

DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST LTD

SURVEY REPORT: BEILI DYFFRYN FARM,
BETHLEHEM, LLANGADOG

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SURVEY AT BEILI DYFFRYN FARM, BETHLEHEM, LLANGADOG, MARCH-APRIL 1989

INTRODUCTION

In March 1988, the Dyfed Archaeological Trust received notice of an application for agricultural improvement at Beili Dyffryn Farm, Bethlehem, for an area which included part of a bracken covered hillside north-east of the large hillfort of Carn Goch. One archaeological site (8378), identified from aerial photographs, was known to exist in the area. An initial field search in 1988 revealed more discrete sites and a relict field system. In March 1988, the improvement scheme was approved subject to certain conditions relating to the archaeological importance of the area. In early 1989, a more complete field survey, including detailed recording of individual sites, was undertaken. At the same time opportunity was taken to inspect an area on the northern side of the hillfort, part of the land comprising Carn Goch common, and now in the ownership of the National Park.

The survey area comprised a block of land 500m by 500m on a north-facing slope to the north-east of the large hillfort of Carn Goch. The land descends in a series of broad steps from over 150m in the south to under 70m in the north. The 'risers' of the steps become increasingly steeper and craggy to the north - in some places becoming small cliffs. The majority of the archaeological sites are situated on the flat or gently sloping portion of the steps.

Apart from trees (mainly alder and birch) that flank two small streams the vegetation is dominated by bracken (*Pteridium*). This is impenetrable in summer and in winter forms a dense surface cover that undoubtedly obscures much of the more ephemeral archaeology. Further site visits will be necessary after the bracken has been killed off, but before ploughing and re-seeding, when more archaeological features may be visible.

Two areas of peat deposits were noted during the survey. The largest of these was to the south and east of site 14201 (Fig. 2), with peat deposits up to 1m deep. Just outside the survey area, to the south of site 14203, the peat deposits were 0.5m deep.

EVIDENCE FOR FORMER AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Past agricultural activity in the area is evidenced by many old field boundaries (14206). These fall into three categories (Fig. 2):

(i) dry-stone walling. This defines the survey area to the south and west. It still survives up to 2m high, but is no longer stock-proof. It is probably the latest field boundary in the area, and possibly represents an enclosure of part of the common of Carn Goch. It is marked on the 1839 Llangadog Tithe Map (Fig. 3).

(ii) field bank of earth and stone with ditch. According to the Tithe Map three small fields were enclosed by this type of boundary - these can still clearly be seen today. It appears that in places this type of boundary has been replaced by the dry-stone wall ((i) above), and that in other areas it clearly overlies the rubble-bank ((iii) below).

(iii) bank of rubble and boulders. These banks vary in character from indistinct lines of stones up to substantial banks constructed from massive boulders and rubble. They appear to divide the area into a series of irregularly shaped fields. Many of the individual sites described below are clearly related to these boundaries.

DATE AND FUNCTION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS

With a general lack of documentary information, and a lack of comparative excavated material, the dating and function of upland sites in Wales is fraught with difficulties; the sites on Carn Goch are no exception to this rule.

There is a relationship between some of the individual sites and the field system(s). But only site 8378 (Figs. 2, 4) can be said to be integral to the early field system composed of type iii boundaries; sites 14204 and 14202 are only attached to field boundaries, and may not have been established until well after the creation of the field system. This does not help to date the early field system as the square enclosure of site 8378 may be of any date from the Bronze Age through to the post-medieval period. What is clear though, is that once established, field boundaries persisted in use, and in some cases were rebuilt in a new style.

The long rectangular building (site 14205, Figs. 2, 10) is similar to sites excavated in Glamorganshire and Breconshire in the 1930s (Cyril and Aileen Fox 1934, 1937, 1939, 1940). These Glamorgan and Brecon sites were interpreted as farmsteads and dated to the 13th and 14th centuries.

Although there is a wealth of evidence for numerous small rectangular structures, similar to sites 14200, 14202 and 14203, scattered across the Welsh uplands very few have been excavated, and where investigation has been carried out virtually no dating evidence has come to light (Butler 1963, Hook 1970). An exception to this was in the Brenig Valley, Clwyd, where a series of rectangular buildings were interpreted as hafodydd, dating to the 15-16th centuries (Allen 1979). However, just to the south-east of our survey area are the remains of a small rectangular building (possibly a cottage) called Pant-y-gelynen (22451), which is very similar to the building remains of site 14200. Pant-y-gelynen was apparently still in use in 1907 (Ordnance Survey).

The hut circle, site 14207 (Fig. 1), and further, possible similar features around site 14200 (Fig. 2) probably indicate an extra-mural settlement to the hillfort.

It seems likely then that the majority of the archaeological remains in the survey area belong in the medieval and post-medieval periods, with some sites, perhaps including use of the earliest field system, of Iron Age date. Probably not all the medieval/post-medieval sites are contemporary, as it is unlikely that a farmstead (14205) and hafodydd settlements would have existed in close proximity.

MANAGEMENT OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE

Within the survey area, current approval for agricultural improvement is restricted to the land east of the stream (Fig. 1, shaded). The field to the west of the stream, O.S. 1241, containing sites 8378, 14200-1 (Fig. 2), is excluded from the present approval. Part of this area falls within the area scheduled as an Ancient Monument (County no. Carm. 37). The eastern boundary of the scheduled area is clearly only arbitrary, and in view of the results of the survey should be amended and extended.

Within the area of approval for agricultural improvement, sites 14202 and 14204 and the associated field boundaries are to be retained. Any other features which may come to light following removal of bracken cover will be recorded, but not otherwise retained, except with the express agreement of the owner.

Elsewhere, further inspection and recording will be required following removal of bracken cover, and prior to removal of archaeological features. The area of approval for such removal includes the newly discovered site 14205 (Figs. 2, 10). The Trust would prefer this site to be retained if possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Trust is grateful for the permission and co-operation afforded by D. E. and S. A. Jenkins, Beili Dyffryn Farm, Bethlehem, and the assistance of Jeff Davies, Brecon Beacons National Park.

LAND OUTSIDE THE APPLICATION AREA: THE POTENTIAL OF CARN GOCH COMMON FOR FURTHER ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

In addition to the sites discovered during detailed fieldwork, the potential for many more unknown archaeological remains existing on Carn Goch common was demonstrated by the finding, during a casual walk across a steep north-facing slope, of a hut circle (14207) and features possibly associated with site 14200. A series of mounds was also noted to the south-east of the hillfort in the 1930s (Fox and Bowen 1935, 72-74, Fig. 28), and numerous abandoned settlements now girdle the common; many of these were recorded on the tithe map (1839), but are now long abandoned.

To assist in the interpretation of Carn Goch hillfort for tourist and academic purposes, and to enable management programmes to be formulated, these sites need to be surveyed. Pollen analysis of peat deposits would help place all the monuments in an environmental framework.

SITE GAZETTEER

8378 (SN 69512482) Fig. 4.

An enclosure situated on level ground at the foot of a north-facing slope. The enclosure is virtually square, 10m by 10m, with evidence of a 0.8m wide entrance on the eastern side. The 1.3m thick enclosure walls are faced with large stones and boulders and have a rubble core; no mortar has been used.

Some of the facing stones are quite massive, up to 0.8 x 0.5 x 0.5m, and large quantities of tumble suggest the walls were originally quite high.

This enclosure is integral to a field system. Three rubble-bank boundaries converge on the site, but all three fade out before they meet the enclosure.

14200 (SN 69452470) Fig. 5.

Situated on a gently sloping shelf of land in an otherwise steep, bracken covered, north-facing slope. The main elements of this site are two rectangular stone-built structures, aligned with their long axes down the slope. The southern-most rectangular structure is now an earthwork, but a portion of surviving, 0.8m thick, straight wall on the east side indicates that this was a rectilinear structure measuring about 6m by 3m internally. There is no indication of an entrance. The structure lies within an enclosure composed of low boulder-built banks and lynchets. There is a marked contrast between the curvilinear line of boulders sitting on a lynchet to the south of the structure and the strongly rectilinear boundaries to the west and north. Part of the rectilinear boundary turns to the west, towards the western rectangular structure.

The western rectangular structure is now separated from the eastern one by a substantial dry-stone wall. Masonry in the western structure stands up to 1m high. The internal dimensions of this structure are 4.7m by 3.5m, with 0.8m thick un-mortared walls. The entrance is in the northern end of the western wall, and 4m directly in front of the entrance, a spring bubbles to the surface.

A narrow track runs diagonally up the hillside to the west of the western structure. This track can be traced for several hundred metres downslope. It runs past a small dam in a valley bottom (the pond behind the dam is now silted up), and crosses the same valley further down on a causeway.

To the east of the eastern rectangular structure are two circular hollows, 7m and 5m in diameter, surrounded by slight banks. Although quite insubstantial, hollows of this nature were not observed away from the vicinity of site 14200. Several more examples may exist (but were not planned) to the south-west of the western rectangular structure. These hollows were noted and interpreted as pit-dwellings by Fox and Bowen in 1935 (72-74, Fig. 28).

On the steep hillside to the south of the site several narrow (cultivation?) terraces exist, they may be of natural origin, although some appear to be associated with rubble walls.

This is clearly a complex site, with rectangular buildings superimposed on a possible settlement of circular structures. The form and situation of the western rectangular structure is unusual for a domestic dwelling.

14201 (SN 69522457) Fig. 6.

This site lies at the head of a small valley, immediately alongside a small stream. Towards the south-east the valley opens out into a small basin, in which 1m of peat deposits have accumulated.

The site itself is a sub-rectangular enclosure, 12m by 7m, aligned with its long axis along the gently sloping valley side. The well-defined enclosure bank is constructed from rubble and the occasional large boulder. There are indications of entrances on the northern and eastern sides, but neither of these are particularly strong. A short length of bank runs from the north-east corner of the enclosure, and parallel to this bank, 2m to the north, is a line of small upright boulders.

Peat has begun to form within the enclosure on the southern side.

14202 (SN 69692481) Fig. 7.

A site on level ground. The outline of a small rectangular structure, attached to a rubble-built field bank, can just be made out beneath dense bracken cover. The building measures 5m by 3m internally. The dry-stone walls are approximately 0.8m thick, and constructed from boulders and rubble. The position of the entrance is not certain, though the large prostrate stone slab on the eastern side may be a fallen door jamb.

14203 (SN 69682457) Fig. 8.

This site lies at the foot of a very steep, craggy slope, adjacent to a peat formation. The site consists of a small rectangular structure, 4.5m by 3m internally, cut into the steep slope. The dry-stone walls are 0.8m thick and are constructed from massive boulders and rubble. There are no clear indications of an entrance. Peat has begun to form within this structure and a wire fence has been constructed across it.

14204 (SN 69712479) Fig. 9.

Situated on level ground amongst a spread of boulders and rubble. This site is difficult to define because in addition to the presumed natural blanket of boulders there has been considerable dumping of stone from clearance activities. Nevertheless, the main elements of the site are a well-preserved east-west aligned rubble built bank, two north-south aligned banks and a discontinuous rubble-bank 10m to the south and parallel to the east-west bank. These elements form a curving rectangular enclosure 45m by 10m. Within the enclosure, an area of concentrated stone and rubble may indicate the site of a building.

14205 (SN 69722517) Fig. 10.

This site lies on the edge of a flood plain at the foot of a very steep, craggy, north-facing slope.

The main element of the site is a long rectangular building, represented by foundations, set on a slight artificial platform, with its long axis down the slight slope. There are two and possibly three rooms to the building. Assuming three, the overall external dimensions of the structure are 22m by 6m. The walls are well built, of dry-stone construction, and are between 0.8m - 1m thick. There is an entrance to the building towards the centre of the western side.

Associated with the building are low rubble field banks and terraces. The curve of the dry-stone wall and of the hedge bank to the north suggest that these may lie on earlier boundaries related to the site.

A narrow but distinct track runs diagonally down the steep slope above the building.

14207 (SN691246, Carn Goch Common)

A round hut, about 4m diameter, situated on a very steep north-facing, scree-covered slope, outside the outer rampart of Carn Goch hillfort. The dry-stone walls of the hut stand up to 1m in height. The entrance faces downslope.

14208 (SN 69902528)

The remains of a single storey, rectangular, stone building, the eastern gable of which stands to its full height. Rubbish dumping has obscured the plan of this structure, but it was probably either a cottage or agricultural building of 19th or 20th century date.

22451 (SN 69942479)

Pant-y-gelynen. The foundations of a small rectangular structure, about 5m by 3.5m, set in a small oval enclosure. The enclosure wall is quite substantial, up to 1.5m high, and the ground within the enclosure is slightly raised, probably due to cultivation. This was probably the site of a cottage. It was apparently occupied in 1907 (Ordnance Survey).

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Tacheometry, using an optical theodolite, was the system employed to survey the field system and fix the individual sites. Time: 6 man days.

The individual sites were surveyed using a theodolite and tapes, the results were drawn up in the field. Time: 2 1/2 man days.

The drawing of the diagrams and writing of the report: 3 1/2 man days.

Total time to produce report 12 man days.

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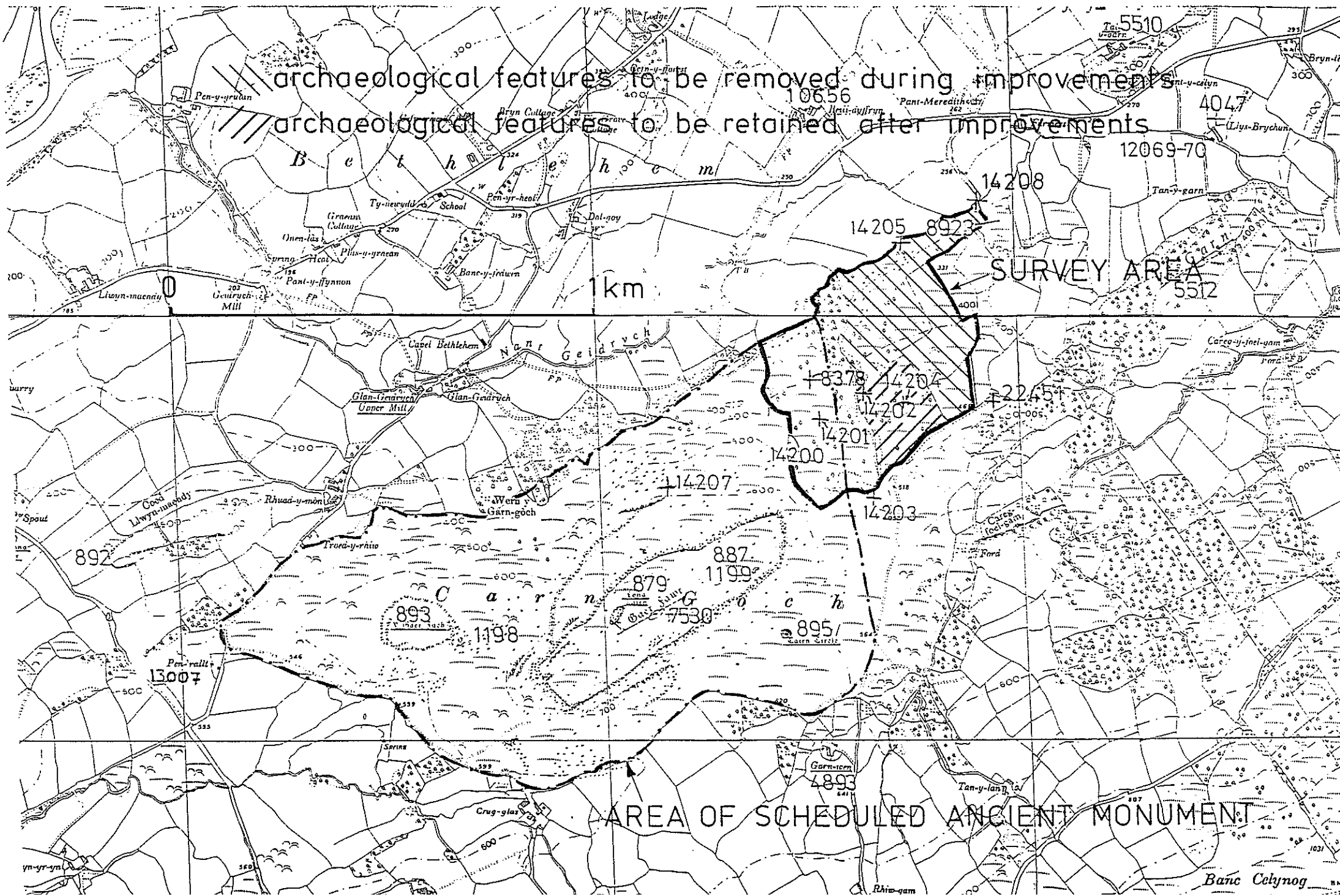
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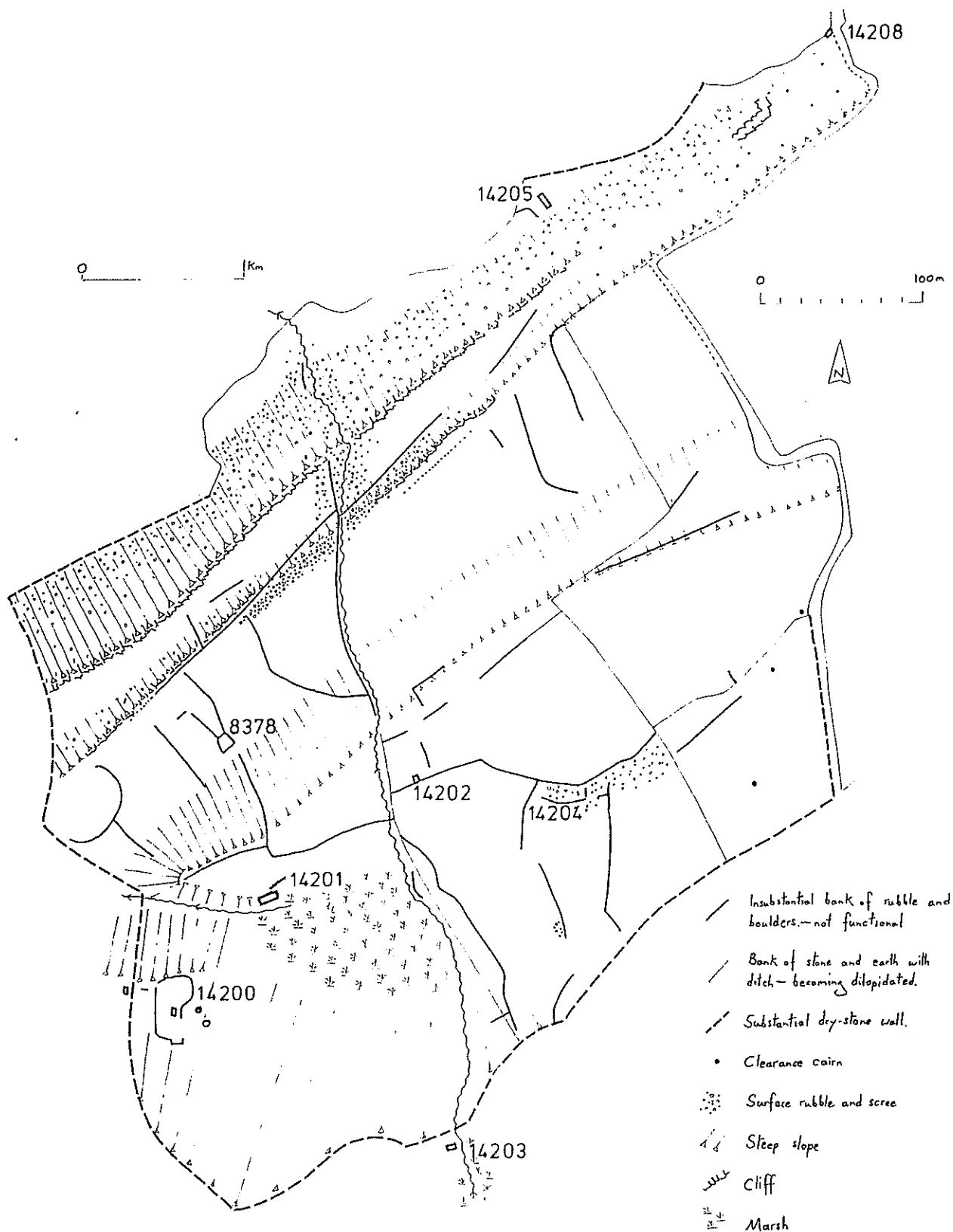


Fig. 2



Llangadog Tithe Map and App.

582 Cae tum fatho

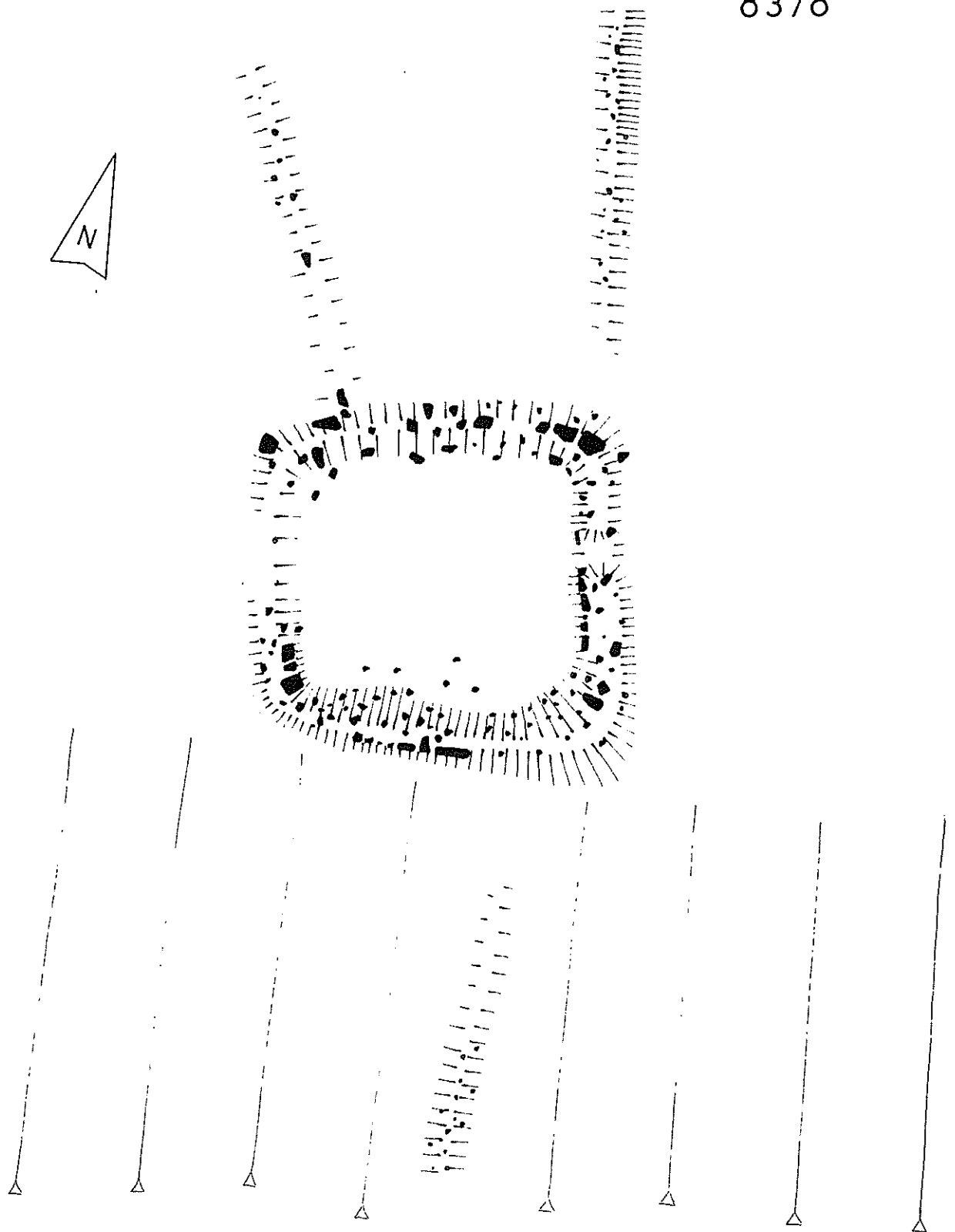
583 Cae bach

584 Cae newydd

585 Cae y baily

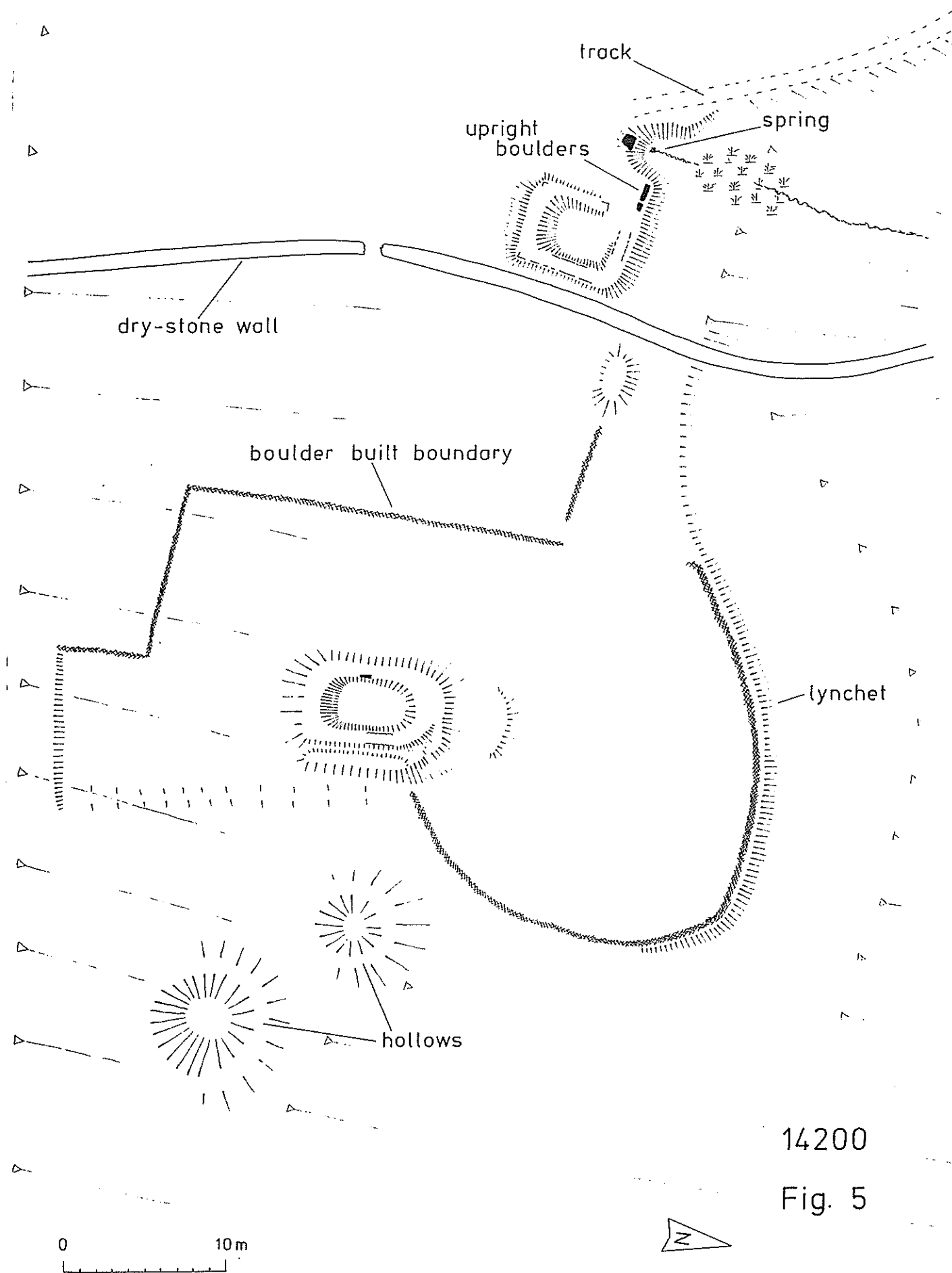
Fig. 3

8378



0 10 m

Fig. 4



14200

Fig. 5

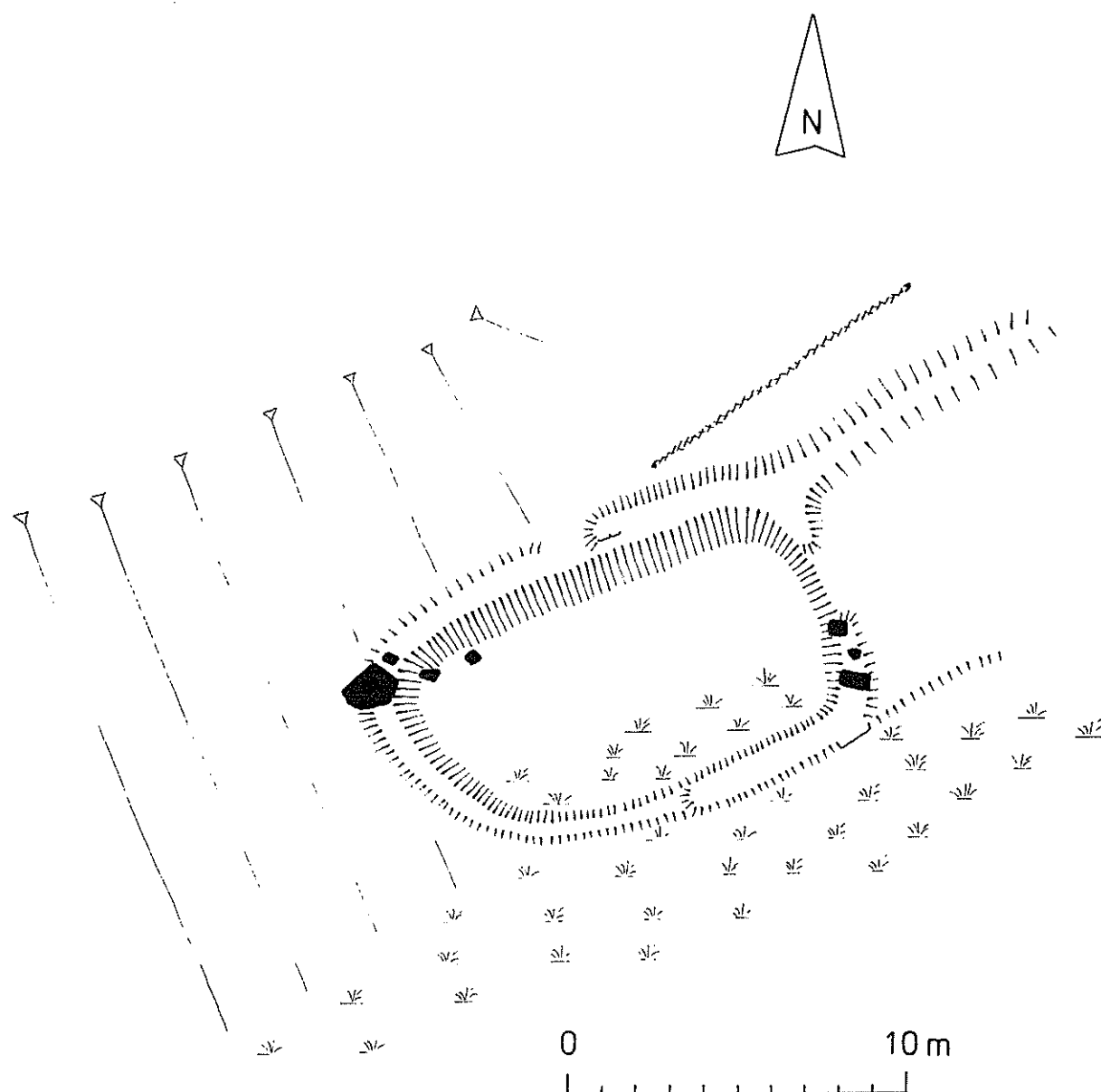


Fig. 6

14202

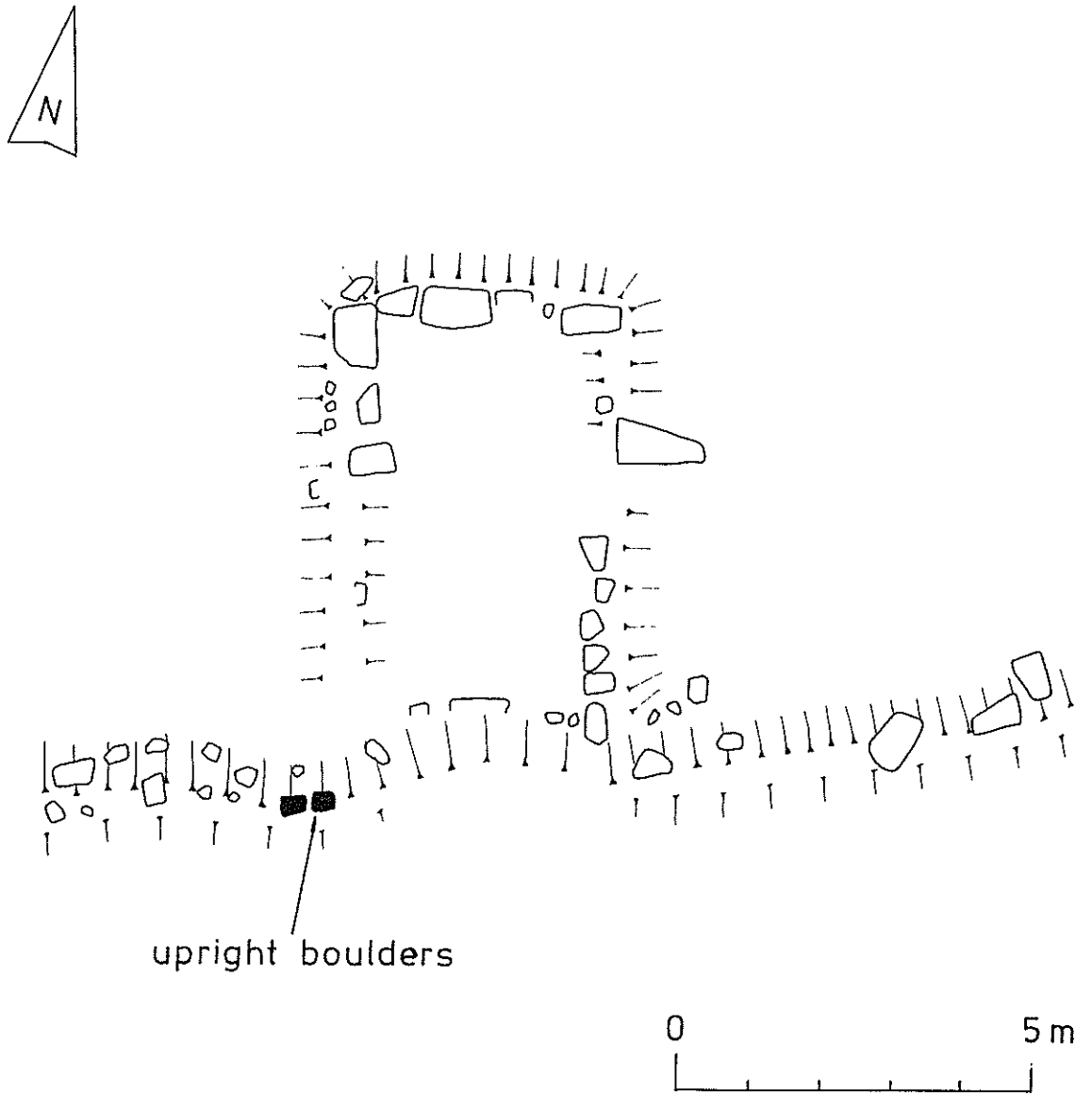


Fig. 7

14203

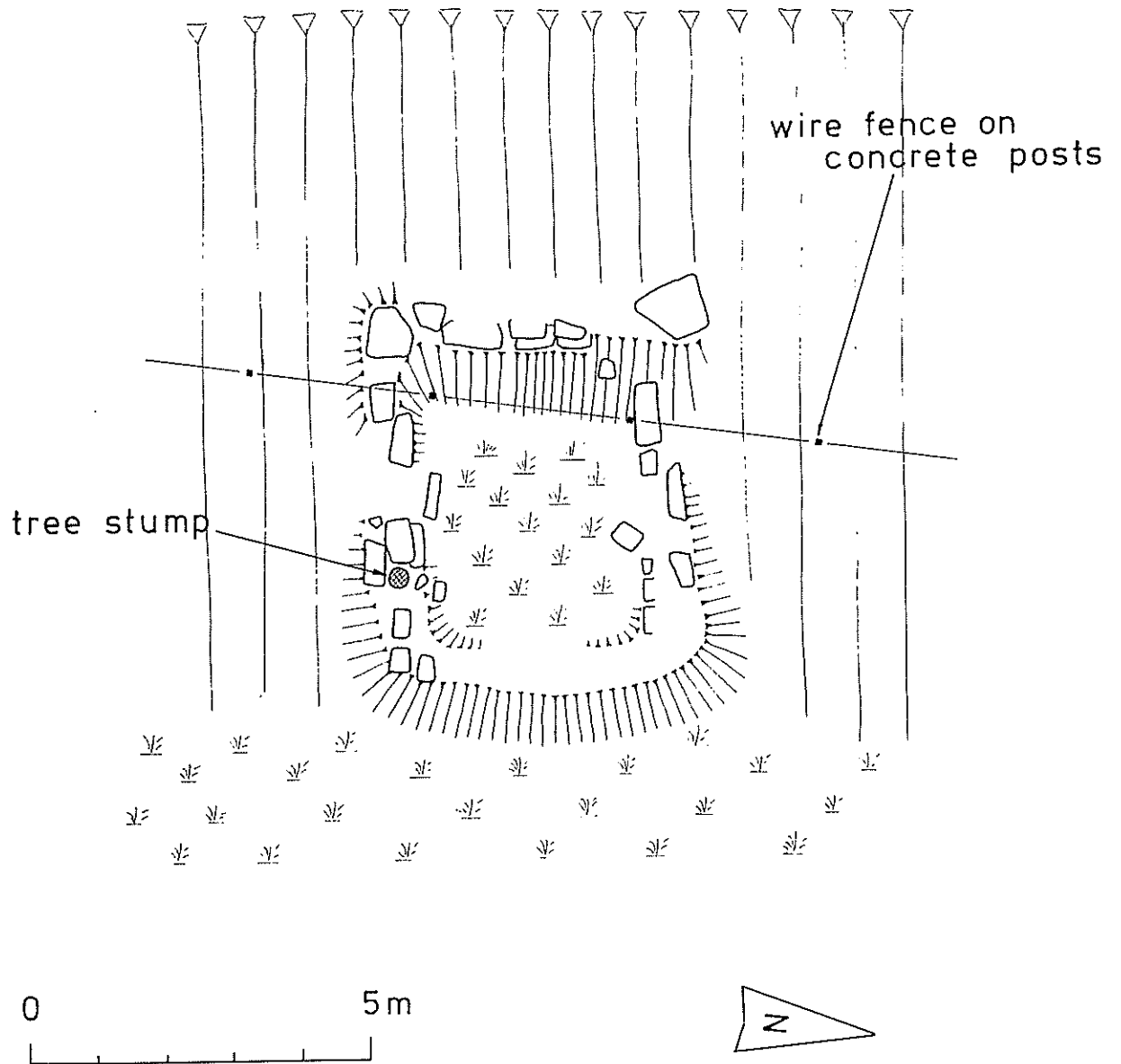


Fig. 8

14204

0 10m

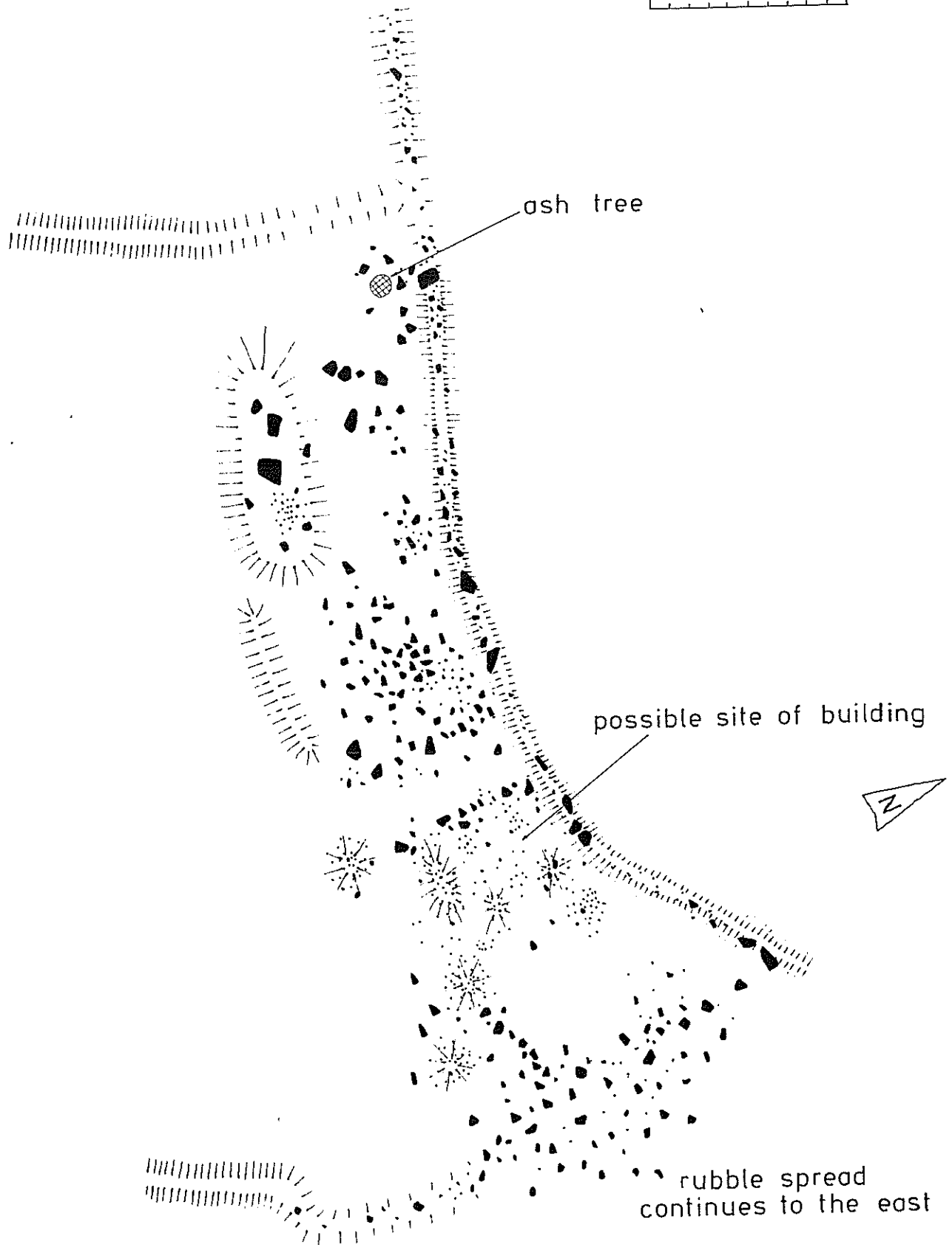


Fig. 9

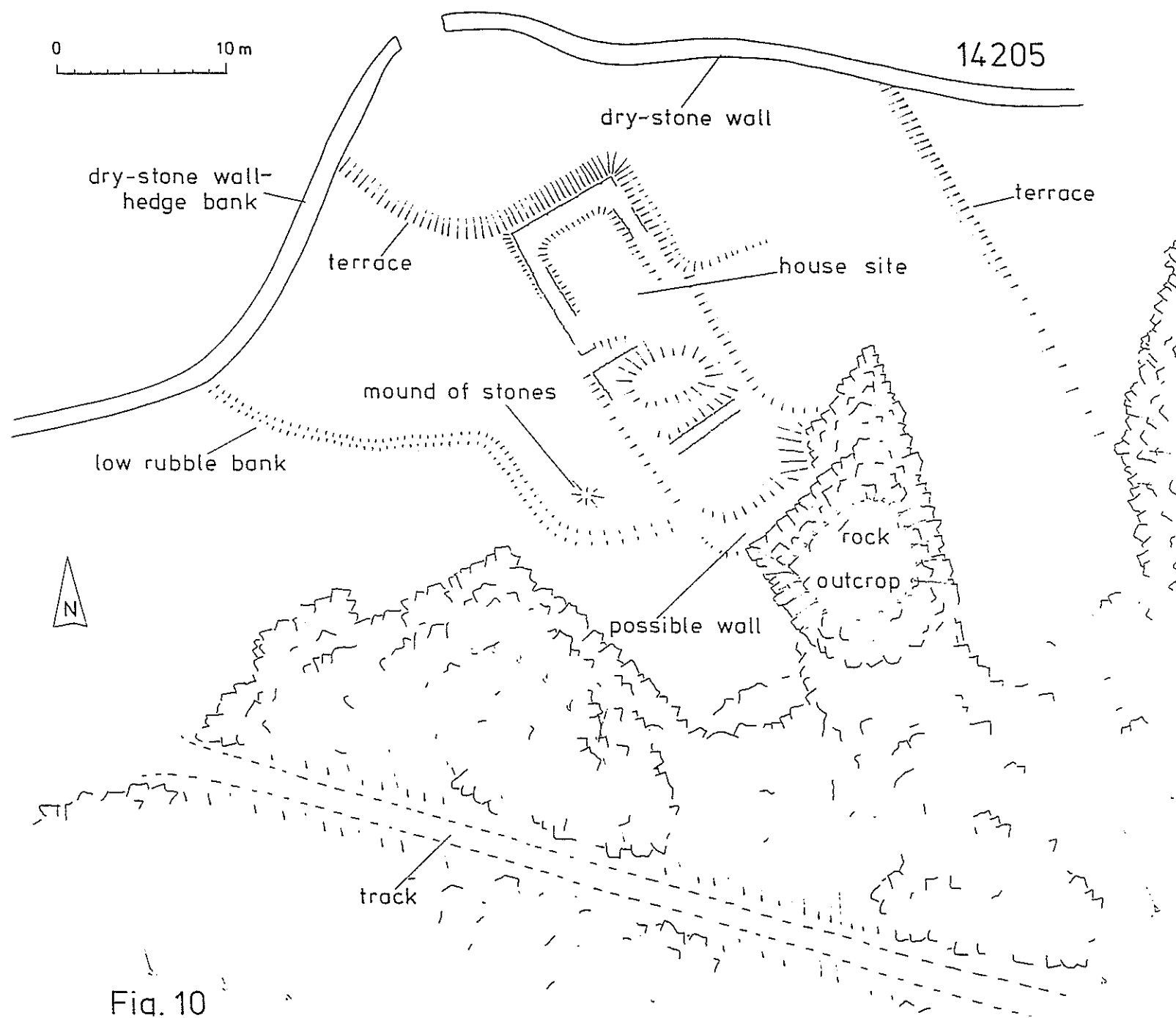


Fig. 10