in part be a biased one, a peripheral remnant of a settlement pattern within which more favourable land was later taken into more permanent, enclosed cultivation. Of

course, the situation is likely to have been complex. While some Group 2 settlements may have preceded the establishment of more intensive cultivation regimes, others, and especially those high within the upland landscapes or along the less favourable tributary systems, may represent the continuation of a less intensive agriculture in more peripheral areas.

The distribution of hut-circle settlement identified here is complex, and it is difficult to make any firm interpretation of the nature of the societies which produced it on the basis of statistical iformation alone. Nonetheless, the general discussion attempted here has at least begun to develop an argument that complex historical processes lay behind the development of the agricultural landscapes of the first millennium BC. These may initially have involved periodic, shifting settlement, which continued in the more peripheral areas, whilst giving way to communities based on more permanent, long-term agricultural regimes in others. We should not, however, consider such processes of change simply as 'natural' evolutionary developments, and in the second part of the chapter I will consider the likely role of material culture within the social practices which lay at their heart.

7.2.2. Brochs

There are 27 firmly identified brochs and broch mounds within the study area, and a further five sites whose attribution is less certain (Table 7.3). This contrasts sharply with the other study areas considered in this thesis. In Study Area 2 (section 8.2.2) for example, there are more than twice as many broch sites within a comparable area. This discrepancy is unlikely to have resulted solely from a differential rate of destruction between the two areas, although there are recorded broch sites which are now no longer visible as a result of recent human activity. A broch is said to have existed within the modern village of Helmsdale (30), presumably now destroyed by the construction of houses on the site. A site is also recorded within the lower part of the Strath of Kildonan (31), and may have been destroyed by the construction of the railway line which runs along the Strath. However, on balance it seems that the destruction of sites as a result of recent human activity in this area is *less* likely to have occurred than within the other study areas. Although prior to the clearances of the early nineteenth century the straths and glens of the area were among the most populous in the Highlands, the destruction of broch sites by non-mechanised, low intensity agriculture is unlikely to have been more widespread than in the much more intensively cultivated landscapes of Study Areas 2 and 3 (sections 8.2 & 9.2). It is therefore vital to consider the relationship between the character of the landscapes within the study area and the nature of later prehistoric settlement. Although this will be explored in detail in section 7.3, some more general comments can usefully be made here.

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Status	Height AOD (m)	Mound Diameter (m)	Mound/ Wall Height (m)	Internal Diameter (m)	Wall Thickness (m)	Surrounding Buildings?	Outer Boundary?
1	Ach an Fhionnfhuraidh	NC92SW 13	NC 9020 2396	Unexcavated	130	_	1.5	8.7	4.0	no	yes
2	Achnagoul	ND13SE 14	ND 1627 3233	Unexcavated	120	23.0	1.5	_	_	possible	yes
3	Achorn	ND13SW 04	ND 1375 3057	Unexcavated	110	30.0	3.5	_	_	possible	no
4	An Dun	ND12SW 10	ND 1033 2492	Unexcavated	120	_	1.0	6.6	3.7	no	yes
5	Balantrath	ND13SW 06	ND 1439 3072	Unexcavated	70	23.0	3.0	_	_	yes	yes
6	Balvalaich	NC91NW 14	NC 9452 1898	Unexcavated	70	_	0.5	9.0	4.5	no	yes
7	Borgue Langwell	ND12SW 01	ND 1026 2181	Partially excavated	90	_	1.2	7.0	5.0	no	no
8	Bridge of Rhemullen (Ballentink)	ND13SE 12	ND 1508 3135	Unexcavated	70	19.0	1.3	_	_	yes	no
9	Burgh Ruadh	ND12NW 06	ND 1160 2852	Unexcavated	170	_	2.0	_	_	yes	yes
10	Carn Bran	NC91SW 02	NC 9420 1220	Unexcavated	100	_	3.7	_	_	possible	yes
11	Carn Nam Buth	NC82SE 11	NC 8989 2498	Unexcavated	100	_		_	3.6	no	yes
12	Dunbeath	ND13SE 17	ND 1553 3044	Excavated	50	_	4.0	8.2	4.3	possible	no
13	Dunbrae (Rhemullen)	ND13SE 11	ND 1532 3098	Unexcavated	60	50.0	1.6	_	_	yes	No
14	Eldrable	NC91NE 20	NC 9833 1816	Unexcavated	70	_		7.5	3.5	no	Yes
15	Gailiable	NC91NW 09	NC 9487 1823	Unexcavated	60	_	2.0	8.5	4.4	no	yes
16	Kilearnan	NC91NW 02	NC 9216 1887	Unexcavated	100	_	3.0	10.0	4.9	no	yes
17	Kilearnan Hill	NC91NW 08	NC 9293 1882	Unexcavated	60	18.0		_	_		
18	Kilphedir	NC91NE 27	NC 9943 1891	Excavated	150	_		10.1	3.8	no	yes
19	Kintradwell	NC90NW 05	NC 9293 0807	Excavated	20	_	4.6	9.4	5.5	yes	
20	Langwell Tulloch	ND02SE 10	ND 0974 2231	Unexcavated	60	32.0		_	_	possible	yes
21	Minera	ND13SE 19	ND 1558 3461	Unexcavated	120	24.0	3.0	_	_	yes	no
22	Ousdale Burn	ND01NE 01	ND 0713 1881	Excavated	60	_	4.3	6.9	4.4	yes	yes
23	Rinsary	ND12SW 04	ND 1168 2335	Unexcavated	100	_	3.0	_	_	no	no
24	Tiantulloch	ND13NE 02	ND 1524 3522	Unexcavated	130	_	3.0	_	_	yes	yes
25	Tulach Bad a'Choilich	ND12SW 09	ND 1005 2404	Unexcavated	60	19.0	3.0	_	_	no	yes
26	Tulloch Turnal	ND02SE 04	ND 0904 2286	Unexcavated	70	15.5		_	_	no	yes
27	Upper Borgue	ND12NW 07	ND 1243 2708	Partially excavated	180	26.0	4.5	_	_	possible	yes

No	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Status	Height AOD (m)	Mound Diameter (m)	Mound Height (m)	Comments
28	Caen Burn	ND01NW 38	ND 01 18	Location Unknown	30	_	_	Anderson (1873) records broch at junction of Caen Burn/Helmsdale River. Not now visible.
29	Dun Phail	ND01SW 02	ND 0148 1387	Indeterminate Remains.	20	_	0.6	Traditional site of broch, now existing only as an amorphous grassy mound. Small finds recovered in 1959.
30	Helmsdale	ND01NW 24	ND 0310 1525	Unexcavated/ Destroyed	30	_	_	Modern house reputedly built on site of broch. RCAHMS records find of objects and part of shell midden.
31	Helmsdale Valley	ND01NW 34	ND 0150 1740	Location Unknown	40	_	_	No sign of site, which may have been destroyed by railway construction.
32	Portgower	ND01SW 05	ND 0008 1279	Indeterminate Remains.	30	21.5	_	Low, turf-covered mound. Local tradition as site of broch.

Table 7.3 : Study Area 1, broch sites (1 – 27: firmly identified sites, 28 – 32: possible sites).

The majority of broch sites (21 or 78%) are located between 40 and 120m AOD (Map 7.2, Figure 7.2), with the greatest number of these (7 or 26%) located at between 41 and 60m AOD. Clearly, this is indicative of a preferential use of certain areas of the landscape, as a large part of the study area lies above the 150m contour, and the majority of hut-circle sites are located at higher elevations than this (see section 7.2.1). This contrasts with the situation in north-eastern Caithness, for example (8.2.2), where broch sites are more evenly spread across the landscape. This further suggests that there is a relationship between the nature of the landscape itself and the location of broch sites. It is possible that this distribution relates simply to the availability of good arable land at lower and more sheltered elevations, and it has been suggested (Cowley forthcoming) that large areas of the landscape may have been abandoned during the later first millennium BC as a result of climate change or environmental degradation. However, the presence of broch sites at Burgh Ruadh (9) and Upper Borgue (27), both in upland situations at more than 170m AOD, warns against a simplistic interpretation of the relationship between brochs and their surroundings. These sites are set in landscapes which are now marginal, and the availability of good land may always have been limited. Furthermore, the presence of sites dating to the later Iron Age in elevated positions deep within the straths and glens (Map 7.4) is a testament to potential of these areas for settlement during later prehistory. A more complex explanation must therefore be sought.

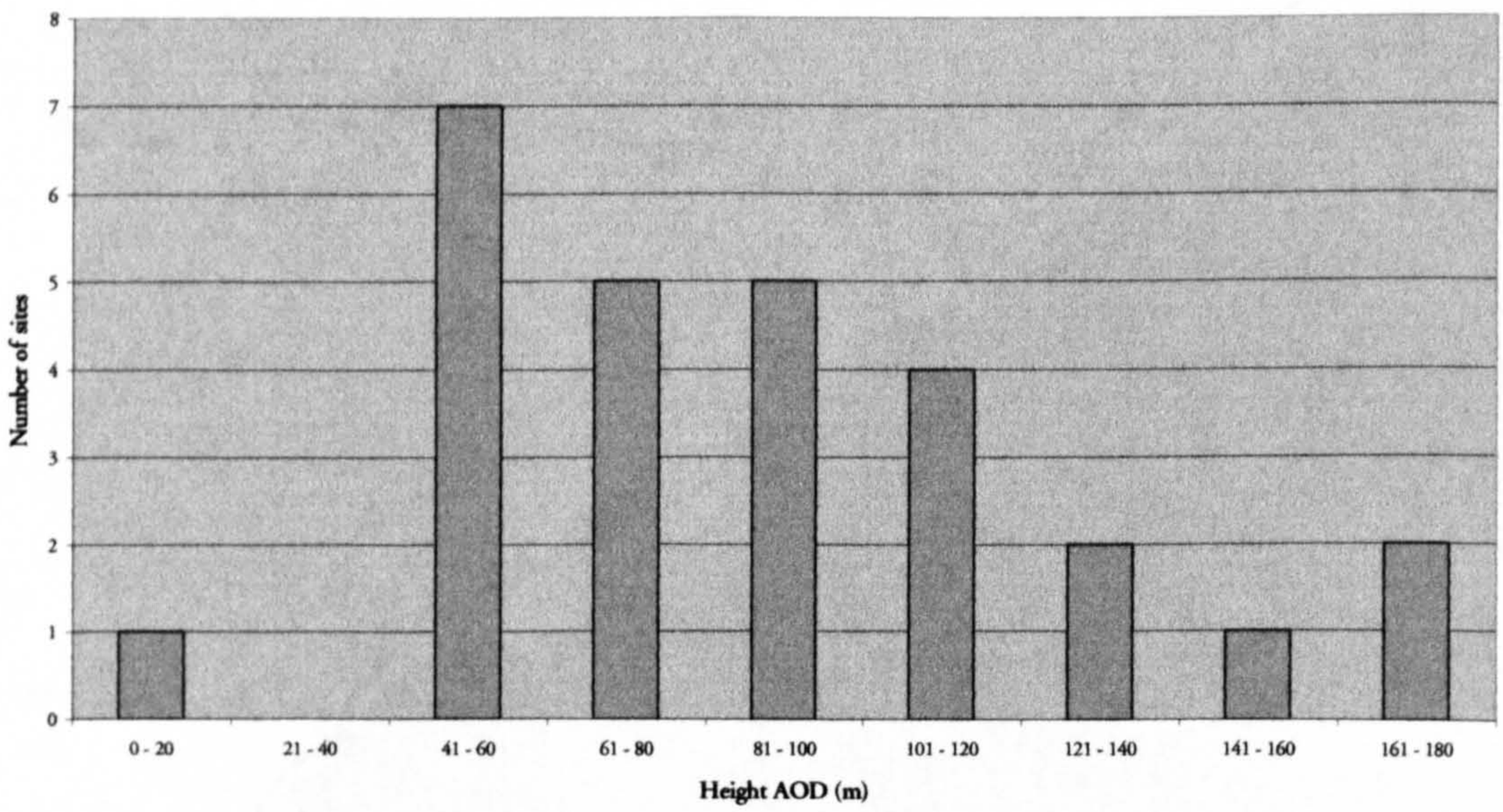
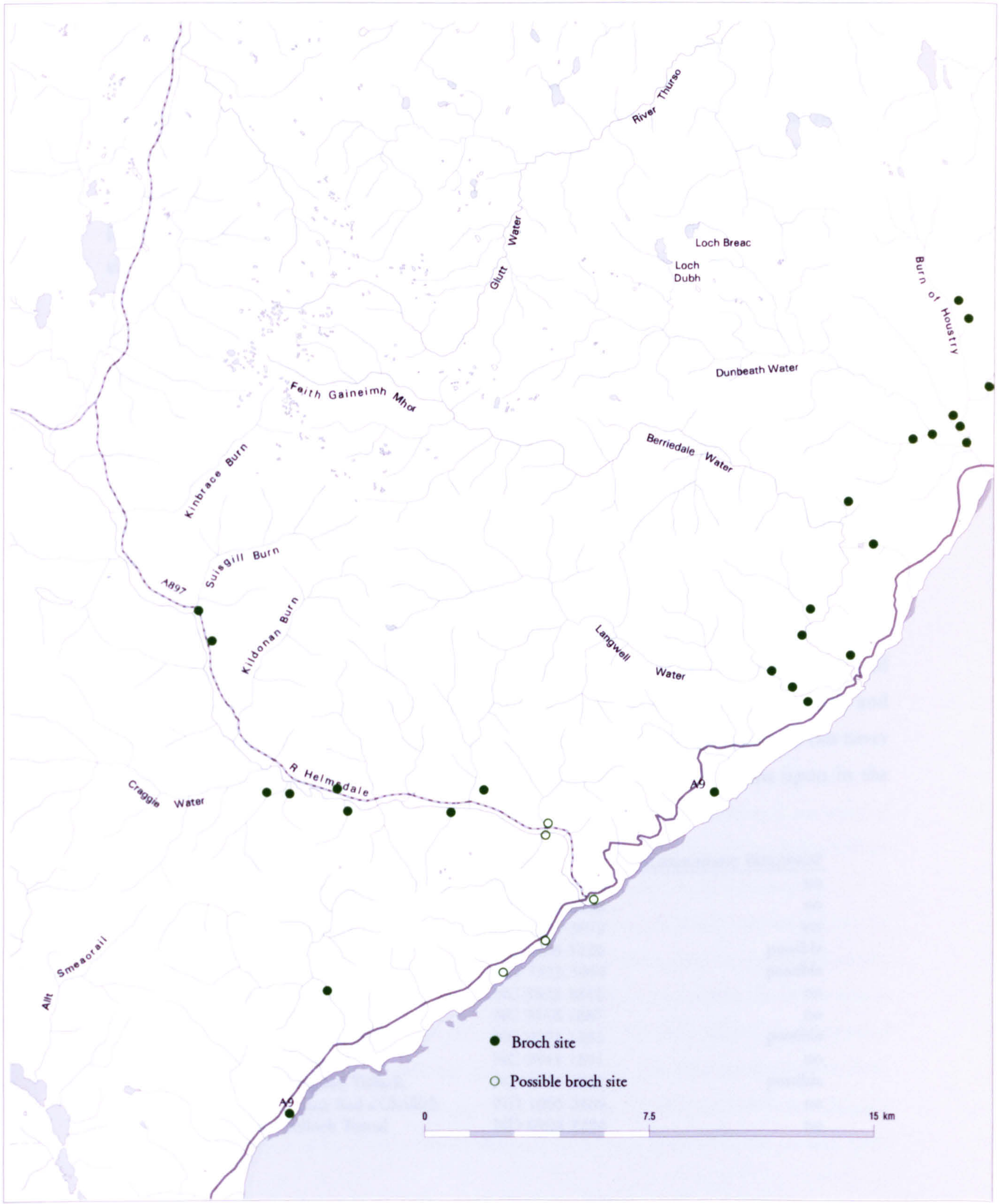


Figure 7.2 : STUDY AREA 1, broch elevation.



Map 7.2 : Study Area 1, location of broch sites.

The overall distribution of broch sites within the study area (Map 7.2), is riverine. Brochs are present beside all of the major river systems of the area, as well as a number of minor watercourses such as the Kintradwell and Ousdale Burns. Once again, however, this overall pattern conceals variation which mitigates against a simple explanation. Only in the Strath of Kildonan, and along the Burn of Houstry, which lie at the southern and northern limits of the study area respectively, do broch sites penetrate the inner valleys. In all other cases, broch sites are situated along their outer reaches, within 3km of the sea. Again, it is possible that this distribution corresponds to the availability of good agricultural land, especially since the two areas noted above represent the widest, most open river valleys within the study area. However, there are areas deep within the river systems, such as the Langwell Water in the vicinity of the farm of Wag, the Berriedale Water around Braemore and the Dunbeath Water near Halmie and Achnaclyth, which are relatively open and fertile and display evidence of both prehistoric and post-medieval cultivation. These areas may always have been able to support agriculture, but there are no broch sites here. In addition, brochs such as An Dun (4) and Kilphedir (18) are rather inaccessible, and seem not to have been primarily placed for easy access to arable land. Again, we should beware of a deterministic interpretation of the relationship between brochs and the land.

The last general landscape feature which can be considered in relation to broch location is the presence of pre-existing settlement. In Chapter 3, I argued that it is a mistake to view archaeological landscapes as successive, disconnected 'layers', within which the structures and agricultural traces of different chronological periods can be considered to be physically and conceptually independent. Landscapes containing the traces of a human presence can never be considered to be empty, and these traces are likely to have been drawn upon in the

No.	Name	NGR	Surrounding Buildings?
1	Ach an Fhionnfhuraidh	NC 9020 2396	no
4	An Dun	ND 1033 2492	no
5	Balantrath	ND 1439 3072	yes
10	Carn Bran	NC 9420 1220	possible
12	Dunbeath	ND 1553 3044	possible
14	Eldrable	NC 9833 1816	no
16	Kilearnan	NC 9216 1887	no
17	Kilearnan Hill	NC 9293 1882	possible
18	Kilphedir	NC 9943 1891	no
20	Langwell Tulloch	ND 0974 2231	possible
25	Tulach Bad a'Choilich	ND 1005 2404	no
26	Tulloch Turnal	ND 0904 2286	no

Table 7.4 : Study Area 1, broch sites within 500m of Group 3 hut-circle settlements.

establishment of new settlement locales (cf. Ingold 1995). Of the 27 firmly identified broch sites within the study area, 8 are situated in areas where the visible evidence of intense post-medieval activity makes the survival of the more ephemeral traces of prehistoric settlement, such as hut-circles and associated field systems, extremely unlikely. Indeed, there are a small number of locations where previously recorded broch sites themselves are no longer apparent, presumably removed by recent activity (Table 7.3, 28 – 32). Of the 19 broch sites which remain, 12 (63%) are situated within 500m of Group 3 hut-circle settlements, associated with developed field systems (Table 7.4). It might be argued that 'broch-builders' simply continued to make use of the best agricultural land. Such an interpretation would rest firstly on the assumption of a discontinuity between the builders of the brochs and the societies which preceded them, and secondly that economic aspects of land-use in small-scale societies can be separated out from the social. Effective challenges have recently been mounted to the second assumption (Tilley 1996, Thomas 1996, 25), and I have already argued that landscapes can never be considered to be without cultural significance. It therefore seems likely that the establishment of brochs at particular locations must have drawn in some way upon existing systems of land tenure (see Chapter 3). This should be contrasted with Swanson's (1988, 95) opinion that "No evidence of any field system around brochs has been found by field survey". This, I would argue, is symptomatic of a more general tendency to treat brochs as disconnected from the landscapes which surround them, itself linked to traditional ideas of the nature of Iron Age society in northern Scotland (see section 2.3). It seems reasonable to suggest that brochs placed very close to existing field systems, and in a few cases incorporated into them as at Ach an Fhionnfhuraidh (1) (Figure 7.3), were making use of existing systems of land enclosure. Of course, the data presented above also indicate that there are a number of broch sites which appear to have no demonstrable relationship to existing land use. I am wary of replacing one overarching scheme with another, and such complexity and variation will be explored instead within the local studies which form the second part of this chapter.

Some general comments on broch architecture within the study area would also be germane to the establishment of a background to the local case studies. In contrast to north-eastern Caithness (section 8.2.2), the number of excavated brochs within the study area is small. Of these, Borgue Langwell (7) and Upper Borgue (27) were subject to unrecorded digging, serving to establish their identity as brochs, but little else. The remaining four sites, Kilphedir (Joass 1865), Kintradwell (Joass 1890), Dunbeath (Anderson 1890) and Ousdale Burn (MacKay 1892), were all excavated during the nineteenth century. In the cavalier spirit

No.	Name	Surrounding Buildings?	Outer Boundary?
1	Ach an Fhionnfhuraidh	no	yes
2	Achnagoul	possible	yes
3	Achorn	possible	no
4	An Dun	no	yes
5	Balantrath	yes	yes
6	Balvalaich	no	yes
7	Borgue Langwell	no	no
8	Bridge of Rhemullen (Ballentink)	yes	no
9	Burgh Ruadh	yes	yes
10	Carn Bran	possible	yes
11	Carn Nam Buth	no	yes
12	Dunbeath	possible	no
13	Dunbrae (Rhemullen)	yes	no
14	Eldrable	no	yes
15	Gailiable	no	yes
16	Kilearnan	no	yes
17	Kilearnan Hill	possible	–
18	Kilphedir	no	yes
19	Kintradwell	yes	–
20	Langwell Tulloch	possible	yes
21	Minera	yes	no
22	Ousdale Burn	yes	yes
23	Rinsary	no	no
24	Tiantulloch	yes	yes
25	Tulach Bad a'Choilich	no	yes
26	Tulloch Turnal	no	yes
27	Upper Borgue	possible	yes

Table 7.5 : Study Area 1, broch sites with surrounding buildings (see also Map 7.3)

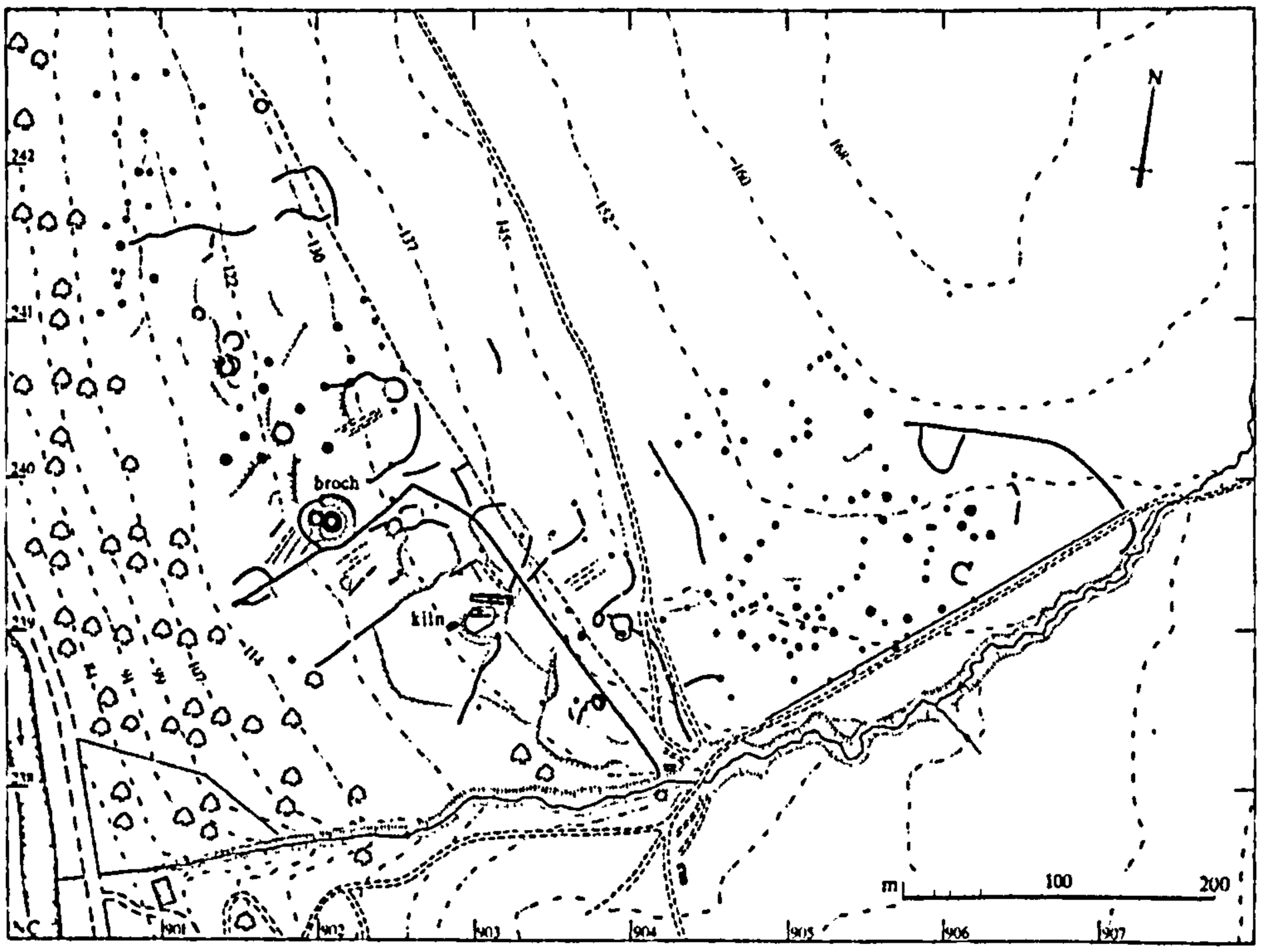
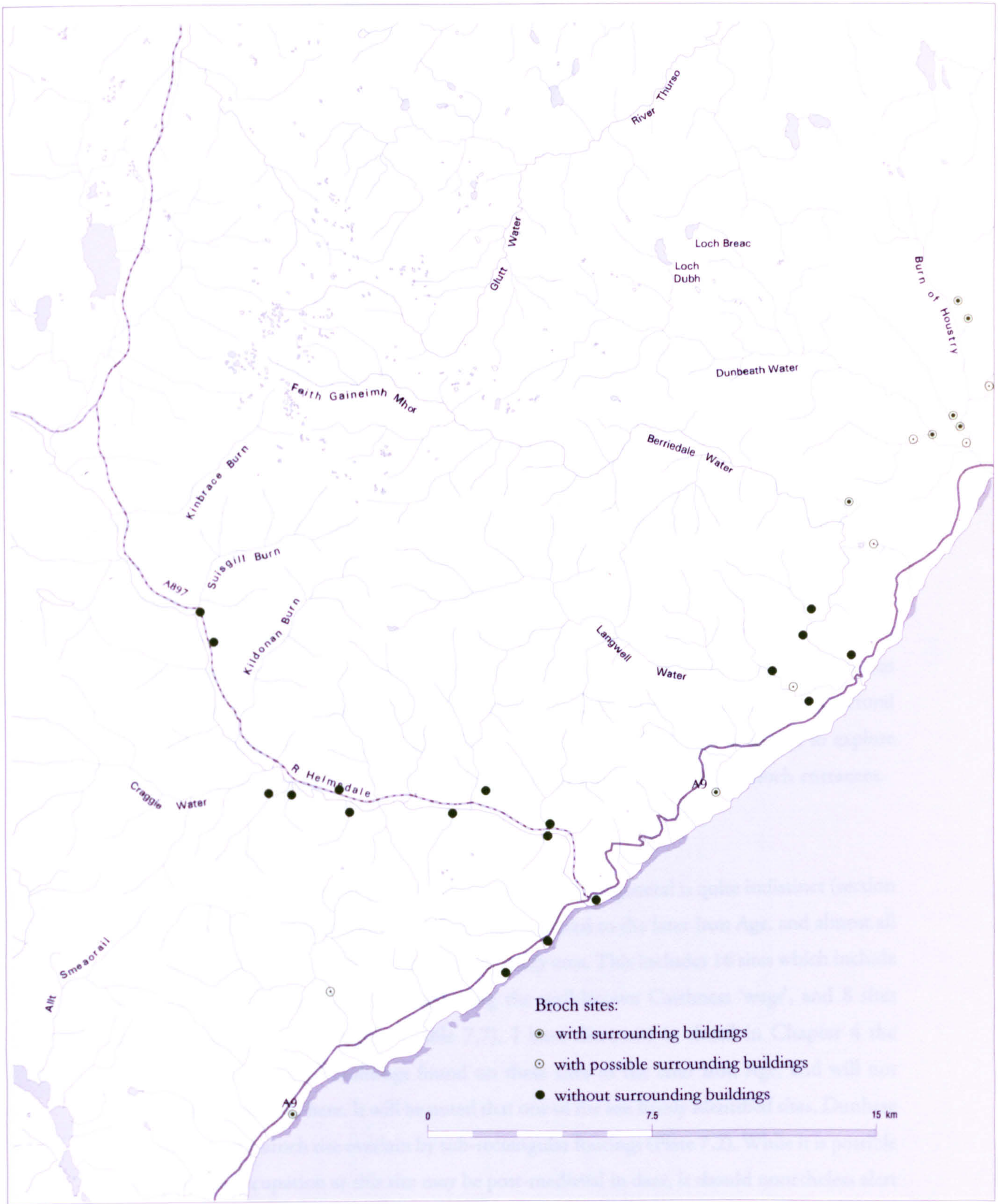


Figure 7.3 : Broch & field systems at Ach an Fhionnfhuaraidh (RCAHMS 1993, Fig. 20).

of antiquarianism, the published reports of these excavations contain very little precise detail. It is clear, however, that insufficient evidence survives for a general discussion of the details of broch structure, in contrast to north-east Caithness (section 8.3.1), where the nature of the field evidence necessitates such an approach.

There are, nonetheless, some general comments on the subject of broch architecture which may be made here. The first concerns a lack of evidence of surrounding buildings, forming part of a contemporary settlement. Of the 20 sites at which it is possible to make a judgement, on the basis of existing remains and published material, only 8 (40%) show any evidence of surrounding buildings (Table 7.5). In addition, the sites which are nucleated in this way are not distributed evenly across the study area. All are located within the Dunbeath Strath, along the Burn of Houstry, and in coastal situations (Map 7.3). Similarly, the 12 sites (60%) at which no evidence of surrounding buildings exists are confined to the Strath of Kildonan and the Langwell and Berriedale valleys. This equates roughly to a north-south division within the study area, with the exception of the two firmly identified coastal sites. However, coastal locations may be underrepresented in this group, as a result of the processes of destruction already noted. The likely relationship between this general distribution, and local landscape contexts, will be examined in the second part of this chapter. However, it may be noted here that 7 (58%) of the sites without surrounding buildings are also immediately adjacent to hut-circle settlements associated with field systems (Table 7.4), whereas only one of those with definite evidence of surrounding buildings is set in such a location. This may suggest that the former group were incorporated into existing settlement landscapes. These continued to function after the building of the brochs, which as a consequence did not form a focus for the kind nucleated settlement represented by the latter group of sites.

The final general aspect of broch architecture to be considered here is entrance orientation. In contrast to north-eastern Caithness (section 8.3.1), no broch site within the current study area can be shown to have more than one entrance passage. This suggests that these buildings were intended to be approached from one direction only. Of the 14 sites at which entrance position is discernible, 9 (64%) are oriented between north-east and south-east, of which 8 (57%) are between due east and south east. Only 5 (36%) are oriented between north-west and south-west, and none to due north or due south (Table 7.6). It has been argued elsewhere (Parker Pearson 1996, Parker Pearson *et al.* 1995, Oswald 1997) that roundhouse and broch entrances may have had a south-easterly orientation which was



Map 7.3 : Study Area 1, broch sites with surrounding buildings.

No.	Name	Entrance Orientation
1	Ach an Fhionnfhuraidh	NW
2	Achnagoul	SE
4	An Dun	W
10	Carn Bran	SW
11	Carn Nam Buth	NNE
12	Dunbeath	SE
13	Dunbrae (Rhemullen)	SE
14	Eldrable	E
15	Gailiable	E
16	Kilearnan	E
18	Kilphedir	SE
19	Kintradwell	SW
21	Minera	W
22	Ousdale Burn	SW
27	Upper Borgue	ESE

Table 7.6 : Study Area 1, broch sites with known entrance orientation.

cosmologically derived, as opposed to more prosaic explanations such as preventing prevailing winds from entering the house. While I would concur in the belief that prehistoric architecture is unlikely to have been an expression of mere pragmatism in our terms, again, I am wary of substituting one form of determinism with another. Although the entrance orientations of the brochs in the current study area show some preference towards an orientation to the east and south-east, this is far from total. A weakness of previous approaches to this problem has been a failure to consider adequately the importance of local landscapes in defining architectural orientations, and one of the chief aims of the local studies which follow will be to explore how local conditions may have affected the positioning and alignment of broch entrances.

7.2.3. Later Iron Age Sites

Although the classification of later Iron Age monuments in general is quite indistinct (section 5.3.3), there is a class of monuments which can be dated to the later Iron Age, and almost all of the known examples fall within the present study area. This includes 16 sites which include firmly identified aisled buildings, including the well-known Caithness 'wags', and 8 sites whose attribution is less secure (Table 7.7). I have discussed in detail in Chapter 4 the attribution of the aisled buildings found on these sites to the later Iron Age, and will not reiterate the argument here. It will be noted that one of the less firmly identified sites, Dunbrae (22) consists of a broch site overlain by sub-rectangular footings (Plate 7.2). While it is possible that the later occupation at this site may be post-medieval in date, it should nonetheless alert us to the strong likelihood that the aisled buildings do not represent the totality of later Iron Age settlement. This seems especially likely given the restricted landscape context of these

NO.	NAME	NMRS NO.	NGR	STATUS	HEIGHT AOD (M)	DESCRIPTION
1	Achorn	ND13SW 04	ND 1375 3057	UNEXCAVATED	110	Sub-rectangular building, associated with at least 4 circular structures.
2	Allt cam Leathaid	ND02NE 03	ND 0892 2964	UNEXCAVATED	150	Turf-covered mound with protruding stones, suggesting aisled construction.
3	Berriedale Water	ND02NE 02	ND 0880 2940	UNEXCAVATED	160	5 discrete structures, at least 3 of aisled construction.
4	Carn nan Uaigh	NC91SW 01	NC 9347 1404	UNEXCAVATED	170	Disturbed site, comprising remains of 2 aisled buildings with surviving pillar stones.
5	Carradh nan Clach	NC91SW 31	NC 9396 1256	UNEXCAVATED	170	Aisled building, with traces of associated structures.
6	Cor Tulloch	ND13NE 01	ND 1513 3553	UNEXCAVATED	130	Complex site, containing at least two aisled buildings, one with lintels in situ, with other associated structures and outer boundary.
7	Dail a Chairn	ND02NW 05	ND 0279 2941	UNEXCAVATED	220	Turf-covered mound of tumbled stone, with opposed pillar stones.
8	Dunbeath Water	ND13SW 10	ND 1188 3295	UNEXCAVATED	110	2 grassy mounds, containing 2 sub-rectangular & 3 sub-circular aisled buildings respectively.
9	Langwell (Borgue Langwell)	ND12SW 02	ND 1016 2191	EXCAVATED	90	Aisled building with associated circular house.
10	Morven (Preas Bhealaich)	ND02NW 02	ND 0130 2740	UNEXCAVATED	250	2 sub-rectangular, aisled buildings, with associated sub-circular structures.
11	Uaigh Bheag 1	NC91SW 11	NC 9360 1423	UNEXCAVATED	170	2 conjoined aisled buildings, associated with a circular structure.
12	Uaigh Bheag 2	NC91SW 30	NC 9348 1377	PARTIALLY EXCAVATED	150	Rectangular aisled building.
13	Wag	ND13SW 05	ND 1063 3308	UNEXCAVATED	120	At least 2, & possibly 3, aisled buildings, with indications of associated structures.
14	Wag Mor	ND03NE 02	ND 0825 3680	UNEXCAVATED	170	2 discrete aisled buildings, one with associated circular structure.
15	Wagmore	ND02NW 09	ND 0183 2582	UNEXCAVATED	200	Linear upright stones within mound, suggesting aisled building.
16	Wagmore Rigg	ND02NW 01	ND 0030 2614	UNEXCAVATED	230	2 conjoined, aisled roundhouses.
17	Achinavish Croft (Braemore)	ND02NE 03	ND 0862 2972	DESTROYED/ MISIDENTIFIED	150	Aisled building noted in 1911, no longer visible at recorded location. Possible misidentification of Allt cam Leathaid.
18	Allt a'Chriosduidhe	ND02SE 24	ND 0985 2453	UNEXCAVATED	150	Rectangular structure, with no surviving evidence of aisled construction.
19	Ballentink	ND13SE 13	ND 1521 3104	UNEXCAVATED	70	Amorphous mound, containing a single row of 6 upright stones and traces of walling.
20	Carn Liath	ND02NW 06	ND 0433 2975	UNEXCAVATED	230	Robbed remains of sub-rectangular structure, with no surviving remains of aisled construction.
21	Dun Burn	ND02NE 09	ND 0982 2501	UNEXCAVATED	150	Bi-partite structure, with no evidence of aisled construction.
22	Dunbrae (Rhemullen)	ND13SE 11	ND 1532 3098	UNEXCAVATED	60	Broch mound with overlying footings of rectangular structures, possibly modern.
23	Eldrable	NC91NE 68	NC 9851 1865	UNEXCAVATED	80	Complex of stone-built structures, including one structure with 2 upright slabs.
24	Kintradwell	NC90NW 05	NC 9293 0807	UNEXCAVATED	40	Amorphous dry-stone structure, constructed using upright stone slabs.

Table 7.7 : Study Area 1, later Iron Age sites (1 –16 firmly identified sites, 17 – 23 possible sites).

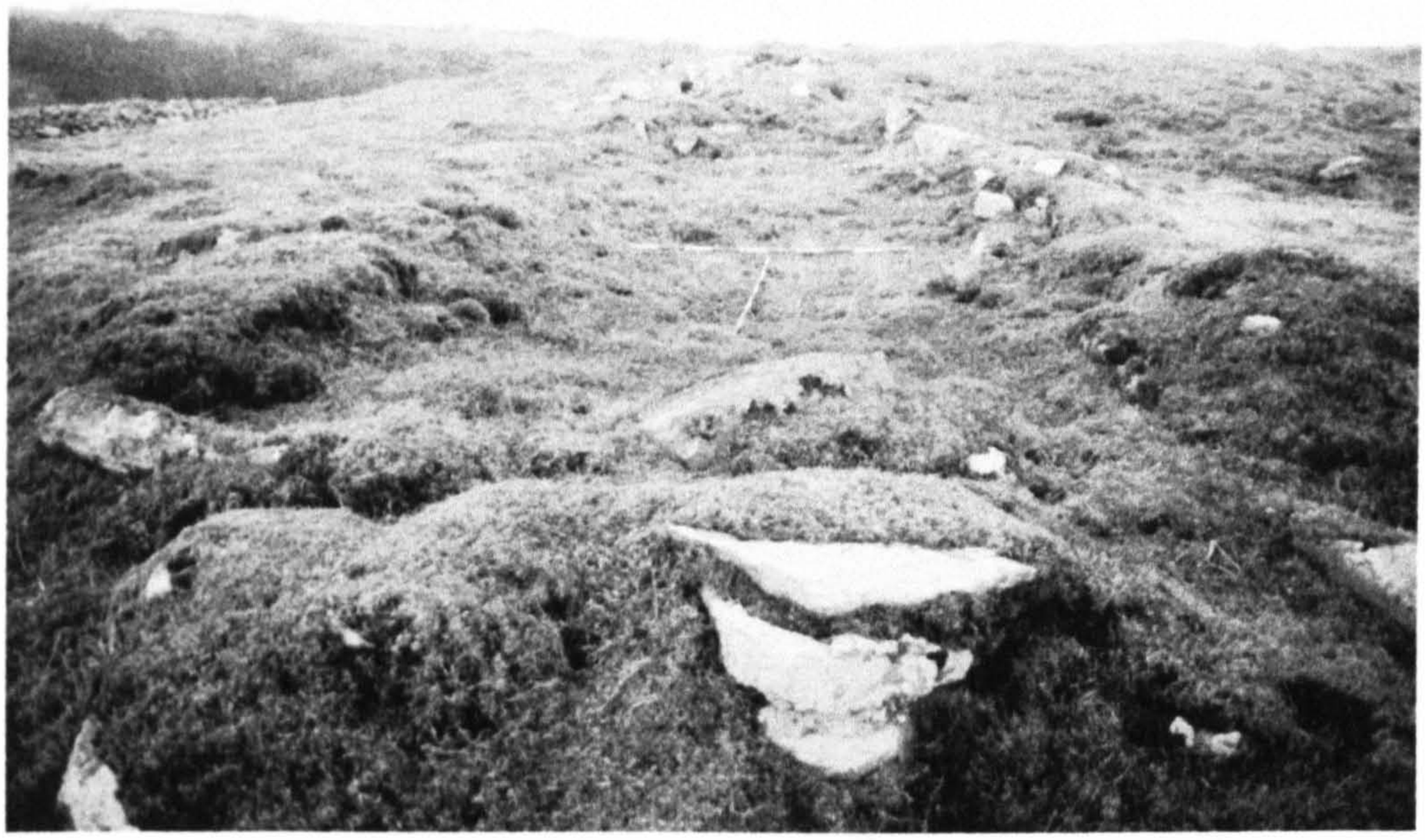


Plate 7.2 : Footings of rectangular buildings overlying broch mound, Dunbrae (13).

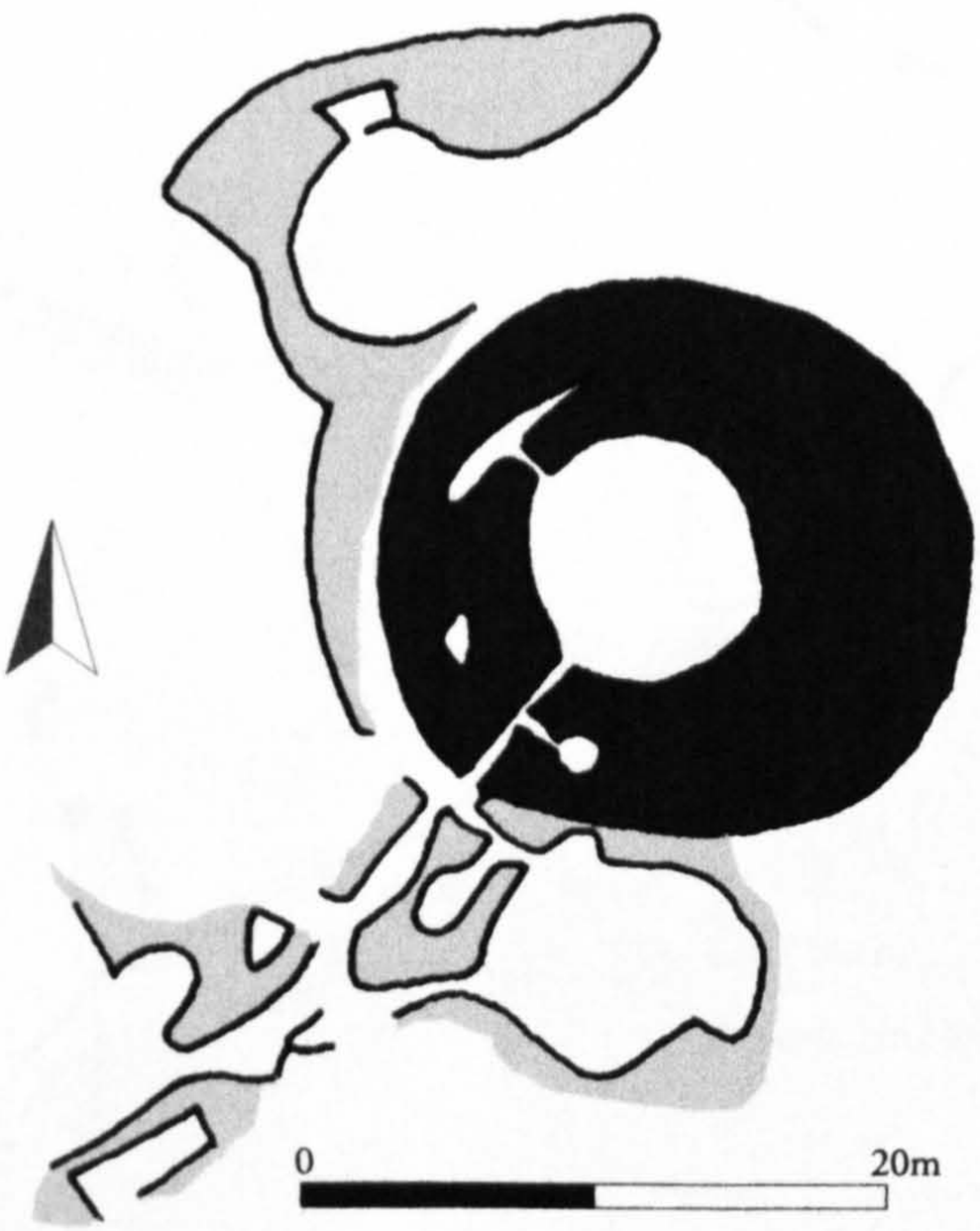


Figure 7.4 : Kintradwell broch (19), showing complex of surrounding buildings (after Joass 1890).

Map 7.4 : Study Area 1, location of later Iron Age sites.

sites (see below), and it is therefore likely that occupation on the broch sites clustered within the outer reaches of the river systems continued into the later Iron Age. It is probably significant that within the Dunbeath Strath, and along the Burn of Houstry, where the majority of broch sites with identifiable surrounding buildings are located, these sites are situated further downstream than the aisled buildings themselves. This introduces the possibility of some degree of chronological overlap. Unfortunately, there is no way of demonstrating continued occupation at broch sites on the basis of existing evidence. Of the three excavated sites within the study area, Kintradwell (19) (Figure 7.4) and Ousdale Burn (22) both have complexes of surrounding buildings, but these were treated with little interest by their excavators, and no detailed information survives as to their likely date or content. Both do, however, contain sub-rectangular elements within their architecture, and the possibility exists of later Iron Age occupation at these sites.

It is clear that later Iron Age sites within the study area favour higher elevations (Figure 7.5). None of the firmly identified sites lies below the 50m contour, and only one of the possible sites, Kintradwell (24) does so. Indeed, the majority of sites lie above 100m AOD, and there are examples well above 200m AOD on the flanks of Morven. It might be argued that this distribution has been affected by the vagaries of post-medieval activity, as I have already suggested for hut-circle settlements within the study area (section 7.2.1). Although the presence of the excavated site at Langwell (9), only 1km from the coast, suggests that

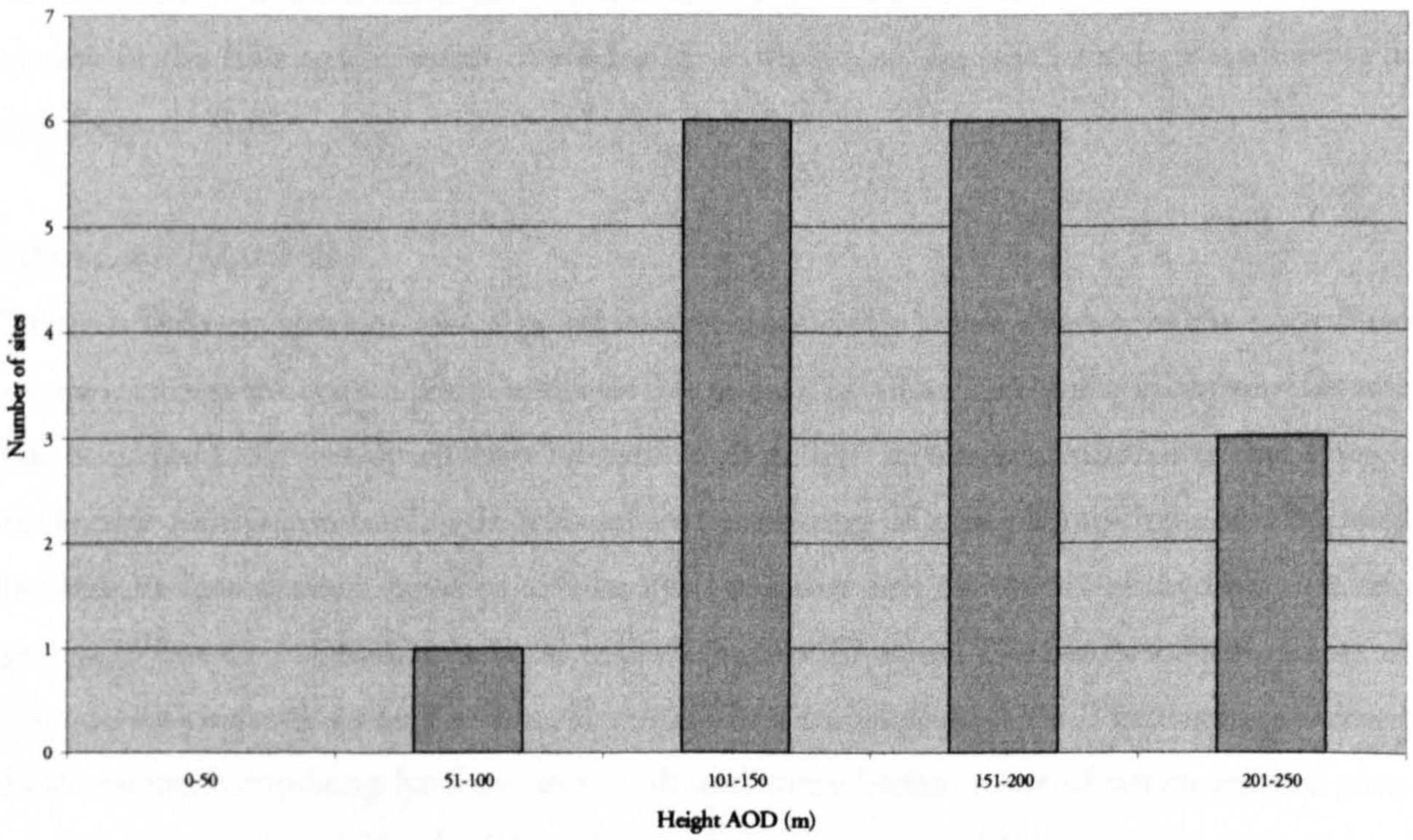


Figure 7.5 : Study Area 1, later Iron Age site elevation.

more aisled buildings may once have been situated at lesser elevations, within the lower reaches of the river systems, the nature of the general landscape context of these sites demonstrates that the distribution discussed here is likely to be genuine. Aisled buildings are almost exclusively confined to the inner reaches of the river systems within the study area (Map 7.4). That they do not occur in areas further downstream, where more ephemeral sites such as hut-circles can be found, indicates that this is not merely a chance product of destruction processes. One of the main aims of the local case studies presented in section 7.3 is to explore the possible reasons for the almost mutually exclusive distribution of broch and aisled buildings sites.

7.3. Local Case Studies

7.3.1. Glen Loth and the Lower Strath of Kildonan

This forms the most southerly part of the study area, with an area in excess of 200km² of upland, consisting chiefly of rounded hills rising to more than 500m above sea level, and reaching their highest point at the 628m summit of Beinn Dhorain, on the east side of Glen Loth. This upland plateau is deeply incised by the Strath of Kildonan, the major river valley of the area, which carries the Helmsdale River to the sea. Kildonan also provides one of the major routes between the eastern and northern coasts of Sutherland. The river is fed by numerous tributary streams, flowing through side valleys, the largest of which are the Kilphedir, Kildonan and Suisgill Burns on the north-east side of the main valley, and the Craggie Water to the south. Glen Loth lies to the south, a deep cut glen which carries the Loth burn from its source in the hills to the south of Kildonan to the sea at the small modern settlement of Lothbeg.

Glen Loth (Map 7.5)

There is little evidence of Iron Age settlement around the lowest reaches of the Loth Burn where it crosses the coastal plain, which at this point is less than 1km wide. However, this area has been the most greatly affected by modern land use, and it is unsurprising that known settlement here is confined to an isolated site, consisting of a single hut-circle. Immediately behind the coastal plain, however, on the spurs to either side the mouth of the Glen, are two groups of hut-circles, both associated with traces of cultivation. The south-western group, of 4 small hut-circles, is set on the lower slopes of Cnoc na h-Iolaire (131). There is an associated field system, comprising lynchets and earth and stone banks, some of which enclose plots with an average size of 25m by 20m. The north-eastern group (132), on the opposite side of the mouth of the glen on the gentler, more open slopes of the south-east spur of Creag Riasgain, consists of six larger hut-circles, associated with a less well defined field system

comprising mostly clearance cairns, but with evidence of lynchets and faint traces of earth banks. Although a settlement of four hut-circles on the opposite bank of the Loth Burn (133) may be associated with an enclosure wall, it is possible that this is a later feature. Further upstream, immediately to the south-east of the junction of Glen Loth and Glen Sletdale, at the base of the steep slopes of Creag Riabhach, is a settlement of three small hut-circles (68), associated with less convincing evidence of cultivation in the form of a shallow, stone-free hollow which may represent the remains of a cultivated enclosure. 250m along the Sletdale Burn, within a well-defined area of flat ground, is a further hut-circle group (69) set within a depopulated post-medieval settlement. This is associated with well-defined lynchets and stone-free ground, which represent evidence for cultivated enclosures, with an average size of 20.0m by 10.0m. Although not all of the structures in this group are physically associated with these cultivation traces, the presence of at least ten hut-circles in an area of less than 0.5km^2 may indicate continued occupation and the development of agricultural settlement over a considerable period. However, the hut-circles within this group have a broad size range. There is some evidence of an association between the smaller circles at the edge of the settlement with unenclosed land.

500m to the north of the junction of Glen Loth and Glen Sletdale is a further group of four hut-circles (77), set into the base of a steep hill-slope, at the point where its gradient eases onto the valley floor. Again, these are associated with both clearance cairns and lynchets, introducing the possibility of a change in land use over time, especially since the lynchets are associated with the structures to the east of the group. Given the rather uniform nature of the landscape around both of these settlements, the evidence suggests a change in land-use over time, rather than the co-existence of two different agricultural regimes.

Glen Loth contains other groups of hut-circles which are associated with clearance cairns only, or lack evidence of associated cultivation. These are located chiefly on land above 200m, or on very steep slopes (Map 7.5).

The single recorded broch site in Glen Loth, Carn Bran (10), is situated on flat ground on the north-east bank of the Loth Burn. The site is largely obscured by tumbled stone (Plate 7.3), but there is evidence of a substantial outer wall which may have enclosed the broch, separating it from its immediate surroundings. There is no evidence of associated agricultural practice in the vicinity of Carn Bran, although it is within 500m of a hut-circle settlement with traces of associated cultivation at the entrance to Glen Sletdale. It may be significant here that the site displays evidence of buildings surrounding the broch, in contrast with the other sites in the Loth/Kildonan area. The nucleation of settlement implied by this may

Plate 7.3 : Carn Bran broch (10), GlenLoth.

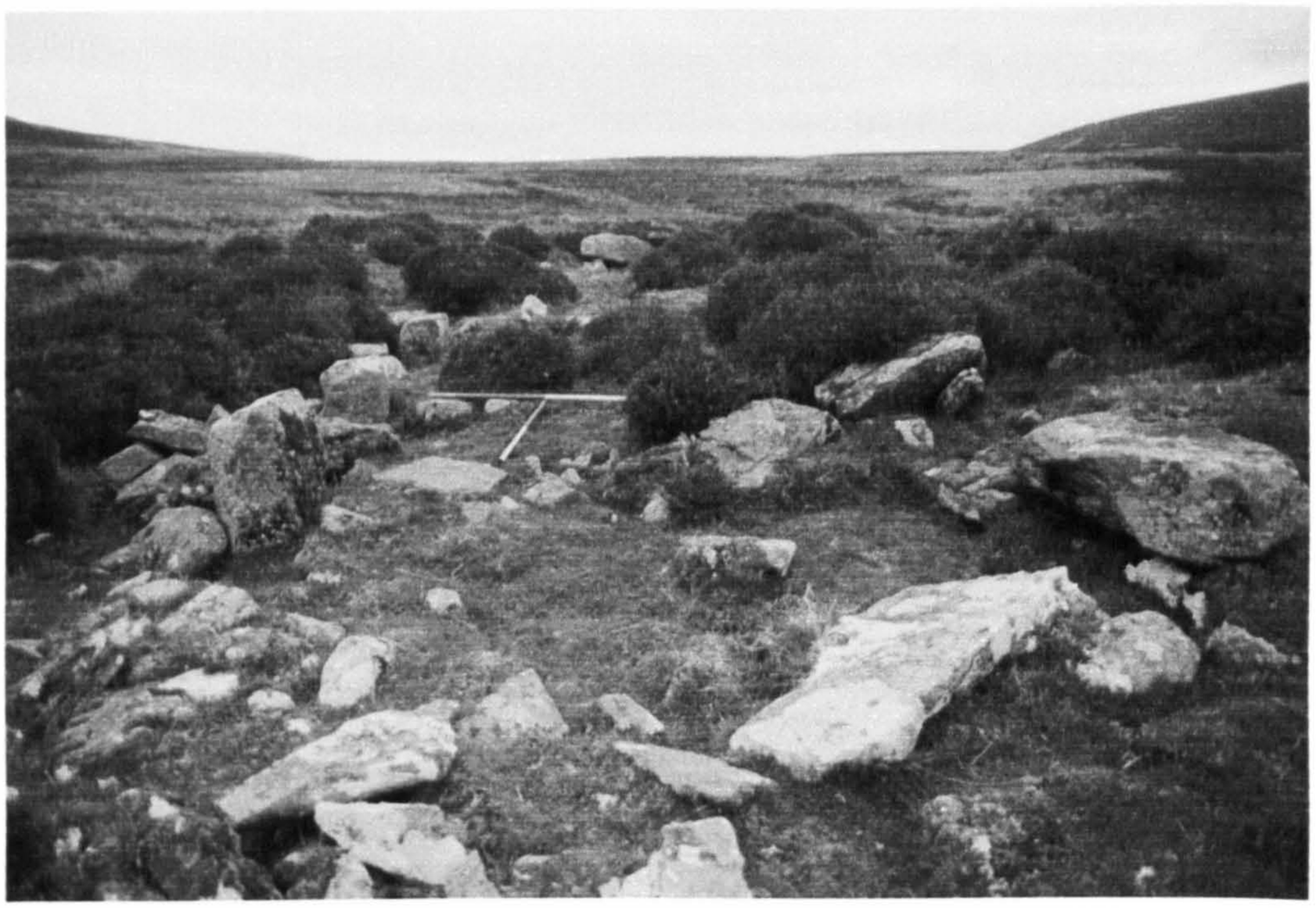


Plate 7.4 : Aisled building, Uaigh Bheag 2 (12), Glen Loth.

explain the lack of the relationship to developed settlement landscapes, and it is possible that this site represents the establishment of a new settlement locale during the middle Iron Age. Certainly, it is situated on the valley floor, and lacks the visual dominance which, I will argue, implies a concern with the maintenance of a relationship with existing cultural landscapes.

Glen Loth is also notable in that it contains four sites with aisled buildings (Map 7.5), the only appreciable concentration of these monuments away from the 'wag' sites further to the north in Caithness. All four of the Loth sites are directly comparable with the Caithness examples, such as the excavated site at Langwell, in that they consist of one or more sub-rectangular aisled buildings, with surviving upright pillar stones, and indications of conjoined circular structures (Figure 7.6, Plate 7.4)). The southernmost of these buildings, Carradh nan Clach (5), is situated 150m to the south of the Loth/Sletdale confluence. The site itself is situated in a shallow hollow at the edge of a river terrace, immediately above the valley floor. There are three further aisled buildings further upstream. Two are named *Uaigh Bheag* (11 & 12). This is the Gaelic for 'little grave', which suggests an alternative derivation for the corruption 'wag', especially since prehistoric sites have often been assumed to be ancient graves. Indeed, Carn nan Uaigh was once known as *Uag* (Morrison 1883), further increasing the likelihood of this alternative derivation. The sites are within 500m of one another, and are intervisible. The southernmost, Uaigh Bheag 2 (12) sits on the undulating floor of the glen, close to the Loth Burn. Uaigh Bheag 1 (11) is situated within a very similar landscape some 500m further upstream, alongside a minor tributary flowing down from the steep, craggy slopes to the west. Close by is the more fragmentary site of Carn nan Uaigh (4), which has been extensively robbed to build an adjacent post-medieval building. Although there is no evidence of contemporary cultivation in association with any of these sites, Carn nan Uaigh and Uaigh Bheag 2 sit within an area previously given over to post-medieval agriculture, which is likely to have influenced the survival of any traces of prehistoric land-use. All four aisled buildings have a similar landscape context, being situated alongside the Loth Burn in locations which are not clearly seen from the valley floor. The northernmost pair of sites are set in an area which is close to the access route into the neighbouring Strath of Kildonan.

Discussion

Adequately recorded archaeological excavation in this area of eastern Sutherland has been rare, and there are therefore problems with the reliable dating of many of its prehistoric structures. However, the evidence from nearby Kilphedir (Fairhurst & Taylor 1971) and Upper Suisgill (Barclay 1985), indicates that developed agricultural landscapes were established at least by the mid-first millennium BC. The radiocarbon determinations from Kilphedir

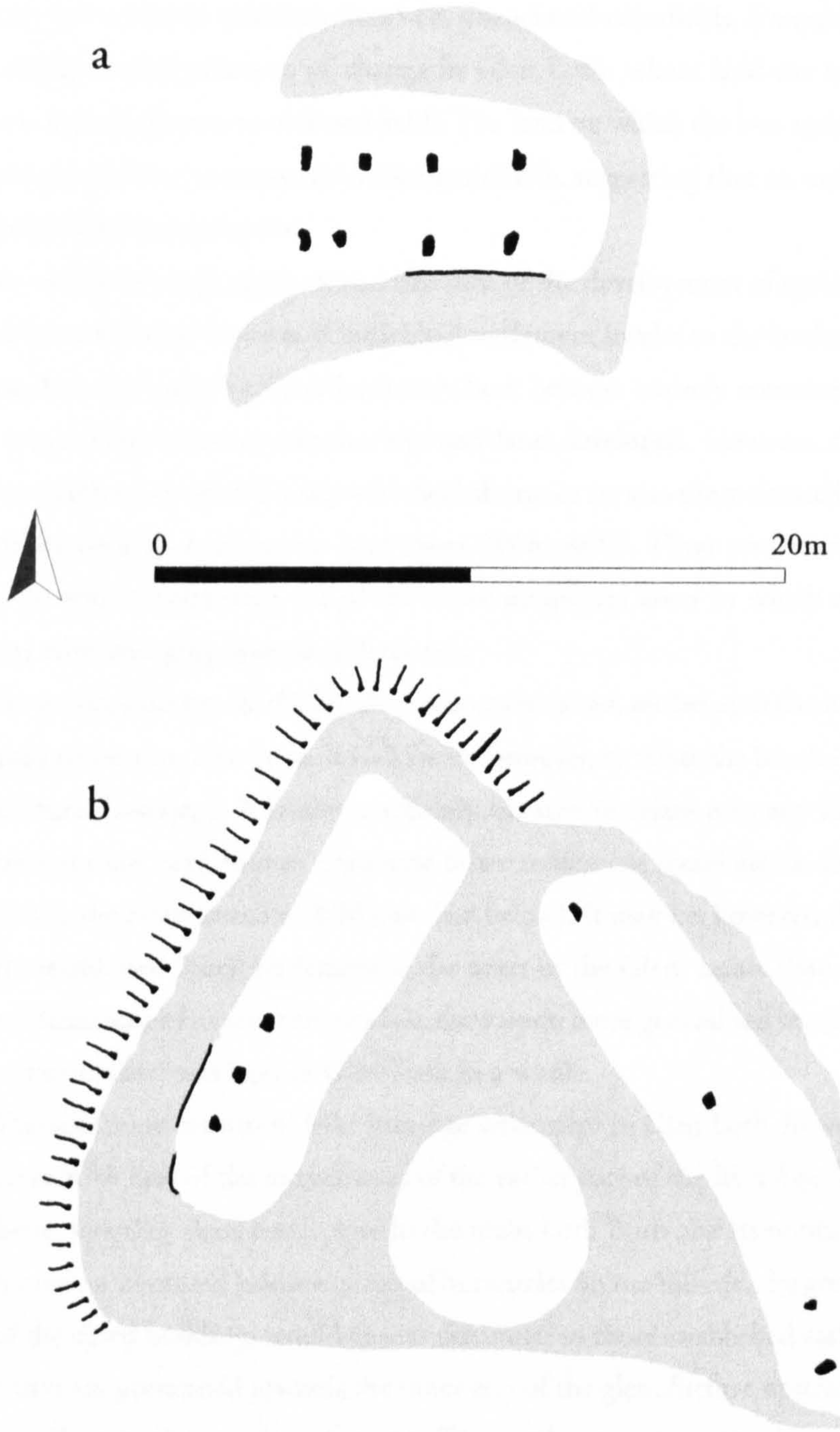


Figure 7.6 : Aisled buildings in Glen Loth, a) Carn nan Uaigh (4), b) Uaigh Bheag 1 (10) (after Ordnance Survey field plans).

suggest that this may have been the result of a long process of agricultural change which began with low intensity practices based on unenclosed cairnfields. I would argue that we may be seeing similar processes of change in Glen Loth, where land-use based on simple clearance is found adjacent to enclosed fields. The land on which the two agricultural systems are located appears environmentally indistinguishable, suggesting that an explanation might be sought in historical processes.

It would be tempting to extend this idea of the development of agricultural practice over time from the consideration of individual settlement locales to the landscape as a whole, to suggest that settlement in Glen Loth may have become entirely concentrated in certain areas as associations between communities and land developed. However, those groups of hut-circles which are associated solely with field clearance are also those situated on the steepest slopes within the glen, and also on land above 200m AOD. These settlements may have as much to do with a continued use of the more peripheral areas in which agriculture was possible, as with changing systems of land-use.

By the time the broch of Carn Bran was constructed, settled agricultural communities were already present in Glen Loth. It is difficult, however, to relate the broch itself directly to this agricultural landscape. It is not specifically situated in relation to any identifiable hut-circle concentration, and fails to dominate other settlement locations as, for example, do similar sites in the main Strath of Kildonan (see below). It may be, however, that the placing of a newly established broch settlement at the heart of the Glen, rather than within the less constricted landscape of its southern reaches, drew upon more generalised tenurial associations between communities and land in Glen Loth as a whole.

The landscape context of later Iron Age settlement in Glen Loth, however, presents a clear contrast with that of the monuments of the earlier part of the Iron Age. The sites sit on or just above the valley floor itself, close to the main Loth Burn and its northern tributaries. Although one site is located below a group of hut-circles on the hillside, the general landscape context of the aisled buildings would appear dissimilar to those established earlier in the Iron Age. The sites are positioned towards the inner end of the glen, further upstream than either the broch or the main hut-circle settlements. The northernmost site sits almost at the head of the glen, at the point where land begins to slope gently up towards the pass giving access to the neighbouring Strath of Kildonan. The placement of structures within the landscape suggests an emphasis on the valley floor. Indeed, the sites towards the head of the Glen are in very poorly drained locations which may never have successfully supported agriculture, and it

may be that accessibility from routes of movement were more important than the agricultural potential of the surrounding land. This landscape context is common to other later Iron Age sites, and I will draw out this argument further in the section dealing with settlement in the Langwell, Berriedale and Dunbeath valleys.

The Lower Strath of Kildonan

I will discuss here the southern and eastern part of the Strath, from its outflow into the Moray Firth to the junction of the River Helmsdale and the Suisgill Burn, 7.5km SSE of the small settlement of Kinbrace. Although hemmed in by rounded, heather covered hills, the floor of the Strath here is wide and flat, up to 700m across, and constrains the flood plain of the meandering River Helmsdale (Plate 7.5). As with the majority of the river valleys in the area, the comparative fertility of the valley floor has made it the focus for recent agricultural exploitation. This will clearly have had a major effect of the more ephemeral material remains of Iron Age settlement, for instance hut-circle sites with associated field systems, and this is reflected in the distribution of known monuments within the Strath (Map 7.6). This shows a concentration of sites and monuments on the lower slopes of the sides of the Strath, and within side valleys carrying tributary streams flowing into the main river. It must always be borne in mind that what we are able to see is likely to be only a partial distribution. This

Plate 7.5 : The lower Strath of Kildonan, looking W from Kilphedir.

impression is strengthened by the existence of at least three sites within the Strath where souterrains exist with little or no trace of above-ground structures. In addition, that the destruction of monuments in this area has continued in recent years is demonstrated by the fate of the earlier prehistoric stone row situated on the valley floor in the vicinity of the Torrish Burn; the deterioration of the site as a result of human activity has been catalogued by a series of visits from Royal Commission inspectors, and the site has now been almost completely destroyed by the construction of a passing place on the A897 road. The development of the modern village and port of Helmsdale must have destroyed or obscured any evidence for Iron Age settlement which existed there. RCAHMS (1993, 5), on the basis of the evidence from Upper Suisgill, suggest that colluvial deposits from the hillsides may mask much prehistoric settlement evidence on the valley floor. Nonetheless, as a result of recent survey in Kildonan, Iron Age archaeology is perhaps better recorded than in much of the remainder of the study area.

Along the Caen Burn, most southerly of the tributaries of the River Helmsdale, both along its steep flanks and on the more gently-sloping moorland to the north-west, are three hut-circle settlements (64, 66 & 67) which are associated with well-defined field systems. That on the south-east side of the burn is well-preserved, and comprises five hut-circles associated with identifiable field plots which average 30m by 25m in size, defined by both clearance cairns, and lynchets and tumbled stone walls. There is some evidence that hut-circles in two groups (66 & 67) have adjoining souterrains, and one of the examples on the north-west side of the burn was sufficiently massively constructed to be recorded on the Ordnance Survey 6" map as a broch site. Such associations, between developed agricultural practices and the elaboration of the architecture of the house itself, exist at numerous other sites within the Strath. Further upstream, situated on what is now marginal land above the steep sides of the Caen Burn, and along the minor tributaries which feed it, are further hut-circle groups (65 & 38), associated with clearance cairns only, and occasionally with patches of stone-free ground, which may be a remnant of small-scale cultivation. The general impression is of a relationship between steeper, higher ground located further inland along the tributary systems, and hut-circle settlement associated with clearance cairns only or without any clear evidence of associated cultivation. However, there are single hut-circles associated with traces of banks and lynchets located along the Caen Burn beyond the main group of clearance cairns (19 & 20), and the distinction between the two agricultural regimes is rather blurred.

Similar patterns of hut-circle settlement may be identified in other tributary systems along the lower Strath of Kildonan (Map 7.6). The Allt Cille Pheadair was densely settled, including the excavated site of Kilphedir itself (Kilphedir 1, 109) (Fairhurst & Taylor 1971). Although Fairhurst and Taylor suggest that hut-circle settlement in this area is particularly dense (*ibid.* 92), this observation was based on survey information available at the time. In the light of known distributions in the area, the concentration of settlement in this particular small area would not appear unusual. Although details of the sequence at Kilphedir have already been discussed (section 5.3.1), it is important here to reiterate the association between hut-circles and cultivation which the excavations revealed. It seems likely that settlement at Kilphedir 1 during the earlier first millennium BC was based on low-intensity, long-fallow agricultural practice, and the periodic occupation and reconstruction of houses at the site. By the later first millennium BC, and perhaps much earlier, this was replaced by permanent

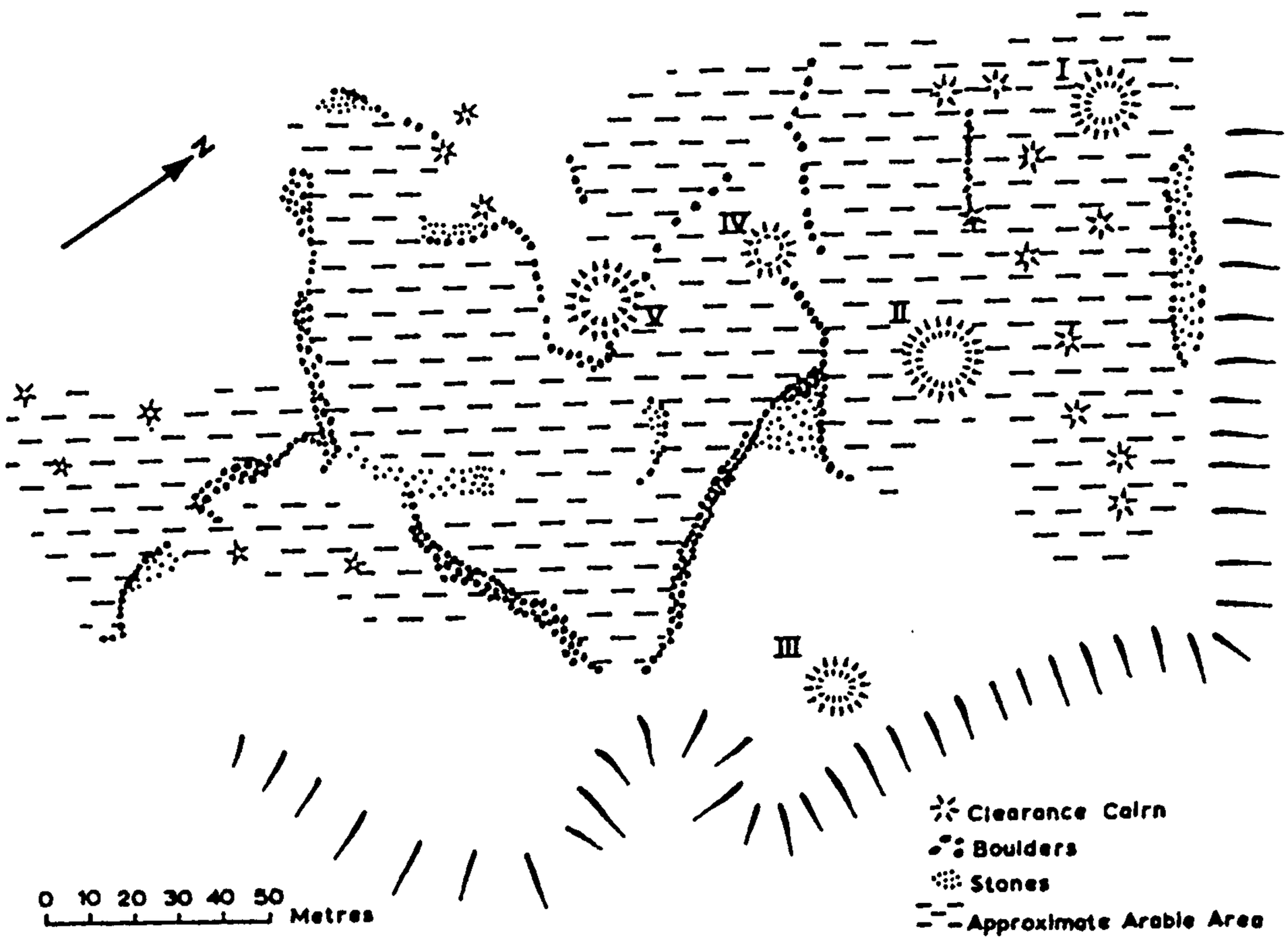


Figure 7.7 : Hut-circles and field systems at Kilphedir 1 (109) (Fairhurst 1971, Figure 1).

occupation, based on a single, more monumental house, with an elaborate, extended entrance passage and a souterrain entered from within the building. This was associated with enclosed cultivation plots, which suggest more intensive, short-fallow cultivation practices (Figure 7.7).

The excavated area at Kilphedir 1 forms only part of a wider settlement landscape, which incorporates at least four concentrations of hut-circle settlement associated with enclosed cultivation (Map 7.6). One of the three hut-circles at Kilphedir 2 (110) is massively constructed, with a conjoined souterrain (Plate 7.6), and may be directly compared with structure V at Kilphedir 1. Although there is no cultivation evidence other than an area of smooth, stone-free ground in direct association with this hut-circle, it lies close to other buildings, which are similar to structure II at Kilphedir. Although these structures are of large diameter, they are neither substantially built nor architecturally complex. It is likely that the associated cultivation evidence, comprising both clearance cairns and well-defined field plots, enclosed by both linear clearance and stony lynchets, should be attributed to the settlement as a whole. I would suggest that we can discern here a familiar range of cultivation, from non-intensive agriculture evidenced by field clearance alone to defined and enclosed cultivation plots, as suggested by

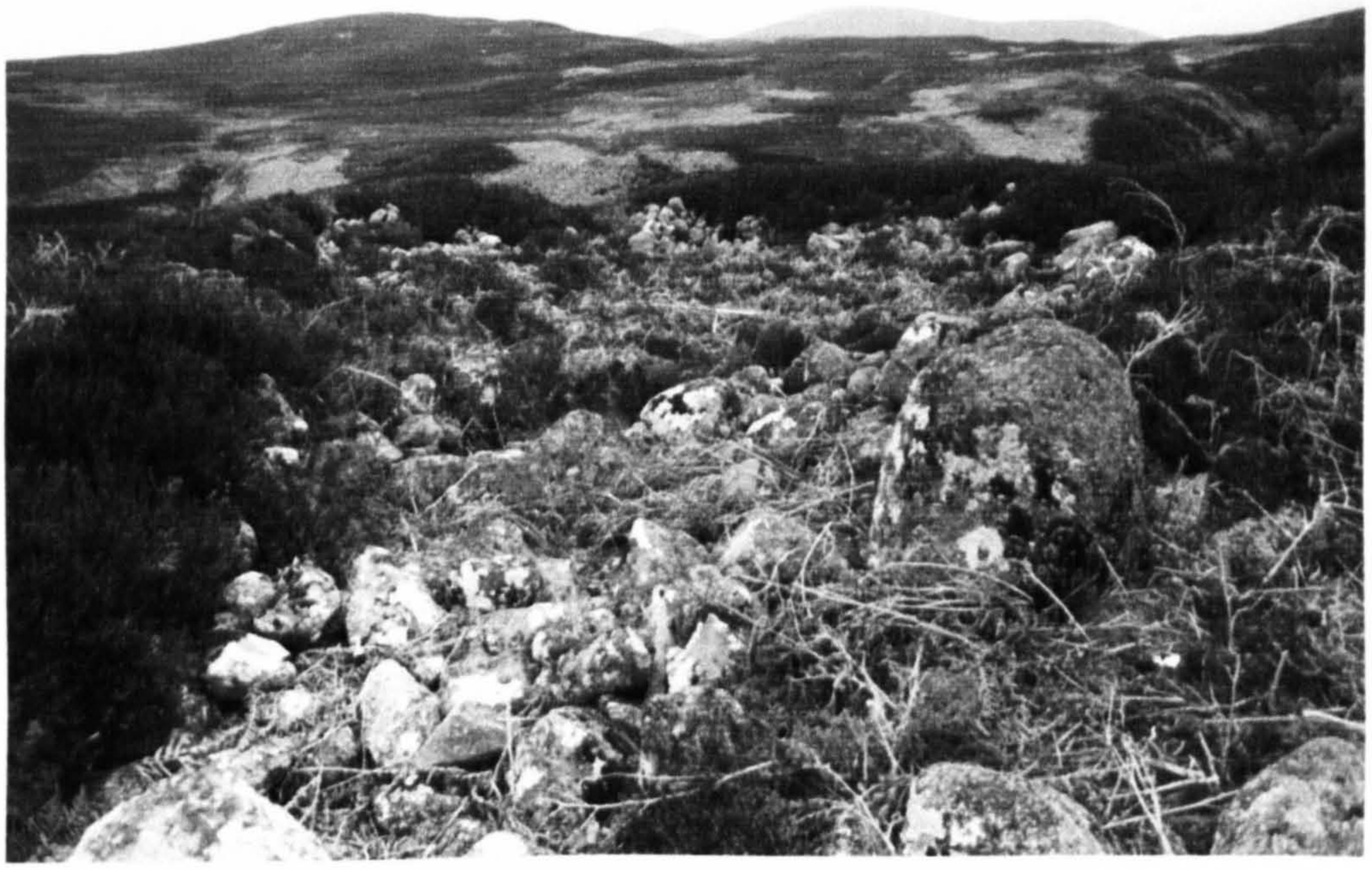


Plate 7.6 : Massively constructed hut-circle at Kilephedir 2 (110).

the excavations at Kilphedir 1, in association with a comparable range of architecture. There are two further hut-circle settlements, associated with both clearance cairns and enclosed plots further upstream along the Allt Cille Pheadair (111 & 113). Both of these groups also include massively-built houses, of which Kilphedir 3 has an associated souterrain.

On the slopes further upstream, on either side of the Allt Cille Pheadair, are hut-circles, either singly or in pairs, with either very ephemeral evidence of cultivation in the form of cleared ground (115), or lacking any evidence of associated land-use (79, 112 & 114). These structures lack the architectural complexity found within the main settlement concentrations in the Kilphedir area. They become increasingly scattered with distance from the main strath, and again it is possible that some represent short-term occupation of more marginal land.

Close parallels can be drawn between the landscape archaeology of the Allt Cille Pheadair and the Caen Burn, but the wider situation within the lower Strath of Kildonan, although similar in many respects, is more complex. Along the Torrish Burn and the lower reaches of the Allt Breac, as well as the minor tributary above the small cluster of buildings at Torrish, there are numerous concentrations of hut-circles in association with clearance cairns, as well as isolated examples above 100m AOD within the upper reaches of the tributaries, with no clear evidence of associated cultivation. Some 2.0km along the Allt Breac, in an apparently marginal location, is a group of three hut-circles associated with a system of enclosed plots (55) defined by earth and stone banks and lynchets, but lacking the clearance cairns noted at other similar sites in less elevated situations. This variation suggests that complex historical processes were in operation. In addition to the development of more intensive agricultural practice in particular areas as part of long-term associations between communities and the land, it is possible that in some less favourable areas small settlements based on more intensive agricultural practice were established *de novo*. It is possible that the social importance of enclosed agriculture was enough to ensure its practice in some areas.

On the southern side of the lower Strath of Kildonan, there is considerable evidence of prehistoric settlement, in association with cultivation remains (Map 7.6). There is cultivation evidence on the hill slopes flanking both the Eldrable and Oulmsdale Burns. Close to the former, cultivation traces range from clearance cairns to enclosed field systems, and include an extensive area of clearance cairns, apparently not directly associated with evidence of domestic settlement. This is situated on a gentle hill-slope, above an extensive field system defined by banks and lynchets, and extends along the face of the hill to the west. Here, it is defined by enclosures constructed from large boulders, sub-divided by lynchets into plots measuring approximately 30m by 30m, suggesting the use of more ephemeral boundaries such as fences against which the lynchets may have formed. A similar field system is located

above the junction of the Oulmsdale Burn and the main River Helmsdale, above which hut-circle settlement, comprising at least six separate structures, extends upstream along the burn for almost 1km (143 & 144). This straggling settlement contrasts with the concentrations on the northern side of the Strath, and probably relates to the constraining effects of the landscape within such minor tributary systems. In the hills to the south and west of this are scattered small groups of hut-circles associated with groups of clearance cairns, which extend into the head-waters of the Loth Burn.

The final area of settlement I will discuss here is a large concentration of sites extending along the spur of Torr Mor (9), to the north-west of the Allt a'Choire Mhoir, which joins the River Helmsdale near Kilearnan. These hut-circles extend down the spur, from just below the point, where the hill-slope steepens towards the summit of The Craggan, to a flat plateau above the floor of the main strath (Plate 7.7). This area of settlement is associated with a substantial field system, comprising both clearance cairns and boulder field dykes and lynchets, although RCAHMS suggest that the latter may not be contemporary with the hut-circles themselves. Unfortunately, post-medieval agriculture has obscured much of this, and it is difficult to locate individual field plots, or to differentiate these from areas of clearance. Later land-use has also affected the preservation of the structures themselves. However, it is notable that there appears to be considerable architectural complexity within this group. There are five individual groups of structures set within the overall area. The southernmost, furthest up the hill-slope, comprises three conjoined circular buildings. Each of the other groups contains circular structures with conjoined sub-rectangular annexes (Plate 7.8), and within the central group there is also evidence of expanded wall terminals, suggesting an extended entrance passage. The impression here is of individual domestic units, set within a wider enclosed agricultural landscape.

There is no way of dating these structures accurately. However, they are surrounded, both to north and south, by hut-circle settlements which display both less architectural complexity (72 & 157) and are also close to others associated with cultivation traces comprising areas of clearance cairns only (10 & 49). This may be evidence that this settlement represents the product of a considerable history of agricultural development, as there is no apparent difference in the nature of the land across the settled area. Indeed, it is possible that this settlement continued in occupation after the establishment of the nearby broch site at Kilearnan, given the presence of sub-rectangular architectural elements at the site. Although there is evidence of a developed field system in the area immediately to the north of the

Plate 7.7 : Part of the hut-circle settlement & field system at Torr Mor, looking S.

Plate 7.8 : Sub-rectangular annexe to hut-circle at Allt a'Choire Mhoir 1 (Torr Mor) (9).

broch, the hut circles at Torr Mor which are associated with it (157) lack the architectural complexity of those further up the spur (9). It is possible that domestic structures went out of use in this area after the construction of the broch, whereas settlement continued further to the south.

There are six broch sites which can be identified, with some certainty, within the lower part of the Strath of Kildonan. The most fragmentary remains are at Kilearnan Hill (17), at which only the outer perimeter of the site remains recognisable. Two more broch sites, at Cnoc Chaisteal, Helmsdale (30) and the Allt Chaen (31) are recorded in early accounts of the area (RCAHMS 1911a, 134), but now exhibit no clear surface traces. Of the eight possible broch sites in the lower Strath of Kildonan, seven share a locational preference, being sited at or above the junction between a tributary stream and the River Helmsdale. Four of the six sites which survive as identifiable remains are sited within 350m of concentrations of hut-circle settlement which are associated with developed field systems. This suggests that the pattern of broch settlement was not overlain on an existing cultivated landscape without regard for it (but cf. Cowley, forthcoming), but would appear to draw upon established patterns of land tenure.

The brochs also occupy highly visible locations. Many of the known hut-circle settlements are sited along tributary streams, often on natural terraces out of sight of the main valley floor, or on secluded slopes within minor side valleys. The brochs, however, are positioned at the outer edges of these tributary valleys, usually on the first terrace above the valley floor (Map 7.6), and were clearly meant to be highly visible from the main Strath.

In addition to their prominent situation, all of the broch sites were also divided off from the surrounding landscape by outer boundaries. The site at Kilearnan (16), for instance, survives as a prominent stone mound surrounded by the remains of an outer rampart and ditch. Similarly, the broch at Eldrable (14) is situated on a small knoll, which appears to have been set apart from the landscape by the addition of outer defences. Perhaps the most impressive example of this concern with separation from the landscape is the broch at Kilphedir (18) (Plate 7.9). Set on the flat summit of a small hillock, less than 200m from Kilphedir hut-circle complex (see above), this excavated site (Joass 1865) survives as a substantial mound of tumbled stone. The site is surrounded by a massive ditch, which effectively separates it from its immediate surroundings (Plate 7.10). Although this site was clearly selected both for its visual dominance, and for the extensive views which it commands along the Strath in either direction, it is overlooked by steep slopes both to the north and to the north-east. Despite its commanding position and monumental structure, it is unlikely that the location of Kilphedir broch was chosen on entirely defensive grounds, as a location further up the slope would

Plate 7.9 : Kilphedir broch (18), seen from the SW.

Plate 7.10 : Outer boundary at Kilphedir broch (18).

have achieved this more effectively. It seems clear that the site was meant to be seen from the lower slopes and the floor of the Strath of Kildonan, from where it remains a prominent landmark. Despite the ubiquity of substantial outer boundaries, at no Kildonan site is there any evidence of structures surrounding the broch itself. The construction of these buildings does not, therefore, appear to have involved the establishment of nucleated settlements.

The Strath of Kildonan lacks distinctive evidence of later Iron Age settlement. Although Foster (1989a, 1989b) has demonstrated that occupation continued on the more complex broch sites of Caithness and Orkney into the Late Iron Age, none of the brochs in the lower part of the Strath appears to have had a similar complex of surrounding buildings. The only possible evidence of settlement which may date to the later part of the Iron Age is a so-called 'homestead' (23) at Eldrable. This site is set into a natural terrace at the base of Eldrable Hill, and would appear to represent the remains of sub-circular structures in association with an externally revetted, sub-rectangular mound. There are, however, insufficient structural details visible to allow a closer identification of the site as an aisled building similar to those found in Glen Loth. In other parts of the study area, known later Iron Age settlement is located on valley floors close to the main river systems. It is therefore possible that the comparative intensity of post-medieval activity in the Strath of Kildonan has resulted in the destruction of later Iron Age sites.

Further upstream along the Strath of Kildonan, between the area discussed above and the Suisgill Burn, there are similar later prehistoric landscapes. Although the distribution of sites and monuments is sparser than downstream, it may be that this relates largely to circumstances of discovery and preservation. In the area of the Kildonan Burn, a major tributary of the River Helmsdale, there is a concentration of hut-circle settlement around the low, flat hill-top of Creag Druim nan Rath. These structures are set in two distinct settlements. The first is situated between the Kildonan Burn itself and the southern top of Creag Druim nan Rath (106). It consists of at least twelve individual hut-circles, of widely varying size, including two larger, sub-circular structures, 12.5m by 11.5m and 12.0 by 9.0m internally, which have expanded wall terminals providing an extended entrance passage. This area of settlement is associated with a field system which includes both clearance cairns and stone field banks, together with a number of distinct lynchets, within which individual plots can be discerned measuring on average 20.0m by 15.0m. 650m further to the north-west is a second group of seven hut-circles (81). Again, these vary widely in size, and one was constructed with expanded wall terminals. This settlement is associated with a field system, defined by both clearance

cairns and stone banks and clear lynchets, with identifiable plots averaging 25.0m by 20.0m in size. The structures furthest down the slope in this area are associated with clearance cairns only. This may again be evidence of the intensification of agricultural practice over time, as this area is not noticeably less suitable for cultivation.

There are two further small settlements, comprising pairs of hut-circles in association with areas of clearance cairns only, close to the main concentrations within the Kildonan Burn system. However, the rest of the area is curiously free of hut-circle settlement; there are only two known isolated hut-circles at the inner extremity of the water-course (14, 107), at elevations over 200m AOD and unassociated with traces of agriculture. Settlement in this area would appear to represent a rather extreme example of the landscapes identified thus far, where enclosed agriculture seems to have developed over time in particular locations at the outer edges of the tributary systems, with more ephemeral and possibly short-lived occupation set deep within the uplands. Indeed, it seems even more likely than elsewhere that such remote structures may have been temporarily occupied shielings.

On the opposite, southern, side of the Strath of Kildonan, to the south of the prominent Learable Hill, hut circle settlement extends along the northern side of the Allt Leitir nan Caile for more than 1km (125 & 126). Those structures furthest from the junction of the tributary with the River Helmsdale are associated with clearance cairns only. Closer to the main Strath, but still above 130m above OD, hut-circle settlement is again associated with areas of clearance cairns, but also with well-defined lynchets. On steeper ground to the south, above 200m AOD, are one or two isolated single hut-circles with no clear evidence of associated cultivation. On the southern slopes of Learable Hill is a further settlement of four hut-circles, in association with field clearance cairns covering an area at least 400m by 300m (127). This settlement is also associated with linear clearance banks and a large enclosure some 110.0m across, however the clearance cairns in this case appear to be set within the area defined by the stone banks (Figure 7.8), demonstrating the complexity of enclosed agriculture in this area.

There is a further area of settlement along the minor tributary of the Allt an Fhionnfhuaraid, a multi period landscape with evidence of activity which may span the first two millennia BC into the first millennium AD (RCAHMS 1993, 19) (1-3) There are at least nine hut-circles, set in three groups. These are associated with a field system, defined partly by a considerable area of clearance cairns within a banked enclosure. There are also more regular, sub-rectangular plots in the immediate vicinity of the hut-circles themselves, and at least two of the hut-circles are conjoined with parts of the field system. One of the hut-circles would appear to have been more massively re-built within the remains of an earlier example, in association with a souterrain (Figure 7.9), recalling the situation at Kilphedir 1.

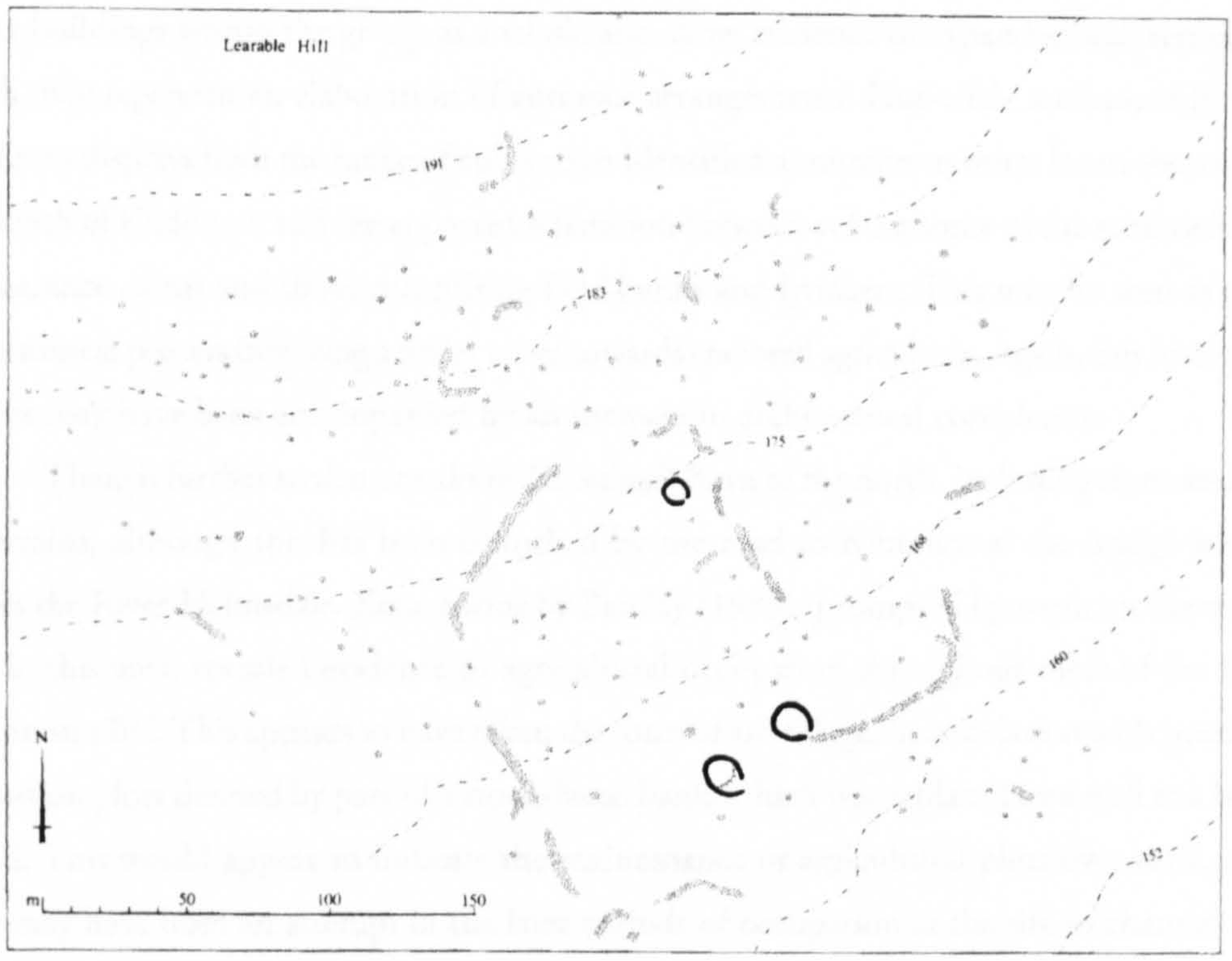


Figure 7.8 : Hut-circles, enclosures and clearance cairns at Learable Hill (127) (RCAHMS 1993, Fig. 5)

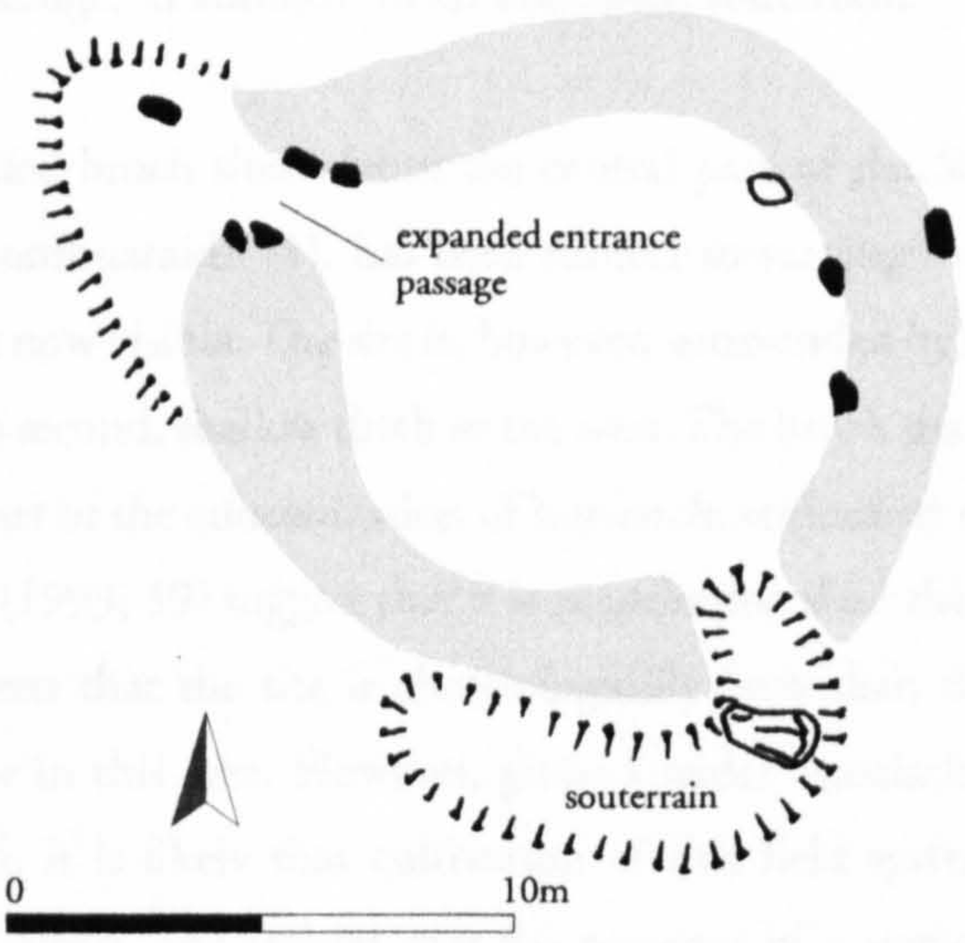


Figure 7.9 : Complex hut-circle at Ach anFhionnfhuaraidh 1 (1)(after RCAHMS 1993, Fig. 12).

Other buildings within the group as a whole also show evidence of expanded wall terminals which may represent an elaboration of entrance arrangements. Hut-circle settlement in this small area displays both the range of cultivation identified at numerous other locations within the Strath of Kildonan, and the apparent separation between at least some of the areas defined by clearance cairns and those comprising field banks and lynchets. This may be seen as part of a historical process involving a wider move towards enclosed agriculture. Again, this historical process may have been accompanied by an increase in architectural complexity.

There is further settlement along the Suisgill Burn to the north, including three known souterrains, although this has been disturbed by the road to Kinbrace at the bridge which crosses the River Helmsdale. Excavations by Barclay (1985), prompted by work on the main road in this area, revealed evidence of agricultural occupation throughout most of the first millennium BC. This appears to have taken the form of ard tillage, in association with possible cultivation plots defined by part of a stone-faced bank, which was replaced by a wall at a later period. This would appear to indicate the maintenance of agricultural plots over time, and there may have been an attempt in the later periods of occupation at the site to channel the flow of water from the hill-slopes above, possibly in attempt to control the periodic inundation of the site with gravel deposits. Further upstream along the Suisgill Burn are numerous hut-circles, set in three major concentrations (171, 35 & 87), associated with cultivation traces, which include both clearance cairns and lynchets. At least one of these hut-circles has an extended entrance passage, in addition to an associated souterrain.

There are two recorded broch sites within the central part of the Strath of Kildonan. The first, at Ach an Fhionnfhuaraidh (1), has been subject to varying interpretations, although little internal detail is now visible. The site is, however, surrounded by a ditch with an internal bank, in addition to a second, shallow ditch to the west. The broch sits in a dominant location within the western part of the concentration of hut-circle settlement discussed above (Figure 7.3), and RCAHMS (1993, 19) suggest that it is superimposed on the field system associated with this. This suggests that the site is chronologically later than the development of the agricultural landscape in this area. However, given a wider association between broch sites and agricultural land, it is likely that cultivation of this field system continued after the establishment of the broch, and indeed that the presence of a settled farming community may have been the reason for the choice of this location. Certainly, there are strong comparison between this broch and others within the Strath of Kildonan, as it sits on a terrace at the outer edge of a tributary system, facing onto the main valley. While forming part of an agricultural landscape, the site also seems to have been separated from its surroundings by an outer boundary. Its entrance passage seems to have been oriented to the north-west, onto the main

strath. This orientation must have been designed to make use of the local landscape. Hill-slopes rise steeply behind the site, from where it is overlooked. However, placing the broch at the highest point of these slopes would leave it remote from both the hut-circles and associated field systems, and invisible from the floor of the Strath. The location which was chosen for the site has the effect of allowing it to break the skyline when approached from the north-west.

The broch site of Carn nam Buth (11) survives as a robbed mound, which sits on a natural knoll some 20m above the valley floor. The sides of this knoll may have been artificially steepened, and the site itself is enclosed by a ditch and external bank, once again separating it from its immediate surroundings. Although the site is not as clearly related to surrounding structures as that at Ach an Fhionnfhuaraidh, this is partly due to the intervention of the modern road from Helmsdale to Kinbrace. The site again sits near the outer reaches of a tributary burn system, the Suisgill Burn, and the presence of the excavated evidence for early agriculture in this area, in addition to the three recorded souterrains here, suggest a relationship to an area of developed agricultural settlement. Indeed, the entrance passage of the site is oriented NNE, in this case away from the main strath and along the face of the terrace on which the site is set towards The Suisgill Burn, suggesting a possible approach from other settlements located in this direction.

As in the case of the lower part of the Strath of Kildonan, there is little evidence for specifically later Iron Age settlement. Again, this may partly be due to the presence of extensive post-medieval activity along the floor of the Strath, including considerable areas of forestry, which will inevitably have destroyed and obscured prehistoric settlement evidence.

Discussion

The limitations of using field evidence alone must always be borne in mind. However, the suggested sequence from Kilphedir, involving a change from non-intensive, long-fallow cultivation to more permanent, enclosed agricultural landscapes, would appear to have been part of wider processes of change during the first millennium BC. A combination of areas of clearance and enclosed field plots can be seen along almost every tributary of the main River Helmsdale, suggesting that these tributaries and side-valleys represent the main settlement locations on the sides of the strath.

In general, hut-circle settlements associated with clearance cairns alone, or with no visible evidence of cultivation, are located on higher ground, and also within the upper reaches of the side-valleys, further from the main Strath. It is probable, then, that as the first millennium BC progressed, permanent agricultural settlement became increasingly associated with the

lower reaches of the tributary systems. The presence of lynchets suggests that the land was worked for considerable periods, and may represent evidence of less substantial field boundaries (cf. Fowler & Evans 1967, 296). Changing land-use also seems to have been accompanied by an increasingly complex and impressive architecture, culminating in massive roundhouses, such as Kilphedir V, with elaborate entrance passages and souterrains entered from within the building.

We therefore have considerable evidence for a change both in the level of intensity and technological investment in agriculture during the first millennium BC, and the degree of architectural permanence within the landscape. It is, however, important not to over-draw the contrast, or to over-simplify the nature of the transition. At some sites, considerable areas of field clearance are present *within* enclosures, and it may be that it was necessary to separate cultivated from uncultivated land even within the less intensive agricultural regimes. I am also wary of suggesting a simple transition between the two broad systems of cultivation, as many of the hut-circle settlements which occur in association with field clearance in the absence of enclosed boundaries lie in areas which are always likely to have been marginal for agriculture. It is therefore possible that less intensive agriculture may have continued in these areas when environmental conditions made it possible. Similarly, the less complex architecture of many of the sites without associated agriculture may have as much to do with functional considerations, perhaps a shieling system, as to long-term processes of change.

Whatever the chronology of these changes, there is clear evidence for the presence of settled agricultural communities in the Strath of Kildonan by the mid-first millennium BC. These communities are likely to have forged lasting tenurial associations with the land, and it is within such a social context that the brochs began to be built. Almost every known broch in the Strath is situated above the junction of a minor tributary or side-valley with the main Strath. They are also situated either adjacent to or, in some cases, within areas of hut-circle settlement, but here maintain a dominant position within the landscape. It is therefore difficult to maintain that brochs represent an intrusive presence, as they clearly draw on long-established associations between communities and land for their meaning within the landscape (see Chapter 3). They are also set in areas where there is evidence of existing architecture which was monumental in scale, if not in degree of permanence.

However, it also appears that an effort was made to maintain a sense of separation between the brochs and the immediate landscape. Often, they are placed close to, but outside of, areas of cultivated land, and all of the sites within the Strath of Kildonan were provided with bank and ditch systems separating them from their surroundings. I would not deny that

these monumental boundaries, and even the seamless architectural form of the brochs themselves, may have operated to deny access at certain times. However, most locations are overlooked from higher ground, which mitigates against defence as a defining consideration, and they must also have had a considerable role within day-to-day social practices.

There is very little direct evidence for settlement during the later part of the Iron Age within the Strath of Kildonan. It is possible that occupation continued on broch sites well into the first millennium AD. However, there is no evidence for complex settlements around any of the Kildonan brochs, similar to those at Kintradwell within the present study area and in north east Caithness and Orkney, which have demonstrable first millennium AD occupation (Ballin Smith 1994 (ed.), Foster 1989b). Similarly, there is no good evidence for the re-use of the brochs themselves, similar to that noted in the Western Isles (Gilmour pers. comm., Armit 1997b, 252) and in north-eastern Caithness (section 8.3.1). It also possible that hut-circle sites continued to be used into the first millennium, as was the case to the south at Lairg (McCullagh & Tipping 1998). Again, there is no direct evidence for this from the Strath of Kildonan, although there are sub-rectangular structures in association with hut-circles at the Allt a'Choire Mhoir. However, it is notable that the only site which might represent *distinct* later Iron Age activity sits on the floor of the Strath, in a similar context to the aisled buildings in Glen Loth, and those in south-east Caithness (see section 7.3.2 – 7.3.3). It is therefore possible that post-medieval land-use, which has been at its most intense on the floor of the Strath of Kildonan, has destroyed any distinctive traces of later Iron Age settlement.

7.3.2. Langwell and Berriedale

This area forms the mountainous south-eastern corner of Caithness, and contains the highest land in the county, including the prominent heights of Morven and Maiden Pap, the long quartzite massif of Scaraben and the grassy ridge linking the quartzite tors of Smean and Carn Mor. The region is dissected by two main valleys, which carry the Langwell and Berriedale Waters from their sources in the peat bogs of the Flow Country to a common outflow into the Moray Firth at Berriedale. The two rivers encircle the high ground, which can only be crossed easily at a restricted number of passes (Plate 7.11).

The Langwell Water (Map 7.7)

The area surrounding the lower part of the Langwell Water is both heavily afforested, and artificially landscaped around Langwell House (Plate 7.12). The survival potential of the more ephemeral evidence of prehistoric settlement is therefore low, especially since destructive activity has continued well into recent times. The remains of a souterrain at Langwell

Plate 7.11 : The Smean - Carn Mor Ridge and the Preas Bhealaich pass (left of picture)

Plate 7.12: The forested slopes below Langwell House.

plantation, within an area of enclosures and subsidiary buildings attached to Langwell House, were recorded by RCAHMS (1911b, 66). Further traces of early settlement may have been present in the area at one time, but this surviving remnant was destroyed by forestry ploughing in 1960.

There are, however, two hut-circle settlements in the area surrounding the junction of the Turnal Burn with the Langwell Water. These are associated both with clearance cairns (118), and an enclosed field system defined both by field walls and clear lynchets (168). At least one large structure within the latter settlement has expanded wall terminals, giving an extended entrance passage. Although there is evidence of hut-circle settlement along the other major tributaries of the lower Langwell Water, the Strathy and Badnachie Burns (Map 7.7), these have been considerably disturbed by post-medieval settlement. All that remains of prehistoric settlement at Strathy is an isolated souterrain.

West of the confluence of the Strathy Burn with the Langwell Water is a settlement complex which extends almost 1.5km upstream. The easternmost settlements here are associated with cultivation traces, in the form of both areas of stone-free ground and scattered clearance cairns (62), or lack evidence of associated cultivation (61). To the west of this are two further settlement groups which are more complex. The easternmost (122) is the better preserved, and consists of at least two massively-built hut-circles. Unfortunately, their entrances have been disturbed by the construction of a later sheep-fold, and any entrance elaboration is no longer apparent. These structures are also associated with an oval enclosure and an adjoining souterrain, now choked with debris. 250m further upstream is a similar, but less well-preserved, settlement (121) set on a natural river terrace. This consists of a rather amorphous enclosure, possibly the remains of a large hut-circle, with an adjoining souterrain which is well preserved and can be entered (Plate 7.13), together with a better preserved hut-circle immediately to the east. Both of these settlements are associated with cultivation traces consisting of boulder field walls (Plate 7.14), together with some artificial terracing of the surrounding hill-slopes. This would appear to have been accompanied by architectural elaboration, at least in the form of the souterrain. There is a clear increase in both architectural complexity and land enclosure moving to the west along the valley, but there is a further settlement (120), set to the west of this group, which lacks evidence of associated cultivation. Given that there is no evident difference in the suitability for cultivation of the land itself within this part of the valley, it may be that this represents evidence for a concentration of settlement in this central area over time.

Plate 7.13 : Entrance to souterrain, Langwell Water (2).

Plate 7.14 : Boulder enclosure walls, Langwell Water.

The distribution of known settlement further upstream along the Langwell Water is rather sparse, but does include a possible hut-circle associated with a souterrain and very fragmentary field walls (119). This suggests that settled agriculture was established along the Langwell Water as far as this point. At the inner end of the river system, and along its tributary the Morven Burn, are a number of small hut-circles (172-4, 138, 176). These are very widely spaced within the landscape, at elevations over 180m AOD, and are associated with cultivation traces in the form of clearance cairns, or simply areas of stone-free ground. These structures are rather slight, and lack any evidence of architectural complexity.

There are three known broch sites along the Langwell Water. The most easterly of these is that at Borgue Langwell (7), which is situated on level ground, high above the south side of the Langwell Water. It sits adjacent to a minor tributary which flows down a steep slope to join the main river (Plate 7.15). Although the site cannot be related to any evidence of settled agriculture in the immediate area, there are adjacent footings of post-medieval buildings, and the area to the south is very disturbed by commercial forestry, suggesting that any such evidence is likely to have been destroyed. The site is visually dominant over the surrounding area, and is clearly visible from the far side of the main valley. The entrance orientation of the broch is not apparent, and there is therefore no indication as to whether the site was approached from the valley floor or from the surrounding land. However, its landscape context echoes that of broch sites within the Strath of Kildonan.

The second Langwell broch site, Langwell Tulloch (20), is located on a natural terrace, directly overlooking the Langwell Water on its north side. It sits adjacent to the Turnal Burn, near the point where it joins the main water-course. Although little structural detail is visible, the landscape context of the site is a familiar one. It is positioned close to the point where a tributary stream joins the Langwell Water, being both visible from the main valley and giving good views along it. The site is adjacent to a hut-circle settlement with evidence of an associated enclosed field system. However, the presence of a surrounding wall at the site suggests that it was physically separated from the surrounding cultivated landscape.

The final broch site, Tulloch Turnal (26), sits on the north side of the Langwell Water, overlooking the river. The site is now very denuded, consisting merely of a stony mound, although the outer wall of the broch remains traceable. The site was probably heavily robbed for stone during the construction of the adjacent post-medieval settlement. The site itself is highly visible from the Langwell Valley in either direction, although the ground behind it rises up gently to the flat spur of Cadha Fhionn, from which it is overlooked. Although the entrance arrangements are not visible, the presence of a ditch on the eastern side of the

Plate 7.15 : Tributary flowing towards the Langwell Valley, from Borgue Langwell broch (7).

mound suggests a separation from the immediate landscape similar to that noted elsewhere. It is difficult to comment further on the position of this site within its settlement landscape, as there are no other surviving later prehistoric structures in an area which has been subject to considerable modern afforestation.

Langwell is an area where distinctive later Iron Age settlement can be identified. There is a marked contrast between the landscape contexts of these settlements and those of the broch sites. All three of the known brochs are situated within the lower reaches of the Langwell Water (Map 7.7), within 3km of the sea. There is only one certain later Iron Age site in this area, the excavated aisled building at Borgue Langwell (9), whereas the other known examples in the area are situated at the very innermost reaches of the river system. I would suggest that this distribution is unlikely to be due entirely to recent disturbance, as all three of the brochs, as well as the aisled building have survived, and it is more likely that it relates to land-use contemporary with the sites themselves.

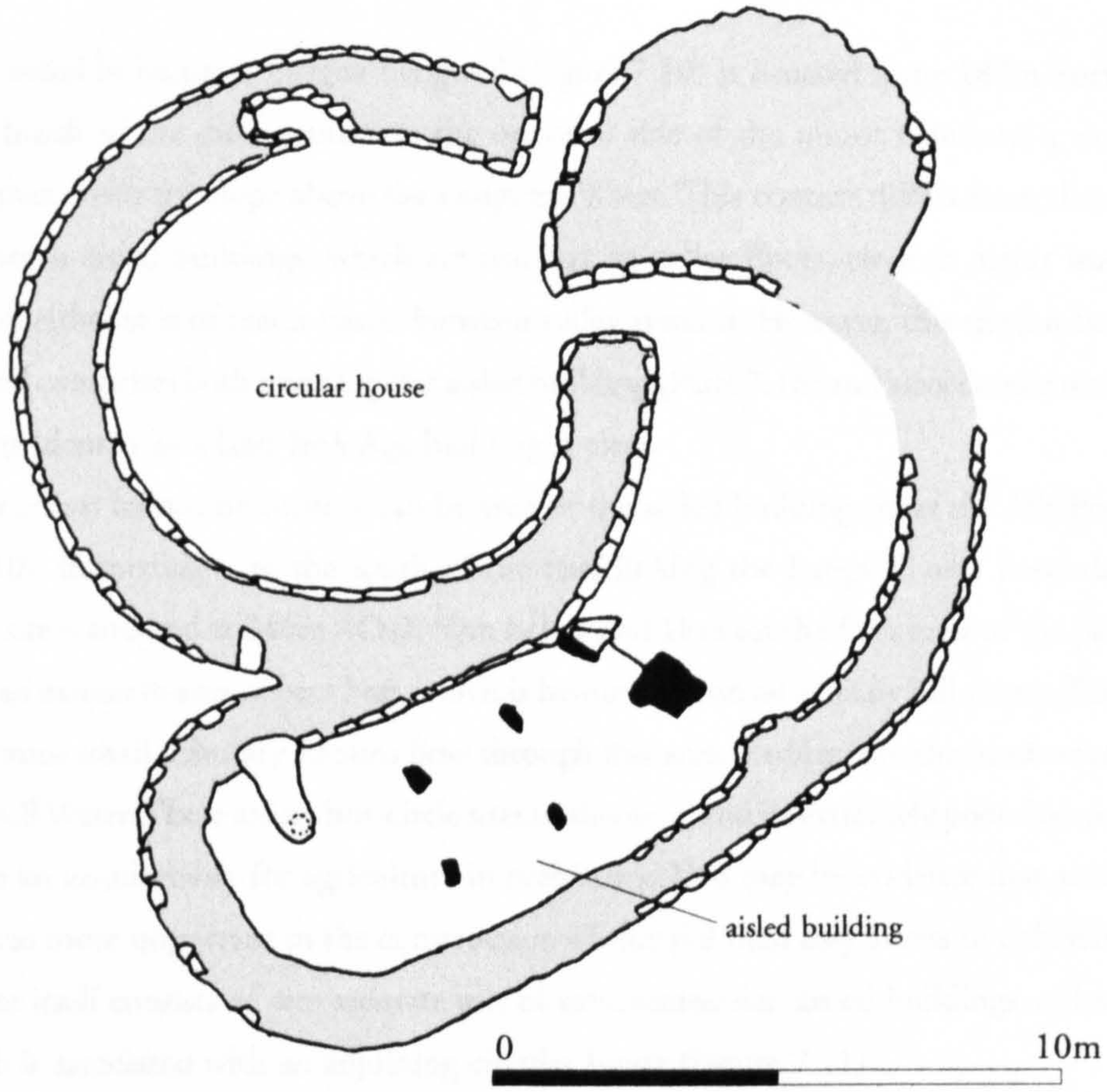


Figure 7.10 : Aisled building and associated house, Borgue Langwell (9) (after Curle 1912, Fig. 2).

Plate 7.16 : Aisled building, Borgue Langwell (9), detail of interior structure.

The aisled building at Borgue Langwell (Figure 7.10) is situated some 180m north-west of the broch of the same name, on the opposite side of the minor tributary, a short distance further down the slope above the Langwell Water. This context differs from that of the other known aisled buildings, which are situated on valley floors, close to major water courses, or on either side of major passes between valley systems. However, this site has been excavated, and comprises both a rectangular aisled building (Plate 7.16) and associated circular house, and its identity as a later Iron Age building is clear.

A recurrent landscape context can be seen at the aisled buildings near the Allt Preas Bhealaich (10), immediately to the south of the pass linking the Langwell and Berriedale Waters. The site is situated at 240m AOD, 50m below and 1km south of the crest of the pass. It overlooks an extensive area of peat bog, which is hemmed in on all sides by hill slopes (Plate 7.17). Numerous small tributary streams flow through this area, feeding into the head-waters of the Langwell Water. There are no hut-circle sites in this area, and its extremely poor drainage may indicate an unsuitability for agriculture in prehistory. This may be evidence that access to the pass was more important in the construction of this site than easy access to cultivable land. The site itself consists of two separate sets of sub-rectangular, aisled buildings, at least one of which is associated with an adjoining circular house (Figure 7.11).

1.5km to the south is the so-called 'wheelhouse' (16) at the end of the prominent spur known as Wagmore Rigg. This consists of a pair of conjoined, circular buildings of aisled construction (Figure 7.12). The landscape of this site contrasts rather markedly with most of the other known aisled building, as it is placed on high ground overlooking the junction of the Morven Burn and the Langwell Water (Plate 7.18). It commands views along the valley of the Langwell Water, as well as along many of its tributaries, and also of the Preas Bhealaich and the aisled buildings which sit to the south of it. Such a location echoes that of the brochs situated downstream, although the site appears to have been semi-subterranean, and would have lacked the visual dominance of the brochs.

Discussion

The distribution and landscape context of Iron Age sites within the Langwell Water exhibits some clear similarities with that of the sites in Eastern Sutherland, discussed above. The density of hut-circle settlement is less, although post-medieval agriculture will have had an effect which cannot be quantified. The situation is perhaps best compared with Glen Loth, in that there are few individual settlement locales. The hut circle settlements themselves show similar processes of development and change, and a comparable association with the land.

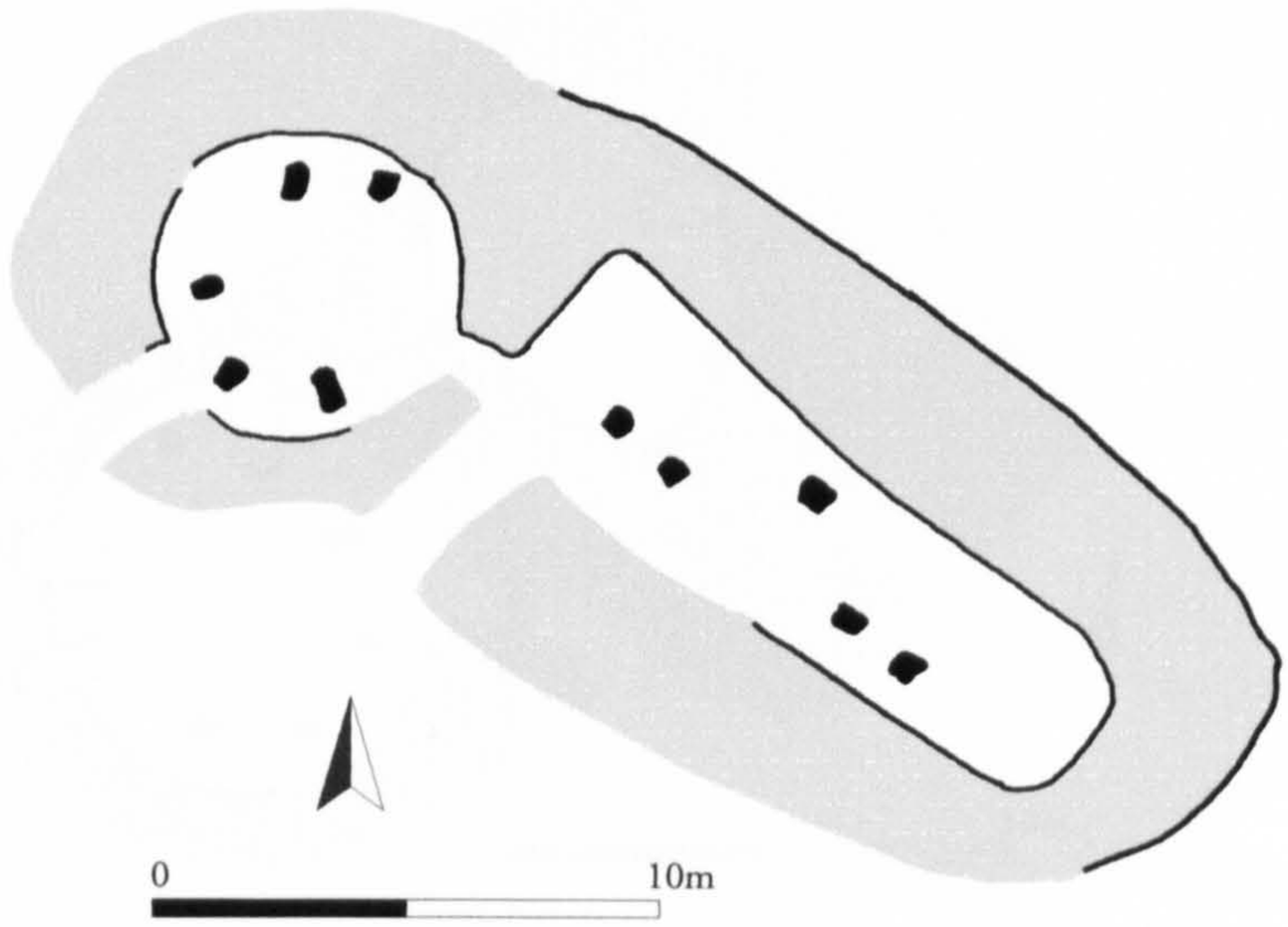


Figure 7.11 : Aisled Building and associated circular house, Preas Bhealaich (10), Morven (after Ordnance Survey field plan).

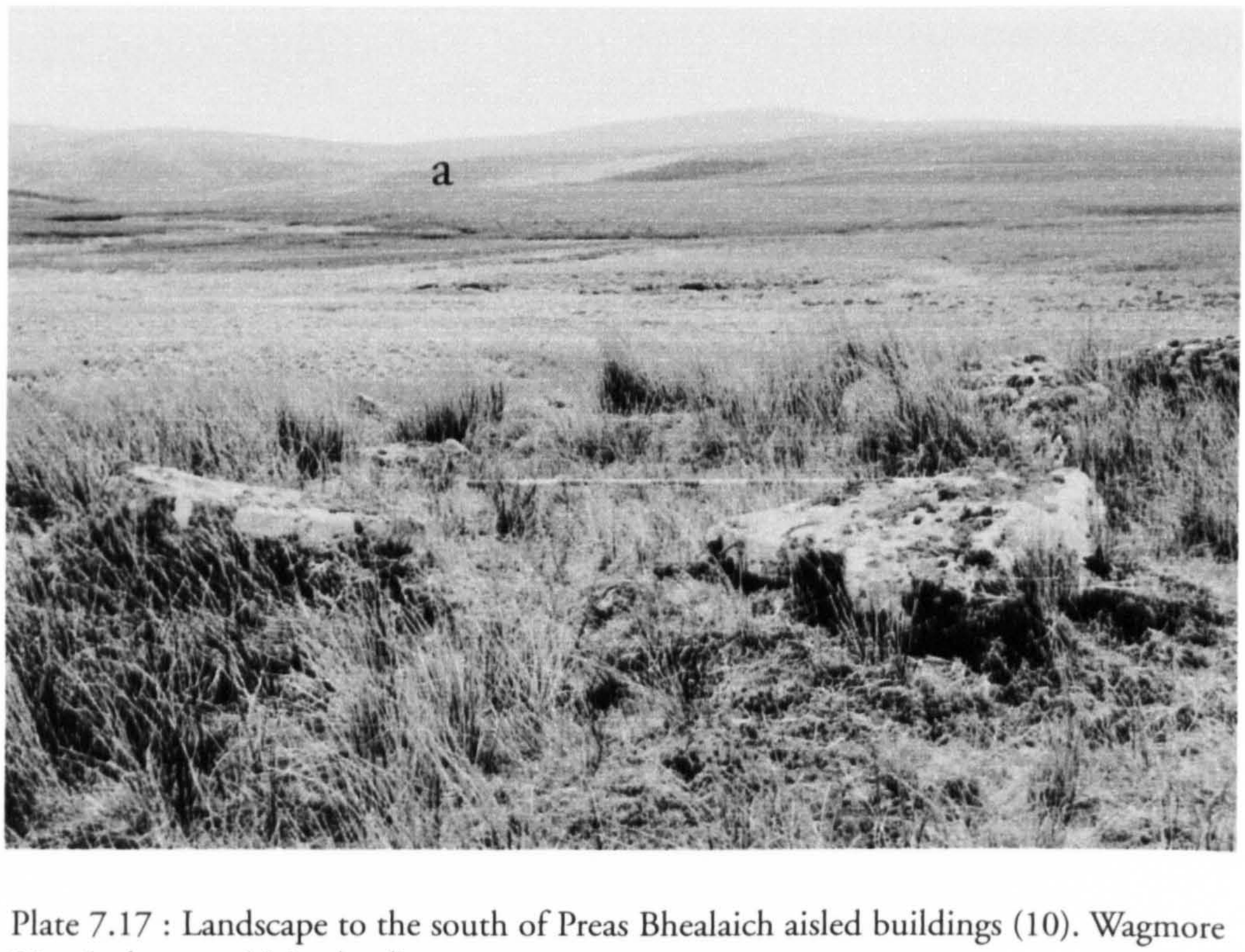


Plate 7.17 : Landscape to the south of Preas Bhealaich aisled buildings (10). Wagmore Rigg is the spur (a) in the distance.

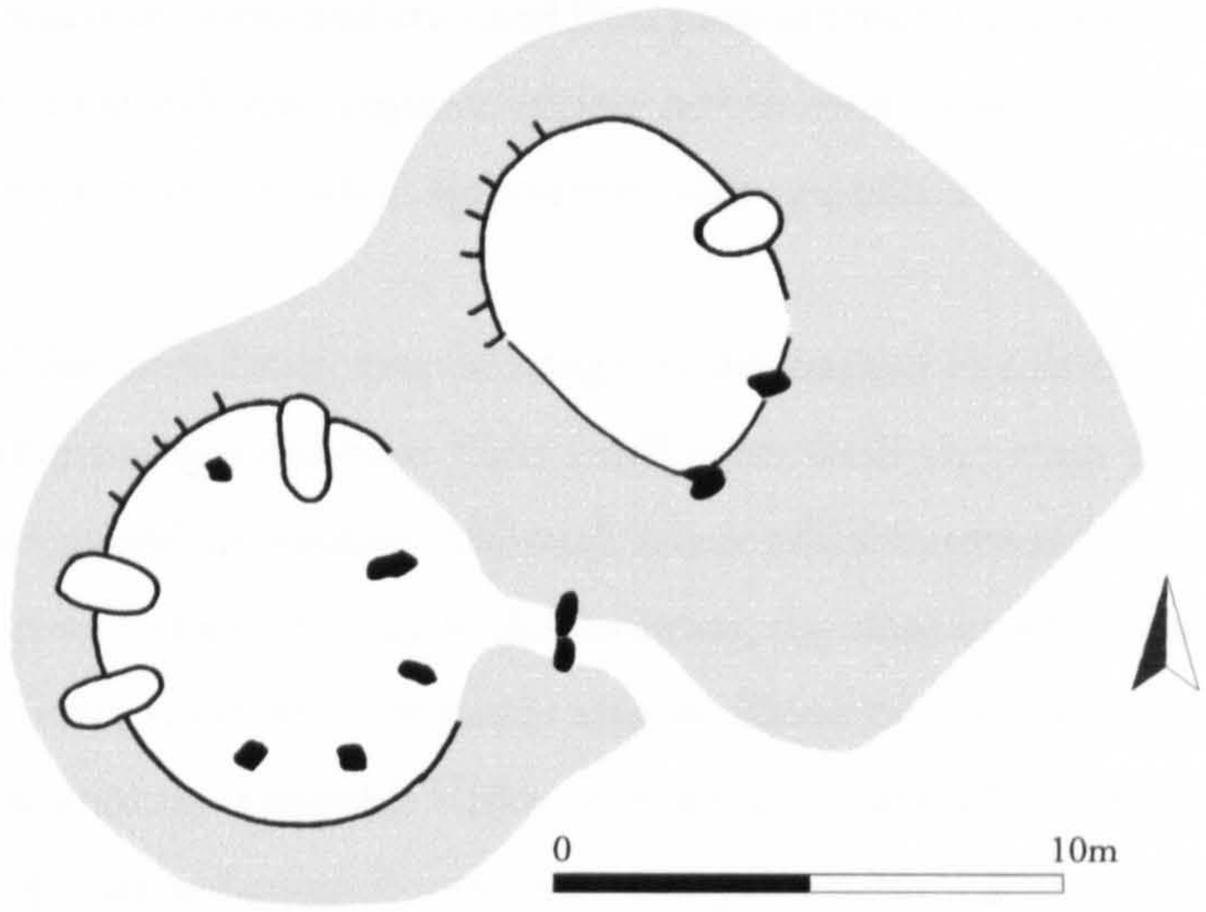


Figure 7.12 : Circular aisled buildings, Wagmore Rigg (16) (after Ordnance Survey field plan).

Plate 7.18 : Junction of the Langwell Water and the Morven Burn, seen from Wagmore Rigg.

Both areas of clearance cairns and enclosed field plots are found in association with settlements in areas where these different regimes appear not to relate specifically to the nature of the land. Settlements with enclosed agriculture also contain more architecturally complex structures.

Two of the three broch sites in Langwell are situated in a familiar landscape context, adjacent to tributary streams near their confluence with the main river, dominating the landscape in the immediate vicinity. Although relationships between these sites and established agricultural settlements are less easy to demonstrate, the areas in which the brochs are located have been highly disturbed by more recent activity. However, it is also notable that the pattern of settlement within the Langwell Valley differs quite markedly from that of the Strath of Kildonan. Broch sites in Langwell were built along the lower reaches of the river system. It is possible that within the narrower, more restricted landscapes of the upper valley settlements of sufficient size for the construction of brochs did not develop. The brochs themselves seem to be closely associated with the open landscapes of the lower reaches of the water course, within which they may have had more architectural effect.

During the later Iron Age, the landscape was used in a radically different way. Aisled buildings were almost exclusively situated at the upper reaches of the valley, and do not appear to have drawn upon pre-existing settlement locales. The site at Borgue Langwell is situated close to a pre-existing broch, and its builders may have drawn upon the established significance of the site. Both of the other aisled buildings are located at places which suggest a concern with access to routes of movement through the landscape, along and between the adjacent valley systems. They would appear to have been sited with little regard either for traditional physical associations between community and land or even for the presence of good cultivable land itself. The later Iron Age may have seen the development of new social strategies which involved a break with traditional practice. This interpretation is strengthened by the architectural change which these sites represent. As I have argued in Chapter 4, a lack of association between later Iron Age buildings and traditional settlement locations was accompanied by a break in traditional architectural practice. This involved buildings which were not visually impressive.

The Berriedale Water (Map 7.8)

The Berriedale Water shares a common outflow with the Langwell Water. In its lower reaches, archaeology along the banks of the river has suffered from recent afforestation and landscaping. Although Srath Cùil, the valley through which the lower Berriedale Water flows, is comparatively narrow, its floor is flat, and there are numerous traces of post-medieval settlement. Separating this from the upper part of the river around Braemore is a narrow, constricted passage through the low hills which form the eastern end of the Scaraben massif.

For almost 2km, from the confluence of the rivers to the first minor tributary on the south side of the valley, Srath Cùil is devoid of evidence of later prehistoric settlement. This is recently afforested land on the slopes below Langwell House (Plate 7.12), and archaeology in this area is likely to have been greatly disturbed by recent land use. The presence of the highly disturbed broch mound at Rinsary (23), overlooking the north bank of the Berriedale Water opposite Langwell House, confirms that Iron Age settlement extended this far downstream.

Hut-circle settlement does extend, quite densely, along the southern bank of the Berriedale Water, upstream from the hillside of Cnoc Fionn, and also along a major tributary, the Dun Burn (Map 7.8). These structures are widely variant in size, and are set in groups of between one and three buildings. Other small hut-circle settlements sit on the west bank of Srath Cùil, often at the junction between the steep valley sides and the more gently-sloping, higher ground to the north and west. Most either lack evidence of cultivation, or are associated with scattered clearance cairns only. It is likely that prehistoric cultivation may have been practised on the floor of the Berriedale Water, which is up to 180m across in its lower reaches. This area has been cultivated more recently, as demonstrated by the presence of the remains of depopulated farming settlements on the valley floor, and this is likely to have obliterated traces of earlier agricultural activity. Indeed, the evidence from Upper Suisgill suggests that colluvial activity may have obscured prehistoric settlement evidence in antiquity.

There are, however, a number of areas in which more substantial traces of hut-circle settlement do survive. One of the most notable is at Tulach Bad a Choilich (167), where a settlement of seven hut-circles is set on the gentle slopes of a spur, above the eastern bank of the Berriedale Water. This settlement is associated with a field system, much of which is comprised of clearance cairns, but which also contains traces of field banks and lynchets, which serves as evidence of more intensive cultivation. The combination of agricultural regimes at Tulach Bad a Choilich suggests at least a degree of agricultural change and intensification in the immediate area. However, although the structures here vary widely in size, they do not display the evidence for increasing monumentality, which has been noted elsewhere. Similarly,

it is difficult to separate areas of clearance from enclosure within the field system itself. Again, in the absence of precise dates, it is difficult to account for such variation, especially since the most complex structure in the immediate area (12) is situated amongst clearance cairns on the opposite side of the valley.

600m further upstream, on a spur which projects into the valley to the north of the junction of the Berriedale Water with the Dun Burn, hut-circle settlement is spread over at least 500m of the south and south-east facing slopes of the spur (135 & 136). The structures themselves vary widely in diameter, and it is notable that the westernmost settlement (136) is set within a small area of clearance cairns, and lacks architecturally complex structures. That to the east are associated with meandering field walls, in addition to field clearance. This suggests agricultural change. This impression is strengthened by evidence of architectural complexity within the eastern group, where the largest structure, some 11.0m in diameter, has an elongated entrance passage provided by expanded wall terminals.

The middle reaches of the Berriedale Water pass between the steep slopes of the eastern end of the Scaraben massif, and its outliers Meall na Caorach and Meall Dhonuill. The valley floor here is very narrow, and known evidence of early settlement is restricted to two isolated groups of hut circles (43 & 134), set into the hill-slopes. Although there are clearance cairns here, there are no recorded examples of field systems, but the restricted nature of the landscape in this area is unlikely ever to have been suitable for significant permanent settlement.

In its upper reaches, the Berriedale Water flows through an area of more open ground, between the gentler northernmost slopes of Morven, Maiden Pap and Scaraben and the lower hills to the north, which separate it from the neighbouring Dunbeath Strath. The valley floor here is more open than to the south, and has been subject to considerable post-medieval land-use (Plate 7.19). The lack of recorded hut-circle settlement in this area may be partly due to a combination of recent disturbance with a lack of archaeological survey in the area. However, it is apparent that much of the area has been improved and drained, and wet conditions on the valley floor may have discouraged settlement prior to this. Nonetheless, given the intensity of recent land-use, there would appear to be little potential for the survival of any traces of hut-circle settlement and associated cultivation on the valley floor itself. There is, however, a multi-period site on the south side of the Berriedale Water, within which at least two of the structures are hut-circles (58). This area of settlement also includes aisled buildings, although these occupy separate mounds, and it is difficult to demonstrate continuity of occupation. There is a short length of field wall, buried within the peat in the vicinity of the hut-circles, which may be evidence of a degree of enclosure in association with the site.

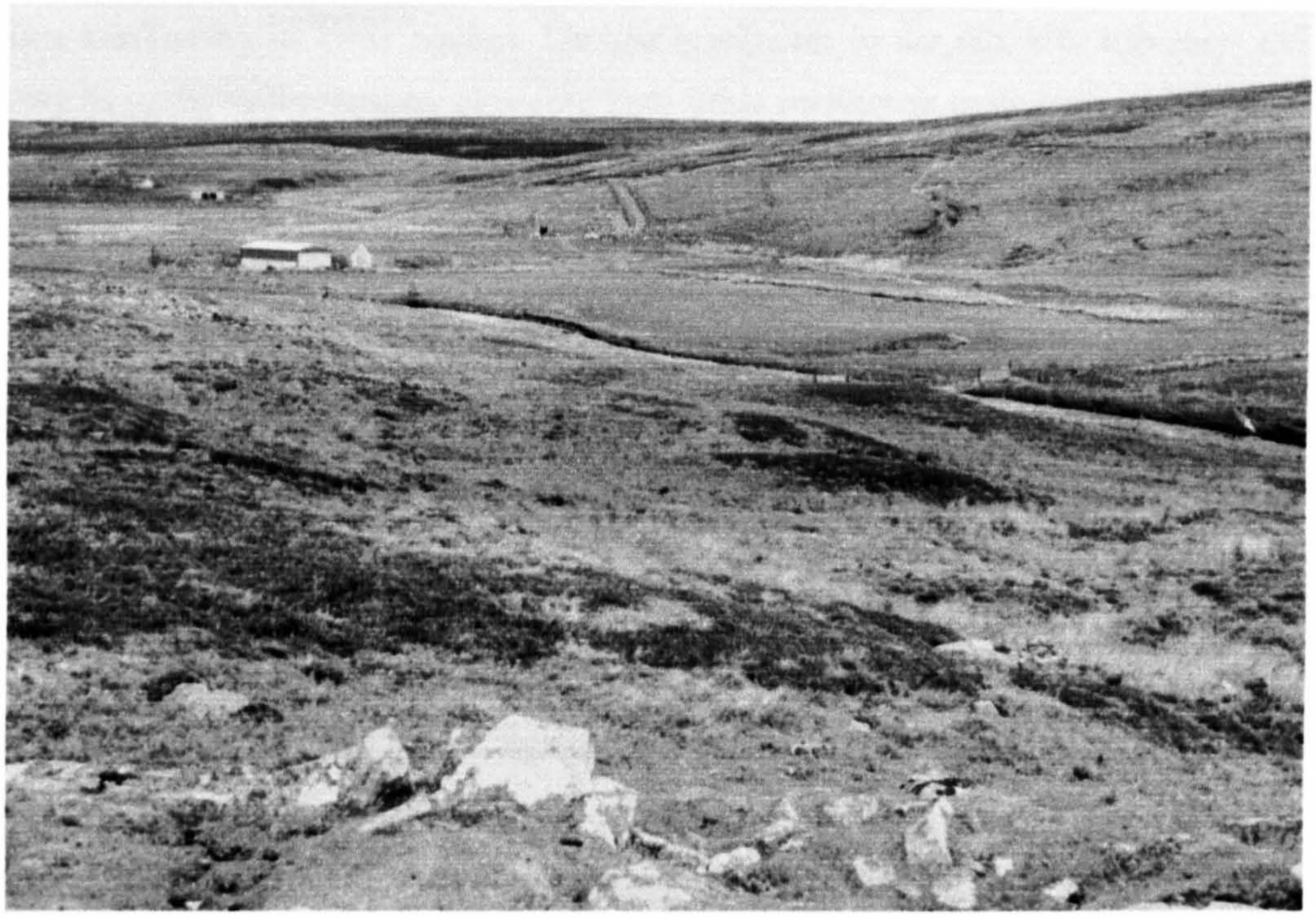


Plate 7.19 : The Upper Berriedale Water, near Braemore.

Although there are few other hut-circles recorded in the Braemore area, there are a number set within the high moorland to its east and north-east. There are at least two hut-circle settlements within what is now marginal land between the two valleys (section 7.3.2).

Upstream from Braemore, there is little surviving evidence for hut-circle settlement, aside from a small group of structures on the lower slopes to the north of the Preas Bhealaich (31). There are no clear cultivation traces in association with this site. As with the neighbouring Langwell Water, the upper reaches of the river may not have seen the establishment of permanent agricultural communities in an area where the extremely poor drainage suggests that permanent cultivation has never been viable.

Middle Iron Age settlement in the Berriedale area is represented by at least five broch mounds (Map 7.8). Again, known sites are confined to the lower reaches of the Berriedale Water, and none are found upstream of its narrow middle reaches.

Rinsary broch (23) sits on a gently-sloping hillside, just above the steep valley sides of the lower Berriedale Water. This disturbed site is now a mass of rubble, and few structural details remain visible. Nonetheless, it is evident that Rinsary shares a general landscape context with most of the other brochs in the local area. It sits at the outermost edge of the Berriedale

valley, overlooking its lower reaches. The site is adjacent to the Allt Mòr tributary, and is visible from the valley bottom. However, little other prehistoric settlement has survived in the area (see above), and it is difficult to relate the site directly to established settlement landscapes.

The broch of Tulach Bad a Choilich (25) is, again, poorly preserved, surviving only as a rather amorphous mound. Although the broch itself is obscured by considerable amounts of debris, short lengths of its outer wall-face are visible. Given its obscure architecture, the most important aspect of the site is its landscape context, particularly its relationship to surrounding archaeology. Unlike Rinsary, Tulach Bad a Choilich sits close to a concentration of hut-circle settlement, both in its immediate vicinity on the western bank of the Berriedale Water, and in the form of the hut-circle group and associated field system of the same name on the opposite side of the Strath. Again, the broch is adjacent to a minor tributary of the main river system. The site is set lower on the valley sides than is the case at other sites in the study area. However, it is prominent, both from the valley floor and from the field systems on its opposite flank, although it is overlooked from the valley sides to the west. There is also evidence of an outer boundary at the site. The general impression is of a site which was intended to establish visual dominance in relation to a specific local landscape.

The broch of An Dun (4) is situated 800m further upstream, and is the most visually impressive site in the Berriedale area (Plate 7.20). At the time of the RCAHMS survey in 1911, a number of internal features of the site were exposed (1911b, 54). These included parts of a fragmentary entrance passage and guard chamber, although the interior of the site is now obscured by rubble. The site is also surrounded by a substantial boundary system, comprising three separate ditches. The landscape context of the site is impressive. It is located on gently-sloping ground on top of a spur high above Srath Cùil, behind which the land slopes up to the summit of Meall na Caorach. The site is highly visible, both from the floor of the valley and its sides. It commands extensive views over both the main Berriedale Water and the steeply inclined tributary valley of the Dun Burn, at the junction of which its is situated. An Dun is at the heart of the greatest concentration of hut-circle settlement in the Berriedale area, which extends both along the flanks of the Dun Burn itself, and on the spur occupied by the broch. This area includes an extensive, enclosed field system (see above). Again, the broch seems to have been positioned so as to dominate an established agricultural landscape. However, its entrance is orientated to the west, away from the known field system and associated buildings. Together with the elaborate boundary system at the site, this suggests an intentional separation from the immediate landscape, as an approach to the broch from this direction would have involved moving right around it.

Plate 7.20 : An Dun broch (4) (a), from the Dun Burn looking NE.

Plate 7.21 : Aisled building, Berriedale Water (3).

Evidence of later Iron Age settlement in the lower and middle reaches of the Berriedale Water is rather sparse. There is a site adjacent to the Allt a' Chriosduidhe (17), a tributary of the Berriedale Water, which sits on the hill-slope above the broch site at Tulach Bad a Choilich, and contains sub-rectangular elements. The site, however, is rather fragmentary, and there is no evidence of the pillars and lintels characteristic of the aisled buildings. While its is possible that this site was occupied during the later Iron Age, the nature of the remains makes this impossible to demonstrate.

The most convincing evidence of later Iron Age settlement lies within the upper part of the Berriedale Water. On the south bank of the river near Braemore is a settlement complex consisting of six separate grassy mounds (3) which also contains evidence of hut-circle settlement. At least two, and possibly three, of the mounds contain the remains of later Iron Age structures. The mound known as Carn Tighe Chreagaich clearly consists of a rectangular aisled building, with an associated circular house, also of aisled form. The rectangular building retains six pillar stones (Plate 7.21), and the circular house a further five (Figure 7.13a). Another mound within this settlement complex contains two conjoined sub-circular buildings, the larger of which contains at least four upright pillar stones. This site is very similar to the conjoined aisled buildings at Wagmore Rigg (15). It may be significant that the conjoined sub-circular aisled buildings appear to *overlie* the remains of a rectangular structure (Figure 7.13b). While no evidence of aisled construction remains, this is akin to the rectangular aisled buildings in other respects. This relationship would appear to confirm the considerable time during which these structures are likely to have been in use, and also that the sub-circular aisled buildings must be broadly contemporary with the rectangular.

As already discussed, a further three mounds in this area contain the remains of hut-circles. These cannot be related physically to the aisled buildings, and it is difficult to demonstrate continuity of settlement in this area between the earlier and later Iron Age. Although the hut-circles sit in an area with some evidence of enclosed field systems, the aisled buildings appear to represent the first substantial, monumental structures in this immediate area. Certainly, Braemore did not form a focus for broch settlement. The aisled buildings are situated close to the present course of the Berriedale Water, in a location which is not visually dominant. They are, however, located at a point where the narrow middle reaches of its valley give onto the flatter landscapes around Braemore, and also close to the passes linking the Berriedale Water to the Dunbeath Strath to the north (Map 7.8). I would argue again that access to routes of movement between the valley systems was more important than a relationship to established cultural landscapes.

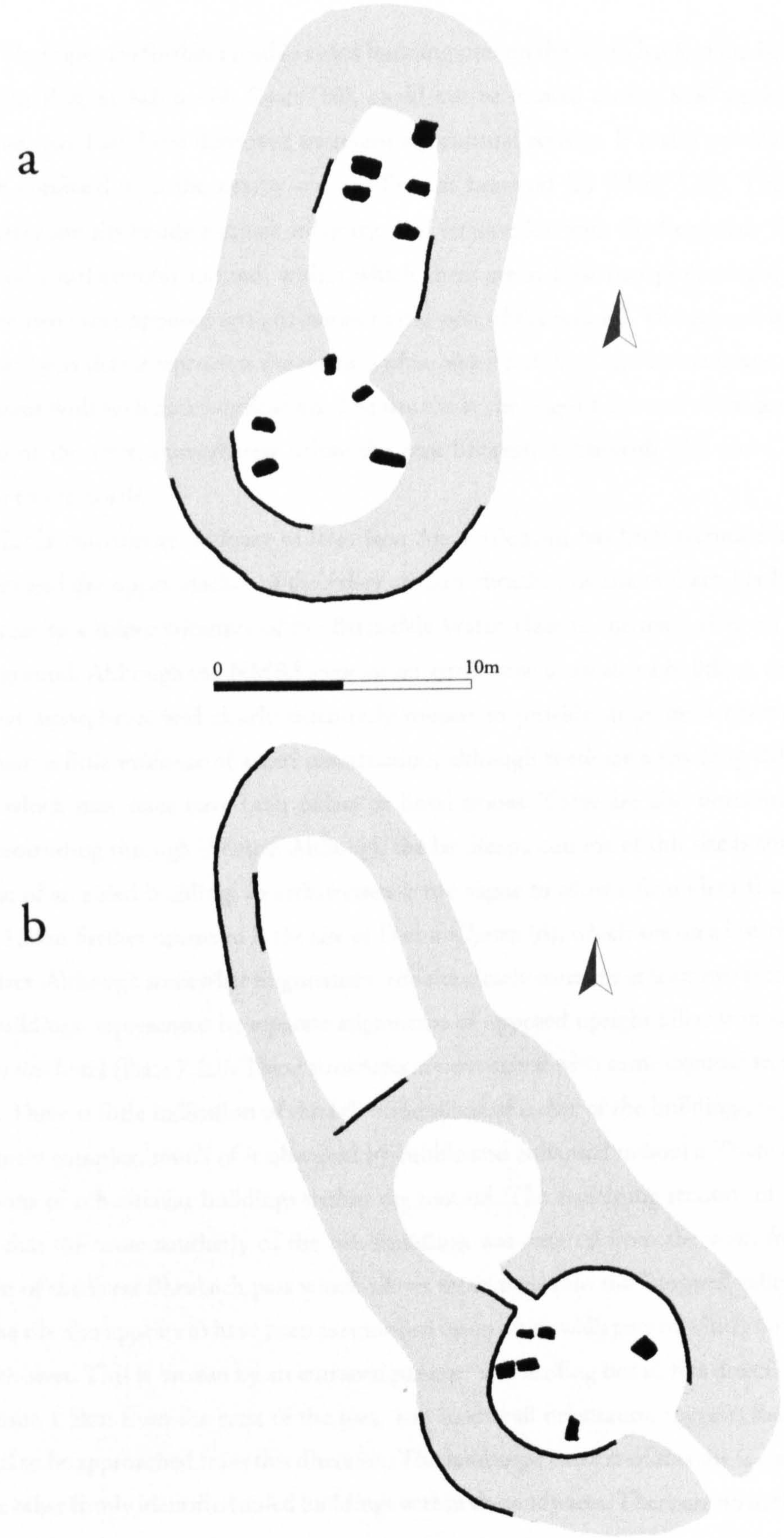


Figure 7.13 : Aisled buildings, Berriedale Water (3), a) *Carn Tighe Chreagaich*,
b) Conjoined circular houses overlying sub-rectangular building (after Ordnance Survey field plan).

There are two further possible aisled building sites on the north bank of the Berriedale Water. The first, at Achinavish Croft (16), could not be located during field work for this thesis, and may have been destroyed by recent agricultural activity. It is also possible that it has been confused with the nearby site at Allt cam Leathaid (2) (Plate 7.22). This rather fragmentary site sits beside a minor tributary, near its junction with the Berriedale Water. It consists of a turf-covered mound, within which there are at least two projecting uprights. There are two more opposed upright stones to the west of the mound. The general layout of the site suggests that it represents the remains of an aisled building, and its landscape context is consistent with such an identification. The site sits at the edge of the area of flat ground at the edge of the river, immediately below the pass between Achinavish Hill and Cnoc na Feadaige to the north.

Little convincing evidence of later Iron Age settlement has been recorded between Braemore and the upper reaches of the valley at Corrichoich. The site of Carn Liath (20) is set adjacent to a minor tributary of the Berriedale Water, close to the main river on gently-sloping ground. Although the NMRS suggests an attribution as an aisled building, the site is somewhat amorphous, and clearly extensively robbed to provide stone for a nearby sheep fold. There is little evidence of aisled construction, although there are a few long slabs lying within, which may once have been pillars or lintel stones. There are also numerous large stones protruding through the turf. Although the landscape context of this site is consistent with that of an aisled building, its architecture is too vague to allow a firm identification.

1.6km further upstream is the site of Dail-a-Chairn (6), which sits on a low rise close to the river. Although somewhat fragmentary, the site clearly contains at least two rectangular aisled buildings, represented by separate alignments of opposed upright pillar stones, with a single *in situ* lintel (Plate 7.23). These structures are associated with some exposed sections of walling. There is little indication of the full dimensions of either of the buildings, as the site is extremely complex, much of it obscured by rubble and collapsed masonry. There are also suggestions of sub-circular buildings within the mound. The remaining sections of walling suggest that the more southerly of the two buildings was entered from the west, from the direction of the Preas Bhealaich pass which allows movement into the Langwell valley (Map 7.8). The site also appears to have been surrounded by an outer wall, part of which survives to the south-west. This is broken by an entrance passage, also leading out in this direction. The site is some 1.5km from the crest of the pass, and its overall orientation suggests that it was intended to be approached from this direction. The landscape context of this site is consistent with the other firmly identified aisled buildings within the study area. There are no indications

Plate 7.22 : Fragmentary aisled building at Allt cam Leathaid (2), Berriedale Water.

Plate 7.23 : Aisled buildings at Dail-a-Chairn (7), Berriedale Water. The Preas Bhealaich pass (a) is at the foot of Morven.

of developed prehistoric agricultural landscapes in the immediate area, and the location of the site seems much more likely to relate to access and movement between adjacent valleys. Again, the site lacks the visual dominance over the surrounding landscape enjoyed by the broch sites, despite its monumental architecture.

Discussion

In the Iron Age landscapes of the Berriedale Water, there are clear echoes of those elsewhere in the Study Area. Although there are fewer recorded hut-circle sites, this may in part be due to a lack of detailed survey over recent years, and also to the damaging effects of recent activity. Those settlement sites which have no traces of associated cultivation are, in general, those which are situated furthest away from the main river system, along the steepest slopes within its narrow and meandering central reaches, and far along tributaries such as the Dun Burn. Hut-circle settlements associated with the traces of more intensive, enclosed agriculture appears to have been established on the gentler slopes close to the main river, and possibly on the valley floor. It is likely that close tenurial associations between communities and the land were established during the first millennium BC, and were probably an important influence on the settlement which followed. In some areas, this process seems to have been accompanied by increasing complexity in domestic architecture. It is important to beware of simplistic developmental schemes, however. It is likely that less monumental structures located in more marginal parts of the landscape persisted.

Although there is good evidence from only two sites, broch settlements seem once again to have drawn upon access to existing, enclosed agricultural landscapes. However, the brochs were also physically separated from the landscapes which surrounded them by monumental boundaries. Again, they were confined to the lower reaches of the river system.

As in the case of the neighbouring straths, later Iron Age activity in Berriedale can be characterised by the presence of aisled buildings. The exclusivity of their distribution, in relation to that of the brochs, is more marked than elsewhere within the study area. The two firmly identified sites are situated to the north and west of the constricted central reaches of the Berriedale Water, in an area in which there are no known broch sites. The immediate landscape contexts of the two types of site are also very different. The aisled buildings sit close to the main river, and lack a dominant visual presence within the landscape. It would also appear that the location of the aisled buildings was largely unrelated to existing agricultural landscapes. The overwhelming impression is that these sites involved the establishment of

places on routes of movement, along and between the river systems. These changing settlement landscapes were accompanied by a new architecture. It would be rash to assume that the aisled buildings represent the totality of later Iron Age settlement within the Berriedale area. It is possible that settlement continued on hut-circle and broch sites into the later Iron Age.

7.3.3. The Dunbeath Water and the Burn of Houstry (Map 7.9)

The valley of the Dunbeath Water, and that of its major tributary the Burn of Houstry, are situated at the margin of the study area. The Dunbeath Strath is the most northerly of the deep-cut valleys of south-eastern Caithness, beyond which the landscape eases into the more densely settled, open and undulating landscape of the Caithness plain. It is hemmed in by low hills. To the south are the Bouilag and Wag Hills, which separate it from the valley of the Berriedale Water, and to the north a low range of hills which reaches its highest point at Cnocan Conachreag, and includes Cnoc na Maranaich, surmounted by a complex of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments. The Burn of Houstry defines the edge of this area, and flows through a less elevated, more undulating landscape, formerly cultivated but now used chiefly as sheep pasture.

The Dunbeath Water

The lower part of the Dunbeath Water has been the most affected by post-medieval practices, and there is little known prehistoric archaeology within the 1.5km between the Moray Firth at Dunbeath Bay and the junction with the Burn of Houstry at Ballachly (Map 7.9). Around this confluence, the landscape has been the subject of much recent settlement and road construction, although some evidence of prehistoric settlement remains. There are a small number of known hut-circles in this area, including a small settlement on the slopes above the Dunbeath Water (92) which is associated with a field system. This includes a number of clearance cairns, in addition to a system of banks and lynchets arranged around small plots. Unfortunately, the addition of post-medieval clearance has obscured architectural details at this site.

Some 600m to the south-west, on gently sloping ground above the south bank of the Dunbeath Water, there is a small settlement of four hut-circles (52), associated with a small number of clearance cairns. At least two of the hut-circles are overlain by post-medieval enclosure walls, suggesting a considerable history of disturbance in this area which also includes a number of more recent houses. There is, however, no evidence of architectural elaboration associated with these structures, and it may be that enclosed agriculture never developed in an area which may have been marginal in antiquity.

Further upstream along the Dunbeath Water, known hut-circle settlement extends rather sparsely along the slopes on either side of the valley (30, 75, 103, 129, 130). Although there are clearance cairns and short lengths of boulder walling in the vicinity of Loedebest (129), and on the north-eastern slopes of Wag Hill (130), none of these structures displays any evidence of architectural complexity. The Dunbeath Water was very extensively settled prior to the clearances (Morrison 1996), and it is likely that much early agricultural settlement has been overlain by the traces of more recent occupation. Certainly, the majority of the known hut-circles situated on the low ground close to the river are set within areas of post-medieval cultivation, as at Halmie (103) and Achnaclyth (5-7), and often within the enclosures themselves. One of the large structures at Halmie has an associated sub-circular enclosure, and recent partial excavation of another structure in this group revealed both evidence of entrance elaboration, and of at least one phase of reconstruction (Pollard, pers. comm.). This recalls the situation at Kilphedir 1, and suggests an association between complex architecture and enclosed cultivation in the area. The hut-circles further upstream, however, are both small and lacking architectural complexity, and may never have been associated with cultivation.

There are, however, a small number of hut-circle settlements with more complex field systems. On the northern slopes of Bouilag Hill, there is extensive evidence of early cultivation, with a complex settlement history. Spread over an area of almost 1 km^2 are traces of settlement comprising the remains of at least twelve hut-circles, set in two groups. Those located nearest to the base of the hill (60) have little evidence of associated agriculture. The structures further uphill, above 180m above OD (59), which have been recently re-examined as part of the extensive Dunbeath Survey, represent a more complex settlement. In addition to the hut-circles themselves, there are the remains of rectangular structures, which may be the remains of more recent shielings, as well as the possible footings of a post-medieval house. Although the hut-circles themselves lack architectural embellishment of their entrances, at least one is associated with the remains of a sub-rectangular enclosure, and another contains at least one radially-set upright stone. The settlement is associated with an enclosure, defined by a boulder wall (Figure 7.14). Although it is impossible to disentangle the chronology of this settlement on the basis of field evidence alone, it is clear that a considerable period of occupation is represented, including some form of enclosure. This may have become associated with a particular area over time, with structures at the base of Bouilag Hill going out of use.

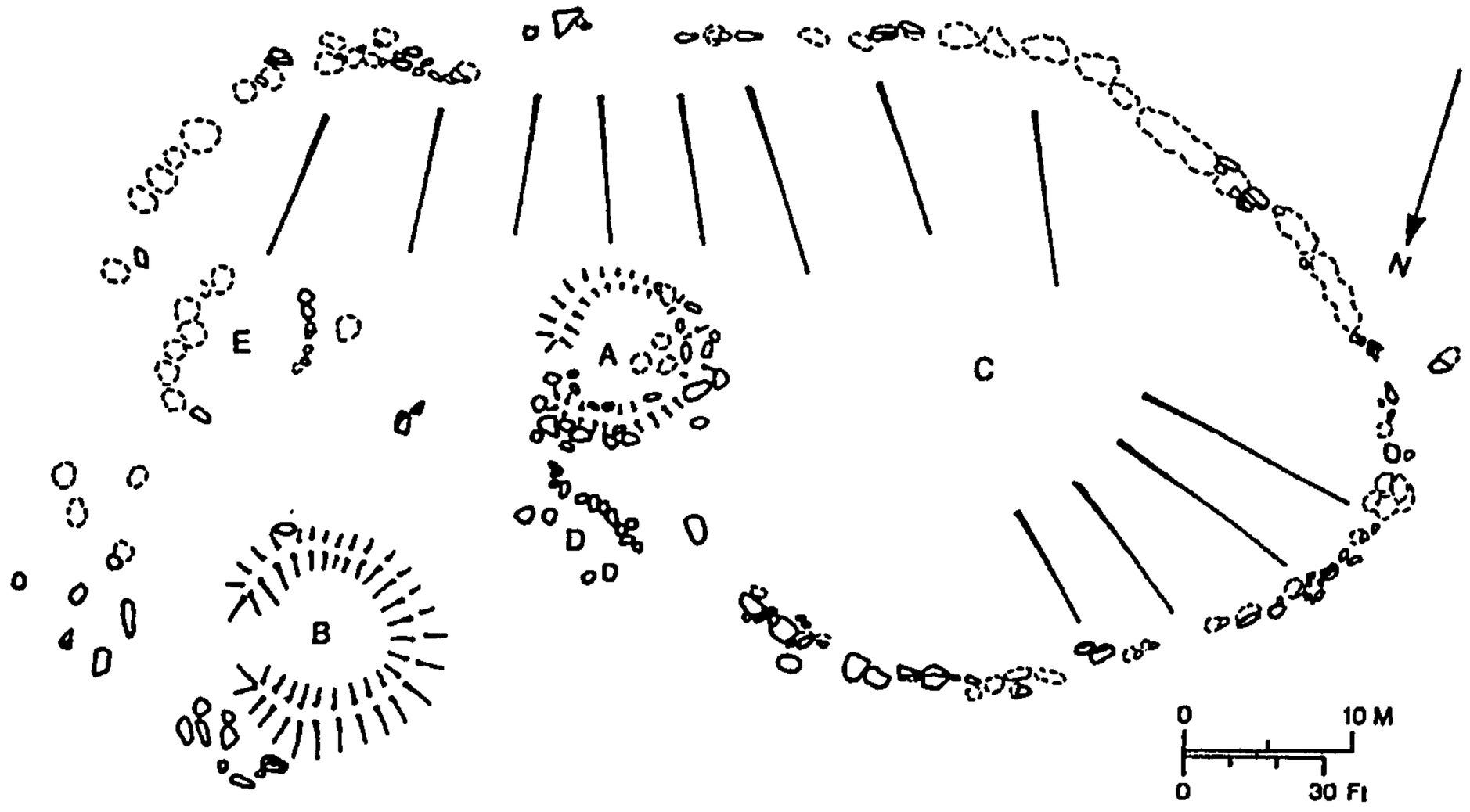


Figure 7.14 : Hut-circle settlement and enclosure, Bouilag Hill (59) (Morrison 1996, Fig. 12)

There are other hut-circle settlements further upstream, both along the Dunbeath Water itself (148 & 149), and along its tributary the Raffin Burn. The most remote hut-circles in the study area (32 & 175) are located near to the Raffin Burn, in an area of heather moorland and peat bog at the edge of the Flow Country. These are single structures, set in an area which seems never to have supported permanent agriculture. It is therefore possible that they represent temporarily occupied shielings, associated with permanent settlement further downstream.

There is further evidence of hut-circle settlement within the hilly area separating the Dunbeath Strath from the upper part of the Berriedale Water. At Bad nan Glac (48), on gently-sloping ground alongside the Dunbeath to Braemore road, is a group of three hut-circles which lack any associated evidence of cultivation bar a single clearance cairn. Although the structures here are large, up to 14.5m in internal diameter, none display any evidence of architectural embellishment. 340m to the north-west of Féith Shalach is a settlement of two hut-circles (96), associated with the overgrown remains of field walls. The small size of these structures, up to only 5.5m in diameter, reinforces the lack of association between hut-circle dimensions and enclosed agriculture. Although this area between the Dunbeath and Berriedale Waters is now extremely marginal, it appears to have supported a range of prehistoric agricultural practice.

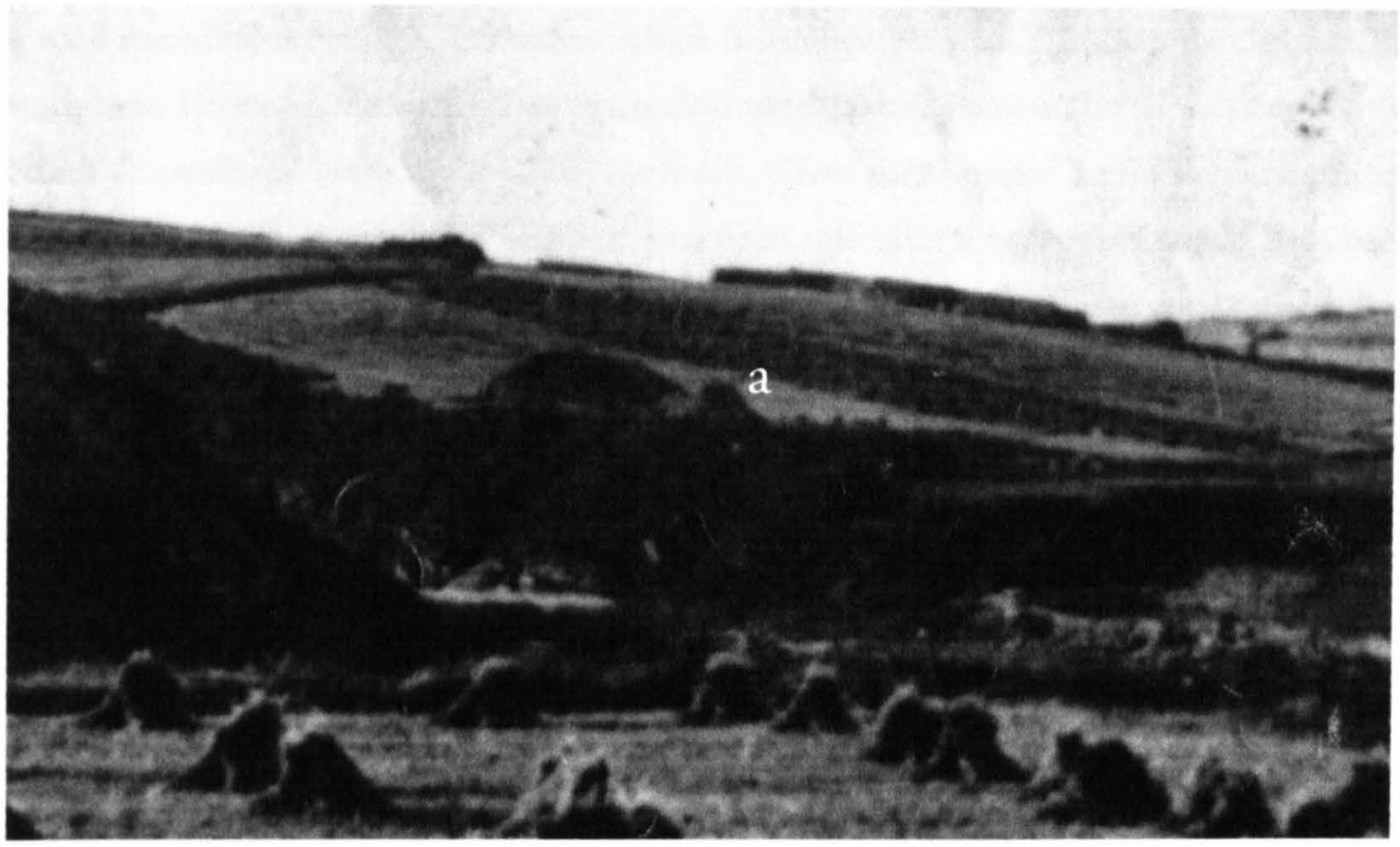


Plate 7.24 : Photograph of Dunbeath broch (12) taken between 1861 and 1866, prior to the excavations of the site. The large feature adjacent to the broch (a) may represent the remains of surrounding buildings removed during the excavations (Crown Copyright : RCAHMS).

Broch settlement appears once more to have been restricted to the lower reaches of the Dunbeath Water, and all five known sites are located within 3km of its mouth (Map 7.9). The closest to the sea is the excavated broch of Dunbeath (12) itself, which sits on a low promontory at the confluence of the Dunbeath Water and the Burn of Houstry, shielded to the south by broken natural crags. This is perhaps the most visually dominant of any of the Dunbeath brochs. Although now shielded by trees and a modern wall, the site was, until relatively recently, visible from the valley floor for a considerable distance downstream (Plate 7.24). It remains an imposing landmark from the slopes on either bank of the Strath, although they overlook the broch, and would have seriously reduced any defensive potential of the site. The single entrance is oriented to the south-east, towards the valley floor, increasing the likelihood that the intended approach was from this direction. In general, it seems likely that the provision of an imposing situation was the main reason for the position of the broch, as a more defensive location further along the spur would reduce its visibility from the valley floor. The site is associated with the junction between a water-course and a major tributary, in a way which recalls the brochs at An Dun (section 7.3.1) and Kilphedir (section 7.3.2). A relationship to existing agricultural landscapes is, however, less evident. There are hut-circle settlements within 500m of the site to the west, one of which is associated with evidence of

settled agricultural practice, a situation which is comparable with that elsewhere within the study area. However, there are no surviving field systems or settlements on the flat floor of the Strath, immediately to the south-east of the broch. Given the restricted area of the promontory on which the broch is set, it is likely that associated agricultural landscapes would have been located here. This area has been subject to much post-medieval agricultural activity, as well as frequent inundation, leading to the deposition of considerable amounts of alluvial material. It is unlikely that prehistoric field systems would have survived these processes. Although this may partly explain the dearth of hut-circle settlement around the broch, it is also notable that there are faint traces of structures surrounding it (Swanson 1988, 115), although these have been much disturbed by recent activity. It is therefore possible that the broch had a surrounding settlement, and represents the establishment of a nucleated settlement.

There are two further broch sites within the lower part of the Dunbeath Water. Neither can be closely associated with the remains of pre-existing settlement. The site at Balantrath (5) consists of a large, grassy mound, situated at the edge of a low, vertical cliff. Although the site is rather amorphous, there is a short exposed stretch of massive outer wall face. Although the site seems to have been designed to be clearly visible from the main valley floor, it does not occupy the highest ground in the area, and would have been overlooked from the east. There is little trace of hut-circle settlement in the immediate vicinity, despite detailed survey of the area in recent years (Morrison 1996). However, once again the surrounding landscape has been very much disturbed by recent human activity. The valley on both sides of the Dunbeath Water is afforested, and a considerable area of ground to the immediate south and east of the site has been disturbed by the construction of a nineteenth century house and outbuildings, together with an accompanying enclosure and access track. Nonetheless, the evidence of a surrounding settlement at Balantrath suggests that it represents a nucleated settlement, established away from existing buildings.

There is a further broch site 700m further upstream at Achorn (3), consisting of a large earth and stone mound. A small, unrecorded trench placed through the mound has revealed part of what appears to be an intra-mural gallery. The site sits on gently-sloping ground, 80m to the south of the Achorn Burn, above the Dunbeath Water, from which it is visible. It does not occupy the highest ground in the immediate area, and is overlooked from the south. Once more, there is little other settlement evidence in the immediate area, aside from a 'homestead' (see below). Once again, the landscape around Achorn broch has suffered the effects of recent activity. The site itself sits within recently cultivated ground, and there is

a complex of sheep enclosures 100m to the south. To the north east is Balcraggie shooting lodge, which is itself surrounded by forestry and landscaped grounds. Although recent land-use is likely to have affected the survival of agricultural landscapes contemporary with the broch, there is considerable evidence of surrounding buildings at the site.

As in Langwell and Berriedale, later Iron Age sites in the Dunbeath Strath differ markedly in their landscape context. Moving upstream along the Dunbeath Water, the first site encountered is a small complex of structures near to the post-medieval settlement at Halmie (8), almost 6km from the coast, and 3.5km from the nearest broch site. This comprises two adjacent turf mounds, each containing a number of adjoining, dry-stone structures. The south-western mound contains what has been described as an 'L-shaped' building, comprising a pair of sub-rectangular structures, apparently joined by a connecting passage (Figure 7.15a). The building is clearly of aisled construction, as it contains lintels supported on stone pillars, the uppermost ends of which protrude above the present ground level in the southernmost chamber (Plate 7.25). The description of the site as 'L-shaped' may, however, be erroneous; the north-south alignment of the lintels in the southernmost chamber indicate that it probably represents a free-standing structure, running from north-west to south-east, rather than a southward extension of the adjacent building. The likely entrance alignment of these buildings is to the south-east, directly downstream along the Dunbeath Water.

Plate 7.25 : Aisled building, Dunbeath Water (8), under spring snows.

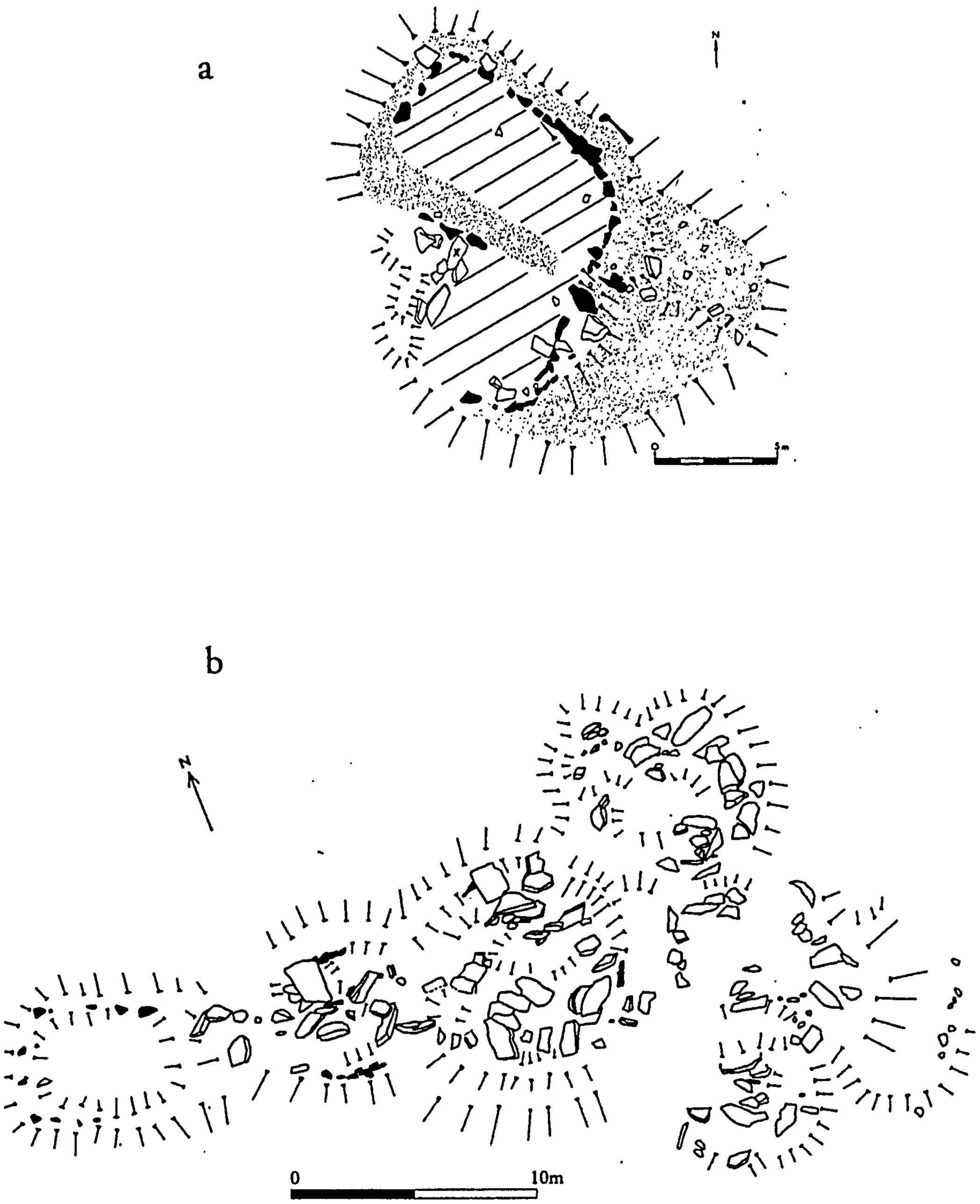
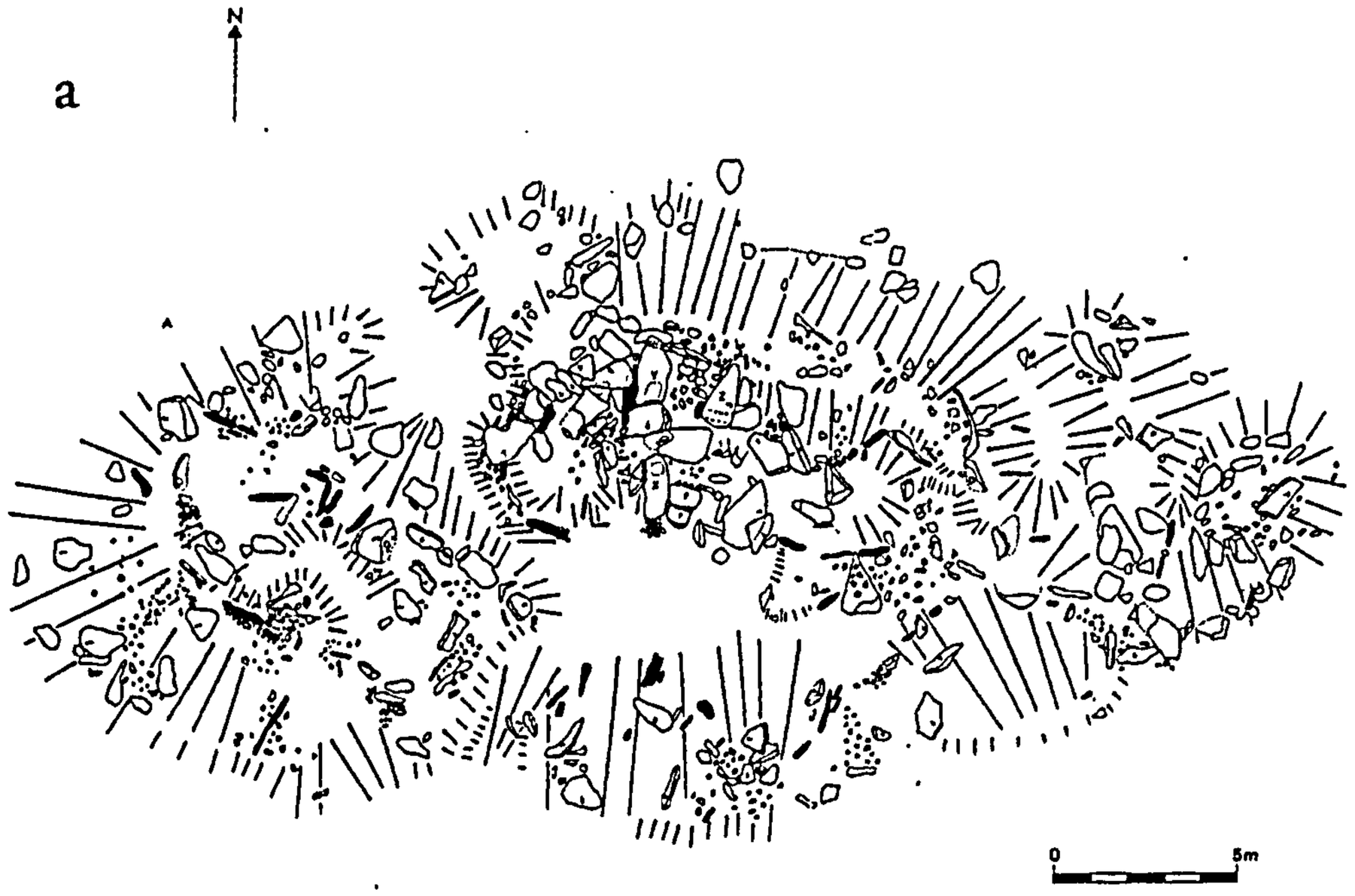


Figure 7.15 : Aisled buildings, Dunbeath Water (8), a) SW mound, with 'L-shaped' building, b) NW mound (Source : Dunbeath Survey).

The mound to the north-east contains at least three sub-circular structures (Figure 7.15b), which show evidence for galleried construction in the form of an *in situ* pillar stone and lintel within the north-western example. Although the three identified structures appear to have been connected, it also appears likely that they overlie earlier structures, including one or more sub-circular buildings. The location of sub-circular aisled buildings close to, but physically separate from, rectangular examples is similar to that already discussed along the upper Berriedale Water, and contrasts sharply with other sites comprising single associated examples of these architectural forms. This suggests a degree of variation within a wider architectural tradition.

The site itself sits on a slight rise within the flat flood-plain close to the north-bank of the Dunbeath Water. It may, however, once have been on the south side of the river, as the site is now surrounded by marshy ground which appears to represent the remains of an old meander. The site is overlooked by higher ground on both sides, from the glacial terrace nearby to the north, and from ground sloping up to Wag Hill to the south. It does not appear to have been constructed to utilise the surrounding landscape in order to maintain visibility in the way that the broch sites seem to have done, as its location is not obvious when moving along the Strath until approached quite closely. Indeed, the depth to which the site is set into its mound indicates that it is likely to have been semi-subterranean. There are no other remains of prehistoric activity in the immediate vicinity. Once more, the location of this site appears more likely to be related to movement along the length of the Strath, along which it is aligned, rather than to establishing a relationship with existing landscapes.

1.1km further to the west is another group of aisled buildings (13) (Figure 7.16), close to the deserted settlement known as the Wag, or Nouag in an earlier form (Morrison 1996, 59). This sits at the foot of the prominent, grassy Wag Hill, alongside the Wag Burn which flows into the Dunbeath Water from the pass between the Bouilag and Wag Hills. The site consists of two individual, grass-covered mounds to which more recent field clearance has been added. It must also have been heavily robbed during the construction of an adjacent pair of post-medieval sheep enclosures. The northern mound contains at least two rectangular aisled buildings (Figure 7.16a), one of which contains two upright pillar stones with *in situ* lintels (Plate 7.26). The other building within this mound is more heavily disturbed, and still contains much collapsed debris. The mound also contains further, more ephemeral, structures to the east, which may represent conjoined circular buildings, although it is difficult to distinguish precise details. The southern mound contains at least one rectangular aisled building (Figure 7.16b), containing several pillar stones, at least one of which retains its lintel. These buildings are situated on flat ground some 500m south of the Dunbeath Water, behind which the landscape slopes up to the hills. It also lies 1.0km to the north of the pass between Bouilag



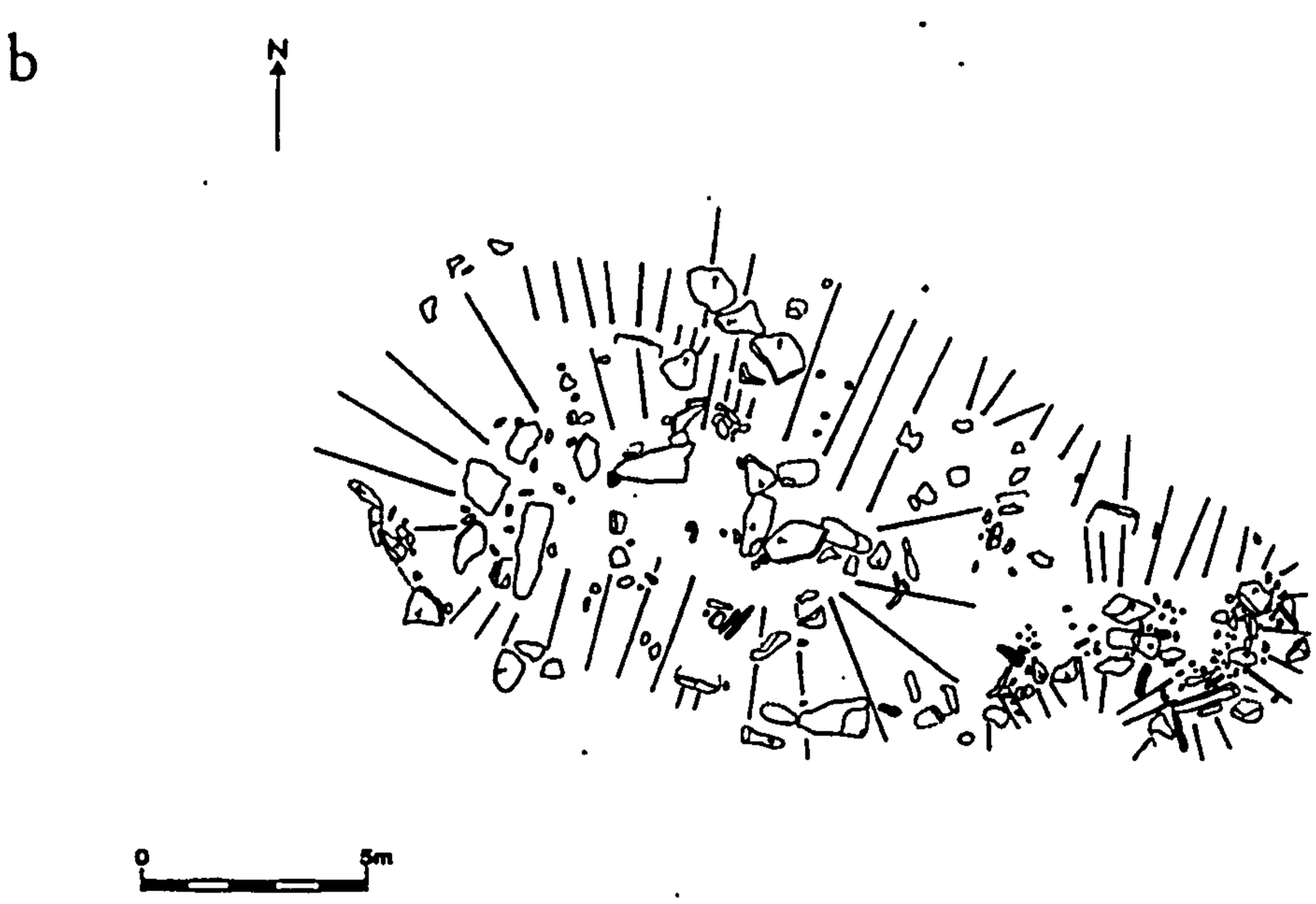


Figure 7.16 : Aisled buildings at the Wag (13), Dunbeath Water, a) N mound, b) S mound (Source : Dunbeath Survey).

Plate 7.26 : Aisled building with *in situ* pillar stones and lintels, the Wag (13), Dunbeath Water.

and Wag Hills, which can be reached by striking directly uphill from the site (Map 7.9). This links the Dunbeath and Berriedale Waters. There are no other indications of prehistoric settlement in the immediate vicinity, although there has been considerable disturbance from nearby post-medieval settlement, and the overall impression is that its situation in the landscape is concerned with routes of movement along and between the valleys.

The Raffin Burn is a major tributary of the Dunbeath Water fed by Loch Breac, below the slopes of Ben Alisky on the edge of the Flow Country (Map 7.9). At Wag Mor (14), more than 3km along the Raffin Burn from the Wag, lies the most remote site within the study area. This comprises at least two rectangular aisled buildings, set within separate low, grassy mounds (Figure 7.17). The northernmost of these contains several earth-fast pillar stones, together with a partially-exposed wall-face along its eastern side. One of the uprights retains its lintel *in situ*. The western side of the mound is very denuded, and has probably been robbed to provide masonry for a nearby sheep shelter.

The southernmost mound contains a rectangular aisled building. This includes at least ten standing pillar-stones, some protruding almost 1.0m from the turf (Plate 7.27). It is, however, difficult to define the central aisle, and some of the pillars appear to be placed centrally within the mound, suggesting greater architectural complexity than is immediately apparent. A large, circular structure, 12.0m in maximum internal diameter, sits at the northern

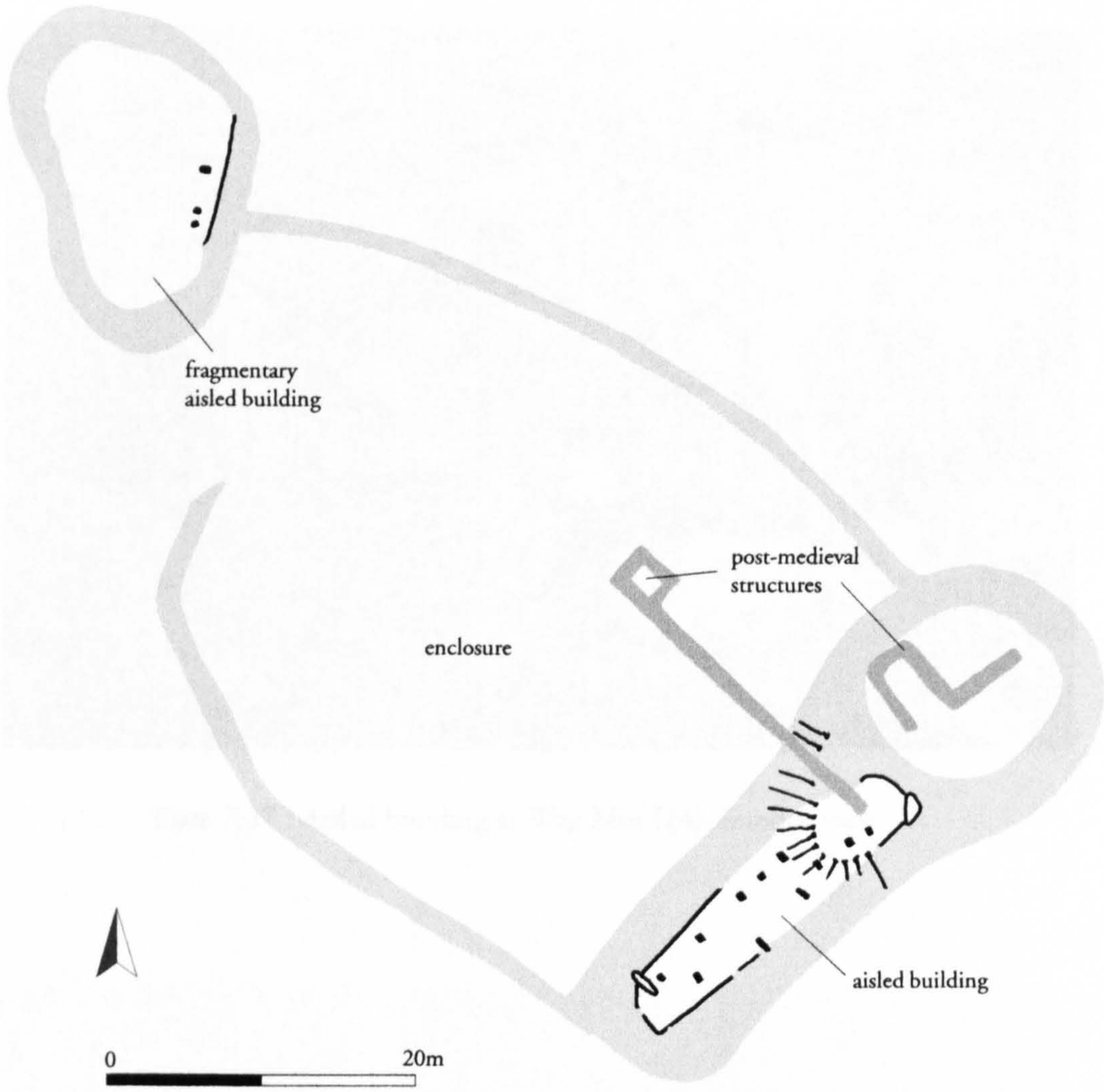


Figure 7.17 : Aisled buildings and enclosure at Wag Mor (14) (after Ordnance Survey field plan).

end of the mound. This may represent the remains of an adjoining circular house, but this area of the site is heavily robbed and overlain by fragmentary rectangular structures, which may be the remains of more recent shielings (Morrison 1996, 60). The two mounds are connected by curving, boulder walls which are partially covered by peat, and it may be that they represent an enclosure contemporary with the aisled buildings themselves.

Both sites sit on gently-sloping ground 300m to the north of the Raffin Burn, overlooked by higher ground to the north and east. The sites themselves face onto a great natural bowl between the high hills to the south and the lower twin summits of Ben Alisky and Beinn Glas-Choire (Plate 7.28). The impression is of a site at the edge of the waterlogged wilderness of the Flow Country. Most of the ground in the immediate vicinity of the site is very poorly drained, and is unlikely ever to have supported agriculture. This impression is

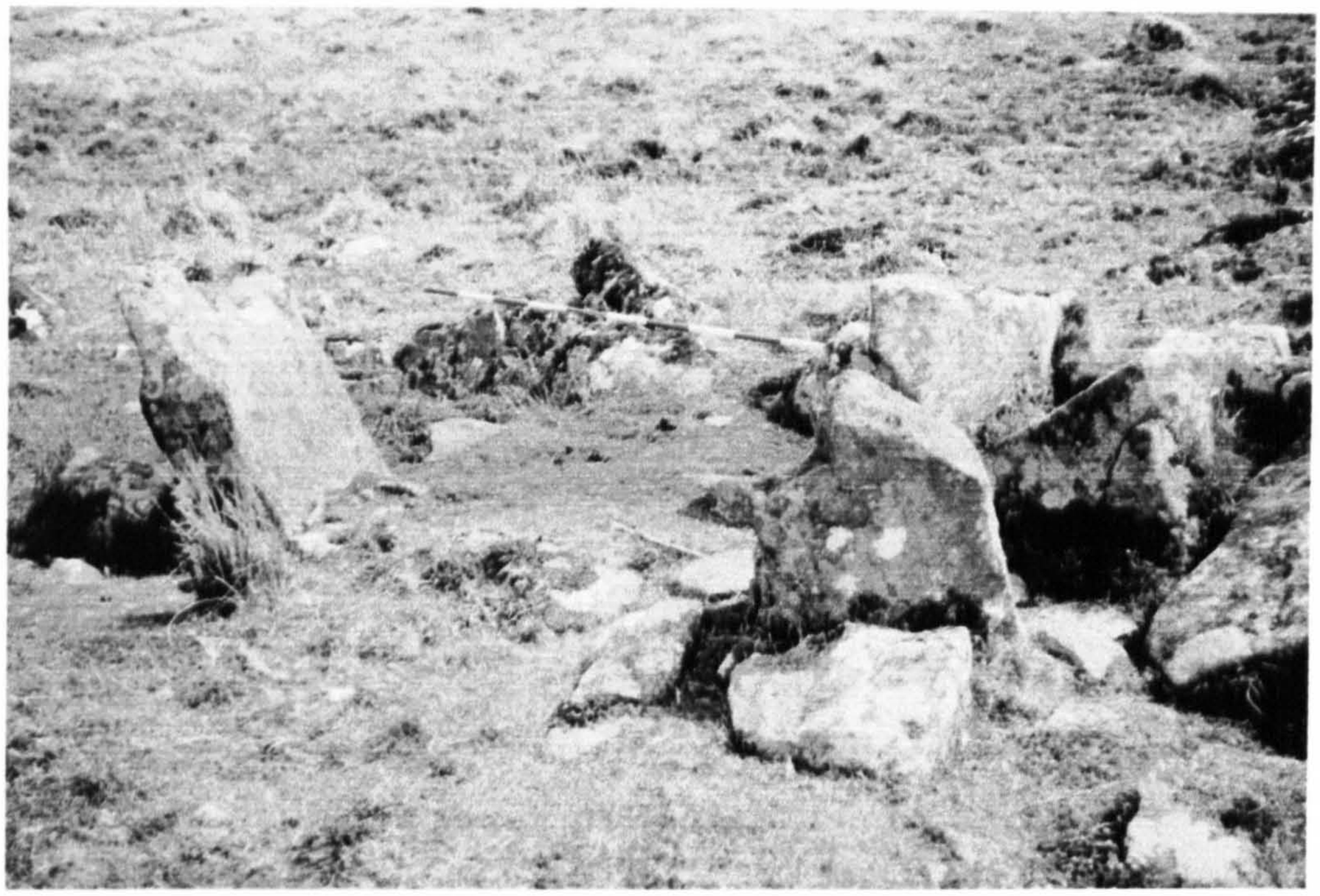


Plate 7.27 : Aisled building at Wag Mor (14), interior view.

Plate 7.28 : View to the NW from Wag Mor (14).

strengthened by the fact that there are no nearby agricultural traces of any period. However, the site is situated to the south of a low pass between Ben Alisky and Cnocan Conachreag, beyond which lie the River Thurso and the undulating landscapes of the northern Caithness Plain. The isolation of the site may, therefore be more apparent than real, an artefact of settlement shifts since prehistory, which have tended to concentrate attention on coastal landscapes. Once again, it is likely that the site relates to routes of movement which have long gone out of use, and its architectural orientation, to the north-east, further suggests that this may be the case. Indeed, such an interpretation seems the more likely in relation to this site, given that more recent drove roads are likely to have passed through this area (Haldane 1952, 106, Sutherland undated, 56).

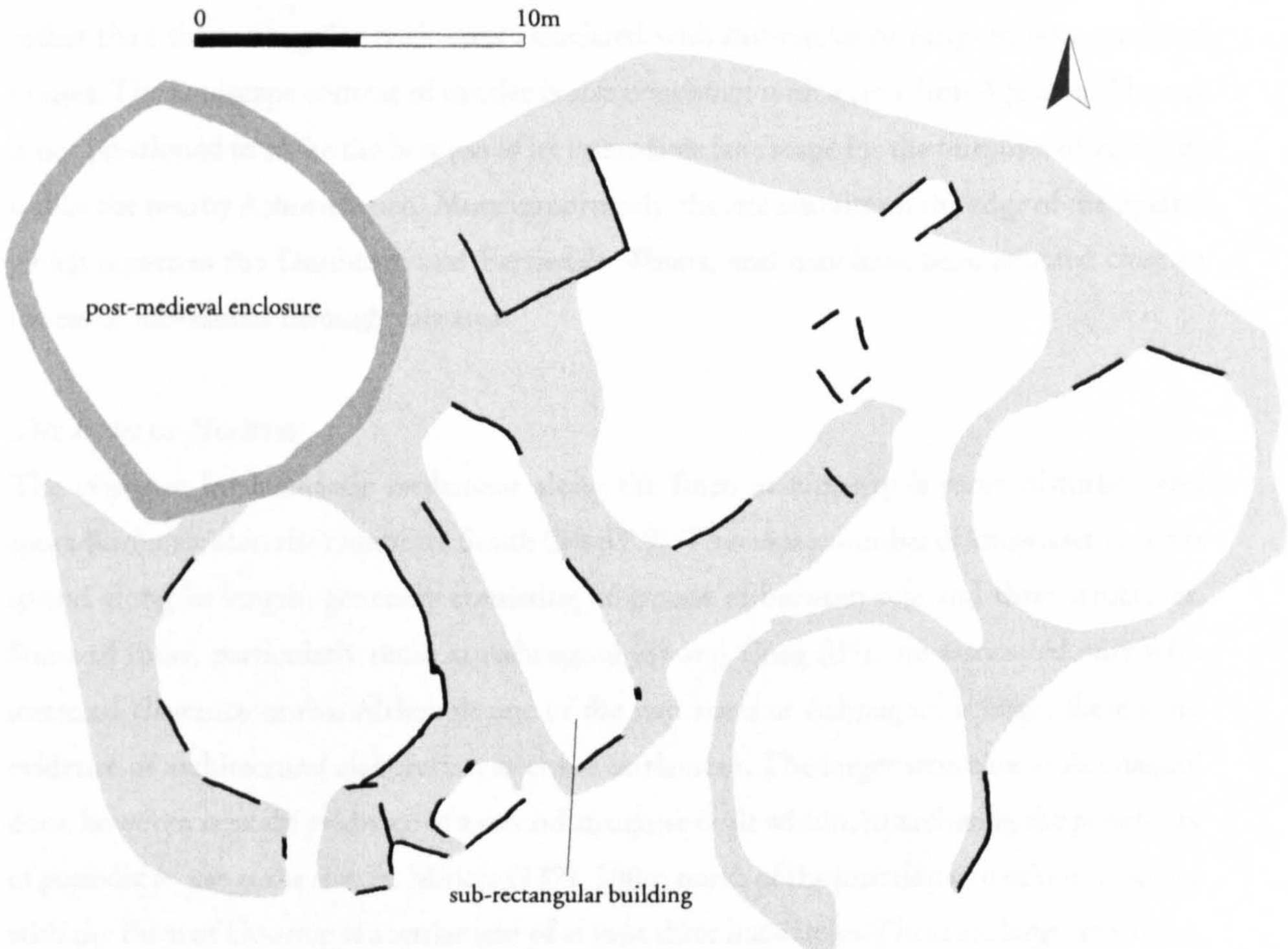


Figure 7.18 : Associated sub-circular and sub-rectangular structures at Achorn (1) (after Ordnance Survey field plan).

There is also a less well-defined, more problematic site to the south, in the area separating the Dunbeath and Berriedale Waters. 70m from the broch mound at Achorn is a complex of structures described by RCAHMS as a 'homestead' (1). This comprises the remains of four conjoined, sub-circular structures defined by low, grass-covered banks, together with a sub-rectangular building, set between the two most northerly circles (Figure 7.18). Stretches of inner and outer wall-face constructed from upright slabs are visible within all of the structures, and there are also traces of box-like alcoves built into the walls of at least two. There is no surviving evidence that any of these buildings contained upright stones with capping lintels, and it is therefore difficult to firmly interpret the site as a complex of aisled buildings. However, the presence of a sub-rectangular building on the site, in combination with conjoined sub-circular structures, is certainly characteristic of the later Iron Age archaeology of the study area. Indeed, the internal dimensions of the rectangular structure at Achorn, 15m by 3.5m, are consistent with firmly identified later Iron Age buildings elsewhere, rather than the rectangular enclosures associated with hut-circles or early- to post-medieval houses. The landscape context of the site is also consistent with a later Iron Age date. The site is not positioned to make the best use of its immediate landscape for the purposes of visibility, unlike the nearby Achorn broch. More importantly, the site also sits on the edge of the upland which separates the Dunbeath and Berriedale Waters, and may have been situated close to routes of movement through this area.

The Burn of Houstry

The evidence for hut-circle settlement along the Burn of Houstry is more disturbed and sporadic than within the Dunbeath Strath (Map 7.9). There are a number of known settlements spread along its length, generally consisting of groups of between one and three structures. Some of these, particularly those at Achnagoul (8) and Cuag (85), are associated only with scattered clearance cairns. Although one of the structures at Achnagoul is large, there is no evidence of architectural elaboration at either settlement. The larger structure at Achnagoul does, however, contain evidence of a second structure built within, introducing the possibility of periodic re-use at the site. At Minera (137), 500m north of the junction of a minor tributary with the Burn of Houstry, is a settlement of at least three hut-circles. These are large structures, between up to 15.0m in internal diameter, and are associated with traces of agriculture in the form of both clearance cairns and a rather fragmentary field system defined by both stone-built walls and turf banks (Plate 7.29). Unfortunately, no structural details are visible.

Plate 7.29 : Hut-circle settlement, Minera (137), Burn of Houstry, a) hut-circle, b) enclosure bank.

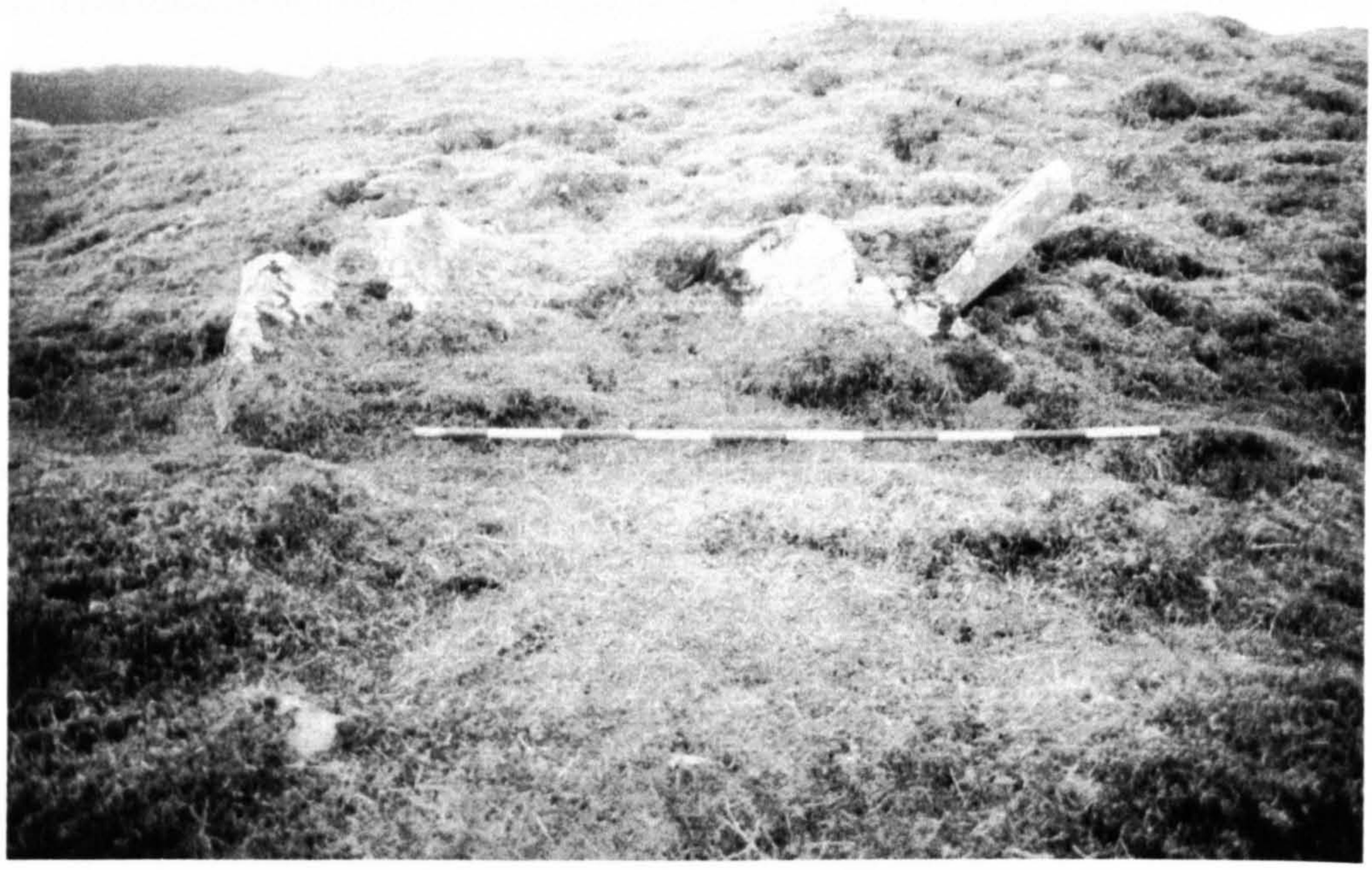


Plate 7.30 : Eart-fast upright stones, amongst the remains of surrounding buildings at Dunbrae (13), Burn of Houstry.

The nature of broch settlement along the Burn of Houstry is rather different to that of the Dunbeath Water, and to the other river systems in the study area. Although there are two sites along its lower reaches, broch settlement also extends further upstream than elsewhere in study area, other than the Strath of Kildonan. The two most southerly of these sites, at Dunbrae (13) and Bridge of Rhemullen (8), occupy the crest of the low spur which separates the Burn of Houstry from a tributary, the Allt an Learanaich. Dunbrae, also known as Rhemullen (cf. Morrison 1996, 45), is the more southerly of the two sites. It consists of a flat-topped, roughly circular turf-covered mound, with a 'stepped' profile. The lower mound contains at least five earth-fast, upright stones on its east side, and a further lone example to the south, suggesting the presence of buildings around the broch (Plate 7.30). The upper mound is capped by the footings of at least five rectangular buildings (Plate 7.2), which may be comparatively recent in date. The site is prominent from the south and east, and the entrance is oriented along the spur, suggesting an intended approach from this direction.

420m to the north-west is the broch mound at Bridge of Rhemullen, which consists of a roughly circular, turf-covered mound, now very disturbed by rabbit burrows and domestic animals. A fragmentary course of walling is exposed at the top of the mound. Although NMRS records note the presence of settlement traces to the south-east of the site, these were not evident when it was visited. However, the three recorded visits by RCAHMS and OS surveyors since 1911 note the progressive degradation of the site, and it is entirely possible that it has suffered very badly since the last recorded visit in 1982. Certainly, the record of the site made by Curle (RCAHMS 1911b, 71) describes a settlement of some complexity, with numerous compartments with protruding stones and slabs. It is therefore likely that the broch was at one time surrounded by a considerable complex of buildings. The site itself sits on the northern part of the spur separating the Burn of Houstry and the Allt an Learanaich, also occupied by Dunbrae to the south. *In their present state*, however, the two sites are not intervisible. Bridge of Rhemullen is overlooked by ground rising gently to the north, although its former entrance orientation is not evident. There are no known hut-circle settlements or field systems in the immediate area of these sites, although the degree of disturbance resulting from post-medieval activity has been considerable. Once again, however, these sites may represent the establishment of nucleated settlements during the middle Iron Age.

There are three further broch sites to the east of the Burn of Houstry, at Achnagoul (2), Minera (21) and Tiantulloch (24) (Map 7.9). These sites are situated much further inland than others to the south and west. All three sites are situated within areas of recent cultivation, the impact of which will have been considerable. The site at Achnagoul consists of a turf-covered mound, within which traces of the broch itself are visible, including part of a lintelled entrance passage and a length of outer wall-face. Although OS surveyors noted traces of an

outer boundary, this is not now visible. The site sits on gently-sloping ground, less than 200m to the east of the Burn of Badnagie, a tributary of the Burn of Houstry, and is overlooked by higher ground to the east. The entrance of the site is oriented towards the south-east, which may have been in the direction of the sea, which is clearly visible from this point. An orientation towards the coast is common among broch sites in north-east Caithness (see section 8.3.1). Hut-circle settlement has been noted along the burn to either side of the cultivated area within which the site is located, suggesting that this may have once extended right along its course and perhaps closer to the broch site than is presently visible. However, like other brochs in the area, Achnagoul may have been surrounded by a complex of buildings, representing the *de novo* establishment of a nucleated settlement in association with an existing field system.

The broch site at Minera (21) is, again, close to a minor tributary of the Burn of Houstry, which lies around 100m to its west. It consists of a mound of 'stepped' profile, within which the outer wall face of the broch is visible. The lower mound contains the indistinct outlines of structures which are likely to represent surrounding buildings, together with one or two upright, earth-fast stones (Plate 7.31). The site lies on gently-sloping ground, which rises to the low summit of Cnoc Breac to the east and south, and is clearly visible from the valley of the Burn of Houstry. The single entrance passage is also oriented towards the valley, and when approaching from this direction the site breaks the skyline directly behind (Plate

Plate 7.31 : Minera broch (21), with traces of surrounding buildings in foreground.

7.31). Once again, the location of the broch appears to have been chosen for visual effect when approached from the valley, as it is overlooked from higher ground to the east. Minera sits within an enclosed area of improved land, and therefore lacks any direct association with contemporary cultivation traces. However, in this case, the enclosed area is comparatively small, and evidence of hut-circle settlement has survived within the moorland and rough grazing to the south and east of the site, together with associated enclosed agricultural plots. While it is likely that the broch drew on existing associations with this area of land, it is also notable that it makes no architectural reference to the structures associated with it. As with many of the broch sites in the immediate area, Minera seems to represent the establishment of a nucleated settlement in the middle Iron Age, and it may be deliberately be oriented away from existing settlement remains.

The mound known as Tiantulloch (24) is situated 650m to the north-west of Minera, at the same elevation on the valley slope (Map 7.9). It contains an identifiable length of outer broch walling. The site again presents the characteristic 'stepped' profile, and the presence of surrounding settlement within this is suggested by the fragmentary remains of what would appear to be the corbelled roof of a building, with a lintelled passage leading away from it. There are no known hut-circles in the immediate vicinity of Tiantulloch on the east side of the Burn of Houstry, but it is again located within an enclosed, improved landscape.

There is a single later Iron Age site along the Burn of Houstry, Cor Tulloch (6), which is nonetheless an important one. This consists of a large turf-covered mound, containing the remains of at least two rectangular aisled buildings, together with numerous other structures (Figure 7.19). The mound itself is surrounded by an outer bank which is likely to have been of turf on a stone foundation. The northernmost of the structures is defined by at least ten upright pillar stones set in two parallel lines, although its exact dimensions cannot be determined. Four of these have lintels *in situ* (Plate 7.32). Two, on the north side, are spanned by a large, flat slab which may represent original roofing material (Plate 7.33). This building appears to have been entered from the east, in which direction there is also an entrance through the outer bank. The southernmost aisled building on the site is defined by nine earth-fast pillar stones, none of which have *in situ* lintels, set in two parallel rows. It measures at least 10m in length, but may once have been much longer as it is considerably disturbed. At the centre of the site, between the two aisled buildings, is a third structure, comprising three upright pillars set around a roughly circular depression. It is difficult to ascertain whether this represents a circular structure, or the scant remains of a larger, rectangular building. Numerous other stones protrude from the turf, and the large size of the mound gives an

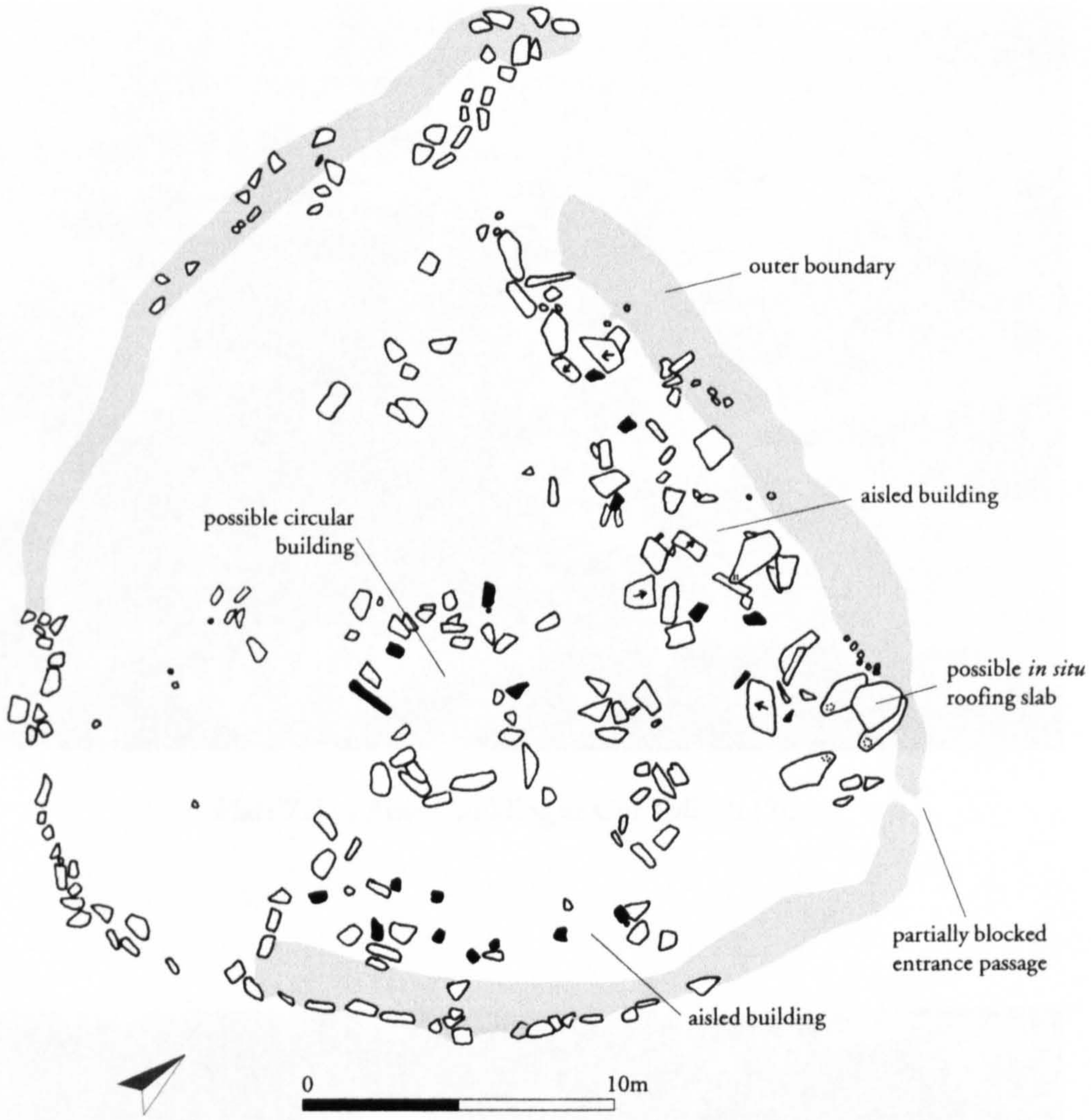


Figure 7.19 : Aisled buildings, Cor Tulloch (5), Burn of Houstry.

impression of considerable complexity. Indeed, in this respect the site may be somewhat different to the other aisled buildings within the study area, and there are several features which invite direct comparison with the Wag of Forse. Although there are no definite signs of the presence of a broch, or any other large building, at Cor Tulloch, prior to the excavations at Forse the only surface structures visible were the aisled buildings themselves (see Appendix 1). It is clear that a considerable depth of deposits is present, and it is possible that this conceals the remains of substantial structures. Another feature shared with the Wag of Forse, which is lacking at most other aisled buildings, is the presence of the remains of a substantial outer boundary, which may originate early in the site's history. Certainly, the aisled buildings

Plate 7.32 : Aisled building at Cor Tulloch (5).

Plate 7.33 : Possible roofing material at Cor Tulloch (5).

at Cor Tulloch are aligned on the entrance gap in this boundary, rather than along the valley, as is the case at other sites discussed here. Again, it may be that these buildings were aligned according to the presence of pre-existing structural features, rather than in relation to the immediate landscape. There are two broch sites in this part of the Houstry valley, the closest to Cor Tulloch being Tiantulloch 0.5km away, again a situation similar to that at Forse. Indeed, the presence of a broch at Cor Tulloch would involve an alignment of three such sites in a very similar fashion to the situation in the Forse area (Map 7.9, section 8.2.2). Clearly, excavation at the site would be necessary in order to establish a structural sequence with any certainty.

Plate 7.34 : View over the Burn of Houstry from Cor Tulloch (6).

The site itself sits within formerly cultivated land overlooking the Burn of Houstry, which at this point flows along a wide, shallow valley (Plate 7.34). The site is clearly visible from the opposite, west, side of the Burn, as well as along its course to both north and south. It is, however, overlooked by land which slopes away gently to the east. Again, this landscape context appears more comparable to other broch sites within the study area, rather than to the other later Iron Age sites.

There is a further site which has been suggested as a possible aisled building at Ballentink (19), situated on the same low spur of land as the brochs at Dunbrae and Bridge of Rhemullen. This site consists of a low, grass-covered mound to which modern field clearance has been added. It contains at least six earth-fast, upright slabs which run from west to east (Plate 7.35), and there are also faint traces of walling on two levels at the eastern side of the mound. The structural details of this site are rather too faint to allow it to be confidently interpreted as an aisled building, especially since it contains only a single alignment of stones, as opposed to the opposed twin rows found at the other sites within the study area.

Plate 7.35 : Possible aisled building at Ballentink (19).

Discussion

This account of the Iron Age settlement landscapes of the Dunbeath Water and the Burn of Houstry has suggested a number of general interpretations. As within the straths and glens further south, hut-circle settlement is widespread, extending right along both river systems and, in the case of the Dunbeath Water, far inland along minor tributary streams into the uplands. Many of the more remote hut-circle settlements are unassociated with clear evidence

of past cultivation, or are surrounded by areas of scattered clearance. There are, however, fewer known areas in which hut-circle settlements are associated with enclosed field systems, although it is likely that these may have been greatly disturbed by post-medieval agriculture and building practices.

There is a marked differences in the landscapes of the middle Iron Age, represented by the brochs, between the Dunbeath Water and the Burn of Houstry. In the former, as in the Berriedale and Langwell valleys discussed above, broch sites are located only within the outer reaches of the Strath. Although it is difficult to relate their positions to that of existing settlement landscapes, as has been possible elsewhere in the study area, it seems nonetheless clear that the brochs were situated so as to visually dominate the valley floor in their immediate locality. As in the Strath of Kildonan further south, broch sites are located far inland along the Burn of Houstry, in places where the landscape itself offers much less potential for visually dominant situations. Here, there is more surviving evidence for developed agricultural landscapes, and it may be that the brochs were positioned in relation to these. However, at the one site where the two are set close together, it seems that little direct reference was made to the immediate landscape. Indeed, it should be borne in mind that, unlike the majority of sites further to the south within the study area, the brochs throughout the Dunbeath and Houstry area display considerable evidence of having been surrounded by complexes of buildings. It is likely that these represent the establishment of nucleated settlements, with the broch at their centre, and the lack of reference to existing settlement landscapes may not be entirely fortuitous.

The later Iron Age landscapes of the Dunbeath Water are radically different from those established earlier in prehistory. Indeed the aisled buildings and brochs have distributions which are almost entirely exclusive. The locations of the aisled buildings within the landscape suggests that they were chosen without regard for either visual dominance, or a relationship to established agricultural practice. Once again, their location far upstream, and close to the passes linking the Dunbeath Water to the neighbouring Berriedale valley, and the suggests a concern with access to routes of movement *through* the landscape. This is echoed by the orientation of their architecture, which is invariably along the valleys, rather than towards their flanks, as in the case of the brochs. Most of these sites are situated in areas which are now marginal, and no longer support agriculture. However, in interpreting them we should be aware of anachronistic ideas concerning routes of movement, brought about by a large scale change to a coastal focus over the last few centuries. Indeed, it is possible that, during the later Iron Age, brochs whose surrounding settlements continued to be occupied may have become peripheral within landscapes which emphasised access to the heart of the valley systems.

These new landscapes were accompanied by a radically different later Iron Age architecture. Monumentality was now internal, within buildings which must have appeared as little more than grassy mounds. These sites frequently include both rectangular and circular architectural forms. I would argue that this new use of the landscape was accompanied by a division between the spaces incorporated within everyday domestic practices and non-domestic areas of life, represented by these contrasting architectural elements. This echoes the themes outlined in Chapter 4. I will go on to explore the social context within which this changing architecture might be viewed in the final part of this chapter.

7.4. Summary and Conclusions

This chapter began with a general discussion of the Iron Age field archaeology of the study area, with the intention of providing a broad background for the problems raised by the local landscape studies. I suggested that this kind of generalising approach, centred around basic statistical information, might obscure significant local variation. This has proved to be the case. It is now necessary to adopt to a broader outlook. In this case, however, my aim is to explore the way in which wider social formations might have resulted from such specific, localised practice.

It is clear that we should not consider hut-circles as belonging to a single chronological context. The field evidence in many areas suggests that settlements based on small groups of roundhouses may have been occupied over much of later prehistory. However, it is equally clear that the observed variation in what remains of these settlement landscapes should not be explained in terms of a simple developmental scheme, involving evolutionary development from simple to complex architecture and unenclosed to enclosed agriculture. The evidence suggests diverse practices spread across the landscape, within which differences in archaeology may be related as much to functional variation between settlements in different locations as to chronology. There are, nonetheless, some areas where wide variations in agricultural practice can be found within restricted areas. Here, the presence of varying cultivation regimes in the most sheltered, less elevated locations may be taken as evidence of change over time. This seems to have involved the long-term maintenance of an enclosed agricultural landscape from at least the mid-first millennium BC, accompanied by an increasingly substantial domestic architecture. However, the association between architecture and landscape is not exclusive, warning against a simplistic causal relationship. Within an increasingly enclosed landscape, close tenurial associations developed between communities and the land must have developed. This process was accompanied by an emphasis on the boundary between the domestic domain and the surrounding landscape. In Chapter 3, I argued that the maintenance of enclosed agricultural landscapes over time necessarily involves social relationships which govern rights

of access to the land over both the short- and long-term. I would further argue here that the increasing permanence and separation of domestic buildings, which were not necessarily larger than those associated with less intensive agricultural regimes, echoes the permanence of the relationship between communities and the land. Given an apparent lack of explicitly ritual monuments, at least from the Late Bronze Age, I would interpret this archaeology as evidence that social relations involving routine access to the land were negotiated within the domestic domain.

Although a concern with some degree of elaboration in domestic architecture is evident, these buildings lack a *formal* landscape context. The physical relationship between domestic buildings and enclosures lacks any repeated pattern, either in terms of physical proximity of patterns of access. This may suggest rights of access to the land which operated at the level of the community, while relationships of power and inequality were negotiated within the domestic domain.

In the brochs, an explicit, formal relationship between buildings and the landscape first becomes apparent. It is likely that these monumental buildings drew on long-standing tenurial associations between communities and their land, but exploited these in a particular way. Thus, the brochs of the study area were situated close to the cultivated landscapes, but also maintained and increased the physical separation from them, using outer boundaries which were often massive in scale. While it might be argued that these boundaries were merely defensive works, it has been repeatedly noted that the brochs of the study area are not sited according to purely defensive criteria. It is also clear that where pre-existing agricultural settlements have influenced the location of brochs, surrounding settlements are never encompassed within their boundary systems. Where directions of approach to the brochs are evident, again these seem to have been designed to emphasise a monumental presence within the landscape, rather than to give easy access to the surrounding land. The overall impression is of truly monumental domestic buildings, which seem to have been intended to dominate and overshadow daily life in a very physical way. It seems likely that the importance of the domestic domain, as a physical venue for the maintenance of social relationships, was cemented during the middle Iron Age. It is also seems to have been the case that the external monumentality of domestic buildings operated to extend their influence, away from the immediacy of personal relationships within the house itself. The size, complexity and investment of labour in these buildings suggest that they must have been central to the maintenance of unequal social relationships, which probably extended to an obligation to participate in the construction of maintenance of the broch itself, an argument which I will developed in greater depth in Chapter 8.

That the brochs were established in certain places within the landscape, often the outer reaches of the river systems, may be evidence of a growing relationship between particular dominant groups and specific places, and the rights of those groups over wider agricultural landscapes. The brochs were few in number in comparison to hut-circle settlements, and it is likely that the social relations within which they were brought into play extended beyond their immediate locale, perhaps into those areas where there was no physical presence. However, it is also likely that the monumental form of the broch itself, and its visibility from almost every part of the immediate cultivated landscape, enabled a presencing of social inequality within the routines of daily life. It would have been almost impossible to carry out any mundane activity without reference to such a dominant presence.

The later Iron Age archaeology could hardly be more different, both in terms of the architecture of the aisled buildings, and of their landscape contexts. Of course, as I have already suggested, it is unlikely that these sites are representative of the entirety of later Iron Age settlement. Excavations elsewhere have indicated that occupation on nucleated broch sites continued into the later Iron Age. Although there is little direct evidence for this from the current study area, an argument can be made for continued occupation on broch sites in north-east Caithness (section 8.3.1). It is therefore likely that the coastline and outer parts of the valley systems, where nucleated broch sites are common, were occupied during the later Iron Age. Nonetheless, many later Iron Age sites are far from known concentrations of existing settlement, and its seems not to have been the intention to draw on existing systems of land tenure. Instead, the emphasis is likely to have been on routes of movement along and between the valleys, and perhaps further across country to the north.

The new landscapes of the later Iron Age were accompanied by an architecture where monumentality was internalised. The aisled buildings were at least partly subterranean, and are unlikely to have been visible until approached quite closely. This lack of external monumentality was accompanied by locations which did not exploit the potential of the local landscape for visual dominance. In many ways, this new architecture might be seen as a transformation of that of the brochs. The spaces created by the pillars and lintels may be analogous to the radial slab partitions found within many excavated broch sites in the north, which seem to have allowed the division of activities taking place within their peripheral spaces (Reid 1989). In the case of the aisled buildings, these sub-divisions were arranged linearly, and introduced the possibility of ranked internal spaces. This use of space contrasts markedly with that of the houses which accompanied the aisled buildings, which retained their circular form, and presumably their domestic focus on a central hearth. Indeed, a small number of domestic buildings retained an entirely circular form.

This internal monumentality may also have implications in relation to the transformation of the wider landscapes within which they are situated. Their lack of external visual impact suggests that intervention in the routines of daily life around them, through the creation of a physical and visual sense of place, was now unimportant. Rather, it is possible that they were only drawn upon within a restricted and specific range of social situations. The evidence from the Wag of Forse (Appendix 1) suggests that the aisled buildings were not specifically domestic in character, and it is at least possible that they were related to the gathering, storage and ordering of produce from a wider landscape. It may be that wider rights of access to land and resources were negotiated elsewhere. Barrett and Foster (1991) have suggested that the later Iron Age may have been characterised by the emergence of more extensive, long-distance social relationships, eventually leading to the establishment of wider political entities during the first millennium AD. I would argue that such processes provide a likely context for the emergence of the aisled buildings.

I have argued here that the later Iron Age archaeology of the present study area may represent a transformation of social practices which had developed through a long association between communities and the land. This argument has of necessity been rather general, as the nature of the available archaeological resource, made up largely from unexcavated field monuments, allows little insight into the details of domestic architecture. However, in north-east Caithness the character of Iron Age archaeology is qualitatively different. Here, there are a number of excavated broch sites, and Chapter 8 will explore the ways in which this architecture was incorporated into routine social practice.

Chapter Eight

Study Area 2
North East Caithness

8.1. Introduction

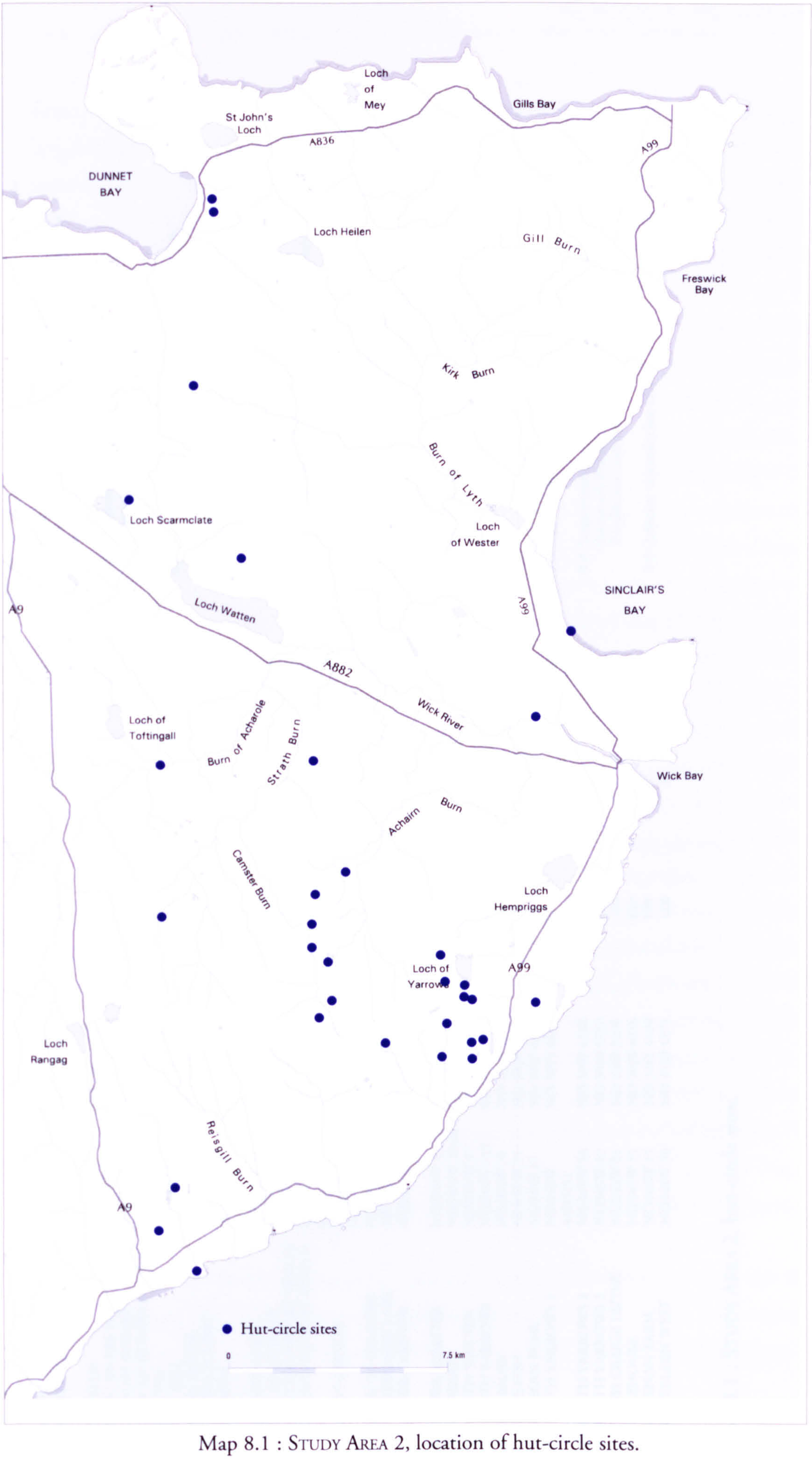
This study area comprises a wide range of modern landscapes, from the upland grazing of the south to the comparatively rich agricultural zone to the north (section 6.3.3). In this chapter, I will explore the place of these landscapes within Iron Age society. As I have discussed previously, there is a fairly substantial archaeological resource available for a study of the Iron Age in the area, including a large number of excavated field monuments which may still be visited, in addition to published research. As with any so-called archaeological 'record', however, this material is not homogeneous, but the product of work spanning the range of archaeological paradigms which have prevailed during the past one hundred and fifty years.

8.2. Landscapes and Domestic Architecture: An Overview of North East Caithness in the Iron Age

8.2.1. Hut-circles

As discussed in section 5.3.1, I will take as our first category of material the 'hut-circles' (Table 8.1). An examination of the location of the surviving monuments of this type within the study area will demonstrate a rather sparse and uneven distribution (Map 8.1). There is a major concentration of hut-circles in the upland area surrounding Loch Watenan, the Loch of Yarrows and the Hill of Ulbster, together with three smaller groups, in the area surrounding the Wag of Forse, in the Camster area and to the north of Dunnet Bay. Away from these locations, only small numbers of single sites have been recorded, for example to the south of the dune system of Ackergill Links behind Sinclair's Bay, within the extensive areas of modern forestry to the north and east of Camster and on the north shore of Loch Scarmclate. Small groups of hut-circles are also known to the east of the Strath Burn, a tributary of the Wick River which joins it to the south of Loch Watten, to the south of the Wick River itself at Cruives, and at Shielton, within the extensive area of peatland to the south-east of the Loch of Toftingall.

Clearly, this distribution is likely to bear little relationship to the contemporary spread of settlement across the landscape. It is likely to be a product of intensive agricultural practice, given that more than half of the modern agricultural land in Caithness lies within the study area, combined with the selective effect of field survey during the present century. Indeed, so biased is this distribution that there would be little value in attempting to divide the known sites into the groups introduced in section 5.3.1. As might be expected, very few of the known hut-circles fall within the agricultural areas, these being limited to the two examples



Map 8.1 : STUDY AREA 2, location of hut-circle sites.

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Height AOD (m)	No. of Structures	Maximum Diameter (m)	Minimum Diameter (m)	Comments
1	ACKERGILL	ND35NW 02	ND 3460 5530	10	1	10.0		Kitchen midden' recorded by Cree (1911).
2	BROUGHWHIN	ND34SW 17	ND 3122 4125	110	3	7.0	4.3	Heather burning has revealed doubtful nature of 2 of these structures.
3	CAMSTER	ND24SE 09	ND 2643 4269	130	1	10.0		
4	CNOC AN EAS BHIG	ND24SE 02	ND 2600 4210	140	4	11.0	7.0	3 structures may be shielings.
5	CNOCAN BUIDHE	ND24NE 06	ND 2690 4709	90	1	11.0		Destroyed by afforestation.
6	CNOCAN BUIDHE SOUTH	ND24NE 11	ND 2586 4632	100	1	11.5		Destroyed by afforestation.
7	CRUIVES	ND35SW 42	ND 3340 5240	10	4	11.0	6.0	
8	FLEX HILL	ND25SE 03	ND 2580 5090	70	10	11.0	8.0	No associated cultivation, but very overgrown with peat.
9	FORSE HOUSE	ND23SW 06	ND 2050 3480	110	15	12.0	8.0	Associated fields system.
10	FRESWICK LINKS				1	5.2		Excavated by Edwards (1925).
11	GLAMOR	ND34SW 52	ND 3037 4190	140	2	7.5	7.5	Possible 'annexe' to one structure, possible associated clearance cairns.
12	GROAT'S LOCH	ND34SW 105	ND 3124 4069	110	2	12.0	10.5	Evidence of entrance elaboration.
13	HILL OF ULBSTER	ND34SW 14	ND 3340 4260	80	4	6.7		Associated clearance cairns.
14	LINKS OF DUNNET NORTH	ND27SW 09	ND 2234 7002	20	1	14.0		Obscured by afforestation.
15	LINKS OF DUNNET SOUTH	ND26NW 05/06/15	ND 2239 6958	20		17.0		Numerous structures, one sub-circular with radial orthostats.
16	LOCH CARNLIA	ND24SE 11-14/19	ND 2575 4450	120	6	11.0	6.5	Dispersed group of hut-circles.
17	LOCH OF CAMSTER	ND24SE 10	ND 2630 4400	120	3	9.0	6.5	Associated with small, contemporary enclosure.
18	LOCH SCARMCLATE	ND15NE 44	ND 1950 5980	30	1	5.4		Associated with a 20m stretch of walling.
19	LOWER CAMSTER	ND24NE 3/9	ND 2575 4530	100	5	12.0	6.5	Possible secondary alteration to one structure, also possible 'keyhole' structure.
20	LOWER RUMSTER	ND23NW 16	ND 2106 3627	110	1	5.5		
21	MUNSARY	ND24NW 18-20	ND 2060 4555	110	3	8.8	8.0	Indeterminate structures.
22	NORTH WATTEN	ND25NW 17	ND 2334 5780	50	2	13.0	8.0	
23	NORTH YARROWS	ND34SW 113	ND 3015 4423	110				
24	RED MOSS	ND26SW 35	ND 2170 6370	50	1	9.0		
25	SHIELTON	ND25SW 21	ND 2056 5076	60	2	9.5	6.0	
26	SIDHEAN FUAR	ND24SE 15	ND 2827 4124	160	1	9.5		
27	SOUTH YARROWS 1	ND34SW 44/45/51	ND 3095 4280	110	5	10.0	5.5	Varied group of structures, one with associated clearance cairns.
28	SOUTH YARROWS 2	ND34SW 53	ND 3097 4320	100	1	12.0	8.0	Large structure, with smaller secondary structure within.
29	SOUTH YARROWS 3	ND34SW 13	ND 3030 4332	120	1	6.4		Associated clearance cairns and enclosure.
30	UAMH CRAIGE LEITHE	ND23SW 03	ND 2180 3340	50	1	17.0		Possible hut-circle with associated clearance cairns.
31	WAREHOUSE	ND34SW 55	ND 3020 4076	110	1	8.0		
32	WATENAN FARM	ND34SW 15	ND 3161 4134	100	2	5.8	4.3	Adjacent to massive hut-circle.
33	WHITELEEN WEST	ND34SW 50	ND 3123 4271	120	1	11.0		

Table 8.1 : Study Area 2, hut-circle sites.

near to the Wick River at Cruives, and to the coastally-located examples within the Dunnet and Ackergill Links. The latter have presumably survived due to their incorporation within extensive dune systems. There are also 'islands' of upland within this agricultural landscape, within which significant evidence of hut-circle settlement has survived. Clearly, however, post-medieval agriculture has had a dramatic effect on the survival and consequent distribution of these monuments.

Where evidence of hut-circle settlement does survive outside the 'island' concentrations, it tends to be at the edges of the peatlands. Although it is possible that this represents the outer edge of a more widespread pattern of settlement, the remainder of which has been removed by agricultural activity, it is also probable that the known distribution has been selectively influenced by the areas chosen for modern survey. This is demonstrably true of the Yarrows/Watenan, Dunnet Bay and Forse areas, which have been the subject of extensive surveys in comparatively recent times (Mercer & Howell 1980, Mercer 1981, Mercer 1985). All of these have produced significant evidence of hut-circle settlement. The upland nature of these landscapes, much of it peat-covered, would suggest that there is no necessary correspondence between land-use connected with hut-circle settlement and patterns of modern agriculture.

Detailed field survey within the study area has been somewhat sporadic since the compilation of the 1911 RCAHMS *Inventory*, and it is notable that the known distribution of hut-circle settlement corresponds closely to that of modern routes of access. All but one of the known sites outside of the recently-surveyed areas are within 1.0km of a currently accessible road or track. In the Camster area, where a modern road does cross a significant expanse of upland, there is a concentration of known hut-circle settlement, much of which was first recorded by the Ordnance Survey in 1972, prior to the large scale afforestation of the area. Indeed, outside of the recently surveyed areas, the distribution of later prehistoric settlement in the study area seems to correspond largely with that of the 1911 *Inventory*, which has been extended only slightly by the discovery of new sites by the OS, and by local survey. It is therefore almost certainly the case that the overall distribution of hut-circles within the study area is a fragmentary and biased one, and can tell us little about the extent of settlement in the past. Of the few known field systems associated with hut-circle settlement, most are deeply buried within the peat, suggesting that the area available for agriculture was once far more widespread.

Given the extreme limitations of the known settlement distribution, it is clear that the scant evidence of hut-circle settlement outside the concentrated areas, which I will explore separately in section 8.3, allows little generalisation concerning first millennium BC landscapes in north-eastern Caithness.

Many of the known hut-circles themselves are rather ephemeral, and in some cases may be the remains of more recent shielings, or even natural features, for example the small group of possible structures at Munsary (21) (Harden & Harvey 1990). The three structures at Cruives (7) are equally ill-defined. At Loch Scarmclate is a possible hut-circle associated with a length of walling some 20.0m in length, which may represent evidence of land enclosure in this area at an early date. However, this structure is extremely small, and appears unlikely to represent a permanently occupied house. That developed settlements were once present is suggested by the recovery of a small number of souterrain sites, including the well-known examples at Ham, which are likely to have been associated with complex, above-ground structures. However, souterrains are not chronologically diagnostic, and are therefore not conclusive evidence of early settlement in themselves. Overall, hut-circle sites are too scattered to allow any general insight into their landscape contexts.

8.2.2. Brochs

There are almost 70 known brochs and broch mounds within the study area (Table 8.2), a distribution which may be interpreted in terms of a much higher degree of survival within the modern landscape. This is unsurprising, given that these sites invariably consist of considerable mounds of earth and stone, whose destruction and removal through agricultural practice is much less likely than that of the more ephemeral hut-circles. Swanson (1988, 92) argues that there may have been unrecorded destruction of brochs in some areas, on the basis that the association which she identifies between broch sites and the general extent of modern agricultural land does not seem to be maintained in these locations. This assumption seems reasonable, in view of the fact that early accounts of Caithness brochs record the destruction and removal of sites in advance of agricultural improvements (Anderson 1890, 1901). As I have already suggested in relation to hut-circle settlement, it is probable that marginal land has increased in extent in some areas since later prehistory (Chapter 6), and it is at least possible that broch sites remain to be located within areas now blanketed by peat. In general, however, it is likely that the current distribution of broch settlement is much more closely representative of the contemporary situation during their occupation than that of the hut-

(Pages 203- 207) Table 8.2 : Study Area 2, broch sites.

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Status	Height AOD m)	Mound Diameter (m)	Mound Height (m)	Internal Diameter (m)	Wall Thickness m)	Surrounding Buildings?	Outer Boundary?
1	ACHAVAR	ND23NE 03	ND 2617 3697	UNEXCAVATED	90	20.73	1.83	6.01		yes	
2	ACHINGALE	ND25SW 14	ND 2434 5353	EXCAVATED/ DESTROYED	30	14.00	1.20				
3	ACHOW (RHIANRIVACH, SWINEY)	ND23NW 03	ND 2303 3617	UNEXCAVATED	110	18.23	2.44			yes	
4	APPNAG TULOCH (FORSE HOUSE)	ND23NW 04	ND 2121 3591	UNEXCAVATED	110	18.23	2.44		3.96	yes	yes
5	BAIL A'CHARN	ND25SW 08	ND 2280 5170	EXCAVATED/ BACKFILLED	60	32.92	5.49	9.14	4.27	yes	yes
6	BALLACHLY	ND14SE 06	ND 1956 4423	UNEXCAVATED	150	23.44				yes	yes
7	BARDINTULLOCH	ND23NE 09	ND 2730 3727	UNEXCAVATED	90						
8	BORROWSTON	ND34SW 08	ND 3288 4353	UNEXCAVATED	70	34.75	3.05			yes	
9	BOWERMADDEN	ND26SW 07	ND 2398 6369	EXCAVATED/ DESTROYED	50			9.14			
10	BRABSTERMIRE	ND36NW 01	ND 3285 6993	PART EXCAVATED	70	35.00	0.90				
11	BRIDGE OF DUNN	ND25NW 07	ND 2041 5613	UNEXCAVATED	40	45.00	1.30				
12	BROUNABAN	ND34SW 33	ND 3231 4347	EXCAVATED	80					yes	
13	BRUAN	ND33NW 01	ND 3102 3949	UNEXCAVATED	80	15.24	3.05			yes	yes
14	BURN OF LATHERONWHEEL	ND13SE 05	ND 1865 3260	UNEXCAVATED	40	16.15	3.05				

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Status	Height AOD m)	Mound Diameter (m)	Mound Height (m)	Internal Diameter (m)	Wall Thickness m)	Surrounding Buildings?	Outer Boundary?
15	BURNSIDE, DURRAN	ND16SE 13	ND 1951 6359	UNEXCAVATED	50	42.00	0.70			yes	yes
16	CAIRN OF ELSAY	ND35SE 06	ND 3871 5198	EXCAVATED	10	18.00	2.70		4.80	no	no
17	CAIRN OF HUMSTER	ND34NE 03	ND 3529 4848	UNEXCAVATED	30	45.00	1.90			yes	yes
18	CAIRNQUOY	ND34NW 06	ND 3309 4743	UNEXCAVATED	80	20.00	1.50				
19	CAMSTER 1 (South)	ND24NE 04	ND 2520 4518	UNEXCAVATED	110	28.00	2.50			yes	yes
20	CAMSTER 2 (North)	ND24NE 05	ND 2555 4558	UNEXCAVATED	100	23.77	3.66			yes	yes
21	CAMSTER FARM	ND26SW 04	ND 2093 6098	UNEXCAVATED/ DESTROYED	50	45.72					yes
22	CARN A'CHLADDA	ND25SW 04	ND 2313 5233	UNEXCAVATED	50	21.00	3.00			yes	yes
23	COGLE (COGHILL)	ND25NE 08	ND 2670 5708	EXCAVATED	30		0.61			yes	
24	EAST CLYTH	ND23NE 11	ND 2995 3923	UNEXCAVATED	80	20.00	1.00				
25	EVERLEY (TOFT'S)	ND36NE 06	ND 3699 6828	EXCAVATED	30			8.84	4.72	yes	yes
26	FRESWICK LINKS (FRESWICK SANDS)	ND36NE 05	ND 3761 6761	EXCAVATED	20			9.95	3.50	yes	
27	GEARSAY CAIRN	ND25NE 08	ND 2726 5819		40						
28	GOLSARY	ND23NW 14	ND 2057 3749	UNEXCAVATED	130	17.07	3.66			yes	yes

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Status	Height AOD m)	Mound Diameter (m)	Mound Height (m)	Internal Diameter (m)	Wall Thickness m)	Surrounding Buildings?	Outer Boundary?
29	GREEN HILL, ROSTER	ND23NE 10	ND 2664 3986	UNEXCAVATED	130	19.51	2.44			yes	
30	GREYSTEIL CASTLE, LOCH RANGAG	ND14SE 04	ND 1795 4167	UNEXCAVATED	120	20.00	4.00	9.00			yes
31	HALCRO MANSE	ND26SW 01	ND 2389 6119	UNEXCAVATED	50	47.00	0.60			yes	yes
32	HEMPRIGGS	ND34NE 04	ND 3511 4717	UNEXCAVATED	50	42.00	1.50			yes	
33	HILL O'WORKS	ND26SE 02	ND 2903 6255	EXCAVATED	20	70.00	2.00	8.84	3.96	yes	yes
34	HILLHEAD (THE PAP)	ND35SE 05	ND 3762 5140	EXCAVATED	30	18.00	1.30	9.14	3.96	yes	
35	KEISS HARBOUR	ND36SE 02	ND 3531 6108	EXCAVATED	10			10.97	3.35	yes	
36	KEISS ROAD	ND36SW 01	ND 3488 6151	EXCAVATED	20			10.36	3.66	yes	yes
37	KEISS WHITE GATE	ND36SE 03	ND 3541 6120	EXCAVATED	10			8.00	4.00	yes	
38	KETTLEBURN	ND35SW 11	ND 3497 5191	EXCAVATED/ DESTROYED	10	36.58			3.35	yes	yes
39	KNOCKINNON	ND13SE 10	ND 1764 3105	UNEXCAVATED	100	20.42	3.96			yes	yes
40	LATHERONWHEEL	ND13SE 06	ND 1762 3251	UNEXCAVATED	110	21.00		8.23		yes	yes
41	LINKS OF DUNNET 1	ND26NW 05	ND 2224 6967		20		2.00				
42	LOWER DUNN 1	ND25NW 02	ND 2026 5670	UNEXCAVATED	40	32.00	3.00			yes	

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Status	Height AOD m)	Mound Diameter (m)	Mound Height (m)	Internal Diameter (m)	Wall Thickness m)	Surrounding Buildings?	Outer Boundary?
43	NESS	ND36NE 01	ND 3814 6665	EXCAVATED	20			6.71	4.57	yes	yes
44	NEWLANDS OF CLYTH	ND23NE 07	ND 2724 3811	UNEXCAVATED	110					yes	yes
45	NORWALL (GREEN HILL, REISS)	ND35SW 10	ND 3266 5445	EXCAVATED	40			9.20	4.11	yes	yes
46	NYBSTER	ND36SE 04	ND 3702 6314	EXCAVATED	10			7.01	4.27	yes	yes
47	OCCUMSTER	ND23NE 02	ND 2693 3565	UNEXCAVATED	70	24.38	3.66				
48	OLD STIRKOKE (CAIRN HILL)	ND34NW 04	ND 3275 4928	PART EXCAVATED	30	27.43	6.30	9.14	3.96		
49	RUMSTER	ND23NW 05	ND 2125 3725	UNEXCAVATED	120	15.85	2.74				
50	SCARFSKERRY	ND27SE 05	ND 2564 7420	UNEXCAVATED	10	14.00	1.60	5.25 (partial)	1.55		yes
51	SCOTTAG	ND25NE 05	ND 2566 5699		40	50.00	2.00				
52	SKIRZA HEAD	ND36NE 02	ND 3940 6844	EXCAVATED	30			6.71	4.27	yes	yes
53	SKITTEN, KILLIMSTER	ND35NW 03	ND 3234 5655	EXCAVATED/ DESTROYED	30	45.72	2.74	9.91	4.57	yes	yes
54	SMERRAL 1	ND13SE 04	ND 1780 3379	UNEXCAVATED	80		3.00			yes	
55	SMERRAL 2 (SMERRAL WOOD)	ND13SE 23	ND 1773 3396	UNEXCAVATED	90		1.40	9.00		possible	yes
56	THRUMSTER 1 (MAINS)	ND34NW 01	ND 3319 4505	EXCAVATED	70			11.40	4.30		

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Status	Height AOD m)	Mound Diameter (m)	Mound Height (m)	Internal Diameter (m)	Wall Thickness m)	Surrounding Buildings?	Outer Boundary?
57	THRUMSTER 2 (LITTLE)	ND34NW 02	ND 3384 4583	UNEXCAVATED	80		2.70	9.40	3.80		
58	THURDISTOFT	ND26NW 01	ND 2078 6731	UNEXCAVATED	20	24.00	2.00				
59	TOFTGUN	ND24SE 06	ND 2798 4241		150						
60	UPPER LATHERON	ND13SE 08	ND 1824 3186	UNEXCAVATED	80		2.13			yes	
61	USSHILLY TULLOCH (THE TULLOCHS)	ND23NW 06	ND 2075 3552	UNEXCAVATED	110		5.49			yes	
62	WAG OF FORSE	ND23NW 01	ND 2048 3520	EXCAVATED	130			9.60	3.60	yes	yes
63	WAREHOUSE	ND34SW 43	ND 3034 4124	UNEXCAVATED	120		2.00			yes	yes
64	WATENAN 1 (North)	ND34SW 10	ND 3180 4146	UNEXCAVATED	100		2.44		3.66	yes	
65	WATENAN 2 (South)	ND34SW 11	ND 3171 4115	UNEXCAVATED	110		1.22	8.23	3.66	no	yes
66	WATTEN	ND25SW 13	ND 2410 5397	UNEXCAVATED	30	25.00	2.50				yes
67	WESTER (CASTLE LINGLAS)	ND35NW 04	ND 3385 5831	EXCAVATED	10		0.50	8.80		yes	yes
68	WEST WATTEN (GREEN HILL)	ND25NW 09	ND 2299 5502	UNEXCAVATED	50	32.00	2.40				
69	YARROWS	ND34SW 01	ND 3083 4349	EXCAVATED	100					yes	yes

circles. The more massive broch sites are likely to have been more resistant, although certainly not immune, to the effects of recent agricultural practice. I would therefore argue that general observations are more useful in arriving at an understanding of broch settlement within the study area as a whole.

As I have discussed in detail in section 5.3.2, I have provisionally accepted Swanson's (1988) identification criteria for broch sites, although I would argue that there are good empirical reasons for adding a further 5 sites to the 64 she suggests as 'definite' examples, making a total of 69 (Table 8.2). There are a further 34 sites recorded by the NMRS which may be regarded as possible broch sites (Table 8.3). Of these, 19 were originally classified as 'brochs' in OS Name Books between 1871 and 1873, and in the RCAHMS Inventory of 1911. A further 6 are classified in these sources as 'possible brochs'. These broad categories conceal a varied range of field monuments, including amorphous grassy mounds which none the less appear to contain substantial structures. That such sites must be taken into account is demonstrated in salutary fashion by the experiences of Hedges (1990, 90) at the Orcadian site of Bu, where what appeared to be a small cairn proved on excavation to be a hitherto unknown broch site. There are also a number of sites which have been so greatly affected by agricultural activity and construction, since their initial identification as antiquities, that no intelligible evidence remains. For the purposes of a general commentary, the initial list of sites summarised in Table 8.2, which can be identified with some degree of certainty as those of brochs, will form the core of the discussion which follows. It is recognised that the vagaries of preservation and positive identification discussed above will have an effect, impossible to quantify and potentially damaging, on any discussion based on site distributions alone. For this reason, comments on the distribution of brochs and other sites will form only a general background to the more detailed landscape studies.

Given the rather low-lying, undulating nature of the landscape within the study area, it is unsurprising that broch sites do not favour any particular elevation (Figure 8.1). There are, however, notable local differences in their use of the landscape. In the south and east of the study area, reaching as far north as the Burn of Lyth and its tributaries and Dunnet Bay, and as far west as Lochs Watten and Yarrows, broch sites are quite evenly distributed over the

(Pages 209 - 210) Table 8.3 : Study Area 2, possible broch sites.

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Status	Height AOD (m)	Mound Diameter (m)	Mound Height (m)
87	LINKS OF DUNNET 3 (DUNNET CARAVAN PARK)	ND27SW 11	ND 2213 7037		10.00	20.00	2.00
88	LINKS OF DUNNET 4	ND27SW 12	ND 2243 7000		30.00	20.00	1.50
89	LOWER DUNN 2 (LOWER DUNN NORTH)	ND25NW 06	ND 2035 5694		40.00	40.00	1.10
90	MAINS OF BOWER TOWER	ND26SW 05	ND 2279 6179		70.00	22.00	0.45
91	MURZA	ND26SE 07	ND 2538 6290		30.00	40.00	2.40
92	PAPIGOE	ND35SE 07	ND 3828 5176	NATURAL MOUND?	10.00	33.53	1.83
93	RATTAR BURN	ND27SE 07	ND 2525 7389	SITE ONLY	10.00		
94	SCHOOLARY	ND26NE 03	ND 2982 6847		70.00		
95	SCORRICLET	ND25SW 09	ND 2485 5051		60.00	29.00	2.00
96	SHORELANDS	ND35SE 19	ND 3647 5425		20.00	45.00	1.00
97	STEMSTER 1	ND35SW 05	ND 3384 5029		40.00	33.53	4.00
98	TANNACH MAINS	ND34NW 05	ND 3236 4748		70.00	29.00	2.00
99	THE TULLOCHS	ND23NE 16	ND 2529 3597		60.00		
100	THUSTER	ND35SW 06	ND 3004 5254		10.00		
101	TULACH GORM 2	ND25NE 01	ND 2510 5604	SITE ONLY	30.00		
102	ULBSTER SCHOOL	ND34SW 09	ND 3243 4150		90.00		
103	WATENAN WEST	ND34SW 12	ND 3126 4134	PROBABLY MASSIVE HUT-CIRCLE	100.00		

landscape. Much of this distribution appears to be concentrated around river systems and major bodies of fresh water (Map 8.2). Broch sites are known along the Wick River and its tributaries the Burn of Acharole and the Achairn Burn, a distribution which may also extend along the Strath Burn, although neither of the sites along this tributary can be reliably identified, a problem shared with the central part of the Wick River. There are also notable concentrations along the Forse and Clyth Burns. To the south of Loch Watten are three broch sites, and there are six more sites in the area around the Lochs of Yarrows and Watenan, an area which forms a separate local case study in section 8.3.

The area of moorland which forms the south-western part of the study area, and which continues westwards to the Flow Country, has a far sparser distribution of broch sites. There are only four reliably identified sites within this area, and again these may relate to standing water and river systems. There are two sites, 0.55km apart, at Camster (19 & 20), which again form part of a detailed local study (section 8.3.3). These sites are situated on the north

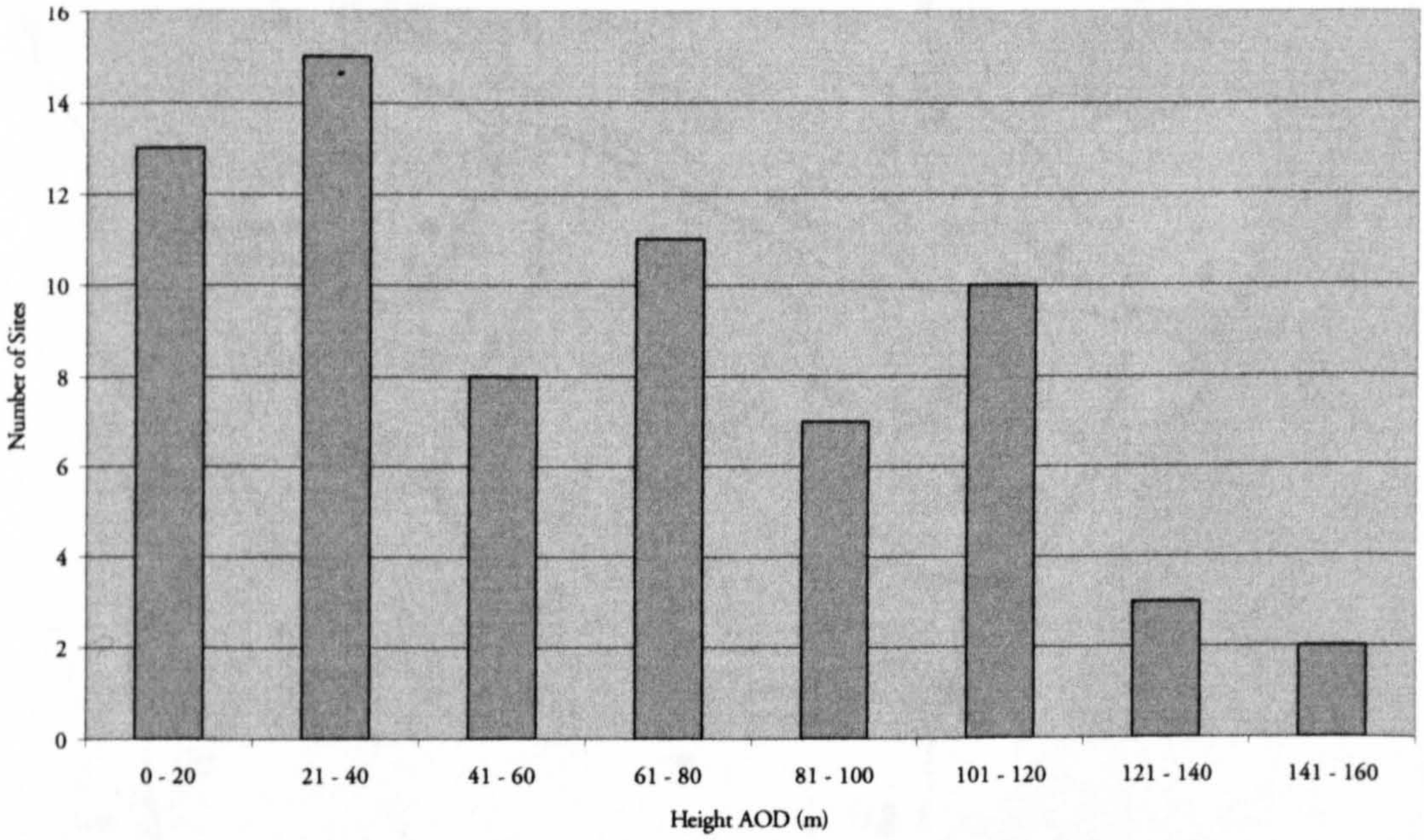


Figure 8.1 : STUDY AREA 2, elevation of broch sites.

Map 8.2 : Study Area 2, location of broch sites.

and south banks of the Camster Burn, which itself flows into the Strath Burn, and eventually the Wick River. The site at Ballachly (6) sits adjacent to a minor tributary of the River Thurso, although this is now canalised in the immediate area of the broch. Finally there is a single broch site, a familiar landmark known locally as Greysteil Castle (30), which sits on a narrow promontory projecting from the eastern shore of Loch Rangag (Plate 8.1). OS surveyors suggest, on the basis of the fact that a raised beach exists 0.5m above the present shore of Loch Rangag, that this site originally sat on an island, possibly an artificial crannog, which was connected to the shore by a causeway, the remains of which are still identifiable.

The part of the study area in which broch sites are the most concentrated comprises a coastal distribution, extending as far as 2.0km inland, and stretching from Upper Latheron (60) in the south-east to the Links of Dunnet (41) in the north. Once more, site distributions are not even throughout this coastal strip, and brochs are located either singly or in small groups, set generally between 1.25km and 3.0km apart along the coast. Again, this distribution would seem to relate to major landscape features. The single sites at Knockinnon (39), Occumster (47) and Hempriggs (32), for instance, are situated adjacent to small water-courses flowing into the Moray Firth. Many of these plunge directly into the sea over steep cliffs. Indeed, sites such as Nybster (46) (Plate 8.2) and Skirza Head (52) seem to have been deliberately chosen for their inaccessibility from the sea. Nonetheless, it is also evident that concentrations of broch sites are found in locations where there is good access to the sea. There is a group of sites close to the narrow inlet at Latheronwheel, for example, as well as in the vicinity of the major bays of the area. The distribution of broch sites along the north coast of the study area away from Dunnet Bay is very sparse, there being only a single firmly identified site near to the small, modern harbour at Skarfskerry (50), although it is at least possible that four other, more amorphous, mounds may represent the sites of brochs. However, it is by no means the case that evidence of broch settlement may be found in the vicinity of all natural harbours and other marine access points.

Given the associations which have been proposed elsewhere between broch sites and agricultural land, their sparse distribution in the extreme north of the area may have been influenced by the widespread peat cover here. There are no known broch sites on Dunnet Head, and only a single clearly identified example elsewhere in this area, the partially-excavated site at Brabstermire (10). Swanson (1988, 91) notes that this site, together with the more amorphous mound at Schoolary (94) to the south-west, sit on islands of arable within the peatlands. She suggests that this small area of arable may have been in cultivation since prehistory, whereas other similar islands of agricultural land in the area may have been reclaimed from the peat more recently. Indeed, Swanson proposes a more general relationship between brochs and agricultural land throughout Caithness, on the basis that the known examples are

Plate 8.1 : Greysteil Castle broch (30), Loch Rangag.

Plate 8.2 : Nybster broch (46), showing location on promontory.

invariably associated with areas of post-medieval cultivation. While I would agree that it is certain that Caithness brochs formed an integral part of their contemporary agricultural landscapes, there is evidence from a number of Caithness sites that marine exploitation was also practised by the occupants of the brochs and their surrounding settlements. Midden deposits containing fish bones and shell were found at both the Harbour and Road brochs, Keiss (Anderson 1901), as well as at Kettleburn (Rhind 1853). The distribution of sites over the study area does, however, demonstrate that in those areas where significant tracts of elevated, marginal land are present, brochs were located around the edges of this upland (Map 8.5).

Within the general distributions discussed above, there are a small number of locations within the study area at which two or more broch sites are very closely grouped (Table 8.4). It has been suggested both that such site clusters represent contemporary groups of sites (Swanson 1988, 92), and also that some degree of replacement was involved. It is unlikely that a single explanation is sufficient to account for this phenomenon, and an attempt will be made to explore this in more depth in the local case studies which follow. It is interesting, however, that in every case but one (Camster) where sufficient detail has been preserved, each group of sites includes at least one which was constructed with two entrances. Of the nine such sites which have been identified (Swanson 1988, fig. 47), six are located either in close groups as detailed in Table 8.4, or within the more widely-spaced cluster of sites around Freswick Bay. This does not mean that unexcavated brochs lack twin entrances, or even that this structural feature may have been comparatively common. In previous discussions, twin entrances have been treated either as mere evidence of secondary re-construction and re-use (MacKie 1969, 1971b), or as an enigma which we lack sufficient evidence to explain (Swanson 1988, 167). Although spatial regularities have been identified within the phenomenon of twin entrances, that they tend to occur at approximately 90 degrees to one another and are set within the eastern arc of the broch wall (ibid. 165), the likely implications of this have not been pursued. Given that such entrances were intended to make the brochs in which they are found permeable in certain directions, it would seem reasonable to explore this in more detail, both in terms of the natural features which these entrances might be oriented towards, and of the possible locations of human settlement to and from which they may have given access. Although these points will be pursued in detail within the local studies which make up the second part of this chapter, it may be noted here that, in the majority of cases, one of the two entrances at each of the sites is oriented towards one or more other brochs within the surrounding landscape. This suggests that the builders of these brochs were making explicit reference to existing settlement locales (Plate 8.3). It also has clear chronological implications for the development of individual settled landscapes. In some cases, it may be that the entrance orientations of newly constructed brochs made reference to existing sites nearby.

Location of Group	NGR (Centred on)	No. of Sites	Maximum Separation (km)	No. of Entrances
Borrowston	ND 326 435	2	0.45	2 (12) ? (8)
Camster	ND 254 453	2	0.50	1 (20) ? (19)
Forse	ND 207 353	3	0.50	2 (62) ? (61) 1(4)
Keiss	ND 350 613	3	0.65	2 (36) 2 (35) 1(37)
Oldhall	ND 204 565	2	0.60	? (11) ? (42)
Watenan	ND 317 413	2	0.30	1 (64) 2(65)

Table 8.4 : Study Area 2, closely grouped broch sites, with the number of entrances at each site where known.

The presence of surrounding settlements is frequently cited as a particular characteristic of the brochs of the northern Mainland and Northern Isles. Of the 69 firmly identified broch sites within the study area, 42 show good evidence of having been surrounded by a complex of external buildings (Table 8.2). Given that the presence of surrounding buildings has almost invariably been demonstrated at excavated sites, it appears reasonable to accept such identifications as reliable. It does not, however, imply that a failure to identify surrounding buildings through field survey is evidence they do not exist. At only two sites, Cairn of Elsay (16) and Watenan South (65), is the state of preservation of the field evidence itself sufficient to allow it to be reliably stated that there was no surrounding settlement.

Of the 42 broch sites with identified surrounding buildings, 26 also have an outer boundary, consisting of an enclosing bank, and in some cases a ditch. There are five sites which possess an outer boundary but no evidence of surrounding buildings, suggesting that, in these cases at least, it is unlikely that an external settlement was ever present, as any recent human practices which may have removed traces of outbuildings would also have affected the outer boundary to a similar degree. There are 33 sites with identifiable outer boundaries (see Table 8.5). Only two of these sites have been excavated. While it is possible that the concentration of recent agricultural practice within the inland area may have affected the survival of traces of outer boundaries, the great majority of the coastal sites are also located within agricultural areas, and I would therefore suggest that the association between this architectural feature and both upland and coastal locations is likely to be meaningful. Those sites set within rolling landscapes with few naturally defensive locations, which a predominantly defensive interpretation of broch function would suggest appear to be more likely to have been provided with the additional protection of an outer boundary, were actually those where such apparently defensive provisions were not thought necessary.

Plate 8.3 : Usshilly Tulloch broch (a), seen from the N entrance at the Wag of Forse.

Plate 8.4 : Freswick Bay from the north. Freswick Sands broch is situated in the dunes to the right of the picture.

While coastal sites, such as Ness (43), Nybster (46) and Skirza Head (52), are located on promontories which might be interpreted as defensive in nature, and which have been further separated from the land by the addition of outer boundaries, equally many other coastal sites, such as the Freswick and Keiss groups, are situated on flat land near to sandy bays (Plate 8.4). There is also a lack of the consistency which would support a predominantly defensive interpretation. Neither Keiss Harbour broch (35) nor the neighbouring site at White Gate (37) show any clear evidence of having been provided with outer defences, despite being very close to the sea from which it might be expected that attacks would come. Keiss Road broch (36), set much further back from the beach, was surrounded by a wall. Similarly, at the site of Watenan North (64) there is no clear outer boundary, whereas at nearby Watenan South (65), which is set in an already superior defensive location, a massive boundary surrounds the site. A simple defensive explanation is clearly insufficient to explain the variation within this evidence (Mercer 1985, 98), and I would suggest that we should consider the possibility of a partly symbolic separation from the surrounding landscape (Hingley 1995). I will return to this point in more detail in the following section, when I will consider some of the above examples in detail, and within their local settlement and landscape contexts.

Landscape Context	Total No. of Sites	No. With Outer Boundary	% of Total With Outer Boundary
Low-lying inland sites	24	8	33
Coastal sites	28	13	46
Upland sites above 100m AOD	17	12	71

Table 8.5 : Study Area 2, summary information on sites with outer boundaries.

8.2.3. Later Iron Age Sites (Map 8.3, Table 8.6)

The identification of the later Iron Age in north east Caithness is always likely to be problematic, given the degree to which post-medieval agricultural practices appear to have modified, and in many cases destroyed, the less monumental traces of earlier human settlement. Recent excavations within the sand dunes of Freswick Links (Morris *et al.* 1995), for instance, have recovered both the ephemeral remains of settlement and cultivation traces, which may indicate agricultural settlement through the mid- to late-first millennium AD. Such evidence will

clearly have been lost from the more intensively cultivated areas. Unlike Study Area 1, this area lacks a single and widespread class of monument which can be identified as belonging to the later Iron Age, and the net must cast wider if we are to attempt any meaningful discussion of the period.

There are at least 33 confirmed broch sites within the study area at which it is possible to identify firm evidence of structures surrounding the broch itself. Given that most of these sites consist of substantial earth and stone mounds, it is likely that considerable depths of occupation exist. Unfortunately, all but two (Forse and Skitten) of the excavated sites within the study area were dug during the last century, at a time when structures surrounding broch sites were considered to be secondary 'squatter' buildings, of little interest. Although we therefore have comparatively well-preserved, excavated complexes of surrounding buildings at a number of sites within the study area, these have been exposed with little regard for the niceties of stratigraphy and phasing. The work of Foster (1989b), however, has suggested on an artefactual basis, that broch sites in the area were occupied into the later Iron Age. The difficulty has been in identifying those structures that might date to this period. In section 8.3.1, I will explore the possibility of identifying later Iron Age activity on these sites in detail, but it may be noted here that at Nybster (46) and Yarrows (69) there are traces of sub-rectangular buildings in association with the brochs. At the latter, at least, these structures were found to be of 'galleried' construction. Both of these architectural attributes are characteristic of the later Iron Age occupation at Forse. At both Keiss Harbour (Anderson 1901, 122) and Keiss Road (ibid. 131) there were traces of large rectangular buildings adjacent to the brochs themselves, and although these have since been interpreted by OS surveyors as the remains of post-medieval settlement, it is at least possible that they represent later Iron Age buildings similar to those at Forse and Yarrows.

In the local studies which follow, one of my chief objectives will be to identify possible evidence for later Iron Age settlement, using field evidence, augmented by existing published accounts.

Map 8.3 : Study Area 2, location of later Iron Age sites.

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Status	Height AOD (m)	Comments
1	Freswick Links	ND36NE 05	ND 3761 6761	Excavated	20	Sub-rectangular building.
2	Green Hill of Clayton	ND36SW 07	ND 3347 6335	Disturbed	50	Amorphous dry-stone structure, possible aisled building site.
3	Keiss Harbour	ND36SE 02	ND 3531 6108	Excavated	10	Possible sub-rectangular building. Deep deposits.
4	Keiss Road	ND36SW 01	ND 3488 6151	Excavated	20	Possible sub-rectangular structures. Deep deposits.
5	Keiss White Gate	ND36SE 03	ND 3541 6120	Excavated	10	Possible sub-rectangular structure & 'galleried' division of broch interior.
6	Kettleburn	ND35SW 11	ND 3497 5191	Excavated/destroyed	10	Possible sub-rectangular building . Deep deposits.
7	Ness	ND36NE 01	ND 3814 6665	Excavated	20	Possible sub-rectangular building outside boundary wall.
8	Norwall	ND35SW 10	ND 3266 5445	Excavated	40	Possible sub-rectangular buildings.
9	Nybster	ND36SE 04	ND 3702 6314	Excavated	10	Conjoined sub-rectangular & circular buildings.
10	Skitten	ND35NW 03	ND 3234 5655	Excavated/destroyed	30	Possible sub-rectangular building. Deep deposits.
11	Wag of Forse	ND23NW 01	ND 2048 3520	Excavated	120	Three sub-rectangular aisled buildings & later cellular structures.
12	Wester	ND35NW 04	ND 3385 5831	Excavated	10	Possible sub-rectangular structures. Cist burials.
13	Yarrows	ND34SW 01	ND 3083 4329	Excavated	100	Aisled buildings around broch & cellular structures. Deep deposits in broch interior.
14	Ackergill Links 1	ND35SW 12	ND 3489 5496	Excavated	10	Natural mound with cist burials.
15	Ackergill Links 2	ND35NW 09	ND 3403 5674	Excavated	10	Natural mound with cist burials.
16	Watenan		ND 3117 4076	Unexcavated	110	Small, sub-circular kerbed cairn, associated with symbol stone.

Table 8.6 : Study Area 2, later Iron Age sites (1 – 13 : settlement sites, 14 – 16 : burial sites).

8.3. Local Case Studies

8.3.1. The East Coast (Map 8.4)

My general intention in presenting local case studies is to concentrate on those areas which possess a range and diversity of field evidence of Iron Age settlement, in order that the processes of change within these landscapes might be explored. The area around the east coast is an exception to this, in that the evidence relates largely to a single class of site, the broch. Nonetheless, I would argue that it is essential to consider these sites in some detail, as they comprise the single most important resource of excavated material for the study of the Iron Age in Caithness. Between Thrumster in the south and Skirza Head in the north, and within 2km of the coast, there are 18 broch sites (Map 8.4), 16 of which have been at least partially excavated. All bar two of these excavations, Kettleburn (Rhind 1853) and Skitten (Calder 1948), were the work of Sir Francis Tress Barry, whose energy as an excavator was not matched by his interest in publication. As a consequence, only nine of these excavations have been documented (Anderson 1901), and then only in a very brief form. Nonetheless, the field monuments, supported by the somewhat meagre written record, represent a resource not available elsewhere in Caithness for the study of the architecture of a coherent group of sites. This is particularly cogent in relation to the occupation of these sites over time, as the complexes of surrounding buildings were revealed at a number of locations, and allow us some insight into the processes of change during the later part of the Iron Age.

Unfortunately, there are few known monument types within the local area other than broch sites, which precludes a detailed study of their relationship to earlier patterns of settlement. A possible hut-circle (1), apparently associated with a midden deposit, was located at Ackergill and excavated by J.E. Cree (RCAHMS 1911b). Although only brief details of this work exist, it appears that a 'crutch-headed bone pin' was recovered from this midden (Proc Soc Antiq Scot 1939). Although midden material is no longer visible at the site, it was re-recorded by Batey (1984, 71) as a low mound, now set within sand dunes within which traces of walling were visible. Although this site may be interpreted as evidence of prehistoric occupation which antedates the construction of the brochs in the area behind Sinclair's Bay, the existence of a single hut-circle gives us little information about the establishment of the settlement landscapes into which the brochs were introduced.

That traces of extensive settlement may once have existed in the area prior to the ravages of post-medieval agriculture and modern construction work is suggested by the possible hut-circle settlement at Cruives (7) on the banks of the Wick River, just outside the study area. An enigmatic structure at Black Score (ND 3775 6540), recorded as a '...possibly prehistoric underground tunnel...' (Batey 1984, 64), hints at the presence of a souterrain. Its recorded dimensions are certainly close to those of the excavated entrance passages of the souterrains at

Freswick Links 2.0km to the north (Edwards 1925). These excavations revealed a pair of souterrains, 3.2m (10'6") apart, consisting of sub-circular chambers, access to which was via narrow entrance passages (Figure 8.2). These were set within a low mound, which also contained a deposit of limpet shells (ibid. 90), suggesting that they were once associated with above-ground domestic activity. Edwards also excavated a hut-circle in this area, which contained traces of a hearth together with a deposit of limpet and whelk shells. It is therefore clear that early settlement of some complexity was located in the Freswick Bay area. Although the souterrains may antedate the construction of the broch sites in the area, souterrains themselves are not chronologically definitive. Indeed, the Freswick souterrains differ markedly from the low, constricted examples encountered elsewhere in Caithness (see Chapter 7), and it is at least possible that they belong to a much later date (cf. Batey 1991, 51).

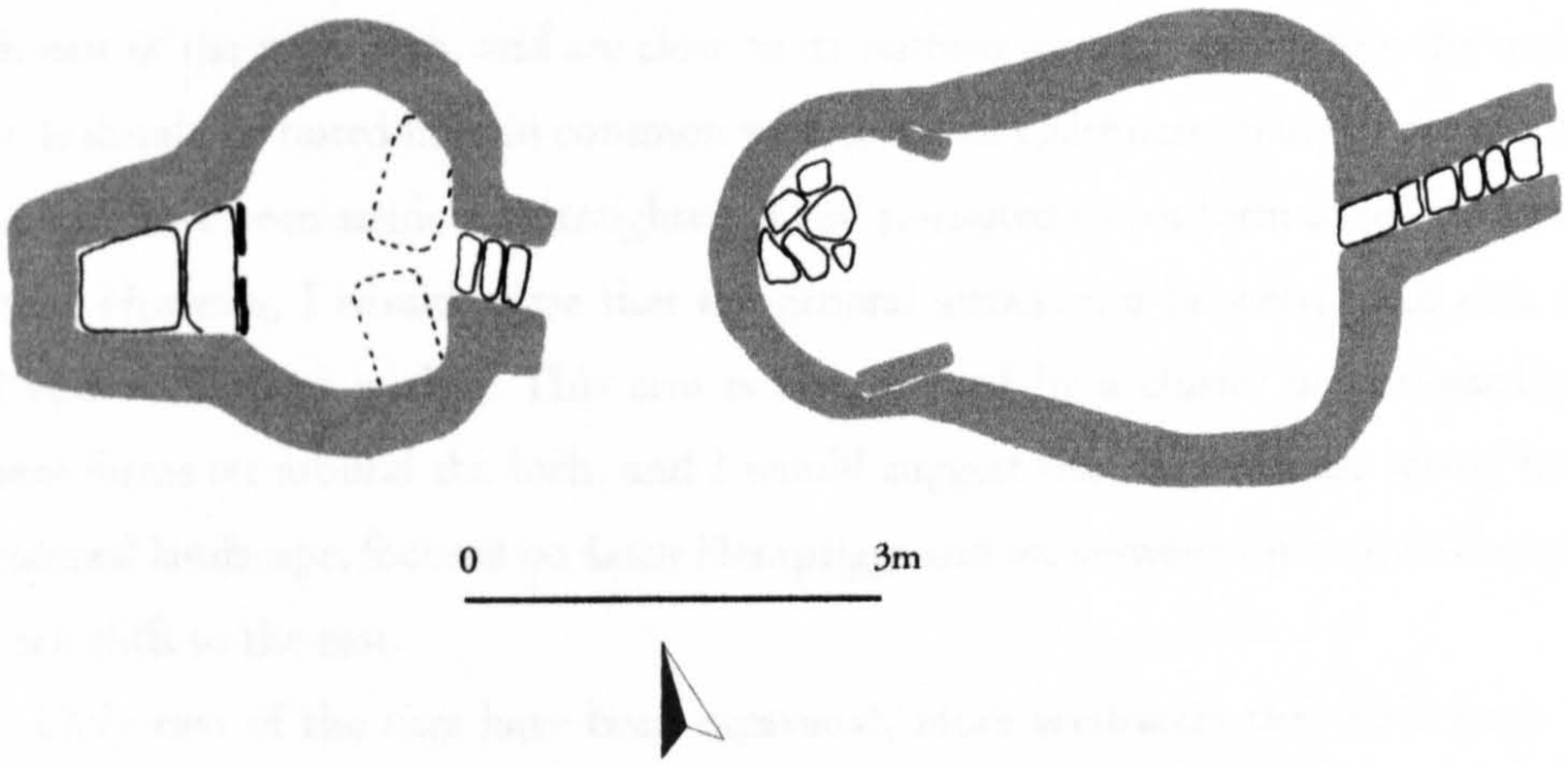


Figure 8.2 : Souterrains at Freswick Links (after Edwards 1925, Fig. 3)

Broch sites are by far the most common archaeological feature of the north-east coast of Caithness. Those within the present local study fall into four groups, on the basis of their association with major landscape features. When travelling along the coast from the south, it becomes clear that subtle undulations in the terrain serve to divide up the landscape, and it appears likely that the broch groupings identified here may be associated with landscape divisions based on the use of visual horizons. In the sections that follow, I will argue that the location and orientation of broch sites was intimately connected to exploitation of local landscapes.

Loch Hempriggs

The most southerly group of sites is also that which is set the farthest back from the shore, and would appear to be more closely associated with Loch Hempriggs, and the water courses which drain into it, than with the sea itself. Although these sites appear at first to be in a coastal location, their contemporary landscape may have had an inland focus. The coastline in this area is rocky, defined by sheer cliffs up to 50m high, and although there are numerous rocky inlets (geos) there is no real access to the sea. Indeed, the immediate shore is largely hidden from view by a range of low knolls stretching along the landward edge of the cliff-top. The four broch sites in this group are situated on the eastern side of Loch Hempriggs (Plate 8.5).

Thrumster Mains (56) and Thrumster Little (57) brochs are located 1.0km apart, and within 500m of the main tributary which drains from a small loch into Loch Hempriggs from the south-west. Hempriggs (32) and Cairn of Humster (17) brochs are located to the north-east of the main loch, and are close to its outflow streams, which join the main Wick River. It should be noted that, in common with much of Caithness, many of the minor burns in the area have been artificially straightened and re-routed to conform to recent agricultural practice. However, I would argue that the general association between these sites and the local bodies of water is clear. This area is also marked by a cluster of post-medieval and modern farms set around the loch, and I would suggest that what we are seeing here is an agricultural landscape, focused on Loch Hempriggs and set between uplands to the west, and high sea cliffs to the east.

Only two of the sites have been excavated, more accurately they have been 'cleared out', although no published record of this work exists. Thrumster Mains broch has been partly destroyed by the construction of a modern building, and no internal details are visible. Although the orientation of its entrance passage is unclear, OS surveyors (1963) suggest that it may have been to the south. There is a record of the recovery of a long-handled bone 'weaving comb' from the site, although its context is unknown (RCAHMS 1911b, 145). Thrumster Little broch is a somewhat smaller structure, and although its interior is visible, it appears highly denuded and turf-covered, and no features can be discerned. The single entrance, however, is preserved, and faces east. At neither site is there any evidence of the presence of a surrounding settlement or enclosing wall. As I have suggested that the sites in this area form part of an agricultural landscape focused on Loch Hempriggs, it is interesting that the entrance passage of neither site would appear to be oriented towards the loch itself; that at Thrumster

Plate 8.5 : Loch Hempriggs, showing location of Thrumster Little (a) and Thrumster Mains (b) brochs.

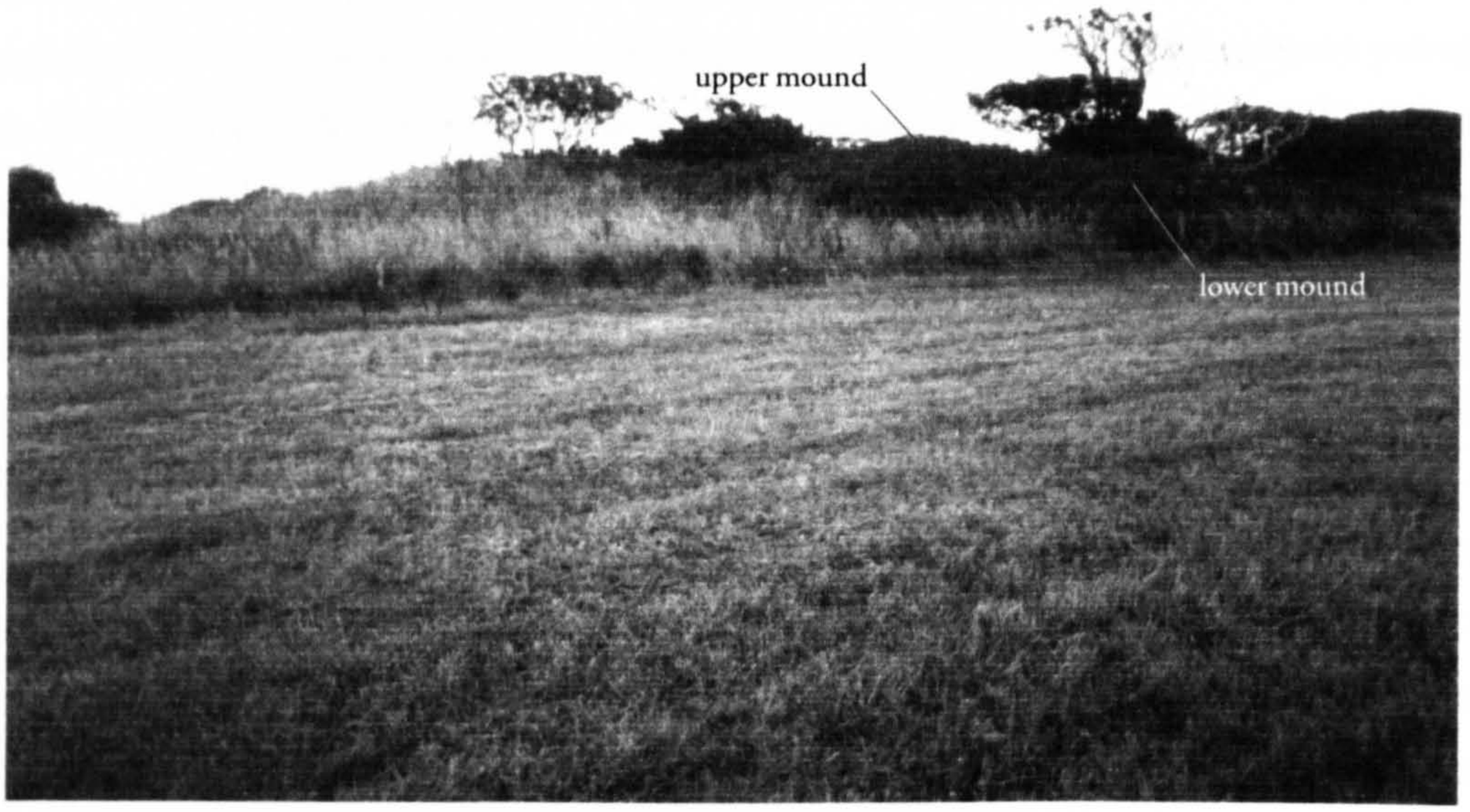


Plate 8.6 : Hempriggs broch, showing 'mound-on-mound' profile.

Little clearly faces the eastern skyline of low knolls, beyond which the sea is visible, and that of Thrumster Mains may be oriented towards the area of upland surrounding the lochs of Yarrows and Watenan. This situation is very different from the other sites within the local study, as will be demonstrated below.

Unfortunately, neither of the other sites in the group, Hempriggs (32) and Cairn of Humster (17), have been excavated, and it is therefore difficult to make any direct architectural comparison with the sites to the south. Both sites consist of large, grassy mounds, although at Hempriggs the outline of the broch appears to rise from a lower mound which may contain outbuildings (Plate 8.6). Cairn of Humster is similarly vague, although again there would appear to be some differentiation between a raised central area, which may represent the broch itself, and surrounding structures. There are also slight traces of a ditch around the site. It is notable that both of these sites display evidence of having surrounding settlements, whereas the better preserved examples to the south do not.

Wick River

The next group of sites to the north consists of three brochs which lie along the lower reaches of the Wick River, and its outflow into the Moray Firth at Wick Bay. All three have been excavated, Kettleburn (31), the furthest upstream, being one of the earliest recorded broch excavations (Rhind 1853). Prior to Rhind's excavations, the site had already been badly damaged by the construction of a small house, built entirely from stone derived from the broch. It is somewhat ironic that this house itself now consists only of stone footings. Rhind's plan of Kettleburn (Figure 8.3) depicts the broch as having two entrances; one, facing NE, appears to have been provided with a pair of 'guard cells' to either side of the entrance passage, the other, facing NW, Rhind shows as a simple passage through the broch wall, with no architectural elaboration. Previous comments on broch entrance orientations (Parker Pearson et al. 1995, Sharples & Parker Pearson 1997) have relied almost entirely on their relationship to cardinal points, and have not explored the possibilities of alignment on local landscape features. It must be admitted that at Kettleburn we are reliant on the accuracy of Rhind's published plan, as there remains little trace of the site within the modern landscape. It nonetheless appears likely that its NW entrance is orientated both in an inland direction, away from the Wick River and towards a group of other broch sites in the area behind Sinclair's Bay, whereas the NE entrance is oriented towards the sea, in the area of the cliffs to the south of Noss Head. Views towards the sea in this direction would have been unobstructed before the construction of the modern town of Wick.

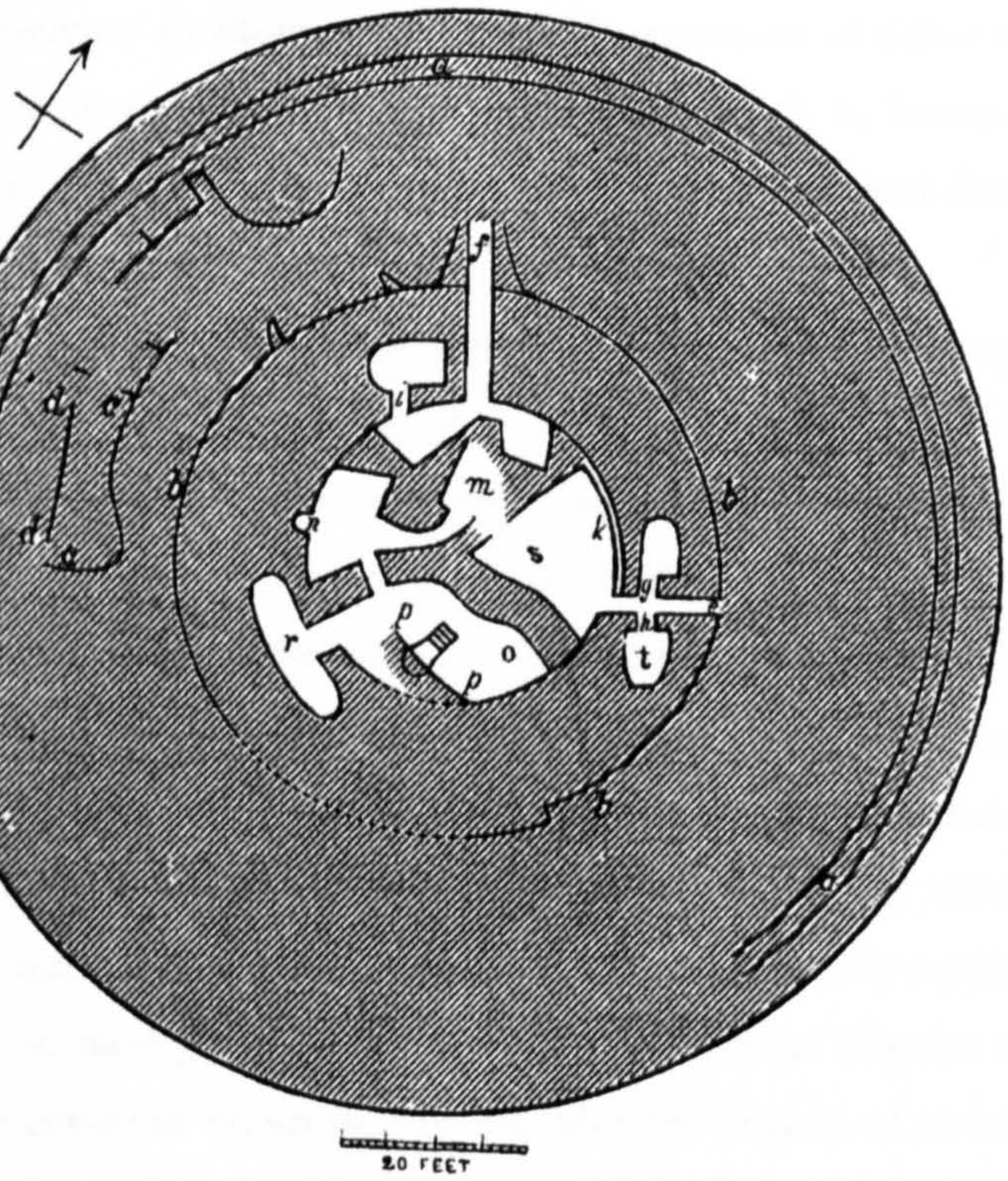


Figure 8.3 : Plan of excavated features at Kettleburn (from Rhind 1853).

Rhind's excavations also revealed a mass of constructional detail within the interior of the broch. Although he had little understanding of this, and it is therefore very difficult to make sense of it on the basis of the published plan and descriptions, it is clear that more than one episode of building activity is represented in the broch interior, and that it is likely to have been augmented, and sub-divided, a number of times. Rhind's account also indicates that he encountered a thin casing wall built around at least the north-western arc of the broch interior, and the profile of the published plan suggests that an exterior casing may also have existed. Such architectural reconstruction is a feature of other sites in the local area, and I will return to it shortly.

The site was also completely surrounded by a boundary wall, which appears as a suspiciously regular circle on Rhind's plan. The entire space between this boundary and the outer wall of the broch itself was filled with the ruins of surrounding buildings, of which Rhind was able to make little sense. The published account does, however, indicate that there may have been more than one episode of building in this area, and the excavations revealed traces of '...a substratum of ashes, intermixed with shells and bones..' (Rhind 1853, 213) at a number of points within the surrounding buildings. Unfortunately, the published plans of

the site are too fragmentary to allow any detailed interpretation of either the surrounding buildings or of the sequence of activities within the broch. It is, however, clear that a considerable sequence of re-building must have occurred at the site, and that this continued well after the initial construction of the broch.

Moving downstream along the Wick River, the next site in the group is at Hillhead (34), to the north-east of Wick (Figure 8.4). It is separated from Kettleburn by a distance of 2.2km, and it is at least possible that there were other sites in the intervening space which have been destroyed by the construction of the town. Hillhead sits 450m to the north of the expanse of Wick Bay, and access to the shore would have been possible in this direction. The site was excavated by Tress Barry in 1903, although the only report which survives is a brief entry in the RCAHMS Inventory (1911b). Although the site today is rather too overgrown and mutilated for precise details to be discerned, the entrance passage seems to have been oriented to the east, and the brief report states that it was reached by a pair of converging passages which seem to have given access through the indistinct remains of surrounding buildings. Given the common occurrence of considerable degrees of reconstruction over time at other sites in the study area, this is unlikely to have been the entrance arrangement when the broch was originally constructed. Indeed, that it belongs to a later stage in the occupation of the site is made more likely by the record in the published account of a casing wall, some 5ft 6ins thick, built around the outer face of the broch wall. Again, there is evidence that the site underwent significant architectural reconstruction and embellishment during its life. Although the site would have had access to the shore at Wick Bay to the south, its entrance passage was oriented towards the high sea cliffs to the east, in which direction the land slopes gently away.

The final site in this group, Cairn of Elsay (16) (Plate 8.7), was also excavated by Tress Barry. It sits within a grass-covered mound on level ground which is now close to the shore, to the north of a narrow inlet through which access to the sea is possible. Erosion here has begun to cut into the broch mound itself. The land rises gently behind the site. Access to the shore is also possible to the south at Broad Haven bay and to the north via the narrow inlet which is now the site of Staxigoe harbour. The single entrance to the broch is still visible, oriented to the south-east in the direction of the shore. There are no visible traces of surrounding buildings at the site, or of an outer boundary. Although it is possible that occupation on the site was over a limited period, and did not involve the kind of architectural complexity visible at the other sites in the group, it is notable that Tress Barry's plan indicates the presence of an external casing wall in the south arc of the broch, through which the entrance passes, and it is therefore likely that at least some reconstruction of the broch was undertaken before its abandonment.

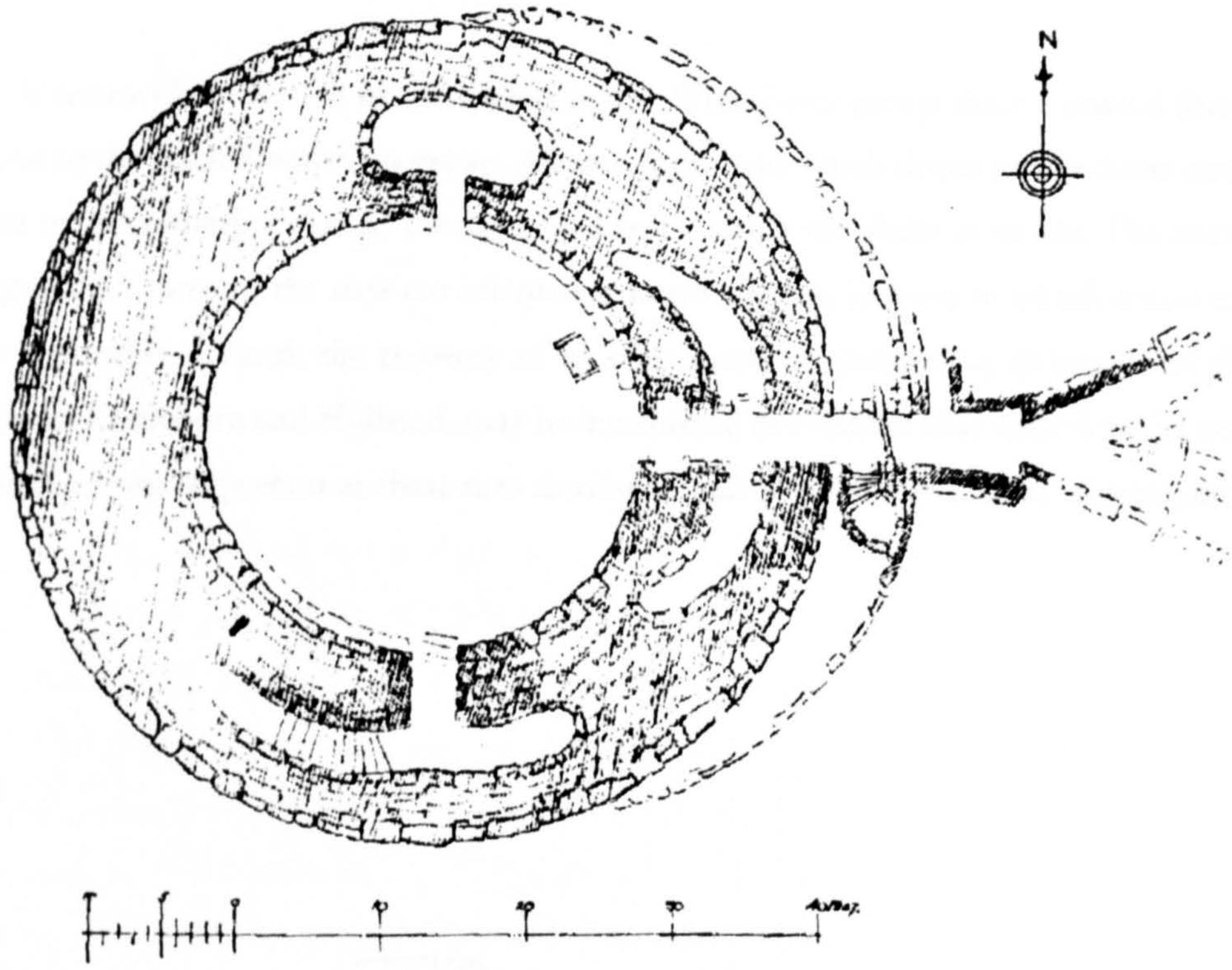


Figure 8.4 : Excavated features at Hillhead broch (34) (RCAHMS 1911b, Fig. 43).

Plate 8.7 : Cairn of Elsay broch (16), from the NW.

It seems likely that all of the brochs in the Wick River group share a coastal focus, in contrast to the Loch Hempriggs group. All are set on land which slopes gently down towards the sea or the estuarine part of the river, and from which the shore is visible. The entrance passages of all three of the sites are oriented towards the sea, in areas to which access to the shore is possible. Indeed, the recovery of midden material, containing quantities of shells, from both Kettleburn and Hillhead, may be interpreted as evidence that some form of marine exploitation was important at these sites during at least part of their history of occupation.

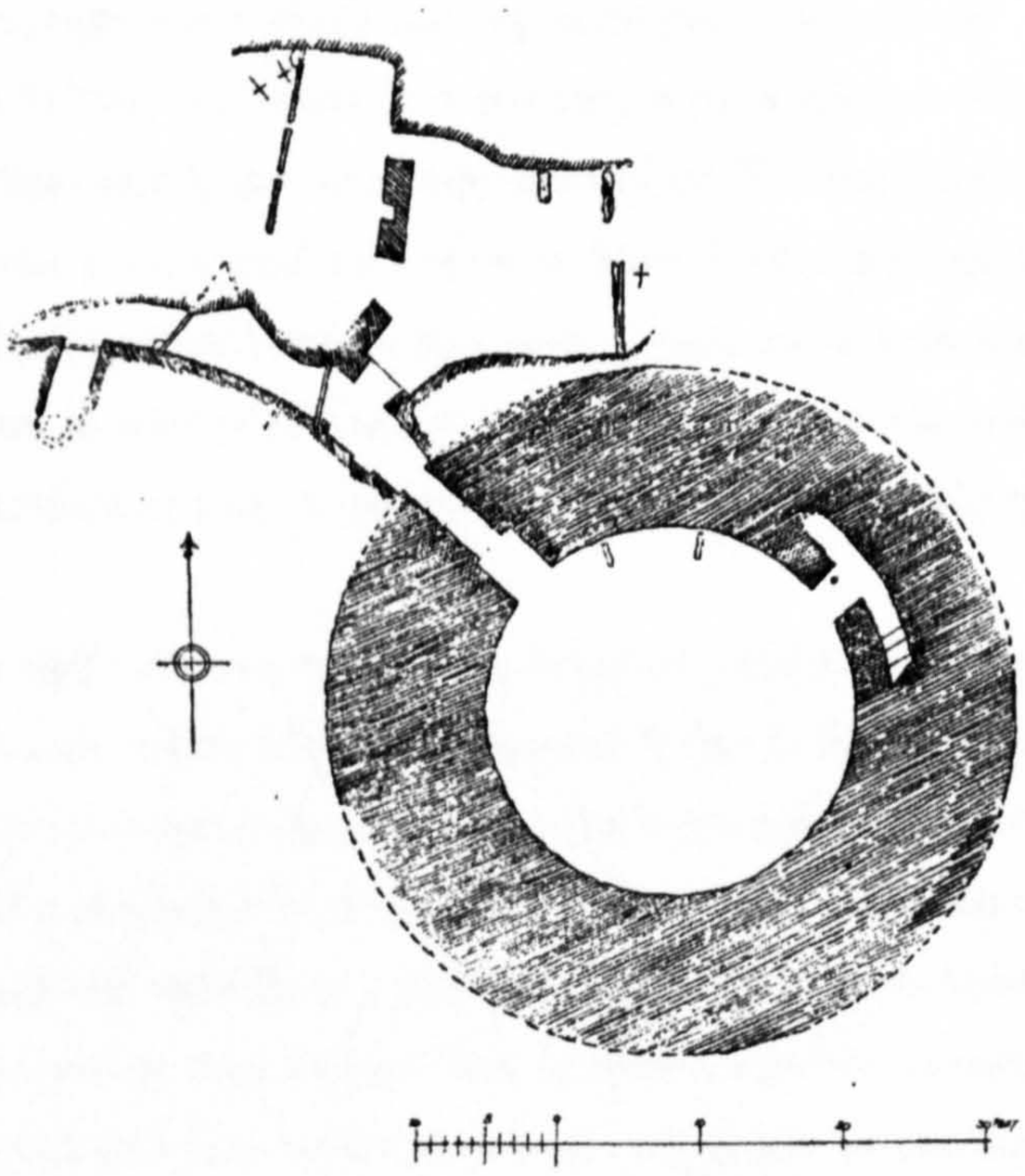


Figure 8.5 : Excavated features at Norwall broch (45).

Sinclair's Bay

Although the sites set behind the wide expanse of Sinclair's Bay are rather dispersed, they are still separated by the local topography from the remainder of the study area, and warrant consideration as a group. The two southernmost sites, Norwall and Skitten, are also those which are situated furthest from the coast, 2.15km and 1.53km respectively. Norwall (45) was partially excavated by Tress Barry in 1903, and a plan made by the local antiquarian John Nicolson (Figure 8.5), although the site is now grassed-over and no clear architectural features are visible. The single entrance passage was found to be oriented towards the west, away from the coast and towards what is now agricultural land, in which direction the land slopes gently down towards the Lochs of Killimster and Winless. The site appears to have been separated from higher ground to the south-east by a considerable ditch, which is still 1.0m deep despite being on ploughed arable land. On the northern side of the site the early excavations located evidence of surrounding buildings. Although little now remains of possible buildings in this area, there is an upright stone which may represent part of a doorway.

The site at Skitten, Killimster (53) was excavated in advance of its destruction by the building of a military aerodrome, itself now abandoned. The site, partially examined by Tress Barry in 1904, was re-excavated by Calder in May 1940. Although his excavations were hurried due to the imminent construction work, Calder was able to examine the entirety of the broch interior, as well as selected portions of its surrounding buildings, rampart and ditch, and produced a plan and a series of sections through the archaeological deposits (Figure 8.6).

The broch itself remained standing to a height of 1.8m (6ft) on its eastern side, although it was reduced to only 0.45m (1ft 6ins) in places. A thin facing wall had been added to the outer face of the broch in its north-eastern arc, which also appeared to have been strengthened by the construction of a heavy buttress on its northern side, and a less imposing example to the east. The broch was entered via a passage through the western, landward, arc of its wall. The entrance appears on plan to have had an outer extension curving to the north. The interior of the broch had been paved in at least two phases, as two superimposed levels of flags were identified in its northern half; it is likely that there was a lower level of occupation beneath these, as two slab-lined boxes and a midden-filled pit were located in the clay beneath the lower paving (Calder 1948, 180). The lower paving may have been largely removed before the upper floor was added, as the upper flags only overlay the lower around the edges of the broch interior. The broch floor contained a series of slab-lined boxes in widely variant states of preservation, both set into the floor and raised above it, suggesting a complex succession of activities within the interior.

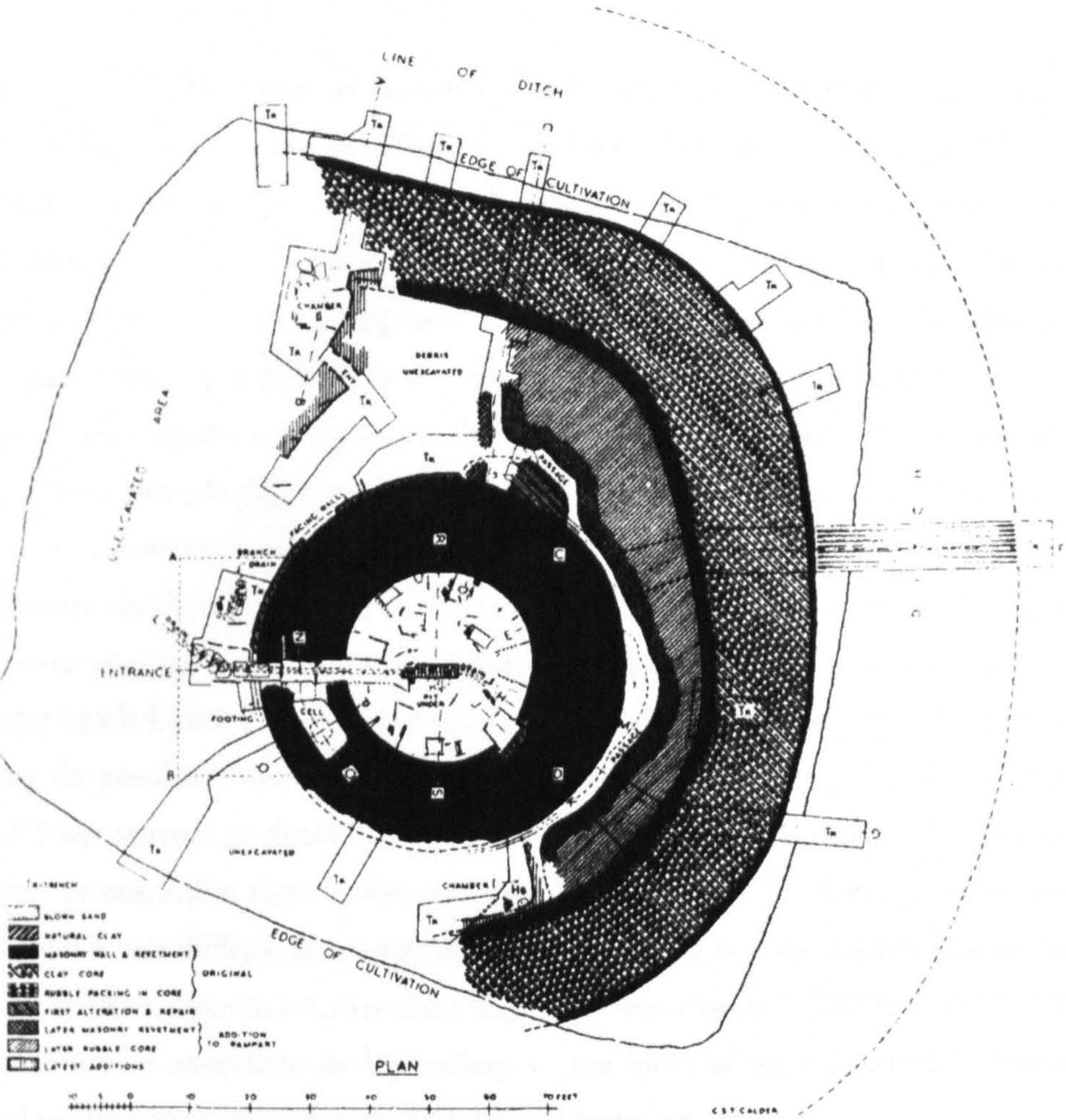


Figure 8.6 : Plan of excavated features at Skitten broch (Calder 1948, Fig. 2)

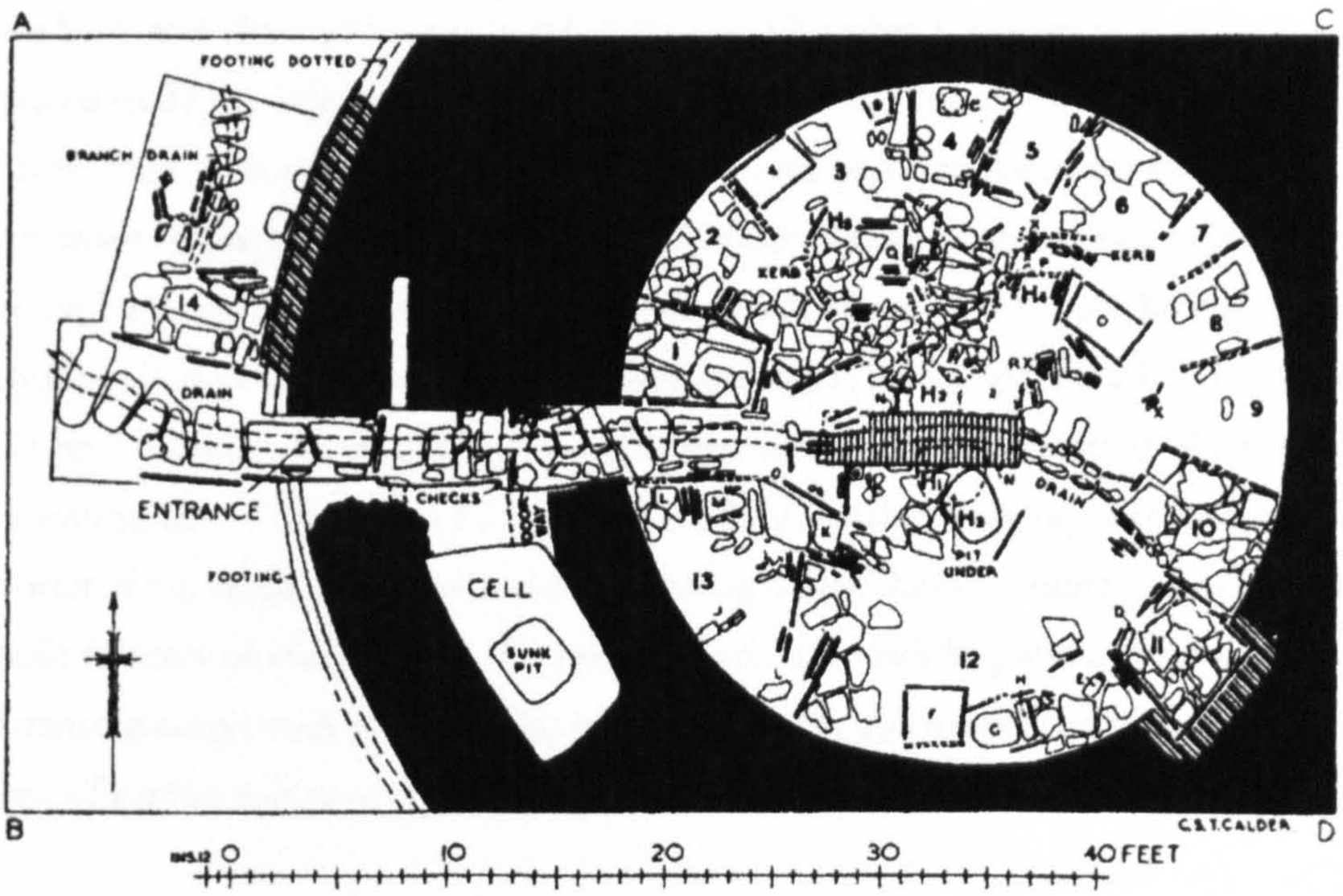


Figure 8.7 : Entrance and interior features at Skitten broch (Calder 1948, Fig. 4).

A series of thirteen radial compartments had been constructed around the edges of the interior wall-face using upright slabs (Figure 8.7). Most of these were at least partially paved, and three contained superimposed layers of paving suggesting at least two periods of use, presumably related to the successive floors within the main part of the building. Two of the compartments (nos. 3 and 12), opposed to one another across the broch interior on the western side, contained slab-lined boxes, and another (no. 4) appears to have contained a complete ceramic vessel, of which only the base survived. There were also a series of five hearths, at least two of which were superimposed and overlay an earlier midden-filled pit; hearths 1 and 2 were built either side of what Calder interpreted as a central fire-back, which blocked direct access to the centre of the broch interior from the entrance, although this feature on the plan appears to overly partly hearth 1. Hearths 4 and 5 were within the northern half of the broch interior, at the level of the lower paving but overlying slab-lined boxes, suggesting the possibility of at least three phases of reconstruction within the broch interior. Calder did not attempt to divide this bewildering array of internal features into a series of occupation phases, other than to note the two floor levels indicated by the superimposed paving, and it is very difficult to attempt this with hindsight given that the site itself no longer exists. It is, however, clear that the interior of the broch was subject to a complex, interdigitated series of structural alterations and variations in the focus of activities, which cannot be adequately characterised by the terms *primary* and *secondary*.

Although the excavations at Skitten were concentrated largely on the interior of the broch, Calder also located the fragmentary remains of surrounding structures within the massive bank and ditch which surrounded the site. Chamber I appears to have been a sub-rectangular building, located between the outer rampart and the broch to the south-east. Its walls were built as interior facing to loose rubble, and had a rounded corner abutting the outer rampart. A single slab set on edge projected from the southern wall face adjacent to the corner, and a paved hearth containing peat ash had been set in the space behind it. All of these features invite comparison with the aisled buildings at Forse (Appendix 1). There appears to have been a deep layer of debris containing peat ash within this building, above which a later construction of upright slabs had been built. A further building was located to the north-west of the broch, built into the strengthening wall of the outer rampart, and contained slab-built features which may have included a hearth. This building also appears to have had an entrance passage, with door-checks, running towards the north-west. Calder noted the presence of further surrounding buildings, but he did not have time to excavate these.

A considerable amount of midden material appears to have been found on the site, including domestic and wild animal bone, fish bone and shells. The contexts in which this material was found are described only in very general terms, although pits and slab-lined boxes beneath the hearths and paving of the broch interior may have been particularly important for the deposition of midden material. The animal assemblage included sheep, pig, cattle and red deer. A mixed assemblage of very fragmented human bone was recovered from throughout the debris.

Although Skitten no longer exists, and this therefore makes contextual re-interpretation problematic, there are clearly important points which can be made on the basis of the information in Calder's published report. It appears that the radial arrangement of partitions, some possibly containing storage jars and focused around a central hearth, became replaced by a more dispersed, compartmentalised use of space. This may have involved separate living areas with individual hearths, although it is by no means certain that all of these were in use simultaneously. The construction of a central 'fire-back' effectively divided the space in two when approached from the entrance.

Although the surviving evidence is fragmentary, it is clear that more than one phase of building is represented in the sub-rectangular structure to the south of the broch. It appears likely that the broch itself was intended to be approached through these buildings, as the area behind it appears not to have been accessible through the outer bank, and became increasingly infilled with later additions, until all that remained was a narrow passage. An outer skin of walling was added to the arc of the broch wall which faces the settlement, and this may have been intended to augment its appearance when seen from this side. The overall impression is of a building which lay at the heart of the settlement and was visually and physically dominant over it.

It is interesting at Skitten, as at Norwall, that the broch has only a single entrance which opens on its western side, and is therefore oriented inland. The land also slopes away in this direction, and the site was completely separated from its surroundings to the seaward by a ditch and massive rampart. Both sites, although situated close to the shore, would appear architecturally oriented on an inland area. Although no traces of contemporary land use now survive, finds from the site are largely those which might be interpreted as belonging to a specifically agricultural context. These include both saddle and rotary querns, rubbing stones and coarse pottery, although the report is not specific about the find context of any of these. Midden material, from all levels of the site which were investigated, contained the bones of domestic cattle and sheep, as well as small amounts of wild species such as fox and red deer.

This material would seem to represent mixed farming, and it may well be that this was practised in the area towards which the sites are oriented. Many marine shells, and one or two small fragments of fish bone, were also found throughout the site, and it is therefore likely that some form of marine exploitation was practised.

The next site within the Sinclair's Bay group is that at Wester, set within the southernmost of two large sand hills known locally as the Birkle Hills. The site is located to the north of the outflow of the Water of Wester into Sinclair's Bay, and was excavated by Tress Barry in 1891 (Figure 8.8). These excavations uncovered traces of surrounding buildings to the north-west of the broch, which would appear from the published plan (Anderson 1901, figure 6.) to include both small, discrete cellular structures and what may be the remains of elongated, passage-like buildings. It is likely that access to the broch entrance would have involved moving through the surrounding buildings. The whole complex of structures was surrounded by a wall or bank. Few of the features identified by Tress Barry are now identifiable, as the site has become covered by blown sand.

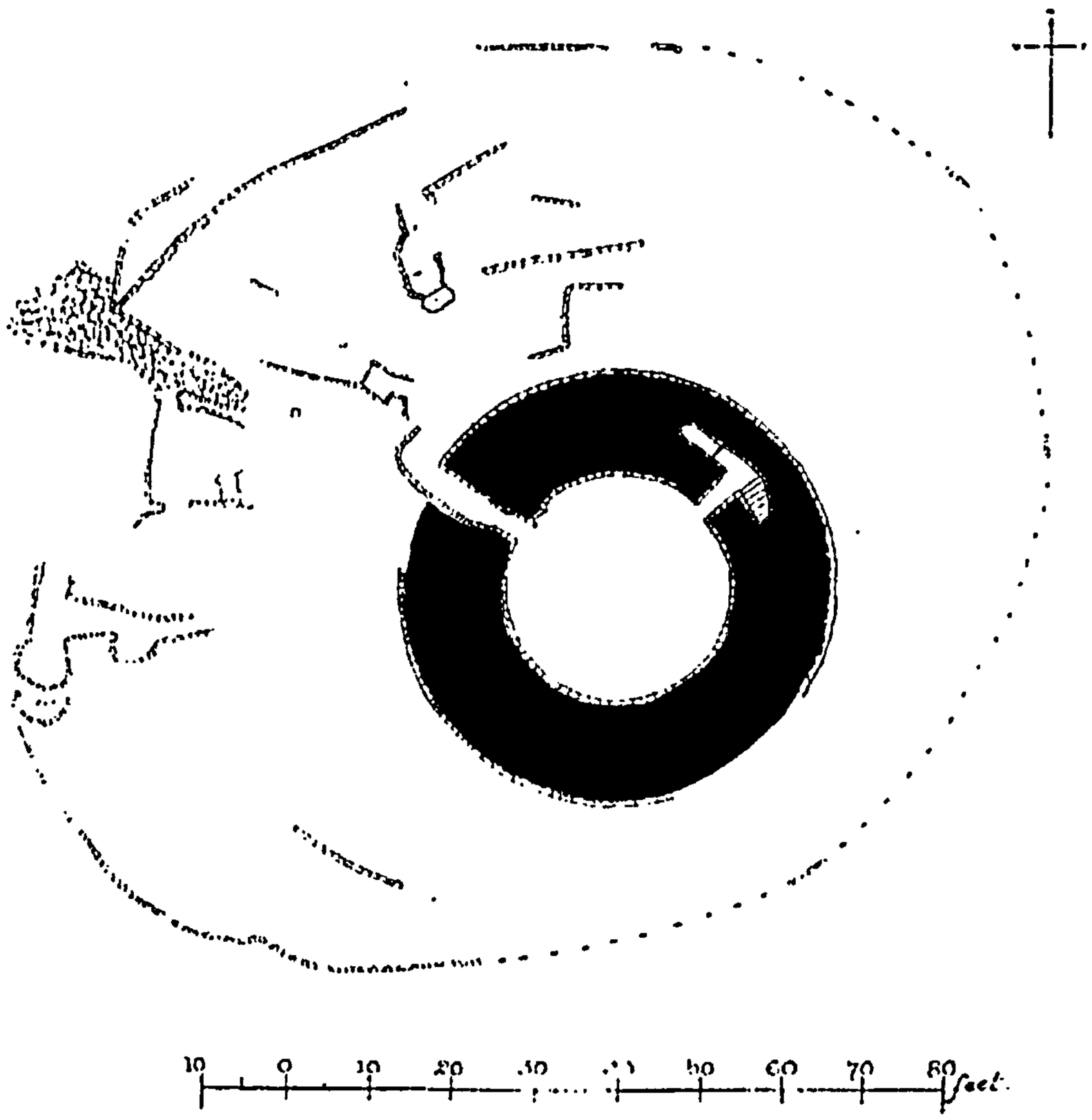


Figure 8.8 : Plan of excavated features at the broch of Wester (Anderson 1901, Fig. 6)

Four cist burials were located within the blown sand deposits which overlay the structures at Wester and, interestingly, the remains of a child's skeleton were recovered from one of the surrounding buildings, although Anderson does not specify which, or at what level this find was made.

Wester broch exhibits less apparent architectural complexity than other sites within the study area. Although there was an intra-mural chamber, little is known about any internal divisions of space which may have existed. Although the site is now situated almost at the sea shore, the entrance passage, in common with those at Norwall and Skitten, is once again oriented inland to the north-west. Although coastal erosion is likely to have moved the shore-line closer to the site than during its occupation, it would still have been situated close to the sea, and it is interesting that a site set in a coastal location should be oriented towards the land. The majority of the known surrounding buildings were also set on the landward side of the broch, and it appears that its entrance passage was sited so as to maintain access to the broch itself through the buildings which surrounded it. This feature is shared by other broch sites within the study area.

To the north of Sinclair's Bay lies perhaps the best-known group of broch sites within the study area, situated close to the modern village of Keiss. Set some 600m north-west of the other two brochs, and furthest from the shore, is the site now known as the Road broch (36) (Figure 8.9). This lies to the south of the graveyard at Keiss, adjacent to the modern road between Wick and John O'Groats. A ditch dug alongside the road cut through an extensive shell midden, in which were found pottery and a number of bone points (Laing 1866, 20; Anderson 1901, 131), but this did not result in the discovery of the broch itself, which was excavated at a later date by Tress Barry. Laing does state in his account of this work, however, that the building foundations he located were overlying midden material. A casing wall had been added to the exterior of the broch, increasing the wall thickness from 3.7m to a maximum of 4.8m (15ft 9ins). The broch is entered via a passage opening to the north-east, containing a pair of opposed door-checks 2.1m (7ft) from the exterior and a collapsed guard cell 0.76m (2ft 6ins) nearer to the broch interior. A second entrance passage through the broch wall contains an opposed pair of bar-holes. This second entrance is blocked by a large stone slab from the inside, and by a casing added to the exterior wall. The interior of the broch itself was subdivided into four sections by flagstone slabs set on edge, and set into the floor were a number of slab-lined boxes.

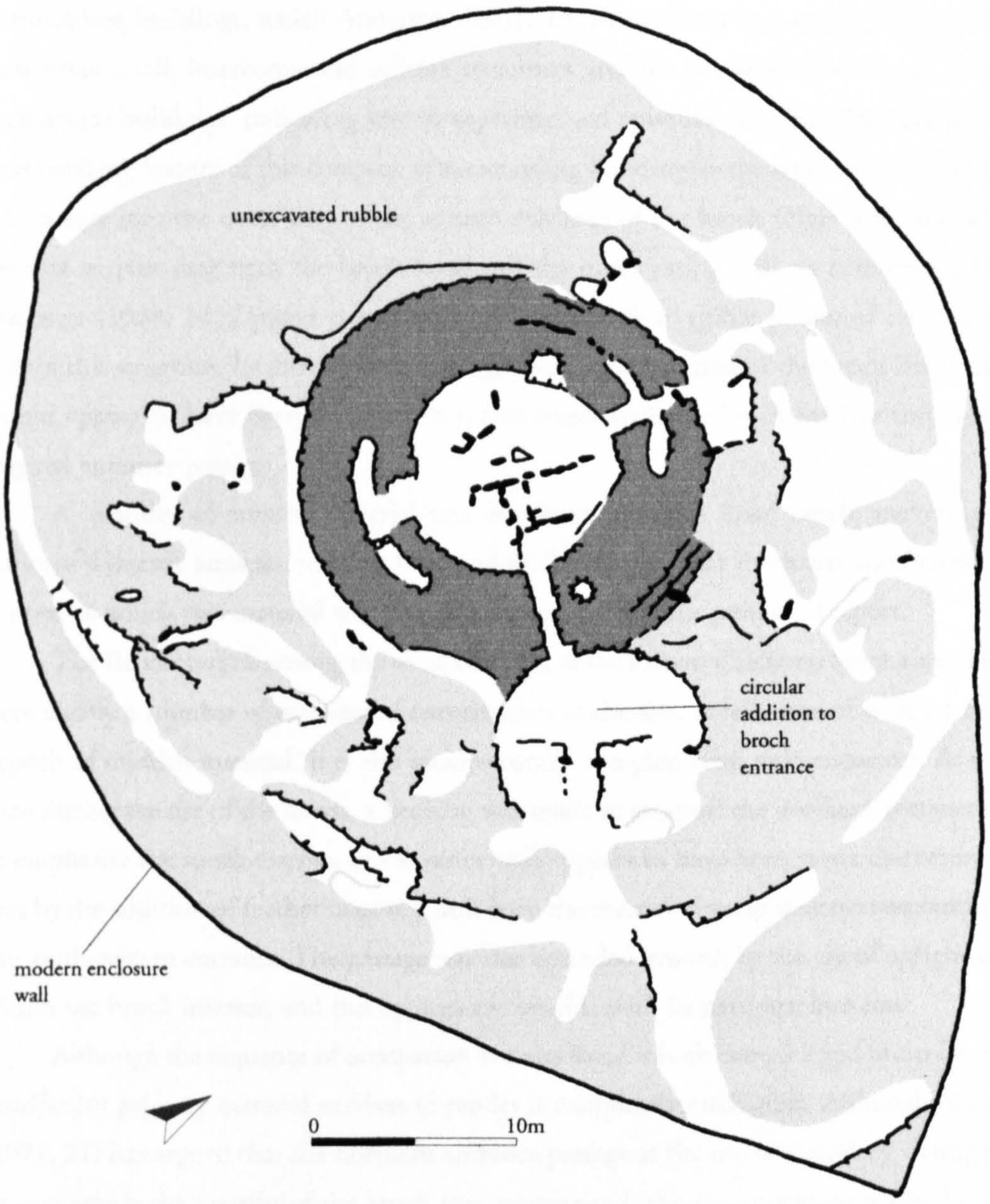


Figure 8.9 : Plan of excavated features at Keiss Road broch (36) (after Swanson 1988, Figure 41)

Between the broch itself and the outer wall of its enclosure are a complex series of surrounding buildings, which Anderson (1901, 137) notes only in passing. These include numerous small, interconnected cellular structures and the remains of what may be sub-rectangular buildings, indicating several superimposed episodes of re-building. Perhaps the most striking feature of this complex of surrounding buildings is the large circular enclosure which cuts into the outer part of the eastern entrance of the broch (Plate 8.8), and which appears to post-date both the broch itself and the outer casing wall, as it intersects both. Swanson (1988, 141) argues convincingly for at least four visible phases of construction within this structure. Its interior area is roughly equivalent to that of the broch itself, and it would appear to have been intended to interconnect with the broch interior through the original entrance passage.

A quantity of midden material was recovered from the Road broch, including the bones of domestic animals, red deer horn and shells. A single bear tooth was also found. The context in which this material was found is not specified in the published report.

The Road broch is among the most complex of the known Caithness broch sites. There were clearly a number of episodes of construction at the site, at least one of which sealed a deposit of midden material. It is also architecturally complex, with twin entrances. At some time during the use of the broch, a decision was made to close off the northern entrance and to emphasise the south-eastern, as the outer wall appears to have been made thicker in this area by the addition of further masonry. Still later, the massive circular structure was added to the south-eastern entrance. The passage was also extended inwards by the use of upright slabs within the broch interior, and this appears to coincide with its partition into four.

Although the sequence of occupation at Keiss Road is both complex and multi-layered, insufficient primary material survives to render it completely intelligible. Although MacKie (1971, 21) has argued that the northern entrance passage at the site is secondary, dating to a time at which the interior of the broch was re-organised, this interpretation is based on an argument which relates to the nearby site at Keiss Harbour. This, I will argue below, cannot be maintained. I would concur with Swanson (1988, 164) in accepting both entrances at the site as original. The northernmost of these is that which appears initially to have been the more elaborate, with a large intra-mural cell and access to a stairway within the broch wall. It is oriented inland, through a complex of outbuildings, towards ground which slopes gently uphill to the north. There is no clear passage through the surrounding buildings on this side of the site, and it may be, *contra* MacKie (1971b, 15) that this entrance went out of use during the occupation of the site. Indeed, there is some confusion inherent in MacKie's re-interpretation, as at no point does Anderson indicate that the eastern entrance to the broch was blocked by the exterior casing wall. Indeed, he states that the northern entrance was

Plate 8.8 : Circular enclosure, added to entrance (a) at Keiss Road broch (36).

Plate 8.9 : View towards the approximate locations of Keiss White Gate (a) & Keiss Harbour (b) brochs from Keiss Road broch (36) E entrance (c).

blocked by later construction in this area (Anderson 1901, 135). This confusion may originate in Anderson's account, which moves directly from a discussion of 'the entrance', meaning the northern passage, to a description of 'the main entrance', meaning the eastern passage, without ever making any clear differentiation between the two. MacKie's reinterpretation cannot, therefore, be maintained, and it is clear that the eastern entrance continued in use into a late phase of occupation at the site.

This entrance appears to have been the one which almost certainly gave access to the broch throughout its history, and it is in this area that the most extraordinary architectural embellishments were made, including the massive, thin-walled circular enclosure, which seems to have overlain earlier reconstruction in this area. As I will argue below, this represents an extreme example of similar architectural features found at other broch sites in the area. This entrance faces other sites in the immediate area, in the vicinity of Keiss harbour. These would have been visible from the site, which sits slightly uphill from them (Plate 8.9).

The confused form of the other buildings surrounding the broch also suggests a long sequence of modification and reconstruction. There is less information relating to occupation within the interior of the broch. Although Anderson does not record a series of superimposed floors similar to those found at other sites in the area, he does mention midden material which may represent extended re-use. MacKie (1971b, 22) argues that the partition of the broch interior into four sections was undertaken at a late stage, although there is no direct evidence for this.

Although occupation at the site well into the later Iron Age is likely, due to the considerable depth and complexity of its settlement history, it is difficult to demonstrate conclusively in structural terms. There are certainly hints of sub-rectangular structures within the outbuildings to both north and south of the broch, but these are too poorly-preserved in their present state, and were never excavated with sufficient clarity, to invite close comparison to material from elsewhere. Anderson mentions the foundations of a sub-rectangular building outside the boundary surrounding the site, which he indicates must belong to a late period as a wall running out from the buildings surrounding the broch passes beneath its foundations (1901, 139). This feature may still be seen, and its large size and rather severely rectangular shape suggest that it belongs to a comparatively recent period.

The second of the excavated brochs at Keiss (35) lies adjacent to the beach, to the north of the village of Keiss, and is also known as the Harbour Mound. The broch was constructed with two entrances. The first of these faces towards the sea, to the south, and appears as a simple passage on the published plan (Anderson 1901, fig. 7.) (Figure 8.10), although there is a brief mention of the presence of the remains of a guard chamber (ibid., 124). The second entrance opens to the north-east, and was blocked at some time in the use of the site; a casing

wall which was built around the inner face of the broch appears to have been built across its inner opening. The intra-mural space containing the stairway was cut into by a small, sub-circular chamber within the thickness of the wall which may be part of this later phase of activity, as an opening in the casing wall was left to allow access to it. Anderson notes the presence of a second floor level within this passage, on which was constructed a fireplace, in addition to other floor levels at various unspecified points within the broch interior. There were also a number of upright slab partitions arranged at various levels.

Although Anderson mentions surrounding structures only in passing, it is clear from the published plan that there were a number of interconnected, cellular buildings around the broch, one of which appears to have been built over the south-eastern arc of its outer walling. This may be significant, as it suggests that settlement on the site may have outlasted the use of the broch structure itself. He also notes the presence of the foundations of a large, rectangular building to the south of the broch. Midden material was found on the site, including quantities of animal and bird bone, limpet and periwinkle shell. The animal assemblage included cattle, sheep/goat and pig.

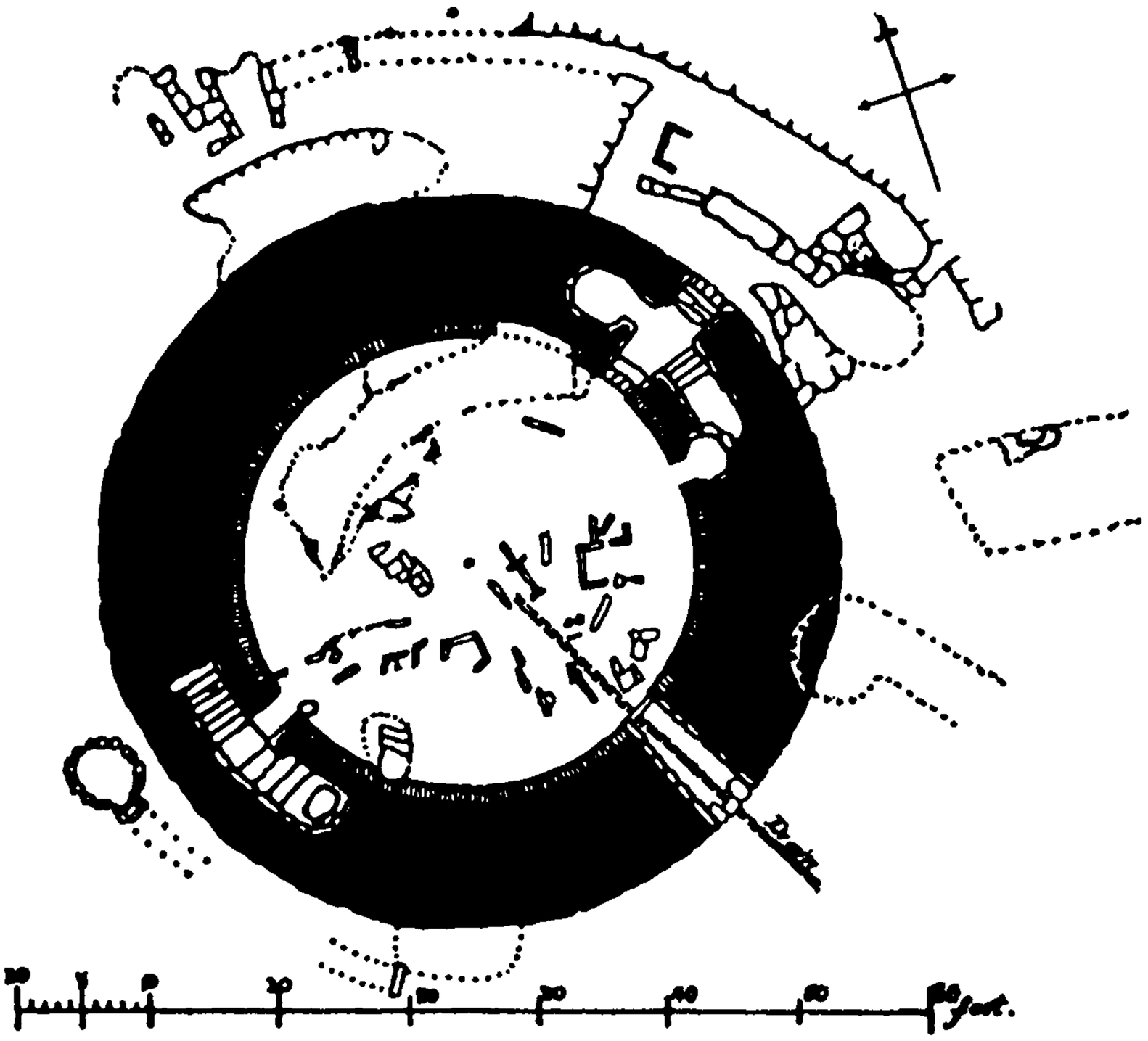


Figure 8.10 : Plan of excavated features at Keiss Harbour broch (Anderson 1901, Fig. 7).

Once again, there appear to have been one or more episodes of architectural elaboration at Keiss Harbour. This involved the sub-division of its interior using slab partitions and, at some time, the construction of a casing wall around its interior which blocked the north-eastern, and more complex, of the two entrances (Plate 8.10).

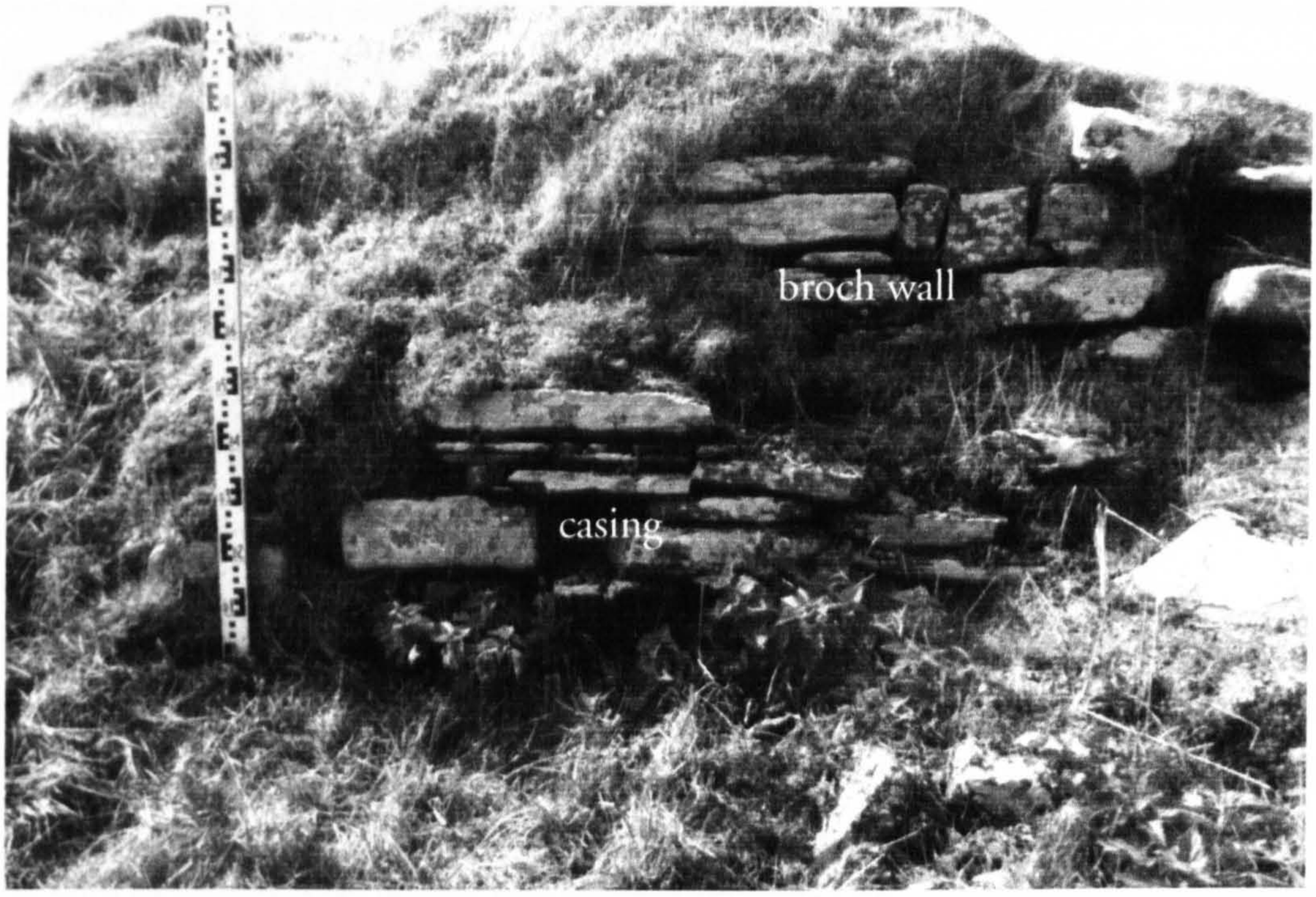


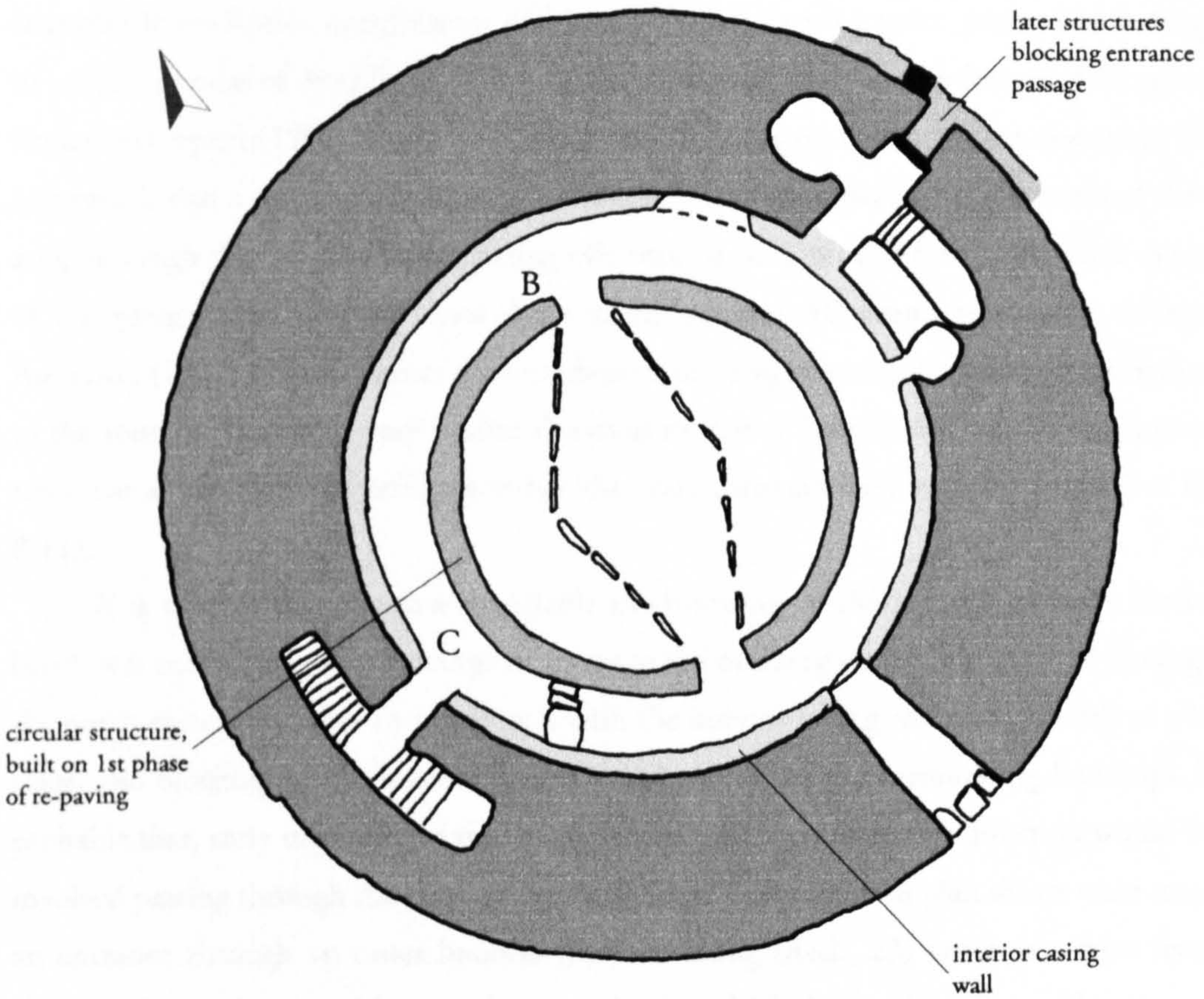
Plate 8.10 : Part of interior casing wall, blocking NE entrance at Keiss Harbour broch (35).

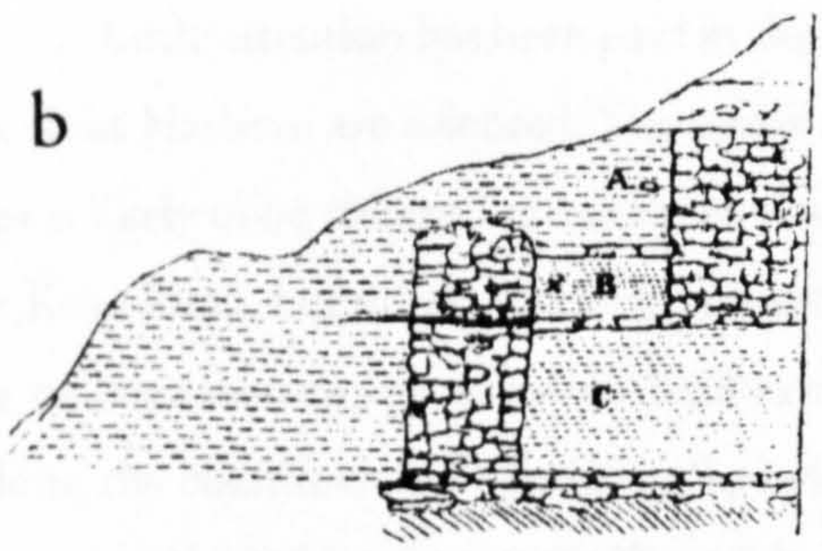
At Keiss Harbour we are faced by the same problem as at the other local broch sites; insufficient primary material remains to allow a detailed discussion of its history of its use and modification. The site was, however, clearly surrounded by a complex of buildings, which unfortunately figure little in the published report of the excavations, or in subsequent accounts. It is difficult, from the surviving remains, to ascertain whether the complexity of reconstruction and modification of the surrounding buildings exists here, as it clearly does at other sites in the study area, but that this was probably the case is suggested by the plan made at the time of Tress Barry's excavations, which indicates that the construction of buildings to the north-east of the site must at one time have blocked access to broch entrance. It is therefore likely that this belongs to a late stage in the modification of the surrounding buildings. MacKie (1971b, 12) argues that this north-eastern entrance was the primary one at the site, and that the south-eastern example is secondary, pushed through the wall after the broch had been partially

demolished. This interpretation cannot be maintained because, as Swanson (1988, 164) points out, during Tress Barry's excavations the remains of a guard chamber were located in association with the south-eastern entrance, and it would be practically impossible to insert such a feature into a standing broch wall. Indeed, MacKie's assertion that this entrance is a secondary one also rests on the reliability of the original plan (Figure 8.10), which shows it as part of a single build with a casing wall around the interior of the broch. My own experiences with Curle's plans of the Wag of Forse (Appendix 1), made much later than those of Keiss harbour, suggest that the fine details of early archaeological survey cannot be relied upon. It is, however, evident that the north-eastern entrance to the broch was blocked at some stage during its occupation, and also that the internal casing wall was built right around its circumference, blocking this entrance but allowing access to the south-eastern passage and the intra-mural stairway (Plate 8.10). There is no reason to consider these two episodes of blocking as part of the same event, as MacKie suggests, since the entrance passage and its flanking chambers may have continued to be used as part of the surrounding buildings after access to the inside of the broch was closed off.

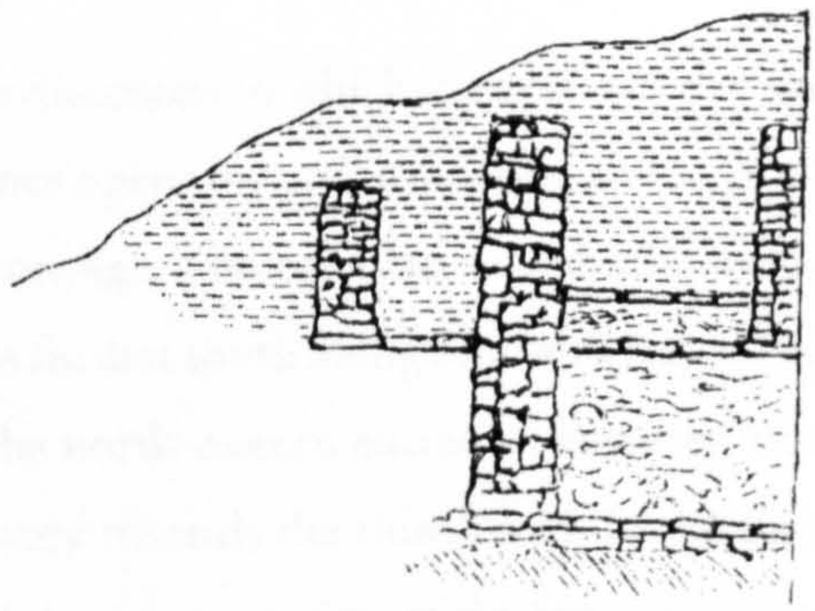
However, as MacKie rightly points out (1971b, 20), the construction of the casing wall around the inside of the broch was not, as has been assumed at other sites, a late feature designed to support a failing structure, but happened early in the history of the site, as a considerable depth of occupation deposits located inside the broch by Laing (1866) must have built up against it. As the site now stands, part of the south-eastern arc of this wall rests on what appear to be traces of paving, possibly the original floor of the broch. This construction, of an apparently cosmetic inner facing, was followed by at least two further episodes of modification, during which the interior of the broch was re-paved. Successive floor levels were separated by thick deposits of midden material, which included shell, bone and ash (ibid., 24). Although such deposits are commonly referred to as 'occupation debris', the implication being that they accumulated as a result of the casual discard of material during the course of domestic occupation, the material at Keiss Harbour was found to a depth of several feet. I would argue that it is inconceivable that the occupants of the broch lived in a confined space with domestic rubbish building up around them. It is far more likely that these layers represent the deliberate deposition of midden material, in order to seal off and separate successive levels of occupation.

That a deliberate, non-utilitarian modification of the structure must have occurred seems all the more likely, given that Laing's excavations revealed that a completely free-standing circular structure was built on top of the first phase of re-paving, at a period when it must have been possible to continue to make use of the first casing wall (Figure 8.11). This building seems to have been associated with a pair of angled alignments of upright stones, which are





Harbour Mound. Second Section at B.



Harbour Mound. First Section at C.

Figure 8.11 : Keiss Harbour broch, a) plan showing features added to the broch (based on MacKie 1971, Fig. 4 & Anderson 1901, Fig. 7), b) sections through the mound made by Laing, showing later structure founded on 1st phase of re-paving (Laing 1866, Fig. 35 & Fig. 36).

not now visible, and presumably were removed during the early excavations. Tress Barry's later plan shows further upright stone divisions within the broch interior, presumably belonging to earlier episodes of modification. It is unclear which of these are the features referred to in Anderson's report (1901, fig. 8), as '...secondary building on debris.' What does seem clear, however, is that a considerable history of occupation is represented by the deposits at the site and, although there is insufficient dating evidence to establish this firmly, MacKie's estimate of a sequence stretching well into the first millennium AD seems reasonable. Although Anderson (1901, 127) also notes the foundations of a large rectangular building immediately to the south of the site, a very similar situation to that at Keiss Road, this would appear to represent a post-medieval building rather than one contemporary with the broch (see Plate 8.11).

It is evident that the first detectable modification of the interior of Keiss Harbour broch was accompanied by a change in access to the building itself. This involved closing off the north-eastern entrance by blocking it with the interior casing wall and, possibly at a later stage, also blocking off the exterior access in the vicinity of the surrounding buildings. It is probable that, early in the life of the site, access to the broch from this direction would have involved passing through the surrounding buildings. The published plan shows what may be an entrance through an outer boundary, which Laing (ibid., 23) notes as a faint feature although it is no longer evident on the ground, after which the broch itself would presumably be reached through the surrounding buildings.

Little attention has been paid in the past to the directions in which the entrance passages at Keiss Harbour are oriented. The south-east entrance opens towards the shore, although the sea is likely to be closer to the site now than in the Iron Age. This orientation is similar to that at Keiss Road, but differs markedly from that of sites further south along Sinclair's Bay, which as we have seen appear to have a landward focus. The north-eastern entrance, however, faces along the coastline, and appears to be oriented directly towards the third broch in the Keiss group, at the White Gate (37) (Plate 8.11). This is interesting, in view of the fact that one of the entrances at Keiss Road is also oriented in this direction. As I have already noted, the majority of brochs in the study area which are known to have had twin entrances are also those which are situated in locales in which broch sites are set close together. Although this is likely to relate at least partly to a bias introduced by differential excavation of these sites in the past, I would argue that the orientations noted here are not coincidental. Furthermore, if this is accepted, it has important chronological implications.

Plate 8.11 : The relationship between Keiss Harbour (a) and Keiss White gate brochs (Crown Copyright : RCAHMS)

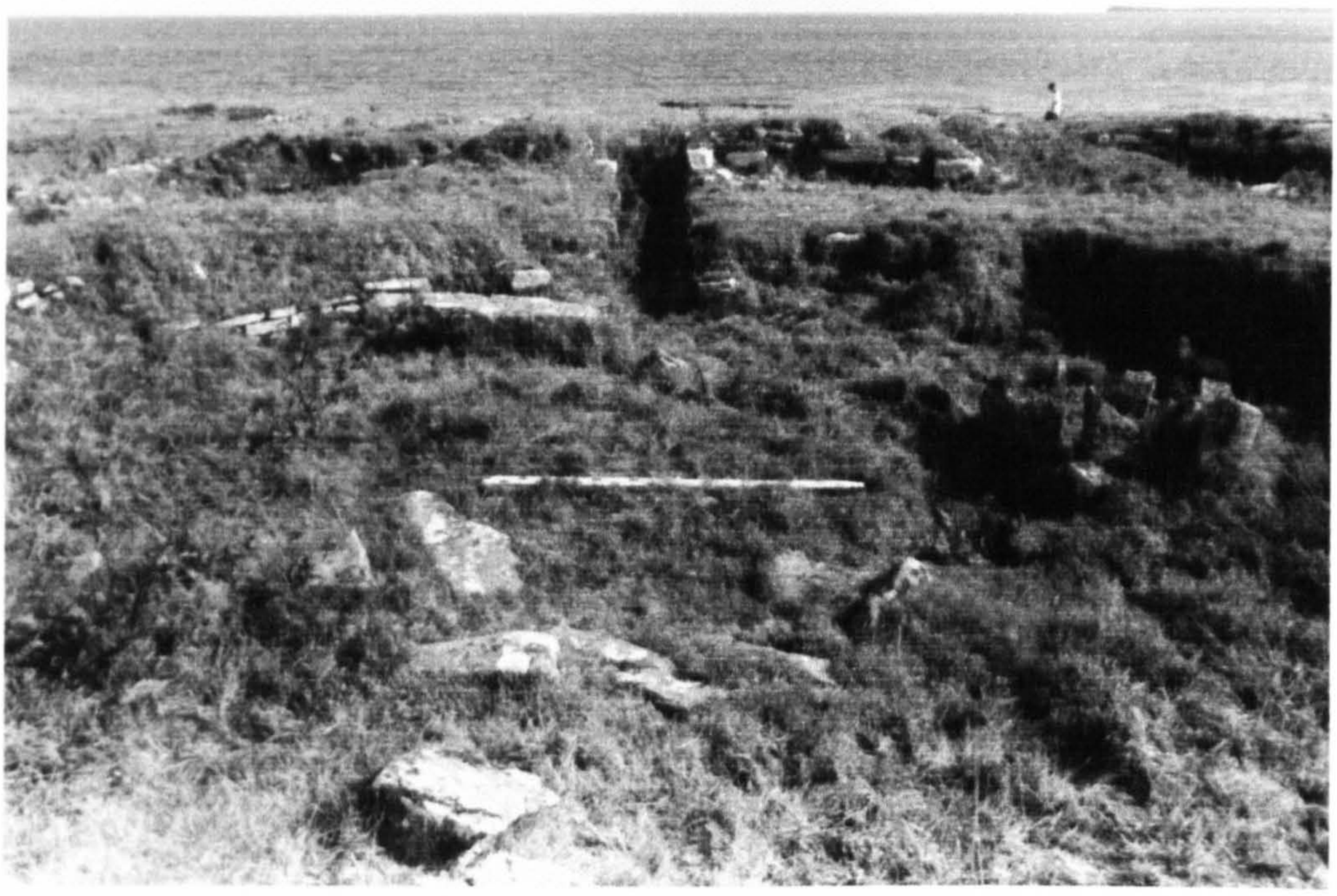


Plate 8.12 : View along the entrance passage at Keiss White Gate broch (37), toward the shore.

The final site in the Keiss grouping is usually referred to as the White Gate broch (37), although the feature after which it was named has long since disappeared. It is situated only 180m north-east along the shore from Keiss Harbour broch, and has an almost identical landscape context. The two sites remain very clearly intervisible. In contrast to its near neighbours, the White Gate broch has only a single entrance passage, which faces directly out to sea to the east (Plate 8.12). Once again the broch was surrounded, at least on its seaward side, by a complex of buildings, although the close proximity of enclosed modern agricultural land to the landward makes it impossible to ascertain whether these structures extended right around the site. As at the other sites in the Keiss group, however, its entrance was arranged so that the broch itself had to be entered through the surrounding buildings (Figure 8.12). Presumably, this involved movement right around the broch when approaching from the landward side. There are also at least two phases of extension visible within the entrance passage at the site, extending it into the area occupied by the surrounding buildings.

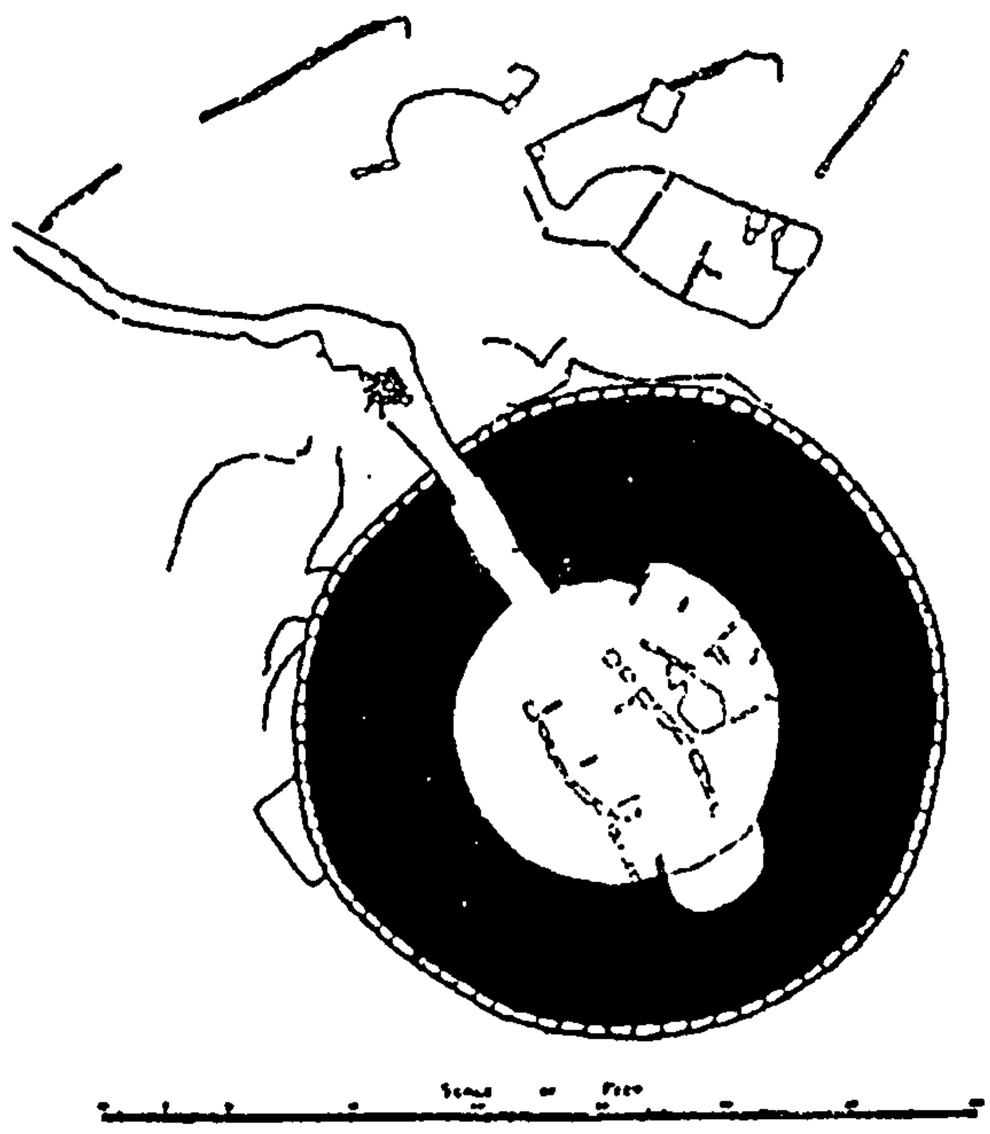


Figure 8.12 : Excavated features at Keiss White Gate broch (Anderson 1901, Fig. 11).

The account of Tress Barry's excavations at the site (Anderson 1901, 127-30) contains less description of the internal deposits at the site than do the accounts of the other Keiss brochs. While it may be that this simply reflects the information available to Anderson when compiling his report, photographs taken at the time of the excavations (Anderson 1901, fig. 12, RCAHMS 1911b, plate LII, Plate 8.13) suggest that the deposits found were never very deep. However, significant features do appear to have been located within the broch interior. Against the south-western arc of the interior wall were at least two radial partitions, formed by upright slabs set perpendicular to the inner wall face. Although it is impossible to be sure, from the surviving documents and photographs, that these partitions were an original feature of the broch, they are clearly analogous to original features found at other sites, and may at least be considered as representative of an early use of space within the broch interior. It is possible that they once extended right around the inner wall face. Within one of the compartments formed by these partitions were found fragments of a large jar of coarse pottery, measuring 42cm in height, presumably a storage jar. That enough fragments were located in one place to allow the reconstruction of this vessel indicates that it is likely to have been broken in situ. Vessels were found in similar contexts at both Skitten (Calder 1948) and Crosskirk (Fairhurst 1984). The broch also seems to have had a central hearth (RCAHMS 1911b, 156).

Plate 8.13 : Interior features at Keiss White Gate broch, taken during Tress Barry's excavations, 1892 (Crown Copyright : RCAHMS).

Perhaps the most important feature located within the broch interior, and one which has received little previous attention, was a double alignment of stones placed horizontally on the ground surface, leading towards the broch entrance and set some 2.4m (8') apart. Along the inner face of the south-western alignment were at least three upright stones, and surviving photographs indicate that others may have been located alongside the north-eastern alignment, as the base of a broken stone is clearly visible (Plate 8.13). This feature was considered to be secondary (Anderson 1901, 128), and the published photographs show that it was clearly founded at a higher level than the slab partitions discussed above, although no great depth of deposits separates the two features. I would argue that this feature is more significant than has previously been recognised. The published photographs indicate that the south-western horizontal alignment was not simply a single course of stones, but at least two, and in places three, and that this was not a simple alignment, but a wall-face. If this interpretation is extended to the north-eastern feature, we have a pair of opposed wall-faces, along the inside of which were positioned upright stones. The photographs demonstrate that these were of considerable proportions, and not the thin slabs which made up the radial partitions. I would argue that what may have been present at the White Gate was a sub-rectangular, aisled building, inserted into the broch and making use of its original entrance. This is very clearly analogous to the situation at the Wag of Forse (Appendix 1).

Although an aisled building at White Gate may have been inserted into existing rubble within the broch interior, as at Forse, it is possible that the site lacked a similar build up of midden deposits and architectural modifications to that found at the other Keiss brochs. It may be that an abandoned building was re-used during the later Iron Age. Although Young (1962, 184) includes the White gate broch in her 'Broch II' category, which implies that it was later than the others in the Keiss group, I would argue that the surviving evidence may be interpreted as an indication that it was the first of the three to be constructed.

Although this thesis is concerned specifically with a discussion of Iron Age settlement archaeology, it would be wrong to ignore the evidence for other practices which exists in the Sinclair's Bay area (Table 8.5). On the coast to the south-east is a large mound, which was the site of excavations in 1925 (Edwards 1926), which revealed a curving alignment of five long cist burials set within the centre of the mound, four of which were contained within sub-rectangular, kerbed cairns (Figure 8.13). A further burial, within a circular kerbed cairn, was located towards the south-eastern terminal of the mound. Although originally thought to be Viking, this cemetery has more recently been re-interpreted as of Late Iron Age date (Ashmore 1980, 352, Batey 1984, 40). More recently, erosion and human disturbance have revealed large slabs which may represent part of a further burial cairn. Further survey has also revealed

a mound some 2.0km to the north which Batey (1984, 41) suggests may represent a second burial site (Table 8.5). This mound contains upright slabs which may represent the corner of a kerb. In addition to the burials, a fragment of a 'Class I' symbol stone was found in association with one of the southern graves during their excavation (Edwards 1926, 179), and a further fragment found by the local antiquarian John Nicolson in 1896 was also apparently standing within this mound (Allen & Anderson 1903, 28, Blackie & Macaulay 1998, 8). Another 'Class I' stone was found re-used as part of the paving in a sub-rectangular, possibly Norse, structure excavated by Tress Barry in the Birkle Hills area, near to the broch of Wester (ibid., 7, Batey 1984, 37).

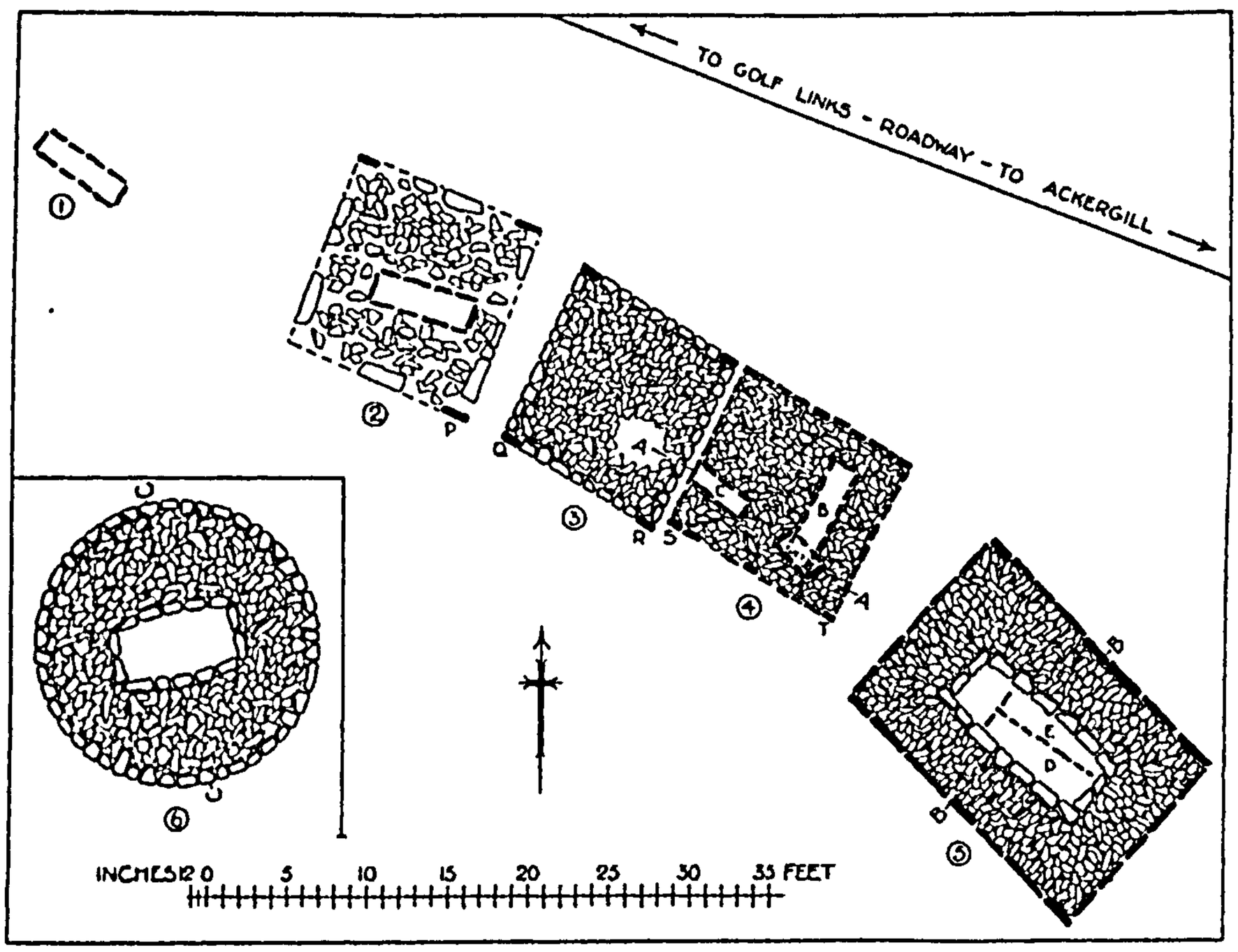


Figure 8.13 : Kerbed burial cairns at Ackergill (Edwards 1926, Fig. 2)

Although neither the burials nor the stones are closely datable, it is likely that the shore of the southern part of Sinclair's Bay had become a focus for burial, and possibly other ritual activity, by the mid-first millennium AD. I have already noted that the two broch sites which do exist in this area, Norwall and Skitten, are set some distance from the coast, and appear to be focused inland, away from the area later used for burial. Similarly, the broch of Wester is separated from the burial mounds by the Water of Wester, and its entrance passage is also

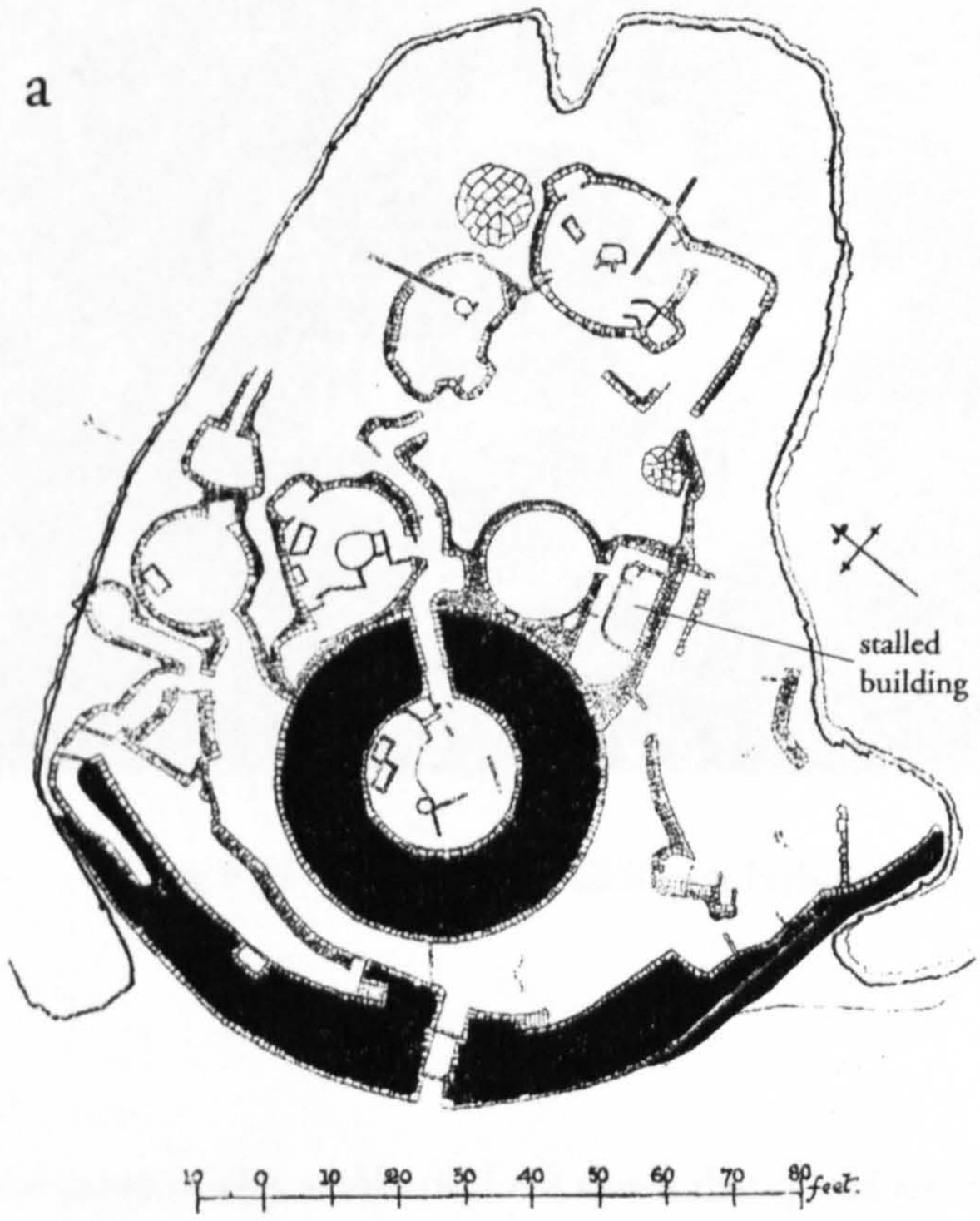
oriented inland, and away from the shore. This broch itself seems to have become a focus for later burial activity. Although there is no firm date associated with the cists which were inserted into the mound, it appears that the child burial at the site was made before the surrounding buildings had become tumbled and covered by the mound. It is at least possible, therefore, that this area may have retained a special significance from an earlier period, and that this was continued into the later Iron Age, and the focus of activity extended to include the visible remains of earlier settlement. This may have included the remains of a prehistoric cairn and a standing stone, which also exist in this area.

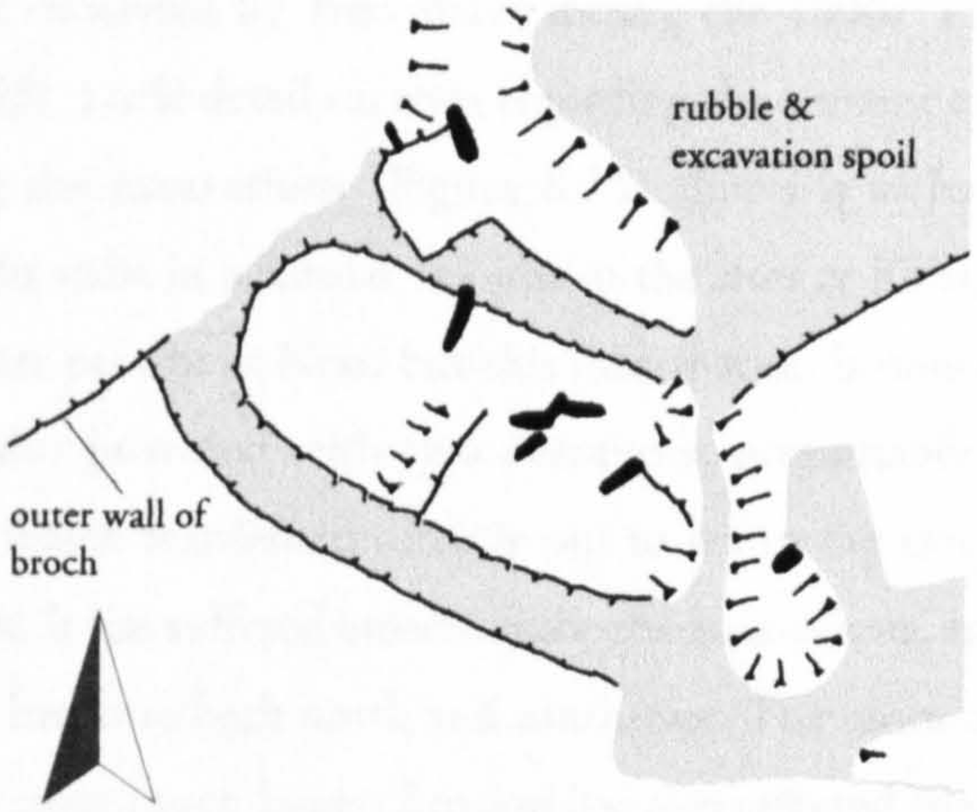
Nybster Broch

The broch at Nybster (46) does not lie within any of the main groups of monuments along the east coast of the study area. However, it is separated from those of the other nearby broch sites by horizons created by the undulation of the coastal landscape.

Although the broch itself, at least as regards its structure as it is visible today, is one of the least architecturally complex in Caithness (Figure 8.14a), diverse measures were clearly taken to restrict and control access to it. Although the approach to the site must always have been from the land, as it sits on a sheer-sided promontory, it is clear that the architecture of the site was so devised as to ensure that entry to the broch itself was from its seaward side, and through the complex of surrounding buildings, a situation found at most of the other sites within the study area. There is also considerable depth and complexity present within the surrounding buildings themselves, including the presence of a structure which may date to the later Iron Age (Figure 8.14b, Plate 8.14). This sub-rectangular building with 'stalled' partitions is much smaller and less monumental than those at Forse, but it does seem to have an associated circular structure which, I would argue, renders the comparison valid. Perhaps the best parallel for this structure is the stalled building at the Orkney broch site of Howe (Section 4.4, Figure 4.4). This would appear to belong to the mid-first millennium AD, and is similar in both form and dimensions to the structure at Nybster. Less than 1km along the coast to the north of Nybster is the promontory fort of Dun Sgarbach (Lamb 1980, 25). Here, a massive wall across the neck of promontory, not unlike that at Nybster itself, encloses a small complex of fragmentary structures which may date to the Iron Age.

a





b

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Figure 8.14 : a) Plan of excavated features at Nybster broch (Anderson 1901, Fig. 20), b) Plan of the stalled building, as it now appears (after Swanson 1988, Figure 38).

Plate 8.14 : The 'stalled' building at Nybster (46).

Freswick Bay

The final local group of sites within the local area is that spread around Freswick Bay. All of the brochs here were excavated by Tress Barry during the 1890s. The southernmost of the sites is that at Ness (43). Little detail survives regarding the content of the broch interior, but a plan made during the excavations (Figure 8.15) shows it as having been subdivided, presumably by upright slabs in a similar fashion to the sites at Keiss. It may be that similar depths of material were present at Ness, but this information is now lost.

The site was also provided with two entrances, presumably as part of its original construction, one of which is oriented directly out to sea to the east, the other towards the land to the south-west. It has suffered erosion since the excavations, and this has removed the outer wall-face of the broch to both north and south-east. The promontory on which the site is situated was clearly once much larger. Erosion has also affected the surrounding buildings on the landward side of the broch, and it is now difficult to make out any details. However, it is clear that at least one structure was placed outside the substantial wall separating the site from the land to the west. The implication of this is that this building may belong to a late phase in the history of the site, as it would seem unlikely that an outer wall would not enclose all of the buildings then present on the site. The original plan of the site shows this structure as an elongated, sub-rectangular building, although there are indications that what is depicted may be an combination of two smaller structures.

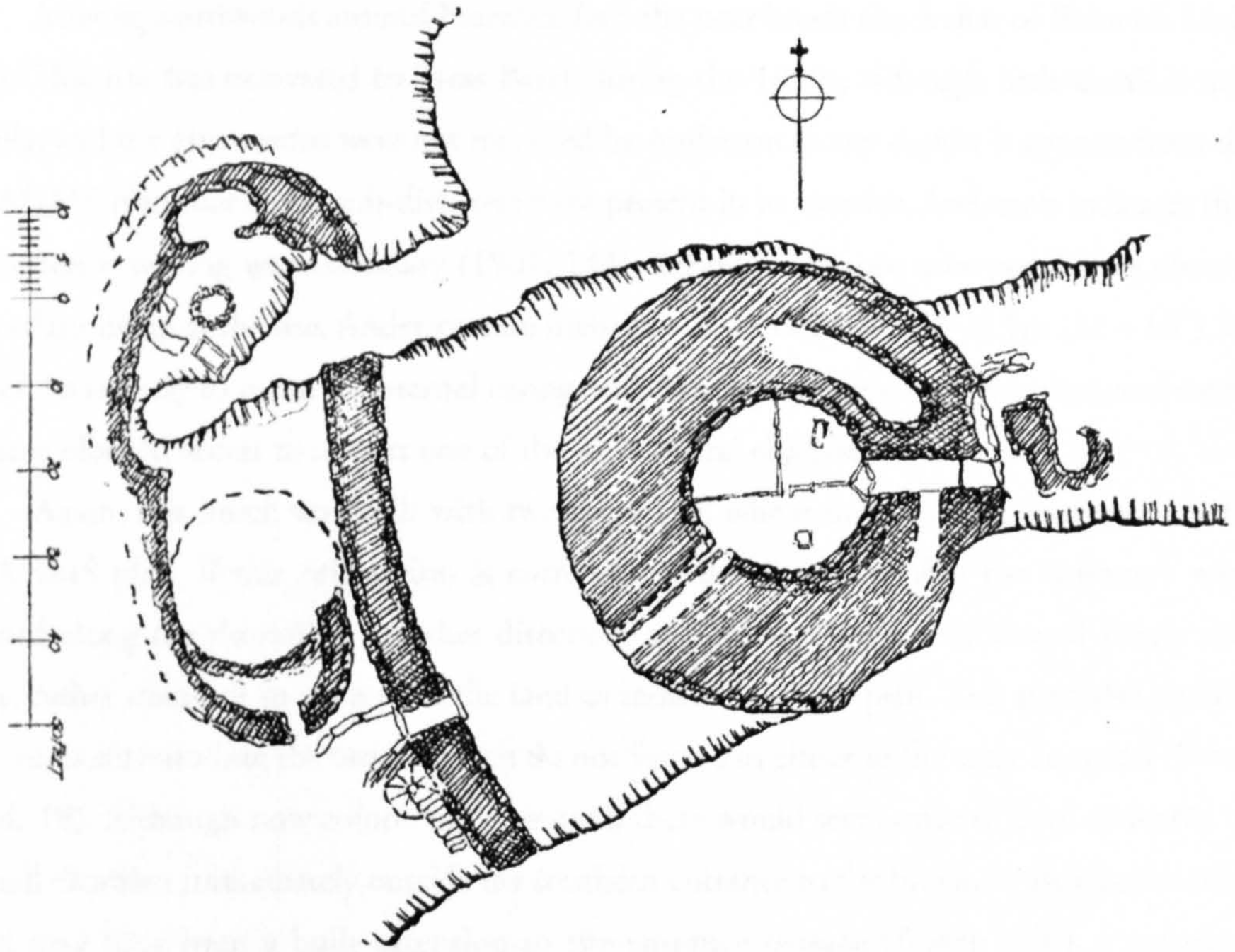


Figure 8.15 : Excavated features at Ness broch (43) (RCAHMS 1911b, Fig. 5).

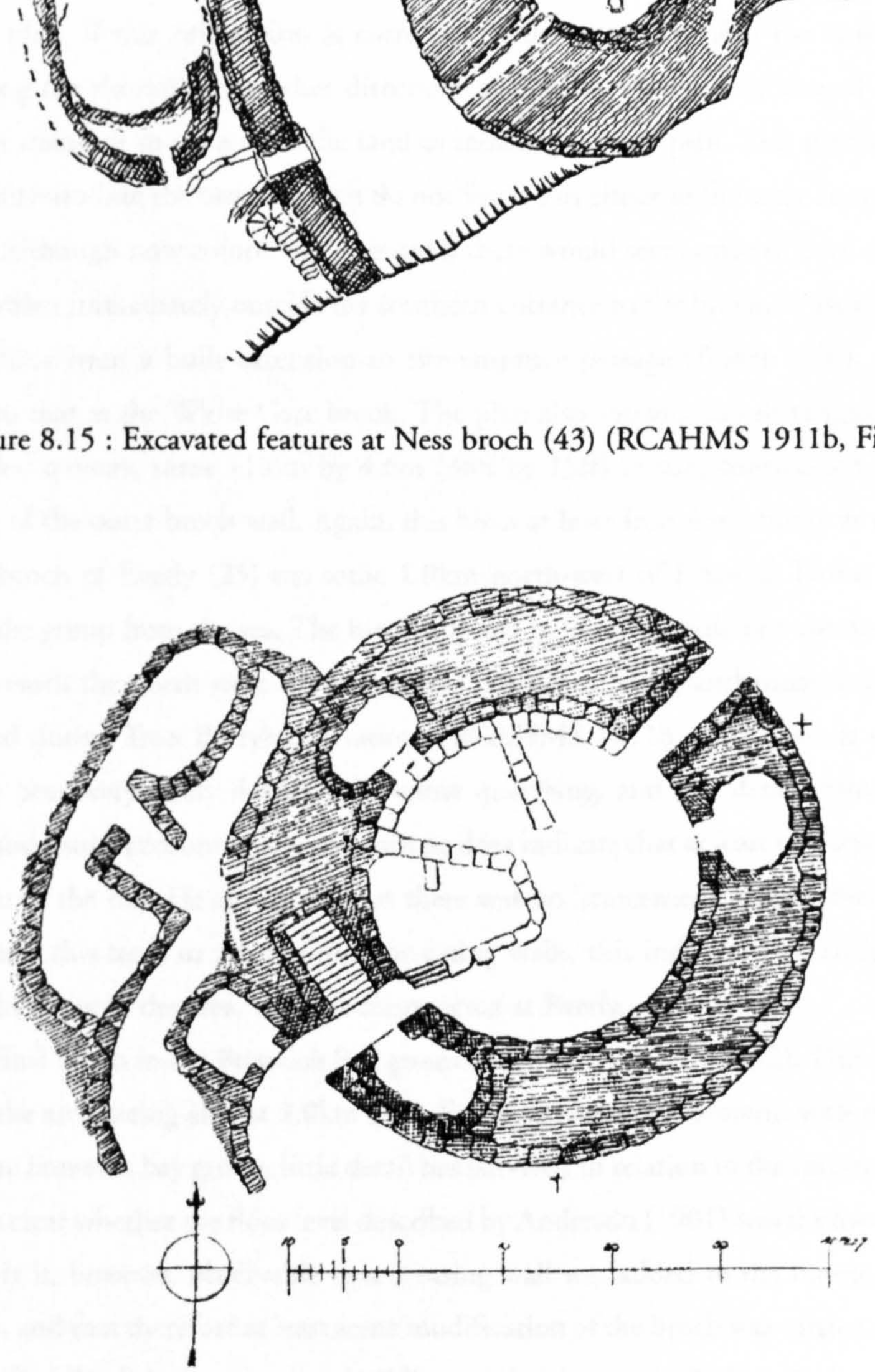


Figure 8.16 : Excavated features at Freswick Links broch (26) (RCAHMS 1911b, Fig. 6).

Moving northwards around Freswick Bay, the next broch site is that of Freswick Links (26). This site was excavated by Tress Barry during the 1890s, although little detail is now visible, and the excavations were not recorded by Anderson in any depth. It appears from the RCAHMS plan that radial sub-divisions were present in its interior. Anderson indicates that this interior walling was secondary (1901, 144), although it is not now possible to observe this relationship at the site. Anderson also mentions a 'scarcement' 0.3 – 0.5m (12 – 18"), by which he is likely to mean an internal casing wall. This is represented on the plan, and seems to have blocked access to at least one of the intra-mural chambers.

Again, this broch was built with two entrances, whose orientation is incorrect on the RCAHMS plan. If this orientation is corrected, it becomes clear that the entrances were aligned along the shore-line in either direction, and towards the broch sites of Everly and Ness, rather than out to sea and to the land as indicated by the plan. This plan also depicts structures surrounding the broch, which do not feature in either of the early accounts (Batey 1984, 18). Although now completely obscured, these would seem once to have consisted of a small chamber immediately outside the southern entrance to the broch, in association with what may have been a built extension to the entrance passage (Figure 8.16), a situation analogous to that at the White Gate broch. The plan also shows a sub-rectangular building with rounded corners, some 11.6m by 4.6m (38ft by 15ft) in size, constructed against the western arc of the outer broch wall. Again, this hints at later Iron Age activity at the site.

The broch of Everly (25) sits some 1.0km north-west of Freswick Links, and is the farthest in the group from the sea. The broch appears to have had only one entrance passage, oriented towards the north-west. Unfortunately, the surrounding settlement at the site was not explored during Tress Barry's excavations (RCAHMS 1911b, 16). Since its excavation, the site has been very badly damaged by stone quarrying, and few details remain visible. However, Anderson's account of the excavations does indicate that at least two separate floors were present at the site. He also notes that there was no 'scarcement'. Given that Anderson invariably uses this term to refer to interior casing walls, this indicates that such a feature, noted at other sites in the area, was not constructed at Everly.

The final broch in the Freswick Bay group is that at Skirza Head (52). This is the most isolated in the area, being almost 2.0km from Freswick Links. In common with most of the brochs in the Freswick bay group, little detail has survived in relation to the internal deposits, and it is not clear whether the floor level described by Anderson (1901) was the lowest located at the site. It is, however, observable that a casing wall was added to the interior wall-face (Plate 8.15), and that therefore at least some modification of the broch was carried out during its lifetime. Details of the surrounding buildings at the site are similarly indistinct, and little remains to be seen of them today. It is, nonetheless, clear that the south-eastern entrance to

the broch was located so as to face out to sea, and that entry to the building from this direction would have involved moving right around the broch, and through the surrounding buildings. The south-west facing broch entrance would appear to be directly oriented towards Ness broch, on the other side of Freswick Bay.

Plate 8.15 : Internal casing wall at Skirza Head broch (52).

Although the evidence for later Iron Age settlement at broch sites during the later Iron Age is rather fragmentary, recent excavations within the sand dunes to the south of Freswick Bay (Morris *et al.* 1995) have revealed evidence of occupation, radiocarbon dated to throughout the mid- to late- first millennium AD. This includes both extensive middens, and fragmentary evidence for settlement which may indicate the presence of timber boundaries or fences (*ibid.* 258). The midden material provided evidence for marine exploitation, as well as the presence of domestic cattle, sheep and pigs. Cultivation traces were also recovered, and it is possible that large areas of the links were under cultivation during the later Iron Age. A cist grave located within Freswick Links in 1965, which may have been re-located during the recent excavations (Batey in Morris *et al.* 1995, 111), contained an adult male inhuman in association with possible later Iron Age artefacts. Although no other graves have been located in the immediate area, this suggests that the Links may have been used for burials in a similar fashion to Sinclair's Bay.

Discussion

There is little evidence for settlement pre-dating the construction of brochs along the north-east coast of Caithness, either in the form of individual sites or the wider context of pre-existing agricultural practices. Although fragmentary evidence for hut-circle settlement, and the presence of surviving souterrains, may represent evidence of occupation close to Sinclair's Bay during the first millennium BC, it is interesting there are no broch sites close to the shore in this area. Although it is possible that this part of the shore was accorded some significance prior to the later Iron Age, the extensive sand dunes in this area may conceal other settlement sites

The evidence for the construction and occupation of the broch sites along the east coast, during what may be termed the middle Iron Age, is more widespread and exhibits greater structural detail. There are a number of recurrent aspects of these early excavations which, in combination with examination of existing monuments in the field, allow a number of general observations to be made. For the purposes of argument, these can be divided into two main themes. The first of these concerns the social use of broch architecture. As I have argued in section 2.3.1, traditional approaches to the broch phenomenon distinguish between supposedly *primary* and *secondary* phases of occupation. This distinction cannot be maintained on the basis of the available evidence. There are 13 excavated brochs within the local study area in relation to which information has survived concerning episodes of modification and re-use. In the case of at least four of these sites, the earliest use of the internal space of the broch seems to have involved radial partitions set perpendicularly to the internal wall-face. This is likely to have been the case at more sites, but later modifications would be expected to have removed evidence of such an arrangement. Certainly, those sites at which internal casing walls are present are also amongst those that lack radial partitions, and it may be that the construction of internal casings necessitated the destruction of earlier features. In any case, there is evidence at nine sites for episodes of modification that involved the re-paving of the interior floor on between one and three occasions. At Skitten, the re-paving was associated with hearths and other features, and it seems that domestic occupation of the broch interior continued throughout this process.

Individual paved floors at these sites are invariably separated by thick layers of midden material, which is often referred to as 'occupation debris'. The traditional explanation of this is that discarded food remains and other refuse accumulated on domestic floors, often to a depth of several feet, until it finally proved necessary to re-pave the whole internal area (eg. MacKie 1971, 20). Such arguments seem unlikely and, I would suggest, may be rooted in the social evolutionism and ethnocentrism which informed many of the early accounts, and have simply been carried forward as a stock explanation. More recent approaches to the treatment

of refuse by non-industrial societies in prehistory (Hill 1993, McOmish 1996, Needham & Spence 1997) have begun to recognise that midden material commonly forms an important symbolic resource, and I would argue that we need to examine more closely our assumptions about its use in the present context. The brochs are likely to have operated within short fallow agricultural systems, where it was necessary to maintain the fertility of the land over time. It is therefore likely that organic refuse, augmented by material such as bone and shell, would have been accumulated for use as manure. This material is likely to have had considerable symbolic significance, and it is in this context that we should view the incorporation of human skeletal material into midden deposits, rather than assuming that it was treated as mere rubbish. It is also likely that broch floors were kept free of debris during their use as domestic spaces, and that the material which covered them was a product of deliberate deposition. Unfortunately, the existence of midden layers was recorded only in passing in antiquarian narratives, and no information survives as to whether they comprised undifferentiated layers or the net result of multiple, discrete acts of deposition. It is therefore almost impossible to judge whether they represent the dumping of refuse into buildings which were unoccupied, or whether they are the consequence of a single episode of deposition which effectively sealed the traces of prior occupation.

What does seem likely, however, is that we cannot think in terms of a simple evolutionary process, from 'primary' defensive use of the broch interior, to 'secondary' conversion into a domestic dwelling. Instead, there was a complex, and possibly continual, history of modification and re-use, which is likely to have extended over considerable periods of time. Episodes of re-flooring which occurred during these histories of modification were often accompanied by the construction of either internal or external casing walls. It is frequently impossible to place this accurately within site sequences, but, at Keiss Harbour at least, this may have been an early development.

Absolute dates from Caithness brochs are scarce, and it is therefore difficult to assess the period over which modifications occurred. However, similar sequences were observed at Crosskirk, outside the present study area, where both re-flooring and casing walls were present, which may have begun as early as 200 BC (Fairhurst 1984, 166). The recovery of later Iron Age artefacts (Foster 1989b) at other sites within the study area suggests histories of occupation stretching well into the first millennium AD. It is therefore unlikely that the initial activity on all of these sites represents a single chronological phase, or, as a consequence, that individual episodes of modification at different sites were contemporary. I would argue that we cannot think in terms of simple horizontal divisions across the material record. It seems likely that the buildings themselves were not merely re-occupied or converted from defensive structures into dwellings, but were deliberately modified and re-made as the material context of

historically-situated social practices. At least at Keiss Harbour and Keiss Road, and possibly at other sites where details do not survive, this process seems sometimes to have taken an extreme form, where completely new circular structures were created. The most important issue, I would argue, is that we should not view the broch merely as a pure and unchanging reflection of the society which produced it, but as a material resource which was actively employed within the practices by which social life was maintained and reproduced. People did not merely occupy an existing building, itself a mere reflection of cultural processes, but periodically, and actively, modified its structure. This may have involved the re-making of the broch itself, which would have allowed the maintenance of social relationships between those involved in the processes of building, and also added new elements to a structure to which historical significance may have been attached.

These processes seem also to have been extended to the buildings surrounding the brochs. There are few well-recorded settlement sequences from most of these buildings. However, at 7 of the 13 sites at which sufficient information survives, indications are preserved that the passage leading to the broch entrance was extended, in one or more episodes, out into the complex of surrounding buildings. Again, this might be seen as a way in which the processes of architectural construction were employed socially, in order to produce an active effect on relationships, both between those who were directly engaged in the constructional processes themselves, and who were obliged to conduct their daily lives around their material consequences. This seems especially likely, given that the elaboration of the broch entrance would seem to involve extending the architectural space of the broch itself out into that of the surrounding buildings, and also to involve the physical reorganisation of the latter.

At the Wag of Forse (Chapter 4), it seems likely that at some time during the later Iron Age this cycle of modification and re-creation of the circular form of the broch was interrupted by the imposition of buildings of a very different, sub-rectangular form. I have argued that there is evidence, albeit fragmentary, for a similar sequence at a number of sites within the local case study area, and it seems likely that at many of these the cycle of reproduction of the circular building form was broken in much the same way. There is, however, less evidence for the direct physical imposition of later buildings onto the brochs themselves, and it is probable that many remained in use in some capacity during the later Iron Age. At the one site where there is at least some evidence for intrusive structures, Keiss White Gate, it is possible that a sub-rectangular structure was inserted into a building which had already gone out of use, but which retained some form of significance within the landscape. Although it may be that, unlike in south-eastern Caithness and eastern Sutherland, the crowded agricultural landscapes of the later Iron Age made new sites for settlement unavailable, it is also probable that broch sites continued in occupation as a result of established associations between communities

and the land. This concern with the traces of the past within the landscape may have been extended to the treatment of past settlement sites as places suitable for burial, and their incorporation into the ritual significance of the landscapes as a whole, although the evidence for this is limited.

Although little direct evidence for the character of the contemporary agricultural landscape survives, it is clear that sites were situated in groups, and it is likely that this is connected to contemporary patterns of land use. Within these local groupings, it seems likely that broch entrance passages were not simply oriented on cardinal points or natural phenomena, but were oriented towards specific features such as the sea and inland bodies of water, and towards other, possibly contemporary, sites within the local landscape. Thus, it is demonstrable that these sites were not merely scattered across the landscape according to some pre-existing plan. Rather, they were involved in the creation of individual places within the landscape, which people made sense of by daily routines of movement within and between them. Patterns of movement and visibility seem to have been essential in defining the character and extent of these local landscapes.

8.3.2. Yarrows and Watenan (Map 8.5)

The area around the small Lochs of Yarrows and Watenan contains one of the richest archaeological resources in Caithness. Within a total area of less than 20km^2 there are numerous prehistoric sites dating from the Neolithic to the later Iron Age. The area has also been the subject of comparatively recent field survey (Mercer 1985), and we therefore have detailed information on the range of field evidence present. For the purposes of this discussion, I will divide the area into two main archaeological landscapes.

The first of these is the area around Loch Watenan. This small, elongated loch is separated from the Loch of Yarrows to the north and from the landscapes to the south and west by higher ground rising to 188m AOD. It is also separated from the cliffs of the coast to the east by a ridge of ground rising to 107m AOD at the Hill of Ulbster. The Loch itself is fed by the Groat's Loch to the west, although this now consists only of an extensive area of bog, and it is likely that local water levels have been affected by the construction of a dry-stone sluice dam to create a small reservoir below Warehouse Hill. As in the case of the Hempriggs and Killimster areas to the north, despite a situation within 2.0km of the coast, the Watenan sites are set within what I will argue was a settlement landscape with a primarily inland focus.

There are a number of hut-circle sites situated to the west of Loch Watenan, within an undulating area of what is now moorland. This is an area of small knolls and low, glacial ridges (Plate 8.16), on many of which were built multiple stone rows, presumably during the earlier part of the Bronze Age. The flat hilltop overlooking the area around the Groat's Loch

Plate 8.16 : Landscape in the Loch Watenan area.

is also the site of a large enclosure, with a monumental entrance at its northern end, made up from four massive upright stones, three of which remain standing. Although this enclosure has been referred to as a 'fort', its low wall appears not to have been defensive in character, and its megalithic architecture would seem to relate more closely to that of the Bronze Age than to the Iron Age enclosures generally found in eastern Scotland. The hut-circles in this area are situated in three separate groups. None of these are associated with obvious traces of contemporary cultivation, such as clear field systems, and it is difficult to comment on the system of land use which may have existed in this area, given that there is also little evidence for the presence of areas of field clearance. The circles themselves also appear to lie individually, or to be set within separate grassy mounds. Given this lack of physical relationship between individual structures, it is difficult to posit any chronological relationship, although the presence of a small hut-circle alongside a large example 250m to the west of Loch Watenan (32) suggests that the two may form part of a contemporary settlement group (Figure 8.17).

Despite the lack of evidence for associated agriculture, some of these sites have important architectural characteristics. The easternmost of the two hut-circles set to the south-west of the Groat's Loch (12) has an entrance passage through its wall which is constructed from thin, upright slabs, and which appears from the surviving evidence to extend, in constructed upright stones, some 2.0m from the outer wall-face to the south-east (Figure 8.18). The

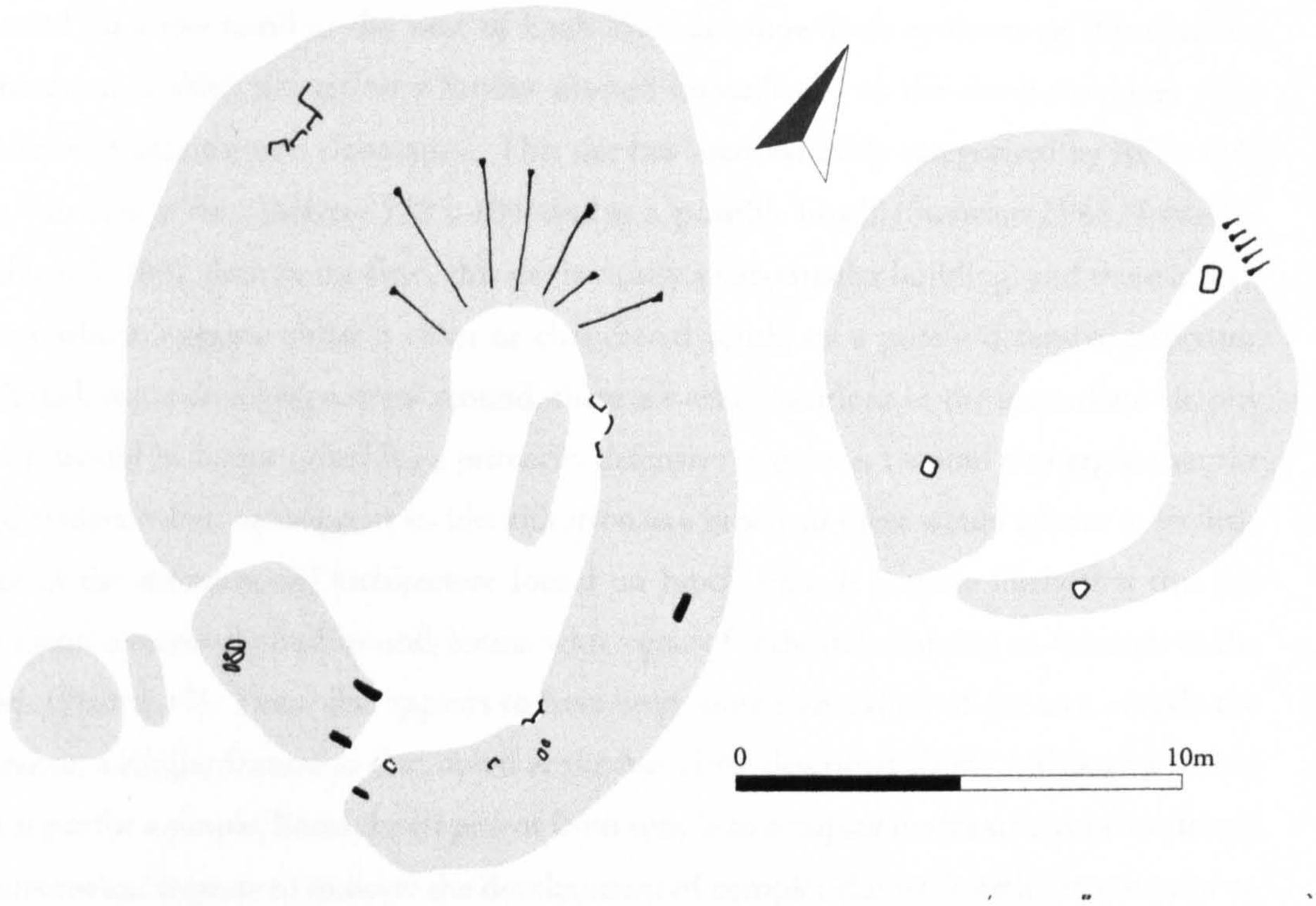


Figure 8.17 : Adjacent large and small hut-circles (32), Loch Watenan (after Mercer 1985, Fig. 51).

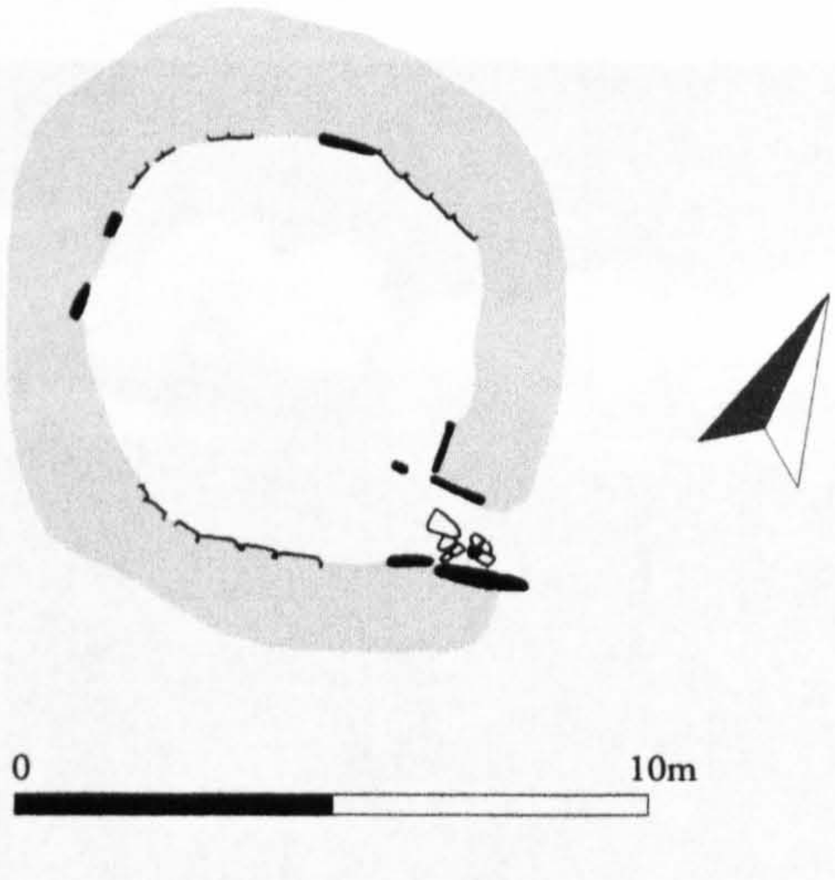


Figure 8.18 : Hut-circle with extended entrance passage, Groat's Loch (12) (based on Mercer 1985, Fig. 51)

entrance orientation of the other structure in this group is unclear. Although the two sites situated on a low knoll to the west of Loch Watenan show little evidence of this entrance elaboration, a third site set on a further mound immediately to the north-east does show evidence of architectural elaboration. This site has been variously categorised by RCAHMS as a 'cairn', as a 'fort' (Mercer 1985, 104) and as a 'possible broch' (Swanson 1988, Table 10) (Table 8.3, 103). Seen in the field, this site is clearly a sub-circular building, and there is little about which suggests either a cairn or chambered tomb, or a purely defensive structure. Although it sits on a low, natural mound, there are other locations in the immediate vicinity which would be better suited for a primarily defensive structure. I would also argue that the field evidence does not support its identification as a broch, as there would appear to be little trace of the monumental architecture found on broch sites. It is more likely that this site represents a massively-built round-house, with a pair of orthostats framing an entrance to the south (Plate 8.17). There also appears to have been some elaboration of the area outside the entrance, a similar feature to that noted at the hut-circle described above. Although I would not argue for a simple, linear development from simple to complex in this structural evidence, it nonetheless appears to indicate the development of complex domestic architecture prior to the construction of the brochs. That so much effort was invested in the construction of domestic buildings suggests that the area is likely to have been permanently settled, with some form of associated land-use.

Plate 8.17 : Interior and entrance of massive hut-circle (103), Loch Watenan.

There are three known broch sites in the Loch Watenan area. Two of these, Watenan North (64) and Watenan South (65), are situated on high ground, which slopes steeply down to the shore of the Loch to the East. Watenan South, located on a natural, rocky ridge overlooking Loch Watenan (Plate 8.18), is the more massive of the two sites. The broch itself is surrounded by a complex of surrounding earthworks, with entrances to the north-west and the south-west, although the entrance to the broch itself would appear to have been in the east, ensuring an approach to the site from the direction of the loch. As there are traces of outbuildings to the south-east of the broch, it is probable that, as with a number of the sites discussed above, the architecture of the site was laid out so as to ensure that people approaching the entrance to the broch itself would do so through any buildings and structures which surrounded it.

The area surrounding Loch Watenan consists of former agricultural land, now used as sheep pasture, which may also have been cultivated when the broch was in occupation. Indeed, the top of the ridge on which the broch is set is enclosed by a series of low banks which bear little direct physical relationship to nearby post-medieval agricultural settlement, and it is possible that they represent land enclosure contemporary with the broch itself. In any case, it seems likely that the broch was sited so as to visually dominate both the bowl of land between it and Warehouse Hill, occupied by the hut-circles discussed above, and also the area surrounding Loch Watenan itself. Indeed, it appears deliberately situated at the junction between two adjacent, but physically separate landscapes, and gives commanding views over both (Plate 8.19).

Watenan North broch is a less massive structure than Watenan South, but would appear to have had a more complex structural history. Mercer (1985, 105) notes at least three outer wall facings within the central part of the mound (Figure 8.19), and this presumably relates to the broch itself. The innermost of these measures approximately 12.0m in diameter; this would be the smallest external diameter at any broch site in the study area (Table 8.2), and it is therefore possible that it was not the first wall built at the site, especially since it appears to be the highest within the mound and may have been built on top of existing structural debris. The presence of three outer wall facings makes little sense as part of a structure of unitary construction, and it appears likely that at Watenan North there is evidence of embellishment and re-use as I have already noted at many sites discussed in section 8.3.1. This structural complexity can also be extended to the large mound within which the site sits, which itself contains three separate wall-faces (Figure 8.19). It is likely that superimposed phases of surrounding buildings and an outer enclosure exist within it, although the ditch which the OS surveyor notes between the broch and an outlying mound appears rather sharply defined to represent prehistoric activity, and may relate to more recent agricultural practice.

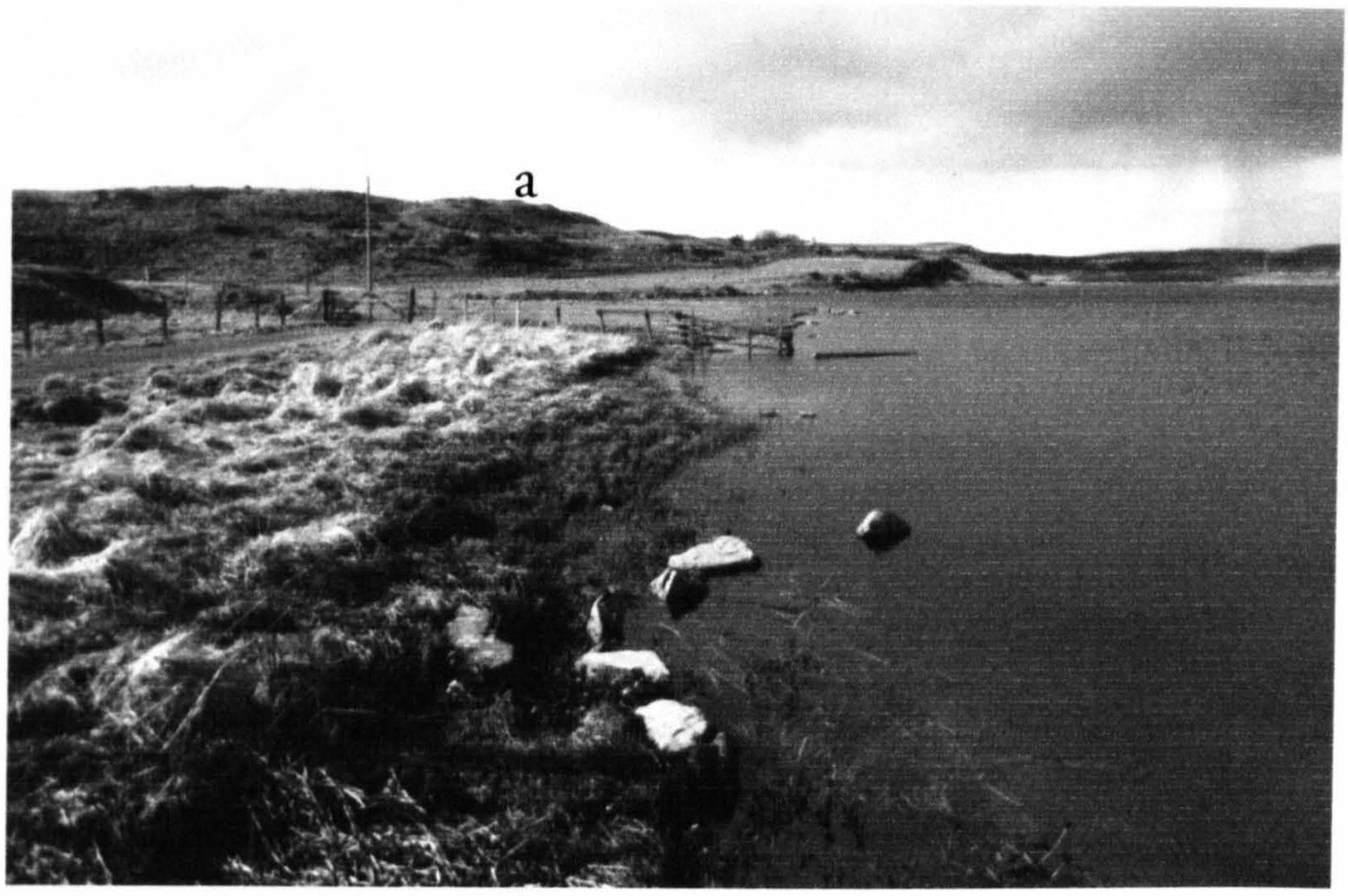


Plate 8.18 : Watenan South broch (65) (a) from the E shore of Loch Watenan.

Plate 8.19 : Watenan South broch (65) (centre), seen from the north.

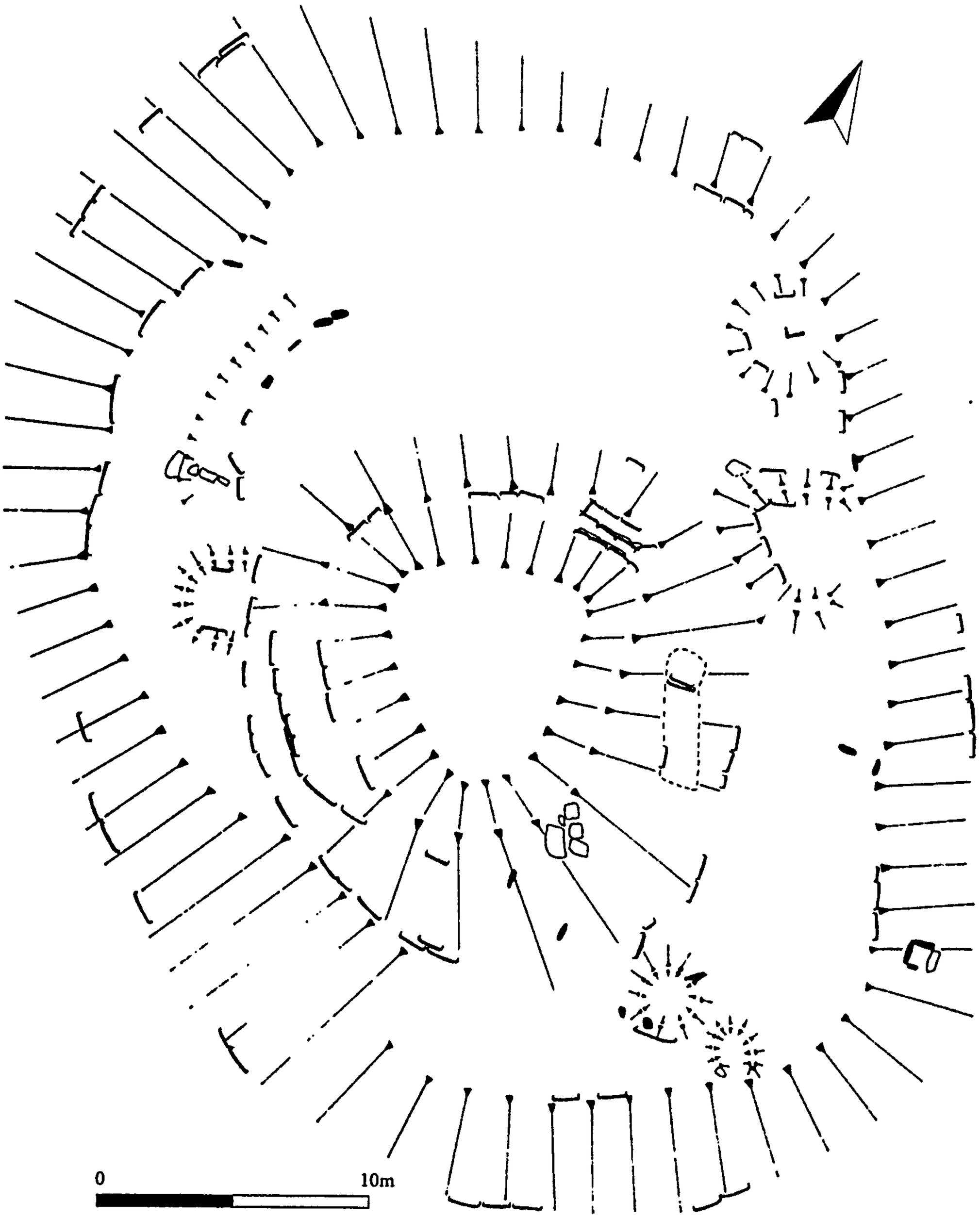


Figure 8.19 : Watenan North broch (64) (from Mercer 1985, Fig. 63).

The position of the site is less commanding within the landscape than that of Watenan South, and any enclosure it may have had must have been far less substantial. Although the site does overlook the northern end of Loch Watenan, the ground slopes away less steeply than it does to the south, and to the west the mound rises gently from the flat agricultural land, giving little defensive potential. Indeed, the two Watenan brochs resist explanation in purely defensive terms, as the site in the strongest natural position was also provided with an elaborate boundary, while that set on the weakest site was not greatly strengthened. Once again, I would argue that it is more profitable to look at the positioning of these sites in terms of their use of the local landscape. There are clear similarities here - both appear to sit at the junction of agricultural land rising gently towards the uplands to the west and the lower lying area around the shores of the loch to the east, and both have their entrances oriented in the latter direction. Both were also entered from a direction facing towards a complex of earlier monuments on the skyline of Warehouse Hill, and it may be that, in addition to providing an approach through the surrounding buildings, it was intended that these sites be seen behind the broch as one approaches. Unfortunately, it is difficult to suggest any chronological relationship between the two sites. Whilst it is possible, as I have suggested above for the sites on the shore at Keiss, that replacement may be represented by sites set so close together, it is impossible to interpret which may have been constructed first, although the apparently greater complexity of the deposits at Watenan North suggests that it may have been in occupation for a longer period.

That broch locations were a response to local landscape conditions is demonstrated by the broch of Warehouse (31), in the shallow valley of the Warehouse Burn. Although the site itself is situated on a low, grassy knoll, it does not occupy the most commanding possible location within the landscape. Furthermore, its entrance faces to the west, away from the sea which is not visible from this location, suggesting that reference was being made to visible points within the landscape, rather than distant and invisible features.

There is no specific evidence for later Iron Age settlement in the Watenan area. However, an oval structure excavated by Anderson (1866), near to the 'fort' at Garrywhin, may represent the remains of a cairn similar to those at Ackergill and Keiss (Ashmore 1980, 350). It is possible that this formed part of a similar burial complex, as there are other more fragmentary cists in the surrounding area (*ibid.*). A further small cairn, capped by a Class I symbol stone, was located in the Watenan area more recently (Gourlay 1982). Although this was not excavated to determine its contents, it is similarly constructed to those in the Sinclair's Bay area. This

Plate 8.20 : Landscape around the Loch of Yarrows.

Plate 8.21 : Hut-circle (28) indicated by ranging poles, situated immediately outside boundary fence of previously cultivated land, Loch of Yarrows.

area contains numerous remains of earlier prehistoric activity, including chambered cairns and standing stones, as well as the Iron Age settlement sites discussed above. It is therefore likely that these monuments were re-appropriated during the later Iron Age, to enhance the significance of these burial practices.

The second part of the local study area consists of the landscapes surrounding the Loch of Yarrows (Map 8.5). The loch is surrounded on three sides by low hills, restricting views in all directions but towards the open moorland to the north, and the scale of this landscape can be misleading. Walking around the area, one is continually surprised by the diminutive scale of the topographic features in comparison to their visual impact (Plate 8.20).

The area to the south of the Loch of Yarrows contains a number of hut-circle sites. As might be expected, these are concentrated within the area of upland around the lower slopes of the hills which separate it from the Watenan sites discussed above. Indeed, the closest hut-circle to the Loch itself (28) is situated almost immediately outside the boundary of an area of recent agricultural land (Plate 8.21), and it is more than likely that other sites have been removed as a result of post-medieval agricultural improvements. The hut-circle contains a smaller sub-circular structure which appears to have been inserted into the earlier building. Although there are no traces of cultivation associated with this structure, any ephemeral features associated with it may have been ploughed out.

Moving further to the south, across a low rise, is a hut-circle (27), associated with a series of at least six low cairns, which are likely to represent contemporary cultivation (Plate 8.22). These sites are situated on gently-sloping ground which faces onto an open bowl, fringed by low ridges, on which a number of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments are situated. The waterlogged state of this bowl suggests that it may once have been a small loch. This area appears to have formed the focus for considerable hut-circle settlement.

Of five further sites in this area, at least two are architecturally significant. The first of these appears to have been a circular building, the interior wall-face of which was lined with upright slabs. Although published plans of the site (eg. Mercer 1985, fig. 49) show the entrance of the site in the south, on examination in the field this opening appears very large, and may simply be an area where the wall of the structure is denuded. To the west of the structure, a pair of upright slabs appear to define a passage, which may have allowed access in this direction. One of these is placed in a perpendicular relationship with another slab, which may represent the inner face of an entranceway. Another upright slab may represent part of a structure extending from the entrance. There is also considerable stone tumble in this area, and it may be that these features represent an attempt to emphasise and extend the entrance passage to the west (Plate 8.23).

Plate 8.22 : Clearance cairn associated with hut-circle settlement (27), Loch of Yarrows.

Plate 8.23 : Elaborate entrance passage, extending from ranging poles down slope to the right, hut-circle settlement (27), Loch of Yarrows.

40.0m to the south, and slightly further up-slope, is a further hut-circle site, consisting of a pair of conjoined structures. The southernmost of these is a comparatively simple, horseshoe-shaped structure, which is largely obscured by heather and peat growth. The northernmost building, however, displays evidence of considerably more architectural complexity (Figure 8.20). On the left side of its entrance are two large, earth-fast stones, and on the opposite side the wall of the structure seems to have been expanded, although some of the material here may be tumble. There is also a short length of wall or bank leading out from the southern arc of this structure, and a more fragmentary section of bank to the north-east. Although this may be part of a field wall, its line is impeded by the southernmost of the two circles, and it is therefore possible that it represents a further attempt at entrance elaboration. Again, it appears that the architecture at this site was intended to draw attention to, and perhaps to channel movement towards, the entrance passage of the hut-circle itself.

The most notable aspect of the orientations of the hut-circle sites in this area is their variety. No two individual settlements have their entrances facing in exactly the same direction, and it would seem likely that local considerations, specifically the presence of nearby settlements, were more important than the use of cardinal points or natural events such as the rising or setting of the sun (cf. Oswald 1997).

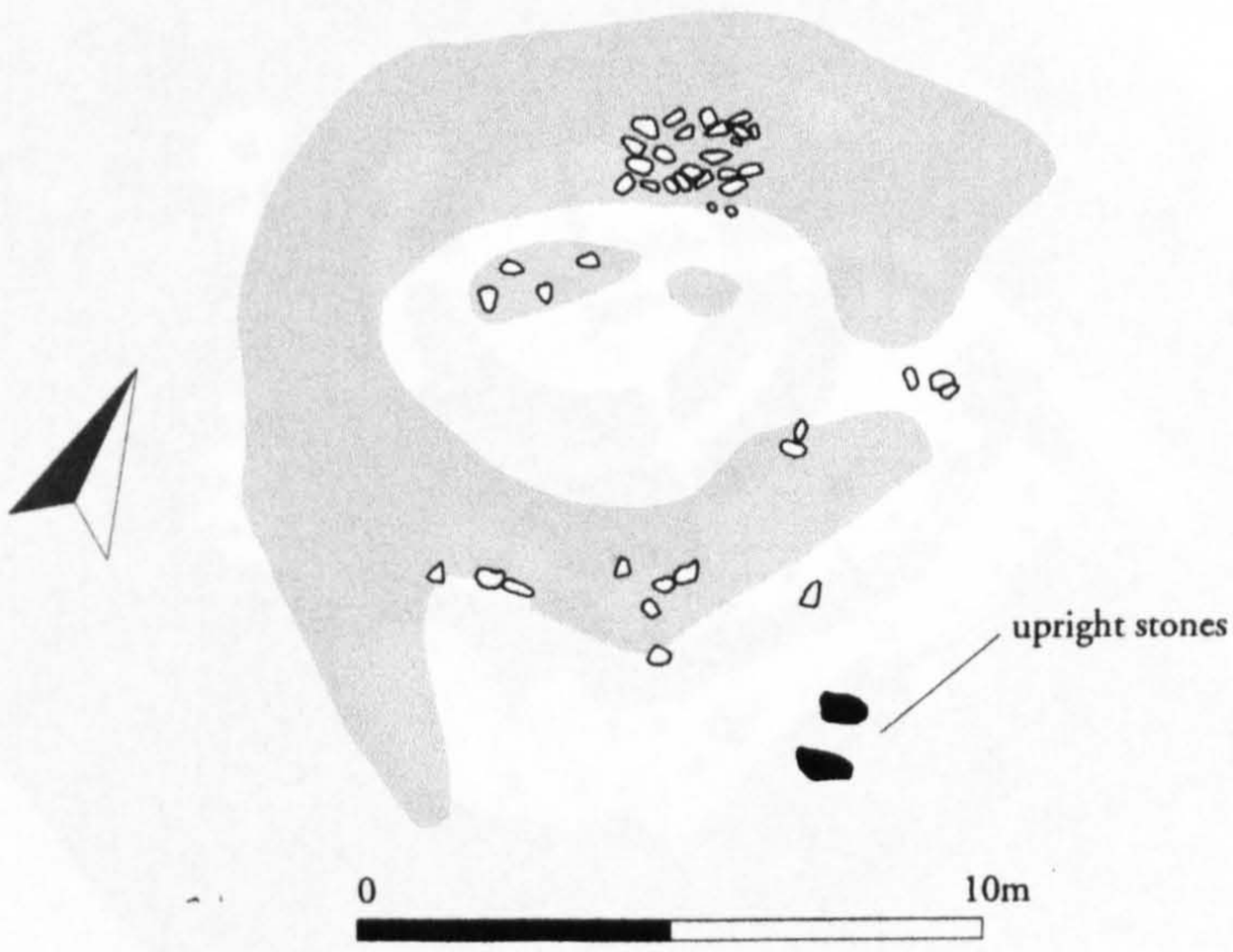


Figure 8.20 : Structure with complex entrance, hut-circles settlement (27), Loch of Yarrows after Mercer 1985, Fig. 50).

On the lower slopes of the Hill of Yarrows, 600m to the west of the Loch of Yarrows itself, is a further hut-circle (29), which would appear to be associated with two small clearance cairns, and is set within a large enclosure measuring 75m by 50m. This suggests that hut-circle settlement was associated with both field clearance and enclosed agriculture in the Yarrows area. This is especially likely, given that it appears to contain few other clearance cairns, suggesting that the ground was kept clear of obstructions to allow more complex methods of ground preparation.

The best known site in the area is the broch of Yarrows (69) itself. The site is situated on flat ground on the south-west shore of the Loch of Yarrows, below land which rises gently to the lower slopes of the Hill of Yarrows to the west. The interior of the site is now flooded, as a result of the artificial raising of the level of the loch. The features of the broch of Yarrows which are important here are the depth of deposits found within its interior, and the complex of buildings which surround it. It is clear, as in the case of the sites at Keiss, that Yarrows broch was originally constructed with two entrances, one facing east onto the loch itself and one to the south, into the area later occupied by the surrounding 'galleried' buildings (Figure 8.21).

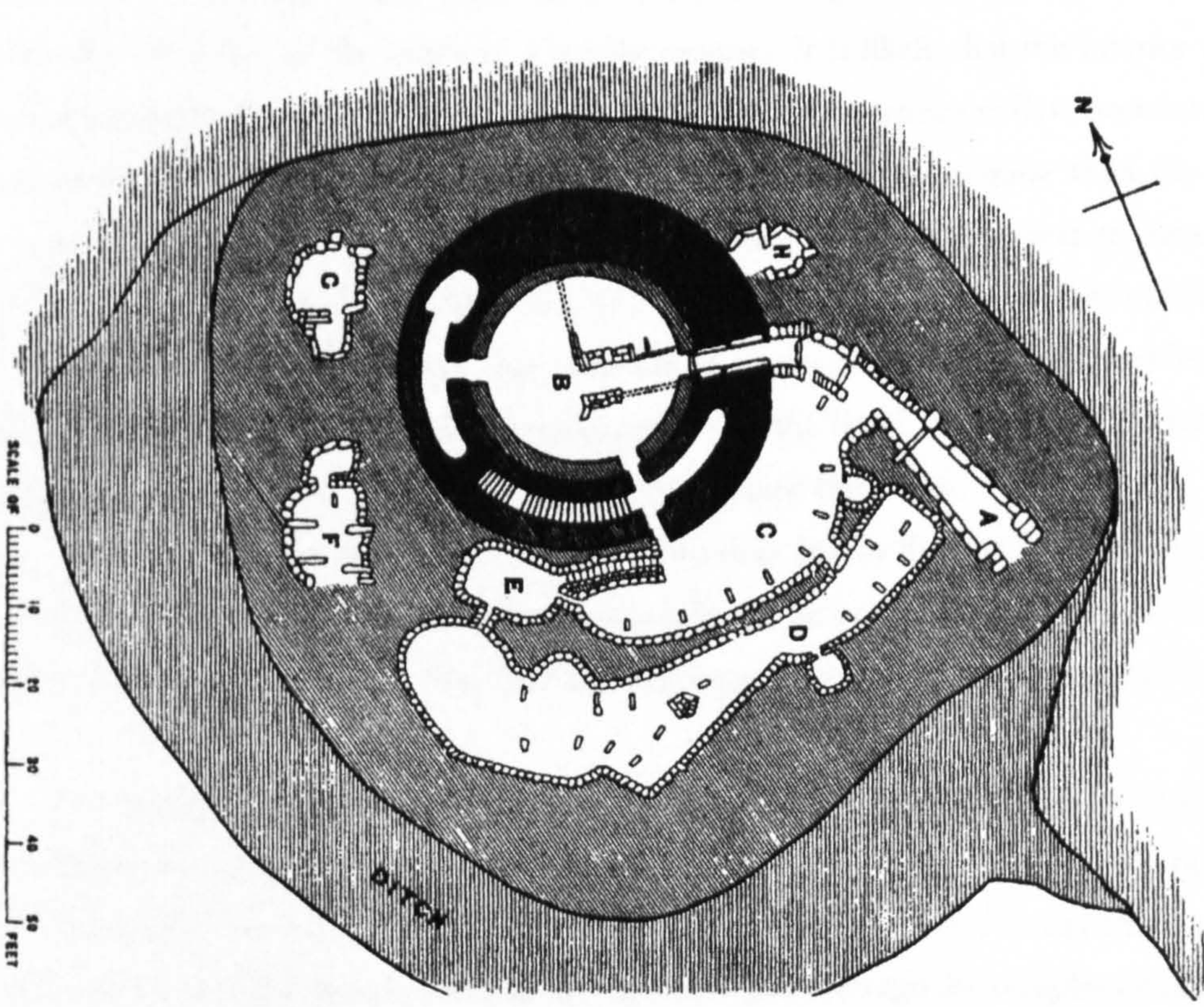


Figure 8.21 : Plan of excavated features at the broch of Yarrows (Anderson 1890, Fig. 1)

The accounts of the excavations at the broch of Yarrows indicate that the deposits found within it were similar to those at other excavated sites within the study area. There appear to have been at least three separate episodes of reconstruction in its interior, which are likely to have been separated by deposits of midden material. During this process, an internal casing wall was added, which actually blocked access to the intramural chamber in the north-west arc of the building, and must have involved the simplification of the architecture of the interior of the broch. It is unlikely that this casing was added for the purposes of strengthening the broch structure, as the collapse of the internal wall of the broch adjacent to the south entrance, presumably in the period since its excavation, has begun to push the internal casing over (Plate 8.24). The evidence from Yarrows, then, suggests a process of re-construction and renegotiation of the internal space of the broch during its history of occupation, a process which at one time involved a re-emphasis of its circular form and, at a later stage, the compartmentalisation of its interior.

This complexity appears also to have extended to the buildings which surround the broch. The long, curvilinear chambers to the south (Figure 8.21), Curle's 'galleried dwellings' or 'wags' (Curle 1912), appear to belong to a late phase, and it seems likely that they overlie traces of earlier buildings. As Mercer (1985, 103) notes, these buildings occupy a very similar position at the site to the earliest 'aisled' structures at the Wag of Forse, and were constructed against the outer face of the broch in a similar manner. It is likely that the interior of the broch remained in use at this time, as the inner 'aisled' structure appears to have been intended to interconnect with it. These buildings are much less rigidly rectangular than the Forse examples. They are also much more 'cellular' in nature, and do not appear to have been constructed in tandem with circular houses like those at Forse. It is possible that the site was restructured during the later Iron Age in order to accommodate changing architectural traditions, and that this involved the maintenance of the broch as the circular domestic component of the site rather than the construction of new buildings.

There is a further comparison between the two sites, in that the small, cellular buildings to the north-west of the broch at Yarrows are similar in nature and dimensions to those at Forse, and it is equally possible that they also represent some of the latest Iron Age activity here.

The broch of Yarrows appears to have been situated at a pivotal location within its immediate landscape. It is surrounded on three sides by hills, and on the fourth by the Loch of Yarrows itself (Plate 8.25). I have already argued that the orientation of its entrance passages would have ensured that people entering the site would pass through the complex of buildings which surround the broch. It is also likely that these orientations also made reference to the wider landscape; entry from the east would have been from the direction of the Loch, with

Plate 8.24 : Broch of Yarrows (69), collapsing interior casing wall.

Plate 8.25 : Broch of Yarrows (69) (a), landscape setting.

the broch breaking a skyline capped with the traces of earlier ritual activity, whereas that from the south lies in the direction of the concentration of known hut-circle settlement. Given that no traces of prehistoric land use survive in the area directly surrounding the broch, it is difficult to relate its position to that of established agricultural landscapes, as has been possible in the case of Study Area One. It is notable, however, that, with the exception of the large enclosure on the hill to the west, the known hut-circle sites in the immediate area can be associated only with scattered clearance cairns, and it may be that the broch is situated in the area which has always contained the most favourable farmland.

At the eastern edge of the local study area, to the north and east of the Hill of Ulbster, is a further group of at least four hut-circles (13), arranged in two pairs. Although the western pair are situated at one corner of a system of enclosure walls, these are likely to be of recent date, given that they join a modern enclosure system to the south, and there is little indication of contemporary land use in association with the hut-circles themselves. However, the eastern pair of hut-circles are closely associated with an area of clearance cairns covering 19000 m^2, which are likely to represent associated land use. These cairns are closely spaced, some being less than 10m apart, and it is therefore likely that this area could only have been employed for agricultural practices operating with limited technological investment. With this in mind, it may be significant that there are no surviving broch sites in the immediate area.

Discussion

Little evidence for early agricultural practice exists within the local study area, aside from the clearance cairns which are associated with a small number of the hut-circle sites. Although it is possible that early field boundaries have been lost to peat encroachment during the first millennium BC, it seems unlikely that this would account for a total lack of evidence, especially since areas of field clearance have survived, and it is therefore possible that the distribution of the evidence is representative of the situation during the occupation of the hut-circle settlements. However, modern agricultural practice, which will almost certainly have removed traces of early field systems and associated structures, has been concentrated on the flat land around the lochs. It is therefore likely that what remains of the hut-circle settlement is the upland component of a wider agricultural landscape.

Although the presence of field clearance cairns, and the lack of evidence of land enclosure, suggests long fallow regimes based on a low level of investment in the land, it is by no means the case that the settlements themselves lacked architectural complexity. At a number of sites within the local study area, there is evidence of an emphasis on the elaboration of the boundary between the domestic domain and the outside world, in the form of extended and elaborated entrance passages. It is therefore likely that from at least the first millennium BC there was a

move towards the domestic domain as the focus for practices which ensured the continuance of the social world. However, the buildings which appear to demonstrate such concerns also lack a formalised relationship to their surrounding landscapes, in that there are no repeated patterns of orientation or location. This might be expected of the material component of social strategies which did not extend to tenurial claims over specific areas of an enclosed landscape.

During the middle Iron Age, with the establishment of the broch sites in the local study area, a complex and stable relationship between settlement sites and their landscapes began to be established. Although I have argued above that the upland areas which form the heart of the local study area saw little development of complex agricultural landscapes during the first millennium BC, it appears none the less likely that these areas retained a significance into the middle Iron Age. I would argue that this represents a partial explanation of the location of broch sites within the landscape. Sharples and Parker Pearson (1997) have recently argued that many broch sites in the Western Isles are situated at transitional points within the landscape, between areas of marginal upland and cultivated landscapes. This may well also be the case within the local study area under discussion here. It is notable that the broch sites discussed here are located at the junction between what is now upland and enclosed agricultural land. It therefore appears likely that relationships and patterns of access between communities and this area of upland had developed which, while they did not result in the establishment of an enclosed agricultural landscape, had an important influence on the location of subsequent settlement. Indeed, the remains of long abandoned settlements may have been incorporated within a wider domain of ancestral traces. These were drawn upon to emphasise the architectural impact of the brochs, which formed a visual link between the routine agricultural landscape in which they were situated, and more distant sky-lines capped with monuments of known ancestral significance. In such a way, the brochs maintained a constant intervention in the daily routines of the agricultural landscape which went on around them.

This consistency of landscape usage was accompanied by a more formalised architecture. More attention appears to have been paid to controlling patterns of approach to the broch sites; invariably entrances were oriented so as to involve an approach from a body of water where this was visible from the site, and to ensure that the high ground, surmounted by its existing prehistoric monuments, would rise behind it. Indeed, it is also possible that brochs were sited in these locations so as to break the horizon. In general, their positioning seems to be calculated to draw upon a cultural landscape, with its patterns of access and association, which was in existence prior to the construction of the brochs.

In addition to their use of the complex landscapes which surrounded them, brochs also formed an architectural resource around which local social relationships might be reworked. In common with many of the sites in the previous local study area, the relative positions of broch and settlement boundaries and entrances were arranged so as to ensure that any surrounding buildings were always passed through when approaching the broch itself, emphasising the physical dominance of the latter over the former. In addition, it is again clear that the architecture of the brochs themselves did not remain static over time, but at both Yarrows and Watenan North there is evidence that it was re-worked on more than one occasion, presumably in association with social strategies whereby the structure itself might be re-appropriated.

Although, as with elsewhere in north-eastern Caithness, the evidence for settlement dating to the later Iron Age is much sparser than that of earlier periods, there are certain specific observations which can be made. At Yarrows, the location of later Iron Age occupation continued to draw on an established settlement locale, and no doubt to exploit a relationship between community and land which had been established over the preceding millennium. As I have demonstrated above, the settlement sequence at Yarrows shows many similarities with that at Forse, but it is also clear that the later Iron Age elements at the site were not imposed on the existing architecture in the same way, and it is possible that the re-working of the broch as an architectural resource continued unbroken well into the first millennium AD, and it may never have been abandoned. However, it is also likely, as at Forse, that during its later history of use, and certainly by the time that the small, cellular structures were inserted into the pre-existing mass of rubble at the site, the site no longer exploited its visual impact within the landscape. Indeed, it seems that the focus began to be placed upon interior monumentality, presumably in a locale whose social significance had long since been established.

8.3.3. The Camster Area (Map 8.6)

The Camster area comprises a narrow, minor upland valley through which the Camster Burn flows northwards into the Strath Burn, and eventually into the Wick River near the outflow of Loch Watten. The area is now an expanse of undulating moorland set between 100m and 120m AOD, enclosed by higher ground on all sides, from the low hills of Yarrows and Oliclett to the east to those of Cnoc an Earrannaichen and Ballharn Hill in the west, beyond which are the edges of the Flow Country. There are no major bodies of water in the immediate area, other than the small Loch of Camster, although this may once have extended over a neighbouring expanse of bog now known as Loch Carnlia. In selecting this as a study area, then, my intention was to explore the character of an upland, inland later prehistoric landscape.

There are three separate clusters of known hut-circle settlement in the Camster area, spread out over 1.5km from north to south along the course of the Camster Burn. All of these sit on terraces above the burn, and the presence of recent drainage channels on the valley floor suggests that it may have been too wet for settlement during prehistory. It is probable that more hut-circles remain undiscovered in the vicinity, and others have very likely been destroyed, as the area is very heavily afforested by commercial plantations (Plate 8.26). Indeed, a number of recorded hut-circle settlements are now set deep within this area of forestry, and it has been necessary to rely on accounts made by OS and RCAHMS surveyors. It is therefore certain that the known distribution of sites along the valley itself is not representative of its former extent, especially as there are outlying examples of hut-circles set within the forested uplands at the edges of the area, at Moss of Whilk and Upper Achairn.

The northernmost of these hut-circle groups (19) consists of five structures, set in groups of two and three hut-circles respectively, moving from north to south. All of these are located within 100m of the present course of the Camster Burn, although this will have clearly altered since they were in occupation. There are no existing traces of cultivation associated with any of these sites, although much of the area is heavily peat-covered and it is possible that ephemeral features such as field clearance cairns or field banks may have been obscured by peat growth. All of the hut-circles are set into the slopes and terraces rising to the east of the Burn, and it is possible that this was done so as to keep them above waterlogged ground along its banks. The hut-circles themselves are comparatively small, and appear to show little evidence of architectural complexity, although OS surveyors note a sub-rectangular 'keyhole' enclosure in association with one of the northern examples. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the visible architecture of these structures is that, where their entrance passages are visible, there appears to be little formalised orientation. Indeed, the entrances appear to have been deliberately oriented so as not to face towards another hut-circle within the same group, a situation closely comparable with that found in the Yarrows area. It is, therefore, likely that the orientation of these structures was more closely related to local conditions than to a slavish adherence to cardinal directions or natural phenomena.

Some 350m further upstream along the Camster Burn to the south is a loose group of four hut-circles, situated on undulating ground between it and Loch Carnlia (16). These structures are of greater average size than those within the group described above, but once again there is little evidence of directly associated contemporary cultivation in the immediate area. Once again, the most striking feature of this settlement is the lack of coherence in the orientation of the entrances of the individual structures which make it up. Although all are oriented broadly towards the southern arc, between SSE and SW, no two lead out in the same

Plate 8.26 : Commercial forestry in the Camster area

Plate 8.27 : Loch of Camster hut-circles (17), inner wall-face of excavated example.

direction, and the overall impression gained is of a desire to avoid facing the entrance of another nearby structure, rather than on a particular cardinal point. Indeed, an outlying example some 500m to the west, on the lower slopes of Ballharn Hill, has its entrance oriented due east, in a direction facing an area of land clear of known settlement.

The final hut-circle grouping within the local study area consists of three structures set immediately to the south-west of the Loch of Camster (17), together with a possible outlying structure to the north of the nearby Neolithic chambered cairns. These hut-circles compare closely in size with the northernmost group, discussed above. Old excavations have revealed part of the inner wall-face of one of the structures, suggesting that it was originally faced with upright, earth-fast stones (Plate 8.27). In addition, in the eastern arc of the interior wall, some 2.0m from the entrance, is an upright stone set perpendicular to the wall-face, which suggests that there may have been at least some radial subdivision of the interior of the structure, similar to that noted at many broch sites in the area. Indeed, these structural details suggest that a degree of care was invested in the construction of this hut-circle, and it may be that the close grouping of the three structures in this area is representative of a contemporary settlement. Other features lend some weight to this interpretation. Firstly, this group of structures also includes a small enclosure, some 3.5m in internal diameter, which appears too small to have been a domestic building, but which none the less appears to represent a contemporary feature. It is therefore likely that this settlement was complex enough to include a subsidiary structure which was employed for a non-domestic function. Secondly, and unusually within the context of the study area as a whole, two neighbouring structures within this group share an entrance orientation, to the SSE. Given the rarity of this within the local landscape, it is possible that the two structures formed part of a single settlement. This group of hut-circles, and the Loch of Camster itself, is not visible from the area alongside the burn, as the view in this direction is obscured by a natural terrace which runs along the course of the present road. It may therefore be the case that it represents an area of settlement separate from the structures to the west. The presence of a number of small cairns, buried beneath up to 1m of peat, near to this group of hut-circles may be evidence of contemporary cultivation, although the frequency and scattered distribution of these, together with a lack of land enclosure, suggests the pursuance of long fallow agriculture here. One of these cairns was excavated during the 1979 excavations at the Camster Long cairn (Swanson 1988, 91). The depth of peat overlying this area of field clearance, as well as over a number of the hut-circles themselves, suggests that much of the former agricultural land in the Camster area may have been lost to peat encroachment in antiquity. However, as Swanson (ibid.) has suggested, the fluctuation of the area employed for agriculture during later prehistory may have been complex, and this is further suggested by the presence of a pair of broch sites towards the north of the local study area.

Although few structural details are visible at either site, both Camster North (20) and Camster South (19) brochs would appear to have had both complexes of surrounding buildings and ditched outer boundaries. Camster North is the better preserved of the two sites, despite considerable damage to the mound by recent ploughing. It sits on a low mound, at the edge of a natural escarpment between 4.0m and 5.0m in height (Plate 8.28). The site appears to have been surrounded by an outer wall, although this is now much denuded, in addition to a ditch, the remains of which terminate at the edge of the escarpment at either end (Plate 8.29). It also remains possible to determine the position of the original entrance to the broch, which is oriented to the north. This is interesting, given the wider context of the other sites within the study area, as the site itself would appear again to sit at the junction of two landscape zones. To the south lies an area of what may have been peat-covered upland even during the occupation of the broch although, as we have seen, agriculture may have continued alongside the Camster Burn. To the north, the landscape slopes away towards the gently undulating agricultural lands alongside the Strath Burn around a major inland body of water, represented by Loch Watten. Views from the site in this direction are extensive. Although the site is extremely dominant when seen from the valley floor, I have already noted that poor drainage may have rendered this area unsuitable for agriculture. It is therefore more likely that cultivation associated with the site was practised in the area to the north and east, in which direction the entrance is oriented. In its use of the landscape, then, the site repeats many of the features which I have already noted at other sites in the study area, in that to enter it would have involved an approach uphill from the direction of a body of water, towards the broch which dominated its surrounding settlement and was backed by a distant area of upland, whose skyline it probably broke (Plate 8.30). It seems clear that at Camster North this use of the wider landscape, and the patterns of visibility involved, outweighed references to the location of the remains of local settlement, which are not visible from the site. Indeed, a sense of separation from the immediate landscape may have been provided by the boundary which surrounds the broch.

Although Camster South shares many of the characteristics of its neighbour in terms of its position within the landscape, it is more poorly preserved. The position of the broch entrance, for instance, cannot be determined, and it is therefore difficult to reach any conclusions concerning its relationship to other sites in the immediate area. It does, however, appear to have had both an outer boundary, and a complex of surrounding buildings within.

Plate 8.28 : Camster North broch (20), from the Camster Burn to the south.

Plate 8.29 : Camster North broch (20), outer boundary.

Although the entrance through this boundary is oriented towards the ENE, in the direction of Camster North broch, it is unclear whether the entrance to the broch itself was oriented in this direction, although this does suggest, once again, that where broch sites were placed close together they made reference to one another through their architecture.

Plate 8.30 : Camster North broch (20), view from N.

Discussion

Within the restricted context of the Camster area, as around the Lochs of Yarrows and Watenan, during the occupation of the hut-circle settlements the focus appears to have been very much on the immediate landscape. This seems to have taken the form of the orientation of the house toward particular, localised areas of the landscape, and there appears to have been little formalised relationship with wider landscape features. Indeed, the chief organising principle which appears to have been in operation appears to have involved the avoidance of any direct architectural reference to other settlements. This might be expected of communities practising long fallow agriculture, who had no tenurial claims over a wider, enclosed landscape.

By the time that the brochs began to be constructed, a more formalised approach to the landscape seems to have been in operation, and one which is very similar to that which I have argued for in other parts of the study area. Although specifics of the architecture of the two brochs in the local area are not available, this formalised approach can be seen in the patterns

of approach to the settlements which were adopted. It appears to have been important to make an explicit and expansive reference to a wider landscape, and to set the broch itself against this, in direct contrast to the more localised approach evident in the hut-circles. However, it should be remembered that such references would have been made very much within a local context, through the day to day patterns of movement and social interaction of which the broch sites formed the material context.

In terms of their specific architecture, there is some evidence that the hut-circles were more complex than might at first be expected of settlements which were associated with the comparatively short-term land use suggested by a lack of enclosed field systems. This should serve as a warning that simple, evolutionary explanations are unlikely to account for agricultural change in the area. Despite the lack of evidence for the kinds of land enclosure I have discussed in section 7.3, there would appear to have been a degree of architectural complexity to these hut-circle settlements, and also some internal differentiation within the settlements themselves. It is therefore likely that we cannot posit a simple link between architectural and agricultural change. It may be that agricultural exploitation continued in some marginal areas at different level of complexity, until this was made impossible by climate change and peat encroachment. It remains clear, however, that the monumentalisation of the house, and the emphasis on its boundaries with the wider landscape, was not a feature of hut-circle settlements in the Camster area. The relationship for which I have argued elsewhere in this chapter, between developed agricultural practices and the domestic domain as a focus for the reproduction of the social world, is not visible in the Camster area until the construction of the broch sites.

8.4. Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to examine the Iron Age archaeology of north eastern Caithness at a local scale, in order to explore the relationship between specific local practices and more generalised material culture patterning. Although these local studies have revealed varied relationships between Iron Age sites and their immediate landscapes, there are certain regularities which are also evident.

Evidence for settlement dating to the late second- to mid-first millennium BC, which I have taken here to be represented by hut-circle settlement (see section 5.3.1), is rather fragmentary, and the majority of this will have been lost as a result of post-medieval agricultural practice. In addition, it is likely that not all hut-circle settlement can be attributed to this early period. However, where the material resource is sufficiently varied, there is at least some evidence for architectural elaboration of the house itself, and especially for the extension of entrance passages. This suggests that domestic architecture was important as a material resource, around which social life might be organised. This architectural complexity is often associated

with evidence of a comparatively low level of investment in the land itself, which does not seem to have been enclosed to any great extent, although it must be noted that the sites with which evidence of land-use may be associated are also those situated within what is now marginal upland. However, there appears to be little formalised architectural relationship between these hut-circle sites and their immediate landscapes. The overall impression is that a central concern was a concentration on the immediate surroundings, and an avoidance of orientations toward other nearby settlements. This suggests that formalised patterns of access and use of these landscapes were not an early development. Indeed, the evidence from Study Area 1 suggests that occupation of such upland landscapes may have been intermittent, and may have drawn upon more generalised rights of access to land and resources.

Evidence for middle Iron Age settlement, the broch sites, is much more widespread, if somewhat decontextualised as a result of a lack of traces of associated land-use. The surviving evidence differs from that which preceded it in two important respects. Firstly, although there are similarities in the use of the house to emphasise the importance of the domestic domain, the brochs are different in terms of both the degree of monumentality and the depth of deposits present at individual sites. Not only did they embody the dominance of the domestic over its immediate surroundings, but this formed a monumental and permanent presence, which was re-negotiated through architectural practices over long time-spans. These were not unchanging monuments, but a material resource which was actively deployed within situated social relationships. Secondly, unlike the surviving hut-circle settlements, the brochs seem to have possesssed a more formalised relationship to their immediate physical landscapes. Although regularities are identifiable, for example in the directions chosen for approaches to the sites and their orientation on other sites within the landscape, this can vary in relation to the particular local landscapes in which the brochs are set. It therefore appears that there appear to have been general principles which governed the location of brochs within the landscape. However, these were negotiated at a local and practical level, rather than as a response to abstract schemes. In general, the density of broch settlement within the study area, and the way in which sites refer to one another architecturally, suggests a network of small-scale, overlapping social relationships based on face-to-face interraction. This was partly achieved through the buildings themselves, which operated as a monumental presence within the routines of everyday life.

Unfortunately, there is no single category of material evidence which allows us to study settlement dating to the later Iron Age within the study area. However, as I have argued in some detail in Chapter 4, the structural sequence at the Wag of Forse allows some insight into the archaeology of the first millennium AD within the study area. Foster (1989b) identifies later Iron Age activity in at least seven broch sites on the basis of artefact studies, but is

sceptical as to the presence of structural evidence which might accompany this (ibid. 199). On the basis of the sequence from Forse, and also from Yarrows, I would argue that the later Iron Age in north eastern Caithness may have been characterised by the construction on existing sites of a sub-rectangular, often aisled architecture, which differs markedly from the rather piecemeal character of the structures which surrounded the brochs during their earlier phases of occupation. In some cases, as at Keiss White Gate, this may have involved the use of existing sites, which may have been mounds of grass-covered rubble. In any case, I would argue that this architecture was very different from that of the brochs, and that fragmentary evidence of it may be found at a number of excavated broch sites within the study area.

As I have already argued in the specific case of Forse, this architecture may have embodied a formalised division between spaces given over to the domestic and non-domestic aspects of life, with a monumental emphasis placed on the latter. Although this is difficult to demonstrate conclusively at most of the sites discussed in this chapter, it seems certain that the architectural emphasis was now an internal one. Thus, although sites may have drawn upon traditions and associations which had been established in particular places, they no longer made use of the same visual dominance within the landscape. Taken together, I would interpret this evidence as an indication that, in the case of these sites at least, that this architecture did not operate within the world of generalised, routine practice, as did that of the broch sites, but within very specific social contexts.

Chapter Nine

Study Area 3
North West Caithness

9.1. Introduction

The North West Caithness study area encompasses a variety of landscapes, from sheer cliffs and wide expanses of sand in the north, to hills, moorland and peat bog in the uplands to the south (section 6.3.4). One of the central aims of this chapter is to explore the relationship between these varied landscapes and the nature and survival of the Iron Age archaeology of the study area. Clearly, the extent of post-medieval land-use will have been a major factor in the composition of the archaeological resource of the area, and an assessment of this will be attempted within the general comments which form section 9.2. In contrast to Study Area 2, and to a lesser extent Study Area 1, there are few excavated sites within the present study area. Of these, only the broch site of Crosskirk has been published in any detail. Nonetheless, the report on Crosskirk (Fairhurst 1984) represents the only detailed account of the excavation of a Caithness broch dating to the latter half of this century.

9.2. Landscapes and Domestic Architecture: An Overview of North West Caithness in the Iron Age

9.2.1. Hut-circles

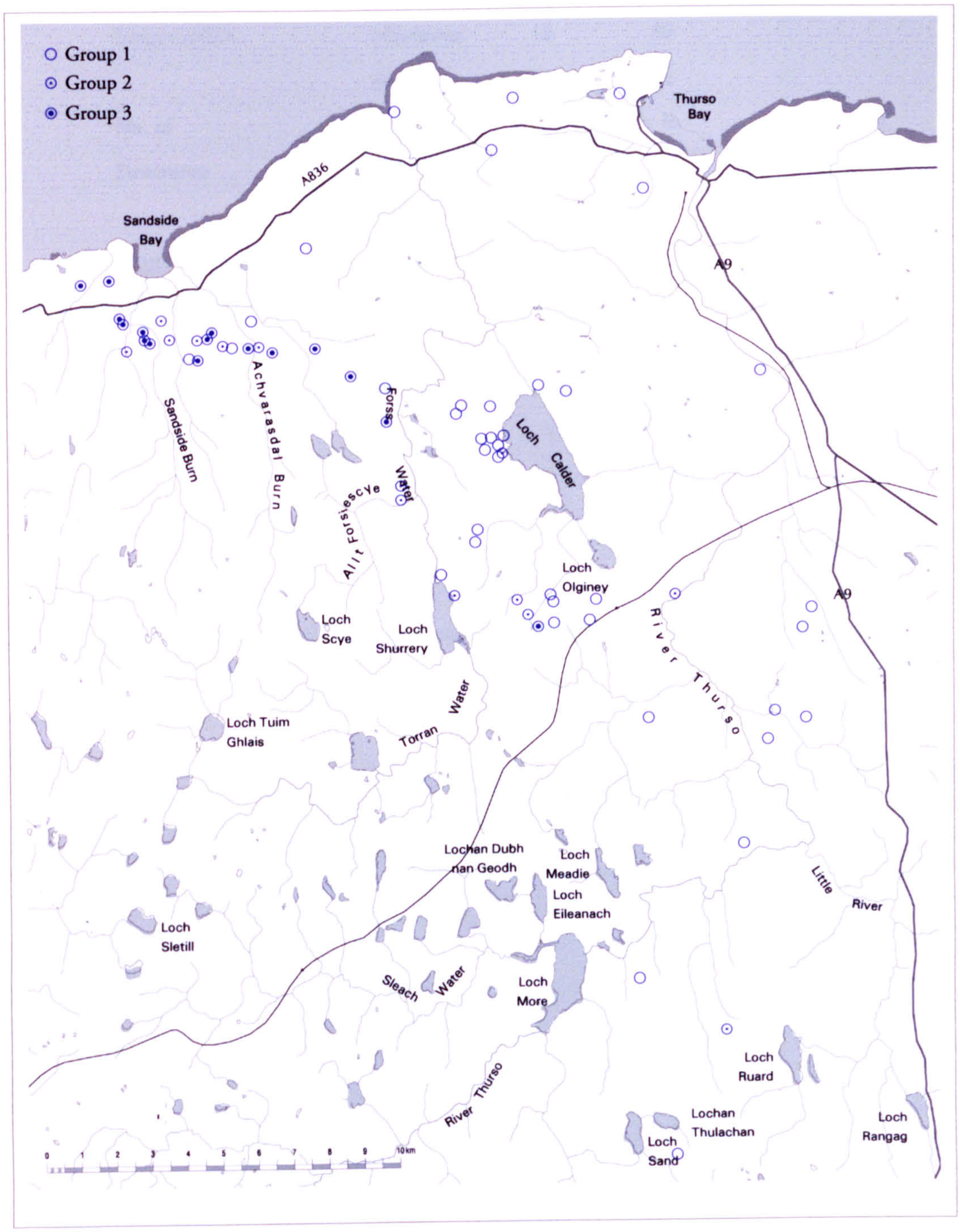
Despite the intensity of modern agricultural practice, the study area contains 78 known hut-circle settlements, comprising 157 individual structures (Table 9.1). This compares very favourably with Study Area 2 (see section 8.2), which contains less than half as many settlements spread over a very similar area, containing a comparable range of landscapes (section 6.3). This variation may in part be attributed to modern survey work in the area. The entire coastal strip of the study area, in addition to the flanks of the Forss Water and the area of upland surrounding Lochs Shurrery and Calder, have been the subject of recent intensive survey (Mercer & Howell 1980, Mercer 1981, 1985). Although this work also touched part of study area 2, the area covered here was less extensive. However, it is clear from the distribution of hut-circle sites within the present study area (Map 9.1) that coastal survey has revealed few new sites. The majority lie in the upland areas to the south, and in the less intensively cultivated landscapes which surround them. However, a sufficient number of sites survives to allow some general observations to be made on the basis of the groups introduced in section 5.2.1. The general information presented in Table 9.2 indicates that the three groups show significant variation in both settlement size and elevation. In addition, the size of individual structures would appear bear little relationship to the agricultural regime with which they are associated. However, the effects of post-medieval land use on the survival of the more ephemeral prehistoric

(Pages 289 - 291) Table 9.1 : Study Area 3, hut-circle settlements.

No	Name	NMS No.	NGR	Height AOD (m)	No. Structures	Max Diam. (m)	Min Diam. (m)	Group	Comments
1	Achaeter	ND06SW 44	ND 0490 6156	80	1				
2	Achanarras Hill	ND15NW 20	ND 1450 5520	100	3	19.0	10.0	1	No associated cultivation, other than well-drained, stone-free ground. Structure 'A' overlies 'B'.
3	Achanarras Hill North	ND15NW 23	ND 1475 5577	70	1	13.0		1	No associated cultivation, other than stone-free ground.
4	Achins 1	NC96SE 10	NC 9615 6341	40	2	12.0		3	Settlement almost completely destroyed by forestry ploughing. Associated with enclosure.
5	Achins 2	NC96SE 12	NC 9647 6405	40	1	13.0		2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
6	Achins 3	NC96SE 26	NC 9595 6374	30	1	8.0		3	Associated with clearance cairns, linear clearance and occasional lynchets.
7	Achins 4	NC96SE 32	NC 9600 6350	40	3	11.5	6.0	3	Structure 'C' sits within an enclosure, 47m by 39m.
8	Achlachan Burn	ND15SW 09	ND 1371 5283	60	1	9.0		1	No associated cultivation.
9	Achlachan Moss	ND15SW 10	ND 1459 5262	70	1	3.7		1	No associated cultivation. Now destroyed by land improvement.
10	Achlibster	ND15SW 25/29	ND 1015 5267	80	3	9.0	7.5	1	No associated cultivation.
11	Achnabeinn	ND05NW 36	ND 0402 5738	100					
12	Achrasker 1	NC96SE 37	NC 9922 6326	60	1	7.0		2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
13	Achrasker 2	NC96SE 38	NC 9892 6323	60	1	8.5		3	Associated with a fragmentary field wall, but no clear signs of clearance cairns.
14	Allt Beinn Ratha	NC96SE 42	NC 9550 6320	40	2	8.0	7.5	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
15	Bell Mount	ND07SE 02	ND 0936 7035	70	1	14.5		1	No associated cultivation, although disturbed by modern activity. Previously interpreted as a 'broch'.
16	Ben Dorrery	ND05NE 55	ND 0671 5530	150	1				
17	Black Mire 1	ND06SE 25	ND 0573 6064	70	1	5.0		1	No associated cultivation, other than stone-free ground. Associated with sub-rectangular annexe, 13 by 7m.
18	Black Mire 2	ND06SE 27	ND 0582 6058	70	1	8.0		1	No associated cultivation, other than stone-free ground.
19	Blar a'Choire	ND05NE 37	ND 0677 5564	120	1	11.0		2	Associated with single clearance cairn, and area of stone-free ground.
20	Borag Knowe	NC96SE 21	NC 9750 6290	70	1	9.5		3	May be associated with large and small enclosures.
21	Borlum Rock	NC96SE 18	NC 9748 6347	70	2	7.5		2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
22	Brackside 1	NC96SE 33	NC 9529 6413	50	1	12.5		3	Associated with clearance cairns, a field wall, and stone-free ground.
23	Brackside 2	NC96SE 44	NC 9539 6397	40	1	7.5		3	Associated with a stretch of walling.
24	Brawlbin	ND05NE 15	ND 0646 5606	130	1	11.5		2	Associated with probable clearance cairns.
25	Brims	ND06NE 11	ND 0575 6883	80	1	5.0		1	No associated cultivation, but within area of post-medieval agriculture.
26	Broubster 1	ND06SW 28/29	ND 0280 6110	80	6	10.0	7.5	3	Associated with small enclosures, field walls, lynchets and scattered clearance cairns, on either side of modern road.

No.	Name	NMS No.	NGR	Height AOD (m)	No. Structures	Max diam. (m)	Min Diam. (m)	Group	Comments
27	Broubster 2	ND06SW 43	ND 0204 6180	90	1				
28	Broubster Cottage	ND06SW 39	ND 0180 6240	100	4	11.5	8.0	3	Associated with scattered clearance cairns and field walls.
29	Broubster Village 1	ND05NW 14	ND 0320 5930	100	7	8.5	4.0	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns
30	Broubster Village 2	ND05NW 14	ND 0320 5890	90	7	13.5	6.5	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
31	Carn nam Muc	ND04NE 07	ND 0988 4532	130	1	6.0		1	No associated cultivation, although the site is overlain by a post-medieval shieling and enclosure.
32	Carrside	ND05NE 41	ND 0765 5906	70	1				
33	Clais an Tobair	ND14NW 14	ND 1283 4909	90	2	15.5	8.5	1	No associated cultivation, although are post-medieval structures close to site.
34	Clais an Tuirc	ND05NE 77	ND 0630 5580	150	1				
35	Claperon	NC96SE 22	NC 9725 6295	50	1	10.5		1	No associated cultivation, although situated within post-medieval enclosure.
36	Clashmore	NC96SE 28	NC 9960 6310	70	8	11.5	7.0	3	Associated with extensive area of clearance cairns, and a single lynchet adjacent to structure 'A'.
37	Cnoc An Ratha 1	ND05NE 02	ND 0528 5770	120	1	9.5		1	Levelled into slope, below the 'fort' on Cnoc an Ratha. Now highly disturbed by forestry.
38	Cnoc An Ratha 2	ND05NE 38	ND 0535 5805	100	1	7.5		1	No associated cultivation.
39	Cnoc na Gaoith	ND06SE 17	ND 0556 6030	90	1	6.0		1	No associated cultivation, other than stone-free ground.
40	Cnoc na Moine	NC96NW 02	NC 9420 6510	70	11	10.0	3.0	3	Small, amorphous, irregular structures, associated with fragmentary walling & scattered clearance cairns.
41	Cnoc Scoot	ND05NE 43-6	ND 0801 5642	90	4				
42	Cnoc Stanger		NC 9600 6520	10	7	16.0	12.0	3	Excavated site, associated with considerable evidence of cultivation.
43	Creag Leathan 1	NC96SE 16	NC 9820 6330	100	4	8.0	4.0	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
44	Creag Leathan 2	NC96SE 24	NC 9846 6324	90	1	9.0		1	No associated cultivation.
45	Creagan Liath	NC96SE 17	NC 9900 6400	50	3	11.0	6.0	1	No associated cultivation.
46	Crosskirk	ND06NW 37	ND 0303 6993	10	2	6.0	5.0	1	No associated cultivation, but adjacent to post-medieval settlement.
47	Cruives	ND06SW 37	ND 0277 6206	80	1	7.5		1	No associated cultivation, although site is adjacent to post-medieval house.
48	Dale	ND15SW 31	ND 1351 5203	60	2	12.5	11.5	1	No associated cultivation, although modern road is adjacent to site.
49	Dirlot	ND14NW 15	ND 1232 4384	150	1	7.0		2	Associated with a single clearance cairn.
50	Dorrery 1	ND05NE 22	ND 0750 5540	100	2	10.0	8.5	1	No associated cultivation, although site is within cultivated field.
51	Dorrery 2	ND05NE 36/58/59/60/61/63	ND 0705 5530	130	7	12.5	8.0	3	Associated with filed banks, enclosing stone-free ground.
52	Feith an Ime 1	ND05NE 52	ND 0748 5600	100	1				

No.	Name	NMS No.	NGR	Height AOD (m)	No. Structures	Max diam. (m)	Min Diam. (m)	Group	Comments
53	Feith an Ime 2	ND05NE 78	ND 0740 5620	100	1				
54	Green Point 1	ND06SE 14	ND 0605 6020	70	2	11.0	8.0	2	Associated with clearance cairns and stone-free ground.
55	Green Point 2	ND06SE 28	ND 0590 6030	70	3	12.0	8.5	1	No associated cultivation, other than stone-free ground.
56	Helshetter	NC96SE 11	NC 9670 6350	30	3	7.0	5.5	2	Associated with a small number of probable clearance cairns.
57	Lieurary	ND06SE 11	ND 0784 6196	130	1	8.0		1	No associated cultivation, but site is very disturbed by recent activity.
58	Little Rock 1	NC96SE 13	NC 9760 6350	70	2	7.0	6.0	3	Associated with enclosure, 68m by 42m..
59	Little Rock 2	NC96SE 14	NC 9770 6350	70	2	8.0	6.0	3	Associated with enclosure, 124m by 50m.
60	Loch Calder 1	ND06SE 24	ND 0559 6046	80	1	11.0		1	No associated cultivation, other than stone-free ground.
61	Loch Calder 2	ND06SE 29	ND 0608 6070	70	1	8.5		1	No associated cultivation, other than stone-free ground.
62	Loch Shurrery 1	ND05NW 03	ND 0432 5679	100	1	7.9		1	No associated cultivation, but construction of a dam has flooded most of the adjacent land.
63	Loch Shurrery 2	ND05NW 21	ND 0470 5620	120	2	9.5	6.0	2	Associated with scattered clearance cairns.
64	Lower Dounreay	NC96NE 03	NC 9850 6700	10	2				Domestic floors, one with clay hearth, revealed by limited excavation, within area of cist burials.
65	Mill Pool	ND15NW 67	ND 1090 5620	50	1	12.5		2	Associated with area of bright green grass and 'rings' which may represent the remains of clearance.
66	Ormlie	ND16NW 79	ND 1000 6770	70	1	17.5		1	No associated cultivation, although site is at edge of modern town.
67	Skinnet	ND16SW 03/14	ND 1330 6250	20	2	11.0	5.0	1	No associated cultivation, although area is disturbed by post medieval cultivation. Sub-rectangular footings may be contemporary with hut-circles.
68	The Carachs	ND05NE 80	ND 0690 5510	150	1				
69	Thusater Burn	ND07SE 06	ND 0635 7028	50	2	5.0	5.0	1	No associated cultivation, although are post-medieval cultivation traces close to site.
70	Torr a'Chaise	ND06SW 27	ND 0476 6143	80	1	9.0		1	No associated cultivation.
71	Torr a'Gheodh	ND05NE 47	ND 0868 5606	80	1				
72	Torr-a-Gairbheal	ND05NE 49/50	ND 0850 5548	80	2				
73	Torran Min	ND05NE 71/72/74	ND 0830 5570	80	3				
74	Tulach an t'Sionnaich	ND06SE 33	ND 0706 6213	70	1	7.0		1	No associated cultivation, although area is disturbed by recent land-use.
75	Tulach Luib Moire	ND14SW 02	ND 1091 4032	170	1	6.7		1	No associated cultivation, although site is overlain by sheepfold.
76	Upper Buolloch	ND06SE 31	ND 0571 6153	90	1	8.0		1	No associated cultivation.
77	Upper Dounreay	ND06NW 32	ND 0055 6607	50	1	8.0		1	No associated cultivation, although site is within cultivated land.
78	West Shebster	ND06SW 35	ND 0080 6320	80	2	10.0	4.5	3	Associated with clearance cairns and field walls.



Map 9.1 : Study Area 3, location of hut-circle settlements.

		Group 1	Group 2	Group3
Number of sites		34	14	15
	Maximum	170	150	130
Height AOD:	Minimum	10	30	30
	Mean	79	84	67
No. of	Maximum	3	6	11
Structures:	Minimum	1	1	1
	Mean	1	2	3
Diameter	Maximum	19.0	13.5	12.5
Of largest in group:	Minimum	3.7	7.0	7.0
	Mean	9.3	9.6	10.0
Diameter	Maximum	11.5	8.0	8.0
Of smallest in group:	Minimum	5.0	4.0	3.0
	Mean	7.6	5.9	6.2

Table 9.2 : STUDY AREA 3, characteristics of hut-circle settlements, by group.

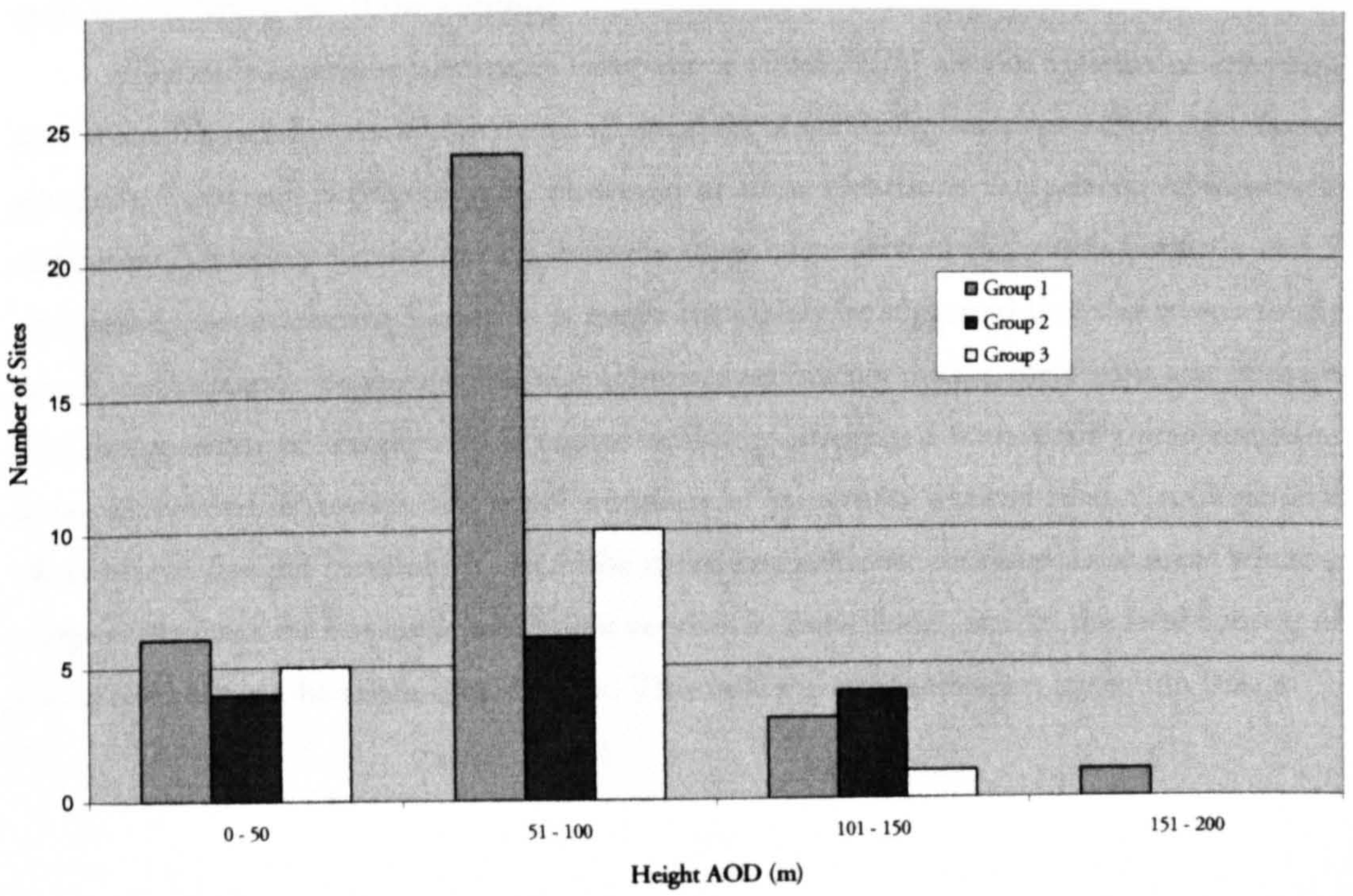


Figure 9.1 : STUDY AREA 3, elevation of hut-circle settlements, by group.

monuments, like hut-circles and their associated cultivation traces, should always be borne in mind, as it is likely to create a bias within statistical evidence such as that presented here. I will explore this in more detail in the discussion of general aspects of hut-circle settlement which follows.

Turning first to site elevation (Figure 9.1), it is notable that very few sites of any group fall between 0m and 50m AOD. Indeed, the land area which falls in this range within the study area is limited, being restricted to a narrow coastal strip and the immediate valley floors of the River Thurso and the Forss Water. This area has been the most intensively cultivated in the study area in recent times. In addition to alluvial deposition along the river systems and the destructive effects of the construction of the modern settlements of Thurso and Hallkirk, it is unsurprising that few hut-circle settlements have survived at lower elevations.

Between 51 and 100m AOD, Group 1 settlements outnumber Groups 2 and 3 by a ratio of more than 2:1. However, once again much of the land below the 100m contour is presently in cultivation, the only notable exceptions being the lower slopes of Creag Leathan and Beinn Ràtha, and the effect of this on the survival of hut-circle settlement is impossible to quantify. It is, however, likely that many early field systems have been overlain and ploughed away by recent cultivation. This seems particularly likely in the case of sites such as Broubster 1 (26), Ormlie (65), Skinnet (66) and Upper Dounreay (76), which are set amidst land which is currently in cultivation. The overall effect of modern agricultural practice is likely to have been to create Group 1 sites artificially , and therefore to introduce a positive bias in their favour below the 100m contour.

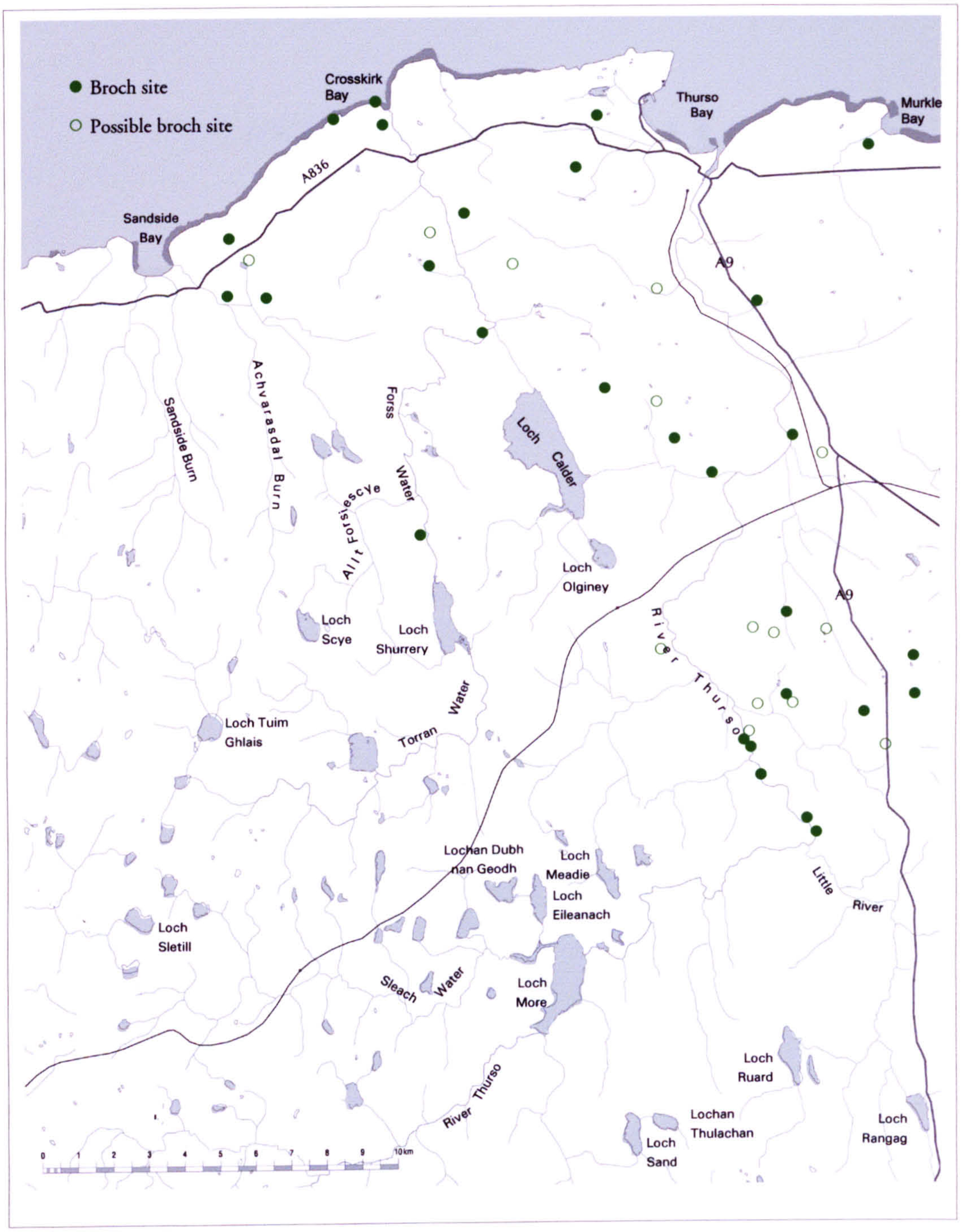
The only extensive landscapes lying above 100m AOD are the uplands to the south and west of the study area, where the small numbers of surviving hut-circles limit the value of generalised discussion (Figure 9.1). However, at these elevations the pattern of hut-circle settlement is broadly similar to that in Study Area 1 (see section 7.2), with Group 1 and 2 sites greatly outnumbering Group 3. It might tentatively be suggested that this relates to the use of these uplands for short-term, non-intensive agriculture during prehistory, and perhaps also the presence of temporarily occupied buildings associated with nearby settlements at lower elevations. However, the small numbers of structures present render such general observations limited in value. It would be more profitable to consider those areas where a range of evidence for hut-circle settlement survives in some detail, so that the local context of this settlement can be taken into account. This task will be undertaken in section 9.3.

9.2.2. Brochs

There are 29 firmly identified broch sites in north west Caithness (Map 9.2), and a further 15 sites whose identification is less secure (Table 9.3). Although comparable to Study Area 1, this is a much smaller number of sites than in Study Area 2, which is similar in area and the range of landscapes represented. However, as noted in section 6.3.4, the southern part of the present study area is largely comprised of marginal upland. Broch sites are found as far south as Tormsdale, near the south-eastern boundary of the study area, but this area of improved land is an inland extension of former cultivation along the River Thurso. To the west of the study area, there are no brochs further south than Tota an Dranndain (21) to the north of Loch Shurrery, and settlement does not extend into the uplands to the south of Ben Dorrery. Other than these inland extensions along the major river systems, then, broch settlement is almost exclusively confined to areas occupied by modern agriculture, a point well made by Swanson (1988, 94). Indeed, over the study area as a whole, broch sites appear more evenly distributed than within Study Area 2 (section 8.2.2), with few sites being located less than 1km apart. There are also fewer notable concentrations of broch sites than in Study Area 2. Concentrated groupings are limited to a group of three sites centred on Achies West (33), although only one of these, Achies East (1), is now sufficiently well-preserved to allow a firm identification as a broch. Some 2km to the south is a group of 5 sites in the Westerdale area. Again, only two of these, Tulach Buaile a'Chroic (23) and Tulach Lochain Bhraseil (24), are sufficiently well-preserved to allow a firm identification as broch sites.

As in Study Area 2, there is a marked lack of broch sites along the Pentland Firth coast to the north of the study area. This does not appear to be explicable in terms of a lack of good marine access as, despite the cliff-girt nature of much of the coastline, there are at least four points at which the sea is easily accessible, Murkle, Thurso, Sandside and Crosskirk Bays. Study Area 2 (section 9.3.1) has demonstrated that brochs might be expected in coastal locations, even where the nature of the coastline makes direct access to the sea impossible. Broch sites are located within 1.5km of the coast near to Murkle Bay at Burnside (6), to Thurso Bay at Scrabster Mains (18) and to Sandside Bay at Knock Urray (17), but no closer. However, there are two sites close to Crosskirk Bay, at Tulloch of Lybster (26) and the excavated site of Crosskirk (10) itself, despite access to the sea here being far more restricted than in the case of the much more extensive sandy bays further along the coast. This suggests that other influences on the survival of broch sites close to the sea should be considered. The most pressing of these is coastal erosion. In Study Area 2, it was noted that broch sites are often

(Pages 297 - 298) Table 9.3 : Study Area 3, broch sites (1 - 29: firmly identified sites, 30 -44: possible sites).



Map 9.2 : Study Area 3, location of broch sites.

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Status	Height AOD (m)	Mound Diameter (m)	Mound Height (m)	Internal Diameter (m)	External Diameter (m)	Wall Thickness (m)	Surrounding Buildings?	Outer Boundary?
1	Achies East	ND15NW 13	ND 1400 5565	Unexcavated	70	45.7	4.3		23.8		yes	no
2	Achunabust	NC96SE 07	NC 9943 6463	Unexcavated	50	30.0	1.8	9.0	19.0	5.0	yes	no
3	Achvarasdal	NC96SE 05	NC 9834 6469	Excavated	40		1.7	10.0	18.2	4.1	yes	no
4	Ballone (Mybster)	ND15SE 08	ND 1619 5280	Unexcavated	90	39.0	3.7				yes	no
5	Brimside Tulloch	ND06NW 22	ND 0495 6696	Unexcavated	60	19.0	1.4				no	no
6	Burnside (Murkle)	ND16NE 02	ND 1626 6881	Unexcavated	20	18.3	3.2				yes	yes
7	Cairn of Sibmister	ND16NE 02	ND 1626 6881	Unexcavated	60	33.0	1.5		16.5		yes	yes
8	Carn na Mairg (Cairn Merk)	ND15SW 22	ND 1331 5103	Part excavated	60		2.4		15.8		yes	yes
9	Cnoc Donn	ND15SW 05	ND 1400 5330	Unexcavated	70	22.0	2.5				yes	yes
10	Crosskirk	ND07SW 04	ND 0248 7012	Excavated	10		3.5	9.5	21.1	5.8	yes	yes
11	Framside	ND06SE 05	ND 0890 6199	Unexcavated	80	40.0	4.3		16.0		yes	
12	Green Tullochs	ND06NW 18	ND 0131 6964	Unexcavated	20		3.7	13.1	22.3	4.6	yes	yes
13	Housle Cairn	ND15NW 01	ND 1190 5960	Unexcavated	50	50.0	4.0		24.0		yes	no
14	Hoy	ND16SW 06	ND 1416 6062	Unexcavated	20	24.0	5.4				yes	no
15	Knock Glass	ND06SE 18	ND 0547 6358	Unexcavated	50	18.5	2.0				yes	yes
16	Knock Urray	NC96NE 16	NC 9838 6630	Unexcavated	20	26.5	2.7		16.5		yes	yes
17	Knockglass	ND15SE 05	ND 1761 5329	Unexcavated	100	36.6	4.0				no	no
18	Scrabster Mains	ND06NE 04	ND 0867 6969	Unexcavated	70	22.3	1.5	9.8			no	yes
19	Spittal Farm	ND15SE 02	ND 1756 5438	Part excavated	100	27.0	1.7	12.5			no	no
20	Thing's Va	ND06NE 01	ND 0808 6824	Part excavated	100	33.5	1.2	9.1	18.3	4.6	yes	yes
21	Tota an Dranndain	ND05NW 08	ND 0374 5792	Unexcavated	90		1.5	9.0	17.0	4.0	yes	no
22	Tulach Beag	ND14NW 01	ND 1459 4980	Unexcavated	70	20.0	1.6				no	no
23	Tulach Buaile a'Chroic	ND15SW 20	ND 1299 5186	Unexcavated	60	27.0	3.0				yes	yes
24	Tulach Lochain Bhraseil	ND15SW 19	ND 1282 5203	Unexcavated	60	35.0	2.5				yes	no
25	Tulach Mor	ND14NW 02	ND 1485 4940	Unexcavated	70				19.0		no	yes
26	Tulloch of Lybster	ND06NW 20	ND 0268 6947	Unexcavated	30	20.0	1.0	9.9	18.7	4.4	yes	yes
27	Tulloch of Shalmstry	ND16SW 08	ND 1316 6443	Unexcavated	30		2.1		21.9		yes	no

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Status	Height AOD (m)	Mound Diameter (m)	Mound Height (m)	Internal Diameter (m)	External Diameter (m)	Wall Thickness (m)	Surrounding Buildings?	Outer Boundary?
28	Tulloch of Stemster	ND06NW 07	ND 0399 6548	Unexcavated	60	21.3	1.5				yes	yes
29	Upper Sour	ND16SW 04	ND 1085 6056	Unexcavated	70	35.0	4.0		18.0		yes	no
30	Achanarras Farm	ND15NE 02	ND 1511 5515	Unexcavated	90							
31	Achbuiligan Tulloch	NC96NE 17	NC 9894 6570	Unexcavated	40	45.0	4.5					
32	Achies	ND15NW 15	ND 1364 5506	Unexcavated	80	28.0	3.0					
33	Achies West	ND15NW 16	ND 1305 5522	Unexcavated	80							
34	Achingoul	ND15SW 01	ND 1047 5463	Unexcavated	60	20.0	0.6					
35	Achlochan Moss	ND15SW 06	ND 1418 5306	Unexcavated	70	27.0	2.0					
36	Balvedavist	ND15SE 11	ND 1680 5185	Unexcavated	80	30.0	0.5					
37	Castlehill	ND16NE 11	ND 1936 6876	Unexcavated	10	16.5	2.1					
38	Dale Farm	ND15SW 07	ND 1320 5304	Unexcavated	60	36.0	3.0					
39	Dale House	ND15SW 16	ND 1297 5227	Unexcavated/ Destroyed	60							
40	Geise	ND16SW 09	ND 1036 6480	Unexcavated	50	30.0	1.5					
41	North Calder	ND16SW 10	ND 1035 6160	Unexcavated	60	46.0	4.0					
42	Oust	ND06NE 07	ND 0632 6552	Unexcavated	80							
43	Sibster	ND16SW 07	ND 1499 6011	Unexcavated	40							
44	Stemster Hill	ND06NW 21	ND 0400 6642	Unexcavated	70	32.9	2.7					

placed above steep cliffs and on narrow headlands, even where there is no good access to the sea. Although this is not obviously the case along the north coast of the present study area, it might be expected that a combination of the well-jointed flagstone bed-rock with the particularly brutal sea conditions of the Pentland Firth, where the sea is recorded as having swept over cliffs more than 60m in height (Omand 1989, 19), might have contributed to the loss of sites through processes of erosion. At the excavated site of Crosskirk (10), the effects of marine erosion, which was the reason for excavations being undertaken, were very evident (Plate 9.1). Although the site seems always to have been located on a promontory defined by a steep-sided geo, erosion of weaknesses in the underlying strata since the abandonment of the site had been severe enough to cut into the broch wall itself, and only its foundations on the seaward face remained (Fairhurst 1984, 19). It seems likely that accelerating coastal erosion in the period between the excavations and the present would have cut deeply into the site, as has been the case at the better known site at Jarlshof, Shetland, where more than half of the broch has been lost to the sea (Hamilton 1956). At Green Tullochs (12), 1.25km to the west

Plate 9.1 : Marine erosion of the broch wall at Crosskirk (Fairhurst 1984, Illus 3).

of Crosskirk, similar processes of erosion are in train. Traces of surrounding buildings to the north of the site are already badly eroded, and the sea has begun to cut into the outer wall-face of the broch itself. Taking the evidence from these sites into account, it is possible that there was once a greater number of coastal broch sites in the study area than is now evident.

Given that the distribution of known broch sites is at least superficially related to that of cultivable land, it is unsurprising that no sites are known above 100m AOD (Figure 9.2). The majority of the landscapes above this elevation comprise marginal uplands, including large areas of blanket peat . Although fewer numbers of sites are set at elevations between 0 and 40m, this is due to the fact that limited areas fall below the 40m contour. The eight broch sites at lower elevations are those in low-lying areas along the River Thurso. Indeed, the overall distribution of brochs within the study area can be considered to be a riverine one, as no certainly identified site is more than a few hundred metres from one of the major rivers, or their tributaries (Map 9.2). It is clear that the presence of a nearby water source would be essential to the location of predominantly agricultural settlement. Given the ubiquity of water sources in north west Caithness, however, the identification of a location close to them possesses little explanatory power in itself.

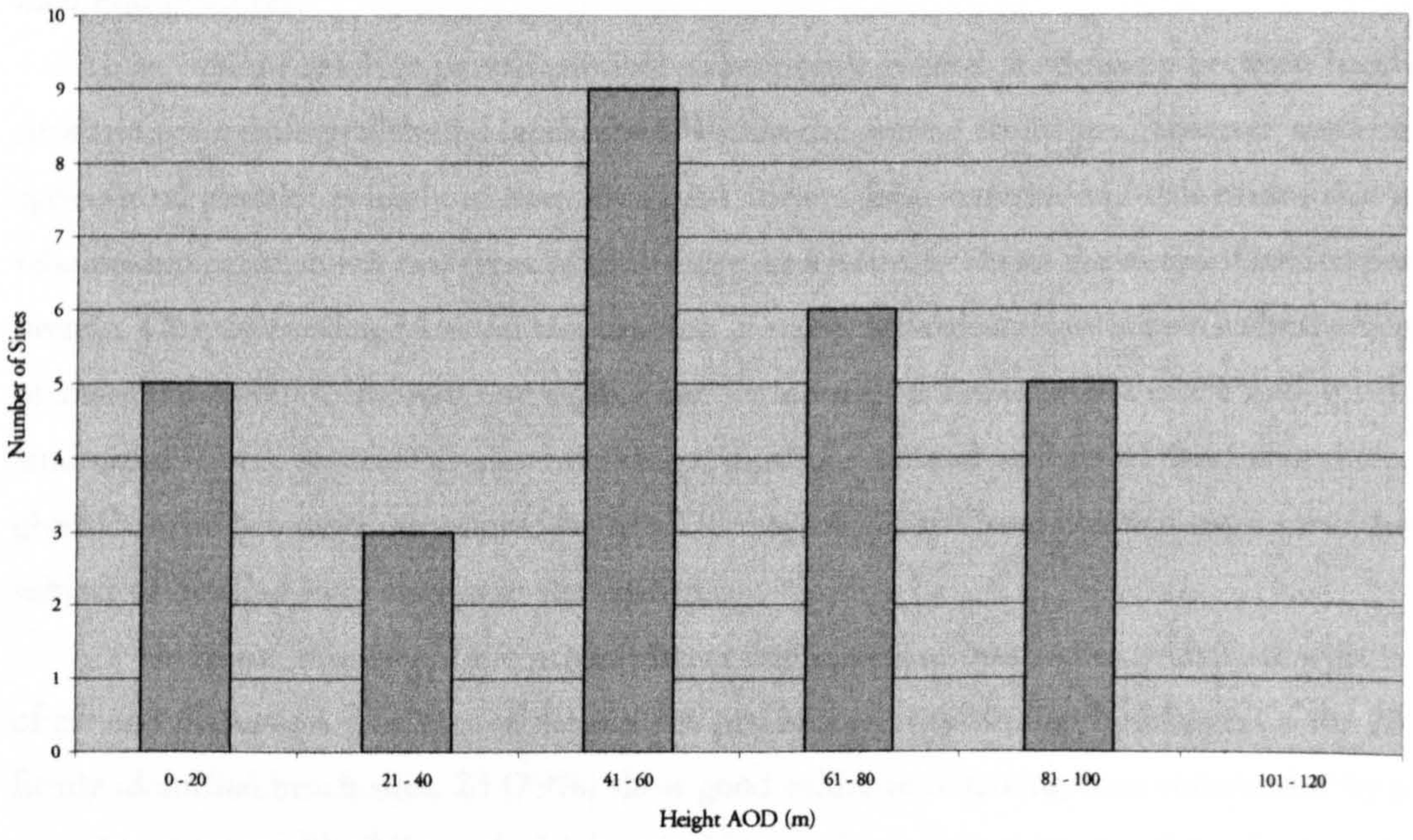


Figure 9.2 : STUDY AREA 3, elevation of broch sites.

There are 15 sites within the study area which cannot be identified with certainty as brochs (Table 9.3) which represents a ratio of just under 1:2 to firmly identified sites. This is comparable with that in Study Area 2, which is just over 1:2, and it is likely that similar processes of destruction have affected the survival of sites in both areas. While there are no well documented instances of the destruction of broch sites, this may be due more to a lack of published information in relation to the present study area than to lower rates of destruction processes. Indeed, there are two sites, Sibster (43) and Geise (40), which, although traditionally the sites of brochs, have exhibited no surface remains when visited by OS and RCAHMS surveyors since 1911 (RCAHMS 1911b, 47, 430). Within the area of the modern farm at Oust (42) is a pair of rock-cut subterranean features, very similar to the pits found on six excavated sites in Caithness, including the site of Crosskirk within the present study area (Swanson 1988, figure 53). Again, these features may represent the scant remains of a broch site which has been otherwise completely destroyed by recent building and agricultural practice. The nature of the other possible broch sites within the study area (Table 9.3), the majority of which are amorphous grassy mounds set in cultivated areas, suggests that the former extent of broch settlement may once have been much greater than at the present. The sites within the cultivated landscape around Dale Farm and House have clearly been very damaged by ploughing, and it is not impossible that other sites have been completely removed by post-medieval practices.

In Study Area 1, it proved possible to propose a general relationship between broch sites and pre-existing cultivated landscapes. Within the present study area, however, modern agricultural practice is likely to have destroyed ancient field systems, and this means that a relationship between the two types of settlement does not exist across the range of landscapes present. Only in restricted areas at the junction of recent agricultural landscapes and expanses of marginal upland, is there any significant juxtaposition between hut-circle and broch landscapes. There seems little potential in attempting a general analysis of these areas here, given that the two most important, the Ben Dorrery and Reay/Creag Leathan areas, form the subject of detailed local studies in section 9.3.

There are, however, some general structural aspects of broch sites, which are worthy of general discussion. The first of these is the presence of surrounding buildings. Of the 29 firmly identified broch sites, 23 (79%) show good evidence of having been surrounded by a complex of external buildings, the highest incidence of this feature in any of the three study areas. Of the sites with surrounding buildings, 13 (57%) were also furnished with an outer boundary, comprising a combination of exterior wall or earthen rampart and one or more ditches (Table 9.3). The proportion of the total number of broch sites with outer boundaries, 14 or 50%, is closely comparable to that within Study Area 2, where 48% of broch sites

Landscape Context	Total No. of Sites	No. With Outer Boundary	% of Total With Outer Boundary
Low-lying inland sites	18	7	39
Coastal sites	5	5	100
Upland sites above 100m AOD	6	2	33

Table 9.4 : Study Area 3, summary information on broch sites with outer boundaries.

display this structural feature (section 8.2.2). The presence of outer boundaries does, however, appear to be less closely related to the general landscape context in which they are found than in Study Area 2 (Table 9.4). This again suggests that a defensive function is unlikely to have been a primary consideration in the siting of the brochs. Local conditions will undoubtedly have been influential. However, almost two thirds of sites set in a rolling table-land, with little natural defensive potential, were not provided with the additional protection of an outer boundary, a very similar proportion to those in upland situations where more naturally defensive locations would be expected to be available. This in turn suggests the lack of a general context within which routine defence of the domestic domain was necessary. As I have already argued in Chapter 7, outer boundaries are likely to have been at least partly concerned with the establishment of a symbolic separation from the surrounding landscape.

There are only 6 sites in total which lack evidence of surrounding buildings. It therefore seems that brochs frequently formed a focus for wider settlements. However, four of the sites without surrounding buildings are set close together in pairs. The first comprises the twin sites of Tulach Mor (25) and Tulach Beag (22), set alongside the River Thurso at the edge of the Flow Country to the south of the Study Area. The second pair of sites comprises the brochs of Knockglass (17) and Spittal Farm (19), set within 1km of one another to the south-east of Spittal Hill. Unfortunately, although there have been partial, undocumented excavations at Spittal Farm, only at Tulach Beag is the entrance orientation clear. Although this is to the south, in the general direction of Tulach Mor, there is insufficient evidence to propose a more general pattern of mutual orientation between sites over the study area as a whole.

I have argued for the significance of broch entrance orientation in influencing both the direction of approach to the sites, and the way in which they were related to wider landscape contexts. It is likely that entrance orientations were not merely a response to either simple climatic and environmental factors, or a rigid adherence to cosmologically-linked practices. Rather, I have suggested that directions of both access and egress would have been important in the maintenance of the social meaning of the building through routine practice. Within

No.	Name	NGR	Status	Entrance Orientation
3	Achvarasdal	NC 9834 6469	Excavated	ESE
8	Carn na Mairg (Cairn Merk)	ND 1331 5103	Part excavated	E
10	Crosskirk	ND 0248 7012	Excavated	SE
12	Green Tullochs	ND 0131 6964	Unexcavated	NE
20	Thing's Va	ND 0808 6824	Part excavated	SE
21	Tota an Dranndain	ND 0374 5792	Unexcavated	NW
22	Tulach Beag	ND 1459 4980	Unexcavated	S
27	Tulloch of Shalmstry	ND 1316 6443	Unexcavated	E

Table 9.5 : Study Area 3, broch sites with visible entrance orientations.

the present study area, however, at only 8 sites is the state of preservation sufficient to allow the entrance orientation to be ascertained with any certainty (Table 9.5). Of these, 6 have entrances oriented in an arc between north-east and south-east. Although this might be viewed as evidence for a pattern of orientations based on solar alignments, in only two instances would this seem a justifiable interpretation. At both Carn na Mairg (8) and Tulloch of Shalmstry (27), easterly entrance orientations appear largely independent of local topography or the presence of other sites. At both sites the entrance is oriented due east, in the direction of gently undulating ground. These orientations would not make the best use of the physical landscape to heighten the visual impact of the brochs themselves, neither do they appear to relate to any surviving monuments. Indeed, it may be significant that these are the only sites with entrances which are oriented due east, and it is at least possible that solar alignments were chosen over other considerations when they were constructed. This should serve to emphasise the localised nature of the relationship between specific instances of broch architecture and their landscapes, and hence emphasis the need for a local scale of view.

This last possibility notwithstanding, at all of the other sites where entrance orientations are visible, interpretations may be sought in the nature of local landscapes. At Thing's Va (20) and Tota an Dranndain (21), entrances are oriented in order that the ground rises behind the sites as they are approached, and this may have ensured that the brochs broke the skyline when standing to their original height, thus increasing their architectural impact. At all of the other sites with visible entrance passages, their orientation appears to be best explained in terms of a reference to other sites within the immediate landscape. The possible orientation of Tulach Mor (25) towards Tulach Beag (22) has already been noted. Of the three sites in the vicinity of Crosskirk Bay, Crosskirk (10) itself and Green Tullochs (12) to the west would appear to have been oriented towards other nearby sites (Green Tullochs towards Crosskirk

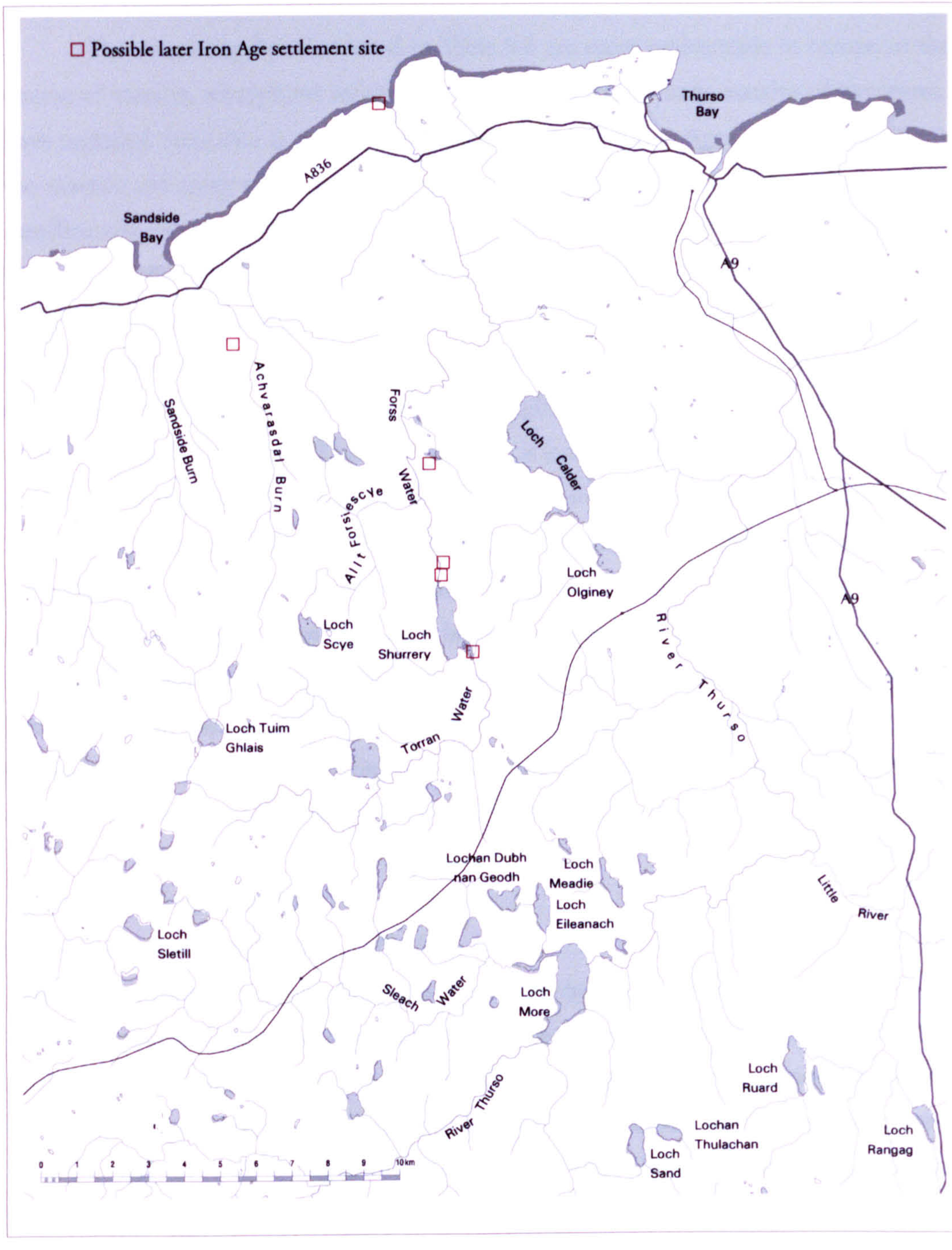
and Crosskirk towards Tulloch of Lybster (26)). Similar patterns of orientation between coastal sites located close to one another have already been noted in Study Area 2. Similarly, the entrance passage of the excavated broch at Achvarasdal (3) is oriented in the general direction of the nearby site at Achunabust (2), and these sites will be discussed in detail in section 9.3.1. Here, an attempt will be made to explore the ways in which general patterns such as those discussed here might result from routine practice on a local scale.

9.2.3. Later Iron Age Settlement

There are only six sites within the study area which might represent occupation dating to the later Iron Age, and none of these can be firmly dated (Table 9.6). The excavated broch site at Crosskirk provides the only secure evidence of occupation during the first millennium AD within the study area. Late occupation at the site was represented largely by the re-use of sections of its surrounding settlement. As excavation of the surrounding buildings at the site was far from total, a shortcoming of Caithness broch excavations in general, it is possible that discrete Later Iron Age buildings may have existed. As I have discussed above, almost 80% of broch sites within the study area display evidence of having been surrounded by complexes of buildings. It is therefore likely that evidence of Later Iron Age occupation may exist at many

No.	Name	NMRS No.	NGR	Status	Height	Description
1	Achnabeinn	ND05NW 11	ND 0430 5726	Unexcavated	100	Massive oval mound with traces of outer bank, containing fragmentary sub-rectangular structures, one with upright stones.
2	Creag Leathan	NC96SE 06	NC 9845 6336	Unexcavated	60	Amorphous stony mound with traces of outer boundary, containing a possible sub-rectangular structure.
3	Crosskirk	ND07SW 04	ND 0248 7012	Excavated/ Destroyed	20	Late use of broch interior and within surrounding structures
4	Lambsdale	ND05SE 01	ND 0511 5477	Excavated	100	Excavations revealed fragmentary sub-rectangular & sub-circular structures within sandy mound.
5	Tota Garbhaig	ND05NW 01	ND 0390 5999	Unexcavated	70	Amorphous stony mound, with fragmentary sub-rectangular structure to E & numerous upright stones.
6	Tulach Gorm	ND05NW 12	ND 0418 5710	Unexcavated	100	Amorphous stony mound containing upright stones.

Table 9.6 : Study Area 3, later Iron Age sites.



Map 9.3 : Study Area 3, Location of later Iron Age sites.

of these sites, especially those such as Achunabust (2), Carn na Mairg (8) and Tulloch of Stemster (28), where the presence of upright slabs suggests the possibility of aisled buildings. Unfortunately, it is impossible to confirm the presence of Later Iron Age structures in the absence of excavation.

The remaining five sites listed in Table 9.6 are more problematic in nature, as they consist of massive, amorphous mounds containing the fragmentary remains of structures. I have included these sites as possibly belonging to the Later Iron Age, as they would appear too massive and stony to represent hut-circles, but appear either too compartmentalised, or insufficiently monumental, to represent the sites of brochs. Perhaps the most interesting of these sites are Achnabeinn (1), Lambsdale (4) and Tota Garbhaig (5), all of which are situated along the upper reaches of the Forss Water (Map 9.3), immediately to the north of the uplands around Loch Shurrery. All of the sites contain the fragmentary remains of sub-rectangular structures, in addition to linear alignments of upright stones, and it remains a possibility that they contain aisled buildings. This interpretation is lent further weight by the fact that these sites lie along the Forss Water, which drains an extensive area of peat bog and upland, the southern approaches to which lie along the valleys of Study Area 1, in particular the Langwell, Berriedale and Dunbeath Straths. As I have argued in Chapter 7, it is likely that routes of movement along these valleys may have been established during the Later Iron Age. The location of similar sites along access routes to this area from the north would be consistent with this interpretation. Although these sites will be considered in detail below, it is worth emphasising here that they are rather fragmentary and amorphous in nature, and the presence of aisled buildings cannot be demonstrated with certainty.

9.3. Local Case Studies

9.3.1. Reay and Creag Leathan (Map 9.4)

The village of Reay is less than 4km from the county boundary of Caithness, and has in the past been in Sutherland. Although modern administrative boundaries are of no direct relevance to prehistoric settlement, the position of this local case study area on the boundary between the two counties in may ways reflects the nature of its landscapes. To the south and west of Reay, the land rises to low, craggy hills, the highest of which is Beinn Ràtha at 242m AOD, which prefigure the upland landscapes of northern Sutherland. The outlying hills of Creag Leathan (127m) and Little Rock (80m) are also situated to the south-east of the area. The overall impression is of a highland landscape in miniature, and it is often easy to misjudge its scale (Plate 9.2). To the north-east, however, the local study area is typical of the agricultural landscapes of northern Caithness. Landscapes of regular, rectangular fields and scattered farms slope gently down to low cliffs, in an area now dominated by the nuclear reactors at Dounreay.

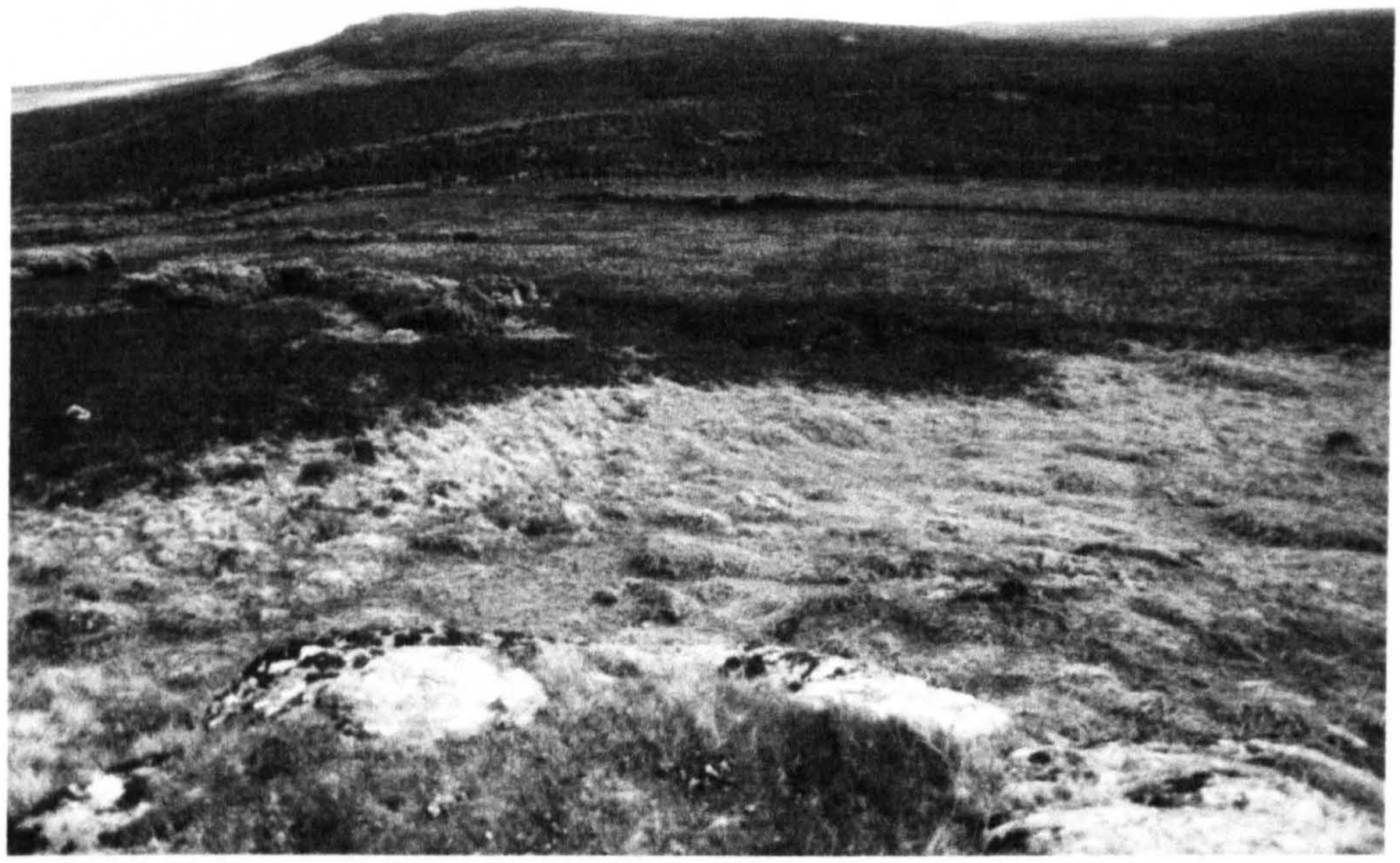


Plate 9.2 : Creag Leathan from the NW.

Immediately to the north of Reay village is Sandside Bay, an expanse of Sand more than 1km in length, hemmed in to either side by rocky cliffs. In selecting this area for a detailed local study, my central aim was to explore the nature of these varied landscapes during the Iron Age, and the influence of this on the archaeology of the Iron Age.

Hut-circle settlement is almost unknown within the agricultural landscapes to the north-east of the local study area. Indeed, there are only two recorded sites, within 3.5km of the coast, between Sandside Bay and Dounreay. Both have been at least partially excavated. The first consisted of the scant remains of two partial floors at Lower Dounreay (64), which were revealed during partial excavations prior to the construction of the Dounreay Atomic Establishment (Cruden 1956). Although one of these floors was found to have a central hearth, confirming the domestic character of the structures, there are few other recorded details of the excavations. It is notable, however, that the evidence appears to have been located within an area of cist burials (Burns 1966), although details of this are similarly vague. The excavators suggest, however, that the burials either pre-date, or are contemporary with, the domestic floors. The best interpretation of this material would seem to be a pair of hut-circles set within a prehistoric cemetery, of likely Bronze Age date.

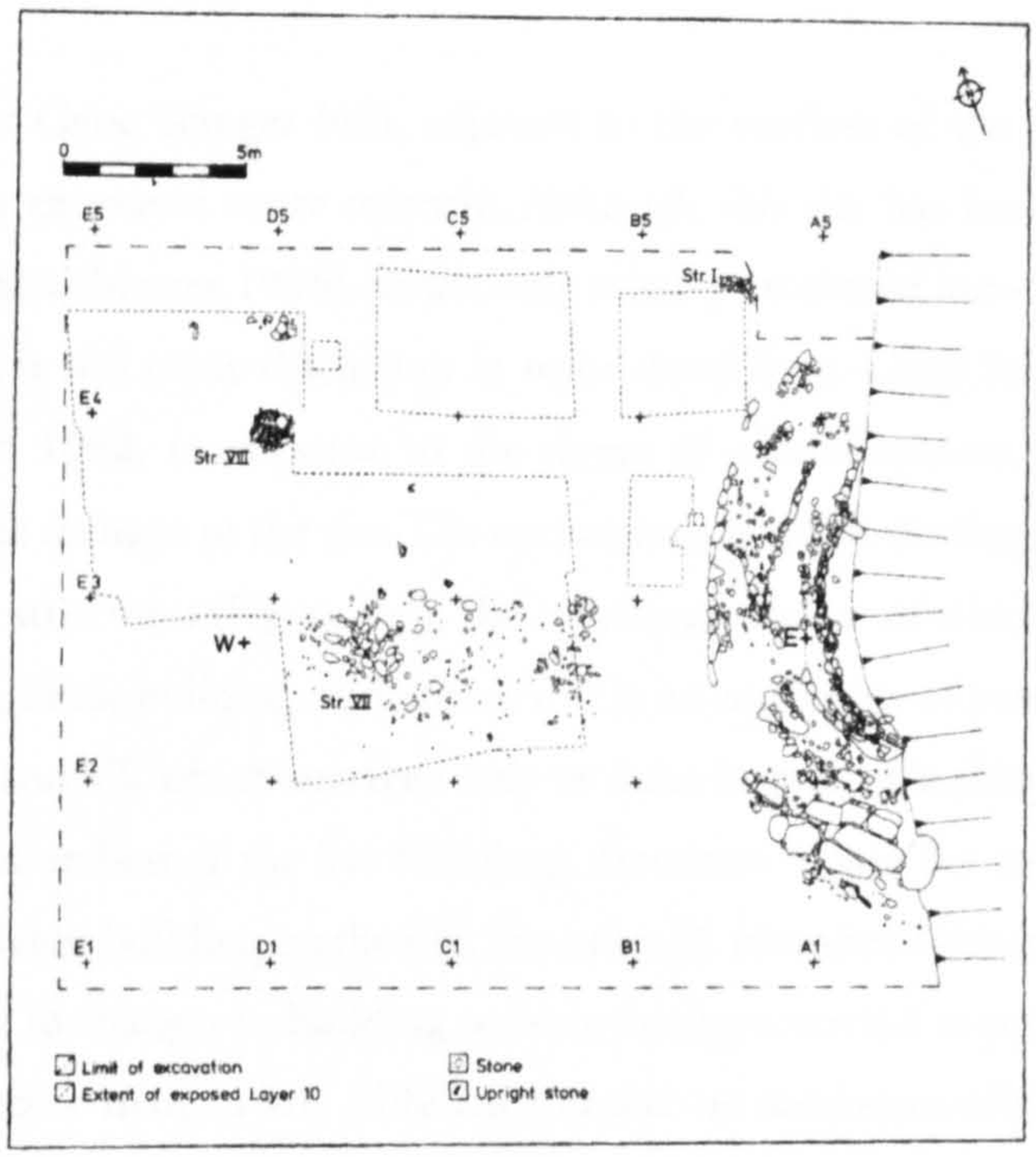


Figure 9.3 : Structures revealed by excavation at Cnoc Stanger (Mercer 1996, Illus 2).

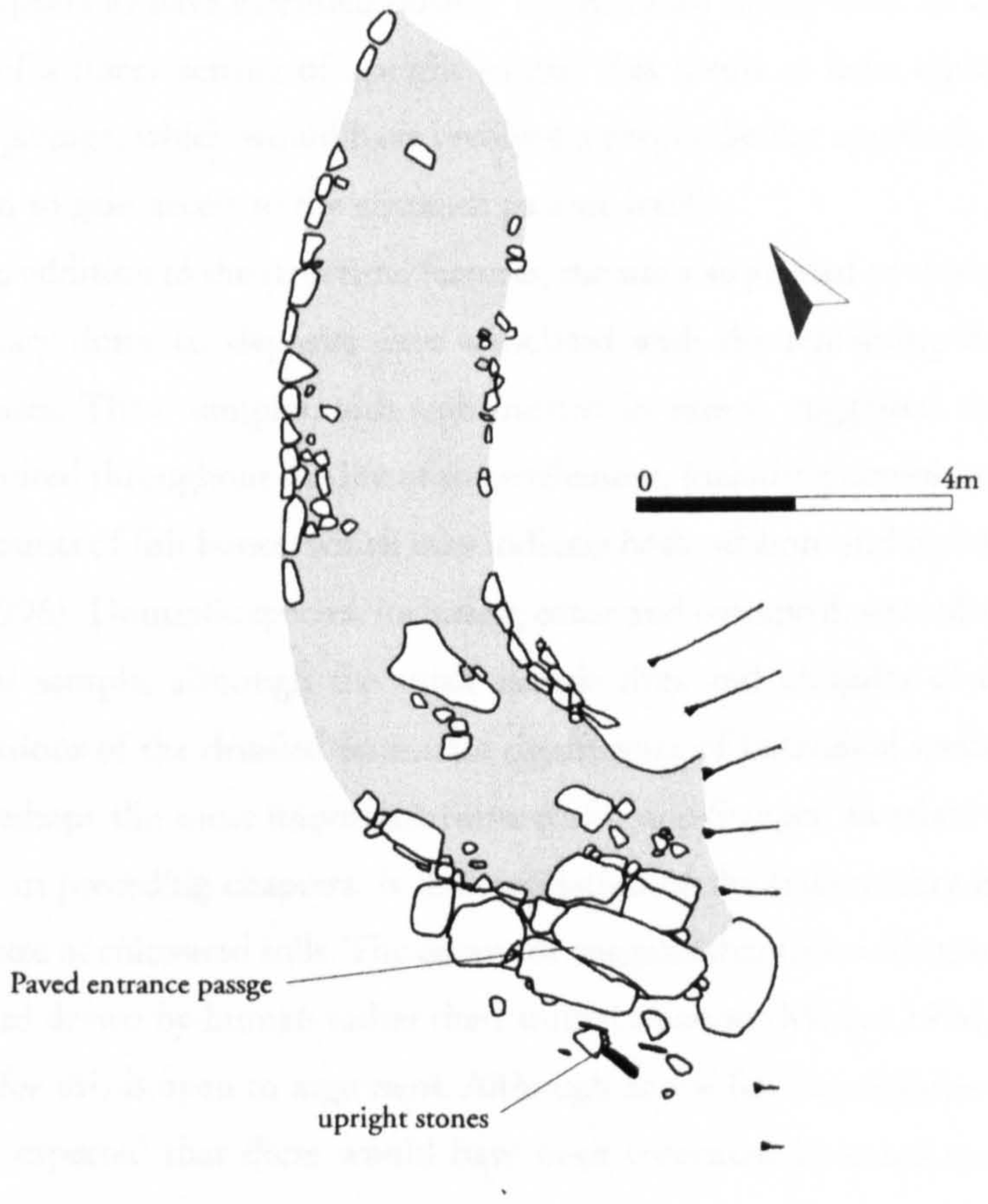


Figure 9.4 : Structure V, Cnoc Stanger (after Mercer 1996, Illus. 5)

The site at Cnoc Stanger (42), adjacent to the outflow of the Sandside Burn into Sandside Bay, was excavated more recently. Although this site has been the subject of an extensive publication (Mercer 1996), as the only reliably excavated hut-circle site within the present study area it will repay discussion in some detail here. Cnoc Stanger was excavated between 1981 and 1982, in response to the threat of coastal erosion, which had already caused considerable damage to the site. The excavations revealed the fragmentary remains of five superimposed structures (Figure 9.3), the curvilinear nature of which suggests that they were roundhouses. These buildings did not survive in an equal state of preservation, especially Structures III, IV and VI, which survived only as short lengths of walling. It does, however, seem likely that the earliest of the five buildings, Structure V, was the most massively-built, certainly than the latest building on the site, Structure II. However, Mercer (*ibid.* 174) relates this variation more to changes in building style, involving a vertical as opposed to a battered outer wall-face, rather than to any difference in size or monumentality between the two buildings. Indeed, it appears that, although both buildings had paved entrance passages, that of Structure V (Figure 9.4) was the more complex. Although the entrance area of this buildings was situated close to the cliff-edge (ibid. 173), and was therefore rather fragmentary, the paving appears to have extended outside the entrance to the west. In conjunction with the remains of a linear setting of upright stones, this seems to have represented an extended entrance passage, which would have involved a perpendicular approach, followed by a right-angle turn to gain access to the entrance passage itself.

In addition to the structural features, the site also yielded environmental information. Fragmentary domestic deposits were associated with the remaining floors of three of the roundhouses. These samples, although limited in extent, suggested that marine resources were exploited throughout the life of the settlement, including deposits of mollusc shells and small amounts of fish bones, which may indicate both offshore and inshore fishing (Finlay, in Mercer 1996). Domestic species, including cattle and ovicaprid, were also represented within the faunal sample, although the small sample sizes and ubiquity of these prevented any interpretations of the detailed economic significance of individual species (*ibid.* 183).

Perhaps the most important feature of Cnoc Stanger, in relation to the arguments advanced in preceding chapters, is the association of the fragmentary buildings with more than a metre of cultivated soils. The excavator suggests that this cultivation was accomplished with an ard drawn by human rather than animal traction (Mercer 1996, 185), although the evidence for this is open to argument. Although actual field boundaries were not located, it might be expected that these would have been truncated by more recent practice on the

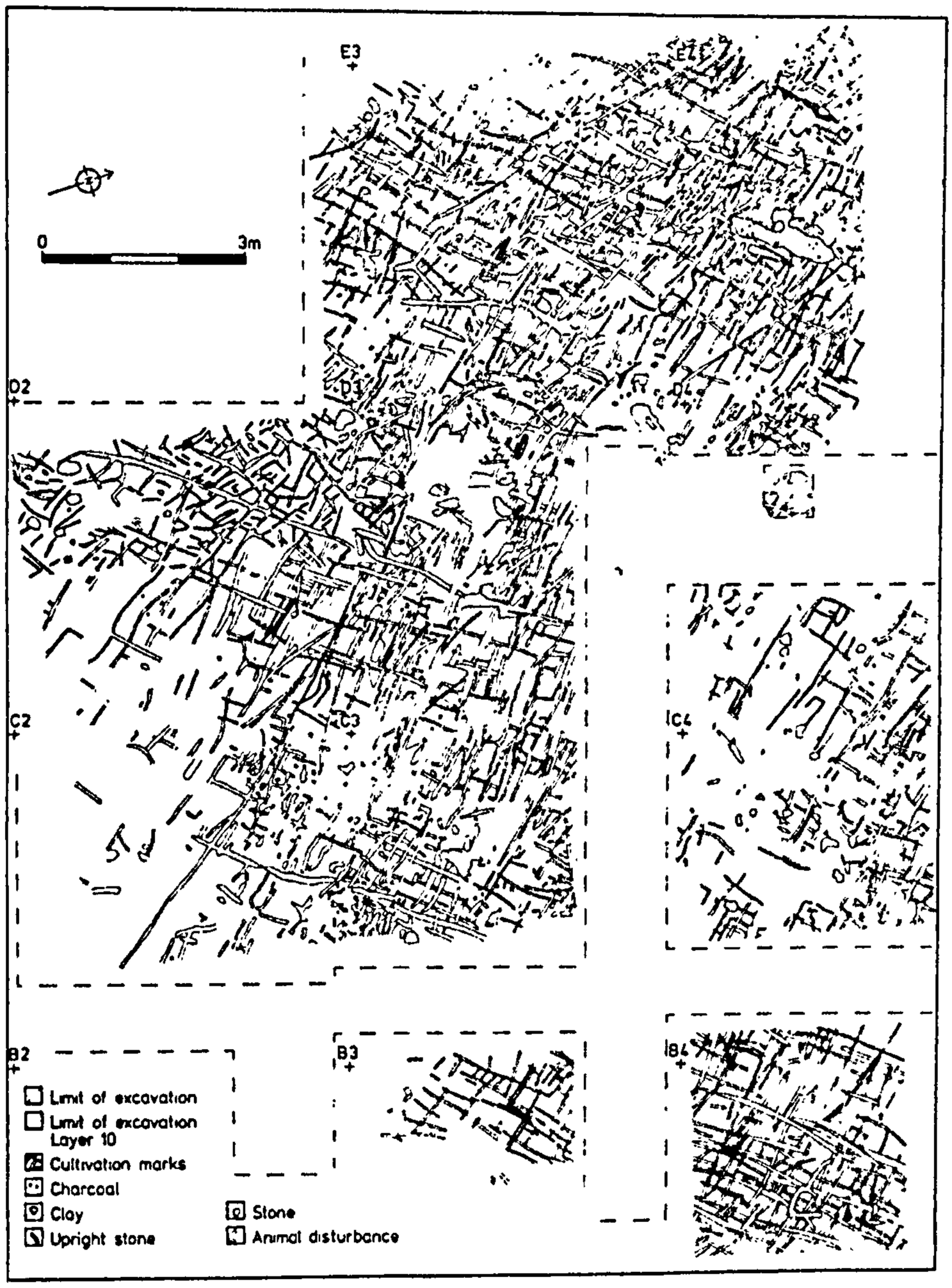


Figure 9.5 : Cultivation traces at Cnoc Stanger (Mercer 1996, Illus 4).

shoreward side of the site. In addition, the consistency of alignment of the plough-marks themselves (Figure 9.5) suggested the presence of formal limits to the cultivated area, perhaps fence lines which have not survived. The cultivated soil also seems to have been regularly fertilised by the use of midden debris, including animal bone, seaweed and shell.

Although radiocarbon dates derived from the site were rather unsatisfactory, the recovery of beaker pottery from a low level in the sequence suggests a commencement of agriculture some time during the late second or early first millennium BC. A date of 960±60bc, reliably associated with Structure V, indicates that settlements associated with enclosed agriculture existed in this area by at least the early first millennium BC. This has clear implications for the nature of prehistoric settlement within the local study area, as I will discuss below.

At Cnoc Stanger we have evidence for the development of settled agriculture, which evidently involved the maintenance of the fertility of the land over time. During the history of this agricultural practice, it is possible that the alignment of the field enclosures themselves was maintained. This enclosed agriculture was associated with a series of roundhouses, the earliest of which shows evidence of architectural elaboration, especially in the area around its entrance. The presence of a house on the same site seems to have been maintained throughout the life of the settlement, and this sequence seems to have involved a degree of change in architectural style, if not in the overall nature of the house itself. This suggests that other apparently single-phase hut-circles may incorporate similar episodes of re-use, as more than one period of occupation was also revealed at Kilphedir (section 7.3.1). This would be impossible to ascertain from field evidence alone, except in a few cases, where secondary walls are visible within hut-circles.

The evidence from Cnoc Stanger is consistent with the arguments which I have advanced in earlier chapters, and has the added advantage of contributing a chronological dimension. It remains here to explore the nature of hut-circle settlement over the remainder of the local study area. There are other hut-circle settlements within the case study area with associated evidence of enclosed cultivation. On the south-east facing slopes of Cnoc na Moine is a large settlement (40), which comprises up to 11 hut-circles and other structures, which vary in internal diameter from 3.0 to 10.0m. The site is heather-covered and set deep in the peat, and few architectural details of the individual structures are visible. However, of the four structures whose entrance orientations can be discerned, none share a common orientation, the range being through a full 270 degrees from due north to due west. This echoes the situation noted in the Watenan, Yarrows and Camster areas (section 8.3.2 – 8.3.3), and it may again be the case that there was a concern with the avoidance of a common orientation. The settlement is associated with cultivation traces in the form of short stretches of walling, although these disappear under the peat. In places, the site is overlain by post-medieval boundaries. The overall extent of cultivation is therefore not evident. The site is also associated with a number of small cairns, most of which are likely to represent field clearance. There is also an extensive area of clearance cairns extending around the south-facing slopes of Cnoc na Moine, which is likely to have been associated with this site. The settlement therefore seems to have been associated with a range of agricultural practice, from field clearance to enclosed plots, which may indicate occupation over a considerable period.

There are further hut-circle settlements associated with field systems along the lower reaches of the Sandside Burn, and its tributary the Backside Burn, which joins it 1.25km south of its outflow into Sandside Bay. The westernmost of these consists of two separate hut-circles. The northernmost, Brackside 1 (22), is the largest, measuring 12.5m by 11.5m. Its

interior is bisected by traces of a bank, which appears to relate to a late use of the structure. There are scattered clearance cairns in the area around the hut-circle itself, and it is also associated with a length of earth and stone bank which extends away to the west, suggesting the remains of an enclosure. Brackside 2 (23) is located 200m to the SSW, and consists of a smaller, circular structure 7.5m in diameter. This is also associated with a length of adjoining field bank, which stretches away to its south-east. The two hut-circles share a common entrance alignment, to the ESE, and it is possible that they represent the remains of a single settlement. This seems the more likely given that the field walls associated with them stretch away in opposite directions, and may once have enclosed a field system beneath the hill-slopes to the west, although this is difficult to demonstrate given the fragmentary nature of the surviving evidence.

500m to the south, along the west bank of the Sandside Burn itself, to the south of the buildings at Achins, is a further area of hut-circle settlement. Here, there are three small, discrete settlements of between 1 and 3 separate structures, arranged linearly along the burn. The central settlement (7) is the most complex, and comprises three separate hut-circles, varying widely in size from 6.0m to 11.5m in internal diameter. Although entrance orientations are not visible at any of the structures, the largest has a conjoined enclosure with dimensions of some 47.0m by 39.0m, which suggests some form of associated enclosed farming practice. This enclosure has an entrance to the NW. The settlement to the south (4), although at one time recorded as comprising two hut circles with an associated enclosure, has now been badly damaged by forestry, and only part of one structure survives. This is bisected by a fence, and the enclosure and other hut-circle have been completely destroyed. The settlement to the north (6), however, survives in better condition. It comprises a single small hut-circle, with an entrance to the south-west, associated with traces of cultivation. This consists mainly of scattered clearance cairns, which are most numerous to the north of the cultivated area, in the vicinity of the hut-circle itself. Further to the south are traces of linear stone clearance, in addition to fragmentary lynchets, suggesting cultivation in this area over a considerable period. I would argue that there may be a chronological dimension to the range of agriculture represented, especially since the central of the three settlements is associated with an enclosure and appears to lack evidence for clearance cairns. This suggests that a strong tenurial association was established with this central area in particular. The evidence of more intensive cultivation to its north, which fades into an area of field clearance, may be further evidence of a gradual concentration on enclosed agriculture in this area over time.

The interpretation of the area around the Brackside and Sandside Burns as a focus of enclosed agriculture is strengthened by the location of other nearby hut-circle settlements. There are three on the gentle hill-slopes to the south and east of those discussed above. Although these are similar in size, comprising between 1 and 3 individual structures, none is associated with an enclosed field system. Two of the settlements (5 & 14) are set on ground which is steeper and less likely to have become a focus for long-term agricultural practice than those discussed above, and these are associated with scattered clearance cairns only. Althoughthe third, near Helshetter (56), is the largest of the three settlements, comprising three individual hut-circles, the buildings themselves are small. Again, the settlement is associated with scattered clearance cairns only. However, one of the structures here displays evidence of having had a smaller secondary structure built within it, suggesting a continued, if periodic, use. The archaeology of this area is complex. Although it appears to indicate the association of the central area along the Sandside and Brackside Burns with enclosed agricultural practice, this may not have involved the abandonment of the more marginal landscapes around it.

In the south-eastern corner of the local study area are the hills of Creag Mhór, Creag Leathan and Little Rock. Although not greatly elevated, Creag Mhór being the highest at 140m AOD, these hills are rocky, and steep in places, and represent a marginal, upland landscape (Plate 9.3). The vegetation is mostly heather and peat bog, with a substantial area of commercial forestry to the south-east. To the north and west, however the gentle lower slopes of the hills are taken up by land which is now pasture, but which has been cultivated in the late to post-medieval period. The immediacy of recently-cultivated land to the hill-slopes is likely to have been a considerable influence on the surviving pattern of hut-circle settlement. Although there is abundant evidence of settlement on the hills themselves, it is almost entirely lacking below the 50m contour, which represents the approximate boundary of recently cultivated land (Map 9.4).

There are, nonetheless, important sites located within the hill landscapes. On the south-eastern slopes of Little Rock, against the base of a line of low crags which define the hill-top, are two adjacent hut-circle settlements with associated enclosures (Plate 9.4). The two structures within the western settlement (58) are small, 6.0m and 7.0m in internal diameter. They are clearly incorporated within the line of the enclosure itself, which measures 58.0m by 42.0m, although its wall appears to partially overlie the wall of the easternmost structure, suggesting that the hut-circles may have been constructed first. Nonetheless, it is clear that hut-circles and enclosure represent elements within a contemporary settlement (Figure 9.6). Both structures share a common entrance orientation, to the south-east. Their

Plate 9.3 : Little Rock from the N.

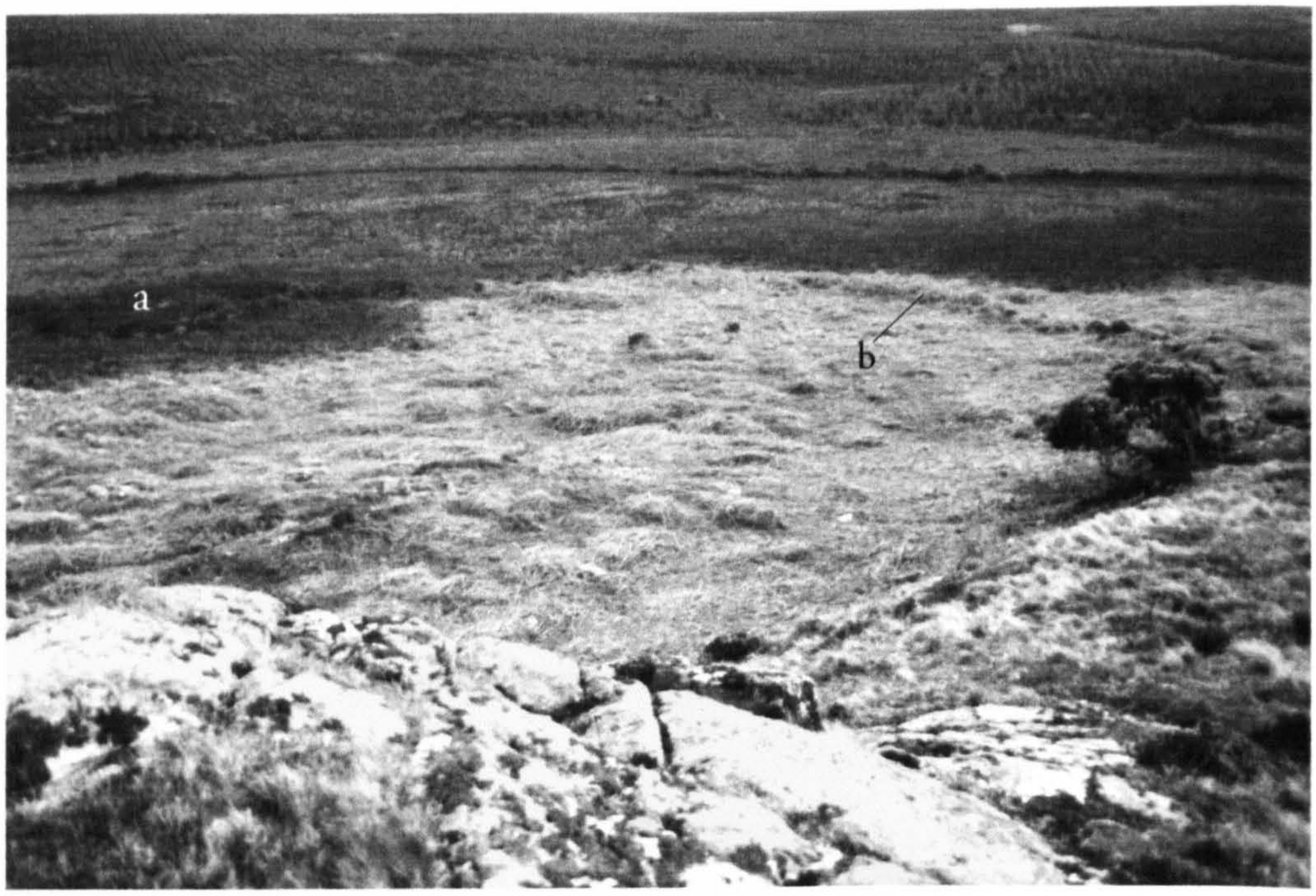


Plate 9.4 : Hut-circle (a) & enclosure (b), Little Rock 1 (58).

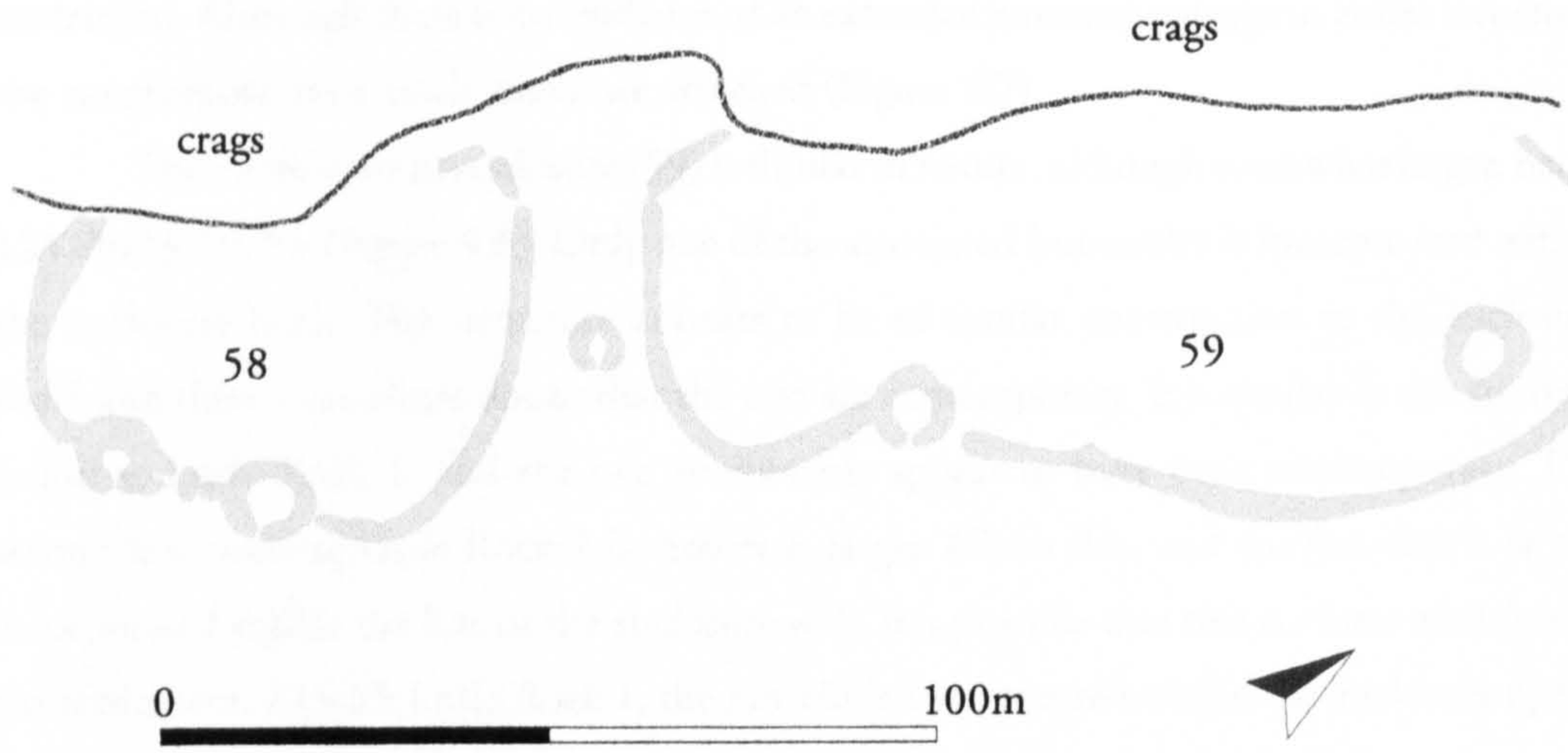


Figure 9.6 : Plan of hut-circles and associated enclosures at Little Rock (after Mercer 1985, Fig. 30).

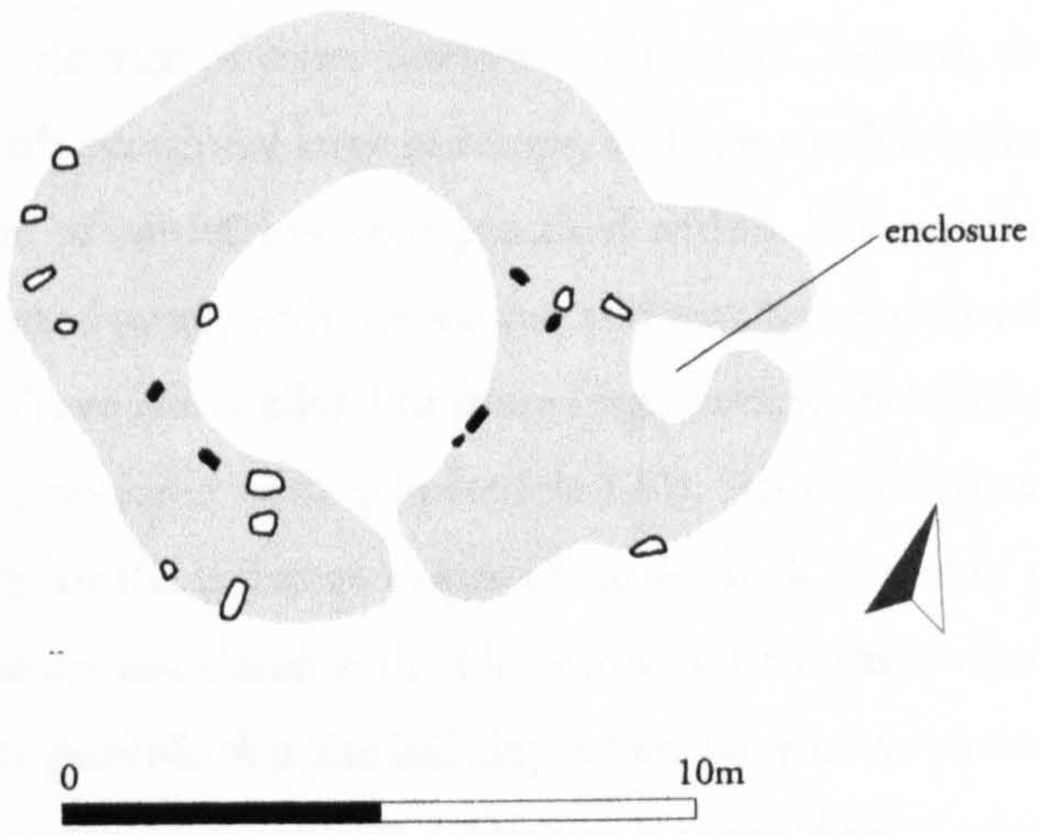


Figure 9.7 : Hut-circle with attached enclosure, Little Rock 1 (58) (after Mercer 1985, Fig. 29)

entrances open outside the enclosure, onto the low saddle between Little Rock and the higher Creag Leathan, and it is apparent that this was the intended direction of approach to the settlement. Although there is no evidence of an extended entrance passage in either structure, the easternmost has a small enclosure attached (Figure 9.7).

The north-eastern enclosure (59) is similar in nature, although somewhat larger, being 124.0m by 50.0m (Figure 9.6). Only one of the associated hut-circles is incorporated within the enclosure bank. This structure appears to be of similar construction to the enclosure itself, and there seems little doubt that the two are contemporary. It is similar in size to those found at Little Rock 1, and the two settlements appear to have been contemporary. The second hut-circle at Little Rock 2 is, however, larger. Given this, and the fact that it is not incorporated within the line of the enclosure wall, it is possible that this is a later addition to the settlement. As with Little Rock 1, the hut-circle incorporated within the enclosure opens to the south-east, outside the enclosure. It would have been approached from the same direction. There is a fifth hut-circle, set between the two enclosures, which opens in the same direction. This is the smallest structure in the group, lacking any evidence of architectural elaboration, and it is possible that it represents an earlier building which antedates the construction of the enclosure.

The remains at Little Rock, then, seem to represent small settlements with associated enclosures. Although the ground within is deeply heather-covered, there is little evidence for cultivation within either enclosure, either in the form of clearance cairns or the lynchets which would represent evidence of more intensive cultivation. Indeed, the ground within Little Rock 2 is stony, with occasional large outcrops, and it seems likely that this would not be the case had any form of cultivation been practised within. It is possible that these sites may not have been connected purely with cultivation, and may even represent stock enclosures, with associated houses. There is a similar, but more fragmentary, enclosure on nearby Borag Knowe, which may be associated with a hut-circle (20). Although there are other small settlements nearby, both on the adjacent slopes of Little Rock (21) and on nearby Creag Leathan (43 & 44), these are associated with cultivation in the form of clearance cairns only (Plate 9.5). It is therefore possible that the hill-slopes here were never permanently enclosed for cultivation. It is, of course, impossible to determine a chronological relationship between the enclosures and hut-circles with associated clearance cairns from field evidence alone. Nonetheless, the presence in this area of settlements which may be associated with farming practice other than the cultivation of crops provides a degree of variation which is not evident elsewhere within the study area. This is especially interesting, in view of the fact that the bones of domesticated animals comprise part of the faunal assemblage from Cnoc Stanger, and it is at least possible that some degree of specialism was involved in the farming practices

of the first millennium BC. Although boundaries would be necessary to prevent livestock from straying, it is the enclosure of the land itself which is most significant. As I have argued in Chapter 3, enclosure of areas of ground implies the existence of long-term tenurial relationships between communities and the land.

Plate 9.5 : Field clearance associated with hut-circle settlement (21).

Although post-medieval agricultural practice has destroyed any evidence for hut-circle settlement on the flat ground between Creag Leathan and the coast to the north, fragmentary field systems have survived on more marginal land immediately to the east. The easternmost of these is at Clashmore (36), which at one time consisted of a settlement of at least 8 hut-circles, associated with an extensive area of clearance cairns. Some of these are large, up to 12m in diameter. In view of the partial excavations at Lower Dounreay discussed above, the possibility that some of the cairns conceal prehistoric burials should not be discounted. When visited by the Ordnance Survey in 1981, a substantial lynchet was visible close to one of the larger hut-circles in this area, suggesting that enclosed agriculture may once have been present. However, recent forestry ploughing has destroyed most of this settlement, and the fragmentary remains of three structures, together with a number of cairns, are all that remains. There is a further single hut-circle recorded at Achrasker (12), alongside the east bank of the Achvarasdal

Burn, in association with a small number of peat-covered clearance cairns. Some 200m further west, below the slopes of Creag Leathan, is another, smaller hut-circle (13) with a fragment of associated walling. This may be the remains of an enclosure. These sites suggest that a range of agriculture may have been practised on the gentle slopes east of the hills in this area, but their general state of preservation is rather too poor to allow this interpretation to be made with any certainty.

There are three broch sites within the local study area which can be identified with certainty, in addition to a further site at Achbuiligan Tulloch (31), which is traditionally identified as the site of a broch. This site has a slightly stepped profile, which may be evidence that it contains the remains of a broch (Swanson 1988, Table 10). However, since it was first recorded (RCAHMS 1911b, 94), the site has been too amorphous for positive identification, a situation which has been exacerbated by recent activity, including the robbing of the site to build nearby structures. Given the uncertain status of this site, the discussion here will concentrate on the three firmly identified sites.

The most remote of these from the area of hut-circle settlement already discussed is Knock Urray (16). This large, turf-covered mound is situated on gently-sloping land, which is now pasture, some 600m from the rocky coast to the east of Sandside Bay. Although no structural details are visible, the stepped profile of the mound tends to confirm its identification as a broch. This stepped profile also suggests that surrounding buildings are present within the mound. When the site was visited during 1910, traces of a ditch were recorded (RCAHMS 1911b, *ibid.*), although this feature is not now visible. It does, however, suggest that the site possessed an outer boundary at one stage in its history. The lack of structural details at Knock Urray means that little can be said about its architecture. Similarly, the intensity of recent practice in the immediate area, including the construction of the Dounreay Nuclear Establishment, has resulted in a dearth of other prehistoric settlement in the vicinity within which to contextualise the site.

The two other broch sites in the local study area are set 1.1km apart, on gently undulating ground to the north of Creag Leathan. Unfortunately, the intervening 1.0km or so has been somewhat intensively used since the sites were in occupation, and includes considerable areas of forestry. As I have discussed above, there are no surviving hut-circle sites in the immediate vicinity of the brochs. The closest evidence of hut-circle settlement is at Creagan Liath (45), some 750m from the easternmost broch site at Achunabust (2). Although

two of the three structures here are quite large, recent practice will have removed any evidence of associated cultivation. The presence of two broch sites close to an extensive area of hut-circle settlement suggests that their construction drew upon existing patterns of land tenure, but this is impossible to demonstrate with any certainty on the basis of existing field evidence.

The broch site at Achunabust (2) comprises an extensive, low grassy mound. Stretches of the outer face of the broch are visible within the mound, together with part of an intra-mural chamber. There is, however, fragmentary evidence of surrounding buildings, confined to the west of the mound, in the form of a slightly stepped profile and areas of protruding stone. Although the entrance orientation of the broch itself is not evident, excavated brochs elsewhere in Caithness (see Chapter 8) are invariably approached through their complexes of surrounding buildings. It is therefore a possibility that the site was approached from the west. This would seem likely, given that the ground begins to rise steeply less than 1km to the east, towards the summit of the Hill of Shebster. If approached from the west, the broch may have broken the horizon when standing to full height. It is also notable that the summit of this hill is capped by a group of chambered cairns, and these may have added to the visual impact of the broch. I have discussed a similar use of local landscapes in section 8.3.2.

1.1 km to the east is the broch of Achvarasdal (3). Although the site has been excavated, no known records of this work survive, and it may have had as much to do with the provision of a garden ornament within the grounds of Achvarasdal House as with genuine antiquarian enquiry. The exterior of the broch has not been exposed, but it is visible as a depression within the mound. The entirety of its interior face and entrance passage are visible, together with a fragmentary guard chamber and intra-mural cell (Plate 9.6). There has, however, clearly been considerable reconstruction of the interior of the broch since its excavation, and it would be unwise to place too much reliance on the details of its structure. The site itself is located within the western portion of a considerable mound, almost 40.0m in maximum diameter. Although the remainder of the mound is rather amorphous, it is likely to contain the remains of surrounding buildings, and a scooped area to the south-west may represent the remains of such a structure. The broch entrance itself opens to the ESE, and although its passage has been extended, this would appear to have been a modern phase of building connected with the conversion of the site into a garden ornament.

The immediate landscape context of Achvarasdal broch is now largely lost. The construction of the adjacent modern house and associated landscaped gardens and woodland both obscures any views from the site, and will have destroyed any surviving evidence for field systems or other settlement in the immediate area. However, it is evident that the broch was constructed on the eastern side of a low natural rise, below the highest ground, and may have been intended to take account of local topography. Its entrance, to the ESE, suggests

Plate 9.6 : Excavated features at Achvarasdal broch (3).

Plate 9.7 : Possible later Iron Age site, Creag Leathan (2).

that the broch may have been approached with higher ground behind, and when standing to full height it will have extended above the sky-line, thus emphasising its visual presence. It may also be significant that the entrance passage is oriented in the direction of the nearby site at Achunabust. I have suggested above that, at the latter site, it is at least possible that the entrance passage is oriented towards the west, in the direction of Achvarasdal. Both are therefore likely to have been built to take account of complex local conditions, making use of the immediate topography and also making reference to other local settlements.

There is little good evidence for Later Iron Age settlement within the local study area. What there is comprises a single site. In open moorland beneath the slopes of Creag Leathan is a large, amorphous mound (2) which contains a confused mass of structural remains. Two small, sub-circular structures set into the southern part of the mound may be a late addition, as they would appear to be scooped into existing debris. To the north of these is a fragmentary and very mutilated structure which may represent the remains of a rectilinear building, although this is far from certain (Plate 9.7). There is no real evidence of aisled construction, although upright stones protrude from the turf here and there. The mound appears to have had an outer boundary or kerb, represented by five or six large, earth-fast stones. Although OS surveyors suggest that this may be the remains of a relatively modern building, the justification for such an interpretation is unclear. This building seems too large for a shieling, and it seems unlikely that a post-medieval house would be built into such a large mound of structural debris in this particular landscape context. There also seems little reason to interpret the site as a neolithic cairn (cf. Mercer 1985, 160).

Although the evidence at Creag Leathan is too fragmentary for it to be firmly identified as the site of an aisled building, its landscape context at least is consistent with such an interpretation. Although the site is situated at quite a low elevation, around 50m AOD, it is within 500m of two small saddles, which allow access through the hills to either side of Creag Leathan itself. This is consistent with the location of aisled buildings in upland landscapes in south-eastern Caithness (section 7.3), and it is at least possible that this site was located on routes of movement towards the uplands to the south. Given the fragmentary nature of the evidence, this interpretation must remain speculative.

Discussion

The excavated evidence from Cnoc Stanger indicates that cultivation was practised in the vicinity of the settlement prior to the early first millennium BC. Although no actual field boundaries were located, the persistence of cultivation in one place over time is highly suggestive of an enclosed agricultural regime, based on short fallow cultivation. There also seems to have been a degree of architectural complexity in association with this, which Mercer (1996, 187)

has argued may be set within a wider context of the development of substantially-built domestic structures throughout northern Scotland. This evidence is consistent with the argument I have developed to this point, which suggests that settlements displaying a degree of architectural complexity in association with enclosed agricultural practice were a feature of the landscapes of north west Caithness at least from the earlier first millennium BC. There is also good evidence from Cnoc Stanger for the maintenance of land fertility, suggesting that access to cultivable land was important in the long-term. In turn, this may be interpreted as evidence for the existence of the kind of tenurial association between communities and the land discussed in Chapter 3.

Unfortunately, recent activity is likely to have cut a swathe through the evidence of prehistoric settlement in the area between Sandside Bay and the uplands to the south. However, the admittedly rather fragmentary evidence of hut-circle settlement associated with the remains of enclosures set on the margins of this upland suggests that enclosed cultivation may one have extended over the flatter landscapes to the north and east. It also seems likely that settlements associated with less intensive, long fallow agriculture once extended along the river systems into the uplands to the south of the local case study area. There are, however, indications of a degree of complexity within this familiar picture of hut-circle settlement, and it is at least possible that in some areas permanent settlement was associated with farming practices other than cultivation. It may be that the permanence engendered by enclosure was as important as the nature of farming practice.

Post-medieval agriculture and building practice, which must have greatly affected the survival of hut-circle settlement, has also destroyed any relationship which may have existed between the broch sites of the area and contemporary agricultural landscapes. Our interpretations of these sites are, therefore, limited to a consideration of their physical landscapes. Nonetheless, it seems that in this respect these sites are consistent with the arguments I have developed to this point. It is likely that broch sites were oriented so as to make use of local topography, to emphasis the dominance of their architecture, and to refer to other nearby settlements.

There is little evidence for later Iron Age settlement, and therefore little value in a detailed interpretation of what exists. However, nothing survives to contradict the argument, advanced in Chapter 7, that the later Iron Age may have seen the extension of settlement along the river valleys into the uplands, linked to patterns of movement across the landscape as a whole.

9.3.2. Ben Dorrery and the Upper Forss Water (Map 9.5)

Although of modest height, its summit standing at only 244m AOD, Ben Dorrery and its neighbour Beinn Freiceadain represent the most prominent high ground in western Caithness. As in the case of the upland areas discussed within the previous local study area, Ben Dorrery is the outer extent of an area of upland which stretches away to the fastness of the Flow Country to the south and west. To the north and east, however, lie the modern agricultural landscapes of the northern Caithness Plain. Ben Dorrery overlooks the upper reaches of the Forss Water to the north-west. Its source, Loch Shurrery, itself fed by the Torran Water, is immediately to the west, although the level of this loch has been raised by the construction of a dam across its outflow. There are other bodies of water on the fringes of the local study area, including the small Loch Olginey and Loch Calder, the largest expanse of fresh water in Caithness. The local study area therefore encompasses a number of varied landscapes, and this section will explore the ways in which an area which is currently marginal may have been used during the Iron Age.

Hut-circle settlement within the local study area is located in two main concentrations. The first is made up from a rather dispersed area of settlement on the lower slopes of Ben Dorrery and on gently sloping ground to the east. The second comprises a more concentrated grouping on the west bank of the Forss Water, around the junction with its tributary the Allt Forsiescye. I will discuss the latter area of settlement first. There are notable empirical differences between the two settlements which survive here. The northernmost, Broubster Village 1 (29) consists of six hut-circles, set in two main groups no more than 150m apart (Figure 9.8). The individual structures are relatively undifferentiated. They are small, ranging from 4.0m to 8.5m in internal diameter. They would seem to be of unitary construction, as their enclosing walls all appear to be of turf or earth with few stones visible. None shows any evidence of architectural complexity, although they share an entrance orientation, towards the south-east. There are scattered clearance cairns across the area around the settlement, but no trace of either contemporary enclosures or lynchets, suggesting a low-intensity of agricultural practice in association with this settlement. This is consistent with evidence of agricultural practice found in association with other similar settlements throughout the study areas. There are also smaller, more concentrated groups of larger cairns set to either side of this settlement. The most clearly defined of these is set some 75m to the north. It consists of nine cairns, eight of which are small, approximately 8.0m in average diameter, and all of which display evidence of both a surrounding curb and a cist within the cairn itself. The ninth, larger, cairn is set towards the north-east of the group. It measures 14.5m in diameter, but there is no evidence of a cist set within it. This group of cairns almost certainly represents a later prehistoric cemetery, perhaps

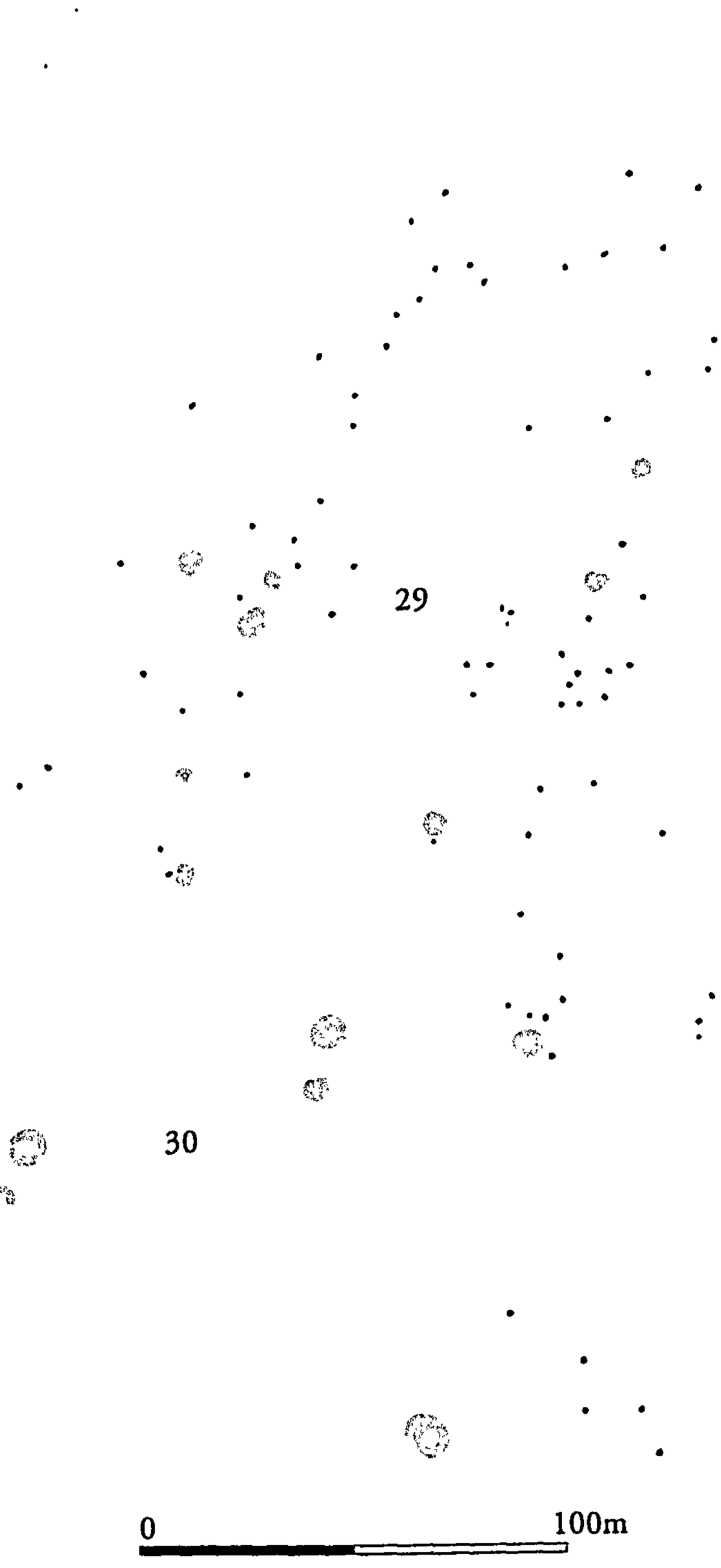


Figure 9.8 : Hut-circle settlements and clearance cairns at Broubster Village (29 & 30) (after Mercer 1985, Fig. 84).

a group of satellite burials related to a large central cairn. Although it is impossible to relate it to the hut-circle settlement with any certainty, possible associations between hut-circles and burial cairns have already been noted at Lower Dounreay and Cnoc na Moine. Given that the structures here lack architectural complexity, and that there is a more complex settlement set on very similar land in the immediate vicinity (see below), it would seem reasonable to argue that the settlement itself may be early, and may be broadly contemporary with the cairns.

The southern hut-circle settlement, Broubster Village 2 (30) comprises seven separate structures, again set in two main groups with an outlying example to the south. Four of the seven are large, between 10.0 and 13.0m in internal diameter. Of these, three are massively constructed with evidence of architectural elaboration in the area around their entrances. Although this generally takes the form of rather amorphous earth and stone mounds to either side of the entrance, that at the southernmost structure within the groups is better preserved. Here, a number of large, earth fast stones protrude from the turf on both sides of the entrance, and these may represent the remains of an extended passage, intentionally controlling the direction of approach (Plate 9.8). The smallest hut-circle lacks such features. However, it is only 4.0m in internal diameter, and may not represent the remains of a permanent dwelling (Plate 9.9); it is situated very close to the structure described above, and may have been a subsidiary building. Certainly, the other small hut-circle does have a pair of earth-fast stones on either side of its entrance. This suggests that small size cannot be easily equated with architectural simplicity.

Although hut-circle settlements discussed elsewhere in this thesis, and in Study Area 1 in particular (Chapter 7), have displayed a general association between architectural elaboration and enclosed agriculture, the only cultivation remains in the area are scattered small clearance cairns. These, like the hut-circles themselves, are set on raised natural mounds, which are likely to be a product of erosion by the small stream channels which seam what is now a rather poorly drained area of pasture. The presence of cultivation traces on these mounds, but not on the surrounding gently sloping marshy ground, may indicate that drainage here has always been too poor to support intensive agriculture. It seems likely that this settlement cannot be explained in terms of a simple relationship between complex architecture and enclosed agriculture. Further settlement may, however, have been located further to the south and west, where late- to post-medieval buildings and associated enclosures are located on better drained land. The presence of much less complex structures immediately to the north does, however, suggest a chronological relationship between the two settlements. As in the Creag Leathan area, there would appear to be considerable complexity present within settlement which is likely to date from at least the first millennium BC, and it is also possible

Plate 9.8 : Remains of elaborate entrance passge at Broubster Village 2 (30)

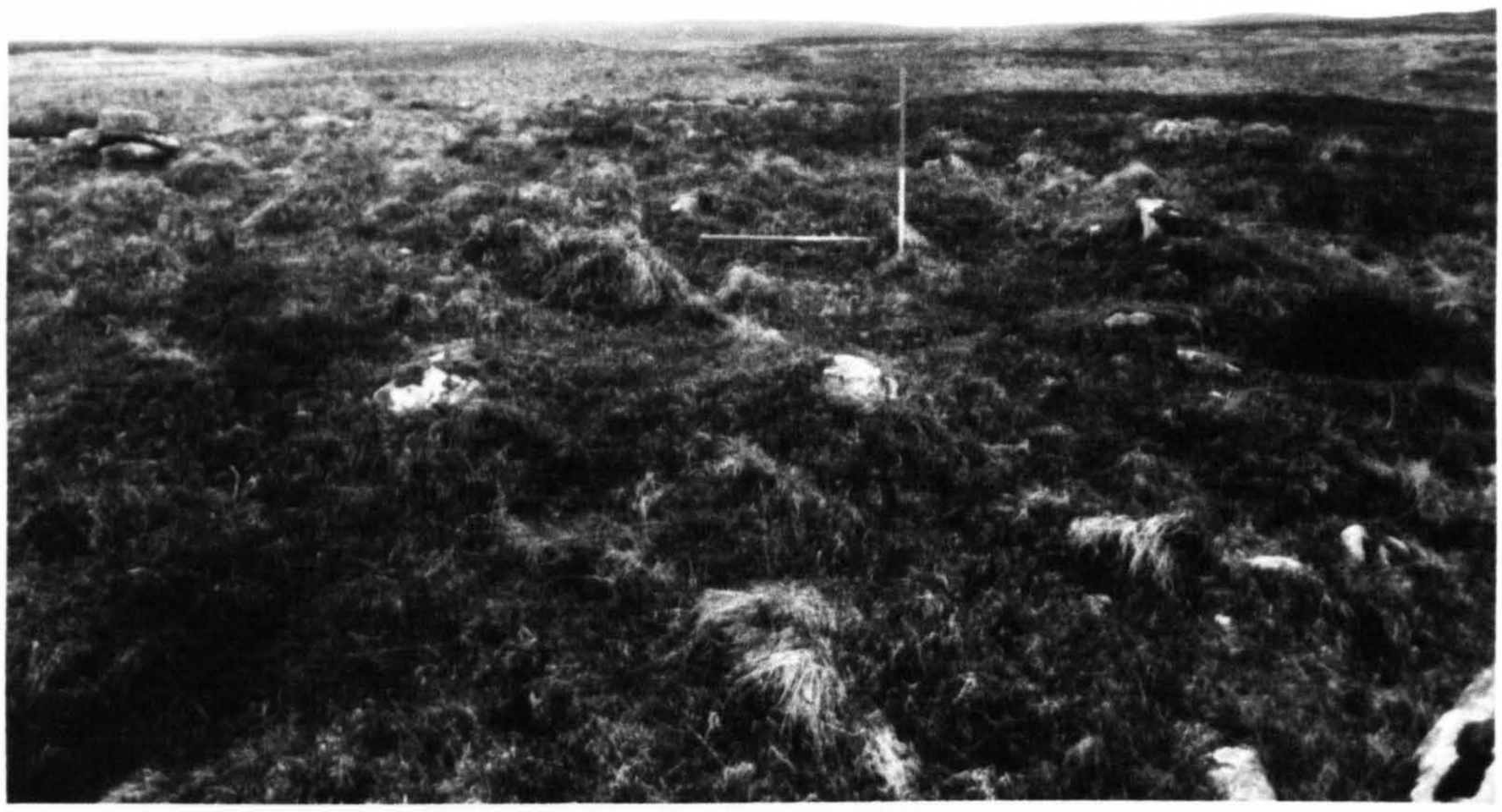


Plate 9.9 : Small hut-circle at Broubster Village 2 (30).

that in the Broubster area complex settlements were maintained on the basis of farming practice other than short fallow cultivation. This may be indirect evidence of differences in subsistence between adjacent settlements, as there is a hut-circle settlement associated with a range of cultivation evidence less than 2km downstream along the Forss Water at Broubster 1 (26).

Evidence of a degree of architectural complexity in a hut-circle can be seen at a rather isolated site at the northern end of Loch Shurrery (61), almost 2.0km from the other sites discussed here. This site has been partially excavated (MacLaren forthcoming), although there is as yet no full publication of this work. Many structural details at this site remain visible. Although this circular building is not particularly large, being 7.9m in internal diameter, it is massively constructed, with a stone-faced rubble wall up to 3.0m in thickness. The excavations revealed a central hearth and adjacent post-hole, confirming the domestic character of the building. They also revealed an entrance passage, leading through the wall to the south-west, which appears to have been extended beyond the exterior wall of the building itself (Plate 9.10). There is no evidence of cultivation in association with this hut-circle. However, the site was excavated in advance of the construction of a dam across the outflow of Loch Shurrery, in order to provide a water supply for the Dounreay nuclear reactor. In addition to the likely destructive effect of this construction work on any traces of associated cultivation, 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps also indicate that the site once lay more than 800m from the edge of

Plate 9.10 : Extended entrance passage, seen from the interior of Loch Shurrery hut-circle (61). The Shurrery dam is visible in the background.

the loch. Given that this distance is now less than 250m, it is clear that a considerable area of land has been submerged, and that traces of cultivation may have been lost. Two samples of charcoal taken from the hearth provided calibrated radiocarbon dates in the fourth century BC (MacLaren forthcoming). While these dates probably relate to one of the final episodes of use of the building, they are consistent with the construction and use of complex domestic buildings elsewhere in the study area during the first millennium BC, a context within which an association with enclosed agriculture might be expected.

The second main group of hut-circle settlements is spread quite densely across the north-eastern lower slopes of Ben Dorrery, and in more scattered form over the flat farmland to the east (Map 9.5). The most northerly of the group on the slopes of Ben Dorrery are set alongside the minor stream which flows from the saddle between it and Beinn Freiceadain. Of the two single structures located in this area, that in the highest location (34), at over 150m AOD, has no associated evidence of cultivation. The lower, larger hut-circle (24), however, is associated with a group of small, grass-covered mounds which may be clearance cairns. Although it is possible that other, more complex, structures once existed in this immediate area, the impression is that these structures occupy a marginal location, in relation to a larger group situated 500m further to the south. Here, there are at least five individual, small settlements set within an area of less than 0.5km2. The two individual structures set on the steeper slopes to the west (16 & 68), again above 150m AOD, show no signs of associated cultivation. Although it is possible that they may have been linked to cultivation on the gentler slopes at the foot of Ben Dorrery, I would argue that it is possible that the choice of a location on steep slopes may relate to practices other than settled cultivation.

The largest hut-circle settlement in this area, consisting of at least 7 separate structures (50), is located on gentle slopes 500m to the east. Of these, the three structures to the south of the group, although not of the greatest dimensions, are the most architecturally complex. The southernmost of these structures was provided with expanded wall terminals, giving an extended entrance passage. Although it is difficult to be sure from field evidence alone, it appears that this entrance passage was further extended at some time after its initial construction. This secondary extension appears now as a pair of rather amorphous earth and stone mounds, each containing earth-fast upright stones, which flank the entrance (Plate 9.11). This arrangement appears to have extended it outwards in a linear fashion. At the other two structures here, a perpendicular change in direction is involved. The central example is the best preserved. 2.5m from its entrance, which was not provided with expanded terminals, is a low bank containing upright stones (Figure 9.9). This effectively blocks a direct approach to the building, and would have involved a movement to either side in order to gain access. This structure also shows evidence of late reconstruction, in the form of a smaller sub-

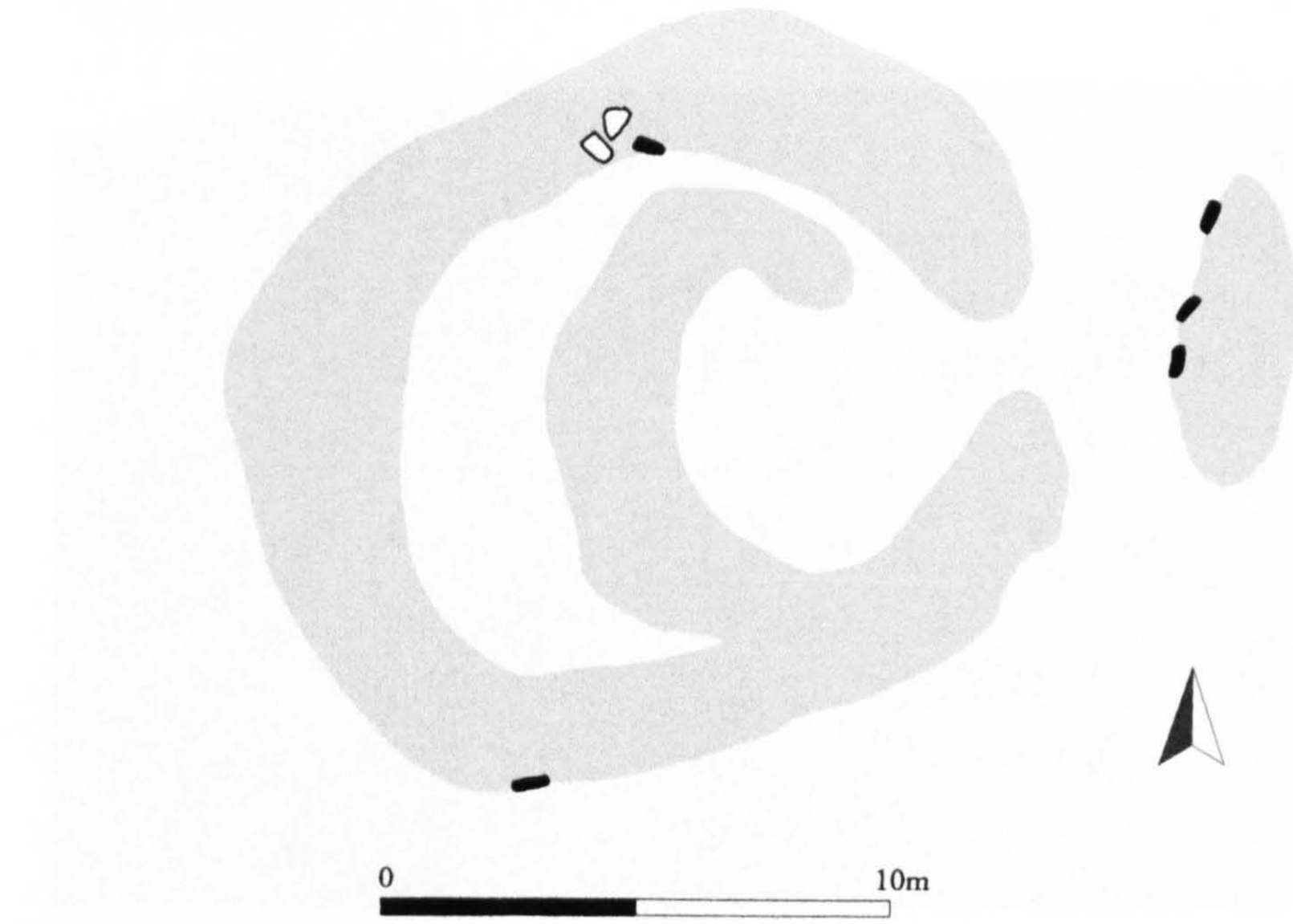


Figure 9.9 : Hut-circle with elaborate entrance, Dorrery 2 (50) (after Mercer 1985, Fig. 47).

circular structure set within its interior. It is clearly impossible to relate this feature to the elaboration of the entrance. The third hut-circle has, unfortunately, been mutilated recently during the erection of overhead power cables, and there is a telegraph pole set within the interior of the building itself (Plate 9.12). It is, nonetheless, evident that it had similar entrance arrangements to its neighbour. Although this feature has been mutilated as a result of heavy machinery driving over it to access the interior of the building, evidence of a similar low bank placed across the line of the entrance persists.

In addition to the architectural complexity of these buildings, there are also traces of associated enclosures. These take the form of low field banks, which extend away from the structure to both west and north-east, and would appear to enclose an area which is free of stone. Although there are no traces of lynchets, the smooth nature of the ground within suggests that this enclosure may have been used for cultivation. The association between architectural complexity and an enclosed agricultural landscape is therefore clear. The exact limits of this enclosure are not now visible, as the area is heather-covered and disturbed. However, it is probably significant that the direction which its enclosing banks take would appear to exclude the less architecturally complex structures, as these are all situated outside its line to the north and west. This, in turn, may be evidence of a chronological relationship between the two settlement areas. It may be that this area became the focus of settlement, in

Plate 9.11 : earth mound (a) flanking hut-circle entrance passage, Dorrery 2 (50).

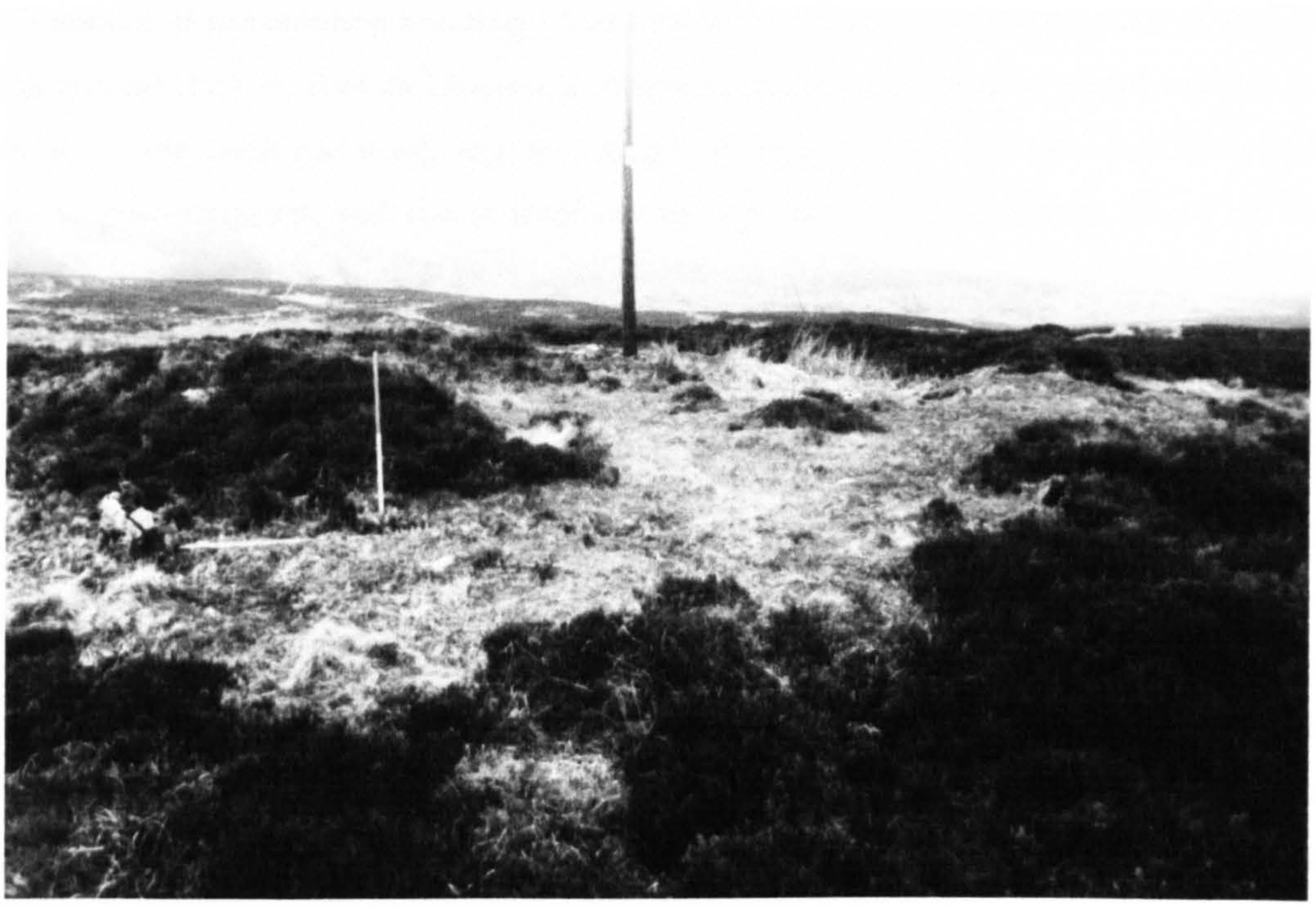


Plate 9.12 : Complex hut-circle at Dorrery 2 (50), disturbed by telegraph pole. Earth mound & upright stones flanking the entrance marked by ranging poles.

association with enclosed cultivation. Visible traces of earlier settlement may have been deliberately left outside the enclosures. This seems the more likely, given that there is a further hut-circle, which lacks either architectural elaboration or any evidence of associated cultivation (19) set on land which is very similar in nature to the north. Although there is late- to post-medieval occupation close to these sites, represented by the fragmentary remains of rectangular buildings, it is unlikely that cultivation associated with this would have affected hut-circle settlement selectively enough to produce such a differentiation.

Although there are a number of hut-circle settlements on the flat land to the east of the modern road leading to Dorrery Lodge, these are all set within a landscape which has until recently been extensively cultivated, parts of which are still under the plough. Although none of these settlements can be associated with traces of cultivation, this is likely to be due to this recent disturbance, rather than to the situation in prehistory.

There is a single firmly identified broch site within the local case study area, at Tota an Dranndain (21). This comprises a large, grassy mound, throughout which numerous large, upright slabs protrude from the turf (Plate 9.13). Its outer and inner wall-faces are infrequently visible, but a depression around most of the circumference of the building suggests the presence of an intra-mural space. The mound on which the broch sits is of stepped profile, suggesting the presence of surrounding buildings. There are also indications of the presence of an outer bank around the site. Tota an Dranndain has been severely damaged by recent activity. It is overlain to the south and south-west by a length of stone and turf dyke which is likely to be late- to post-medieval, and this is itself cut by a modern field boundary. There are also indications that the broch itself has at one time formed a stone quarry, probably during the construction of the adjacent farm of Torrovaich. Indeed, enclosures associated with this farm extend to within a few metres of the broch site. Although the area is now given over entirely to pasture, it has clearly been extensively cultivated in recent times. This activity might be expected to have removed any traces of other settlement in the vicinity of the more durable broch mound. The closest hut-circle settlements are those to the north of the Allt Forsiescye, some 1.1km to the north, and the single example at the head of Loch Shurrery, a similar distance to the south. There are also massive mounds in the vicinity of the site, at Carn Liath and Tulach Gorm, but the extremely amorphous nature of these makes any interpretation of their contents impossible. It is therefore difficult to discuss the relationship of the site to existing settled agricultural landscapes. However, the presence of a single broch site, with what is likely to have been a surrounding settlement, suggests a relationship to an area of arable land on the edge of the uplands. It is also possible to make some more general interpretations of the relationship of the architecture at site to its immediate physical landscape.

Plate 9.13 : Tota an Dranndain broch (21).

Plate 9.14 : Ben Dorrery from Tota an Dranndain (21) to the NW.

The entrance passage of the broch is oriented to the north-west. On approaching the site from this direction, the broch is likely to have broken the impressive skyline, formed by Beinn Freiceadain and Ben Dorrery to the south-east (Plate 9.14). The former hill is crowned by a large enclosure (Mercer 1985, 108), which may antedate the broch. There are also a number of chambered cairns in this area, although these are not directly visible from the broch. This kind of visual relationship, between brochs and distant landscapes with visible traces of earlier activity, has already been noted elsewhere in this thesis, most notably in the Watenan and Yarrows area (section 8.3.2). At Tota an Dranndain, it seems all the more likely that this orientation was deliberate, as the flatness of the ground immediately surrounding the broch means that it would have been possible to orient the entrance in any direction. Once again, I would argue that it is important to prioritise local landscapes when interpreting the orientation of prehistoric architecture, rather than relying on generalised determining principles, of whatever kind, derived from statistical data. In this case, it would seem that the traces of earlier human practice within the landscape were deliberately used to increase the visual impact of the broch.

Although I have already remarked on the paucity of settlement evidence specific to the later Iron Age within the study area as whole (section 9.2.3), three of the five sites which I have suggested may represent such evidence are set within the local study area. The northernmost of these, Tota Garbhaig (4), is set at the edge of what is now marshy ground 350m to the east of the Forss Water. The area to its immediate east, below the 70m contour on which it sits, contains Lochan Ealach, in addition to a number of smaller lochans, and is likely to have been even less well drained prior to a likely reduction in level of the Forss Water, as a result of the damming of the outflow of Loch Shurrery.

The site itself consists of a large, grassy mound, 42.0m by 30.0m, with a number of earth-fast upright stones protruding through the turf. It evidently contains a number of structures, although collapse and recent quarrying have obscured their precise form. Although two cist burials were reportedly found set into the mound during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there is no visible trace of these. The present form of the mound is certainly not consistent with an identification as a burial site, although the large number of upright stones has in the past resulted in its classification by RCAHMS as a cairn. However, the overall form of the site at least suggests a combination of sub-rectangular and sub-circular elements, especially at the east end where the mound tapers to 14.5m in width and may

conceal the remains of a rectangular building. Taken together with the presence of earth-fast uprights, it is possible that the site represents the remains of an aisled building and associated structures. However, more positive identification is impossible, given the current state of preservation of the site.

The second site is at Achnabeinn (1), 2.7km to the south on the east bank of the Forss Water. This comprises a massive oval mound 25.0m by 14.0m in overall dimensions, which contains the remains of at least two sub-rectangular structures. The most substantial are set at the north-east corner of the mound, where a sub-rectangular building measuring at least 10.0m by 4.0m is defined by low earth and stone banks on both long sides. It is likely that the building was once longer, and has been truncated to the south where it fades into the surrounding pasture. In the north-east corner, massive masonry survives to 0.6m in height, although the western side of the structure appears still to be choked with debris. The building may be composed of a facing wall within a larger mound. It contains a clearly visible, rounded internal corner (Plate 9.15). In both of these respects, and also its general dimensions, this fragmentary building is similar to aisled buildings elsewhere, particularly those at the Wag of Forse. This is especially marked in the case of its internal width, which at 4.0m is very close to that of Aisled Building I at Forse (see Appendix 1). This similarity is further enhanced by the presence of a pair of parallel alignments of at least 6 upright stones to the south of the building, which are suggestive of aisled construction (Plate 9.16). The other structure within the mound

Plate 9.15 : Internal corner at Achnabeinn (1).

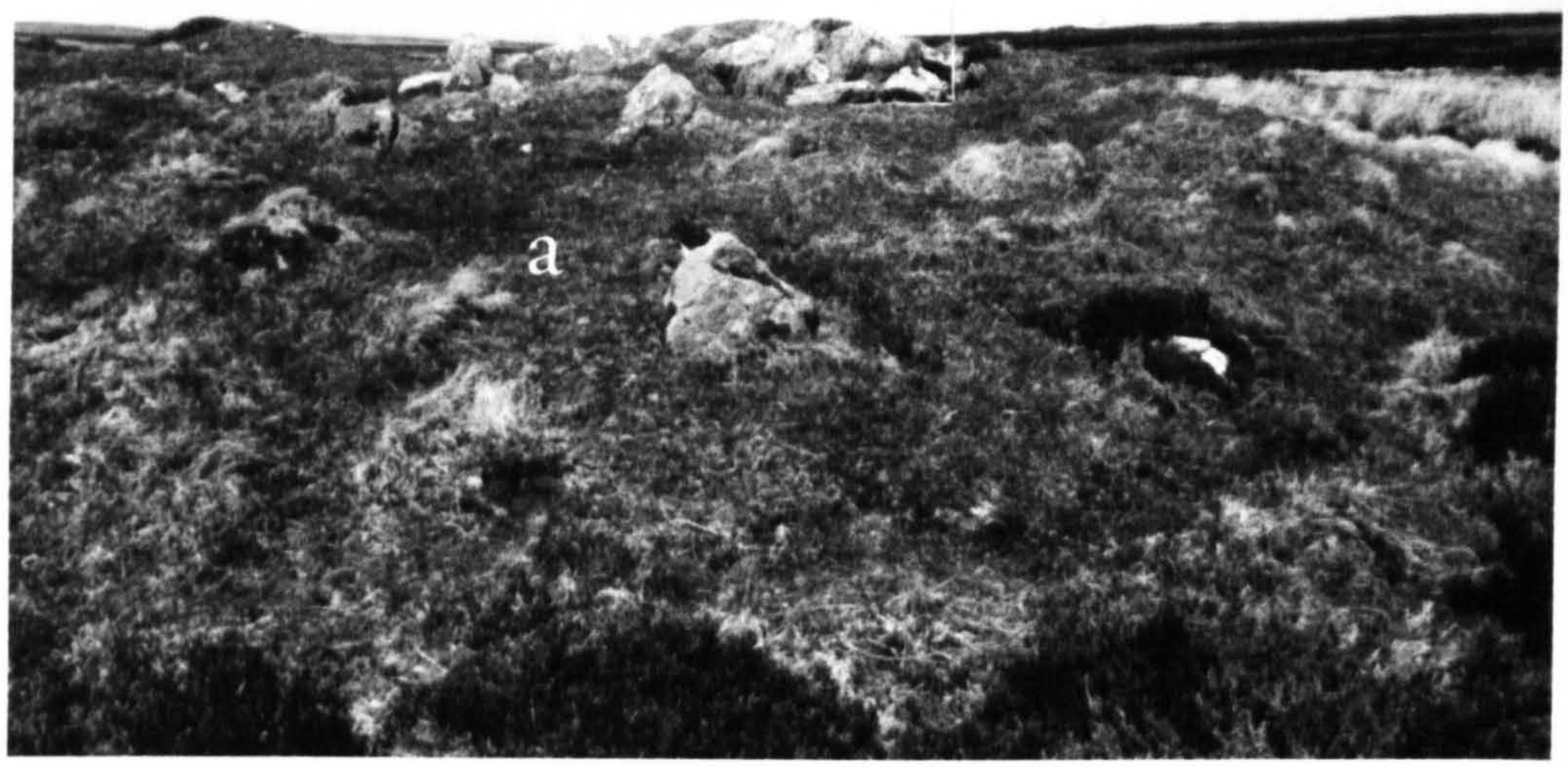


Plate 9.16 : Aligned upright stones (a), Achnabeinn (21).

Plate 9.17 : Possible entrance (a) at Achnabeinn (21).

is far more ephemeral. It seems to represent a large, sub-rectangular structure, at least 8.0m by 5.0m, running from east to west, outlined by fragmentary, turf-covered walls with occasional protruding stones. A possible corner survives to the north-west. Again, the dimensions of this structure are similar to those of the buildings at Forse. There are also traces of an outer bank right around the mound, and very large upright stones on the south side of this which may represent the remains of a monumental entrance (Plate 9.17). Although this site cannot be demonstrated to be of later Iron Age date with certainty, it might reasonably be interpreted as containing at least one rectangular aisled building. Although OS surveyors have suggested the it may represent a chambered cairn, the dimensions of the structures present are much greater than those of any known chamber in Caithness (Davidson & Henshall 1991, Chapter 4). I would argue that the most likely interpretation is a multi-period enclosed settlement similar to the Wag of Forse (Appendix 1, Chapter 4) or Cor Tulloch (Chapter 7), within which aisled buildings may represent only one episode of activity.

Although the mound at Lambsdale (4), is classified by RCAHMS as a 'cairn', excavations contemporary with those at Loch Shurrery (MacLaren forthcoming), although partial, demonstrated this identification to be erroneous. The excavations revealed parts of both a sub-rectangular and a sub-circular building. These do not compare exactly with later Iron Age buildings elsewhere in the area discussed in this thesis, and in particular there was no trace of aisled construction. Indeed, most of the pottery assemblage recovered from the site is likely to be medieval (Campbell forthcoming a). However, it is notable that most of this material was apparently unstratified, and the possibility remains that these structures are of later Iron Age date.

Although it is difficult to ascribe any of the sites discussed here to the later Iron Age with certainty, their landscape context would appear to be consistent with such an interpretation. All are set on the flat valley floor of the Forss Water, close to the river itself, and none would appear to have been situated with visual impact in mind, as more impressive situations are available in the vicinity of each. All of the brochs in this area, with the exception of Tota an Dranndain discussed above, are located much further downstream. The nearest site is at Knock Glass (15), some 4.0km from Tota Garbhaig. Indeed, Achnabeinn is situated close to Loch Shurrery, the shore of which represents a passage between the heights of Beinn nam Bad Mor and Ben Dorrery and thence along the River Thurso into the uplands which represent the upper reaches of the Langwell, Berriedale and Dunbeath river systems. The site at Lambsdale is situated to the south of Loch Shurrery, even further along this possible route of movement.

Discussion

The present local case study area comprises an area of upland, at the margin of a wider agricultural landscape, which is in may respects similar to the Creag Leathan area discussed above. Although it would be wrong, therefore, to claim that either is representative of the study area as a whole, the area around Ben Dorrery encompasses a variety of evidence which enhances an understanding of Iron Age landscapes in the north.

Groups of hut-circle settlements are, again, divorced from the wider landscape by the effects of subsequent land-use. However, we once again are presented with a clear association between architectural complexity and enclosed agriculture. Indeed, it is possible that the areas chosen for enclosure may have deliberately included such complex buildings, and excluded traces of earlier settlement. Once again, the nature of this architecture itself involves control over the direction of access to the domestic domain, and an emphasis on the boundary between this and the outside world. However, the hut-circle sites along the Forss Water should warn us of the dangers of simplistic explanations which fail to consider variation in human practice. It would be simplistic to cast the relationship between architecture and landscapes as a causal one. Although I have attempted to demonstrate a recurrent association between a concern with the elaboration of the domestic domain and the maintenance of the agricultural landscape over time, this is not to suggest that one is the direct result of the other. Rather, I would argue that although social relationships negotiated within the domestic domain may have been played out in routine daily practice across the arable landscape, it may also have been possible for similar modes of social life to be maintained through other practices. It is possible that these included economic regimes other than the cultivation of crops, although it is difficult to demonstrate this conclusively from the surviving evidence.

Although no physical relationship between these early landscapes and those of the middle Iron Age remains, it would seem likely that a concern with monumentality in domestic buildings was maintained, and also transformed through the establishment of a formal relationship to the wider landscape. In particular this may have involved an explicit use of topography, and even the presence of existing monuments, to heighten the visual effect. In this way, broch architecture would have been able to achieve a consistent intervention in the routines of the agricultural landscape. This does not appear to have been a feature of either the architecture or location of hut-circle sites.

The evidence for later Iron Age settlement is rather indefinite, and it would be a mistake to place too much reliance on it. However, it is at least possible that domestic buildings involving internal monumentality were once again being constructed within landscapes which emphasised routes of movement. Indeed, the evidence from the local study area introduces the possibility of tracing such routes of movement from north to south.

9.3.3. Westerdale (Map 9.6)

For the purposes of this discussion, the Westerdale area will be defined as the landscapes enclosed by Spittal Hill to the east and the meandering River Thurso to the west. This is an area of some 40 km^2. It consists, in the main, of regular, rectangular fields, which in places are still defined by the traditional flagstone fences. The extent of arable in this landscape is now more limited than in the recent past, and much of the land has been given over to pasture. Nonetheless, cultivation here was intensive until comparatively recently, and included a southward extension of improved land along the River Thurso as far south as Dalemore and Tormsdale. As I will discuss shortly, this is likely to have exercised a considerable influence on the survival of prehistoric settlement evidence. To the south, however, the cultivated lands give way to the peat bogs and lochans at the edge of the Flow Country, which forms the boundary with Study Areas 1 and 2. Although this area forms part of a study of broch sites along the River Thurso undertaken by Swanson (1988), aspects of the relationship between sites and the landscape are worth exploring in more detail here.

Given the intensity of recent agricultural practice in the local study area, it would be unrealistic to assume that the distribution of later prehistoric sites is in any way representative of that during their history of occupation. This seems particularly relevant to the survival of hut-circle sites. There are only seven known hut-circle settlements within an area almost twice as extensive as either of the other local studies presented in this chapter (Map 9.6). It is therefore clear that more recent processes have had a major, if non quantifiable, effect. Evidence of processes of destruction exists at Achlachan Moss (9). Here, a small hut-circle was recorded by Curle (RCAHMS 1911b, 35), and revisited twice by OS surveyors, in 1962 and 1963. However, on the occasion of the final recorded visit to the site, in 1981, it was found to have been destroyed by recent land improvement. Numerous similar episodes of destruction must have gone unrecorded in an area where the ubiquitous straightened and canalised burns testify to the extent of drainage and land reclamation in the recent past. There are also large expanses of modern forestry within the local study area, which will have had a similarly destructive effect on the survival of the more ephemeral traces of later prehistoric settlement. On the northern flanks of Achlibster Hill (10) are three hut-circles which now show no evidence of associated cultivation. However, the site is located in a clearing within an extensive tract of modern forestry, which is likely to have destroyed both evidence of contemporary cultivation in the immediate area, and traces of nearby settlements.

Where hut-circle settlement does survive, then, it is invariably situated in peripheral locations. At Mill Pool (65), on the north bank of the River Thurso, traces of settlement lie immediately outside the regular fields around the settlement of Olgrinmore. Here, a large hut-circle 12.5m in internal diameter is associated with a number of small circular features, which may be the remains of denuded clearance cairns. There are also earth and stone banks in this area, although it is possible that these are natural features. Nonetheless, the location of this fragmentary settlement on the edge of a modern agricultural landscape recalls the situation along the Burn of Houstry (Chapter 7), and it may be that prehistoric cultivation was once extensive here.

A settlement of three large hut-circles, up to 19.0m in internal diameter, has also survived along a low ridge, at 100m AOD, to the north of Achanarras Hill (2). At least one of the structures overlies an earlier building, suggesting a chronological depth to occupation at this settlement. There are no clear indications of associated cultivation, other than the smooth, stone-free character of the immediately surrounding land. However, the flanks of this ridge, the crest of which is now marginal land, slope down into recently cultivated land on either side, and it is possible that this site represents a relic of an area of settlement which was once much larger. That this may have been the case is suggested by the presence of a further single hut-circle 600m to the north (3), in a considerably more disturbed location close to modern farms. It is now impossible to determine whether hut-circle settlement once extended over the intervening area. Further effects of modern practice on the survival of early agricultural landscapes can be seen at Dale (48), where a small settlement of two hut-circles is set at the junction of two modern roads. Part of one of these structures has been destroyed by the construction of a drainage ditch along the course of the road. The hut-circles sit just outside the corner of a modern field (Plate 9.18), and there are similar enclosures on both sides of the road junction (Figure 9.10). Although there is no surviving evidence of associated cultivation, the intensity of recent practice in this area renders it very unlikely that this is in any way representative of the situation contemporary with the settlement itself. Indeed, there is another hut-circle adjacent to the Achlachan Burn, 750m to the NNE. This structure is similar in size and construction to those at Dale. Although it displays no evidence of associated cultivation, the site is immediately outside the easternmost of the modern enclosures in the area, and it is therefore possible that both cultivation traces and further structures one extended into an area between two settlements which now appear quite distinct.

Plate 9.18 : Modern arable enclosure at Dale. Hut-circles survive within the marginal land to the left (W) of the field wall.

Figure 9.10 : Hut-circle sites (blue circles) and modern enclosures in the Westerdale area (from Ordnance Survey 1:10,560 sheet ND 15 SW).

The evidence for hut-circle sites within the local case study area is therefore unlikely to tell us very much about either the extent or nature of agricultural settlement during much of the first millennium BC. The evidence for broch settlement is, however, more substantial. There are 8 firmly identified broch sites in the Westerdale area, 28% of the total number of firmly identified sites within the study area. There are also 6 possible broch sites, 40% of the total of such sites. There would, therefore, appear to be a variation in the ratio between the two groups of sites, 1.3:1, when compared to that of the study area as a whole, which is almost 2:1 (section 9.2.2). Given the intensity of recent agricultural practice in the local study area, which I have suggested above has greatly affected the survival of hut-circle settlement, this may repay further detailed discussion.

Looking first at the overall distribution of possible broch sites within the local study area, it is immediately evident that all but one, Achlochan Moss (35) are situated in the immediate vicinity of modern farms. In contrast, only three of the firmly identified sites are in such a location. This suggests that recent agricultural practice may have created a strong bias in the survival of broch sites. This impression is confirmed by the nature and condition of the sites themselves. Only at Achlochan Moss (35), which lies outside the area now taken up by modern enclosures, are any intelligible remains visible, although these are rather indeterminate. At two of the sites in the vicinity of modern farms, Achies West (33) and Dale House (39), there are no clear remains of any kind. Indeed, the latter is recorded as having been removed during the 19th century (Anderson 1890, 185). At the remaining three sites, damage resulting from recent practice is only too obvious. The site at Achanarras Farm (30) now consists only of a fragmentary grassy mound, most of which appears to have been ploughed out. The remainder has formed a site for the construction of farm buildings. Both Achies (32) and Dale Farm (38) are represented by amorphous grassy mounds which have been severely damaged by recent ploughing, and the latter was obscured by a crop as recently as 1995. Although it is therefore uncertain whether all, or any, of these sites are brochs, I would strongly suspect that there may have been many more sites in the area than is presently apparent. The corollary of this is that interpretations based on large scale distributions are likely to be seriously flawed.

Taking the indeterminate and damaged sites discussed above into account, there are two major groups within the local study area, one in the area between Spittal Hill and the farmland around Achies, and the other in the Dale area, with a southward extension along the River Thurso (Map 9.6). However, within the northern group only a single site, Achies East (1), has been firmly identified as a broch. The site comprises a large, grassy mound, with a stepped profile, which suggests the presence of surrounding buildings. Although there is no trace of an outer boundary at the site, it sits within an area of formerly cultivated land, and it

is possible that such features may have been destroyed by recent activity, which includes deep ploughing for forestry. Unfortunately, the entrance orientation of the site is not evident, and it is therefore impossible to comment on any relationship it may have had to a wider cultivated landscape. Although there are a small number of hut-circle sites in the area (Map 9.6), none of these are associated with evidence of cultivation, and it is therefore impossible to relate either Achies East or any of the possible broch sites to an agricultural landscape, or to suggest a chronological relationship between them. Given the evident potential for cultivation of this area of Caithness, however, it would appear reasonable to accept Swanson's proposed association (1988, Chapter 4) between broch sites and arable land. It is notable that none of the sites within this northern group occupies the highest ground in its immediate vicinity. Neither are they set close to the river on the valley floor, as is the case further to the south. All are at or near the break of slope, where Achanarras Hill meets the flat agricultural land to the north and east. Given that at least some of the possible sites here are likely to represent the sites of brochs, it seems reasonable to attempt some interpretation of their landscape context. No site occupies the best natural defensive position, as all sit below the highest point on the hill, and are overlooked from above. It seems more likely that the brochs were intended to be seen from the landscapes below. I would therefore suggest, if rather tentatively, that these sites may have been positioned in order to make use of the local topography to enhance the architectural presence of the buildings themselves, and to exercise a visual dominance over their surroundings, while still maintaining a physical relationship to cultivated land. This seems especially likely in the case of Achies East, which breaks the skyline of the ridge when viewed from further down the slope (Plate 9.19).

The southern group of sites, around Dale House, comprises six firmly identified broch sites, in addition to a further three sites which cannot be identified with any certainty. Two of the former group, Tulach Buaile a'Chroic (23) and Tulach Lochain Bhraseil (24), are situated within 200m of each other on the flat western bank of the River Thurso. The possible site at Dale Farm (38) is located only 200m away on the opposite bank of the river. Both sites survive as turf-covered mounds with a stepped profile, suggesting the presence of surrounding buildings. However, they are very close to modern farm buildings, and have suffered damage from recent agricultural practice (Plate 9.20). It is no longer possible to identify the entrance orientation at either site. Although in the immediate area there are two, and possibly three, broch sites, as a consequence of this later disturbance it is impossible to ascertain whether they make any explicit reference to one another through their architecture. This was certainly the case at sites along the north-east coast of Caithness (section 8.3.1), and to a lesser extent within the present study area. It is therefore impossible to say with certainty whether the sites were in contemporary occupation, or whether a degree of overlap or replacement was involved.

Plate 9.19 : Achies East broch (1) from the NW.

Plate 9.20 : Tulach Buaile a'Chroic broch (23) (a).

However, it may be significant that there are no sites along the River Thurso within 3.5km of Tulach Buaile a'Chroic to the north, whereas the site distribution to the south is more regular, although it is always possible that sites have been destroyed, and this has gone unrecorded. The area immediately adjacent to the river lies outside the area of modern agricultural enclosures, and it is therefore less likely that sites here have been destroyed by recent practice than it is elsewhere within this part of the local study area. It is, therefore, possible that this difference in site distribution relates to the situation when the brochs were in occupation, and that the placing of either one of the sites so close to the other may have been deliberate. Both sites show evidence of having had surrounding settlements. It is possible that they were in contemporary occupation, and if this were the case the possibility exists that the placing of two monumental buildings so close together may be seen within a context where architecture was employed within networks of competition and interaction between neighbouring social groups. Certainly the position of the sites in such a low lying situation, rather than on the slopes to the west, would appear to suggest that other landscape considerations were more important than visual dominance over a wider agricultural landscape. Of course it is also possible that one site replaced the other, and given their current state of preservation it is difficult to choose between the two interpretations.

A similar juxtaposition of sites may be found to the south of the local study area, where the brochs of Tulach Mor (24) and Tulach Beag (22) are set within 400m of one another. Again, both sites are surrounded by the traces of buildings, suggesting that they represent small settlements. However, at Tulach Beag the site is sufficiently well preserved to allow its southerly entrance orientation to be defined. Tualch Mor is clearly visible when looking in this direction (Plate 9.21). The landscape is extremely flat in this area, and there is little potential for the use of local topographic features to emphasise the location of either site. I would argue that the choice of this orientation over other possibilities relates to a deliberate reference to the nearby site. Again, the two sites are closely grouped within a landscape where settlement spacing is generally more regular. As in the case of the sites discussed above, it is difficult to determine whether this relates to the use of monumental architecture within social relationships of competition between adjacent settlements, or whether replacement is involved. In the latter case, however, the evidence would suggest that Tulach Mor was the earlier site. It is also the higher and more prominent of the two (Plate 9.22), with a substantial outer boundary, and it is possible that relationships between the occupants of the two sites were negotiated partly through these patterns of visual dominance and mutual

Plate 9.21 : Tulach Mor (24) (a) from the entrance at Tulach Beag (22).

Plate 9.22 : Tulach Mor (24), showing outer boundary (foreground).

reference. Indeed, these sites are among the few in the study area which lack evidence of surrounding buildings, and it may be that social relationships were maintained on a more extensive basis, between the two brochs, rather than within the kind of nucleated settlement represented by other broch sites.

At Carn na Mairg (8), a partially excavated site which occupies an intermediate location between the two pairs of brochs discussed above, the orientation of the single entrance passage is visible. This is to the east. From this direction, it is notable that the site breaks the distant skyline of hills. The broch itself obscures the outline of Ben Dorrey as it is approached, although this hill is visible on moving a short distance to either side (Plate 9.23). Although this relationship is admittedly rather speculative, it is possible that this site was utilising significant aspects of the local landscape to enhance its dominance over the routine practices of the surrounding agricultural land.

Plate 9.23 : Carn na Mairg (8), from the NE, showing Ben Dorrery in the distance.

A number of the broch sites within the local case study area have evidence of complexes of surrounding buildings, and at least some of these might be expected to have been occupied during the later Iron Age. The state of preservation of these sites does not, however, allow the identification of such structures. Only at Carn na Mairg, where the excavations have exposed

a small part of the surrounding buildings, can evidence of the presence of upright stones be seen. The local case study area is located at the edge of upland landscapes, beyond which lie the upper reaches of the river systems discussed in Chapter 7. It is therefore somewhat surprising that there are no traces of aisled buildings, however fragmentary, in this area. On the basis of present evidence, however, there is little which can be said about the nature of later Iron Age settlement in Westerdale area.

Discussion

I suggested in section 9.2.1 that the number of hut-circle sites within the study area allowed their division into groups on the basis of associated cultivation evidence. It was also evident, however, that a general analyses on the basis of statistical data and overall distributions was of little value, given the intensity of recent agricultural practice in some areas of the study area, and the marginal character of others. While the first two local case studies were selected on the basis that a range of settlement evidence would be present, it was clear from the outset that in the Westerdale area a single class of monument, the broch, represented almost the whole of the existing Iron Age archaeological resource. The chief benefit of this area to an understanding of hut-circle settlement is therefore to highlight the inherent problems with a general scale of analysis. The intensity of modern agricultural practice across almost the whole of the local study area has reduced the remaining sites to a situation on the margins of the contemporary cultivated landscape. The cumulative effect of this over wider areas, such as northern Scotland or even a single parish, is likely to render seriously flawed accounts which rely on a general scale of analysis alone.

Recent processes of destruction have also influenced the potential for an understanding of broch settlement. Intensive agricultural practices have directly affected the survival of sites, if to a reduced degree. Although there are a number of possible sites set in close association, it is now impossible to say with certainty that they represent the sites of brochs, and the potential for discussions of the interrelationships between closely grouped sites has been much reduced. This is a particular problem within the northern part of the local study area. Furthermore, it is now almost impossible to relate existing broch sites to contemporary cultivated landscapes.

Although the possibilities for an understanding of the relationships between broch sites and their surrounding landscapes is much reduced, there are a number of interpretations which can be made, if more tentatively than elsewhere within the study areas. Firstly, the evidence does not contradict the argument, which I have developed up to this point, that we should turn to the context of local landscapes for an understanding of the location and orientation of broch sites. Thus, it seems likely that at some sites the local topography may

have been used to enhance the visual dominance of these monumental buildings over their immediate landscapes. In this way, their constant and monumental presence may have achieved an intervention in the routine, daily practices which were carried out around them. Some sites, chiefly those close to the River Thurso to the south of the local study area, seem not to embody such concerns to the same degree. Although broch location may relate in part to existing agricultural landscapes for which no evidence survives, in the case of at least one site, Tulach Beag, it seems to have been more important to maintain a reference to a nearby site. Other closely grouped brochs are also placed close to the river on the valley floor. I would argue that this is strong evidence for the diversity of practice which may have been exercised within a wider architectural tradition. What is most important to an understanding of these sites, I would argue, is the way in which they were intimately connected to their local landscapes, and worked to intervene in the daily practices which were carried out in and around them.

9.4. Summary and Conclusions

In many respects, north-west Caithness is the least satisfactory of the three Study Areas presented in this thesis. Although the area contains a variety of monuments dating to the Iron Age, these lack the important physical juxtapositions found in Study Area 1. The area also lacks the extensive resource of excavated monuments which is a feature of Study Area 2. Its potential for meaningful interpretations of the role of domestic architecture in the social practices of the Iron Age is therefore considerably reduced.

Given these weaknesses, however, it is encouraging to note the recurrence of juxtapositions of material culture and landscape similar to those elsewhere in this thesis. Hut-circle sites must have suffered greatly from the effects of recent agricultural practice. However, on at least some sites a relationship between architecturally complex domestic buildings and enclosed, permanent agriculture can be demonstrated, although this is largely confined to areas at the edges of marginal upland, and it would be unwise to extend it over the study area as a whole. Nonetheless, the radiocarbon dates from Cnoc Stanger suggest that settled agriculture was established in the area during the first part of the first millennium BC. The evidence for the maintenance of the fertility of this area over time strengthens the argument, which I have outlined in Chapter 3, that long-term associations between communities and the land are likely to have been central to the maintenance of social life. The elaboration of the house, and especially the boundary between it and the outside world, further suggests that the domestic domain may have been central to the negotiation of the social relationships which ultimately governed short term access to the land, and long-term rights over it. The presence of burials, which may be contemporary, in the vicinity of some sites, does, however,

suggest that proximity to an ancestral source may also have been important. This has not been noted within the other study areas. It is interesting that some of these sites seem also to maintain a constant architectural orientation, which is not a feature of hut-circle settlement elsewhere in the study areas presented in this thesis.

Unfortunately, any relationship between broch settlement and existing cultivated landscapes has largely been destroyed. It is, however, consistent with the arguments advanced elsewhere that the brochs appear to have involved the establishment of a more formal relationship with the landscape. This seems to have involved the use of local topography to heighten the visual impact of buildings, which were themselves a monumental presence. As most broch sites seemed to have formed the focus for a larger settlement, it is likely that their monumentality represented a constant presence within the daily lives of those who carried out their routine activities around them. Although the evidence is less convincing than in Study Area 2, it is also possible that certain sites were deliberately oriented towards one another, perhaps as part of localised social relationships involving interaction, and perhaps competition, between neighbouring settlements. I would argue that relationships of inequality were maintained through routine practices and face-to-face social networks, not via an appeal to abstract sources if authority.

Unfortunately, the evidence for later Iron Age settlement within the study area is weak. No individual site can be set within a Later Iron Age context with certainty, although there is at least one convincing candidate. On the other hand, no evidence exists to contradict the arguments advanced as to the likely character of such settlement in previous chapters. Indeed, the sites along the Forss Water introduce the tantalising possibility that routes of movement across the landscape, for which I have argued above, might also be located to the north of the valleys of south-east Caithness, and that the areas which these crossed may have been permeable in both directions.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion
Towards a Social Archaeology of the Iron Age in Northern Scotland

10.1. Introduction

In Chapter 1, I outlined two overall aims which I hoped to achieve through the research presented in this thesis. The first of these, the compilation of a body of empirical evidence for Iron Age settlement in Northern Scotland, requires little further comment here. I hope that I have been able to present a thorough descriptive account of the nature and geographic location of this resource which will be of use to subsequent researchers in the field. My second aim has been to pursue an interpretative approach to this material through the key themes of landscape change and the social role of domestic architecture. I would venture that this also has been a success, in that I have been able to achieve some new insights into the nature of change in the agricultural landscapes of the northern mainland which extend across traditional chronological boundaries, and have been able to suggest some ways in which the routine use of domestic architecture may have operated within this wider landscape context. I would be the first to admit, however, that much of the discussion in the proceeding pages has been conducted at a very specific, localised scale. Indeed, it was my stated aim to pursue such a local scale of view in order to identify subtleties of landscape use which might have been glossed over by a more generalising approach. The varying degrees of success which I met in this project have been discussed in the individual conclusions to Chapters 7 – 9, and it would be superfluous to recount them here. However, I have no wish to keep my nose so firmly to the ground as to ignore the wider implications of these localised studies. It is clear that wider similarities in domestic architecture do exist across Northern Scotland as a whole, as well as across the Atlantic Province on a more general level. Furthermore, I have not tried to deny in this thesis that wider patterning in material culture exists, or that it may bear a relationship to larger social formations. Rather, my argument is that such material similarities are the *result* of human practices pursued within localised contexts. As archaeologists, our best hope of understanding the way in which wider social formations might have been constructed lies in an exploration of the material conditions of life on a local scale. In this final chapter, I want to identify some of the wider regional similarities which exist across the study areas. I will also make some suggestions as to further work, which might extend what I hope has been a worthwhile contribution to an understanding of the nature of social life during the Iron Age in Northern Scotland.

10.2. Changing Landscapes of Everyday Life in Northern Scotland

It is almost certain that hut-circle settlement was not confined to the earlier Iron Age. In the upland landscapes of the southern part of the area under discussion in this thesis, where most broch sites never appear to have formed the heart of a nucleated settlement, it seems very likely that many hut-circles may have continued in occupation, and been drawn into changing

networks of social relationships. It is also evident that a degree of local diversity is represented by these sites which may not be chronologically derived. It seems particularly likely that long-fallow agriculture may have continued in the more favourable areas on the margins of the cultivated landscape. Nevertheless, there is considerable evidence for the existence of agricultural regimes based both on field clearance alone, and on enclosed land. I have interpreted this in terms of a basic distinction between *long-fallow* and *short-fallow* cultivation, and have argued that the inception of the latter implies a fundamental social change. At some point between the later second- and mid-first millennium BC, it seems likely that strong tenurial links were established between agricultural communities and specific areas of an enclosed landscape. This may have represented a radical move away from a more generalised concept of the relationship between community and land.

These new landscapes were accompanied by a changing domestic architecture. Although houses were not necessarily larger, they were certainly more monumental in scale, if not in longevity. This was also a time when increasing attention was paid to the boundary between the domestic domain and the outside world, in the form of elongated and elaborated entrance passages. These changes in domestic architecture have two main implications. Firstly, the emphasis on monumentality suggests that it was becoming increasingly important to fix the location of the domestic domain within the landscape through the physical dominance of the house over the routines of daily life, including everyday patterns of movement towards and away from the house. However, there is little evidence that these houses were treated as a long-term resource in the way that seems to have become common in the middle Iron Age. Indeed, what little excavated evidence there is suggests that even houses which utilised a large amount of stone in their construction were repeatedly rebuilt on the same site, rather than being increasingly embellished over time. It is possible that the life-cycle of the house was associated with that of a particular household over a comparatively short period. Thomas (1997, 216) interprets the elaborate 'facades' found at later prehistoric enclosures in southern Britain as symbolic of a kinship division between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', and the elaborate entrance arrangements of many of the hut-circles of Northern Scotland may have been drawn into the creation of similar meanings. It is clear that the domestic domain itself was becoming ever more important, and I would argue that it may have formed the primary context for the reproduction of social relationships. Relationships pursued within the house may have been implicated both in the short-term negotiation of the daily routines of the cultivated landscape, and in long-term systems of inheritance. However, it seems that they were centred on the house itself, the architecture of which did not seek to dominate a wider landscape.

Clear relationships between sites chosen for the construction of brochs and existing agricultural landscapes are demonstrable only in limited areas, chiefly in the river valleys of the south-east and upland 'islands' further north. Elsewhere, the destructive effects of modern agriculture are likely to have removed the traces of later prehistoric cultivation. It is also possible that later buildings, particularly in the case of massive broch mounds which must contain considerable depths of occupation material, may overlie the traces of less substantial early occupation. Although the brochs to the south and east of the area seem to have been set within cultivated landscapes which were already firmly established, their physical relationship to these landscapes differs greatly from even the more massive of the hut-circles. In the brochs, we appear to be seeing the establishment of a formalised, repeated relationship between domestic architecture and a wider agricultural landscape for the first time. The brochs seem to have been sited so as to dominate their landscapes visually. They were also physically separated from these landscapes by monumental boundaries. Although I would not dispute that the great size and impenetrability of these buildings may have functioned to protect those within on occasion, interpretations which focus on a narrowly 'defensive' function for the brochs fail to account for the way in which they must have been incorporated within the routine practices which went on around them. I would argue that the brochs represent the first domestic buildings which were *monumental* in the truest sense of the word. Their construction in stone means that they are likely to have provided a lasting symbol of the importance of those entitled to reside within, which may have been maintained and reappropriated over a number of generations. The relationships of social inequality which must have brought these buildings into being were continually re-worked, through their very physical intervention in the routines of the agricultural landscape. It is noticeable, in the southern and eastern part of the area under discussion, that the brochs are far fewer in number than the hut-circles set within the surrounding landscape. Even allowing for the likelihood that the latter had a shorter life span, perhaps being tied to that of an individual household, and that more people are likely to have been accommodated within a broch over a longer history of use, this discrepancy still speaks of fundamental social change. The coarse chronology which I have been obliged to work within makes these changes difficult to define in any detail. However, while we should always beware of simplistic correlations between building size and social structure, it nonetheless seems likely that rights of access were extended over far wider areas of the landscape during the middle Iron Age. It also seems likely that many of the less monumental buildings set within these landscapes continued in occupation, and that therefore some form of tributary relationship must have been established between their occupants and those of the brochs. Such ideas have been expressed before (e.g. MacKie 1965, Barrett 1981). What I wish to emphasise here is that the brochs themselves were no mere

reflection of social formations established elsewhere, either through large scale population movement, the diffusion of ideas or social structures which were independent of the material context within which they were set. What I hope I have demonstrated in this thesis is that the systems of land tenure on which the 'broch builders' drew were rooted in established traditions. There is no indication that any abstract source of authority was in operation during the middle Iron Age. Indeed, the very monumentality of the brochs suggests that domestic architecture was vitally important in the reproduction of society through routine practice, and that the relationships which were central to this were pursued on a localised, face-to-face basis.

The character of the middle Iron Age archaeology of the northern part of the area discussed in this thesis is very different to that of the south. It is difficult to propose any clear relationship between the location of broch sites and their contemporary surrounding landscapes. However, it is still possible, in many instances, to explore the relationship between a site and its physical landscape. Although one of the results of the scale of view adopted in the local case study areas has been to identify just how varied is the relationship between sites and their landscapes, there are two main general observations which may be drawn from this. Firstly, given the less elevated and more undulating nature of the north of the area under discussion, it is hardly surprising that the locations chosen for brochs are far less visually dominant than to the south. However, the majority of sites do make use of local topography in order to enhance their visual impact, whether through breaking the skyline of a low ridge, being viewed against the backdrop of more distant hills, or being situated at the edge of a steep-sided river valley. Sites may also have drawn upon the proximity of landscapes given significance by the presence of ancestral remains, which although long abandoned may have been incorporated into practices which reproduced new social relationships. In most cases, an *appearance* of dominance seems to have been more important than occupying the highest or most easily defensible location. As in the southern area, this suggests that the monumentality of the brochs worked to intervene in the daily life of the agricultural landscape.

In the main, however, these sites were not the fulcrum of a more dispersed pattern of settlement, but lay at the heart of a nucleated community. While it is clearly difficult to demonstrate with any certainty, the clustered and interconnected nature of these would make more sense within the context of communities linked by the bonds of kinship. Nonetheless, the monumental presence of the broch at the heart of such settlements would be a constant reminder of differences in status between those entitled to reside within, and those living in the clustered buildings outside.

The second general point which can be drawn from the landscape context of the northern and eastern broch sites concerns the patterns of intervisibility and mutual reference which appear to exist between them. Many sites were clearly oriented towards others within their local landscapes. Unfortunately, the underdeveloped chronology of broch settlement in the north does not allow us to ascertain whether these patterns of visual reference relate to the use of abandoned sites as an ancestral resource, or whether they should be viewed in the context of relationships of interdependence between neighbouring settlements. It is tempting to suggest that these were not the isolated 'island' communities of the western isles (Armit 1997b, 250), but extended households linked by kinship, who maintained networks of relationships with communities spread over a wider landscape. Indeed, this may be one way of approaching the problem of the formal similarity of middle Iron Age architecture throughout the 'Atlantic Province'. This has often been cast as a reflection of a wider social unity, and even the wholesale importation of a unitary social system from elsewhere. I would suggest that, in fact, this similarity may relate to a social situation which is almost completely opposed to this. Societies consist of a range of very different, and often competing, institutions which operate within varied practical contexts. Indeed, it is seldom possible to clearly demarcate the boundaries of social institutions, and both individuals and groups often construct their identities through relationships which extend well outside the every day world of routine practice (Giddens 1984, 163 – 8). This is just as likely to have been the case during the Iron Age, and the similarity of domestic architecture over a wide area may have been the result of an almost infinite number of interdigitated relationships, pursued between small communities who were not necessarily in physical proximity. A widespread recognition of a common social meaning in domestic architecture, and hence a certain physical similarity, may have resulted. Indeed, the historically attested development of wider social formations in the later Iron Age seems to have been accompanied by an increasingly *heterogeneous* domestic architecture.

Although the brochs of the north and east have been largely decontextualised by modern land use, here we have the advantage of a significant body of excavated material, which allows important insights into the structural details of domestic architecture. This suggests that the interiors of these monumental buildings had also become formalised and, at least initially, divided into very specific areas. However, the excavated evidence also affords a glimpse of more infrequent episodes of modification and embellishment. Although a dichotomy has grown up between interpretations which propose such subdivisions as part of an original 'plan' and those which consider them as mere secondary modifications, I would suggest that the true situation may have been far more complex. Given the extended chronology which is emerging for the brochs, there now seems no reason to think in terms of linear sequences of development in the use of broch interiors. Bloch (1995) has shown how, rather than being a

mere living space, the house may function as a metaphor for the permanence and continuity of both the household and the wider social group. He also demonstrates that the significance of individual buildings may be maintained and enhanced through practical acts of physical elaboration. This opens up subtleties which are obscured by simplistic concepts of 'primary' and 'secondary' occupation. I would argue that we should move away from interpreting the use of broch sites over time in terms of a simple linear retrogression from construction to decay, and think in terms of more cyclical processes. Thus, I would suggest that the instances of elaboration which I have identified in the brochs of Northern Scotland, which are sometimes extreme in nature, should be seen as episodes in the use of the brochs as a complex material resource. This was incorporated in practices which served both to reproduce the community at large, and possibly also to enable the appropriation of the building by successive generations. In addition, I would argue that the settlements of buildings surrounding these brochs should also not be seen in simplistic terms, either as part of a preordained plan or as mere 'squatter' dwellings, but instead may represent a continuous process of accretion and elaboration of structures which drew their social meaning from the central symbolic and material resource of the broch itself.

The later Iron Age seems to have seen the construction of a radically different set of social landscapes, with monumental domestic buildings being constructed deep within the river valleys of south east Caithness and eastern Sutherland, and possibly also to the north. I do not wish to argue that these sites represent the totality of settlement dating to the later Iron Age. Although unequivocal evidence is limited, it is almost certain that broch sites continued to provide a focus for settlement well into the First Millennium AD. In some cases, this seems to have involved the continued use of the complexes of surrounding buildings, and even of the broch itself. However, in most cases this continued use seems to have involved the construction of rectangular buildings. These represented a discontinuity with long sequences of reproduction of the predominantly circular form of the house. I would argue, then, that this later use should not be assumed to be continuity in the accepted sense. Rather, it may have had more to do with the appropriation of places of traditional significance (Bradley 1987). Broch sites were not being used in their original form, but rather were being drawn upon as a resource for the creation of new social worlds (cf. Driscoll 1998). The significance of a new, rectangular architecture may, in some instances, have been emphasised by its being physically imposed upon existing circular buildings.

As I have suggested above, however, new landscapes were created during the later Iron Age, and aisled buildings were constructed deep within the straths and glens. The location of such buildings appears not to have drawn upon existing systems of land cultivation, and in some cases they were placed in landscapes which are unlikely ever to have been cultivable.

The visual dominance enjoyed by the brochs does not seem to have been a concern during the late Iron Age, and many sites may have been at least partly subterranean. This suggests that a physical intervention of domestic architecture within the routines of the landscape was no longer of primary importance. On the contrary, the location of the aisled buildings suggests that patterns of access and movement along and between the river systems was now central to the maintenance of social life. Indeed, our perception of the landscapes occupied by these buildings as peripheral may be a comparatively modern one, a result of the shift of emphasis away from the valleys and towards the coast during the past two hundred years. The heart of the area discussed in this thesis, the hills, moorland and peat bog of central Caithness, may never have been farmed or settled. However, during the later Iron Age, it may have been the hub of routes of movement linking landscapes to both north and south.

The task of this concluding chapter is to identify wider social contexts within which the specific local practices identified might be set. Barrett and Foster (1991) have proposed just such a context for the later Iron Age. They suggest that it may have been characterised by the emergence of more extensive, long-distance social relationships, eventually leading to the establishment of the wider political entities of the early historic period, such as that which we now know as 'Pictland'. It seems likely that social life was negotiated through the brochs on a localised, face-to-face basis. The establishment of power relationships which operated over much wider areas may eventually have removed the imperative for practices which involved a constant, routine reinforcement through the domestic domain. Although the precise function of the aisled buildings remains unclear on the basis of present evidence, it is possible that they were intended as storehouses for produce, which may have been brought in from the surrounding landscape. It is also possible that localised obligations were fulfilled during the specific acts of deposition of such produce, perhaps as part of local networks of tribute, rather than on a more generalised, daily basis. This would be one way to explain both their internal monumentality and their lack of visual impact. It is therefore possible that the aisled buildings were associated with those who were entitled to receive produce from the surrounding community, and maintained their social standing from this. Officials directly appointed by regional potentates do not seem to have been a feature of 'Pictland' until the eighth century AD (Foster 1996, 61), and the aisled buildings are likely to be somewhat earlier in date. Nonetheless, it seems possible that they were incorporated within wider tributary relations, possibly even nascent systems of taxation which involved the transfer of moveable wealth in return for rights of access to land. The pursuance of such practices may have obliged local elites to move widely across the landscape in order to take possession of material tributes. Such movement would also have been necessary to reinforce relationships of dominance

which were no longer reproduced through the daily routines of the agricultural landscape. The aisled buildings may have been positioned at the intersection of local and regional landscapes, and may have represented part of the "...material conditions of life within which ...'proto-states' may have emerged" (Barrett & Foster 1991, 49).

10.3. Notes for Further Work

This thesis has involved the compilation of a considerable body of empirical material, much of which has been derived from unexcavated sites and monuments. At the conclusion of a piece of work such as this, it is customary to suggest that our understanding of the material discussed may be improved by further excavations on the sites discussed. While I hope I have been able to demonstrate in this thesis that useful insights can be gained into the nature of past social lives through an exploration of field monuments, it is nonetheless true that new programmes of excavation would clarify certain issues which I have been able to touch on only tentatively. Even in the case of more recent excavations at broch site on the northern mainland, for instance, the opportunity has been lost to undertake a thorough examination of the complexes of surrounding buildings, and therefore to understanding something of processes of long-term use and change on these sites, and especially the presence and nature of later Iron Age buildings. It is, however, unlikely that a major broch excavation will be undertaken in Caithness or eastern Sutherland in the near future. Such programmes of work are both time-consuming and enormously expensive, and there is little immediate threat to the survival of sites which would justify this within the current climate. However, it is certainly true, as I hope I have been able to demonstrate within the preceding pages, that the aisled buildings are an important class of later prehistoric site which may offer the key to an understanding of the early- to mid-first millennium AD in Northern Scotland. It is therefore unfortunate that so little detailed information exists as to their precise chronological context, or in relation to processes of use and deposition. It is imperative that a major excavation be carried out on one of these sites with the benefit of current excavation techniques, in order to bring them fully into the mainstream of British prehistory. There are a number of sites which would repay excavation. The sites of Cor Tulloch and the Wag, in the Dunbeath area, both offer both good access and the apparent survival of undisturbed deposits within the aisled buildings themselves. One site at which there is incontrovertible justification for further excavation, however, is the Wag of Forse. Here we have a partially excavated site which displays for an occupation sequence quite as broad and varied as, for example, the far better known sites at Clickhimin and Jarshof, Shetland or Gurness and Midhowe, Orkney. A programme of re-excavation here would serve both to enable the presentation of this fascinating and important site to a wider public, and to elucidate the relationship between its aisled buildings

and both earlier and later structures. Undisturbed deposits exist within both the broch and one of the aisled buildings here, offering the likelihood of recovering important contextual and chronological information. A programme of research such as this would help to restore Northern Scotland to the central position which it once held in the study of the Iron Age in Atlantic Scotland.

Appendices

Appendix 1

The Wag of Forse

A re-interpretation of a multi-period site in Caithness

1. Introduction

1.1. General description

The Wag of Forse was partially excavated by A.O. Curle during June and July 1939, and this work was continued over a further three seasons following the Second World War, between 1946 and 1948. The excavations were summarised by Curle in a series of papers published in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries (P.S.A.S)* (Curle 1941, 1946, 1948). The site had previously been scheduled in 1934 (Hingley 1991), following its inclusion in the Royal Commission inventory of 1911, and was therefore presumably considered to be of importance in relation to the surrounding archaeology (Curle 1941, 24). Curle's preliminary sketch of the unexcavated site (Figure 4), made at the time of his tour of the county during 1910, indicates that it must have represented a considerable, turf-covered mound of earth and large stones, with the outlines of some of the constituent structures visible on the surface. This perceived monumentality appears to have been largely responsible for the selection of the site for excavation, in preference to surrounding archaeology of a rather more ephemeral character. Deterioration of the site since the conclusion of the excavations appears to have been limited (Hingley 1991), although there has been little or no consolidation. Although Curle back-filled his excavations to some extent, and much of the fine structural detail is now overgrown, the present appearance and condition of the site can be considered to be largely that in which it was left in 1948. Although it is a scheduled ancient monument, there is no official access to the Wag of Forse, and there are no signposts indicating its location on nearby public roads. As a consequence, numbers of visitors to the site during the past fifty years have been low, and the site has not suffered the attendant problems of erosion to any appreciable degree.

1.2. Geographic location and landscape setting

The Wag of Forse is situated in Latheron Parish, Caithness, 1.7km NNE of the village of Latheron itself (Figure 1). The site is located at ND 2048 3520, some 120m above OD, at the southern edge of what today is an extensive area of heather moorland and rough pasture. To the south and east lies a system of ancient field walls, overlain by cultivation strips or rigs which mark the site of pre-clearance cultivation, although the area today is used as sheep pasture. Although it is probable that the field walls post-date the occupation of the Wag of Forse itself, there are traces of an earlier field system extending from the site into this area (Figure 2). It is therefore likely that this was the area cultivated in the past. To the north and west of the site, the land rises in a series of terraces formed by eroded natural flagstone outcrops,

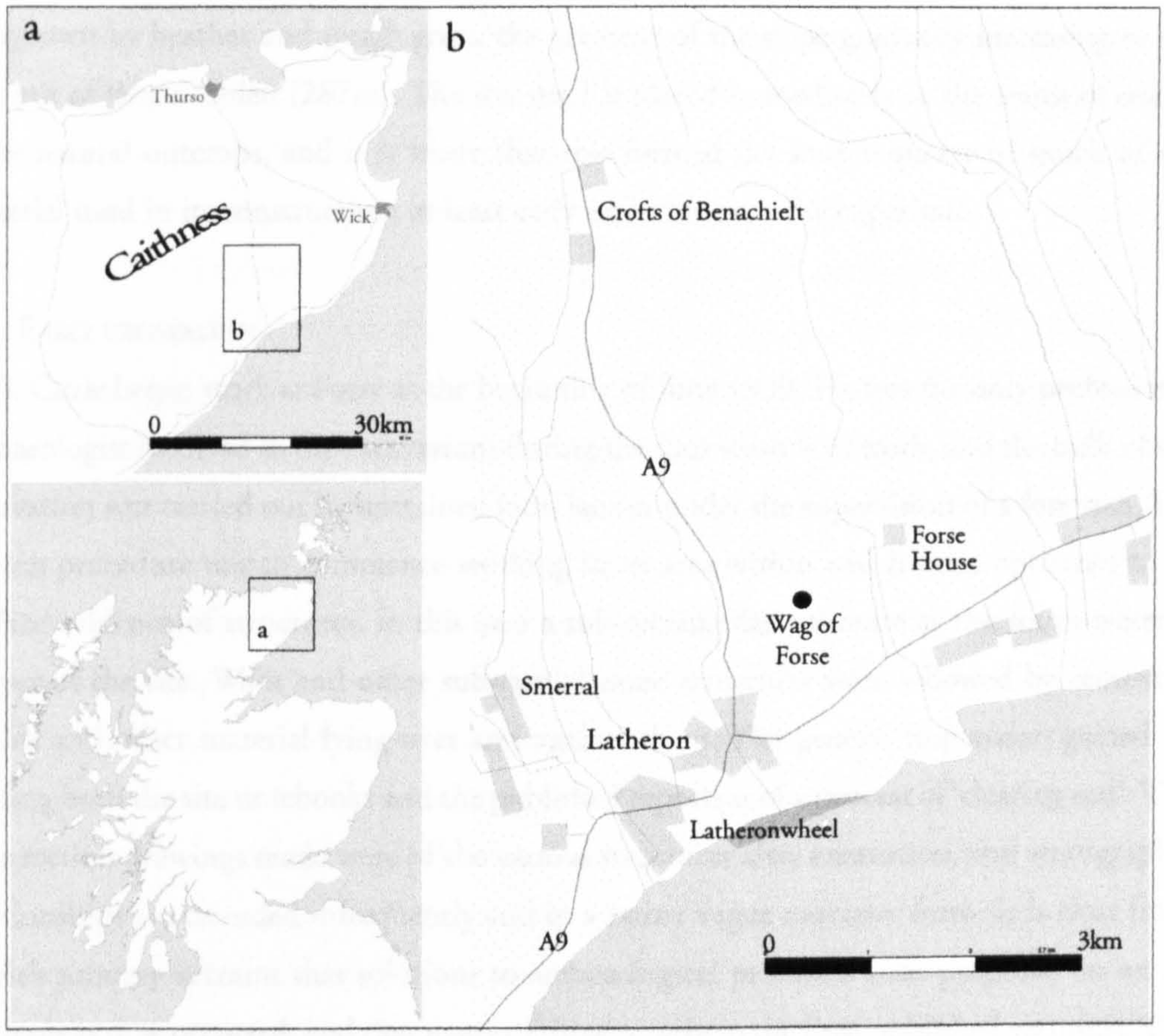


Figure 1 : Location of the WAG OF FORSE.

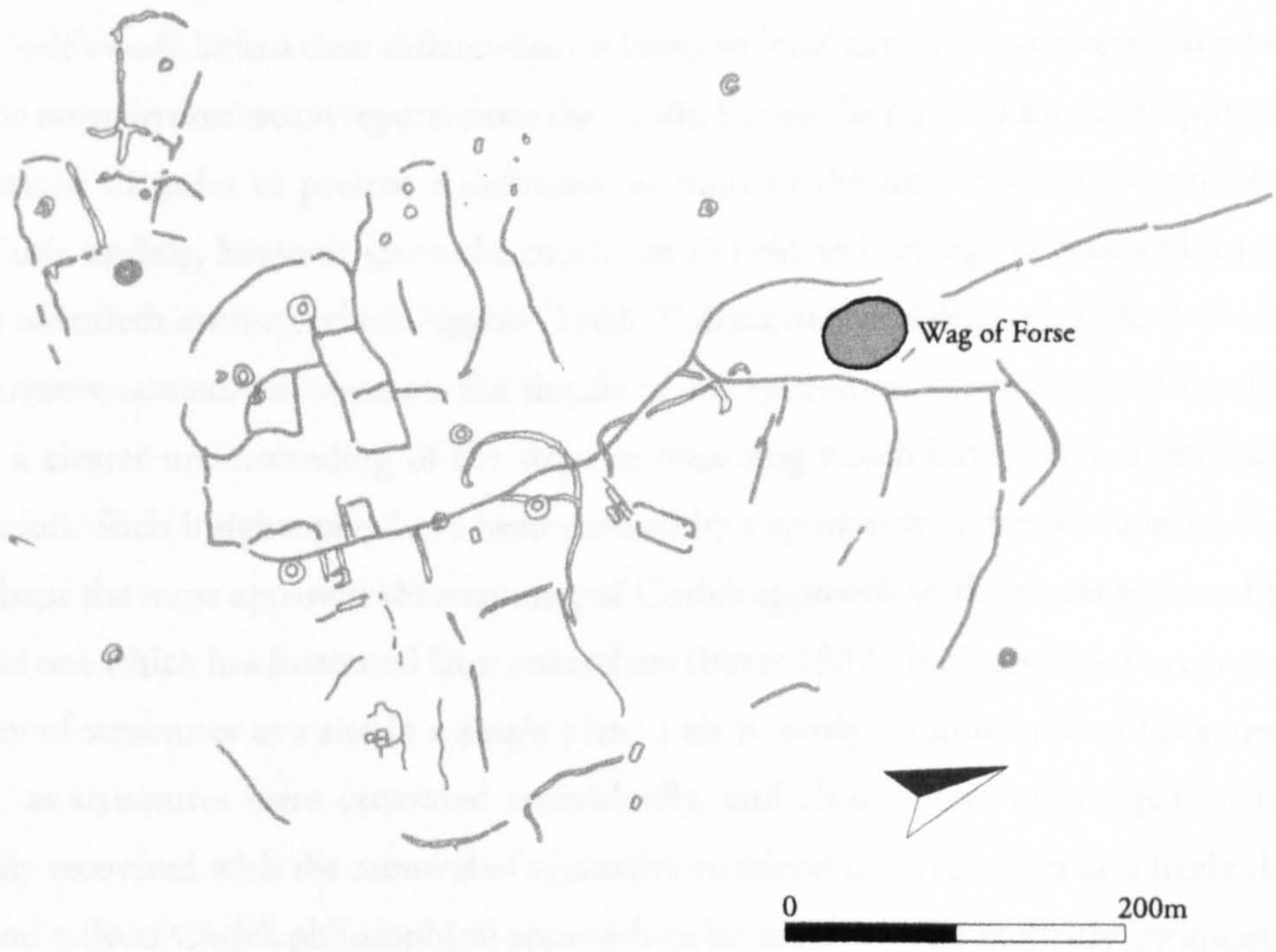


Figure 2 : Field systems around the WAG OF FORSE (after Mercer in Hingley 1991).

overgrown by heather and rough grass, the gradient of the slope gradually increasing to the summit of Ben-a-Chielt (287m). The site itself is placed immediately to the south of one of these natural outcrops, and it is likely that this formed the source quarry of much of the material used in its construction, at least early in its history of occupation.

1.3. Early excavation

A.O. Curle began work at Forse at the beginning of June 1939. He was the only professional archaeologist involved in the excavations during the four seasons of work, and the bulk of the excavation was carried out by untrained local labour under the supervision of a foreman. His chosen procedure was to commence working in an area within which there appeared to be surface evidence of structures, in this case a sub-rectangular structure at the south-western corner of the site. Walls and other substantial stone structures were followed by removing rubble and other material lying over and against them. The general impression gained by reading both the site notebooks and the published reports is of a process of 'clearing out'. The only section drawings made were of the various structures after excavation, and stratigraphic relationships are recorded infrequently and in a rather vague narrative form. It is clear from Curle's primary account that solutions to archaeological problems were proposed on an *ad hoc* basis as they occurred, and that many of these survive to the final published accounts. The latter are, in fact, little more than condensed and rationalised versions of the field notes. In common with the majority of published excavations in Scotland from the earlier part of this century, Curle's work lacks a clear differentiation between 'raw' data and interpretation which became the norm in excavation reports from the 1950s. Rather, he pursued a unitary approach to his material in order to present a definitive account of the site. It would be unfair to criticise Curle unduly, however, given the condition of field archaeology in Scotland during the earlier twentieth century, which Piggott (1962, 2) dismisses as "shocking". Indeed, Curle's *ad hoc* narrative sometimes obscures the details of his excavation procedure, it also often facilitates a clearer understanding of the steps in reasoning which have led to a particular interpretation. Such insights may have been masked by a spuriously systematic approach.

Perhaps the most apparent shortcoming of Curle's approach to the presentation of his results, and one which has frustrated later researchers (Batey 1987), is his attempt to represent the totality of structures at a site in a single plan. This is partly symptomatic of his general approach, as structures were excavated individually, and clear phases of occupation not sequentially recovered with the removal of successive stratigraphic layers. It is also likely that this method reflects Curle's philosophical approach to his material. His explicitly antiquarian approach, which involved recording and describing numerous archaeological monuments of many periods, may have led Curle to regard the landscape as a palimpsest, an approach which

he applies on a smaller scale to the excavations at Forse. I would not deny that the imposition of chronological demarcation lines onto the remains of past activity is an arbitrary construction of the archaeologist. It does not reflect the true nature of the formation of the archaeological record, in the sense that the most easily recognisable stratigraphic horizons are likely to be due to periods of decay or destruction rather than to stability of use (Barrett 1987). However, such an approach is none the less analytically useful as long as its arbitrary nature is recognised. In the current context, where I am involved in a re-reading of Curle's original archaeological text (see section 2.1 below), gross divisions of the archaeology at Forse are all that are likely to be reasonably recognised. In what follows, then, I will attempt to discuss the stratigraphic and structural information that survives, and to suggest a revised phasing for the Wag of Forse. This will be combined with an interpretation of these structures as *architecture,* in an attempt to move away from the structural/cultural typologies which have defined much previous work on the Atlantic Iron Age, and instead to consider how this architecture may have been the product of Iron Age society in Caithness, and may itself have worked in the control and articulation of human social relationships.

2. Re-interpretation

2.1. General methodology

It is fortunate, that unlike many other archaeologists and antiquaries working during the earlier part of this century, A.O. Curle maintained copious descriptive records of his work. In addition to notes detailing his excavations at Freswick Links and Forse, Curle also kept a journal of his tour of Caithness made for the purpose of compiling the RCAHMS inventory for the county (RCAHMS 1911b), as well as notes, illustrations and descriptions of numerous museum artefacts and single finds, and a personal diary. All of these were donated to the nation after Curle's death, and are now held in the National Monuments Record for Scotland (NMRS). It was my intention, in undertaking the programme of research presented here, to make the best possible use of this primary material, and consequently several weeks were spent at the NMRS in making detailed notes on Curle's record of his excavations at Forse, in addition to any other potentially relevant material contained within his other notes and journals. Although these notes were taken in condensed form, a concerted effort was made to reduce interpretation on my part at this stage, and consequently a full record was made of every entry relating to the excavations, however apparently trivial it appeared. Copies were also obtained of the sketch plans and artefact illustrations which accompany Curle's notes, and a record kept of the various finds described therein.

Once the compilation of this material in note form was complete, an attempt was made to re-consider the nature and phasing of the site based on Curle's primary observations, a comparison between these and his published accounts, and most importantly a detailed examination of the site itself. I am, however, conscious of the methodological limitations of this approach - what I have undertaken, in essence, is a re-reading and re-interpretation of Curle's original *text* rather than a reconsideration of the physical process of excavation itself. Any new observations are therefore partly a critical account of the intellectual approach of the original excavator, and of the logical structure of the argument presented in his text. Although it has been possible to recover some of the original context of Curle's work by visiting the site itself, at which many of the structural relationships he noted can still be observed, a significant part of this context no longer exists. The re-interpretation presented below is therefore inextricably dependent on Curle's original observations, and should not in any sense be considered as a 'new' excavation report - what I hope to show is that in several important respects Curle was mistaken about the nature of the site based on his own observations, and that a meaningful re-interpretation of his material can be put forward so long as we are clear about its limitations. Thus, Curle's published interpretations of the archaeology at Forse have been integrated into this re-interpretation only where there is contextual corroboration, either from the site as it stands or from within his primary text itself; similarly, his observations have been rejected where such corroboration is lacking, or where his text displays internal contradiction or logical inconsistency.

2.2. The site sequence

Curle interpreted the material recovered during the excavations at Forse as it was revealed, and these results were published as narrative accounts over a span of seven years. He does not appear at any time to have considered the totality of the excavated evidence, at least in print, and the resultant interpretation therefore represents the sum of a series of *ad hoc* solutions offered piecemeal as interpretative problems occurred. As I hope to show, erroneous interpretations made during this process were never re-assessed, were perpetuated, and have been reproduced in more recent work (MacKie 1971, Mercer 1991). This is especially evident in Curle's plan of the Wag of Forse (Figure 3), first presented in his second report (Curle 1945, fig 1.). This contains stratigraphic interpretations which are contradicted by the text of the report but which he continued to reproduce in its original form.

Detailed analysis of Curle's field notebooks, and a comparison between these and his published accounts, has allowed the revised phasing for the Wag of Forse which follows. The original identification letters used by Curle are somewhat confusing as they relate to structures as they were recovered during the course of the excavations rather than to individual phases,

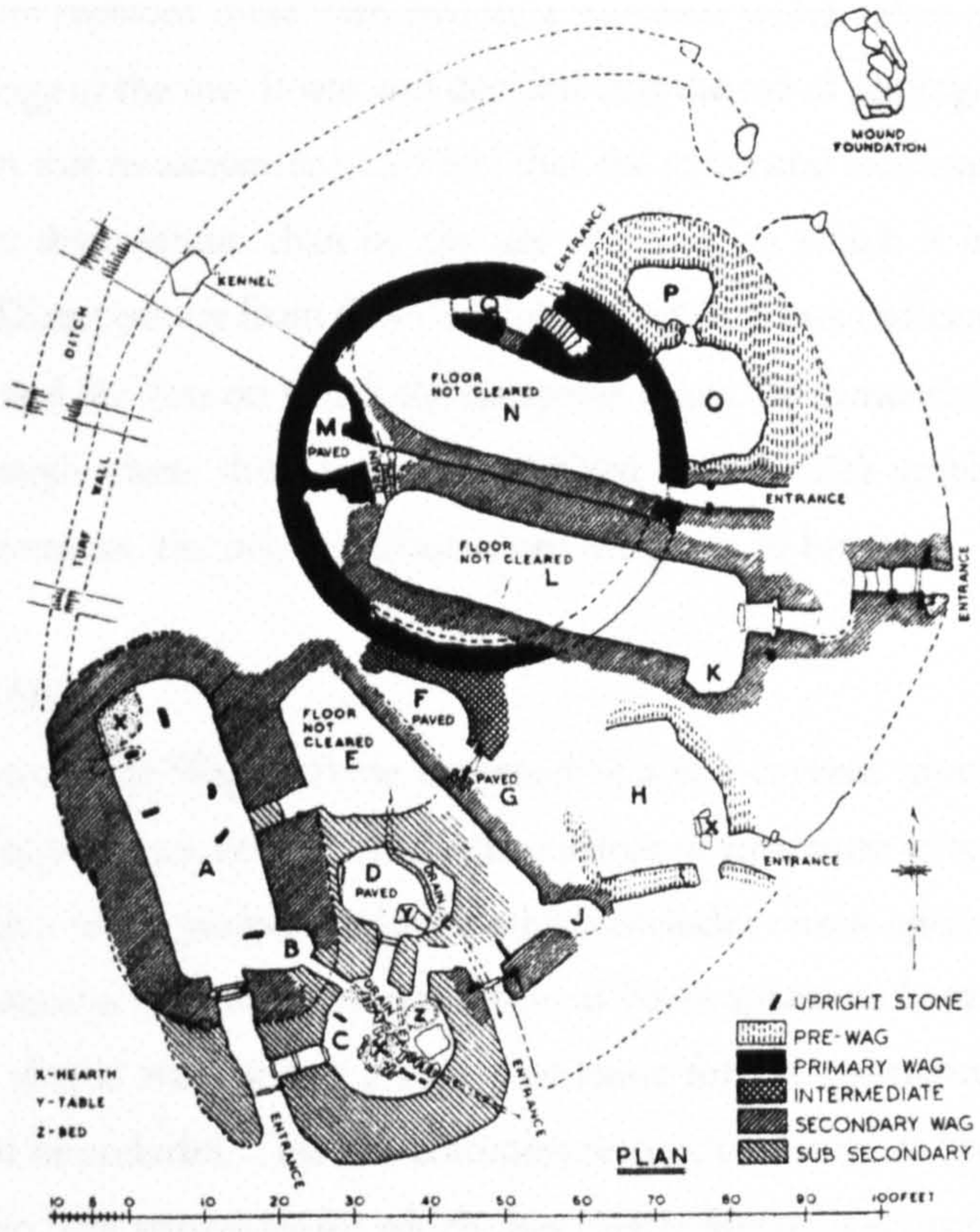


Figure 3 : Published plan of the Wag of Forse (Curle 1946, Fig 1).

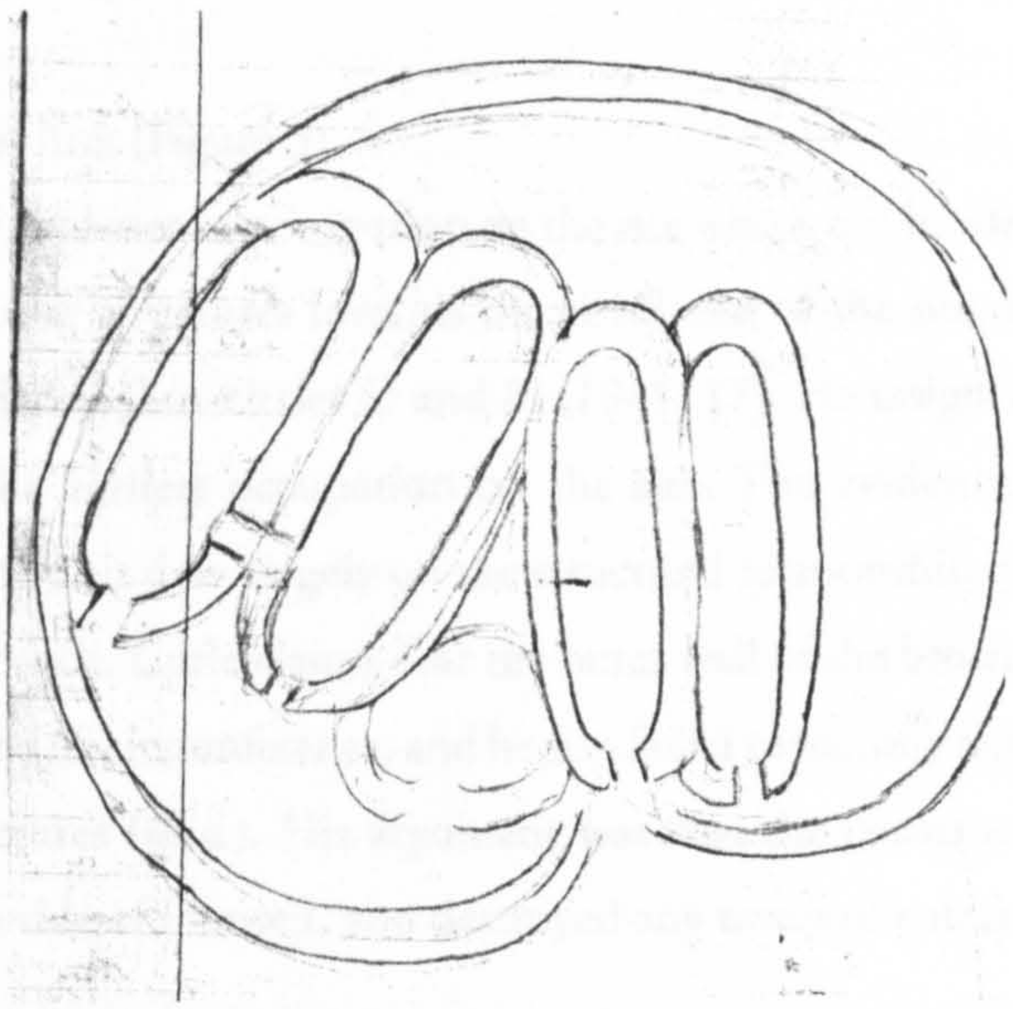


Figure 4 : Pre-excavation plan of the Wag of Forse, 1910. Crown Copyright: RCAHMS

and I have therefore replaced these with structure numbers which relate more closely to the suggested chronology of the site. It was also decided that the use of photography should be an integral element in this re-assessment, as I feel that the structural relationships discussed are better conveyed in this manner than by the use of plans, on which it is difficult to show structural details. Direct quotes from Curle's original field notes are indicated by their NMRS reference number and the date on which the entry was made. All dimensions are presented in metric units, although where these have been derived from Curle's notebooks, rather than from direct measurement, the original dimensions are given in brackets.

Phase O: Recent Use

Prior to its excavation, the Wag of Forse consisted of a turf-covered mound made up from rubble and many large stones, within which the outlines of structures were visible (Figure 4). The site sits within a multi-period landscape which includes recent agricultural settlement, and few of the structures uncovered by excavation at Forse appear to have been complete; it is therefore likely that it was used as a source of stone for the construction of these later buildings and field boundaries. This is a common feature of the other 'wag' sites, of which many sit adjacent to later structures for which they clearly formed a source of building stone. The mound was also used for the burial of dead livestock by the local shepherds, and Curle was obliged to remove two "woolly skeletons" at the outset of the excavations (MS/28/461(3), 7/6/39).

Phase 1: Later Iron Age (Figure 5)

The latest structural evidence of occupation on the site which can be identified as pre-modern are the two sub-circular structures towards the north-east of the site, House I and House II which Curle identified as 'hut-circles O and P' (1945, 17). He assigned these to a "pre-wag" phase (Figure 3), the earliest occupation on the site. The evidence for this is, however, unconvincing, resting as it does largely on the structural relationship between the hut-circles and the wall of the broch. Curle claims that the outer wall of the broch is thinner in this area than elsewhere around its circumference, and he also failed to identify any evidence of entrances into these two structures (*ibid.*). His argument was that the construction of the broch cut through the western side of House I, and destroyed any traces of entrances which might have existed in this area.

Although it is now difficult to gauge the thickness of the broch wall in this area due to collapse and the overgrowth of vegetation, examination of the site itself indicates that access to these structures may have been gained via a space between them and the broch outer wall, in addition to through an entrance passage placed to the south of the structures to which

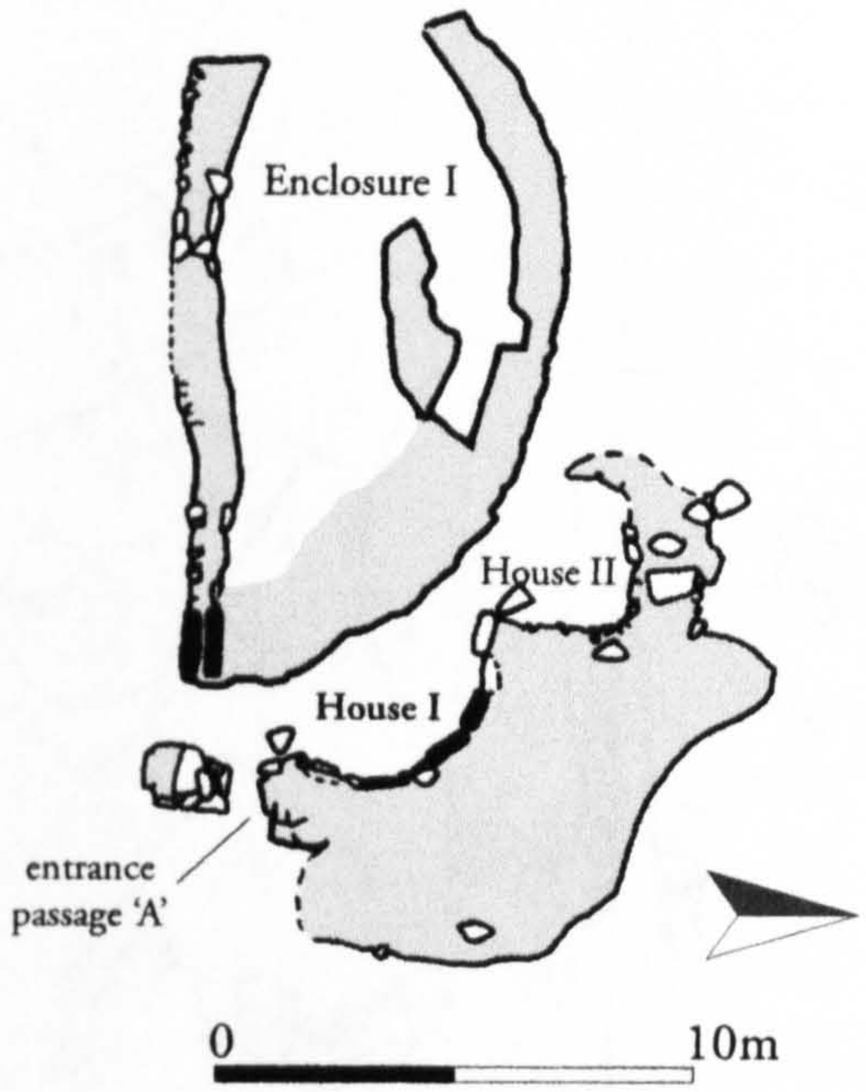


Figure 5 : Plan of Phase 1 structures.

access is from the east. Curle's field notes suggest that this space may be an original feature of the site, as he notes that he is "...opening up a passage from the doorway which may lead to them..." (Houses I and II) (MS/28/461(4), 16/8/46). Whatever the status of this area, it is clear both in looking at the site plan and also on the ground that the constructed entrance passage A was intended to lead to the two sub-circular cells. An explanation of Curle's failure to realise this can perhaps be found in a comparison between his plans of the Wag of Forse (Figure 3) and an examination of the site as it now stands (Figure 5). An error was clearly made in the representation of this area of the site during the production of the original plane-table plan (Figure 6), and this has been perpetuated and compounded in the later production of an inked version for publication and the subsequent interpretations based on this. Curle's published plan depicts the entrance passage to Houses I and II leading to a gap through the roundhouse wall into the secondary Enclosure I (N in Curle's nomenclature (Figure 3)), although an examination of this area of the site itself demonstrates conclusively that this is not the case. The two entrances are clearly not aligned, that which gives access to Houses I and II opening opposite the solid outer face of the broch wall and turning to the right to lead to House I. The entrance through the broch wall leads into the gap between the walls which define the boundary between Enclosure I and Aisled Building III. Furthermore, in his published plan Curle has transposed the stone slab which forms the sill of the eastern entrance through

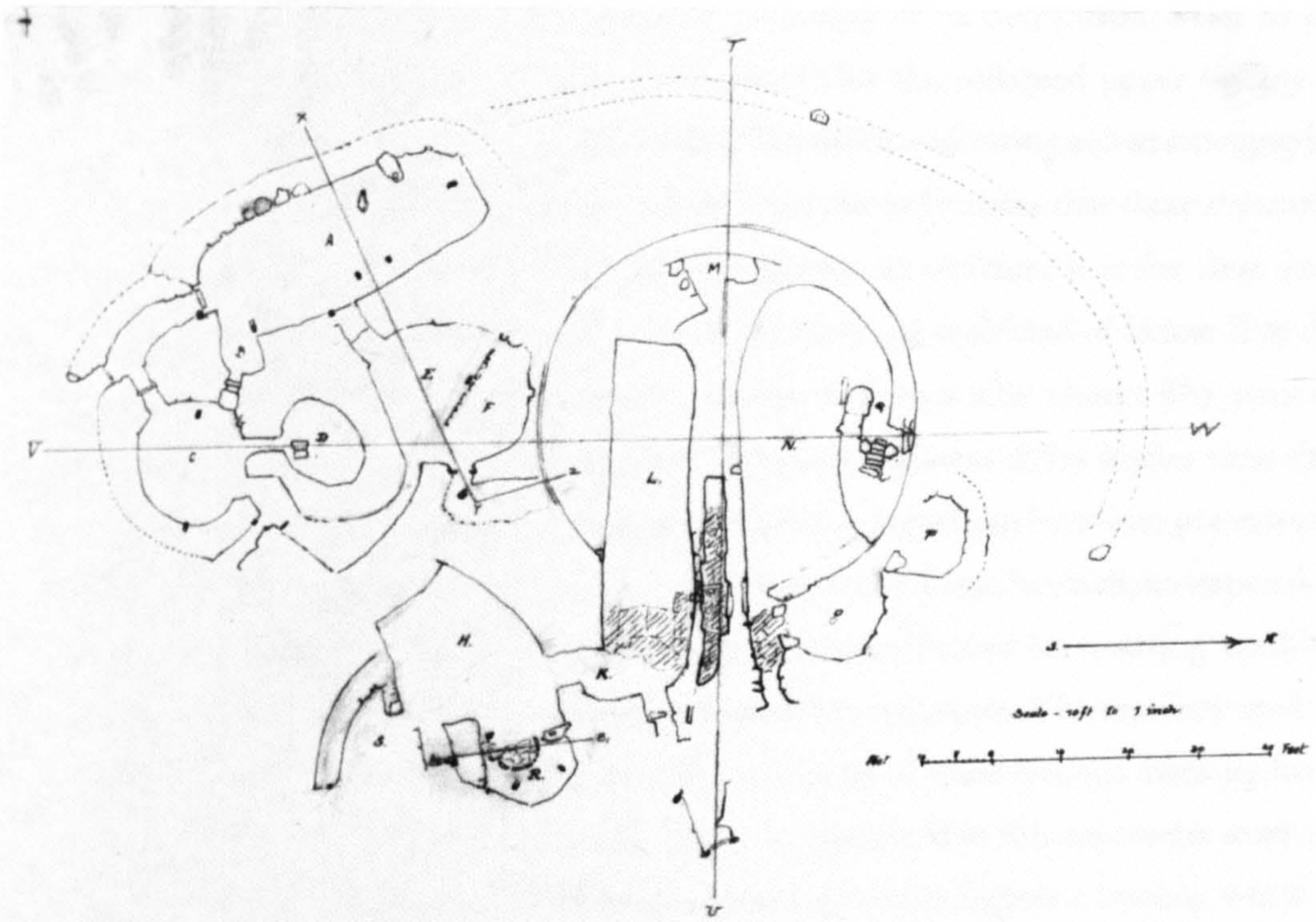


Figure 6 : Original plane-table plan of the Wag of Forse, made during Curle's excavations. Crown Copyright: RCAHMS.

the broch wall, which appears in its correct position on the original field drawing (Figure 6), to a supposed entrance into Enclosure I, 1.6m further to the north. There is no good evidence for this. It is impossible to determine now at what point this error occurred, but it has important implications for the phasing of this area of the site, not only in relation to Phase 1 but also for earlier periods of the site's history (see below). It is now apparent that, contrary to Curle's interpretation of this area of the site, access was possible to Houses I and II. It is therefore difficult to maintain his argument that later construction has truncated them in the area of their supposed entrances.

There are also entries in Curle's field notes which indicate that the suggested stratigraphic context for these structures is itself erroneous. Clearing of the interior of House I appears to have cut through the latest floor level to reveal traces of occupation beneath, and its foundations were clearly built above the remains of an earlier wall. A section cut through the wall of House I exposed occupation traces, including pottery sherds, charcoal and fragments of bone, and it is therefore likely that its foundations were placed on an earlier structure, which was itself wholly or partly obscured by midden material. While it is therefore clear that these structures do not represent the primary occupation on the site, there are additional indications

that they may in fact belong to a late phase in its history of its occupation. Prior to the beginning of the excavations in this area Curle noted that the collapsed upper walling of Houses I and II had slumped *over* the ruined wall of the broch, indicating a clear stratigraphic primacy in favour of the latter, and on several other occasions he notes that these structures had been constructed *against* the wall of the roundhouse. In addition, it is the clear from Curle's notes that the inner depth from the top of the surviving wall-head of House II to the latest floor level was greater than that on the outside, and even after almost fifty years of silting and vegetation growth the interior level of House I is some 0.5m higher than that outside. The implication is that these structures are likely to have been built into pre-existing structural debris and possibly the midden material which Curle found beneath, an impression strengthened by the fact that they appear to have been constructed by revetting tumbled stone with a new wall-face rather than being free-standing structures. The masonry used to construct this wall-face is very mixed in character, consisting of some sections made up from large stones and some from smaller rubble, and it is possible that this represents material robbed from surrounding structures. Given the proximity of the flagstone outcrop which is likely to have formed the source of stone for many of the features on the site, it appears likely that the earliest structures on the site would have been constructed from freshly quarried, evenly sized blocks rather than this very mixed material. This is the walling of 'poor quality' which forms part of Curle's argument for an early date for these structures.

There are also very ephemeral indications of late activity in the south-eastern part of the site, in the form of possible laid paving and scattered pottery sherds. However, despite the linear nature of Curle's excavation technique, the horizontal stratigraphy at Forse is not well developed, and it is therefore impossible to correlate this with the occupation evidence detailed above.

Finds and their Context

Although Curle details the recovery of "...remains of human occupation and small sherds of coarse cooking pot at various depths..." (1946, 17), it is apparent from his notes that most of this material was derived from earlier occupation in this area. At least one earlier floor level was cut through, and that most of the material described as coming from House I was actually found some 0.51m (1ft 9ins) below its foundation level. It is, however, possible that several small sherds of pottery relate to later activity within House I.

Interpretation of Structures

In view of these new observations on their character, it is difficult to maintain the interpretation that Houses I and II are primary, and they are more likely to relate to the latest observable phase of structural activity on the site. Indeed, it was Curle's initial observation that these structures were "...very late...sheep or lamb folds as (the) exterior wall is slight..." (MS/28/461(2), 14/8/46). The reasoning behind his change of interpretation is never made clear, either in note form or in his published work. Given the pre-eminence of typological and evolutionary approaches to material culture during the earlier part of this century (see Chapter 2), it is possible that Curle made the assumption that the irregular form of these structures, together with the less monumental masonry used in their construction when compared with the other buildings at Forse, indicated that they might fall early within a local developmental sequence. It is more likely that Houses I and II represent a building made up from two cells built against the remains of the broch outer wall. These were connected by a short passage, and entered via a more complex passage opening to the east. This structure may have been used in conjunction with an existing open yard, Enclosure I, defined by the insertion of a wall across the central area of the broch and making use of part of its northern arc of walling, including the northern entrance. Houses I and II were set into pre-existing structural debris and sit at the periphery of the northern part of the site, which must have consisted of a large mound of rubble and structural debris by the time they were built. The small amount of occupation material which may be assigned to this phase of occupation suggests small-scale domestic activity within these structures, consisting as it does of pottery sherds and part of a saddle quern. Given that much of the site is very disturbed, and other areas remain unexcavated, it is impossible to say whether these structures represent the sole occupation dating to this phase at Forse.

In the absence of any kind of reliable absolute dating material from Forse it is impossible to give these structures a precise chronological context, especially since there is little indication of the duration of the break between their occupation and that of the other structures on the site. The best structural parallels for Houses I and II would appear to be the late Iron Age structures from Howe (Ballin Smith (ed.) 1994, Illus 74). There is also some similarity to the 'figure-of-eight' buildings from Birsay Bay (Morris 1991) and the Brough of Birsay, Orkney (Hunter 1986), which are generally though to date to the later centuries of the first millennium AD. It might therefore be suggested, if tentatively given the geographical distance between the buildings at Forse and the Orkney examples, that this phase of activity falls somewhere within the middle to later first millennium AD.

Phase 2: middle/later Iron Age (Figure 7)

Enclosure I

An examination of the area of the site containing Enclosure I as it stands today indicates that although Aisled Building III is completely enclosed by its own facing walls, and is therefore uncontentious as a discrete structure, Enclosure I is far more problematic in nature. Curle records the height of the broch wall in this area as being between 1.22m (4ft) and 1.52m (5ft), presumably from foundation level. Although the wall height of the southern arc of somewhat less, between 0.91m (3ft) and 1.22m (4ft), it is clear that it would have been possible to utilise this part of the circumference as part of the outer wall of Aisled Building III in this area also. However, consideration of the primary excavation records also indicates that considerably more excavation was undertaken in the southern area, within which workmen were required to remove large amounts of debris, than in the northern area where the entrance area of the roundhouse lay just below the surface, and appeared at first to form an integral part of Enclosure I. It is likely, then, that Enclosure I was constructed making use of the visible remnant of the walling of the northern arc of the broch, whereas Aisled Building III was built into what would have appeared as a mound of tumbled stonework.

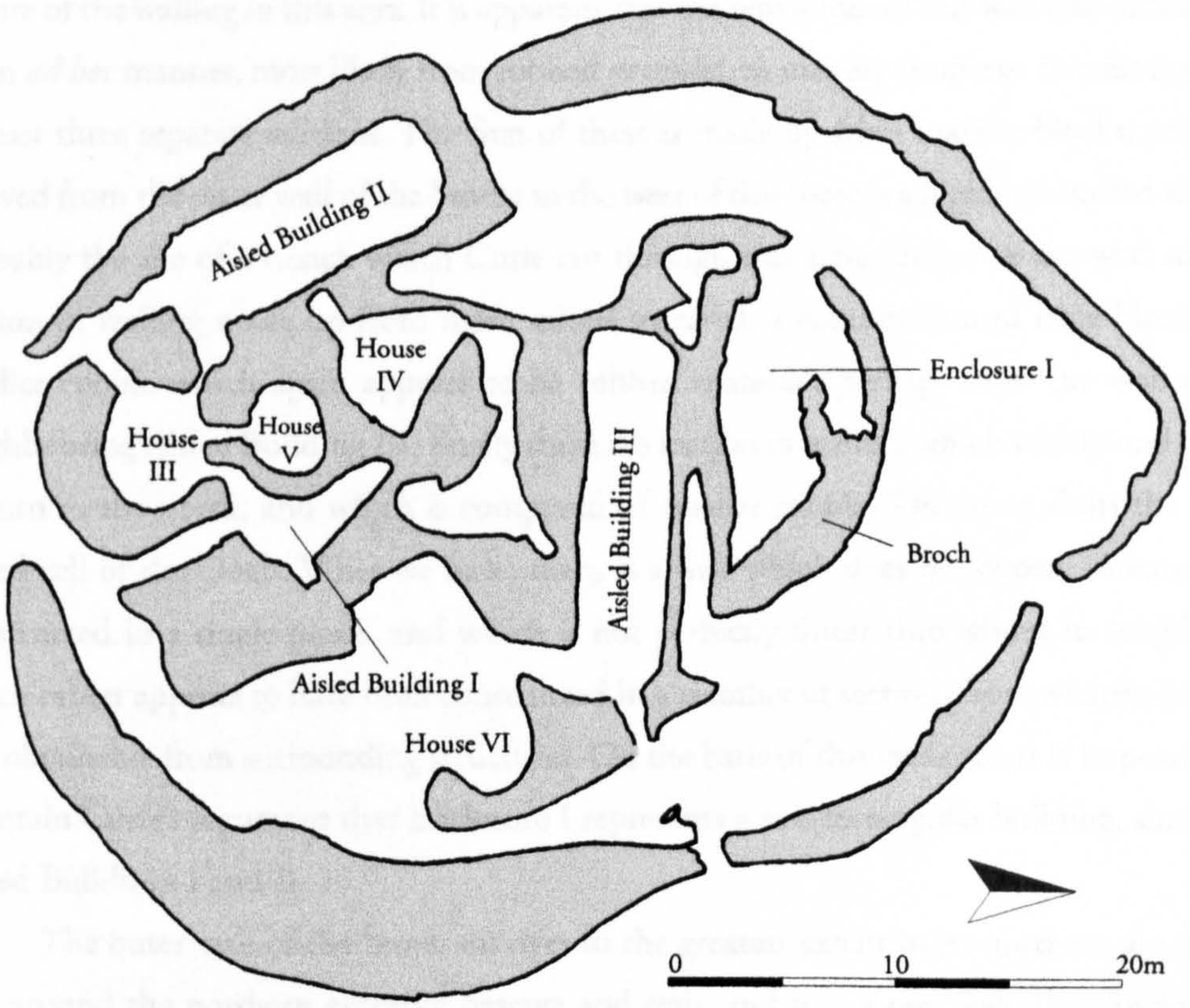


Figure 7 : Location of Phase 2 structures (after Mercer in Hingley 1991).

There is a problem here in that the wall which defines the southern boundary of Enclosure I, and which is its only original structural component, appears on examination in the field to be constructed in more than one fabric. Although Curle's published plan represents this wall as running in a fairly straight line across the site, in reality it changes direction at least twice along its length, and these directional changes appear to correspond to constructional changes within the masonry of the wall itself (see Figure 8). Each end of this wall is defined by a pre-existing constructional element of the broch; at the western end the junction between the large stones defining the outer edge of the intra-mural cell is very clear - the two merely abut rather than being bonded together (Figure 8, Plate 1), and at the eastern end the terminal of this wall is defined by two huge slabs placed side by side and which delineate the original eastern entrance through the broch outer wall. Once again, the wall of Enclosure I abuts these slabs rather than being bonded into them, and they clearly sit at a slightly different angle. The best explanation of the use of these two slabs in this manner would appear to be that they represent the re-use of masonry from the original structure of the broch, as will be discussed below. Although Curle recorded these slabs on his original field drawing, he failed to include them in the final published version, perhaps because he was unable to explain them satisfactorily within the context of a wall of unitary construction. Curle was, however, aware of the secondary nature of the walling in this area. It is apparent that the remainder of this wall was constructed in an *ad hoc* manner, most likely from robbed material, as moving from east to west there are at least three separate sections. The first of these is made up from massive blocks, probably derived from the outer wall of the broch; to the west of this there is a highly disturbed section, probably the site of a trench which Curle cut through this area; further to the west still is a section of walling made up from more mixed material, a combination of large blocks and smaller rubble which again appears to be robbed material, perhaps from the wall of the neighbouring Aisled Building III; finally there is a section of walling which widens and begins to turn to the north, and which is composed of smaller rubble. The latter abuts the intra-mural cell of the broch. What we have, then, is a wall which does not appear to have been constructed in a single phase, and which is not perfectly linear throughout its length, but which rather appears to have been constructed in a number of sections from whatever rubble was obtainable from surrounding structures. On the basis of this evidence, it is impossible to maintain Curle's argument that Enclosure I represents a sub-rectangular building, similar to Aisled Buildings I and II.

The outer wall of the broch survives to the greatest extent in its northern arc, in the area around the northern entrance passage and stair, and it is more likely that Enclosure I represents the re-use of this area of the roundhouse, together with its upstanding entrance, at a late period in the history of the site. Curle also recovered evidence of burning on the

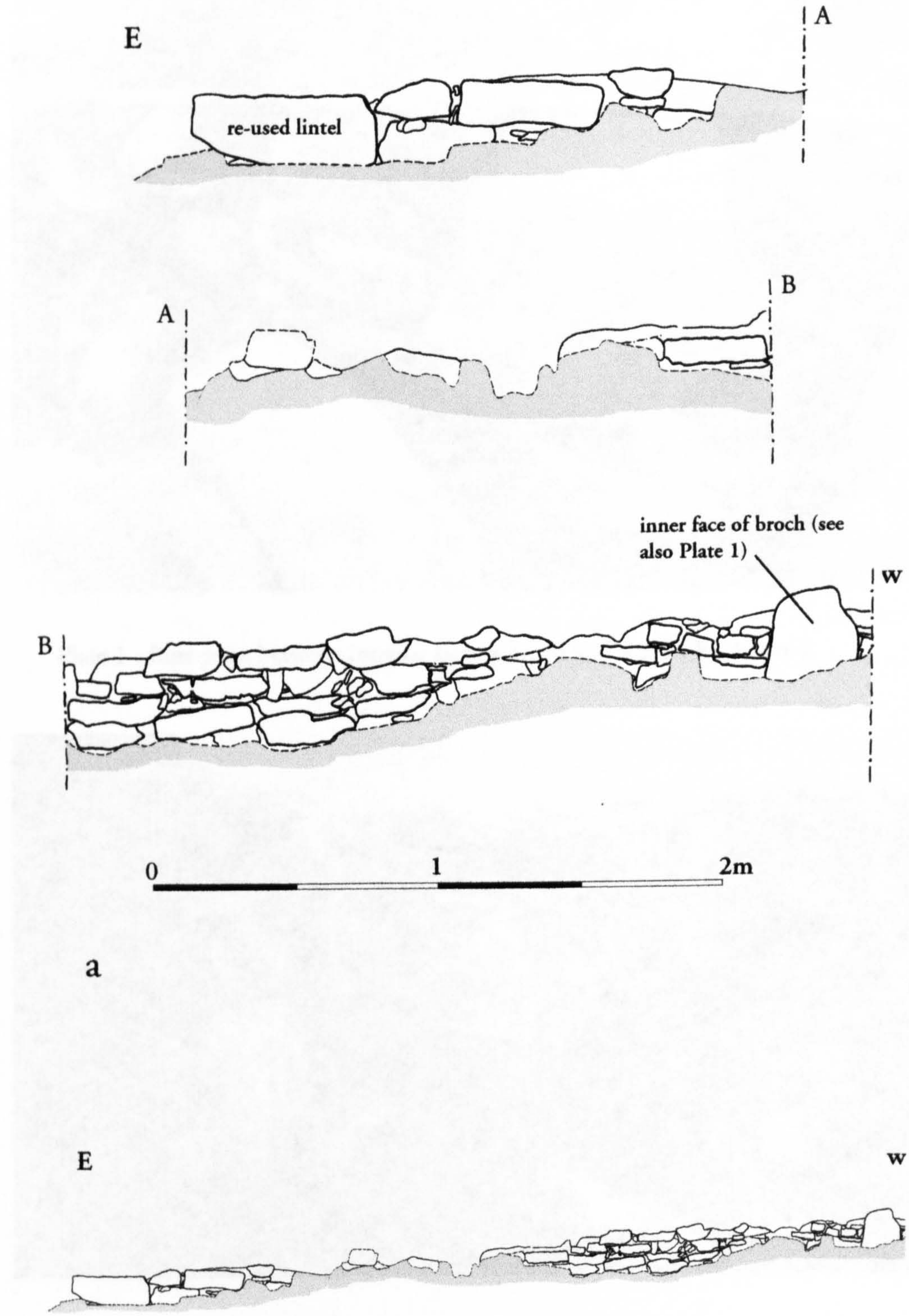


Figure 8 : North face of wall defining Enclosure I; a) showing differences in build, b) complete section.

Plate 1 : Butt-joint between interior face of broch and wall of Enclosure I.

Plate 2 : Entrance to Aisled Building I, showing door-post set into exterior face of House III.

surviving wall-head of the broch in this area, in the form of ash and charcoal, which may also belong to this phase of re-use. Although the southern half of the broch interior has been obscured by the insertion of Aisled Building III, and there is therefore no direct evidence of reconstruction or re-use in this area prior to its construction, it is notable that the wall which defines Enclosure I respects both the former eastern entrance to the broch, and the access to the mural cell on the opposite side of the broch. Indeed, the wall appears to take a kink to the north to avoid the eastern broch entrance. I would argue that this can be interpreted as evidence that this wall was built to subdivide the broch interior, using the two existing entrances for access to the respective halves. However, as the eastern end of this wall appears to make use of the lintel slabs of the original entrance, it is likely that the broch wall was reduced in height at this time, and is unlikely to have been a roofed building after this alteration.

The above structural relationship has clear implications for the relative chronology of the site. As the wall defining Enclosure I appears to have been intended to sub-divide the broch interior, it must therefore antedate the construction of Aisled Building III, which lies partly against it, and which fills the southern half of the broch interior. This suggests that the broch remained as a recognisable building when Aisled Building III was constructed, although extensively re-worked and much reduced in height. It is possible that Enclosure I continued in use during the occupation of Aisled Building III, as there appears to have been little depth of deposits in this area.

The aisled buildings.

It is clear from the sketch plan made by Curle at the time of his tour of Caithness during 1910 (Figure 4), that the elements of the Wag of Forse which were the most evident as standing structures at the surface were four apparently elongated, sub-rectangular structures (noted on Curle's published plan as 'A', 'E'/'J', 'L' and 'N'), arranged roughly on an east-west axis, although in the case of 'N' Curle was probably misled by its surface appearance (see previous discussion). Indeed, it was the presence of these structures, and the evidence of aisled construction in the form of vertical stone pillars protruding from the turf, which first prompted Curle to include the site within his class of 'galleried dwellings'. These sub-rectangular structures, although characterised by Curle as "secondary wag" (1945, 13), along with associated cellular buildings, are those which are closest to the vague but generally accepted idea of what constitutes a 'wag'.

It would appear reasonable to suggest that Aisled Building III is the latest of the sub-rectangular structures on the site, given that it completely overlies most of the southern part of the broch. It seems likely that the other aisled buildings were in use during the continued occupation of the interior of the broch, a situation found at the site of Yarrows (Figure 8.21).

It is clear that the circular form of the broch was not apparent to Curle at an early stage of the excavations, as he initially thought that its entrance, guard chamber and stairway, uncovered during early August 1946, were elements belonging to what he took to be the most northerly sub-rectangular structure, Enclosure I. Indeed, although the discovery that the segments of curved walling adjoining these features suggested to Curle that he "...might be dealing with the remains of a broch incorporated in the wag..." (MS/28/461 (3), 13/8/46), he discounted this on the grounds that other structural elements did not suggest a broch. It was not until almost the full circumference of the broch wall had been revealed that Curle realised that his two 'wags' had, in fact, been intruded into a pre-existing circular building.

In attempting a reconsideration of the phasing of this area of the site, we are hampered by the fact that the interiors of the structures concerned have never been fully explored. Having already excavated one sub-rectangular structure at the southern end of the site (Aisled Building I), and part of another (Aisled Building II), Curle clearly considered any further exhaustive work unnecessary, given that he considered that he had elucidated their general structural form. In attempting to evaluate the relationship between the northern 'wag(s)' and the broch we are, therefore, solely dependent on the physical relationships between the visible structural elements of these two buildings. Unfortunately, neither in his published report nor in his primary records does Curle discuss these structural relationships in detail, and merely describes the secondary structures as having been 'intruded' into the broch, or as 'interrupting' the circumference of its wall. It was therefore necessary to examine these relationships directly in the field.

Aisled Building I and Associated Structures (Figure 9)

It is in the south-western area of the site, that the structural relationships which exist between extant structures are clearest. The structure which lies at the lowest level in this stratigraphic sequence, and which can therefore be considered to be the earliest in this area, is Aisled Building I, which was clearly recognised as such by Curle. This is defined now by its surviving entrance area to the south, which is very similar in form to those of Aisled Buildings II and III, and a heavily robbed and denuded wall which defines its north-eastern side. Entry to Aisled Building I from outside was gained via an elongated passage running from south to north and along the eastern outer wall of House III, through a pair of stone slabs serving as door posts and a stone sill or door-check. The latter is now no longer visible, although it was recorded by Curle on his published plan (Figure 3). It is clear that the door posts leading into Aisled Building I were set into the common outer wall of House III integrally as part of the original construction (Plate 2), and therefore that Aisled Building I and House III were constructed together and in contemporary use. Access to House III from Aisled Building I

Figure 9 : Phase 2, Aisled Building I and associated structures.

was via a passage to the west of the main entrance to this area, which is now partly truncated by the south-eastern arc of the later sub-circular structure House V, which was built into and over Aisled Building I after it had gone out of use. It is also probable that the short section of walling which forms the eastern side of the passage from House III to House V is part of the original structure of Aisled Building I. It is constructed from very similar large stones to those making up the visible inner face of the wall of the Aisled Building I, and can also be seen to curve slightly to the west towards the site of a western main wall, which I would argue was destroyed by later building in this area. The eastern wall of Aisled Building I is visible at foundation level within House IV, and was clearly reduced to this level during the construction of this enclosure, as it appears to rise up again at its southern end. On the evidence of the surviving fragment, this wall would appear to be very similar in its thickness and construction from massive stone blocks to the wall of Aisled Building II. Curle's interpretation of this wall is somewhat contradictory, as although he noted that a "...circular structure (is) intersected by the N wall of wag 2 (Aisled Building I here)..." (MS/28/461(3), 30/8/46), he persisted in considering House IV as two separate structures ('E' & 'F', Figure 3). He also, however, considered the wall of Aisled Building I to be later than House IV, and to cut across these two discrete structures. Such a structural relationship appears inherently unlikely, and this impression is confirmed by an examination of this area of the site, which indicates that House IV is indeed a single structure which overlies a pre-existing sub-rectangular aisled building. These structural relationships indicate that Aisled Building I was the earliest of the sub-rectangular aisled buildings to be constructed on the site, and that, with the exception of House III, which appears to have been of contemporary construction, the other buildings in this south-western area are later and were built over it.

Although it is difficult to demonstrate stratigraphically without further excavation, it would appear reasonable to suggest that Aisled Building II, immediately to the east of Aisled Building I, was constructed when the latter went out of use. There is little difference between the relative floor levels in these two areas, indeed the interior of Aisled Building I is actually less than 0.5m lower than the entrance passage to Aisled Building II, suggesting that Aisled Building II was constructed shortly after the end of use in the former rather than after any depth of debris had accumulated. It is clear that House III continued in use during this phase, as there are two discrete passages between it and Aisled Building II.

House III itself, when excavated, contained internal structures which are now no longer visible, as the interiors of all of the buildings on the site are presently overgrown with rough grass. When Curle removed the vegetation from this area of the site he found it to be overlain and partly filled by flat stones around 35cm (14ins) in length which he took to be collapsed roofing material. That these stones were "scaled", or overlapping from a common centre (1941, 29), suggested to him that they represented the remains of a 'beehive' or corbelled roof. Neither Curle's published reports on the Wag of Forse, nor his field notebooks contain any photographs or illustrations of this putative roofing material, and it is therefore difficult to comment on the value of this observation. It is notable that, judging by Curle's observations on the character of the stones involved, that this collapsed material is unlikely to have been derived from the wall-face of House III. Although this was less massive in character than some of the other structures on the site, and somewhat mixed in nature, it was constructed from consistently larger and thicker stones than those found filling the chamber itself, and this may represent corroboration of his suggestion of a corbelled roof. In addition, only one upright slab was located by Curle in the interior of House III, and no trace was found of there having been others, and it is therefore likely that this structure was of different construction to the aisled buildings at the site.

Although the interior floor of House III is now obscured, Curle did locate and describe a number of features within this area. Slightly to the south of the centre of the floor was a circular hearth, some 1.68m (5ft 6ins) in diameter, paved with flagstones and surrounded by a kerb made up from smaller flags placed on edge (Plate 3). On the eastern side of the hearth Curle noted two larger slabs, which he interpreted as a fire-back. Prior to excavation, the area of the hearth was covered by a layer of ash and charcoal up to 20cm (8ins) in thickness, which Curle considered to have been the result of the burning of peat although no diagnostic tests were carried out on this material. On the south-eastern side of the hearth were placed two flat stones, set on edge, which Curle interpreted as having been used as a partition, dividing up the interior of the structure into two distinct occupation areas. On the northern and eastern part of the floor were traces of flagstone paving, and also a carefully constructed covered

Plate 3 : Excavated hearth in House III (Curle 1941, Plate XL, 1).

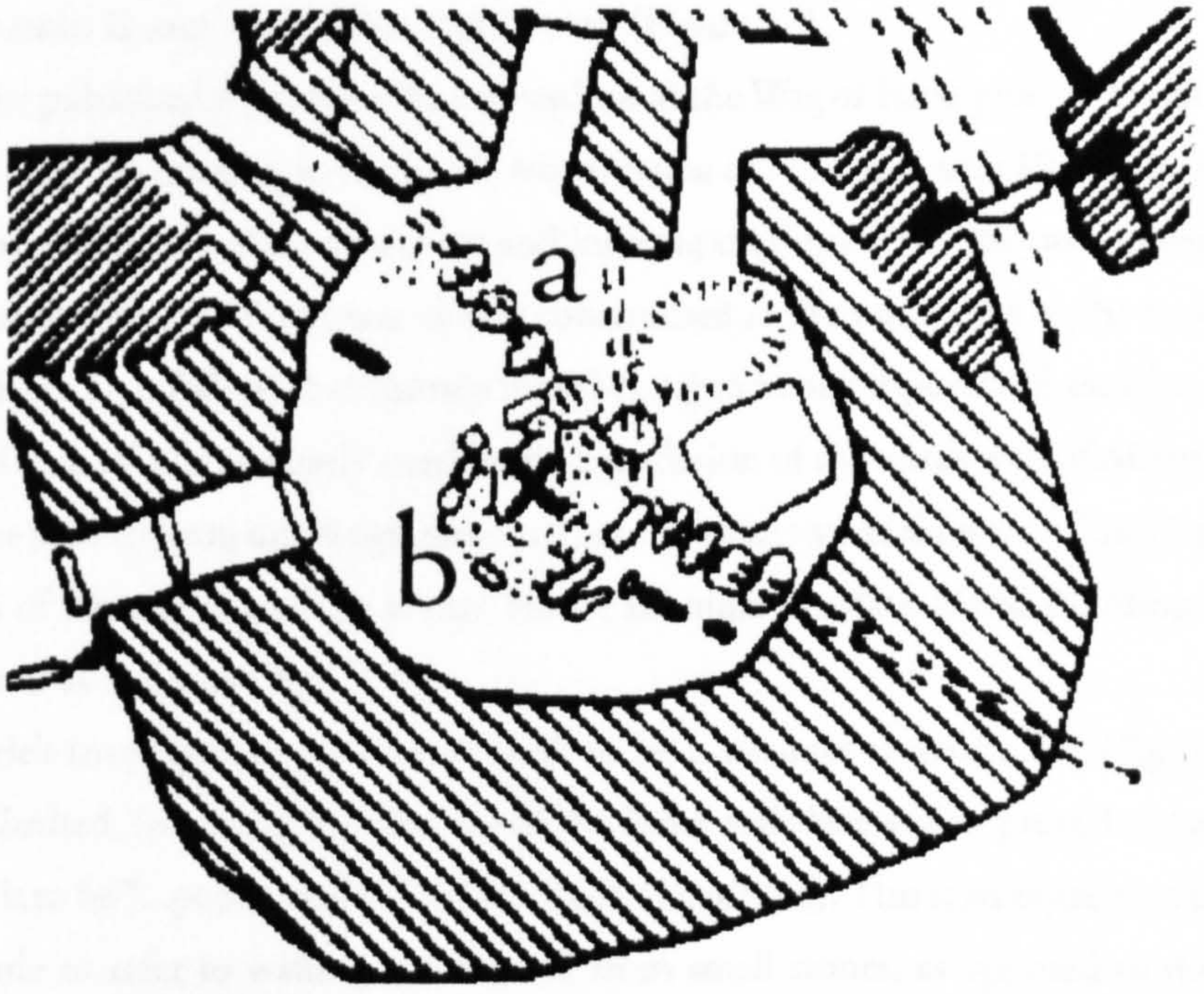


Figure 10 : Excavated features in House III (Curle's 'C'); a) drain, b) hearth (from Curle 1946, Fig. 1)

drain, which passed across the interior of House III to the north-east of the centre, apparently draining through the wall to the south-east (Figure 10). This led Curle to suggest that this northern area of the interior of House III was intended as a living space, being well-drained and paved, whereas the remainder, being unpaved and "...black and greasy on the surface..." (1941, 80), was not intended for human habitation. It is, however, probable that these conditions relate more to the subsequent abandonment and collapse of the structure rather than to its use, the greasy conditions being due to the effect of water on fire debris, and that the whole of the interior was intended as a domestic space. This is especially likely given the position of the two large stones set into the hearth, which it appears reasonable to accept as a fire-back given the thickness of ash which Curle records as having been found lying against them. This therefore suggests that cooking and other domestic activities took place in the southern and western section of the structure. The implications of the use of space within this and other structures will be discussed more fully below. Curle located a deposit of grey clay within House III, which he took to represent secondary flooring material, but his notes on the excavation of Aisled Building II (see below) indicate that he had a poor appreciation of the subtleties of stratigraphy on the site. It is therefore possible that this material represents either the primary flooring or part of a succession of clay floors, the latter appearing most likely given that House III seems to have had a long history of occupation.

Aisled Building II and associated structures (Figure 11)

Although the published reports on the excavations at the Wag of Forse present Aisled Building II as the primary occupation in the south-western area of the site (Curle 1941), the structural relationships which are visible on the ground indicate that this is not the case. Given that the entrance into Aisled Building I was clearly constructed at the same time as the outer wall of House III (Plate 2), it follows that the two must belong to a contemporary phase of occupation. However, House IV just as clearly overlies the foundation of the north wall of Aisled Building I, and can be seen to form one single structure, rather than two as shown on Curle's plan. The implication of these relationships is that House III must pre-date Aisled Building II, rather than *vice versa* as suggested by Curle.

Curle's investigation of what he took to be a separate structure, 'E' (Figure 3), was somewhat limited, involving the clearing of the inner wall-face which proved to be difficult as he found it to be "...poorly built..." (MS/28/461 (3), 3/8/46). This is an expression frequently used by Curle to refer to walling constructed from small stones, as opposed to the massive blocks used in the broch and some of the sub-rectangular aisled buildings, and there is therefore no need to attribute to this comment any relevance to the structural integrity of the building itself. The eastern wall of 'E' is now obscured by rubble and the growth of turf, and it is

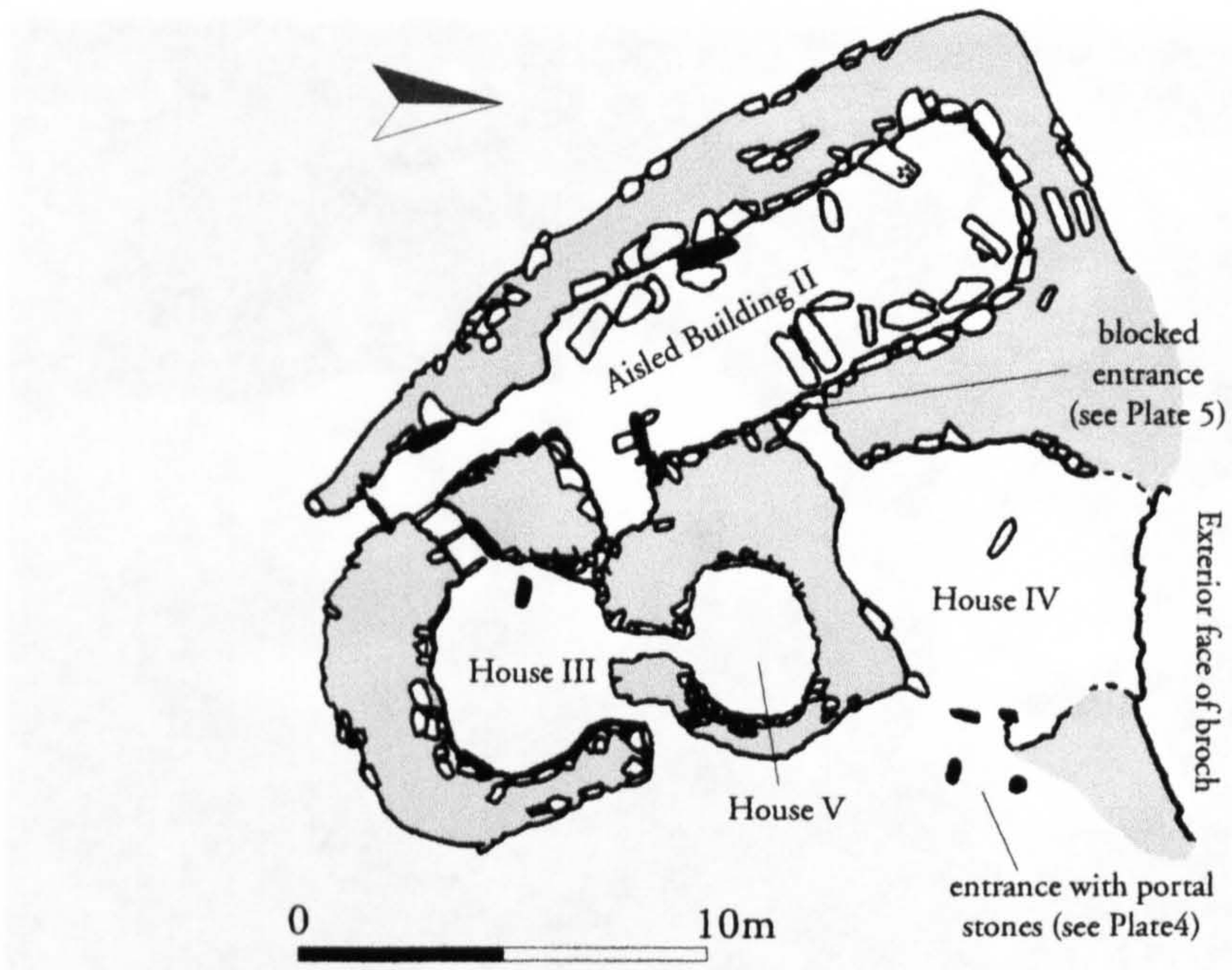


Figure 11 : Phase 2, Aisled Building II and associated structures.

therefore difficult to comment further on its method of construction. There is, however, no visible discontinuity between this wall and that which Curle refers to as defining structure 'F', and there is therefore no reason not to regard the two as a single sub-circular structure, House IV, especially as Curle records that 'F' is constructed from similarly "inferior" masonry to 'E'. Curle also noted variation in the construction of the wall of House IV, involving a mixture of massive stones and lighter rubble. This may be evidence of the re-use of stone from nearby structures which had gone out of use, the most likely source being the Aisled Building I over which House IV had been built. Once again, subsequent collapse and turf growth have obscured these structural details. House IV was entered from the south-east via a doorway whose portal stones are still visible *in situ* (Plate 4), and a further pair of portal stones to the east of these which indicate that this was probably a complex entrance leading to the outside. The access route to this entrance is now obscured by rubble, much of which appears to be composed of excavation spoil. However, this area was not fully cleared during the excavations, and at least some of this material may be in its original position. Curle also recovered traces of paving from within House IV.

Plate 4 : Portal stones, south-east entrance to House IV.

Plate 5 : Blocked doorway to House IV, through east wall of Aisled Building I.

It is clear, then, that House IV is a single structure rather than the two indicated by Curle. He probably came to this conclusion as a result of the assumption that the dividing wall represented a structure which was never completed, rather than the denuded foundations of the wall of Aisled Building I. The precise relationship of House IV to the outer wall-face of the broch is now obscured by vegetation and collapse, but it is evident that it does not in any way overlie the broch wall. Curle's field notes state more than once that House IV was, in fact, built *against* the outer wall of the broch and that the two walls are in contact. While this suggests a stratigraphic primacy in the case of the broch, it also suggests that it remained upstanding, with its outer wall-face clear of debris, at the time the sub-circular structure was constructed against it. The implications of this for the interpretation of this area of the site will be considered below. There is also a clear structural relationship between House IV and Aisled Building II: the east wall of the latter incorporates as an original feature a doorway, 0.85m in width, which leads to a short entrance passage, through the outer wall of Aisled Building II, into House IV (Plate 5 & Figure 11). At some time during the occupation of Aisled Building II this entrance was blocked with large stones to give a continuous inner wall-face, indicating that the former continued in use after access to House IV by this route was discontinued. It is therefore possible to argue that House IV was in occupation during an early phase of the use of Aisled Building II, and the apparent consistency of the internal wall-face of the latter with the entrance passage further suggests that the two structures may belong to the same constructional phase.

It is also evident that House III continued in use after the construction of Aisled Building II, as they share a common entrance passage opening to the south. This passage appears to have had a very complex constructional history. The entranceway opening eastwards into House III contains three separate door-sills which are still visible (Figure 11), although Curle(1941, 29) noted evidence of a door in relation to only one of these, in the form of a socket-hole. Given the complexity of the measures taken to restrict access to House III via this entrance, it is likely that it represents the earliest entrance in this area and that it was originally opened on to the outside. The entrance passage in this area was subsequently extended by some 3.35m (11ft), by the construction of an additional stretch of walling (Curle 1941, 28), the join of which with the original entrance passage remains clearly visible (Plate 6). A sill slab sits some 2.13m (7ft) from the end of the extended passage, and probably marks the site of an external door. It is impossible to comment on whether, as Curle suggests, the complex entrance to House III was abandoned after the construction of the extension to this entrance passage, while access to Aisled Building II from the south continued at a higher level. Nonetheless, his excavation notes indicate that at some stage this entrance was deliberately and carefully filled with stone, since removed. There is a further opening between Aisled

Plate 6 : Extended entrance passage, south of Aisled Building II.

Plate 7 : Interior of Wag II from the south.

Building II and House III, with its lintel stones *in situ*, which opens from an alcove in the south-eastern corner of Aisled Building II, but which is very narrow and is never likely to have functioned as a corridor between the two buildings (Figure 11). Although Curle notes that this passage exhibited evidence of more than one phase of construction, it is difficult now to demonstrate this. It may be that this passage, which is too narrow to allow access between the two buildings, represents the remnant of a pre-existing feature, modified during the construction of House V.

House V, which is connected to House III by a narrow passage leading to the north (Figure 9), clearly post-dates the latter, as it was constructed within the abandoned Aisled Building I, and re-uses a section of its walling to make up the eastern side of the connecting passage (see discussion above). A section of curved walling joins this to the outer wall of House IV. Curle notes that the passage to House V was "...broken through..." the north wall of House III (MS/28/461 (3), 3/8/46), although it is now difficult to demonstrate this relationship. House V was probably constructed at a later phase of construction than House IV, as there is a butt-joint between their adjoining walls. Curle did, however, locate a drain during his excavations which ran under the common wall between the two, suggesting that they were intended for contemporary use. House V is also constructed from small, flat stones rather than the more massive masonry of House III, and this may equate to the 'poor' construction which Curle noted in the walls of House IV. This may be another indication that the two belong to the same phase of activity.

Although Curle was unable to locate a built hearth within House V, he noted that considerable quantities of peat ash and charcoal were recovered from the floor level (MS/28/461 (2), 3/8/46), indicating that some form of domestic fire had probably been in use. He also recovered the remains of a short section of walling within House V, measuring 0.91m (3ft) in length by 0.51m (1ft 8ins) in breadth, which was at first interpreted as the remains of an earlier structure. Subsequently, Curle altered his interpretation of this feature to that of a loading bench for grain. This idea, which was suggested by the frequent finds of saddle querns at Forse, suggested to Curle that the site had been involved in the processing of grain (1945, 14). This interpretation, in addition to contradictintg Curle's non-domestic interpretation of the structures at Forse, is unconvincing. It is difficult to maintain that grain would have been brought for processing to such a small building, which was comparatively difficult of access. It is clear that Curle did reach the floor level within House V, as he found it to be carefully paved throughout (Curle 1945, 14), but he was unable to locate a constructed fire-place despite the evidence of burning indicated by the charcoal and peat ash. It is my interpretation,

therefore, that this structure represents a fire-back against which a domestic fire may have been built, although such an interpretation must remain speculative in the absence of new excavation, given that the internal features of this building are now obscured by vegetation and turf.

Aisled Building II, the westernmost of the sub-rectangular aisled buildings on the site, is probably the best preserved and certainly the most completely excavated of the complex of structures at Forse. Curle explored and cleared its interior almost completely, and the view of the interior of the structure from the south gives an idea of the monumental appearance which these buildings might have presented when in use (Plate 7). Its interior wall-face is constructed in massive masonry blocks of a larger size than those used to build any of the adjoining sub-circular structures (Plate 8). This internal monumentality appears to have been an intended effect on the part of the builders of this structure, as the external wall-face, although now largely turf-covered, where it is visible is constructed from much more mixed and less massive stonework. Indeed, it is possible that Aisled Building II was partially defined by facing walls only, revetted into existing structural material.

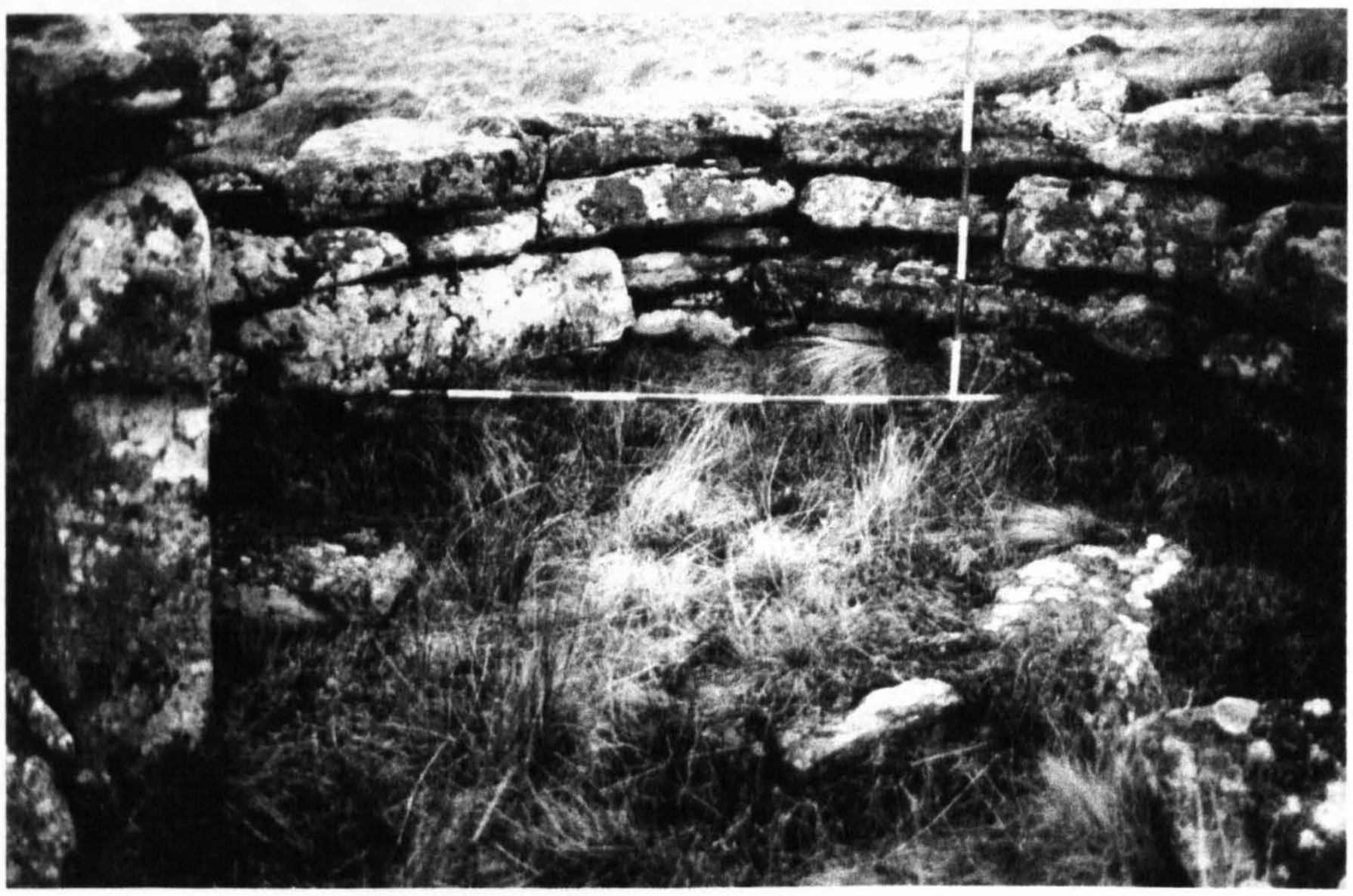


Plate 8 : Massive masonry, north-west corner of Aisled Building II.

Aisled Building II is the only building on the site which now retains a standing pillar with its lintel *in situ*, although two other standing pillars survive (Plate 9). The pillar and lintel now stand to a height of 1.4m to the base of the lintel on the interior side, and 1.1m to the wall-head, although these measurements relate to the present ground surface. The build-up of turf and other vegetation since Aisled Building II was excavated will have raised the ground level somewhat; at the time it was uncovered Curle recorded the interior wall-height as 1.22-1.52m (4-5ft). The recess formed by this pillar and lintel is 0.65m in depth from the outer edge of the lintel to the inner wall-face. Although this is the only vertical pillar at the site which still retains its lintel *in situ*, another stands to a height of 1.6m in the north-east corner of Aisled Building II, and a fallen pillar stone lying at the east side of this structure measures 1.5m. These measurements suggest that the 'gallery' formed by the pillars when standing would have been roofed by lintel slabs at a fairly consistent height of approximately 1.5m. There is, however, some doubt as to the original floor level within the interior of Aisled Building II. Although Curle noted during his excavations that the floor within this structure was composed of a bed of yellow clay (1941, 27), which he refers to in his field notes as "...clayey pan...", it is possible that this material may have been the natural sub-soil in this area of the site, an idea which Curle himself suggests in his field notes. However, lying on this clay was a layer of soil some 30cm in thickness, onto which rubble interpreted as the remains of a roof had fallen. Although Curle interpreted this material as evidence of the long abandonment of Aisled Building II prior to the collapse of its roof, it may that it represents a build-up of occupation material, perhaps successive earth floors. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that several sherds of pottery were found incorporated within this layer. Such a re-interpretation would offer an alternative explanation for the structural setting of the upright pillars within Aisled Building II; Curle suggests that these were placed directly onto the supposed clay floor and held in position by the weight of the lintel slabs that rested on them, without any form of socket. Such an arrangement appears inherently unstable, and it may be that they were set into a previously prepared floor of packed earth. Corroboration for this interpretation comes from Curle's notes on the excavation of the area to the south of Aisled Building III, as he notes that uprights had been "...sunk in the wag floor on a prepared bed and the wag floor level extended above the rest of the hearth..." (MS/28/461(4), 20/8/47), although these structural elements were removed during the course of the work and are consequently no longer visible. It is certain that the outer walls of the building were constructed prior to the placement of the lintels, as the one which remained *in situ* was laid directly onto the wall-head rather than being structurally incorporated within it. Three of the pillar stones remain standing at present, and six were found to be *in situ* at the time of Curle's excavations.

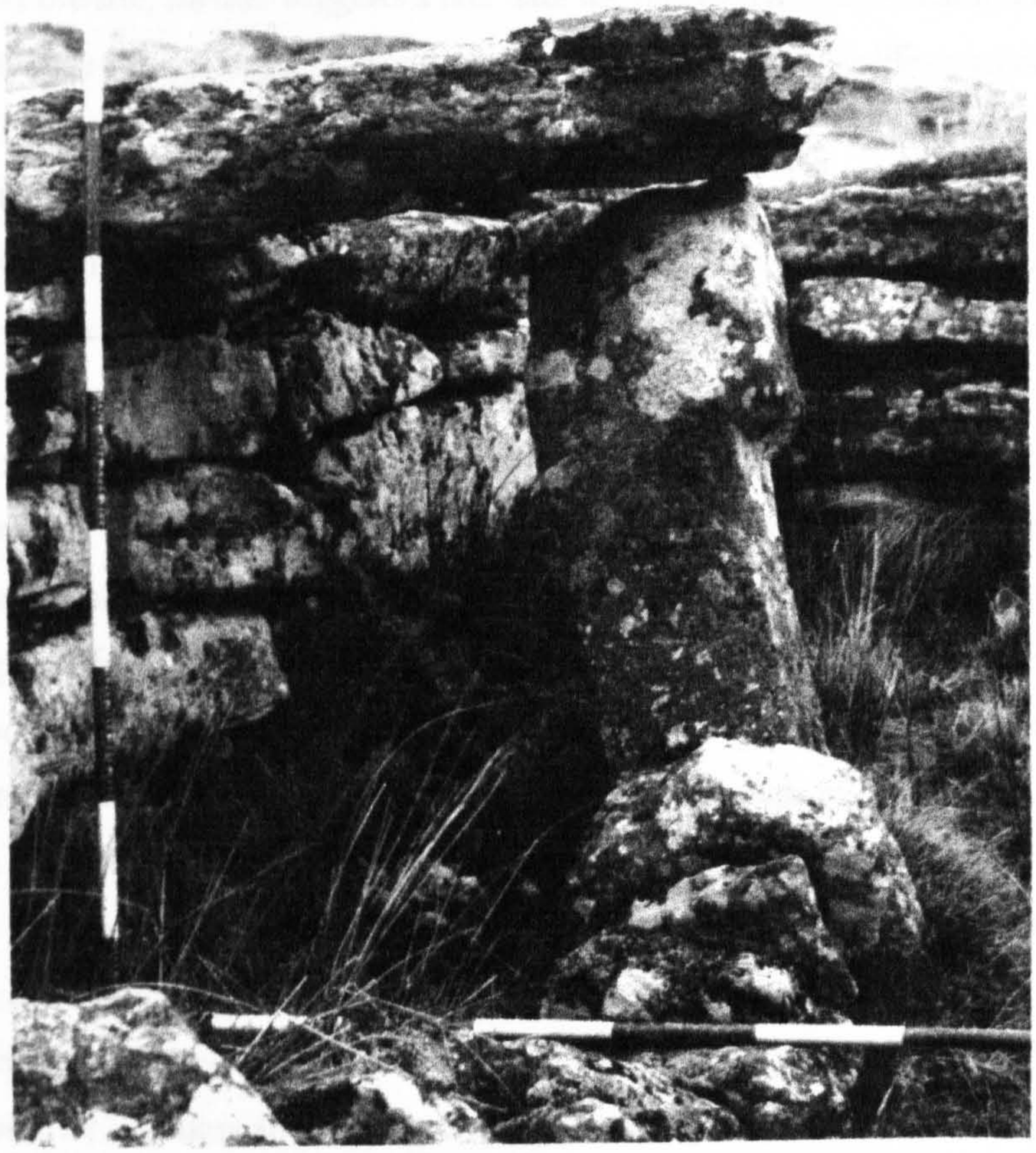


Plate 9 : Pillar stone with *in situ* lintel, north-west corner of Aisled Building II.

Few internal features were recovered by excavation from the interior of Aisled Building II, with the exception of a hearth set against the wall in the north-western corner. In common with the majority of the internal structural features at the site, little now remains of this hearth on the surface. It does not, however, appear to have been constructed as an integral part of the building itself. It consisted of a row of flat stones against which a fire had clearly been built, as the surrounding soil contained much wood charcoal, as opposed to the peat ash found within other excavated structures (Curle 1941, 28). The stratigraphic relationships in

this area were not clearly recorded, and it is therefore impossible to ascertain whether this hearth represents an original feature or relates to secondary use. Given the prolonged history of occupation of Aisled Building II suggested by the structural alterations noted above, it is difficult to maintain a clear distinction between primary and secondary use. However, the location of this hearth in a corner of the building may indicate that it did not form part of its original construction. The apparent use of wood as fuel, as opposed to the peat ash found elsewhere on the site, further suggests a late date for this hearth. Furthermore, the amount of charcoal found around it suggests that it was in use at the end of the life-span of the building.

Aisled Building III (Figure 12)

It is evident from the discussion above of the wall of Enclosure I that it and Aisled Building III are not of one construction, and that they are likely to belong to two different phases of occupation. Although this area of the site is now somewhat overgrown with turf, Curle states in his field notes that the wall of Aisled Building III is "...broader and more strongly built..." than that which defines Enclosure I (MS/28/461 (3), 19/8/46), and it is clear from an examination of the visible sections of the inner wall-face of the former that it was constructed in a single phase from massive blocks of stone (Plate 10). Curle did not excavate the interior of Aisled Building III to any appreciable extent, merely digging a trench through the debris in the centre, from which no finds were recovered. Although he appears to have reached occupation levels which relate to the broch (see below), he either did not observe, or did not record, the relationship between this and the intruded aisled building (MS/28/461 (3), 20/8/46). There is therefore little information regarding the internal structural and spatial layout of this structure, although it appears likely that Aisled Building III was of aisled construction as Curle notes its "...pillars and capstones lying overturned in confusion..." (MS/28/461 (3), 16/8/46).

What is particularly striking about Aisled Building III is its similarity in plan to Aisled Building II and to the surviving portion of Aisled Building I. All posses the same sub-rectangular form and have a similar entrance arrangement, with one entrance leading into the interior of the aisled building itself and another to adjoining sub-circular houses. In the area of the entrance passage to Aisled Building III, it is likely that Curle has made a further interpretative error. He asserts that the entrance passage, which he found to be paved, leading through the outer turf bank to the east of the site was originally intended to give access to the entrance to Aisled Building III, but an examination of the site as it stands renders this interpretation unlikely. This outer entrance is in alignment with the entrance through the broch outer wall on its eastern side (see Figure 14), and passes through a second pair of pillar slabs on this

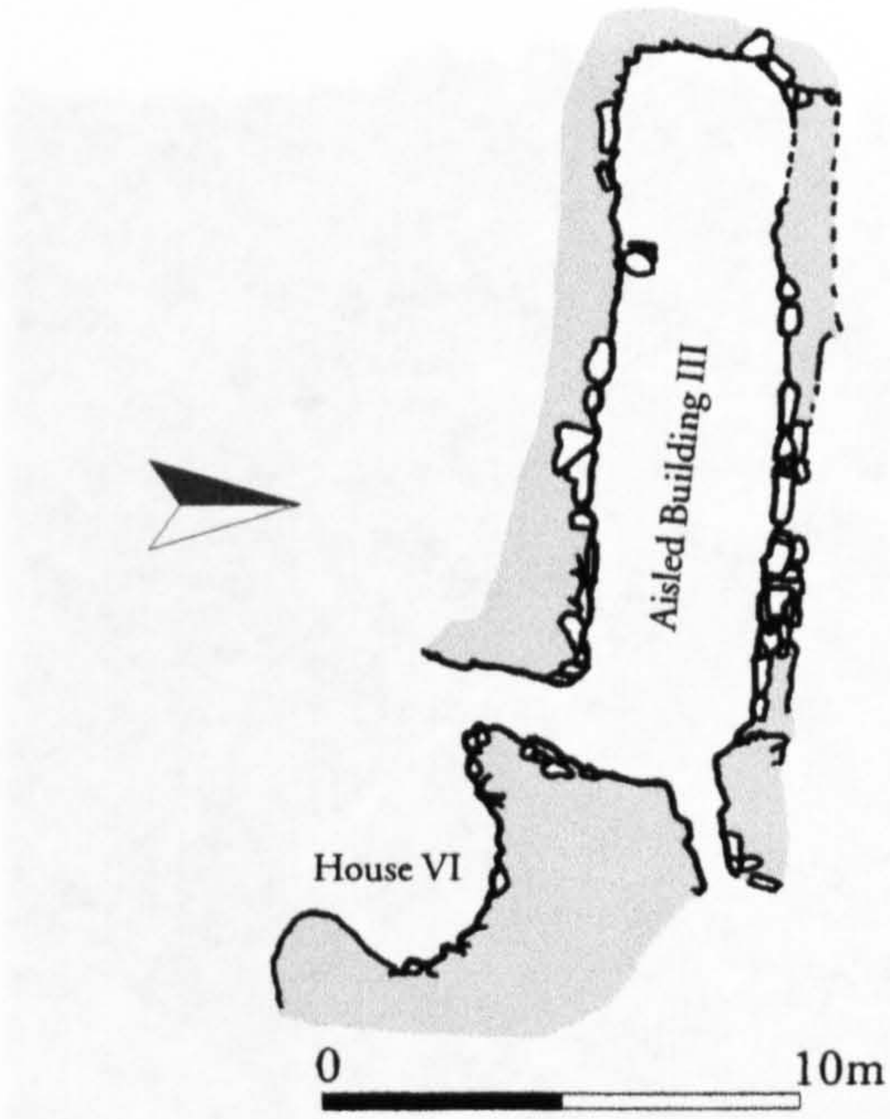


Figure 12 : Phase 2, Aisled Building III and associated structures.

Plate 10 : Inner facing wall, north side of Aisled Building III.

Plate 11 : Difference in level between structures to south-east of the site. The Wall in the foreground belongs to Structure II.

alignment. The apparent passage leading to Aisled Building III via this entrance is unconvincing, and appears more likely to be an artefact of the method of excavation employed rather than an original feature (there is considerable post-excavation reconstruction of features visible elsewhere on the site). Although entry to Aisled Building III must have been made from this direction, given the alignment of the entrance, and may have made use of this passage, it is highly unlikely that the two relate to the same phase of construction; indeed, it is probable that this erroneous interpretation arose at least partly as a result of the difference between the published plan of the site, which ignores the eastern entrance through the roundhouse wall, and the original field drawing, leading Curle to conclude that the outer entrance was intended to give access to Aisled Building III.

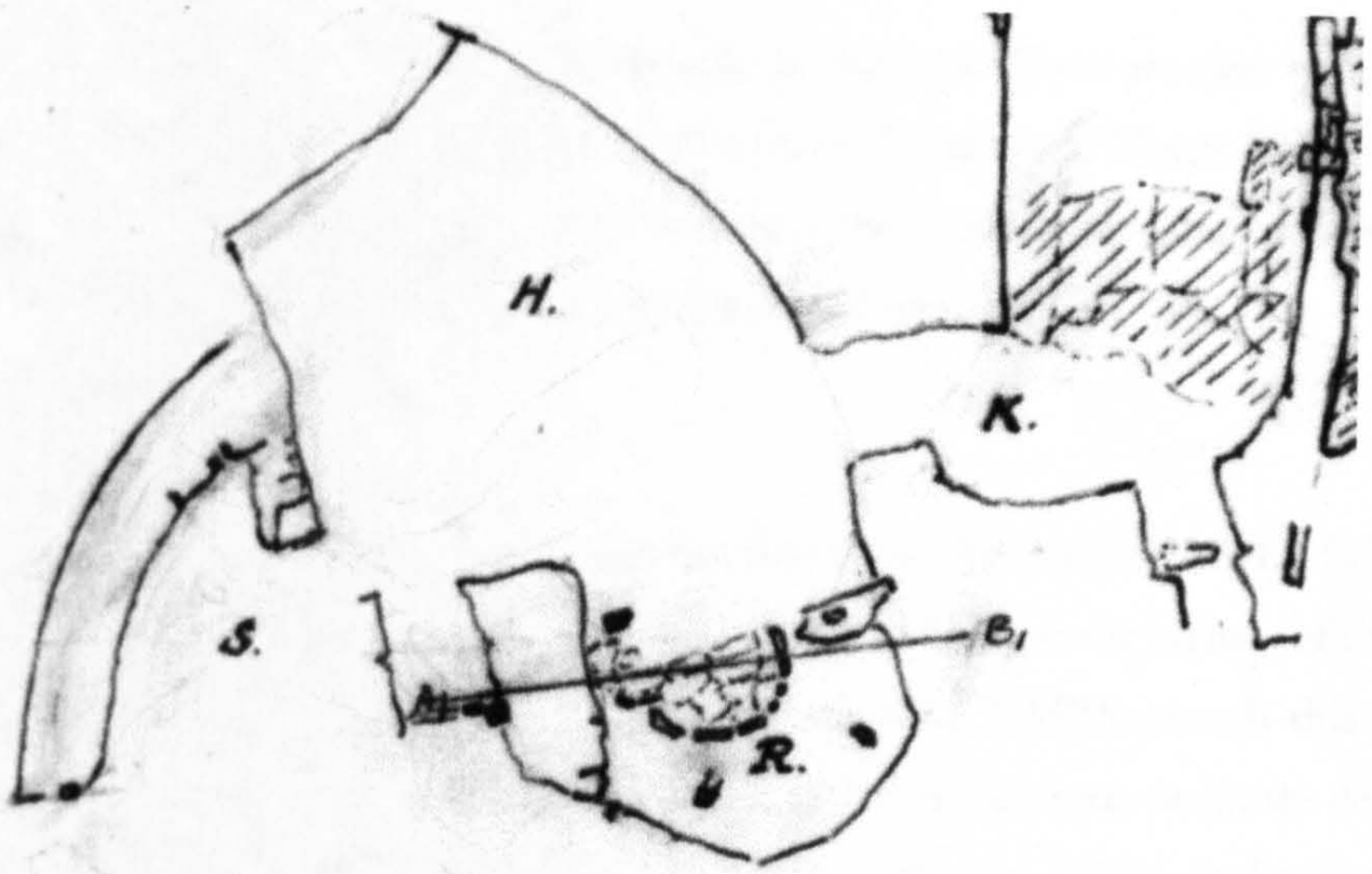


Figure 13 : Phase 2, Excavated hearth (R) in House VI. From original plane-table plan. Crown Copyright: RCAHMS.

The area to the south of Aisled Building III, entered via a passage leading from north to south, lies within one of the most highly disturbed areas of the site, and in uncovering occupation traces beneath Curle removed most of the rubble and occupation material from what appears to have been an adjoining sub-circular structure. The depth of stratigraphy in this area appears to have been very great, and it is possible that in this area structures were again built into pre-existing rubble and midden material, as Curle notes a deposit of cockle shells, some 10-13cm (4-5") in thickness, below the wall separating the entrance passage to Aisled Building III from the highly disturbed House VI to the south (MS/28/461 (4), 13/8/47). The depth of stratigraphy which originally lay beneath the uppermost structures in this area is still evident in the respective levels of the extant structures (Plate 11). House VI is now heavily mutilated, both as a result of Curle's excavations and, presumably, of stone robbing in the past. However, although this is no longer visible, Curle did note the presence of a single upright pillar within this area (1948, 277), a similar arrangement to that within House III. Indeed, the published illustrations of this area suggest that there may have been more pillar stones here (Figure 13), although this is not clarified in Curle's text. Given the curvature of the remaining section of walling which defines the northern part of this area, it might be suggested that it contained a sub-circular building. Curle's excavations in this area also revealed a deposit of peat ash some 15cm (6") in thickness, which proved to be lying within a large paved, circular hearth, surrounded by a stone kerb around 1.8m (6') in diameter (Figure 13) This was later removed to give access to occupation material lying beneath, but there appear

to have been at least two superimposed hearths in this area. There are clear parallels between the fragmentary structures in the upper levels within this area and House III(see above); both areas contain a sub-circular house connected by a short passage to a larger, sub-rectangular aisled building, and both also contain circular, paved hearths.

THE BROCH (Figure 14)

Surviving stratigraphic relationships, as well as those described by Curle in his field notes and published reports, indicate that a large, circular stone building is the earliest of the structures at Forse which can be ascribed to Phase 2. Although the NMRS records this feature as a 'Dun', there is some debate as to its classification, and it has been variously described as a 'dun' (MacKie 1971b) and a 'broch' (Mercer 1985, Swanson 1988). As I will argue, there appears to be no reason to interpret this building as anything other than a broch. MacKie's suggestion that it should be classified as a 'dun' rests on an assumption that the present state of its visible wall-faces is representative of that during which it was in occupation, which cannot be maintained. His interpretation of the broch as an early architectural form, antedating other broch sites in the area, also rests on structural arguments relating to the sites at Keiss (Section 8.3.1).

Although the broch is perhaps the most striking feature of the site when viewed in plan (Figure 3), it is rather obscured on the ground by later features, and its existence as a discrete structure did not become clear to Curle until mid-August 1946, well into the second season of work at the site. This was despite the earlier recovery of sections of its structure, most notably the northern entrance and adjoining stairway, and the internal cells to the west. As discussed above, the northern entrance into the broch was initially thought to have been constructed as an integral part of Enclosure I. Curle therefore attempted to account for it in this context, suggesting that the stairway led to a platform on which people defending the site from attack might have been positioned, or on which a beacon fire might have been placed. Further excavations subsequently exposed almost the full circumference of a circular wall of which the doorway was an integral structural feature, in addition to a small, cellular chamber built out from its western arc. It became clear that what was represented was a large, circular building with an external diameter of at least 16.5m. The northern entrance and accompanying stairway are perhaps the best-preserved element of the broch; the doorway still exists to its full height of 1.0m, and is floored with flagstone paving and capped with a single lintel slab 0.5m in thickness (Plate 12). On passing through this doorway from the north, a stone stairway rises immediately on the left (east) to what is now the existing wall-head, via six surviving stair-treads (Plate 13). To the west is a short passage, the western terminal of which

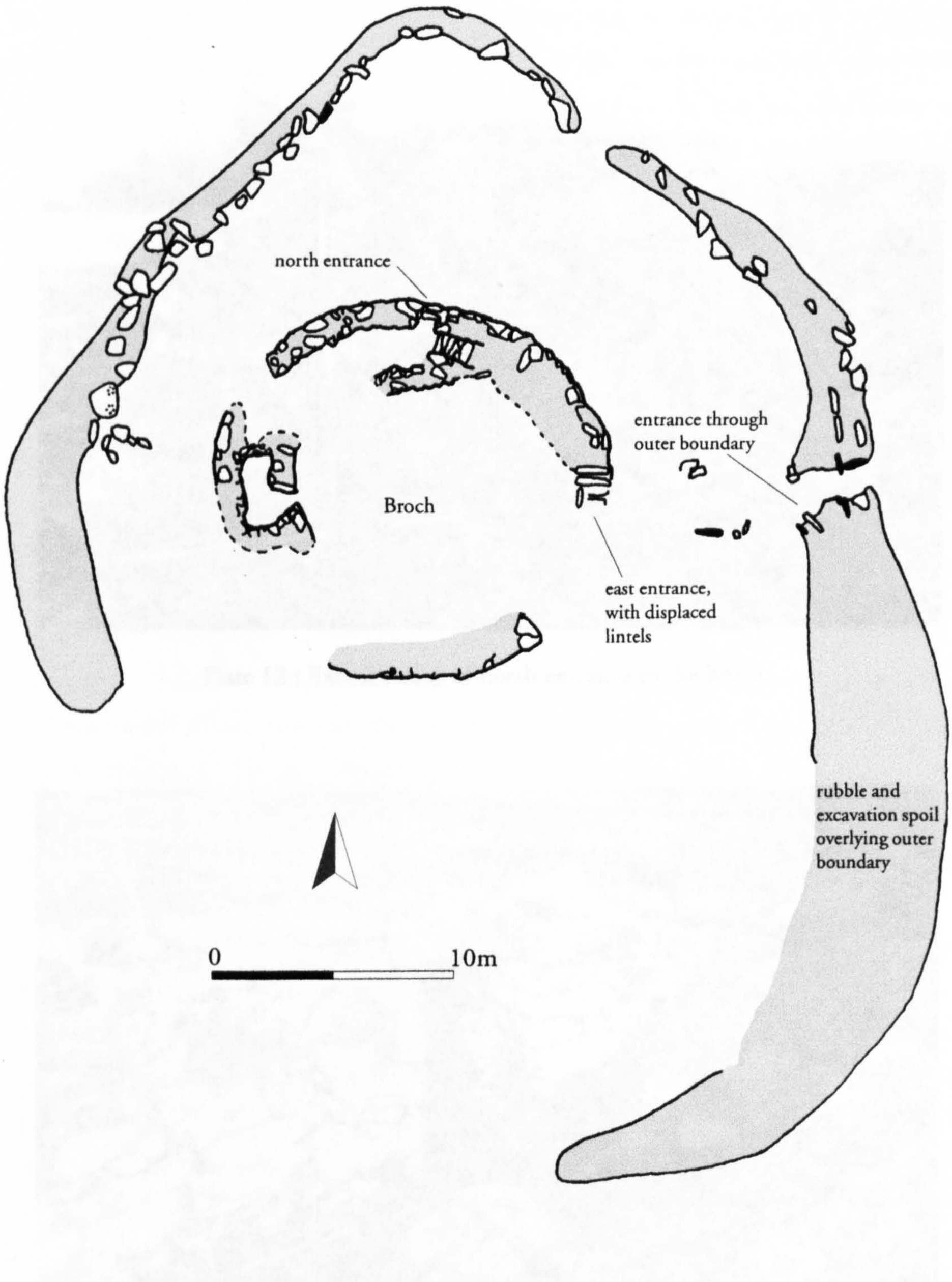


Figure 14 : Phase 2, the broch and associated structures.

Plate 12 : Exterior view of north entrance to the broch.

Plate 13 : Interior view of north entrance to broch, showing stairway (right) and possible chamber (left).

has been broken down by later use, and possibly also during the excavation of the site. It is therefore impossible to ascertain whether this represents the remains of a cell, or whether this passage continued around the western inner circumference of the building. The southern side of this passage is formed by a section of walling 1.2m in thickness, through which an entrance, presumably original, gave access to the central area of the broch interior, although this was blocked with stonework during a later stage of the occupation of the site (possibly during Phase 1).

Curle's excavations did not clear the interior of the broch to any appreciable extent, and the character of its flooring is therefore largely unknown. Small trenches dug through the debris within Enclosure I and Aisled Building III did reveal traces of paving, which may have been related to the occupation of the broch. This is no longer visible, although there original paving survives within the entrance area. In the centre of the western arc of the broch is a small chamber, 3.0m in length and 1.6m maximum width, which is clearly original as it is of one construction with the outer wall of the broch (see discussion of relationship between this and the wall of Enclosure I above). This chamber was entered via an original entrance from the interior of the broch (Plate 14), although access from this direction was later truncated by the construction of secondary features. Although Curle's excavations within this chamber revealed evidence of drainage channels and paving, these are no longer visible due to the growth of turf. Although there is no indication as to how this cell may have been roofed, it is clearly analogous to the intra-mural cells found at other broch sites in Caithness (Swanson 1988), and as such it may have been corbelled to its full height.

The aspect of the broch which Curle appears to have most seriously misinterpreted is the highly disturbed entrance through its eastern arc. Although his published account (1945, 14) contains a brief reference to this entrance, and puts forward the view that it formed part of the original construction of the broch, a comparison of the original field plan of the site (Figure 6) with that published in the subsequent reports (Figure 3) reveals important irregularities. In the later plans this entrance has been moved to the north, so that it appears to give access to Enclosure I (see discussion above), and appears to have been confused with the entrance passage leading to Houses I and II. In reality this entrance leads into the space between the walls defining the division between Aisled Building III and Enclosure I. It was not intended to give access to either of these structures, and was clearly part of the original construction of the outer wall of the broch; its heavy sill slab remains set into the ground in the centre of the former circumference of the outer wall. There is evidence that this entrance may have been monumental in nature, in the form of two huge slabs set vertically into the ground immediately to the north, which now form the eastern terminal of the wall defining Enclosure I. It is likely that these slabs have been re-used in their current position, and originally

Plate 14 : Entrance to chamber within broch wall.

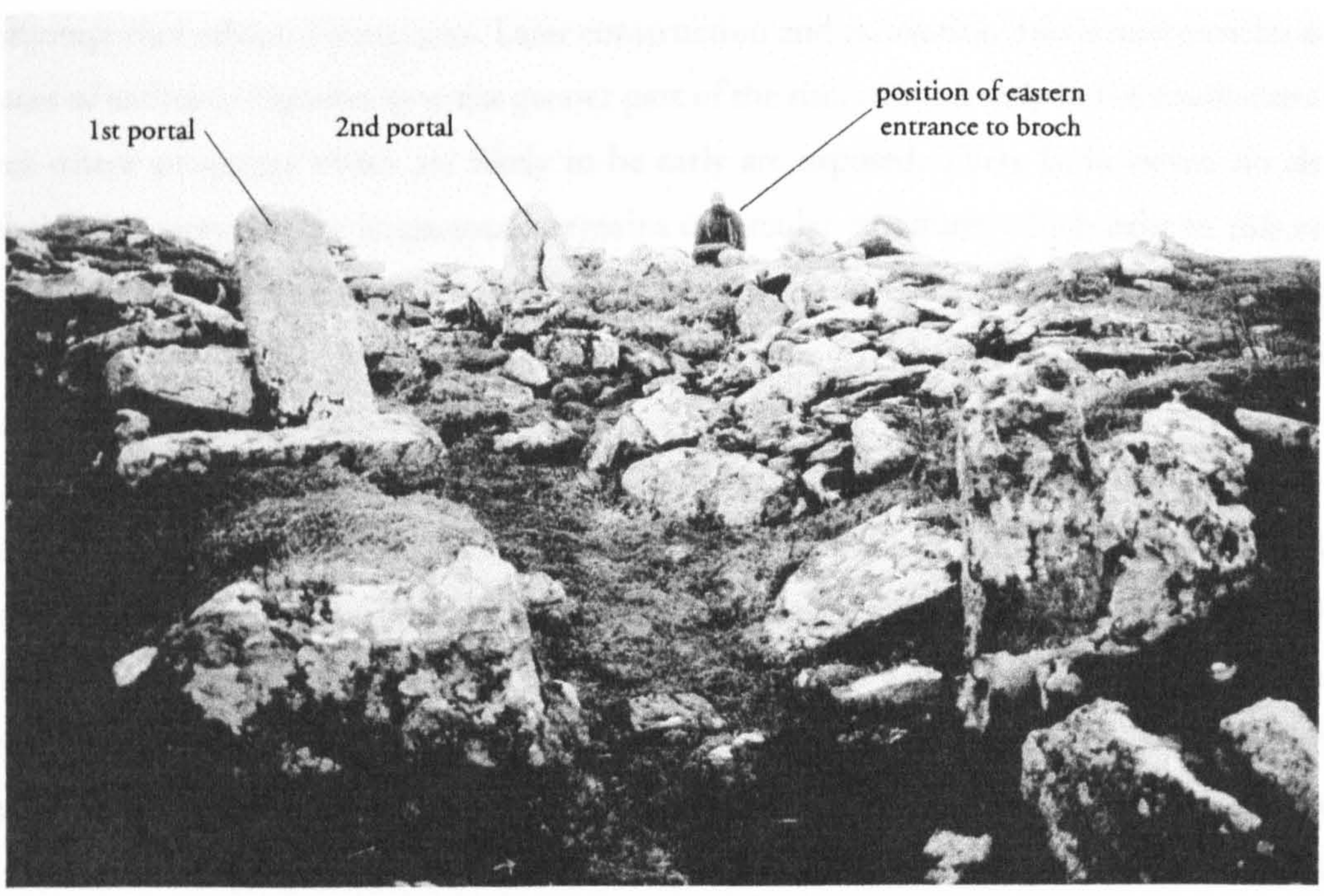


Plate 15 : Entrance through the outer bank, viewed from the east, showing surviving portal stones.

formed part of a monumental entrance through the broch wall in this area, of which only the sill remains *in situ*. The distortion of the plans of the site which has occurred has allowed Curle to argue that the complex entrance through the outer wall was intended to give access to Aisled Building III and Enclosure I, when it is clear, both on the ground and in more recent plans, that it is in alignment with the eastern entrance through the broch wall, and formed part of a contemporary means of access to the site in this area (Plate 15). The use of this entrance for access to Aisled Building III and Enclosure I is at best secondary, and may even be the result of an attempt to locate such an access route at the time of the excavations. This entrance through the outer bank of the site was complex, passing through at least two sets of portal slabs (Plate 15) and rising from the level of the cultivated land to the east up to the raised level of the site. Given the complex and monumental character of this access route, it appears likely that this was the main entrance to the broch from without the outer bank of the site. The exterior wall of the broch itself is of similarly monumental construction, being made up from massive stone blocks set horizontally, and its thickness is consistent where the whole of the wall is now exposed, varying between 1.1m and 1.25m. Although there is no unequivocal evidence at Forse that the broch stood alone when first built, it is impossible, given the confusing condition of the site, to argue either for or against the presence of any contemporary adjacent structures. Later construction and excavation debris now overlies any traces of earlier occupation over the greater part of the site, and it is only in the south-eastern area where structures which are likely to be early are exposed. There is, however, no clear relationship between the fragmentary remains of circular structures which exist in this area and the broch, and the very low level of the former within the mound of structural debris suggests that they relate to the earliest visible occupation on the site. These structures will be discussed in the following section.

It is likely that the outer bank which surrounds the accumulated mass of structures was in contemporary use with the broch, if not actually constructed within the same phase. Its irregular shape further suggests that it has been frequently and radically modified, with the addition and closure of entrance passages as required. The bank certainly antedates Aisled Building II, as the western outer wall of the latter can be seen to extend outside the line of this boundary along its whole length. This is contrary to Curle's view, as his plan shows the two structures in conjunction in this area. As already discussed, the complex eastern entrance through the outer bank aligns with the disturbed eastern doorway to the broch, and must have been in use as some form of boundary at this stage, indicating that at least the eastern side of the outer bank was upstanding at this time. Little is known about the structure of the outer bank, although it appears to have been built from turf on a stone base. Curle noted that a shallow ditch ran along a natural depression to the west of the site, between the hillside and

the outer turf bank (1945, 18), but there is now little trace of this feature, although it may be represented by an extant shallow depression in this area. A further, and somewhat enigmatic feature of the outer bank in this area is the so-called 'kennel'. This is a recess, 0.58m in width, 0.8m at its present maximum depth and 0.27m in height to the present ground surface, formed by the insertion of flagstones into the structure of the bank itself and covered by a massive lintel 1.2m in length. It appears to have been higher when first noted by Curle, and probing indicates that the stones which make up its sides extend some distance below the present ground surface. Although this recess is one of the few structural features of the outer bank which is now visible, Curle's interpretation of it as a 'kennel' (*ibid.*) is speculative in the extreme, and its original function remains obscure. It is possible that this feature is the entrance to a souterrain beneath the outer bank of the site, although further excavation would be required to demonstrate this.

Finds and their Context

The small finds from Forse have never been adequately published, although the majority appear to have been catalogued by Curle as they were recovered. Most of these objects, however, were turned up by the site workers during the clearing of the various structures, and consequently have no clear associated stratigraphic context or horizontal position. It would therefore be a mistake to place too much reliance on the finds record when interpreting the structural remains at the site. It is, however, possible to place a small percentage of the finds into context, as this can be reconstructed from Curle's field notes, and to use this as the basis for some general observations.

Although the majority (79%) of the finds which can be assigned to a particular structure were recovered from the sub-circular houses and the adjoining passages, only 21% being from the aisled buildings, these figures are misleading. The degree to which the interiors of these structures were excavated was biased towards the former, only Aisled Building II being investigated thoroughly. Only trial pits were cut into Aisled Building III, and Aisled Building I is too heavily disturbed and overlain by later structures for a consideration of the numbers of objects found within to have any meaning. It is therefore necessary to restrict quantitative consideration of small finds to Aisled Building II and Houses III - IV, which are the most fully excavated structures on the site, and which can also be considered to have been in contemporary occupation. Indeed, they seem to have been in use together as a unit. Most of the objects from these contexts appear to have been recovered from House III, specifically from the area of the hearth, including all of the pottery, hammerstones and spindle whorls. The only finds from Aisled Building II were a saddle quern and an abraded pebble, and the

connecting passages yielded a quern, an abraded pebble and a single sherd of pottery. Although it is impossible to correlate individual finds from different structures stratigraphically, it would appear reasonable to make certain general observations. The majority of the finds were recovered from the sub-circular houses, chiefly House III, and consist mainly of domestic objects connected with food preparation and cooking, such as coarse pottery, saddle querns and hammerstones. There are also spindle whorls and fragments of lignite armlet, objects related to the production of clothing and body adornment. Much of this material is derived from ash from the hearth within House III, and can presumably be taken to be connected to the occupation of the structure rather its use for the deposition of objects after abandonment. The clearing of Aisled Building II, by contrast, produced very little in the way of artefactual material, the only finds being a single quern and an abraded pebble.

Interpretation of Structures

The majority of the structural features at Forse belong to Phase 2. The earliest identifiable structure which can be assigned to this phase appears to have been a substantial dry-stone built roundhouse, the internal features and landscape setting of which lead the present writer to concur with recent researchers (Swanson 1988, 138, Mercer pers. comm.) in interpreting it as a broch. The broch had at least two entrances, in common with several other examples in Caithness, one leading to the north and another, now destroyed but possibly the more complex and monumental, leading out onto agricultural land to the east. It appears that the interior of the broch was greatly modified for re-use at a late stage in the occupation at Forse, most probably during Phase I (see discussion above), and that this process involved the partial dismantling of the inner skin of what would originally have been a building of hollow-walled construction. Much of the material derived from the inner skin may have been used in the construction of the wall of Enclosure I, and it is probable that the cell to the west of the broch interior and the guard chamber adjacent to the northern entrance represent a remnant of this. Although there remains considerable debate as to the height of brochs in the north, it is undeniable that the building at Forse would have been an impressive and monumental piece of architecture, rising above its surrounding enclosure and totally dominating the lower-lying land to the east (Plate 16). The gradient of the hillside into which the broch is set has been used by its builders to accentuate this impression of height, and it was probably positioned so that it broke the skyline when viewed from the agricultural land to the east. Entry to the site from this area would have been gained via a monumental entrance, rising up the slope to the interior of the broch itself.

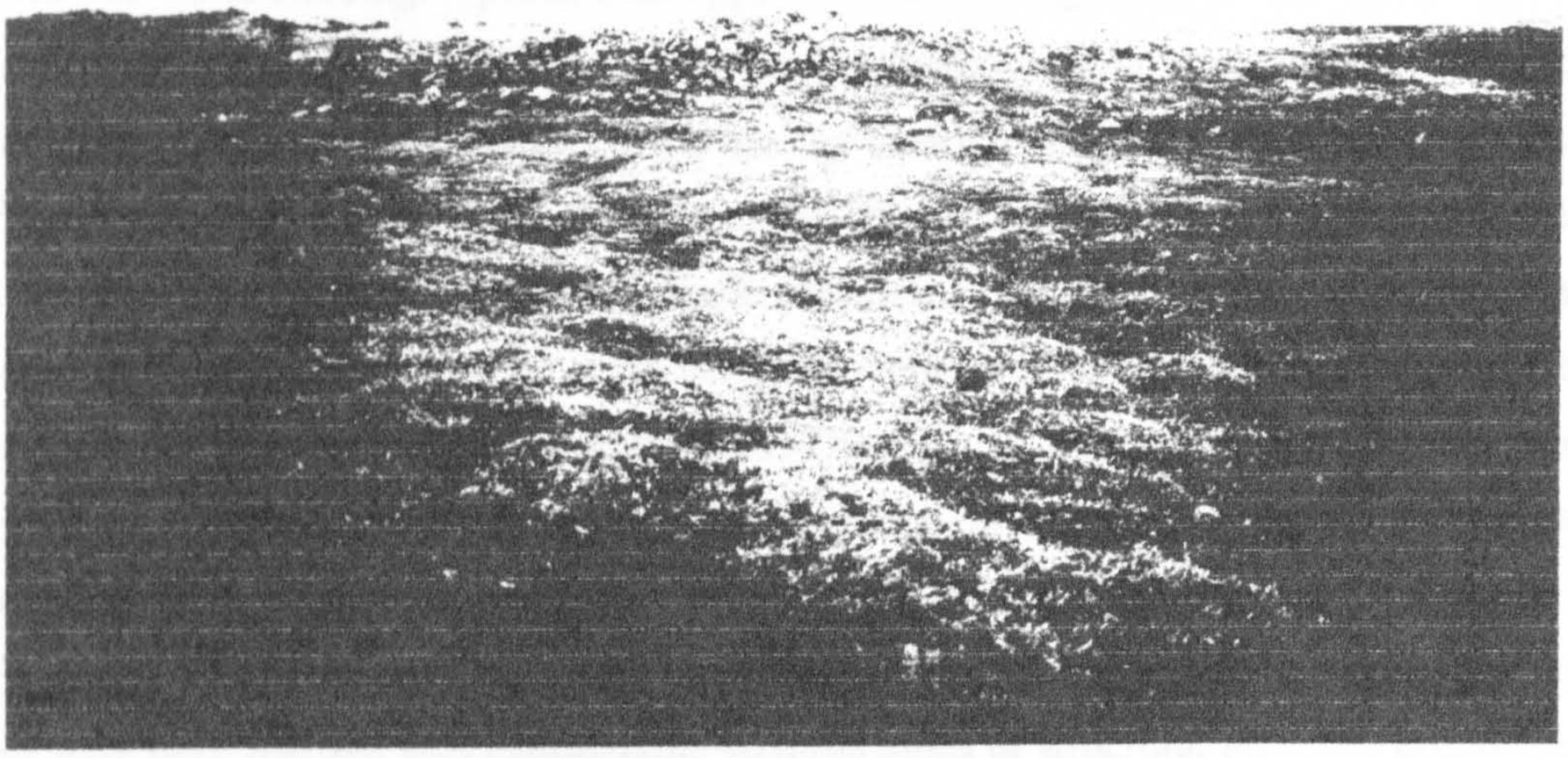


Plate 16 : The WAG OF FORSE, seen from lower ground to the east.

The first aisled building to be constructed at Forse appears to have been to the south-west of the broch, and it appears that the lower part of the outer wall of the broch at least was standing at this stage, given that structures which post-date Aisled Building I were built against it, although it is not possible to state whether the broch itself was still occupied at this stage. Aisled Building I was accompanied by an adjoining sub-circular building, House III, which itself remained in use throughout a period of reconstruction which saw the replacement of Aisled Building I by Aisled Building II and two further sub-circular buildings, Houses IV and V. The last of the aisled buildings to have been constructed at Forse appears to have been Aisled Building III, as it was quite deliberately intruded into the structure of the broch, which itself appears to have been standing, even if not actually occupied, during the construction of the other aisled buildings. With the construction of the aisled buildings there appears to be an important and fundamental shift in architectural emphasis. The broch was clearly intended to be visible, and to have a considerable architectural impact, from the area to the east. Even in its present state of preservation the site is visible from the main A9 road, a kilometre to the east. The aisled buildings themselves may not have been visible from a distance, given that it is likely that the outer boundary of the site remained in use. The later structures do, however, retain a monumental aspect in their architecture, but this now takes the form of the use of the pillars and capstones within the interiors of the sub-rectangular

aisled buildings themselves, together with the use of massive stonework in their construction. It thus appears that there was a shift from an external to an internal monumentality. This shift in spatial emphasis is combined with a fundamental change in the form of the structures at Forse: the aisled buildings represent the appearance of rectangular structures on the site for the first time. Although Curle interpreted the long wags as cattle byres, this interpretation would appear to be a very crude structural analogy drawn with the post-medieval longhouses of Caithness, and perhaps the blackhouses of the Western Isles, and to have little application to the structures at Forse. In essence, Curle considered that the bays formed by the pillar stones and lintel slabs within the aisled buildings were cattle stalls, but this is supported by very little in the way of archaeological evidence. There are, for instance, no recorded structures within the excavated aisled buildings which might have functioned as drains for the periodic cleansing which would presumably have been necessary in buildings designed for the stalling of animals. The massively-constructed outer walls of the examples at Forse, some of which may have been revetted into considerable accumulations of structural material, would have been impossible to break down for the removal of manure at the end of the Winter, further rendering the analogy with the early post-medieval farmstead untenable. In addition, many of the passageways connecting the structures at Forse, and linking them to the outside, appear unnecessarily narrow, long and constricted were they intended for animals; on the contrary, the architecture of these buildings appears far more suited to the control and restriction of the movement of people. An interpretation of the function of the aisled buildings which sees them as animal shelters can therefore be rejected, and Curle's interpretation of the adjoining cellular houses as 'herd's cabins' (Curle 1946, 12) is by implication unsound. In his published reports he is at pains to diminish the domestic nature of these buildings, but the finds recovered from them, chiefly coarse pottery and fragments of saddle querns, the location of a central hearth, or at least evidence of the burning of peat and the evidence for careful drainage, in each one would appear to represent unequivocal evidence of domestic activity.

There is no conclusive evidence either for or against the presence of outbuildings related to the occupation of the broch at Forse, although it is possible that the traces of early occupation which lie beneath Houses I and II may represent such occupation. It would, however, appear reasonable to suggest that the broch represents an architectural space within which a whole range of domestic activities were undertaken, and that the circularity of the building served to focus these activities around a central space, perhaps occupied by a domestic hearth, although there is no evidence of this. Reid (1989, 12) has suggested that the peripheral areas of broch interiors were used for agricultural activities such as the storage and processing of crops, whereas social relationships were articulated around the focal area of the central hearth. It is possible that the construction of the rectangular aisled buildings at Forse represents a

realignment of the differentiation between domestic and agricultural activity, with the peripheral areas of the domestic space given over to the latter being replaced by a new form of building. We thus have an architectural contrast between circular houses, where the spatial focus remains concentrated on a central area, and rectangular buildings where the depth of space from front to back and right/left symmetry are the defining spatial characteristics. It is noticeable at Forse that the latest aisled building on the site, Aisled Building III, was constructed so as to completely obscure the part of the broch within which it lies, and that this represents a deliberate imposition of a rectangular form upon a circular building. It appears to have been very important to maintain the internal shape and construction of the aisled building, with its massive stonework and rounded corners, and pre-existing structural elements of the broch are not employed within this building in contrast to the later Enclosure I. It may be that this represents a symbolic statement of the differentiation between non-domestic and domestic spaces at Forse, and the growing importance of the former at the site given that the aisled building overlies the broch which was previously the focus of activity. It is certainly noticeable that the traces of domestic structures which may have been associated with Aisled Building III lie outside the circumference of the broch wall. Aisled Building III is also the only aisled building on the site which is entered from the east, possibly via a pre-existing monumental entrance, as opposed to the other aisled buildings at Forse, which open to the south and south-east, further emphasising the dominant location of this building on the site.

Phase 3: Early Occupation

The excavated structures which lie at the lowest level within the mound at Forse are situated within the south-eastern part of the site. It was in this area that Curle removed the most material during the course of his excavations, and thus many of the structural and stratigraphic relationships he observed were poorly recorded and are now no longer visible.

In this area there appear to be the remains of at least two sub-circular structures, Structures I and II. These lie at different levels, and the arcs of the sections of walling which define them do not intersect at an angle which would suggest that they belong to a single structure. It can thus be suggested that these structures represent two phases of occupation at a level below that of Aisled Building III, whose associated House VI to the south appears to overlie them (Plate 11). It would appear to be the earliest of these occupation phases given that it is at the lowest level, but Curle's excavation notes indicate that he had little understanding of this area, and are therefore largely unhelpful. Structure II, however, was more carefully observed, and on the removal of the overlying stone rubble was found to consist of a curved section of walling constructed from large natural stones. Associated with this was an area paved with flat stones, which in turn was set around what Curle describes as a "cairn" (MS/

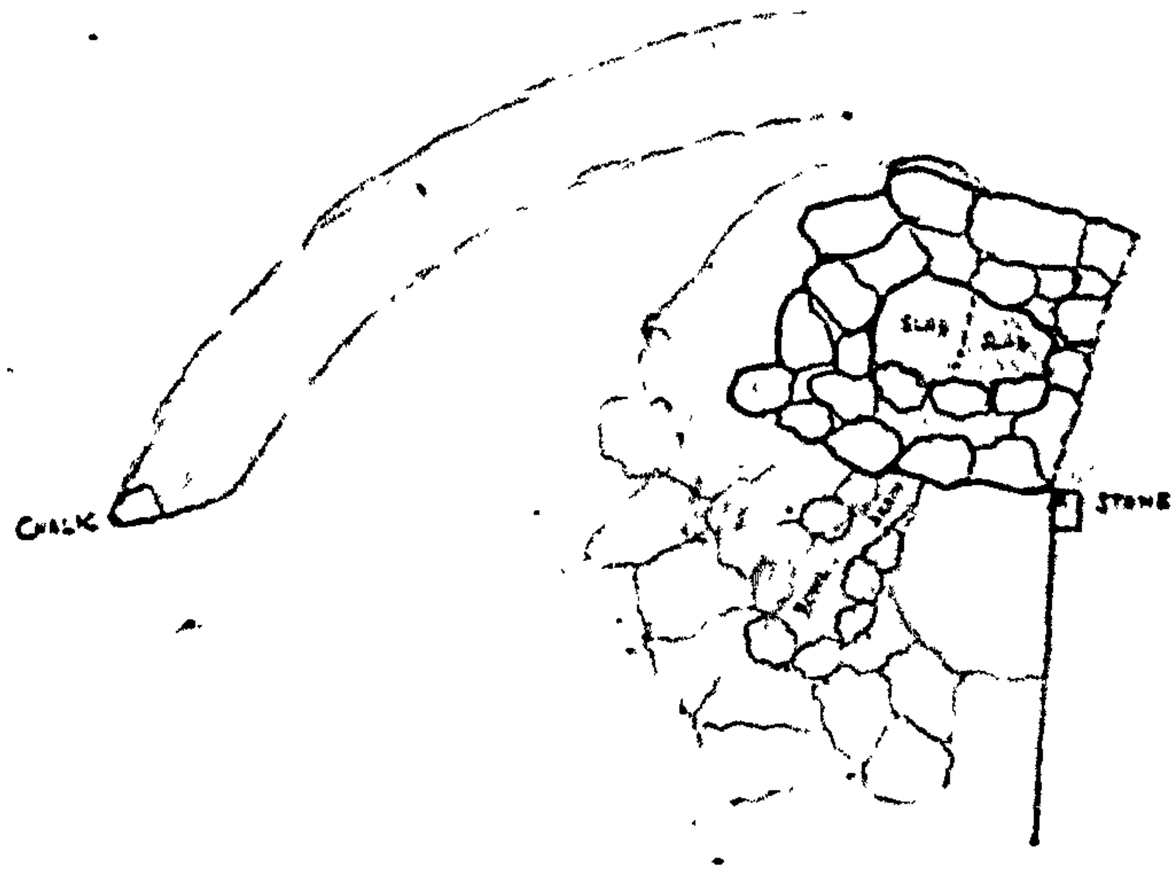


Figure 15 : The 'cist' within Structure II, from original plane-table plan. Crown Copyright: RCAHMS.

28/461(4), 21/6/48), which he originally took to be the remains of a stone hut. The latter consisted of a low mound of stones in the centre of which was a cell or 'cist' covered by two flat, rectangular slabs (Figure 15). On lifting the covering slabs, Curle found the 'cist' to have been filled by two large stones; these were removed and the floor of the structure was found to be covered by loose soil which contained numerous flecks of charcoal. On the west side of the 'cist' was a recess which contained the decomposed remains of the jaw and teeth of a sheep. At the exterior of the cairn structure were two channels, to the south and east, but Curle could find no connection between these and the interior of the 'cist', and given that one appears to have passed beneath a large slab within the defining wall of II, it is probably safer to regard these channels as drainage for the centre of the building itself, rather than being connected to the 'cist'.

The outer turf and stone bank which surrounds the site cannot be attributed to any given phase on the basis of the extant field evidence, or the meagre stratigraphic record preserved in Curle's notes. However, the fact that this boundary encompasses all of the structural evidence at Forse would tend to suggest that its line, if not its current form, date to the earliest periods of occupation on the site.

Interpretation of Structures

The remains of the earliest known occupation at Forse are the most disturbed and poorly understood on the site. It would appear that there were at least two superimposed, sub-circular stone buildings within the south-eastern area of the site, the uppermost of which contained paving and was drained. The stone 'cist' within structure II contained no skeletal material, although a quantity of charcoal was found within it, and it would therefore appear reasonable to regard this as some form of cooking trough. Although there is no good dating evidence for this area of the site, given that it lies at a lower level than the broch and its surrounding structures it would appear reasonable to assign it an earlier prehistoric date, possibly the later Bronze Age.

3. Summary

I have attempted to present a contextual re-assessment of the archaeological information derived from the excavations at the Wag of Forse. Perhaps the most fundamental result of this process has been the elucidation of a revised sequence of occupation at the site, which differs markedly from that advanced by A.O. Curle (1941, 1946, 1948). The initial occupation at Forse, or at least the earliest for which there is extant evidence, appears to have consisted of at least two phases of superimposed sub-circular domestic buildings, the uppermost of which was internally drained and contained what appears to have been a cooking trough. The outer boundary of the site can be seen to enclose all of the known structural traces, and I would therefore suggest that it represents an early feature which was probably in use during the earliest known phase of activity. It is difficult to interpret this early occupation further, given that its traces are fragmentary and somewhat ephemeral.

These sub-circular structures were superseded during the middle Iron Age (more precise dating is impossible due to the paucity of good chronological evidence at Forse) by a broch, which continued to make use of the outer boundary of the site, as at least one entrance passed through this to give access to the broch itself. It is impossible to make any definite statement as to the presence of contemporary surrounding buildings, common at Caithness broch sites (Swanson 1988, Chapter 7), as the remains of later settlement overlie most of the area outside the broch itself. It is likely, however, that while the broch outer wall was still in use the first of a series of three sub-rectangular aisled buildings, together with an adjoining sub-circular house, was constructed within the southern area of the site, and that this was later overlain by a further aisled building and two more adjoining houses, although the first of the sub-circular buildings continued in use. This area of the site is remarkable for its complex series of structural modifications, and must have been in occupation for a considerable period of time. I would

suggest that the latest aisled building to built on the site was quite deliberately intruded into the structure of the broch itself. Although there is no clear stratigraphic correlation between it and the other aisled buildings, the fact that the latter were built against the broch outer wall indicates that the broch may still have been in use when they were constructed.

The final occupation on the site consisted of two interconnected cellular houses built up against the broch wall within its north-eastern arc, together with an enclosure or yard, defined by a wall built from robbed stone across the surviving northern part of the broch interior. These structures may date to the later first millennium AD.

4. The Finds

A full inventory of the small finds from the Wag of Forse was not included in any of the published reports of the excavations at the site, although some are mentioned in general terms. A small number of finds illustrations also appear in Curle's published work (e.g. 1941, figs. 1 & 2, 1945, fig. 1, 1948, fig. 3). The following list includes all of the small finds mentioned individually in the excavation notebooks, but it is clear that other examples were discarded before a detailed description could be made. The identifying numbers are those allotted by Curle, although where possible I have included the accession number under which items may be found within the collections of the National Museum of Scotland. Although the Museum holds many of the finds from Forse, at the time of writing access to material in its collections was unavailable, and it is therefore impossible to include photographs and other illustrative material. The approximate context in which individual finds were found has also been included, although it should be borne in mind that the excavations at Forse were carried out in the absence of a full appreciation of the subtleties of stratigraphy.

Number	NMS Number	Description	Location
FW1		saddle quern, broken	floor of passage between Aisled Building II & House III, 2' inwards
FW2	X.HD 714	schist disc, 3.5" dia	soil & debris around standing pillar in House III, 3'8" from top
FW3		rim sherd, coarse black pot	on grey clay floor in House III
FW4	X.HD 718	cooking pot, crushed	hearth in House III, top level of ash
FW5	X.HD 713	hammerstone, 3.5" length	hearth in House III, 8" above lowest level
FW6	X.HD 716	spindle whorl, incomplete	hearth in house III, 8" above lowest level
FW7		granite saddle quern, incomplete	used as paving at east side of House III
FW8-11	X.HD 717	lignite ring segments	adjacent to wall of House III, on east side
FW12	X.HD 712	rubber stone	unknown
FW13		perforated flat slab, 1'9" length ("door weight")	against wall of passage between Aisled Building II & House IV
FW14		abraded quartz pebble	west side of Aisled Building II, found clearing wall
FW15		hammerstone, 5.5" length	in wall of drain in House III, at junction with house wall
FW16	X.HD 719	pottery, finger-impressed rim sherd	in ash around hearth in House III
FW17		saddle quern, length 1'6", width 1'	Aisled Building II, adjacent to wall at a high level
FW18	X.HD 715	block of stone with circular depression on one face ("lamp")	Aisled Building II
FW19		pottery, sherds	filling of secondary entrance between House III and House IV
FW20		pottery, everted rim sherd	floor of House III, amongst peat ash
FW21	X.HD 779	upper stone of rotary quern, granite	west side of House IV

Number	NMS Number	Description	Location
FW22	X.HD 778	pebble, flaked and ground edge	unknown
FW22(a)	X.HD 780	segment of jet armlet	S wall of entrance to Aisled Building III
FW23	X.HD 781/2/3	perforated femur head	north doorway of broch
FW24		pottery, sherd	S of entrance to Aisled Building III, among rubble and peat ash, 1' above floor level
FW25		pottery, sherd	S of entrance to Aisled Building III, at floor level
FW26		bone, deer horn or seal bone	floor of Aisled Building I, just inside door
FW27		red flint, small core	House II
FW28		perforated stone, yellow sandstone	broch doorway
FW29		pottery, small sherd	east entrance of broch, at sill level
FW30	X.HD 777	stone pounder, half	floor level, west side of broch
FW31	X.HD 776	stone rubber, 4.125" length, 3.875" width	north doorway of outer bank
FW32		pebble, abraded	in bar-hole, entrance to Aisled Building I
FW33		pottery, rim sherd	House II, upper level
FW34		pottery, rim sherd with finger impressions	passage between Aisled Building I and House III
FW35		stone rubber, 4" length, 3.75" width	south-west area of site, beneath foundation stone of later wall
FW36	X.HD 810	half of small saddle quern, 8" length, 4" width	wall-face to south-east of pillar stone in House VI
FW37		broken upper stone of small saddle ('lap') quern, 8.25" length, 4.25"width	1' below surface at wall face to south-east of pillar stone in House VI
FW38		rubber stone, 4" length, 3.75" width	18" - 2' below surface in House VI
FW39		ground pebble, 6.75" length, 4.25" width	floor of House VI, amongst charcoal and bone fragments

Number	NMS Number	Description	Location
FW40		part of lignite ring	debris at entrance to 'Wag 4' (not clear as to whether this is from broch entrance or that of Enclosure I)
FW41		hammerstone	debris at entrance to 'Wag 4' (position again unclear)
FW42		pot sherd with 'cruciform' decorated	top of peat ash adjacent to lower hearth in House VI
FW43		granite saddle quern, 12" length, 11.5" width, 6" thickness	position unclear (see FW40)
FW44	X.HD 809	flint flake ('strike-a-light')	top of peat ash adjacent to lower hearth in House VI
FW45		half of saddle quern, 9" length, 4.5" width, 3.5" thickness	top of peat ash adjacent to lower hearth in House VI
FW46		small ovoid pebble, slightly abraded	entrance to Aisled Building I
FW47		granite pebble, 5" length, 4" width, 3" thickness	entrance to Aisled Building I
FW48	X.HD 806	discoid sandstone bead, 3.25" diameter	south end of Aisled Building I
FW49		oblong stone pounder, much worn, bifacial at either end, 4.25" length, 2.5" width	floor level, south wall of Aisled Building I
FW50		abraded pebble, 3.8" length, 3.25" width	passage between House IV and House V
FW51		possible rotary quernstone, 11.5" length, 8.5" width	outer foundation level of broch wall, near north end of Aisled Building I
FW52		stone pounder, abraded at both ends, 6" length, 3.75" width	circular structure below level of House VI
FW53		broken hammerstone	original ground surface, outside circular structure below level of House VI
FW54		broken hammerstone	original ground surface, outside circular structure below level of House VI

Number	NMS Number	Description	Location
FW55		hammerstone, 6" length, 3.5" width	base of exterior of west wall of circular structure below level of House VI
FW56		half of hammerstone, 4.25" length	near floor level in circular structure below level of House VI
FW57		part of hammerstone	debris from area of circular structure below level of House VI
FW58		part of hammerstone	near surface of debris in circular structure below level of House VI
FW59		pot sherd, decorated	upper part of "cairn" within circular structure below level of House VI
FW60	X.HD 812	saddle ('lap') quern, 10" length, 7" width, 3" thickness	lowest level in circular structure below level of House VI
FW61		piece of split bone, possibly sharpened at either end	floor level of circular structure below level of House VI
FW62	X.HD 832	hammerstone, abraded at one end, 5.75" length, 3" width	debris from circular structure below level of House VI
FW63		half of small saddle quern	House VI, just above base of pillar stone
FW64	X.HD 817	discoid stone whorl	high level within circular structure below level of House VI
FW65		section of lignite armlet	from level of 'intermediate' hearth within House VI
FW66		pot, rim and body sherds	level of 'intermediate' hearth within House VI
FW67	X.HD 829	stone pot lid	hearth at side of 'cairn' in circular structure beneath level of House VI
FW68		pot, rim sherd	hearth at side of 'cairn' in circular structure beneath level of House VI

Number	NMS Number	Description	Location
FW69		pot, rim sherds (2)	
FW70		pot, rim sherds (2), black, very fine fabric	hearth at side of 'cairn' in circular structure beneath level of House VI
FW71		pot, rim and body sherds (5)	adjacent to kerb in circular structure beneath level of House VI
FW72	X.HD 814	hammerstone, 5.5" length, abraded both ends	Unknown
FW73	X.HD 814	hammerstone, 3.5" length, much abraded one end	Unknown
FW74	X.HD 814	part of hammerstone, 4.75" length, much abraded one end	Unknown
FW75		part of hammerstone	paving in circular structure beneath level of House VI
FW76		pot, sherd, grooved decoration	earliest hearth in circular structure below level of House VI
FW77		pot, sherds, everted rim	lowest paved level to north of 'cairn' in circular structure below level of House VI
FW78		perforated lignite fragment	lowest paved level to north of 'cairn' in circular structure below level of House VI
FW79		segment of lignite armlet	paving to east of 'cairn', in circular structure below level of House VI

Appendix 2

A Gazetteer of Aisled Buildings in Northern Scotland

1. Introduction

All of the sites discussed here may be found within the general tables of later Iron Age sites in Chapters 7 to 9. Almost all have also been discussed in some detail in the sections of these chapters (sections 7.3 to 9.3) which contain accounts of the individual local study areas. Although details of both the brochs and hut-circles of Caithness have been presented in other works, however, to my knowledge there is no complete list of the aisled buildings, or 'wags', of Northern Scotland available in printed form. This Appendix is therefore intended as a concise gazetteer, giving locational information and a short description of each site. The gazetteer is split into two parts; the first part lists 'firmly identified sites' at which clear remains of aisled buildings may be viewed in the field, the second contains 'possible sites', at which there is some evidence for the presence of aisled buildings, but at which this cannot be confirmed given the present state of preservation of the site. The sites are identified by name, using the form currently recognised by RCAHMS. They also have a unique site number, which is a composite of the study area within which a fuller discussion and illustrations of the site may be found, and the number by which the is identified within its study area (e.g. Achorn, 1/01 is later Iron Age site 1 in Study Area 1). Measurements given are interior dimensions.

2. Gazetteer

2.1. Firmly Identified Sites

Achorn

Site Number: 1/01

NMRS Reference: ND13SW 04

NGR: ND 1375 3057

Description:

The site consists of a low mound, containing at least four grass-covered sub-circular structures. Adjacent to the westernmost of these is a sub-rectangular structure measuring 13.0 by 14.0m, although there is no clear entranceway or other connection between the two. Although there is no clear evidence of aisled construction at the site, the conjunction of sub-rectangular and sub-circular elements is characteristic of later Iron Age settlement in northern Scotland (see Figure 7.18).

Allt Cam Leathaid, Berriedale Water

Site Number: 1/02

NMRS Reference: ND02NE 03

NGR: ND 0892 2964

Description:

The site sits beside the Allt cam Leathaid, a tributary stream of the Berriedale Water. It consists of a turf-covered mound 18m by 13.5m and 0.8m in height, set with its long axis from north to south. There are at least two earth-fast, upright stones protruding from the turf, and to the west of the mound appear to be a further pair of opposed uprights. In addition, a turf bank appears to curve away on the east side. It is possible that this represents the remains of a sub-rectangular aisled building and adjoining sub-circular structure, but the disturbed and ephemeral nature of the site makes positive identification very difficult.

Berriedale Water

Site Number: 1/03

NMRS Reference: ND02NE 02

NGR: ND 0880 2940

Description:

On the south bank of the Berriedale water, some 1.25km south-east of Braemore, is a complex settlement, consisting of six separate grass-covered mounds. At least two, and possibly three, of these appear to contain the remains of sub-rectangular aisled buildings and associated structures. The mound closest to Braemore, and also the lowest on the hillside (structure 'C' according to RCAHMS terminology), shows little evidence of aisled construction. It consists of a jumble of large stones which is sub-rectangular in outline, measuring 12.8m by 5m internally, and which contains one possible stone pillar and lintel, although this may be coincidental. Structure 'B' sits at around the same level on the hillside, but some 200m further to the south-east. It consists of two conjoined circular structures, 6.5m and 5m in maximum diameter, linked by a narrow passage. The larger of these structures sits to the south-east of the smaller example, and contains traces of four upright pillar stones, although no *in situ* lintels were visible, and also appears to have an entrance in its southern arc. The smaller structure, to the north-west, displays no evidence of aisled construction, but is extremely denuded and overgrown. The two sub-circular structures appear to overlie a third, possibly sub-rectangular, structure, but little now remains of this. Structure 'A' (Carn Tighe Chreagaich), 50m uphill to the south from 'B', clearly consists of a sub-rectangular aisled building, 10.4m by 4.9m and associated sub-circular structure, 7.9m in maximum diameter. The aisled building

still contains six upright, earth-fast pillar stones, with no lintels *in situ* although several still lie within its interior. None were visible within the circular structure, although two were noted by RCAHMS (1911). The two structures appear on the ground to be conjoined, rather than overlying as suggested by RCAHMS (1960) (see Figure 7.13).

Carn nan Uaigh

Site Number: 1/04

NMRS Reference: NC91SW 01

NGR: NC 9347 1404

Description:

The site is situated within a post-medieval enclosure, to the west of the Loth Burn. It comprises the fragmentary remains of two aisled buildings, one of which has been overlain by the footings of a post-medieval house. The easternmost aisled building is the better preserved, and contains two rows of four upright stones, although there are no lintel slabs *in situ*. The other building has been encroached upon by the more recent house, and only four upright stones protrude through the rubble by which it is obscured (see Figure 7.6).

Carradh nan Clach

Site Number: 1/05

NMRS Reference: NC91SW 31

NGR: NC 9396 1256

Description:

The site is situated in a shallow hollow at the edge of a river terrace, on the west side of the Loth Burn, some 150m south of the junction of Glen Loth and Glen Sletdale. It consists of a single aisled building, measuring 12.0m by 4.0m. There is a semicircular expansion at the south western corner of the building, which appears to have been entered from the south east. There are traces of a possible associated sub-circular structure and other fragmentary remains to the south west of the site.

Cor Tulloch

Site Number: 1/06

NMRS Reference: ND13NE 01

NGR: ND 1513 3553

Description:

The site sits on gently-sloping ground overlooking the wide, flat valley of the Burn of Houstry. It consists of a turf-covered mound approximately 32m in diameter, which contains the remains of at least two sub-rectangular aisled buildings, surrounded by an outer bank which appears to be of turf on a stone foundation. The northernmost aisled building is aligned south-east-north-west, and is defined by at least ten earth-fast, standing pillar stones set in two parallel lines, of which four have lintel stones *in situ*. The first two lintel stones on the north side are joined by a large, flat slab which may represent part of the original roofing. The aisled building measures at least 16m by 4m internally, and appears to have been entered from the east, in which direction there is an entrance through the outer bank. The southernmost aisled building is defined by two rows of nine earth-fast pillar stones, although none have lintel stones *in situ*, and measures at least 10m by 2m. It may, however, originally have been much larger, as it is poorly preserved and its dimensions are difficult to ascertain. At the centre of the site, between the two aisled buildings, is a third structure which is defined by three earth-fast, upright pillars set around a roughly circular depression. It is impossible to ascertain whether this represents the remains of a sub-circular structure or part of a larger, heavily-robbed aisled building. There are numerous other stones protruding from the earth, and the large size of the mound on which the site sits gives the impression that it contains much occupation material (see Figure 7.19).

Dail a Chairn

Site Number: 1/07

NMRS Reference: ND02NW 05

NGR: ND 0279 2941

Description:

The site sits on a low rise 50m from the Berriedale Water, 1.5km from the Preas Bhealaich pass. It consists of at least two sub-rectangular aisled buildings, evidenced by two separate alignments of pillar stones, one oriented north-east-south-west and the other east-west, together with exposed sections of walling, although only one lintel remains *in situ*. There is little indication of the size of either aisled building, as the site is extremely complex, and much of it is obscured by tumbled stone. Other areas have been extensively robbed, probably to provide

stone for the nearby modern house at Corrichoich. The large size of the mound within which the site sits indicates that there are further structures present, and there are suggestions of sub-circular buildings, and also that it may be constructed over a considerable amount of prior occupation debris.

Dunbeath Water (Halmie)

Site Number: 1/08

NMRS Reference: ND13SW 10

NGR: ND 1188 3295

Description:

The site sits on the north bank of the Dunbeath Water, below the deserted settlement of Halmie. It consists of two adjacent turf mounds, each containing a number of adjoining stone structures. The south-western mound contains what RCAHMS (1911, 1982) describes as an 'L-shaped' house (House A), consisting of a pair of sub-rectangular chambers, joined by an apparent connecting passage to the south-east, the northernmost chamber being 10m in length by 4.5m in width internally, the southernmost 6m in length by 5m in width internally. The presence of lintel slabs supported on stone pillars, the upper ends of which are clearly visible above the present ground level in the southernmost chamber, would appear sufficient to allow the identification of these structures as sub-rectangular 'wags' similar to the excavated example at Langwell (Curle 1911). Examination of the site on the ground as it stands at present suggests that the description of this site as 'L-shaped' may be erroneous, however; the north-south placement of the lintel slabs in the southernmost chamber indicate that it probably ran from north-west to south-east rather than being a southward extension of the northernmost chamber. The site probably consists of two parallel rectangular chambers, therefore. There is now little convincing evidence of an entrance passage into either of the structures, although there are indications that entry may have been gained to both via an opening in the eastern wall. The mound to the north-east contains three sub-circular structures, 8m by 7m, 5m by 4.5m and 5m diameter, which show evidence for aisled construction in the form of an *in situ* pillar stone and lintel within the north-western example (House C). Although RCAHMS and the Dunbeath survey record the existence of one, and possibly three, further sub-circular structures these were difficult to identify when the site was visited. Although the three identified structures appear to have been contiguous, it is also likely that they sit on top of earlier structures, which may include one or more of the other sub-circular buildings (see Figure 7.15).

Langwell (Borgue Langwell)

Site Number: 1/09

NMRS Reference: ND12SW 02

NGR: ND 1016 2191

Description:

The site is one of the two excavated aisled buildings (Curle 1911). It is located 180m north west of Brogue Langwell broch, near a tributary which flows into the Langwell Water to the north. It comprises a curving, sub-rectangular aisled building measuring some 11.6m by 4.3m, associated with a circular house 8.2m in internal diameter. Within the aisled building, four pillar stones remain standing, one of which retains its lintel slab *in situ* (see Figure 7.10).

Morven (Preas Bhealaich)

Site Number: 1/10

NMRS Reference: ND02NW 02

NGR: ND 0130 2740

Description:

The sites sit immediately to the south of the steep hillside of Morven (706m), and 1km from the pass between it and Smean, which divides the Langwell and Berriedale Waters. It consists of the remains of two sub-rectangular aisled buildings, at least one of which has an associated sub-circular structure. Wag 'A' (RCAHMS terminology) sits furthest up the slope to the north, some 15m from Wag 'B'. It appears to be a sub-rectangular aisled building, 13m by 5m with a wall 0.6m high in places, with evidence for aisled construction in the form of upright, earth-fast pillar stones, four of which retain lintel slabs *in situ* (although one of these is partly supported by a small chock stone, and might not be in its original position). Parts of the internal wall-facing are visible beneath the lintel stones, and indicate construction in light dry-stone masonry. Although the Ordnance Survey plan shows an entrance to the site at its eastern end, the end walls of the site are obscured by fallen masonry and consequently rather vague, and there is therefore little good evidence for the position of the original entrance. There appears to a be a further short length of walling at the eastern end of the aisled building which, although now very denuded, may have been part of an associated structure. Wag 'B' consists of a sub-rectangular aisled building 14.6m by 3.7m internally, with an associated sub-circular structure at its western end, 6.4m in maximum diameter. Although the remains of this structure are more substantial than those of 'A', they are partially obscured by tumbled stone, and although its aisled construction is evidenced by the presence of upright pillar stones, it is difficult to determine how many of these remain *in situ*, as most appear to have

collapsed. There is a clear passage between the two elements of the site, which is defined by a short stretch of walling on its north side. It is possible that 'B' has a double exterior wall, as there appears to be an outer boundary running on roughly the same alignment as the inner wall face, although it is possible than this represents the remains of an enclosing bank (see Figure 7.11).

Uaigh Bheag 1

Site Number: 1/11

NMRS Reference: ND13SW 11

NGR: ND 9360 1423

Description:

The site is located on the floor of Glen Loth, to the west of the Loth Burn. It comprises two sub-rectangular aisled buildings, with an associated circular structure set between them. The western aisled building measures 14.0m by 4.0m, and appears to have had an entrance to the south west. It contains a row of three upright pillar stones, but there are no *in situ* lintel slabs. The outline of the eastern building is rather vague, and it is overlain by rubble and field clearance. Part of its wall has also been destroyed by ploughing. It measures approximately 20.0m by 4.0m, and may have had an entrance to the south east. There are at least two surviving pillar stones, and possibly others, although it is difficult to differentiate these from the rubble which has accumulated on the site.

Uaigh Bheag 2

Site Number: 1/12

NMRS Reference: ND13SW 30

NGR: ND 9348 1377

Description:

The site is located within an area of post-medieval cultivation, now abandoned, on the west bank of the Loth Burn. It comprises a rectangular aisled building, which measures 14.0 by 4.0m, although there is no clear evidence of the original entrance direction. Part of the interior of the site has been cleared out, possibly as a source of stone for nearby post-medieval buildings, but in the untouched northern part of the interior four pillar stones remain. None has an *in situ* lintel slab (see Figure 7.6).

Wag

Site Number: 1/13

NMRS Reference: ND13SW 05

NGR: ND 1063 3308

Description: The site is located on the southern bank of the Dunbeath Water, adjacent to the Wag Burn. It consists of two separate, grass-covered mounds, both of which contain the remains of aisled buildings. The southern mound, which measures 37.5m by 18.8m, comprises at least two rectangular aisled buildings, within one of which there are two upright pillar stones with *in situ* lintels. There are also traces of possible conjoined, sub-circular structures to the east of the mound. The northern mound measures 21.0m by 8.5m, and comprises at least one rectangular aisled building. This contains several upright pillar stones, on of which retains an *in situ* lintel stone. The sites are adjacent to a conjoined pair of modern sheepfolds, and it likely that much stone has been robbed from them to build these features (see Figure 7.16).

Wag Mor

Site Number: 1/14

NMRS Reference: ND03NE 02

NGR: ND 0825 3680

Description:

The site is 300m to the north of the Raffin Burn, which flows into the Dunbeath Water at Achnaclyth. It consists of the remains of at least two sub-rectangular aisled buildings, set within two separate low, grassy mounds. The structure which lies furthest to the north is the least well-preserved, and measures 24m by 17m. It appears to have an exposed wall-face along its eastern side, aligned along the long axis of the mound from north to south, and there are several earth-fast, upright pillar stones which run parallel with this, one of which retains its lintel *in situ*. The west side of the mound is very denuded, and may have been robbed to provide stone for the nearby early modern sheepfold. The southernmost mound contains a sub-rectangular aisled building 22m by 4.2m internally, aligned from south-west - north-east. There are at least ten standing pillars, some being almost 1m in height, although it is difficult to make out the central aisle and some pillar stones appear to placed directly in the centre of the mound. The rounded north-east corner of the aisled building is very well-defined, constructed in dry-stone masonry, and it is covered by a large flat slab which, although it may be secondary, may also represent a roofing slab of the type found at Cor Tulloch. There is a large sub-circular structure, 12m in maximum internal diameter, at the northern end of

the mound, but this is heavily robbed and overlain by traces of early modern buildings. It is therefore difficult to ascertain whether it is contemporary with the aisled building. There are traces of boulder-built walls extending between the two mounds on the site and RCAHMS (1982) suggest that these may represent an enclosure contemporary with the aisled buildings (see Figure 7.17).

Wagmore

Site Number: 1/15

NMRS Reference: ND02NW 09

NGR: ND 0183 2582

Description:

The site sits on the north side of the Langwell Water. It consists of a rather amorphous, grass-covered mound, 15m in diameter and 2m in height, from which project several earth-fast, upright stones. RCAHMS (1990) suggest that this may represent "...an untouched wag or round wag".

Wagmore Rigg

Site Number: 1/16

NMRS Reference: ND02NW 01

NGR: ND 0030 2614

Description:

The site sits in a dominant position at the end of Wagmore Rigg, a prominent spur which projects from the high ground to the north-west towards the junction of the Langwell Water and its tributary the Morven Burn. It consists of two conjoined sub-circular structures, 8.8m and 6.1m in maximum internal diameter. The largest structure, to the south-west, is well preserved and is defined by a dry-stone wall 0.6m in height, and contains nine earth-fast, upright pillar stones, three of which still have *in situ* lintels. Other lintel stones lie on the ground within the structure itself. There is also a massive slab lying in the vicinity of the entrance to the east, which may a displaced door lintel. The north-eastern structure is now largely obscured by tumbled masonry, much of which has fallen away down the slope on which the site sits, and contains no visible upright pillars. Although the site appears from in front to have been set into the slope which rises behind it, further examination shows that it has been banked up at the rear and appears to sit on a substantial mound, perhaps made up from occupation material (see Figure 7.12).

Keiss White Gate

Site Number: 2/05

NMRS Reference: ND36SE 03

NGR: ND 3541 6120

Description:

The site is the northernmost of three brochs at Keiss. It is situated at the shore, just outside a modern enclosure, the wall of which deviates to avoid the broch. All three Keiss brochs display evidence of complexes of surrounding buildings, but there are no clearly visible traces of aisled buildings within these. However, photographs taken of the site during excavations by Tress Barry at the White Gate broch in 1892 show what appear to be the remains of opposed wall faces, built across the interior of the broch on a line leading away from the entrance (see Plate 8.13). The photographs also show a row of upright stones places along the inner face of the south-western wall face, and there also appear to be broken off examples along the north-eastern example. This feature is markedly different from the slab partitions found at other excavated broch sites along the east coast of Caithness, and it seems very likely that it represents the remains of an aisled building, built into debris within the broch in a similar fashion to the Wag of Forse. It is also likely that the crude excavation techniques employed by Tress Barry failed to identify the true nature of this structure. Unfortunately, little of this structure is now visible, although large stones lying about the interior of the broch may derive from it (see Figure 8.12).

Nybster

Site Number: 2/09

NMRS Reference: ND36SE 04

NGR: ND 3702 6314

Description:

The broch of Nybster sits on a sheer-sided promontory, which projects into the Moray Firth to the south-east of the village of Auckengill. Excavations at the site by Tress Barry have left a rather confused complex of surrounding buildings, part of which is overlain by excavation spoil. Within this complex of buildings is a very clear sub-rectangular building, with at least two upright stones forming 'stalls' against its inner wall-face. The visible portion of this building measures approximately 6.0 by 3.0 metres, although it appears to extend beneath rubble to the east, and may in reality be much larger. Tress Barry's plan shows this building to be

associated with a conjoined circular structure, although again most of this is overlain by rubble and excavation spoil. However, the association between circular and rectangular elements at the site is clear, and it seems very likely that this is a later Iron Age aisled building (see Figure 8.14).

Wag of Forse

Site Number: 2/11

NMRS Reference: ND23NW 01

NGR: ND 2048 3520

Description:

The Wag of Forse is described in detail in Appendix 1. The site comprises a mass of structural remains, and has a considerable history of occupation. Among the structures are at least three rectangular aisled buildings, one of which (Aisled Building II) is the best preserved example in Caithness. All of the aisled buildings have associated sub-circular houses, all of which have been excavated to some degree.

2.2. Possible Sites

Achinavish Croft, Braemore

Site Number: 1/17

NMRS Reference: ND02NE 03

NGR: ND 0862 2972

Description:

Although described as a homestead by RCAHMS, there is now no trace of a site at the grid reference given. This is located within a field which, although at present grassland, appears to have been ploughed in the past, and this activity may have destroyed the site. There is a very slight mound in approximately the correct position, which may represent evidence of the site's former position.

Ballentink

Site Number: 1/19

NMRS Reference: ND13SE 13

NGR: ND 1521 3104

Description:

The site sits on the same low ridge as the Dunbrae broch mound, a few hundred metres further to the north. It consists of a low, grass-covered mound adjacent to modern clearance cairns. It contains at least six earth-fast slabs which run from west to east. There are also traces of walling at two levels on the east side of the mound, which may relate to these slabs.

Carn Liath

Site Number: 1/20

NMRS Reference: ND02NW 06

NGR: ND 0433 2975

Description:

The site sits adjacent to a tributary stream of the Berriedale Water. It is described by RCAHMS (1982) as "...the scant remains of a homestead or wag...", but now displays little evidence of aisled construction, although one or two long slabs lie in its interior, and might possibly represent lintel stones. The site consists of a mound approximately 18m in diameter, containing two conjoined enclosures the outlines of which are somewhat vague, and may represent either rectangular and associated sub-circular structures, or two associated circles. The site is very denuded and overgrown with grass, and may have been robbed to provide stone for the construction of the adjacent sheepfold. There are, however, numerous large stones protruding through the turf, together with a length of exposed walling on the south-eastern side constructed from large stones and quartz boulders, which might represent an outer boundary. There are possible entrances through this wall to the north and east.

Dunbrae (Rhemullen)

Site Number: 1/22

NMRS Reference: ND13SE 11

NGR: ND 1532 3098

Description:

The site sits on a low ridge overlooking the Allt an Learanaich, a tributary which flows into the Burn of Houstry at Ballachly. It consists of a turf-covered mound, probably containing a broch, which displays the stepped, or 'mound-on-mound', profile characteristic of many other unexcavated Caithness broch mounds (Swanson 1988, 100). The upper part of the mound, which contains what appears to be part of the stonework of a double-walled entrance passage, may represent the broch itself, and measures some 21m in diameter and 1.6-1.8m in height. This upper mound rises out of a more amorphous hillock measuring 50m in length by 40m in width. The latter contains at least five upright, earth-fast stones, 1.2-1.4m in length on its east side, and a further single similar stone to the south, and these may represent the remains of occupation surrounding the broch itself. The entire site is overlain by the footings of stone-built structures, which are likely to be early modern, and which have the following dimensions:

1 (south-east of mound): 8.6m by 2.6m
2 (south of mound): 5.0m by 3.0m
3 (north-west of mound): 5.9m by 3.9m
4 (north, top of mound): 5.1m by 3.9m
5 (north-east of mound): 6.5m by 7.8m

Achnabeinn

Site Number: 3/01

NMRS Reference: ND05NW 11

NGR: ND 0430 5726

Description:

The site sits on the east bank of the Forss Water, to the north of Loch Shurrery. It consists of a massive grassy mound, which contains the remains of at least two rectangular structures. The best preserved is set to the north east of the mound, and measures at least 10.0 by 4.0m, although it is likely to have been truncated by more recent activity to the south. A clear, rounded corner, constructed in massive dry stone masonry, is visible in the north east corner of this building. There are also parallel alignments of at least 6 upright stones to the south of this building. Although there are no surviving lintel slabs, this feature is suggestive of aisled

construction. The other structure within the mound is more amorphous, but appears to represent a rectangular structure measuring at least 8.0m by 5.0m. There are traces of an outer bank around the site. Although this site has, in the past, been classified as a 'cairn', the existing evidence does not support this, and the best interpretation would appear to be a pair of rectangular aisled buildings within a surrounding bank or wall.

Creag Leathan

Site Number: 3/02

NMRS Reference: NC96SE 06

NGR: NC 9845 6336

Description:

The site is on the northern slopes of the low, craggy hill Creag Leathan. It consists of a large and rather amorphous mound of structural remains and rubble. To the north of the mound is a fragmentary, sub-rectangular building which contains a number of upright stones, although there is no clear evidence of aisled construction.

Lambsdale

Site Number: 3/04

NMRS Reference: ND05SE 01

NGR: ND 0511 5477

Description:

The site is located on the east bank of the Torran Water, 350m from the point at which it joins Loch Shurrery. It was excavated during 1955, in advance of the artificial raising of the level of Loch Shurrery (MacLaren forthcoming), although this did not inundate the site as expected. Although the excavations were rather limited in extent, they did reveal a fragmentary rectangular structure some 3.5m in width, although the full length of this was not revealed. This was associated with the remains of a sub-circular structure, within which there was a hearth. Although the combination of sub-rectangular and sub-circular elements is characteristic of later Iron Age settlement in northern Scotland, there was no trace of aisled construction in either building. In addition, the pottery from the site, although mostly unstratified, appears to be largely medieval in date, with a possible range from the Norse period until the 12th or 13th century (Campbell, forthcoming).

Tota Garbhaig

Site Number: 3/06

NMRS Reference: ND05NW 01

NGR: ND 0390 5999

Description: The site is located 350m to the east of the Forss Water, near to the settlement of Broubster. It comprises a large grassy mound, within which a number of earth-fast, upright stones protrude through the turf. Although rather amorphous, the form of the site suggests a combination of sub-rectangular and sub-circular structural elements. Taken together with the presence of upright stones, this may be tentatively interpreted as evidence of aisled buildings, although a positive identification is impossible given the vague nature of the remains.

Appendix 3

Radiocarbon Dates

The number of published radiocarbon dates available for later prehistoric domestic sites within the area termed 'Northern Scotland' for the purposes of this thesis is extremely small, amounting to only 21 individual dates from four separate sites. These are summarised below:

1. Cnoc Stanger

Site Summary

The site consisted of the fragmentary remains of a succession of later prehistoric roundhouses (II – VI), eroding from a sandy cliff face. The roundhouses were associated with midden deposits, and evidence for agriculture in the form of deeply stratified tilled soils and ard-marks.

Summary of Dates

Laboratory Number	*Date (BP)*	*Source*
GU-1681	3350 ±90	Structure II, mixed charcoal from floor deposit.
GU-1682	2910 ±60	Structure V, birch charcoal from floor deposit.
GU-168 3	3620 ±95	Structure V, mixed charcoal from floor deposit.

References

Mercer 1996

2. Crosskirk

Site Summary

The site consists of a broch, within which evidence for several episodes of occupation and reconstruction was recovered. The broch was surrounded by a complex of buildings and enclosures which, although not fully excavated due to time and safety constraints, also produced evidence of successive episodes of reconstruction and re-use.

Summary of Dates

Laboratory Number	*Date (bp)*	*Source*
SRR-266	2380 ±45	Broch, organic material under earliest identified floor.
SRR-267	1880 ±70	Broch, charcoal from reconstructed hearth.
SRR-268	2120 ±50	Enclosure IIIa, charcoal from hearth.
SRR-269	2770 ±100	Enclosure VII, charcoal on floor.
SRR-270	2100 ±100	Grave III (in Enclosure I), rib bone.
SRR-271	2070 ±80	Enclosure I, charcoal on floor.
SRR-272	2050 ±50	Broch, charcoal from occupation deposits.

References

Fairhurst 1984

3. Kilphedir

Site Summary:

The site consists of a settlement of five hut-circles (I-V), associated with cultivation traces comprising both clearance cairns and boulder field walls. On excavation, the hut-circles proved to be the remains of a series of roundhouses, ranging from 6.0m to 11.0m in internal diameter. Although all five hut-circles were excavated, sufficient charcoal to allow radiocarbon determinations was recovered from secure contexts from only two.

Summary of Dates:

Hut-Circle III, from charcoal derived from birch, hazel and possibly alder twigs, found on the roundhouse floor and sealed by peat formation:

Laboratory number	*Date (ad/bc)*
GU-299	420 ±40 bc

Hut-Circle V, from charcoal found in a hearth, associated with the reconstruction of the roundhouse at a late stage of its occupation:

Laboratory number	*Date (ad/bc)*
GU-67	28 ±60 ad
GU-10	42 ±60 ad
GU-11	114 ±55 bc
1-1061	150 ±80 bc
SRR-3	150 ±50 bc

References:

Fairhurst & Taylor 1971

4. Upper Suisgill

Site Summary

The site consisted of the fragmentary remains of two phases of construction, at least one of which involved two successive post-built structures. This structural evidence was associated with cultivation traces, in the form of ard-marks, and demarcation features such as walls, fence lines and a substantial, stone-faced enclosure bank. There are also three souterrains close to the site, although these could not be related stratigraphically to the remainder of the excavated evidence.

Summary of Dates

Laboratory Number	*Date (bc)*	*Source*
GU-1326	630 ±60	Twigs and small branches from gravel wash.
GU-1490	885 ±90	Structure 2, charcoal from burnt post.
GU-1491	255 ±65	Charcoal from occupation layer.
GU-1492	825 ±105	House 1a, charcoal from posthole.
GU-1493	990 ±60	Burnt stakes on top of primary settlement boundary bank.

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Barclay 1985

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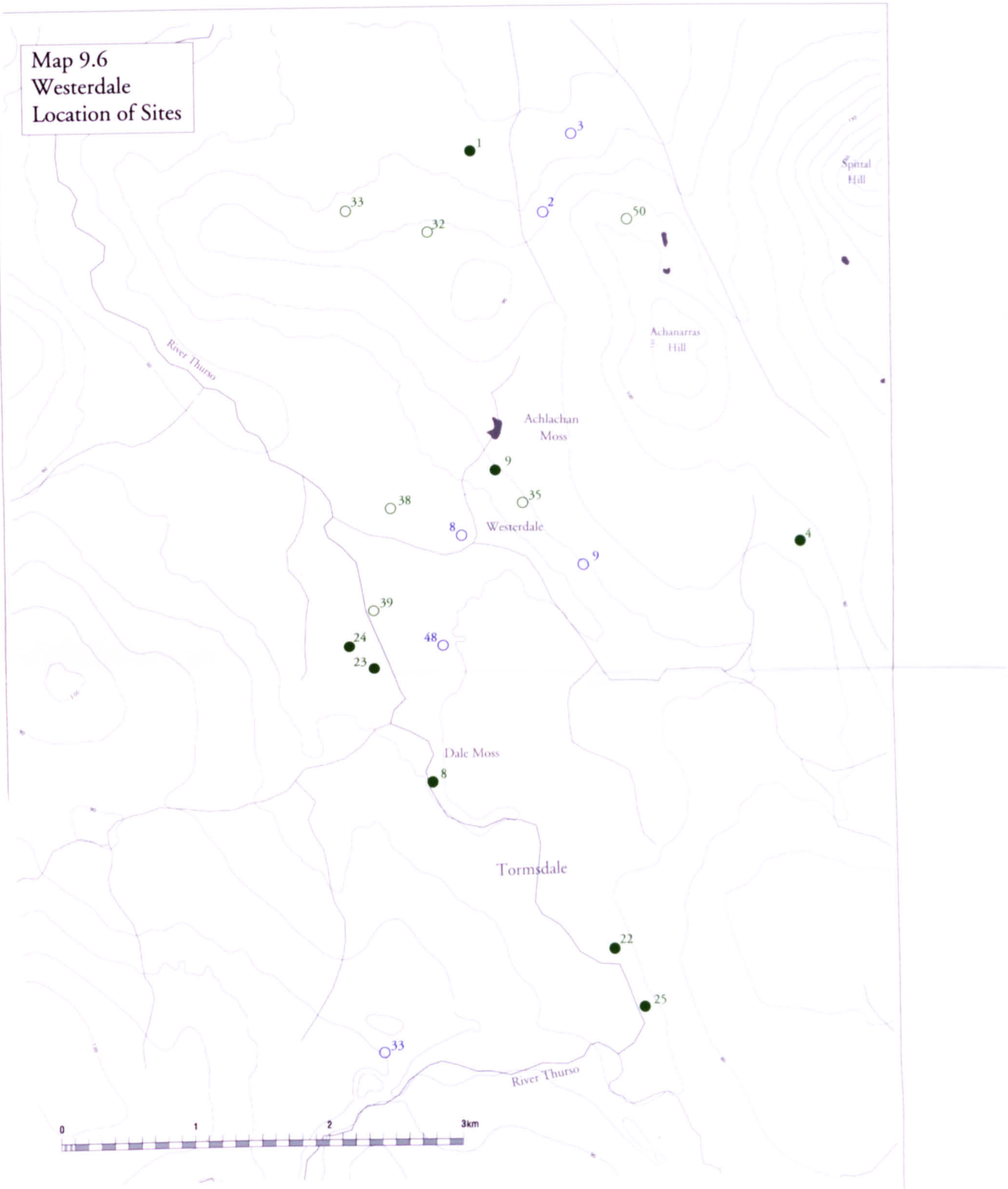
Map 9.6
Westerdale
Location of Sites



Lochan Ealach

Loch Calder

Allt Forsiscye

Forss Water

Loch Olginey

Loch a' Mhuilinn

Beinn Freiceadain

fort

Loch Shurrery

Ben Dorrery

Lambsdale Leans

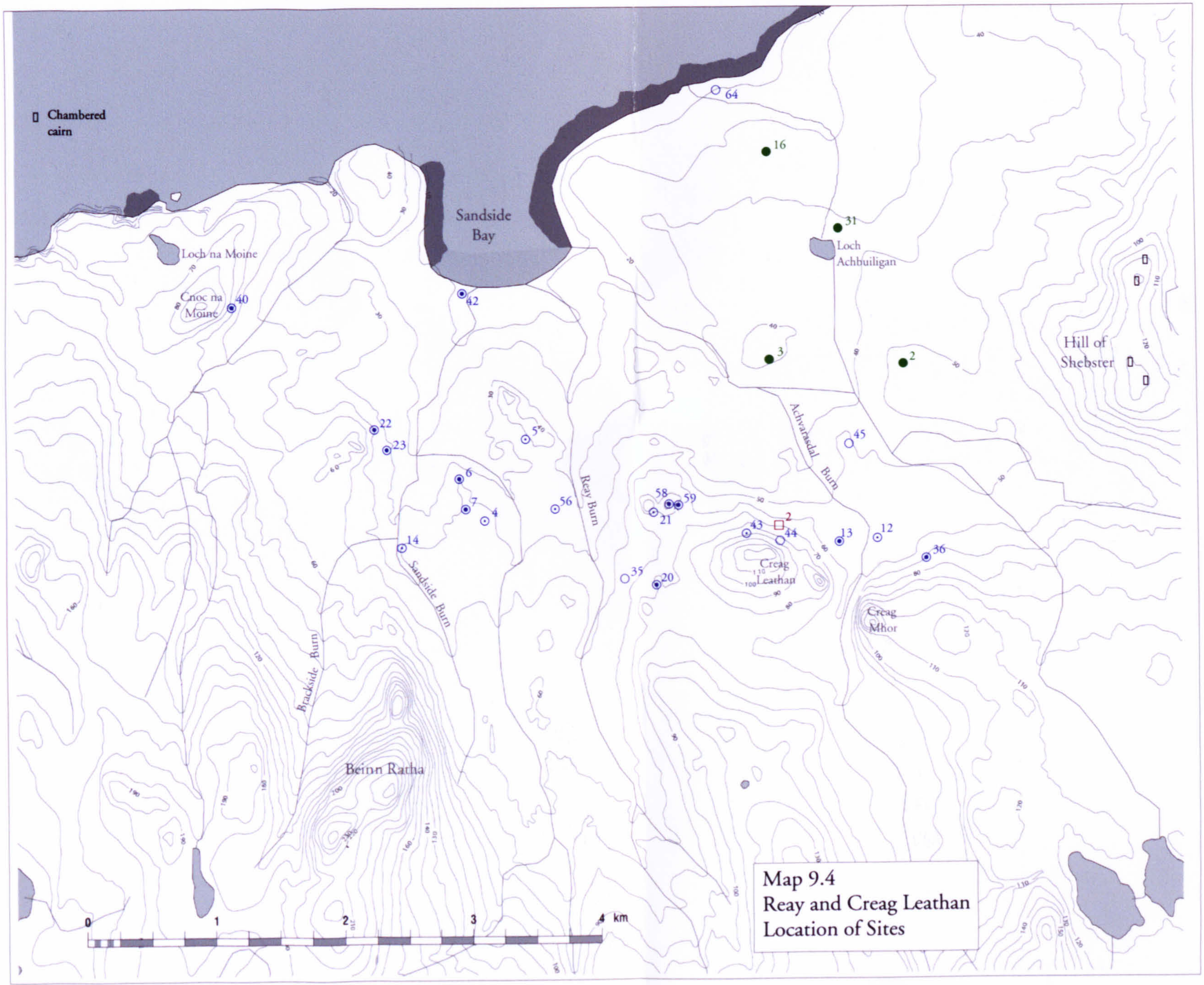
Torran Water

Blar Dearg

Chambered cairn

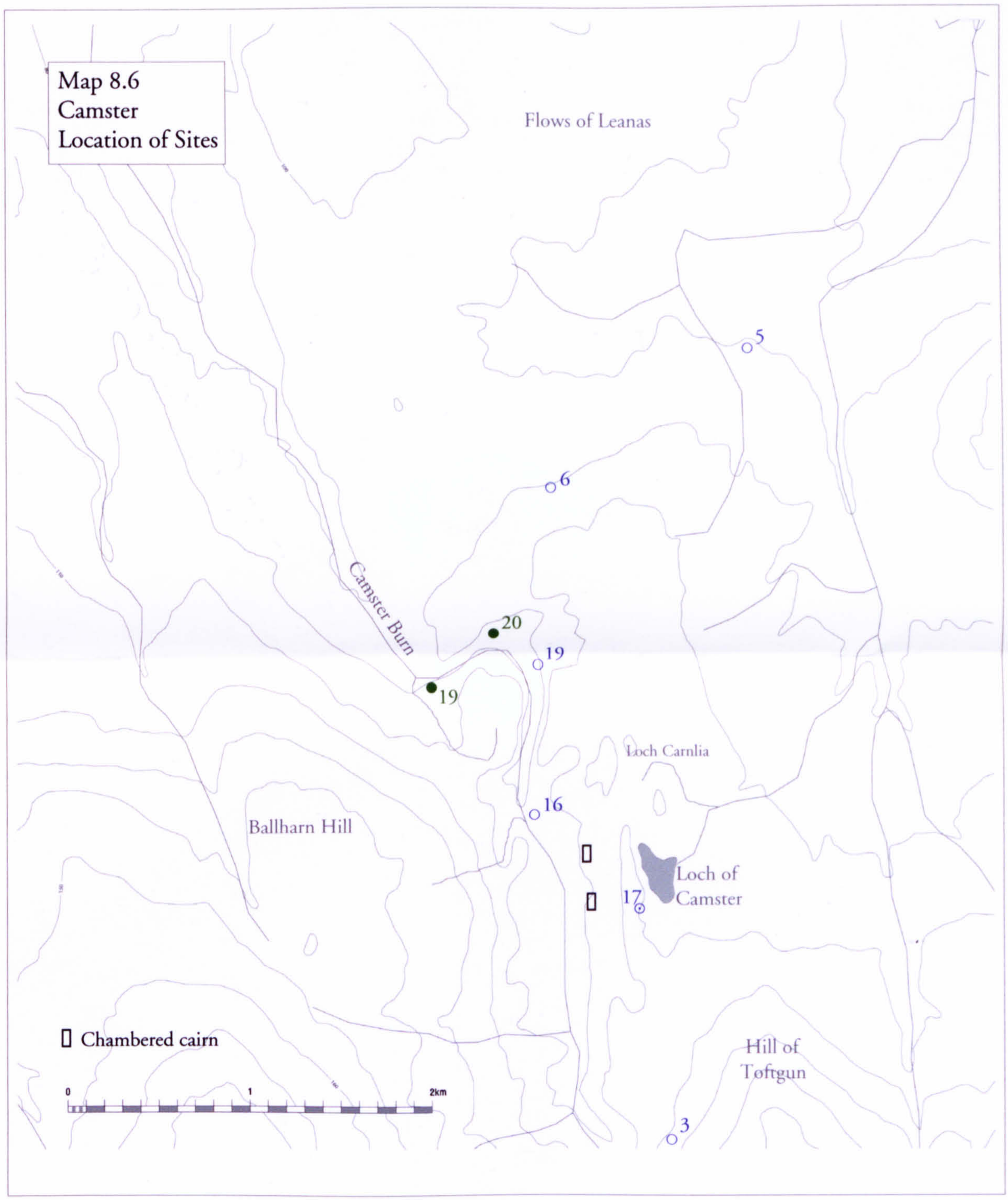
0 1 2 3 4km

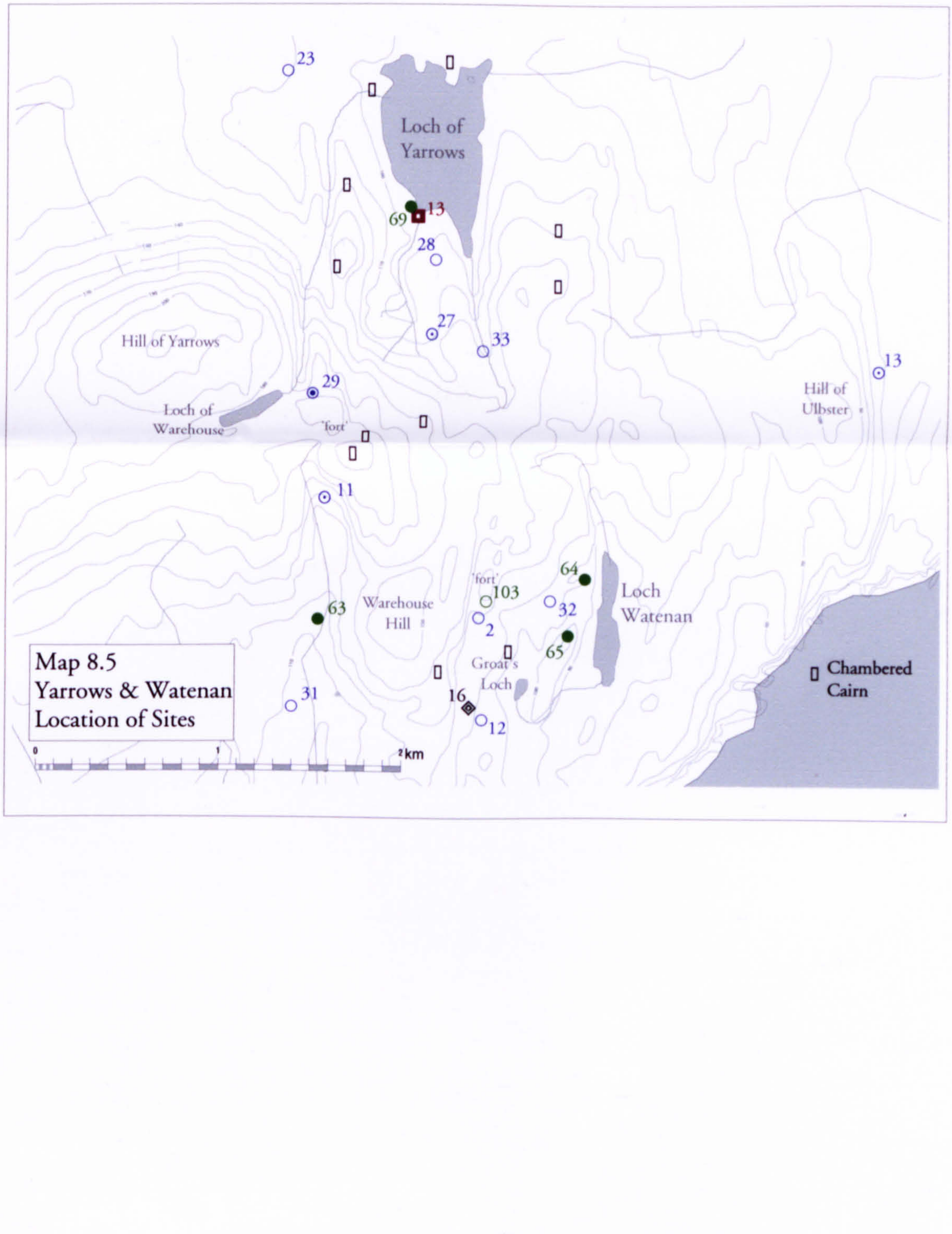
Map 9.5
Ben Dorrery & Upper Forss Water
Location of Sites



Map 9.4
Reay and Creag Leathan
Location of Sites

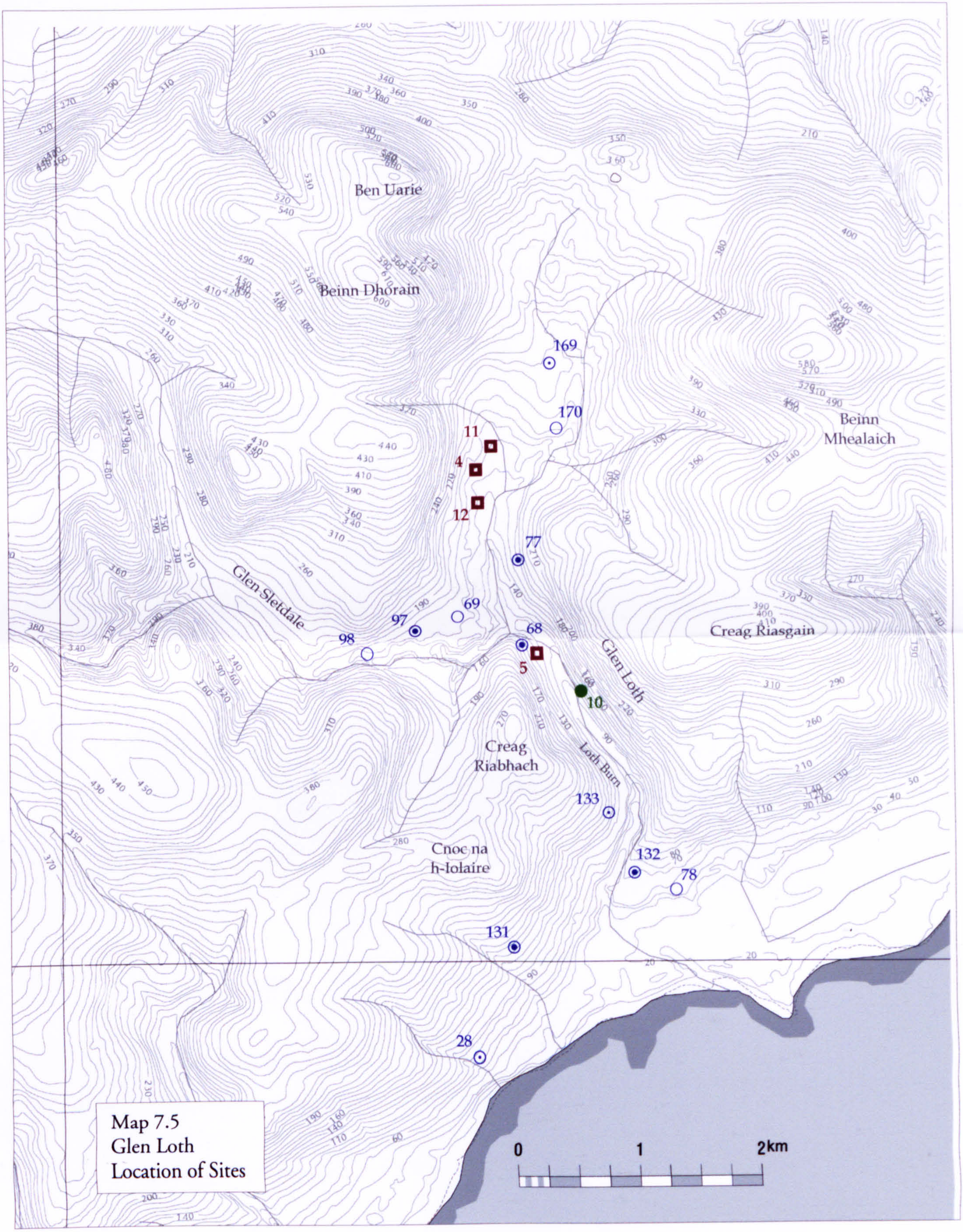
Map 8.6
Camster
Location of Sites




Loch of Yarrows
Hill of Yarrows
Loch of Warehouse
'fort'
Hill of Ulbster
Warehouse Hill
'fort'
Groat's Loch
Loch Watenan
Chambered Cairn
23
13
69
28
27
33
29
11
63
31
103
2
64
32
65
16
12
Map 8.5
Yarrows & Watenan
Location of Sites
0
1
2km

Symbol Key, Maps 7.5 – 7.9, 8.4 – 8.6 & 9.4 – 9.6

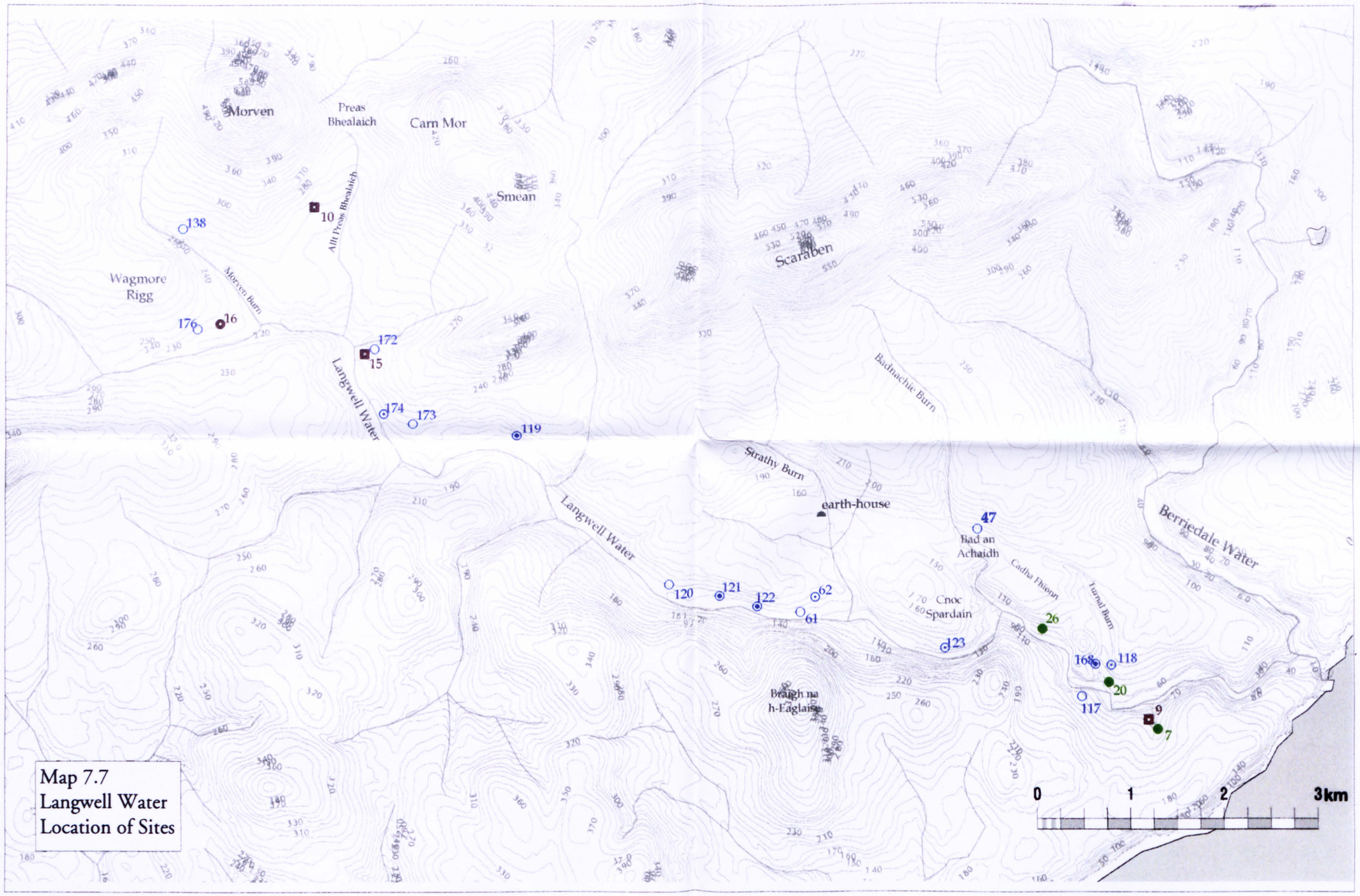
Hut Circle Settlements	Broch Sites	Later Iron Age Sites
○ Group 1 ⊙ Group 2 ◉ Group 3	● Broch site ○ Possible broch site	■ Later Iron Age site □ Possible later Iron Age site



Map 7.5
Glen Loth
Location of Sites

Map 7.6
Lower Strath of Kildonan
Location of Sites

0 7.5 km



Map 7.7
Langwell Water
Location of Sites

Berriedale Water

Achmavish Hill

Cnoc na Feadaige

Maiden Pap

Carn Mor

Morven

Smean

Scaraben

Meall na Caorach

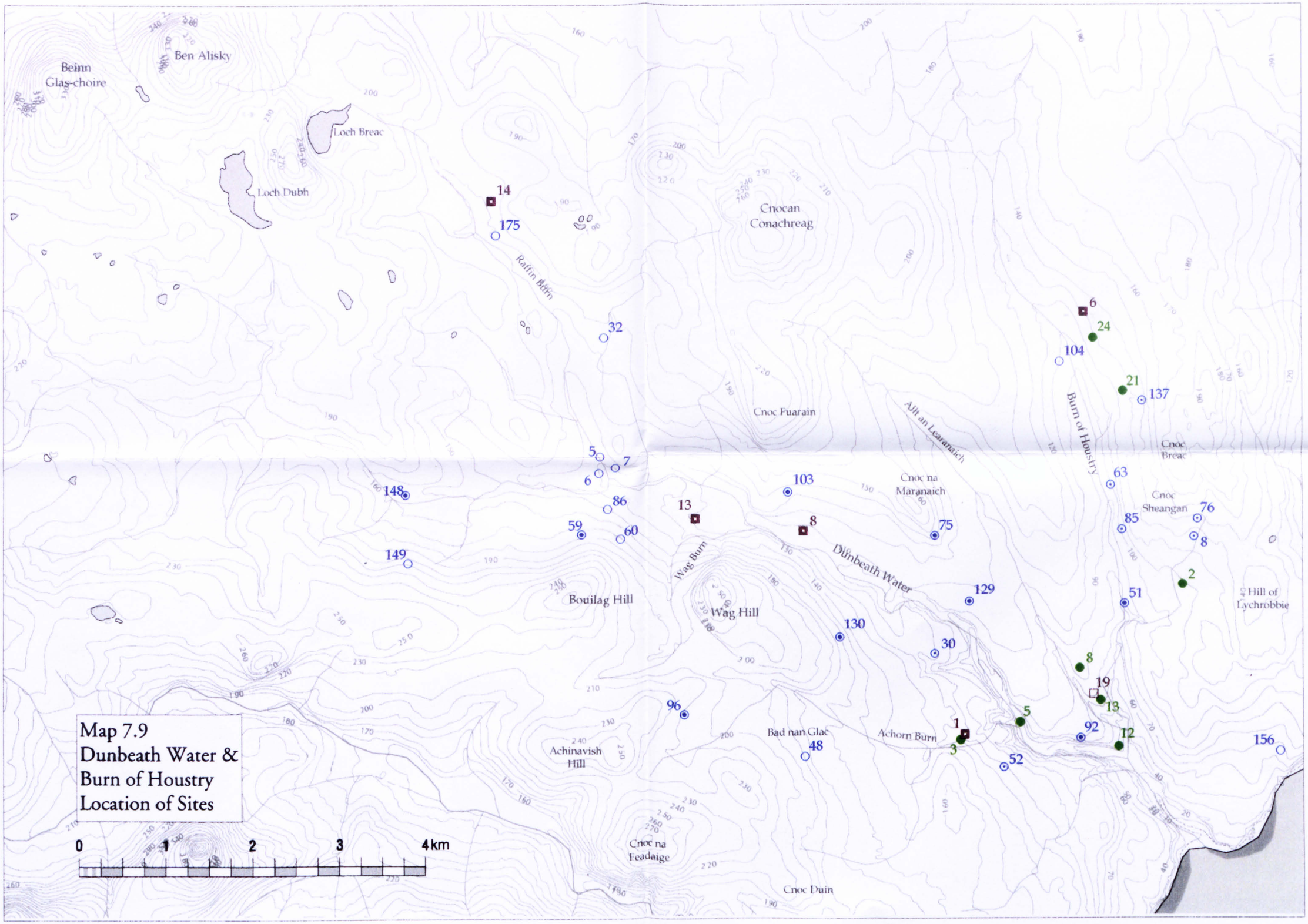
Dun Burn

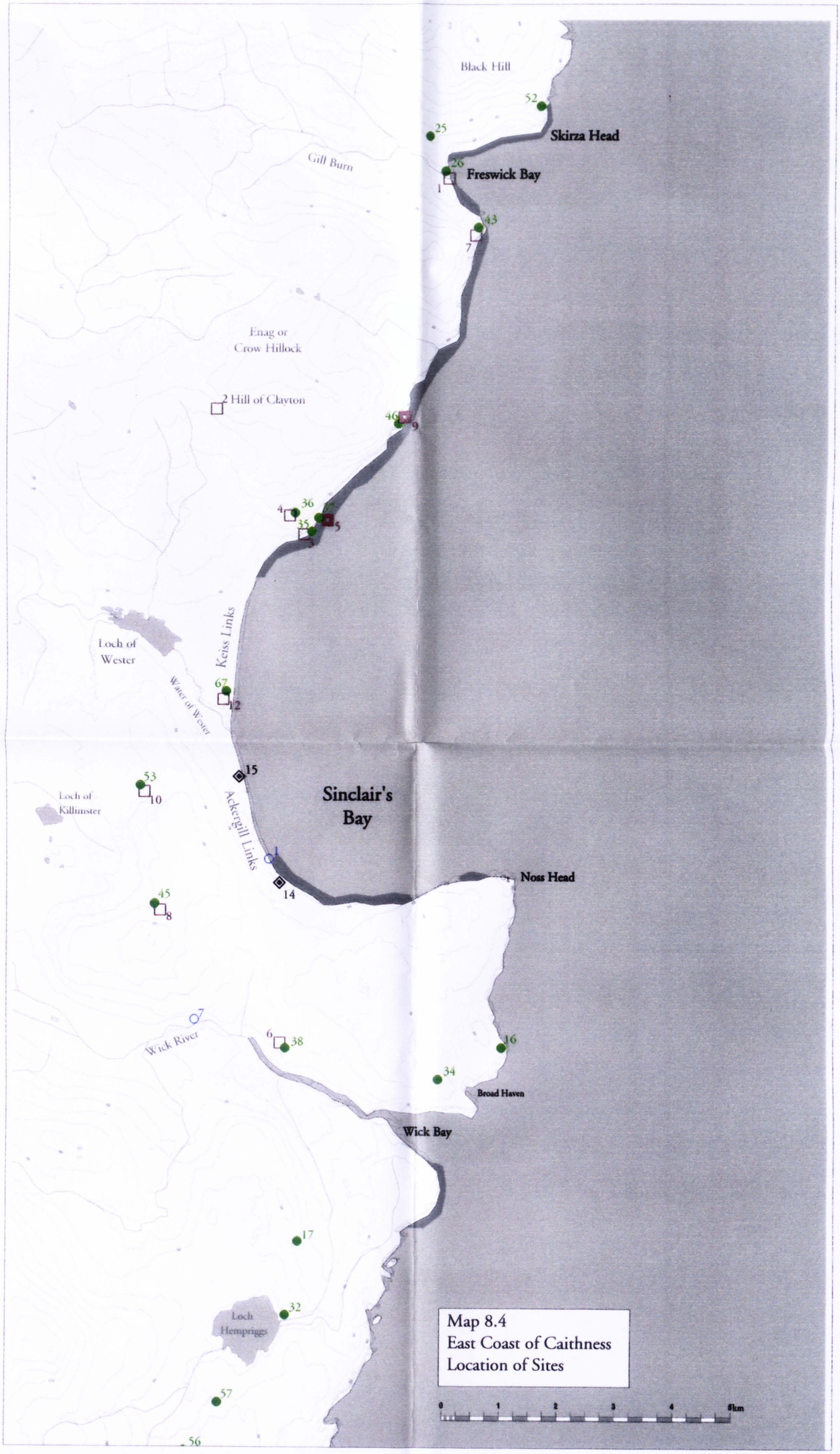
Cnoc Fionn

Berriedale Water

0 1 2 3 4km

Map 7.8
Berriedale Water
Location of Sites


Beinn Glas-choire
Ben Alisky
Loch Breac
Loch Dubh
Raffin Burn
Cnocan Conachreag
Cnoc Fuarain
Allt an Learanaich
Burn of Houstry
Cnoc Breac
Cnoc na Maranaich
Cnoc Sheangan
Hill of Lychrobbie
Wag Burn
Dunbeath Water
Wag Hill
Bouilag Hill
Achinavish Hill
Bad nan Glac
Achorn Burn
Cnoc na Feadaige
Cnoc Duin
14
175
32
5
6
7
86
59
60
148
149
13
103
8
75
129
130
30
96
48
6
24
104
21
137
63
85
76
8
2
51
1
3
5
52
92
12
19
13
8
156
Map 7.9
Dunbeath Water &
Burn of Houstry
Location of Sites
0
1
2
3
4km


Black Hill
Skirza Head
Freswick Bay
Gill Burn
Enag or
Crow Hillock
Hill of Clayton
Loch of
Wester
Keiss Links
Water of Wester
Loch of
Killimster
Sinclair's
Bay
Ackergill Links
Noss Head
Wick River
Broad Haven
Wick Bay
Loch
Hempriggs
Map 8.4
East Coast of Caithness
Location of Sites
0 1 2 3 4 5km