

# **MYNYDD MALLAEN RAPID SURVEY 1995**

Grant-aided by the Royal Commission  
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Report by:  
G Williams & I Darke  
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## RAPID SURVEY ON MYNYDD MALLAEN 1995

By G H Williams and I Darke.

### INTRODUCTION

The project was carried out as part of the Welsh uplands initiative. This involves rapid survey of areas of the Welsh Uplands. The initiative is funded by CADW and administered by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. Mynydd Mallaen was proposed as a survey area, and the proposal was accepted by the Commission, as the mountain was one of a number of priority areas for survey defined by the Commission.

### THE STUDY AREA

The area of common on Mynydd Mallaen, as defined in the commons register amounts to an area of 2218 ha or 22.18 sq kms and reaches a height of 462 m. It is Crown freehold land, the largest Crown Common in Carmarthenshire comprising 48% of such land and has probably survived enclosure owing to this. It is bounded by very steep slopes in the north, east and south although the approach is more gentle on the east. The top is a dissected plateau, with a series of ridges separated by valleys draining into the Gwenlais valley which deeply dissects the mountain on the south. The solid geology is overlain by boulder clay, particularly in the valleys.

The study area (*Figure 1*) is of approximately 6 sq km, and lies on the north-west of the mountain. It comprises 27% of the Crown Common of which 550 ha lies in the Manor of Cayo, and 1668 ha in the Manor of Mallaen, and was chosen for a number of reasons. It is an area of contrasting topography and microenvironments where high valleys provide a relatively sheltered environment which contrasts with open moorland on the ridges. Here also was the greatest concentration of known sites on the mountain: aerial photography suggested the existence of early land divisions, although these had not been resolved adequately by ground survey, and early Bronze Age ritual monuments were known in and to the north of the study area. Preliminary survey also revealed the presence of some new sites and showed the suitability of the landscape, considerable areas of which were free of blanket peat, for the survival of recognisable ancient features.

Topographically, the study area includes part of the Gwenlais valley and its tributary valleys. On the south these comprise the main valley running west to east and then north to south. To the north are tributary valleys, running generally north-east to south-west between which are ridges. The ridge which forms the edge of the mountain on the north-west is divided into two (Banc y Ddau Fryn and Pen Cerrigiddos) by a further north-west to south-east valley. The valleys are typically broad and U-shaped top valleys, with steep sides, the bottoms infilled with boulder clay. At one side of the valley floors are deeper, steep sided bottom valleys which accommodate the streams and which often have terraces of boulder clay in the bottom. The tops of the ridges are relatively flat. The upper slopes of the valleys on the west, north and east level out to merge with the north-south ridges forming an east to west ridge.

To the south-west of the main valley is a further ridge, Esgair Ferchon. There is a further deep valley cut into the side of the mountain on the north-west of the study area. Typically the lower valleys, both the top and bottom valleys, are free of peat and, in the bottom valleys, the streams are free running. These areas support grass and, on the steep sides of the valleys, heather and bilberry. There is some bracken and localised areas of rushes. The summits of the intervening ridges are often grassy. However, on both the flanks of the valleys and the summits there are some extensive areas of blanket peat. The upper valleys are choked with peat bog, which as the valleys level out become extensive. The ridges on the north-west tend to be rocky, in particular Banc y Ddau Fryn/ Pen Cerrigdiddos which is rocky and scree strewn to the north-west. Soils, where exposed, are typically podsollic.

The area chosen were km squares SN 7143, 7144, 7243, 7244, 7342 and 7344. SN 7143 and 7144 included the steep flanks of the mountain (which is partly afforested) and of the aforementioned valley cut into the side of the mountain. The edge of these steep slopes were taken as the limits of the study area. To compensate for the omission of these areas an additional strip was walked on the north (in SN 7145, 7245 and 7345) and an additional area walked on the east (in SN 7443) the latter to fully explore the complexities of trackways in this area. The area covered is slightly less than the 6 sq km originally intended, due to the large number of sites and the complexities of some of the trackways which were discovered (Note 2).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The survey was carried out by the authors' walking transects 30m apart. Initially all areas were subject to this detailed survey but at a later stage, areas of bog and blanket peat were subject to a less rigorous survey as experience revealed that archaeological features were absent. The complex trackways were walked separately i.e. treated as linear features. Written descriptions of all sites (including an account of threat and damage where appropriate) were made. Sketch plans of the majority of individual features were made. Selective photography only of the most 'photogenic' sites was carried out.

Location of sites was from 1:10,000 colour aerial photographs (Geonex) and a combination of GPS, compass bearings and estimation from known features: GPS proved adequate in itself with accuracy of, on average, 30 metres but invaluable when used in conjunction with other methods. As a method of re-locating known sites of low profile it proved most inadequate.

## THE SITES

266 entries were recorded. Of these 8 were already recorded on the SMR (Note 1) or are shown on OS maps (trackways and field boundaries). 19 are doubtful sites (*Figure 4, 8, 24 and 25*), and 7 are definitely not antiquities but were recorded as part of a Trust policy to record natural features which could well be mistaken for genuine archaeological features by future, amateur fieldworkers. 4 numbers were allocated to groups of features. 228 are genuine, 'new' archaeological sites. All apart from the definitely natural features are included on the accompanying maps, and in the gazetteer - the natural features are recorded in the Trust's SMR.

### The Early Bronze Age

#### *Ritual cairns (Figures 2, 5, 6 and 7)*

The majority of early Bronze Age sites, 15, are ritual cairns (PRNs <sup>4102</sup>~~4012~~, 13038, 13039, 29871, 30339, 30343, 30367, 30369, 30380, 30400, 30402, 30433, 30487 and probably 30364 and 30398). These are generally low, platform structures although PRNs 13038, 13039 and 30402 are relatively high, (although 30402 is a very small feature). Cairns seem to be concentrated in the more stony north-west area of the mountain, with more occurring to the north and north-west of the study area. These include two massive summit cairns - Crugiau Merched - which lie to the north at the highest point of the mountain. Significantly, larger cairns also occur in the valley on the north-west where clearance reveals a fairly large number of erratics.) There are two examples of paired cairns PRNs 13038 and 13039 and PRNs 30339 and 30343. Perhaps significantly PRNs 13038 and 13039 include pairings of a flat topped and bowl shaped cairns while PRNs 30339 and 30343 include a platform and a possible ring cairn. PRNs 29871 and 30400 are ring cairns, the former terraced into the hillside with short external banks flanking the entrance, the latter also interesting in that a very small central area is offset from the entrance passage. PRN 30402 is a very small, probably ritual cairn, relatively high but with a hollowed centre - a type known elsewhere in Dyfed, albeit on a larger scale and more generally on Dartmoor. PRN 30367 is a regular, clearly ritual cairn but, interestingly, of a symmetrical oval shape (see also 30512 below). PRN 30339 may possibly be a form of ring cairn or its form may be the result of excavation: it includes a cist. PRN 30433 may have a kerb. PRNs 13038, 30339 and 30402 have possibly outlying upright stones and 30364 has possible portal stones (Marshall and Murphy 1991). PRN 4012 is surmounted by a standing stone.

#### *Standing stones (Figures 2 and 8)*

<sup>4108</sup>~~4018~~ PRN <sup>4102</sup>~~4012~~ is also a standing stone. Both sites <sup>4102</sup>~~4012~~ and 4018 are similar. They are flat tapering slabs. Animal erosion has exposed similar packing stones in the form of an elongated slab against their faces. Such massive packing, and the location of the sites on an upland ridge, is rare. A recumbent stone 13037 may also be a fallen standing stone. An enigmatic shallow but very doubtful regular linear hollow adjacent to it (PRN 29879) may be an associated ritual feature. A small oval quartz block 29869 may be erratic although the fact that the block is of quartz and lies close to cairns (PRNs 13038 and 13039) may be significant.

### *'Scoops' ? (Figures 2, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14a, 14b and 25)*

A large number (70) of sites on the mountain consist of short sections of ditch with upcast banks on one side. Here they are given the neutral term 'scoops' but they are clearly examples of the 'scoop graves' first identified by Fox and Murray-Thripland in the Glamorgan uplands (*Archaeologia Cambrensis* 1942). Various suggestions have been proposed to explain these: they are sepulchral monuments; the result of collapse of trees; or that they are the result of military exercises. With the exception of some sharp profiled features such as PRN 30338 the majority have every appearance of antiquity. Like other Bronze Age sites and unlike relatively late mediaeval/recent monuments they do not occur in areas of blanket peat. They could, generally, be the result of collapse of trees in antiquity. But this theory is difficult to support. They rarely occur in isolation and tend to occur in groups. In any particular area the scoop is often on the same side - upslope if the feature is aligned along the slope, at the side of the feature is aligned across the slope. In some cases there is no ditch. In other cases, mound groups 30412 (*Figure 14a*) and particularly 30461 (*Figure 14b*), the features occur in conjunction with clearance cairns, and the latter group also includes a ritual cairn PRN 30487. This upholds the suggestion that cairnfields may include a ritual dimension in addition to the purely functional (in terms of pastoral or agricultural clearance) and that the scoops may be part of this additional function.

Cairnfield/mound group 30461, for the reasons given above, appears most likely to be of Bronze Age date. One other cairnfield 29895 (*Figure 2*) is known but may be associated with nearby longhuts PRNs 29885 and 29886 (*Figure 4*). Individual clearance cairns in the bottom of lower valleys may also be of Medieval / post Medieval date (see below). The cairns are sometimes grassed over whilst sometimes stones remain apparent. While clearance for pastoral farming has been discussed, colluvial build up on the upslope of some of the mounds in cairnfield/mound group 30389 (*Figure 2*), which lie on quite gentle slopes, suggests cultivation as a factor in the clearance in question.

### *Settlements*

The only unequivocal settlement of prehistoric date on the mountain is PRN 30361 (*Figures 2 and 15b*): this consists of two oval 'roundhouses', stone built and within a arc of walling: a small 'string of beads' type site, typical of upland settlement in western and NW Wales and NW Britain (e.g. the unenclosed upland settlements of Carns). Again, it may be significant that this site lies in a very stony area. A further apparently ancient stretch of substantial walling nearby (although of uncertain date) seems to respect the extent of a scree slope. It may be that similar structures elsewhere on the mountain were constructed of wood (and, by extrapolation, this may partly explain the lack of upland Bronze Age type settlements in Dyfed). Elsewhere on the mountain there are small oval platforms, PRNs 30359, 30360, 30436, 30438, 30441 and perhaps 30546 (*Figures 2 and 16*). If grouped together these would be acceptable as 'unenclosed platform settlements', groups and individual examples of which are being increasingly recognised in Wales: in isolation on Mynydd Mallaen they are admittedly less convincing.

## *Burnt Mounds*

30513  
PRN 31513 is a burnt mound (*Figure 15a*). It lies on the edge of a ridge, overlooking a valley, at an altitude of 400m and is possibly crescentic toward a spring. Its position is seemingly unique in Dyfed. The fact that it utilises a spring on this exposed position, but ignores a stream in the sheltered valley below is particularly interesting: does this indicate a possibly non-functional aspect to the location of the burnt mound? The importance of this site is increased by the fact that the adjacent spring and flanks of the mound are choked in peat.

## *Trackways ?*

It is tempting to suggest that an element in the trackway complex (see below) is of Bronze Age origin. Standing stones 4012 and 4018 lie close to trackways, and the association of standing stones and ancient trackways is well known (Williams 1988): similarly a complex of cairns and a ? standing stones (PRNs 13038, 13039, 13037 and 29869 at SN 71204350) may be related to a nearby major junction of trackways, PRN 30556 (*Figure 3*).

## **The Roman Period**

Crossing the study area is an ancient leat, of probable Roman origin, (Bick 1988, B&H Burnham and Walker 1992) constructed to tap the headwaters of the Gwenlais (PRNs 30457, 30394, 29891 and 29872). At its north-western end (SN 72684423), the Gwenlais is deeply worn down so that the true beginnings of the leat are lost. Likewise where two other streams cross its route, all traces are eroded for some distance either side, and other sections are lost in boggy terrain. The visible remaining sections consist of a shallow ditch (1.0m wide x 0.25m deep), and a low spread bank on the south-western downslope side (2.5m wide x 0.2m deep) which follows the 390m contour on an almost level course.

## **The Mediaeval/Early-Post Mediaeval period**

### *Longhuts (Figure 3)*

20 sites can be classified as longhuts in the broadest sense of the word. These are variable and correspond to the types defined locally at Blaencaron and also discovered at Llyn Brianne (Muckle and Williams 1993, Crane 1995).

PRNs 30432 and 30440 (*Figure 17*) are Blaencaron type 1 longhuts; platforms with no surviving superstructure aligned at right angles to the slope (in the case of the substantial structure PRN 30440) or along the slope (in the case of the small structure PRN 30432).

13 sites (PRNs 29880, 29882, 29885, 30356, 30365, 30424, 30427, 30429, 30437, 30449, 30456, 30500 and 30509) are type 3 longhuts (*Figure 18, 19 and 20*), with relatively substantial surviving superstructure (no very substantial structures of type 3 have been discovered, such as occurred at Blaencaron). They are again aligned up and down or along the slope: sometimes no platforms are needed as the ground is level.

The majority are rectangular or sub-rectangular although PRNs 30456 and 30509 are trapezoidal and 30356 is square. They are represented by walls. These generally take the form of grassy banks: wall facing, sometimes orthostatic, is visible in the majority - PRNs 29880, 29882, 30356, 30365, 30424, 30429, 30437, 30449, 30456, 30500 and 30509. Other features are associated: PRN 29880 has an additional yard at one end; PRNs 29885, 30429, 30500 and 30509 have sub-divisions, PRNs 30429 and 30500 with additional compartments at the end. PRNs 29882 and 30437 have small internal platforms and, in the case of PRN 29882, possible animal stalls at one end. There are no opposing entrances/cross passages in these structures (although these may be implied in the platform house PRN 29880 lying at right angles to the slope). PRNs 29882, 29885, 30356, 30365, 30427, 30429, 30437, 30449, 30500 and 30509 have rounded corners, sometimes in conjunction with squared corners. PRN 30509 has a possible drain at the downslope end. PRN 30456 has a hood cut into the scarp at a higher level than the main part of the structure, perhaps implying the presence of a loft.

5 structures (PRNs 29878, 29886, 30428, 30450 and 30510) are 'longhuts' of Blaencaron type 4 (*Figure 21*) - elongated hollows probably accommodating a sunken structure but, on Mynydd Mallaen, with no trace of superstructure surviving (such as having survived at Blaencaron). With the exception of PRN 29878 (which is cut into the side of a hollow way) they are paired with longhuts of type 3 and are probably storage structures. Type 3 structures PRNs 30427 and 30500 have mounds outside the structure, which are probably middens (as at Blaencaron). A mound outside type 4 structure PRN 29886 may be upcast.

#### *Land division (Figure 3)*

There is a complex system of land division on the mountain. In the main they consist of generally fairly weak banks and ditches which run between areas of boggy ground.

PRN 13540 is more strongly embanked - with a bank up to 2.5m high and a ditch up to 1.0m deep (and, with the exception of elements in complex 13539, was the only feature of this type recognised by earlier aerial photography). PRN 13539 is associated with a more complex system of fields/enclosures located both within and without the main enclosure.

These features seem likely to be Mediaeval/early post Mediaeval. Elements (banks, ditches and entrances) in features 13539 and 13540 seem to be associated with longhuts but in no case are these associations unequivocal. PRNs 29872, 30374 and 30458 end at the edge of peat bogs; PRNs 30374 and 30458 also overlie blanket peat. PRNs 30446 and 30453 have entrances which respect trackways (although PRN 29891 is also clearly post dated by a trackway) and PRNs 29872 and 30458 have gaps which correspond to the general line of the trackways although they are cut by later lines of the trackways.

### *Clearance Cairns? (Figure 2, 14a, 14b, 22, 23 and 25)*

As mentioned, cairnfield 29895 lies close to, and may have been associated with, longhuts 29885 and 29886 (Figure 3). Other isolated clearance cairns lie on boulder clay terraces at the bottom of deep valleys immediately adjacent to streams (29877, 29881, 29883, 29884, 30357, 30455, 30475 and 30476). They clearly represent clearance, presumably for cultivation, to the edge of these terraces (the stones were presumably not actually dumped in the streams as this would block them and cause flooding). Of these, PRNs 29883 and 30455 lie close to long huts and all may represent Mediaeval/post Mediaeval cultivation accompanying ?seasonal, ?primarily pastoral exploitation of the uplands. Cairn 29881 and cairn/longhut 30455/30456 may also be associated with ramps in the banks of streams where cattle may have gained access to the stream.

### *Trackways (Figure 3)*

There is a complex system of trackways on the mountain. Major well defined tracks lead from off the mountain (PRNs 13541, 30526, 29862, 29868 and perhaps 29865). There is a complex junction of trackways on the west PRN 30556 at SN 71184352, to which major tracks lead from off the mountain (29862, 29868 and perhaps 29865) and from which other major tracks (29899 and 30335) lead out onto the mountain to eventually disappear. There is a possible further junction PRN 30543 at SN 73294497 (although associated trackways are not well-defined). There is a further network of more minor (less well defined) tracks linking or leading off from these major trackways. But, only in the cases of 29899 and 30335, do major tracks seem to lead across the mountain.

The tracks are generally manifest as hollow ways, sometimes as terraced tracks and rarely as level tracks: sometimes the line of the tracks are marked by lines of rushes, particularly entirely so on level ground. The compression of the ground by traffic has presumably led to very localised waterlogging and rush growth. The tracks tend to be best defined where they have cut into the ground, generally on slopes (as hollow ways or terraced tracks) and are less well defined on level ground. Consequently the major, well worn tracks are generally well defined over their whole length as surface features although the minor, less well defined tracks are often discontinuous on level ground. On steep slopes there is a sometimes complex network of replacement trackways.

As mentioned in the case of PRNs 30446 and 30453 these trackways are clearly respected by the boundary banks. Trackways PRNs 29851 and 30515 are also clearly associated with longhuts.

### *Pillow Mound/? (Figures 4 and 25)*

Other Mediaeval/post mediaeval sites include a possible, small pillow mound PRN 30512. It is markedly rectangular, probably flanked by ditches. But it lies at a very high altitude and may be a variant ritual monument of rectilinear type.



### *Peat Cuttings?*

The existence of peat cutting is mentioned by Bick (Arch. Wales 28, 1988) and also implied by the fact that most of the registered common rights of pasture are also accompanied by a right of turbary and estovers.

Across the mountain there were many localised areas of partial sinkage in the peat. Interpretation of these areas is very uncertain and only in two cases (PRNs 29876 and 30337) were they definitely considered to be the site of peat cuttings : but this interpretation is very uncertain.

### *Ridge and Furrow (Figure 3)*

Only one area of ridge and furrow (PRN 30502) was positively identified. However, studies of ariel photography shows extensive areas of ridge and furrow immediately to the south of the study area, implying that this form of agriculture played an important role in the past land use over the entire mountain.

### **Later post Mediaeval/Modern**

Later post Mediaeval sites (*Figure 4*) include three sheep shelters, PRNs 30362 (*Figure 24*), 30370 and 30554. Their construction is opportunistic: 30362 is constructed in a rocky area and 30370 and 30554 overlie and cannibalise earlier features, a ritual cairn and longhut respectively. Also recorded is a modern sheep dip 30396. Modern farm tracks on the mountain have not been recorded.

### **NOTES**

1. Archaeology history includes sites recorded by the OS (PRNs 4102 and 4108), sites recovered during field visits by Emyr Morgan (PRNs 13037, 13038 and 13039) and during aerial photography by Terry James (PRNs 13539, 13540 and 13541).
2. In fact, preliminary survey, the SMR and consultation with individuals who knew the area led to a gross underestimate of the number of sites present: more preliminary survey should ideally be carried out on any such proposed survey area to provide a clearer evaluation of what is likely to be met with.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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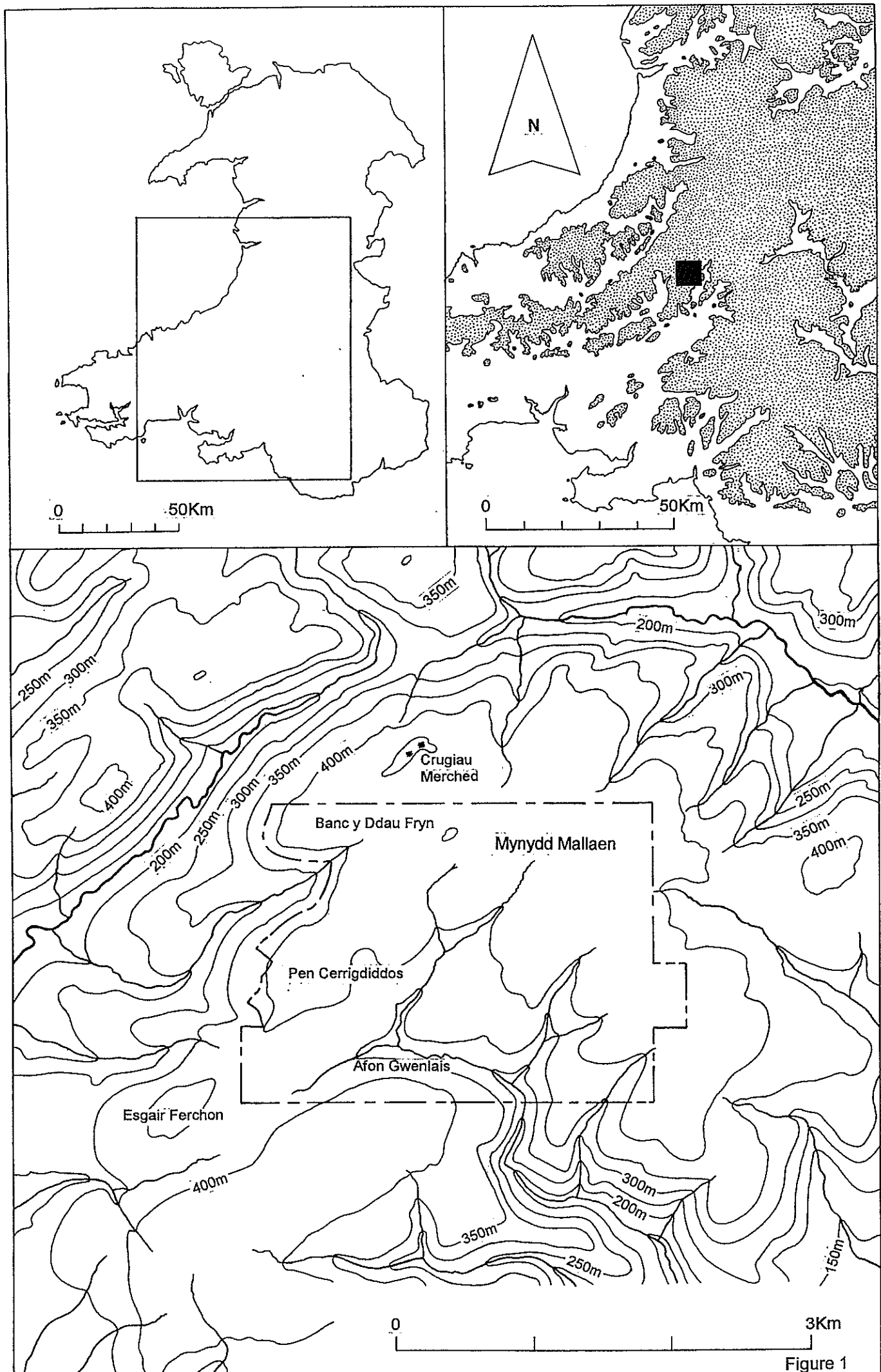
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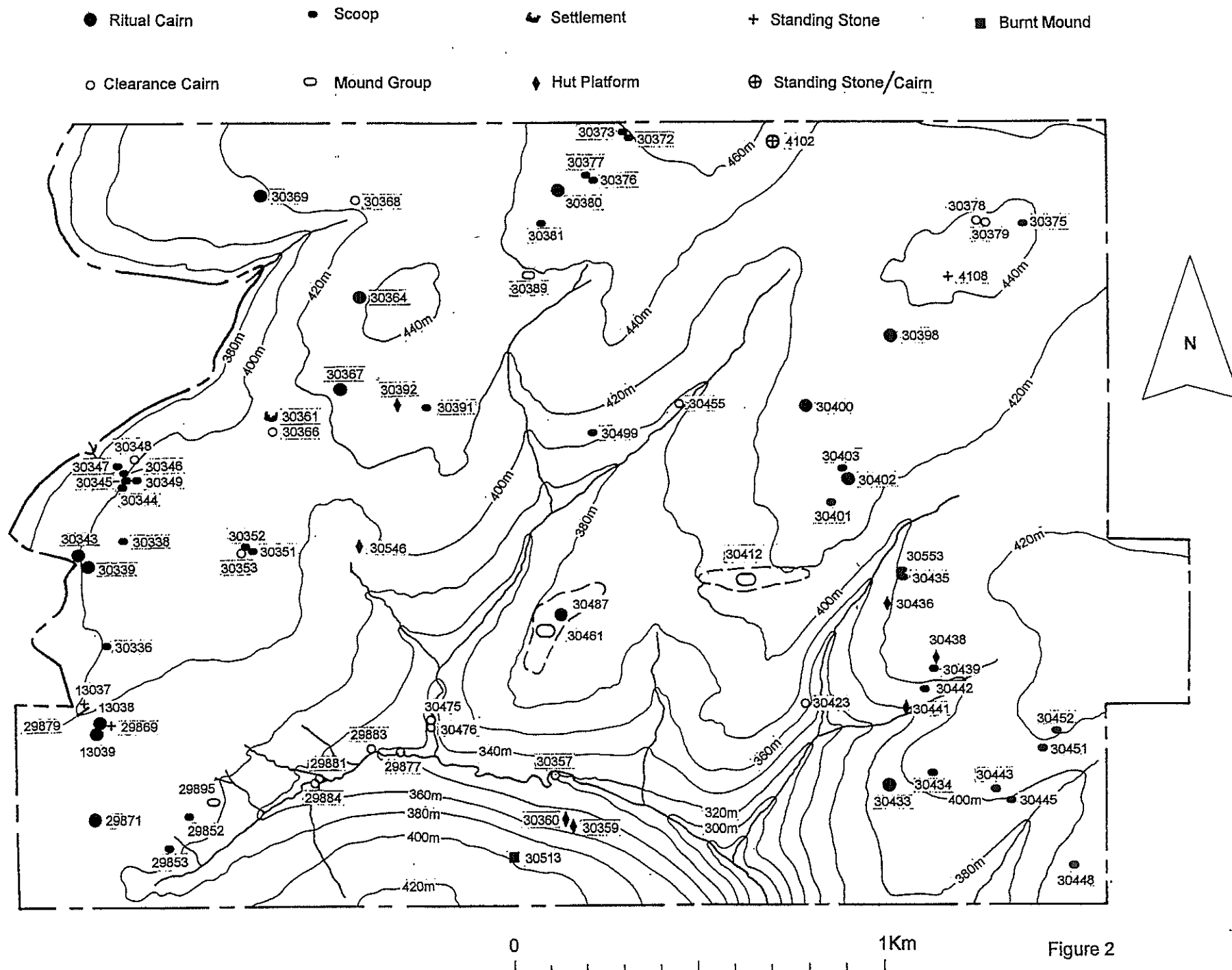


Figure 2

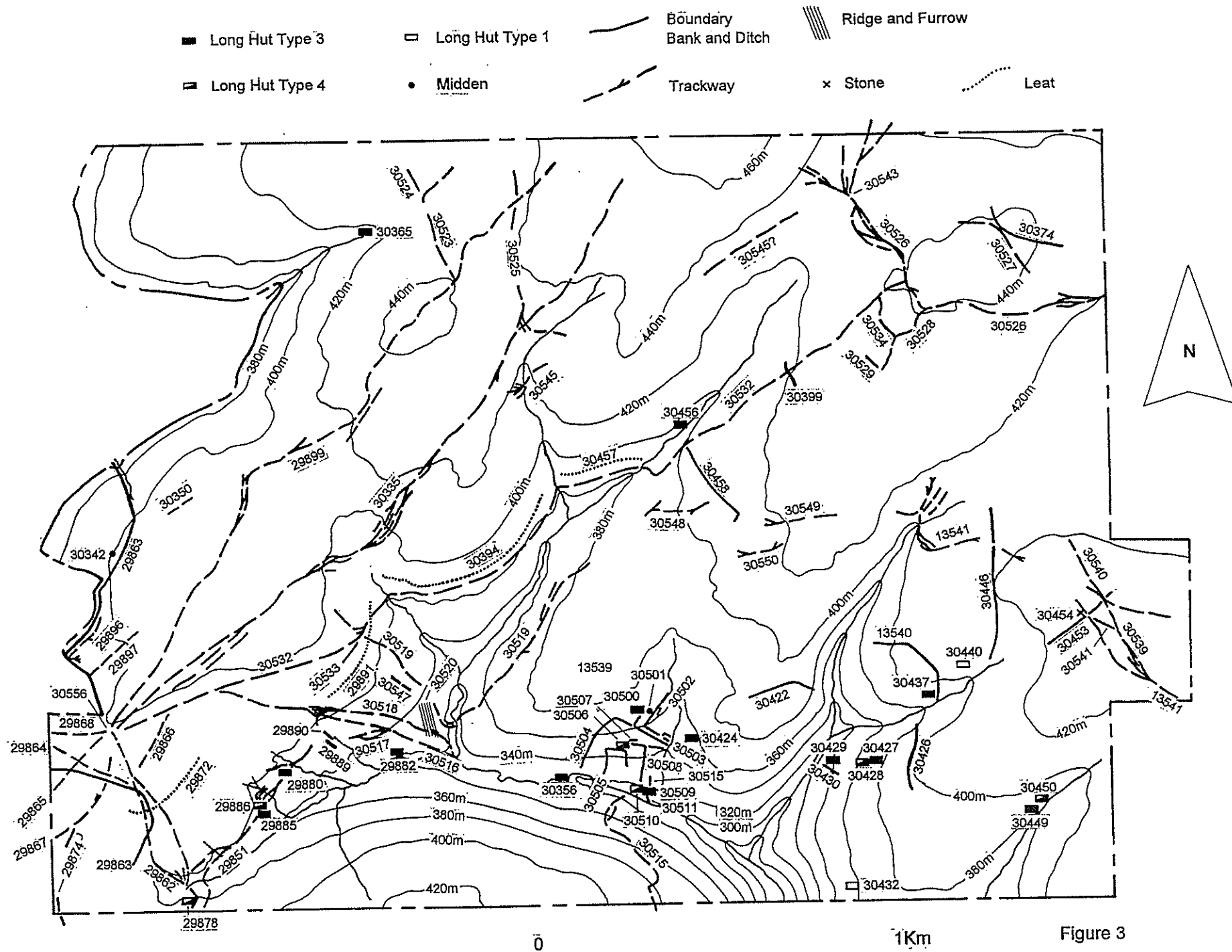


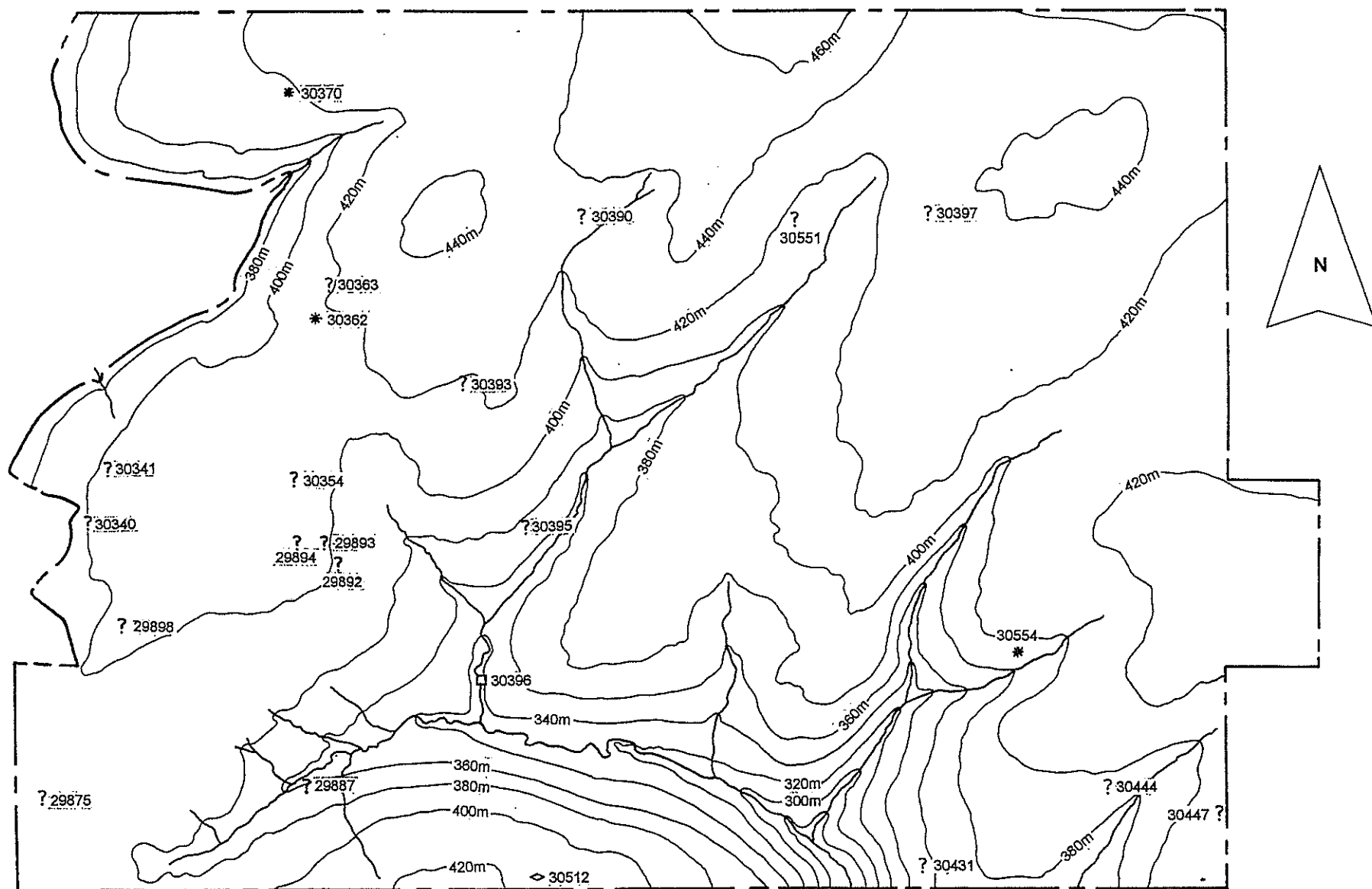
Figure 3

? Unknown

\* Sheep Shelter

□ Sheep Dip

◇ Pillow Mound



0

1Km

Figure 4

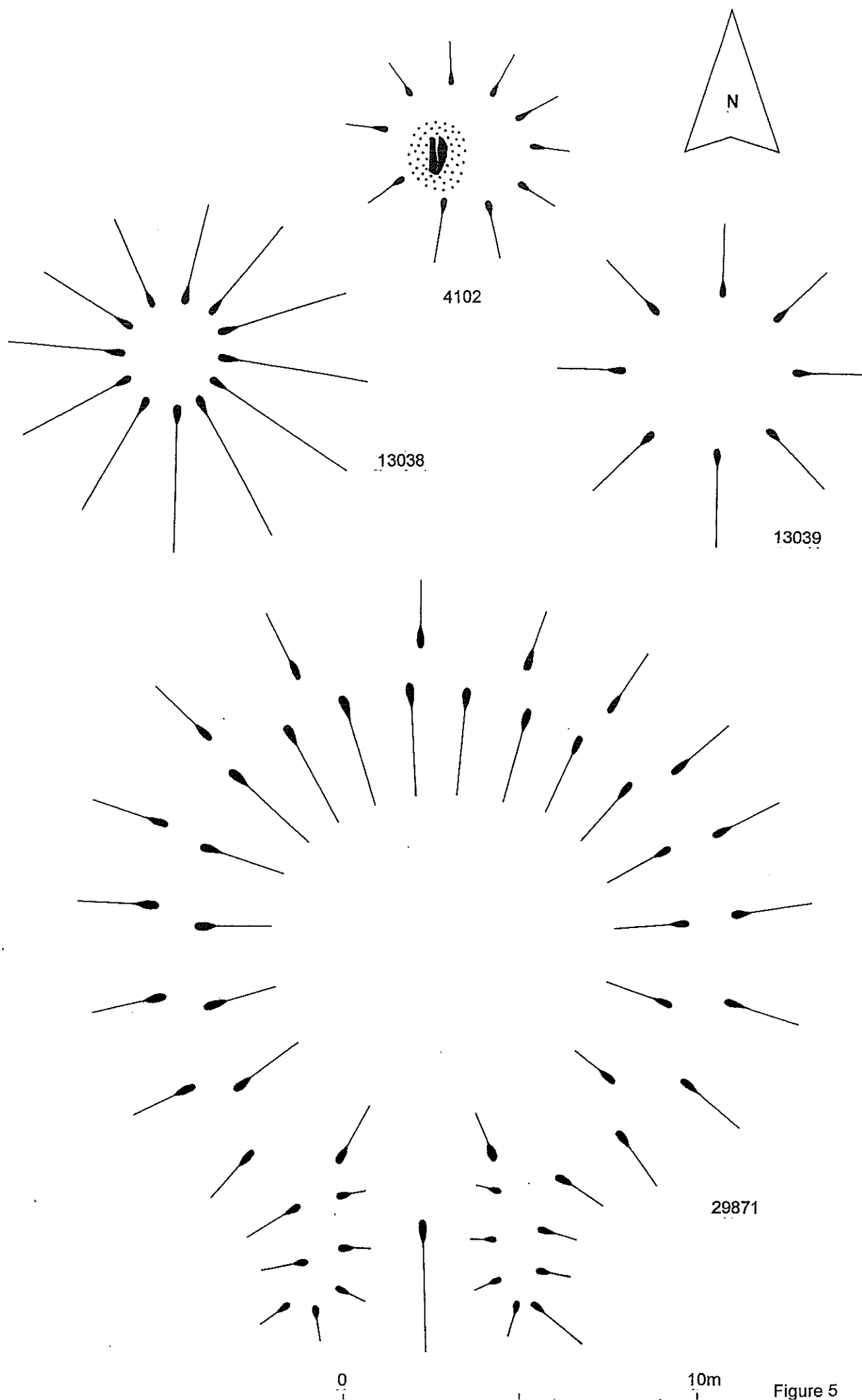


Figure 5

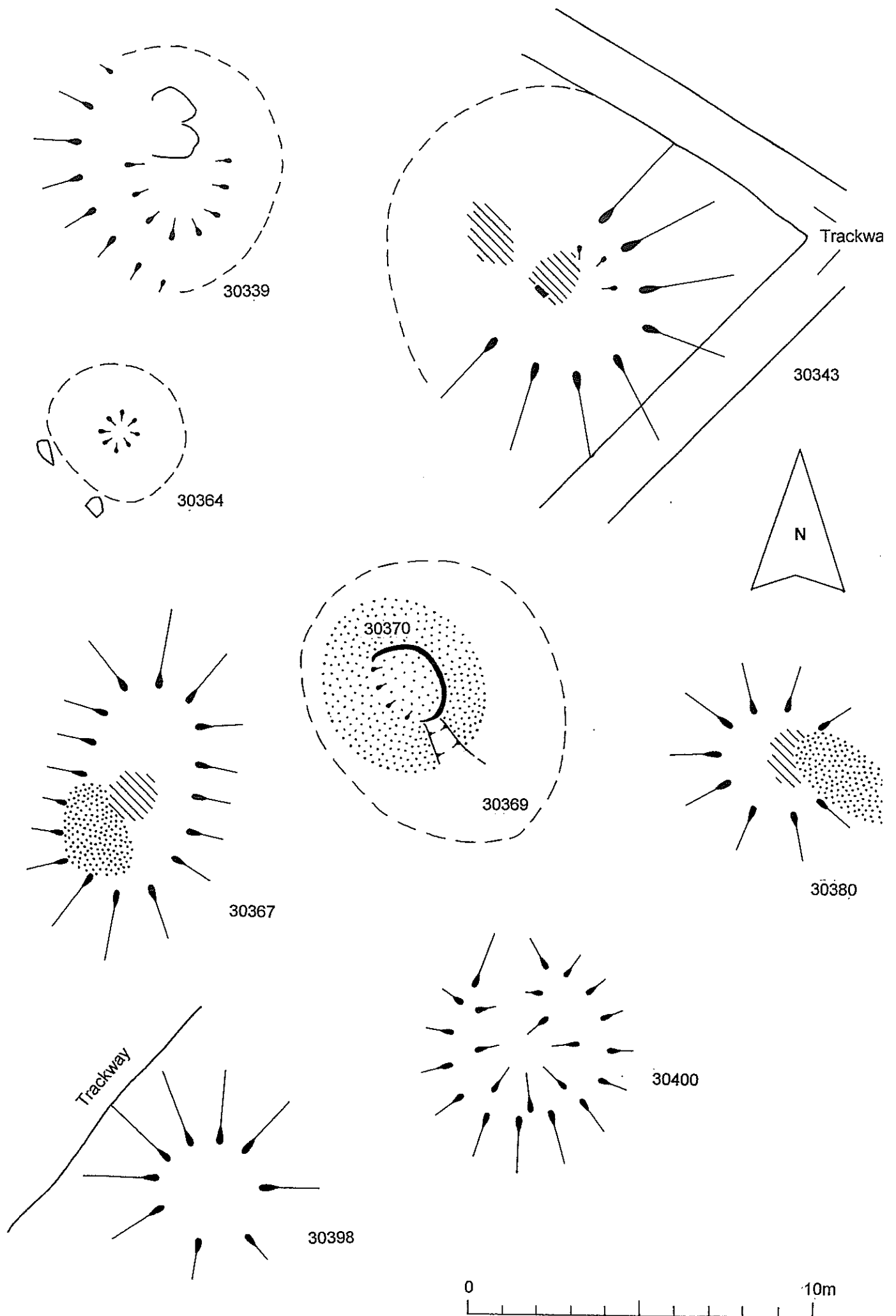
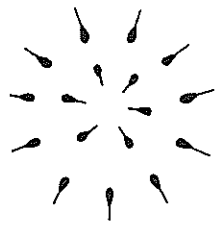
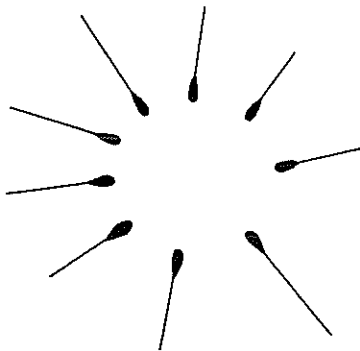
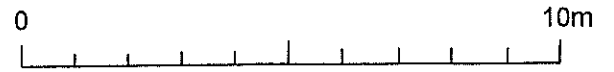
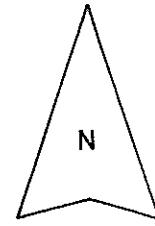


Figure 6

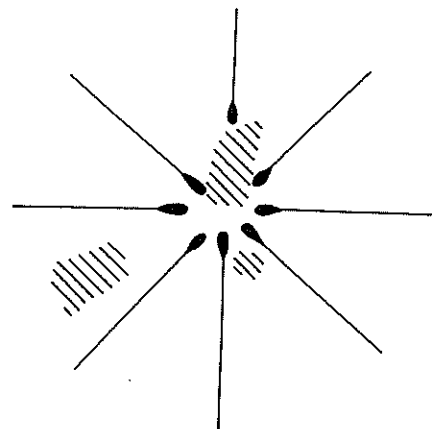




30402



30433



30487

Figure 7

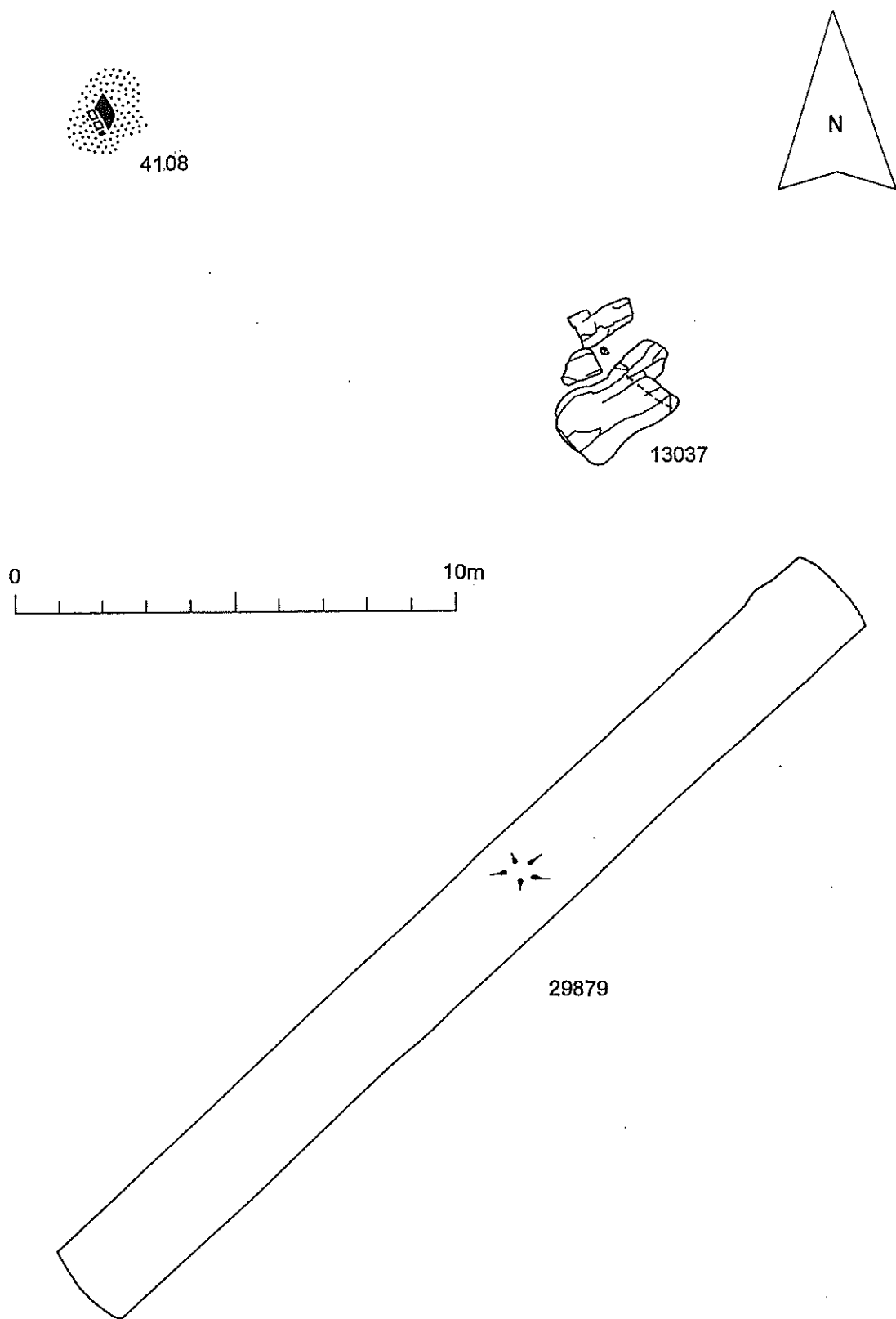
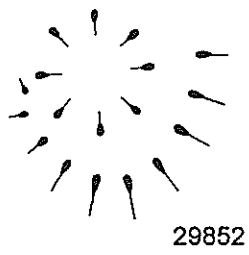
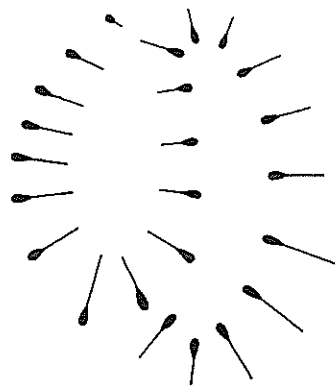


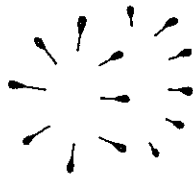
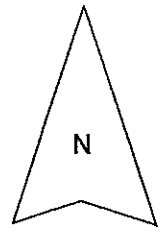
Figure 8



29852



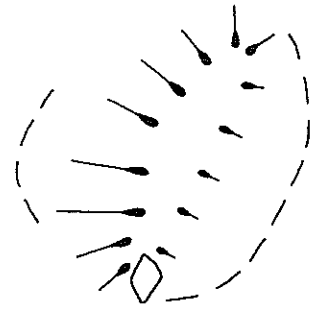
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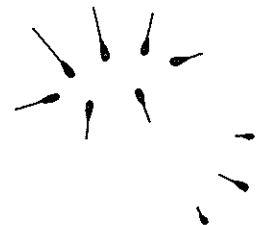
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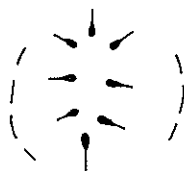
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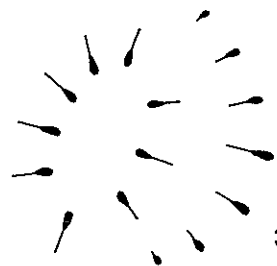
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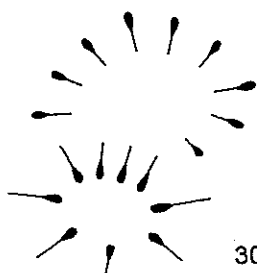
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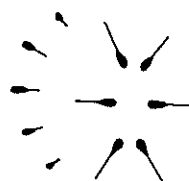
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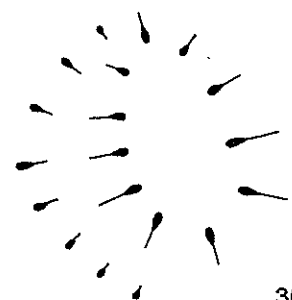
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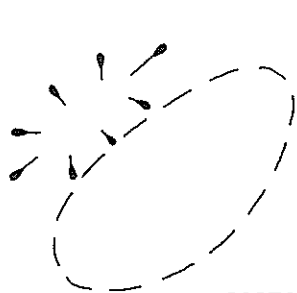
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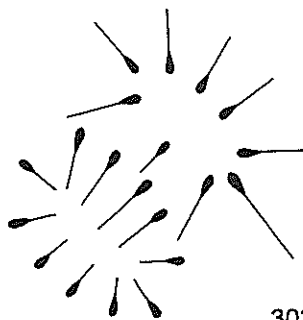
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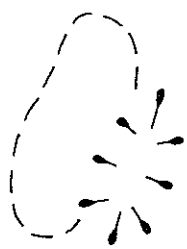
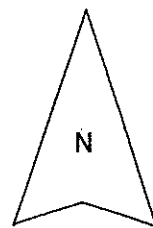
Figure 9



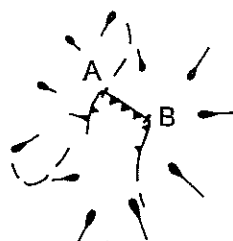
30376



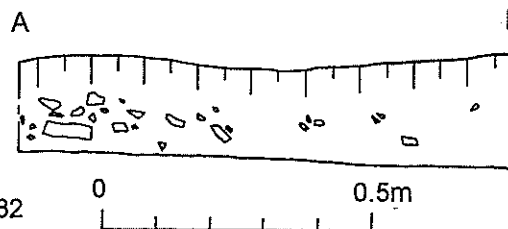
30377



30381



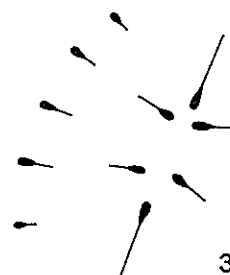
30382



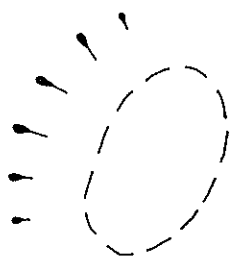
30383



30384



30385



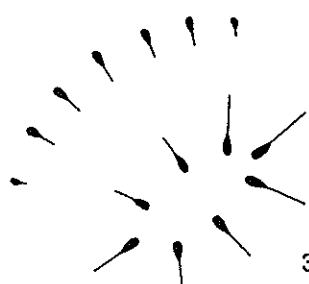
30386



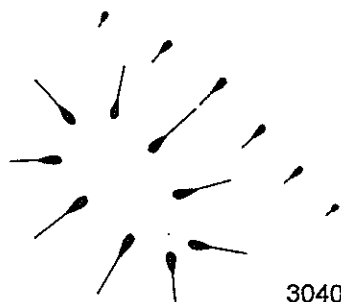
30387



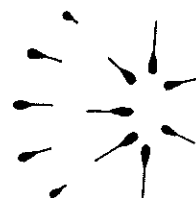
30388



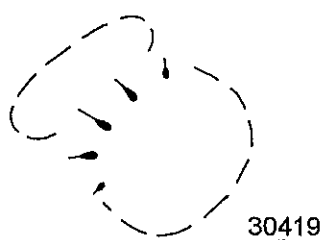
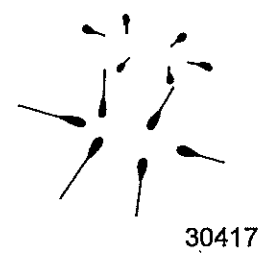
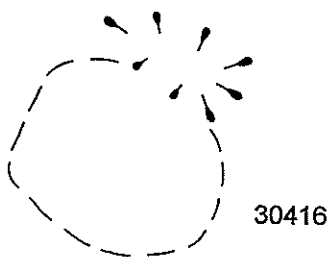
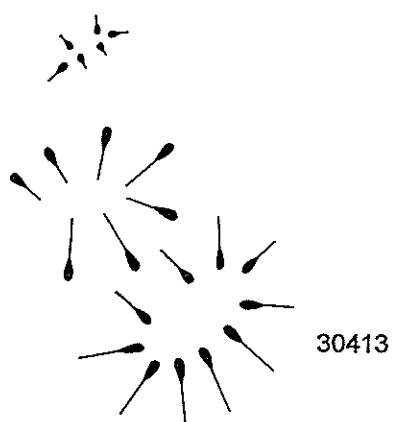
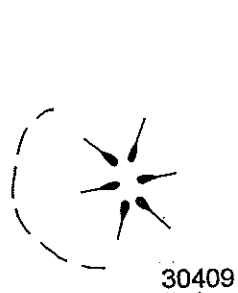
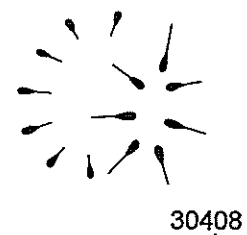
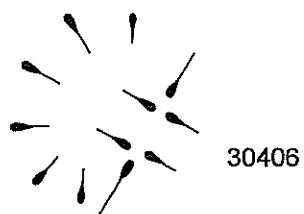
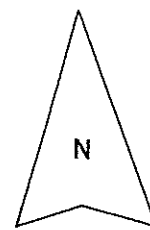
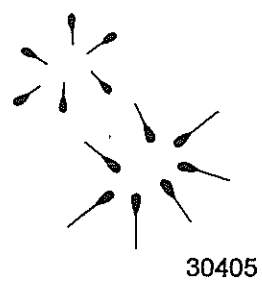
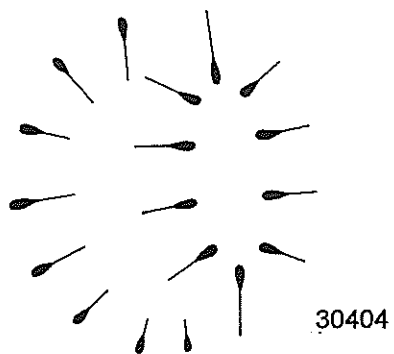
30391



30401



30403



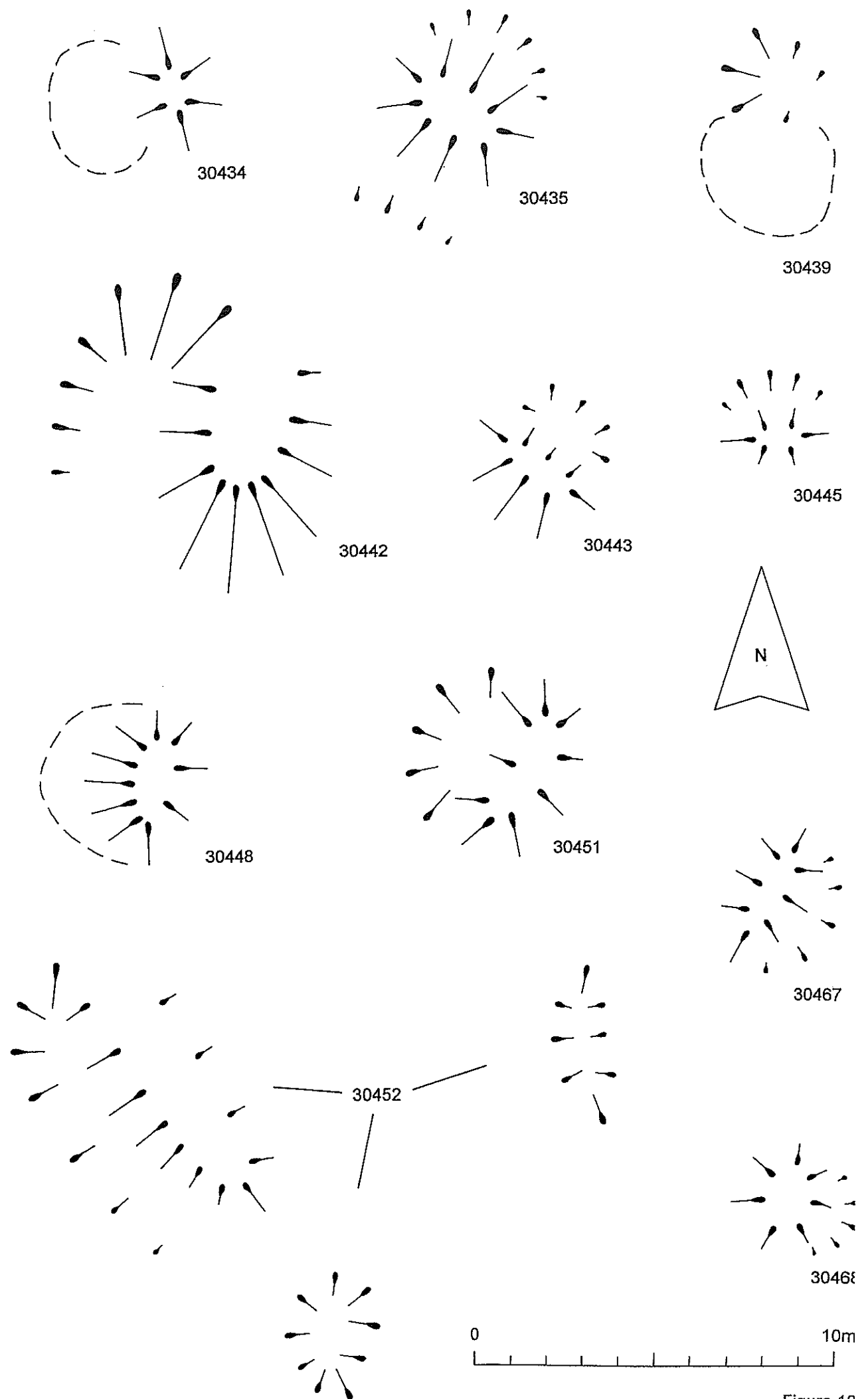


Figure 12

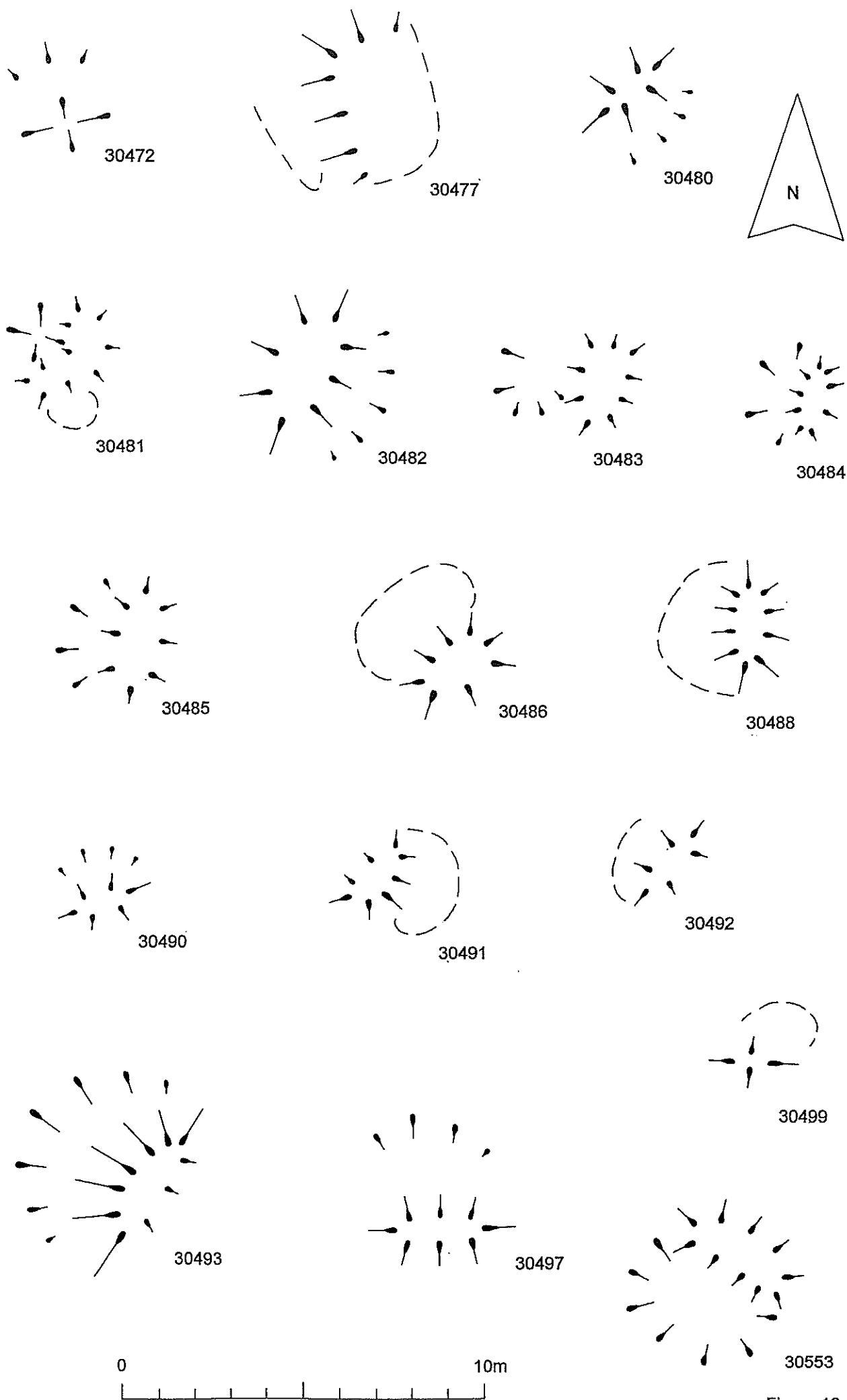


Figure 13

# Mound Group 30412

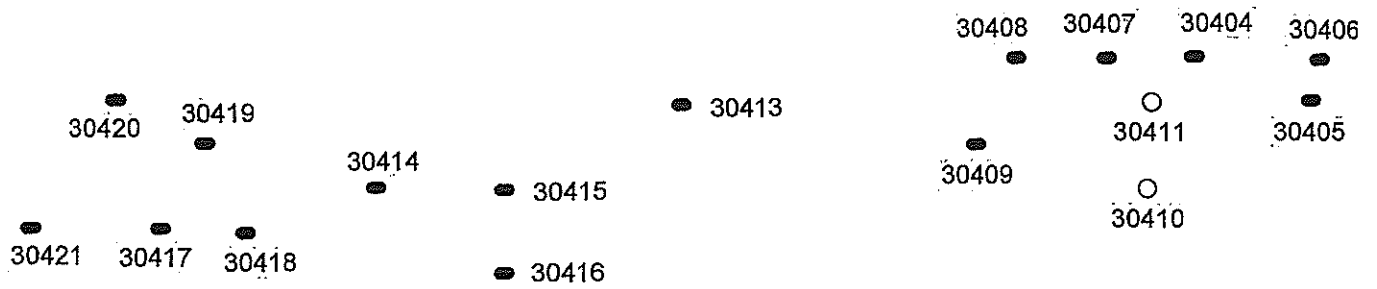


Figure 14a

# Mound Group 30461

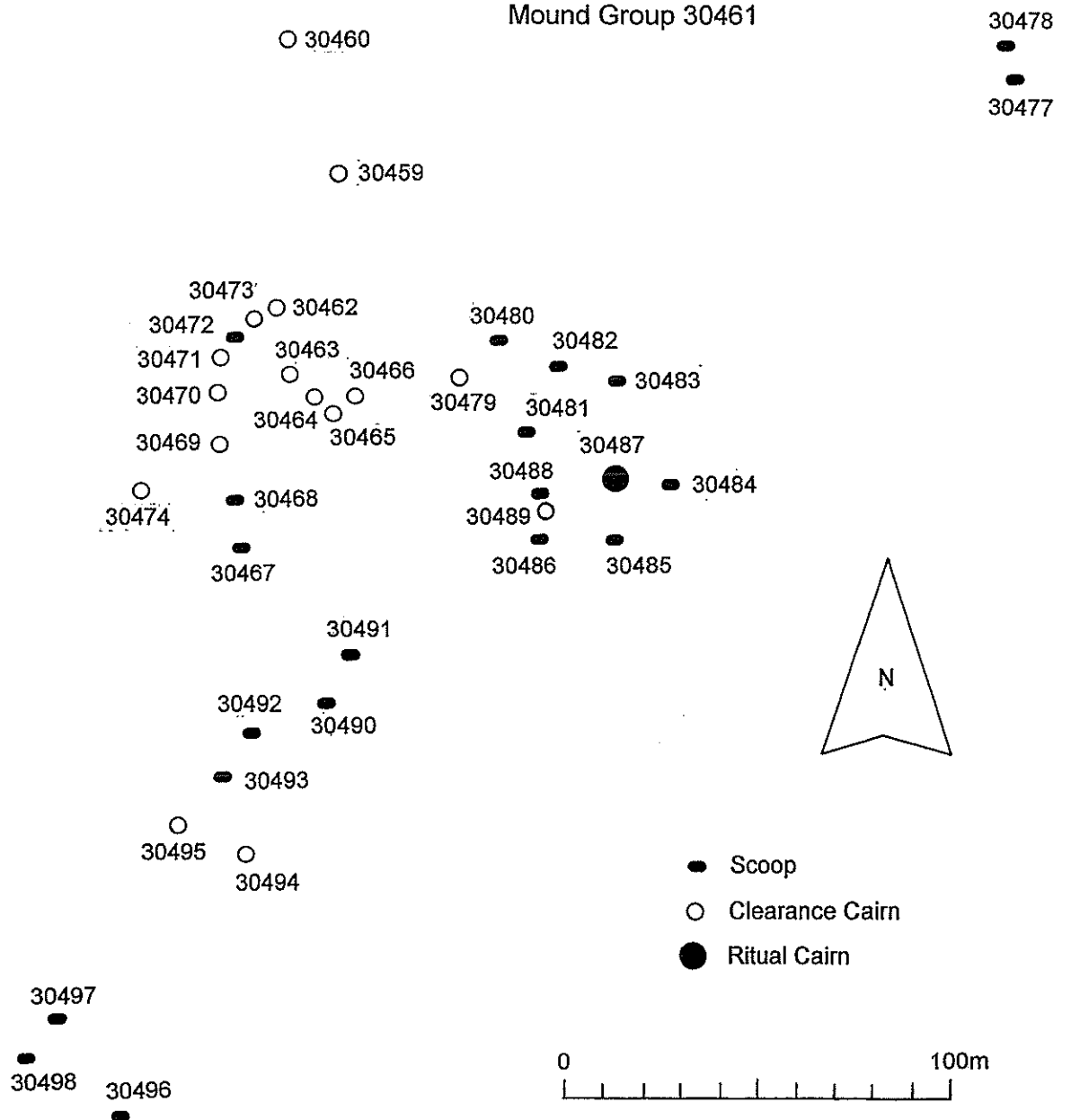


Figure 14b



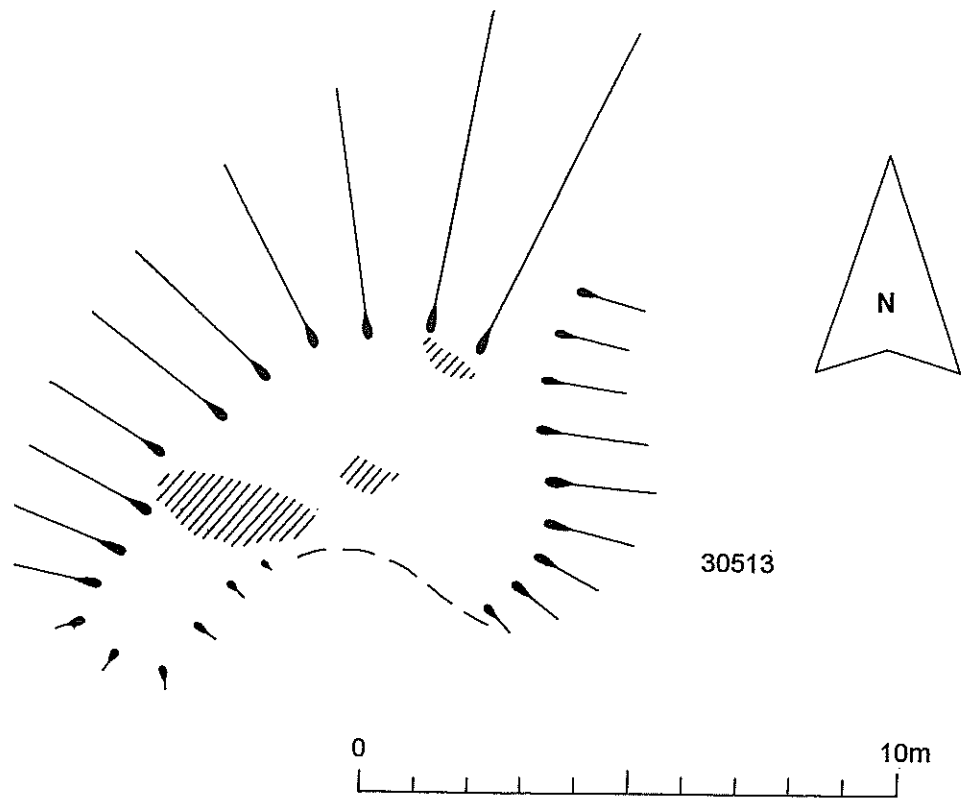


Figure 15a

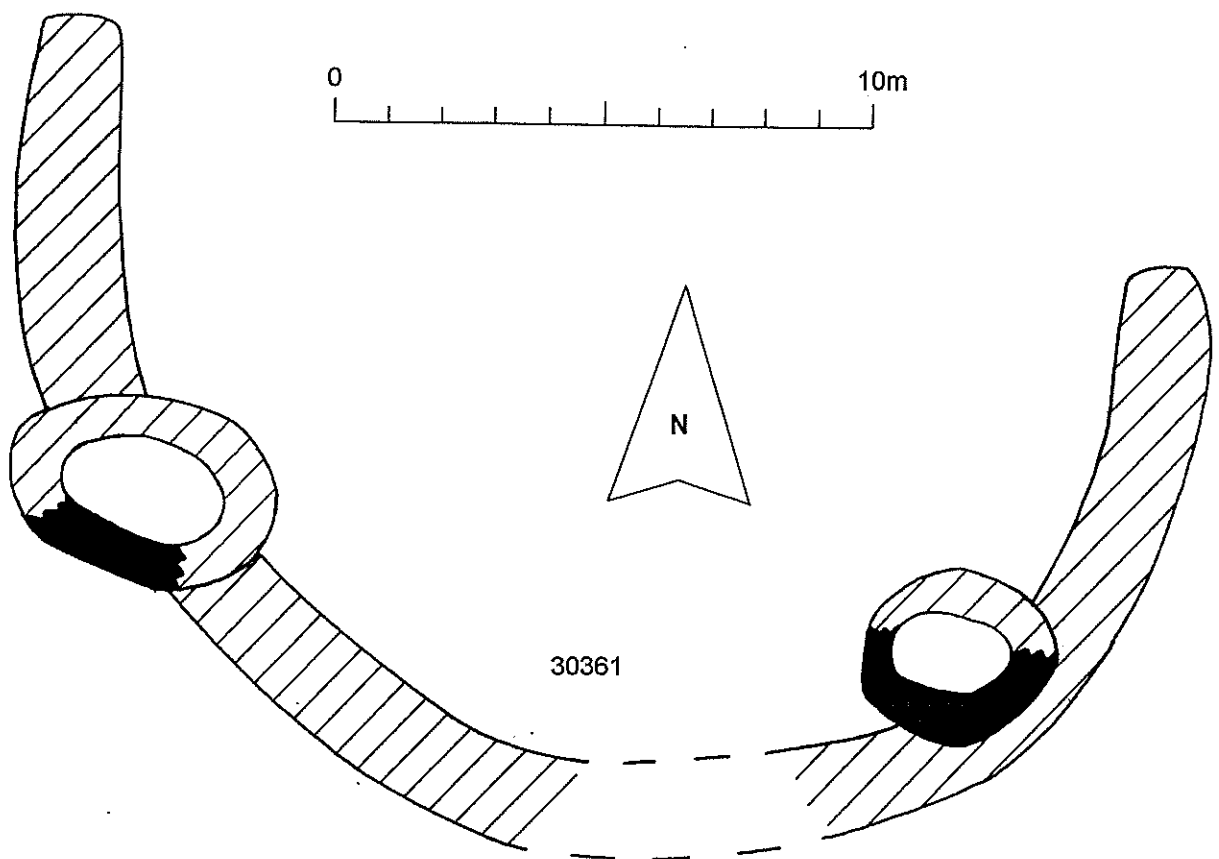


Figure 15b

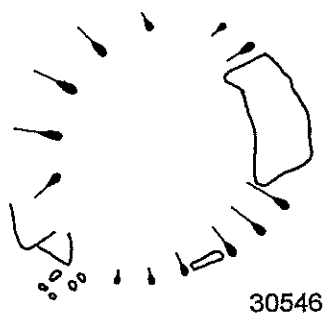
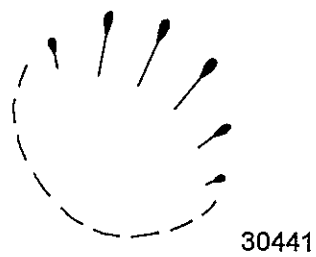
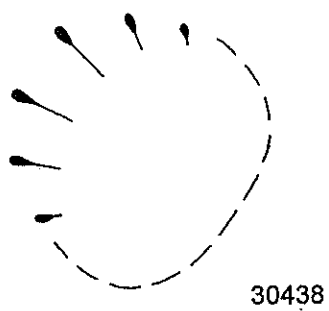
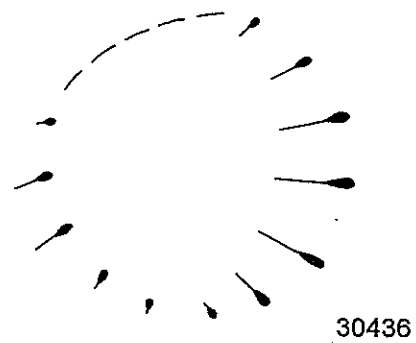
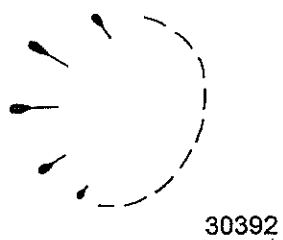
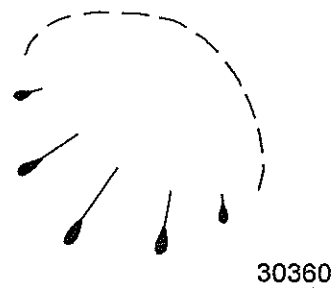
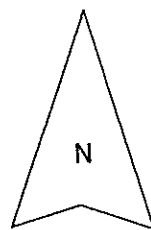
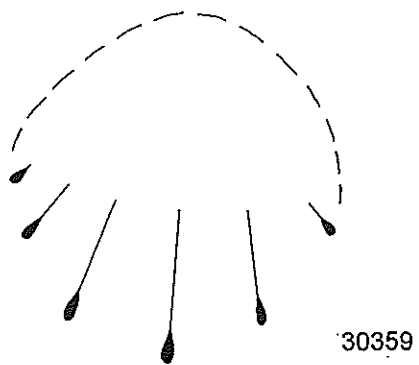


Figure 16

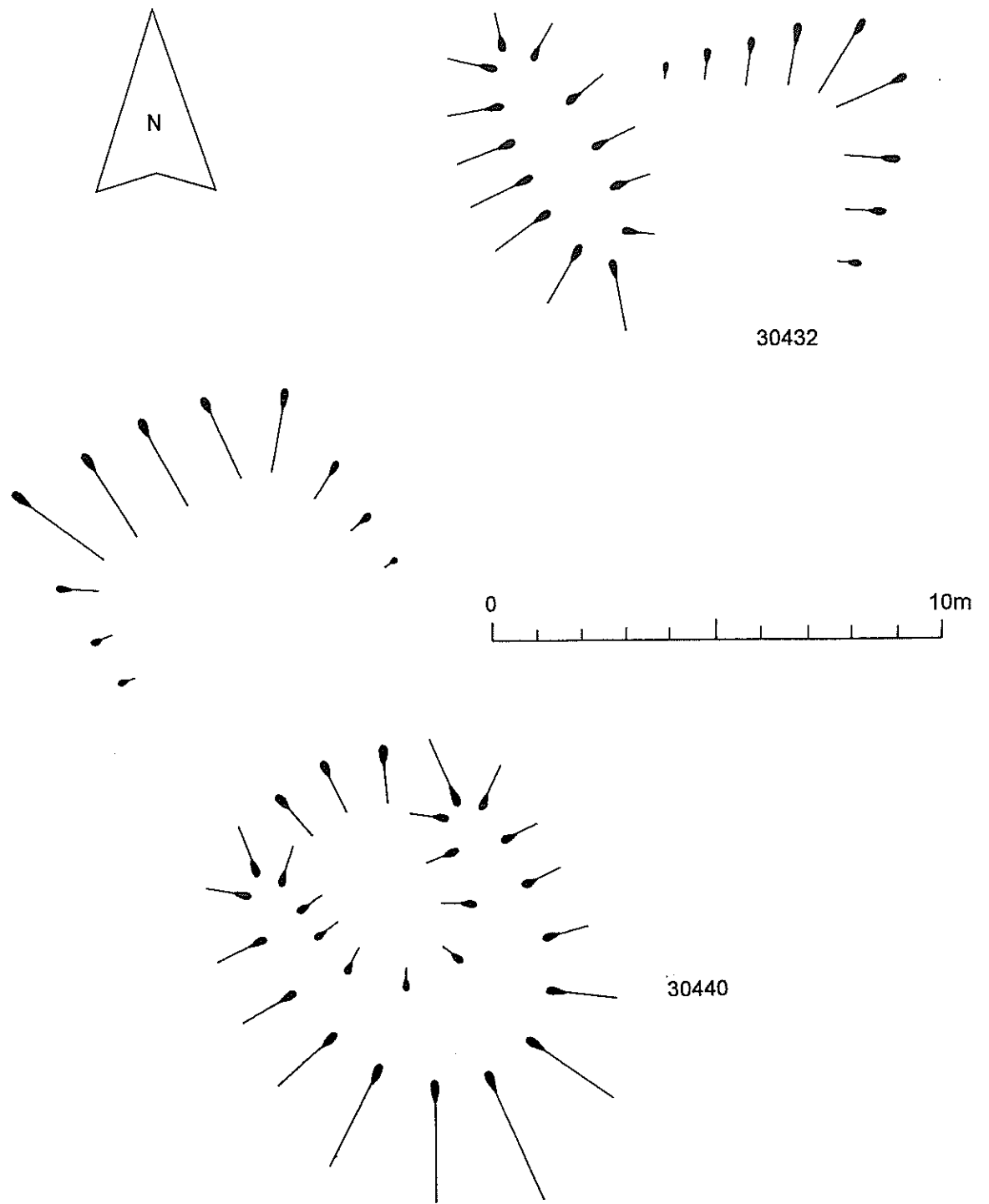
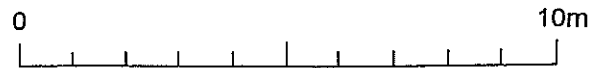
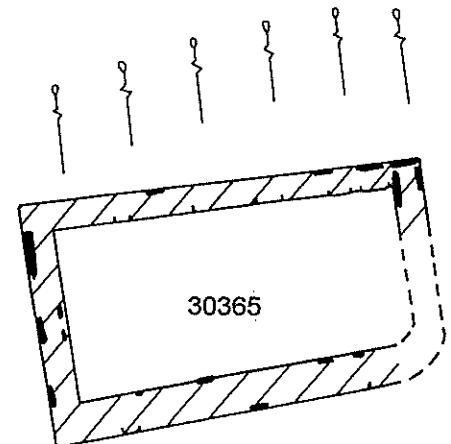
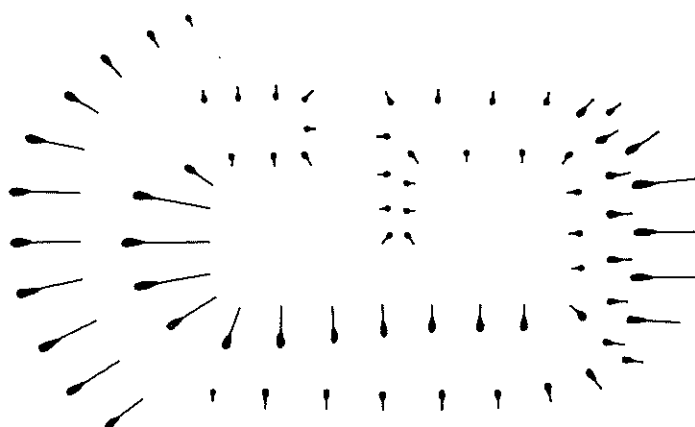
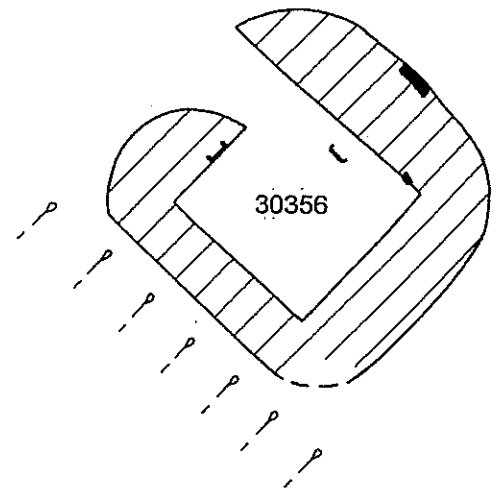
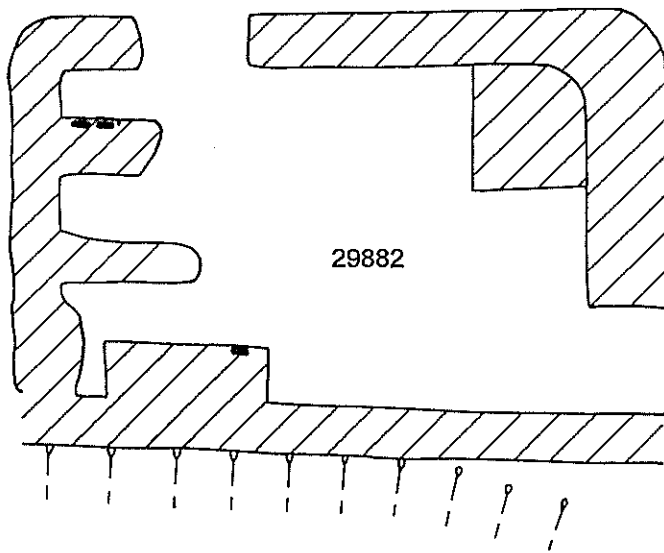
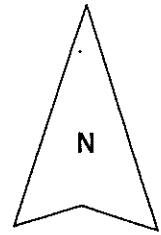
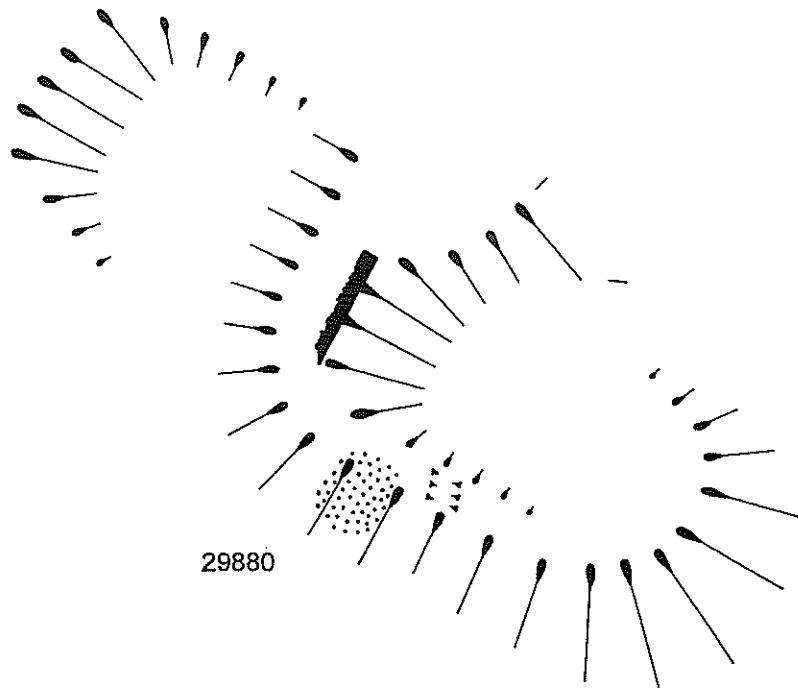


Figure 17



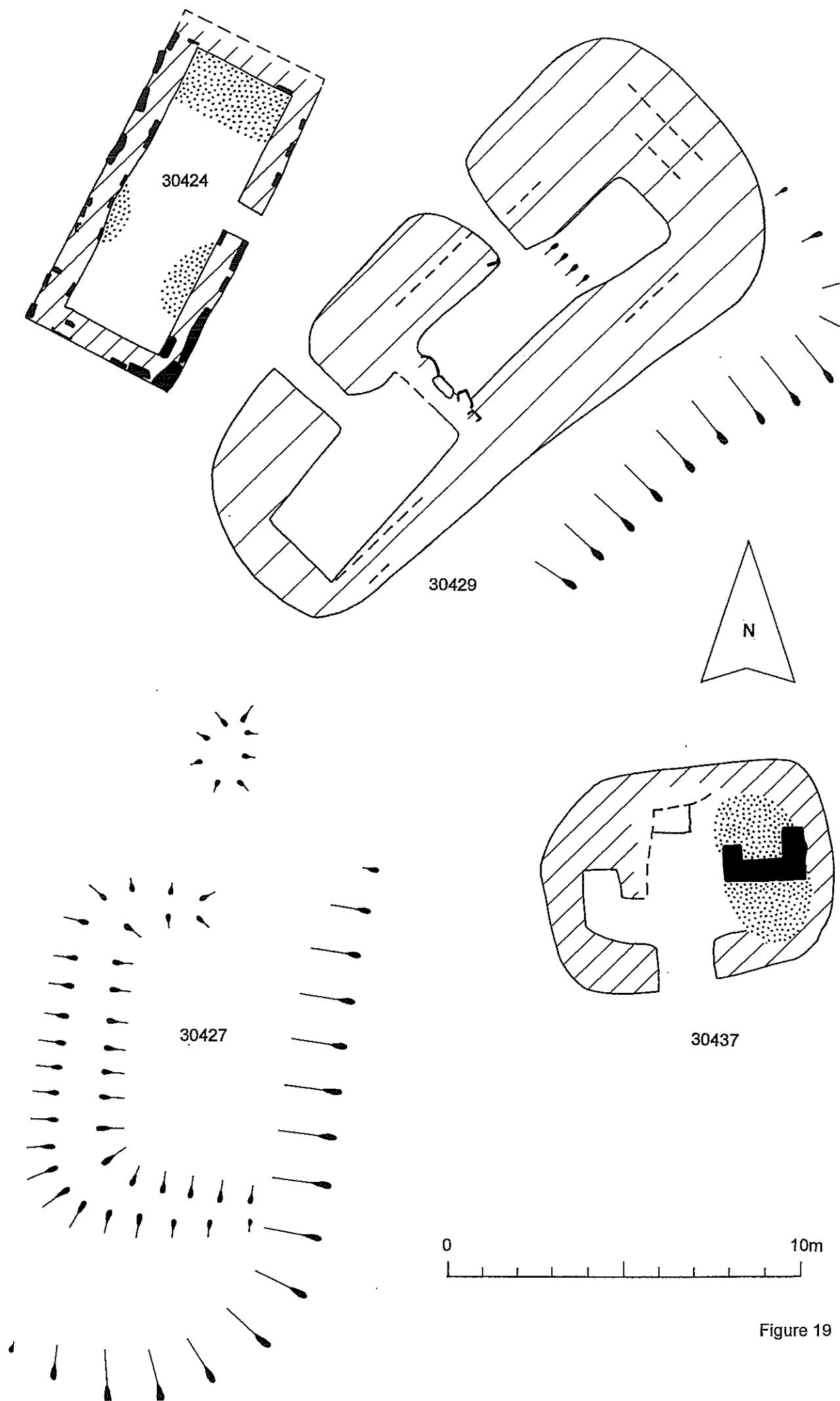


Figure 19

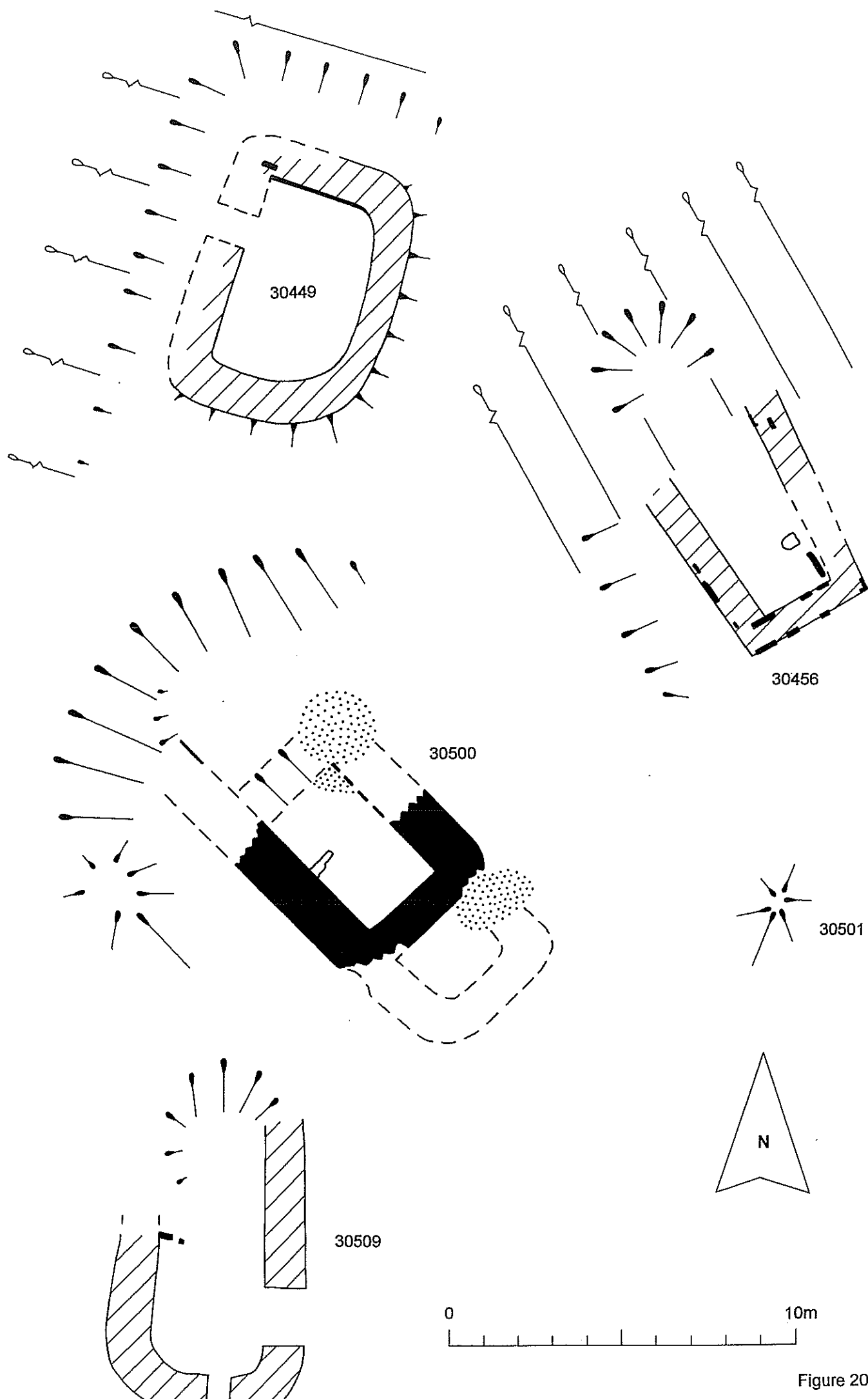


Figure 20

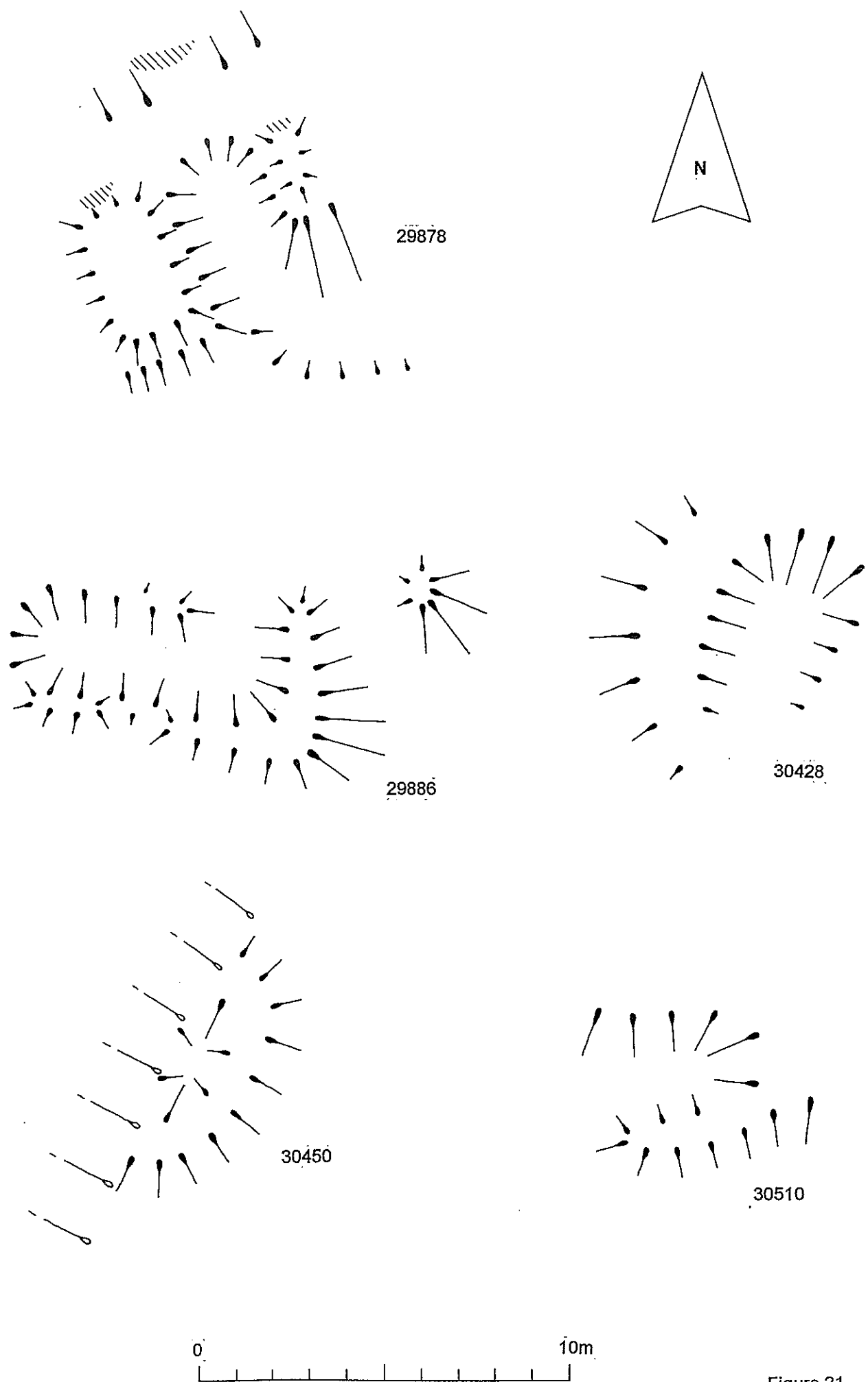


Figure 21

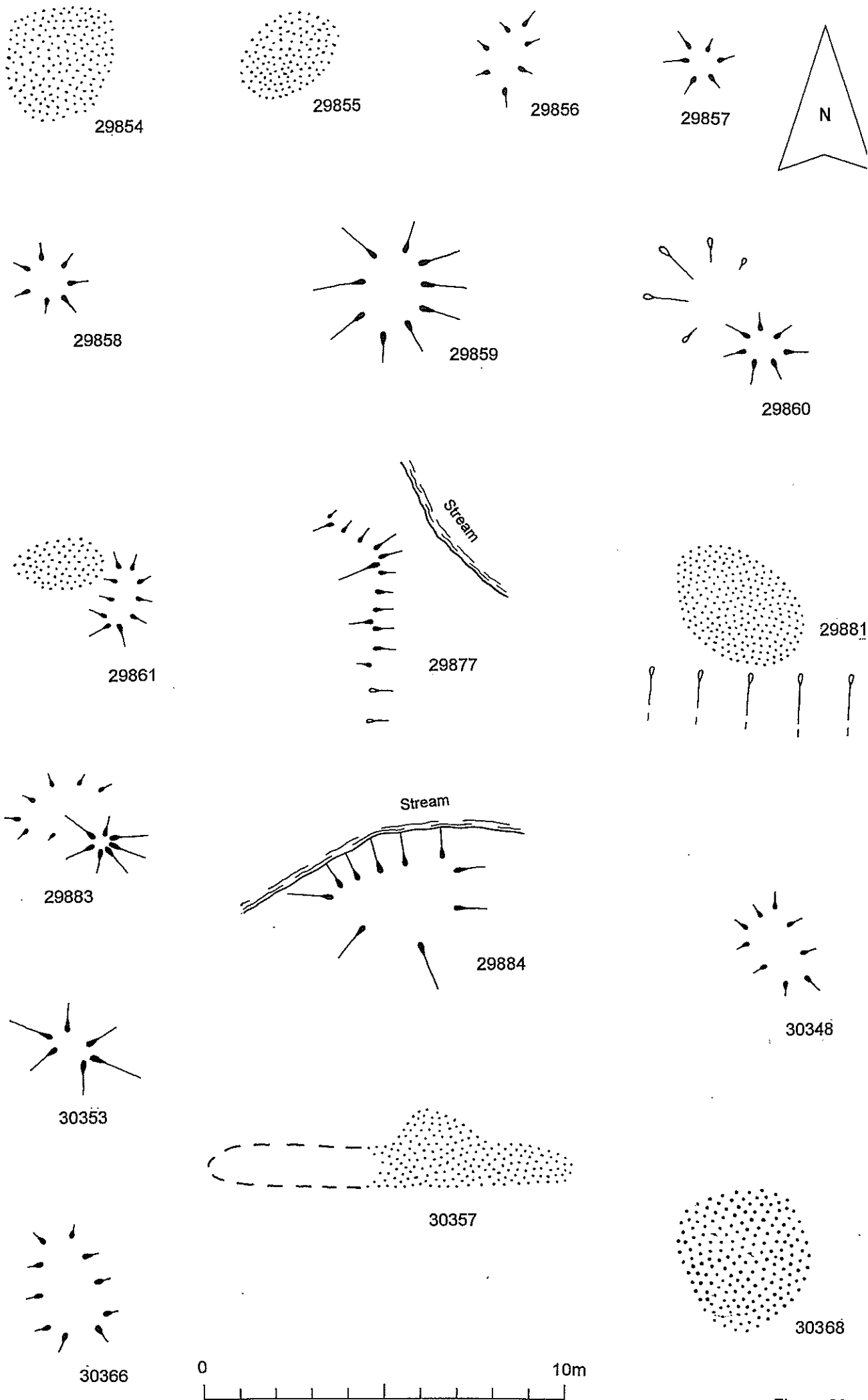
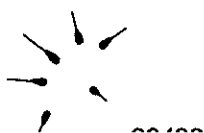
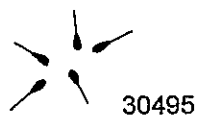
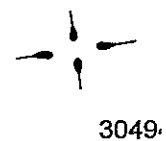
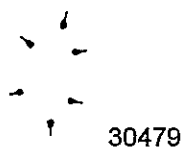
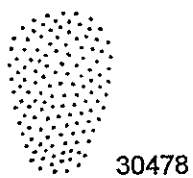
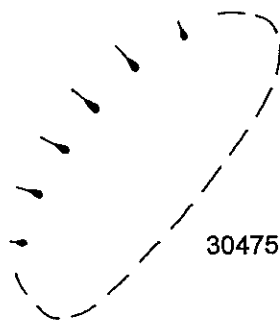
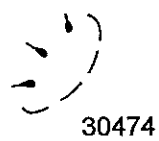
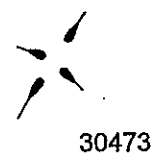
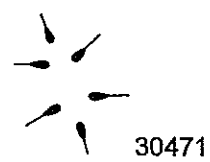
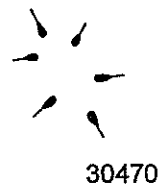
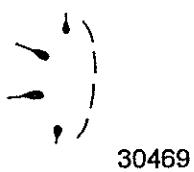
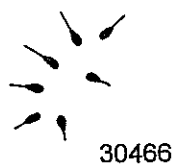
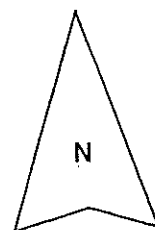
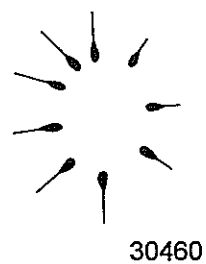
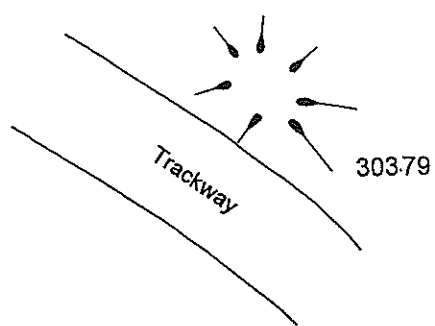


Figure 22





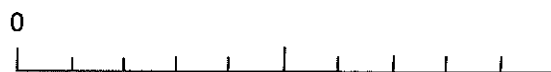
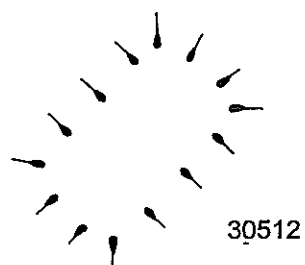
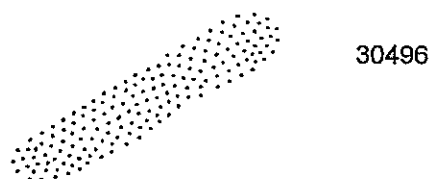
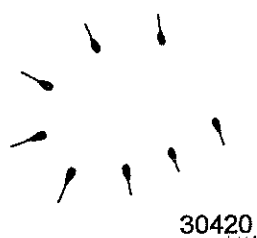
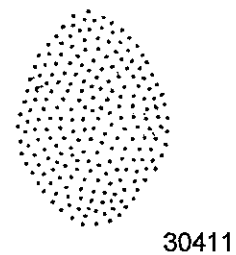
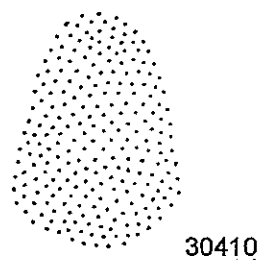
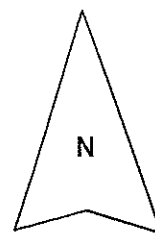


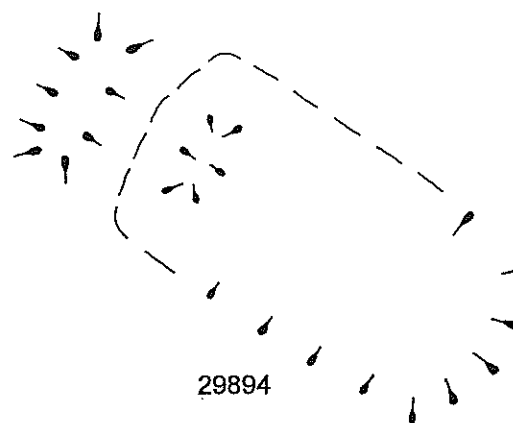
Figure 24



29892



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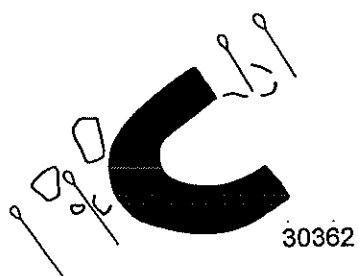
30340



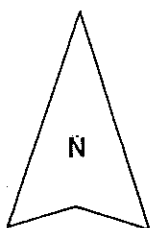
30341



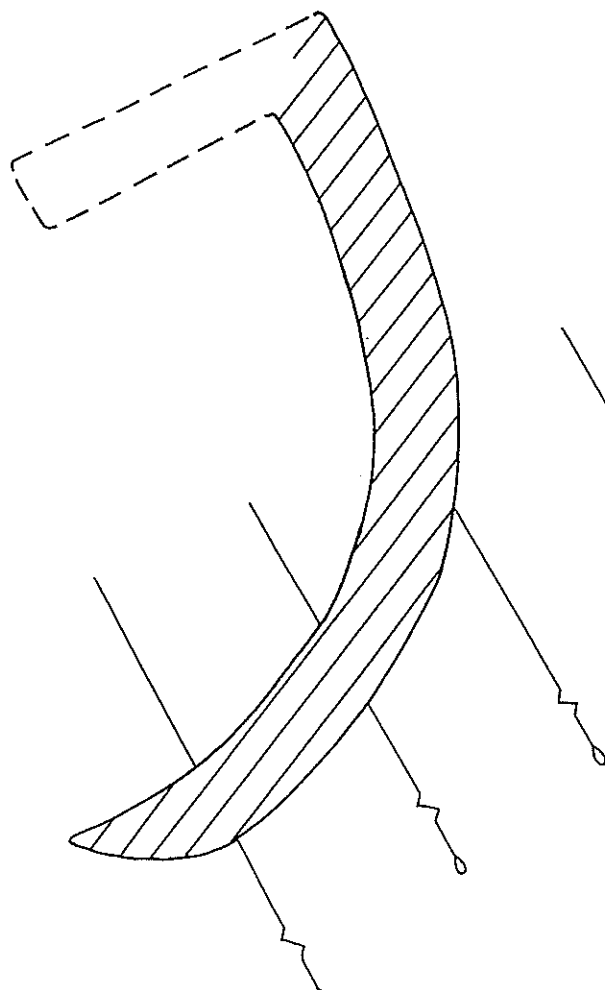
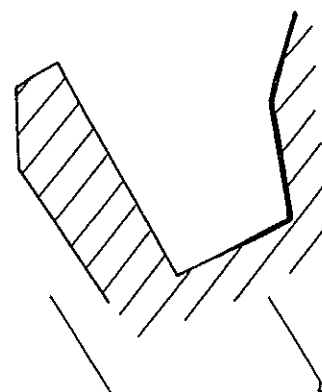
30354



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Figure 25