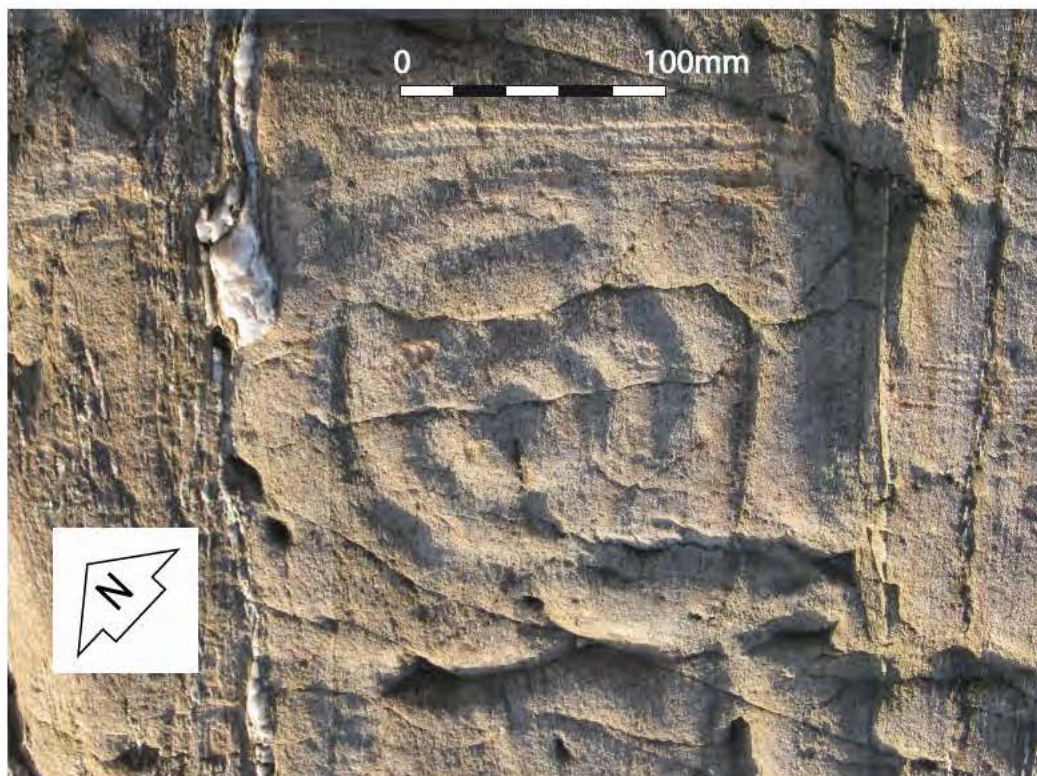


SOME RECENT ROCK ART FROM NORTH-WEST WALES



By George Smith



Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

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Cover: Rock art panel at Treferwydd, Anglesey

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By George Smith *c.* 3500 words

Illustration captions

1 The archaeology of the Cregennen Lakes area, Arthog, Meirionnydd. Based on Ordnance Survey maps. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Licence number AL 100020895.

2 The Pant-y-llan cup-marked stones A Western, B Eastern

3 The Llyn Du cup and ring marked stone, A General view from the south-east. Scale with 0.2m divisions B, detail. Scale with 0.2m and 10mm divisions

4 The archaeology of the Camarnaint area, Llanfairfechan, Conwy. Based on Ordnance Survey maps. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Licence number AL 100020895.

5 The Camarnaint cup-marked stone. Plan and profile

6 Treferwydd, Llangaffo, Anglesey: Location of the rock-art

7 Treferwydd, Llangaffo, Anglesey: The cup and ring marked stone (vertical view)

The north-west of Wales is an area relatively devoid of rock art, compared to other parts of Britain and is chiefly known for the complex art found at two Neolithic chambered tombs on Anglesey, Barclodiad y Gawres and Bryn Celli Ddu (Lynch 1991). In both cases the art and the passage grave form of the tombs indicate close affinities to Neolithic tombs with rock art in Ireland. The unusual nature of the tombs and of the art suggests movement of people. In recent years there has been a gradually increasing awareness and discovery of more rock art, mainly of simple cup-marks, as well as a few of more complex art. Some of these have arisen from the Pan-Wales Prehistoric Funerary and Ritual survey project that was carried out as a monument evaluation exercise for Cadw in 2000-2003. Others have been made by intensive study of existing monuments (Nash 2005), which has stimulated further interest and highlighted the potential for further discoveries. This note describes some of them, all listed on the Gwynedd Historic

Environment Record, for which record numbers are given. A useful database of all known rock art sites in Wales has also been created by Zoe Walmsley as part of a BA dissertation in 2011 at Bangor University. Many thanks go to Frances Lynch for helpful discussion and editing, to Richard Cooke for surveying (Treferwydd), to John Burman and Beaver Hughes for assistance on site and to the landowners, Paul and Jeanette Butler for allowing access at Treferwydd.

Pant-y-llan, Arthog, Meirionnydd

There are three records of cup-marks in the Arthog area to the west of the Cregennen lakes (Fig. 1). The first occurs on two stones just to the south of the lakes. The second occurs on a free standing boulder to the west of the lakes. The third occurs on a free standing boulder close to a kerb cairn at Bron Lletty Ifan, 3km west of the lakes (beyond the area shown on the map).

INSERT FIG 1

The first (HER PRNs 4237 and 4238) consists of two groups of cup-marks that are visible on areas of exposed ground rock. These lie on a low ridge that is oriented approximately east-west in the base of an upland valley at a height of 245m OD. The land is enclosed but unimproved moorland. These cup-marks were first reported in 1974 (Dancer 1974, 195). The rocks are difficult to locate, being partly grassed over, and the surfaces are weathered so the cup-marks are faint. The cup-marks are all of similar size and depth, 40-45mm diameter and 10-20mm deep (Fig. 2). The rocks appear to be isolated boulders rather than areas of exposed bedrock. However, it is possible that they are *in situ* surface fragments of a deeply weathered and fissured outcrop. The western stone, at SH 6620 1326, has a random placing of 9 cup-marks of which 7 are set around the perimeter of the stone. The eastern stone, at SH 6624 1323, has 4 cup-marks set in a probably deliberately evenly spaced arc, which faces east-south-east.

INSERT FIG 2

The second cup-marked stone (HER PRN 4891) now lies in a small stream valley at SH 6510 1400, where it has been tipped with other stones during recent field improvements. When first

noted in about 1961 it was still in its original position further up the slope in what was moorland, now enclosed and improved (Fig. 1). The Ordnance Survey provided the following description from information provided by Mr Dancer - 'Cup marked stone found NW of a small stone circle in Maes Pant y Llan. It is a flat stone with the top broken away lying on a small raised mound with about 8 shallow cups circa one inch in diameter.' (OS NAR card SH 61 SE29). The stone was drawn and published by Dancer (1974, 189).

The third group of cup-marks at Bron Lletty Ifan (HER PRN 12895, NGR SH 6334 1263) appear on the top surface of a large angular block that appears to have been moved from a nearby outcrop. The block lies only 10m to the north-east of a substantial (unexcavated) kerb cairn (Smith and Burman 2003). Six of the ten cup-marks there also formed an arc, which faced south-west.

Most of the landscape in this area (Fig. 1) is currently rough grassland and is notable for the number of prehistoric funerary and ritual features present, including over twenty cairns, six standing stones and a probable stone circle. There is little doubt that this was a focus of prehistoric activity. The setting is dramatic, with the lakes set against the steep backdrop of the Cader Idris range. The valley itself also forms a natural route from the coast at the west through to the Mawddach valley to the east and, considering the number of cairns and standing stones along its length, has been suggested to be a major prehistoric route (Bowen and Gresham 1967).

Whether this should be regarded as primarily a ceremonial route in itself or a funerary centre that developed alongside an existing route is impossible to say. All three groups of cup-marks lie within 100m of nearby cairns, and the second lies about 170m west of a stone circle but the only close association is that at the Bron Lletty Ifan cairn. However, although the close association between cairn and rock art is evident, it cannot be certain whether the cairn or the cup-marked stone came first or were of contemporary creation.

The Pant-y-llan cup-marks occur on very small areas of exposed rock at ground level within

rough grassland so there may well be more rock art hidden from view. Therefore, although the groups of cup-marks seem to form just a small part of this intensively used prehistoric landscape they might be more frequent and of greater significance than is now evident.

INSERT FIG 3

Llyn Du, Llanbedr, Meirionnydd

This feature (HER PRN 27558) was first identified in 2008 and reported to the Megalithic Portal website by Peter A. Boyle of St Cleers, Carmarthenshire, and was visited in 2010 as part of a survey for Cadw (Hopewell and Smith 2010). The feature is found at SH 6534 2942, within a high pass at 510m OD, between the mountains of Rhinog Fawr and Rhinog Fach and only 150m west of the lake of Llyn Du. It was created on the upper face of a large angular natural block of stone, about 1.4m high and 2.4m long, part of an extensive boulder field of massive blocks deriving from the mountain side above (Fig. 3A). It consists of a cup and ring mark on a smooth, slightly sloping rock facing to the south (Fig. 3B). The mark is 150mm diameter overall. It has a gap at the top and possibly also at the bottom where, leading from its lower edge, is a natural weathered crack. This crack seems to have pre-dated the ring mark and was then deliberately incorporated in the design, providing a downslope 'tail'. This is a common, but unexplained feature of the design of cup and ring marks found elsewhere, for example in Argyll, sometimes as incorporated natural cracks, sometimes as carved grooves (Morris 1977, 12-13). There are other natural weathered fissures on the rock face and it may be that these should also be considered as incorporated in the design.

The location of the rock art suggests it may have something to do with a natural route through the mountains, followed by an existing trail, which however, is not the lowest or easiest route. The rock art is close to the summit of the pass but is not in an obviously visible position, being amongst many other boulders. As a well-produced carving it is very much an outlier in terms of distribution with only one other example of such art known from Meirionnydd, a spiral decorated

small boulder (Lynch 1992). The presence of probable prehistoric burial cairns nearby on the summits of both the Rhinogs provides another possible reason for the presence of the rock art.

INSERT FIG 4

Camarnaint, Llanfairfechan, Conwy

This cup-marked stone (HER PRN 27502) was discovered as part of survey for Cadw and is located at SH 6939 7308 on an east-facing hillside at a height of 310m OD, just below the moorland boundary wall and has extensive views over the valley and upland beyond (Fig. 4). It is an approximately flat-topped, protruding outcrop or possibly very large erratic boulder, about 7m by 4m and about 1m high. On the upper surface of the rock are 147 certain and 10 possible cup-marks (Fig. 5). The surface of the rock is weathered and divided by a deep natural fissure. One part of the rock has become detached and has subsided slightly from its original position. The cup-marks are similar in size and depth, the largest 100mm diameter and 30mm deep. The only exceptions are three oval marks that appear to derive from the deliberate merging of adjoining pairs of cup-marks. The marks are well distributed in an apparently random way but there is a concentration of about 90 marks towards the front edge of the rock. Two of the oval marks have a similar alignment, approximately NW to SE. The number of marks means that patterns could easily be mis-construed although there are some lines of contiguous marks that suggest deliberate sequential production. The surface of the rock has a number of finer natural cracks and the distribution of the marks suggests that they utilised the spaces between these cracks as 'panels'. This is particularly evident at the east side of the surface where the cup marks avoid a central area of cracking. On the other hand the densest area of marks, while making use of a part of the surface without cracks, clusters around the deep central fissure. One possible explanation could be that the central fissure, which is now filled with soil and grassed over, was used for a burial or other deposit. An excavation of the fissure and the area surrounding the rock could provide evidence for dating or interpretation, as was the case with two areas of rock art excavated in the

Kilmartin Valley, Argyll (Jones 2011).

INSERT FIG 5

The rock outcrop is an isolated and prominent feature on this hillside although there are smaller outcrops and glacial erratic boulders in the area. It provides a natural raised 'platform' and viewing point. The slopes around this valley are conspicuous for the extensive evidence of prehistoric occupation. On the opposite side of the valley is a prominent hill on which is a semi-defensive enclosed round house settlement of unknown date and at the foot of which is what has been suggested to be an outlying area of the Graig Lwyd Neolithic stone axe production. Within the bounds of the valley are burnt mounds, field systems and hut circle settlement (Fig. 4). In contrast, funerary and ritual sites are absent although the upland further away, but within view to the east, contains the greatest concentration of prehistoric funerary and ritual sites in North Wales, including stone circles, several standing stones and numerous burial cairns. Thus, whereas it might be expected that the rock art was associated with local occupation, or with a route from lowland to upland, it could have wider associations.

INSERT FIGS 6 AND 7

Treferydd, Llangaffo, Anglesey

This feature (HER PRN 27536) was discovered by the landowner, Mr Paul Butler, during creation of a new garden within which were two large rock outcrops, both overgrown with grass and scrub. One of these was cleaned of soil in order to create a garden feature. The rock was scraped of soil by machine and then jet-washed. Some time later a small cup and ring carving was noticed and reported to GAT. The rock cup and ring mark lies at SH 4614 7010 at about 50m OD, on the east side and just below the summit and of a long ridge with wide views over the Braint Valley, the Menai Straits and the mountains beyond. The feature lies on the approximately level top of the outcrop (Fig. 6). The design is 180mm in overall diameter and consists of a central cup with two outer concentric rings and a partial third ring which makes use of a natural weathered

crack (Fig. 7). The marks are accurately laid out and the surface is smooth, as if pecked and then rubbed. There are no visible peck marks but the rock surface is weathered. The fine, straight linear grooves are machine marks from cleaning the rock surface prior to discovery of the cup and ring mark. The design created gives the overall effect of a relief pattern of three concentric raised relief rings, rather than a cup mark with concentric grooves. The outermost ring has a gap on the east side. The rock on which the carving has been made is strikingly decorative, being highly folded and banded schist incorporating fine veins of quartz. The carving has been placed in one wider, unbroken band between quartz veins and is framed by weathered cross cracks which seem to have been deliberately chosen. Similar rock was selected for construction of the Trefignath Neolithic chambered tomb, Holyhead, and may have been regarded as having special qualities. Although the outcrop is large, no other carvings have been found on it. The outcrop is just one of several on this ridge, all of which are overgrown and other rock art may be hidden from view. The ridge is likely to have provided an important early route between the former tidal estuary of the Cefni River to the north and the valley of the River Braint to the south. The Braint Valley was a focus of Neolithic activity, with several chambered tombs, a probable henge and a stone circle. Some association between that activity and the rock art is likely with a recurring resemblance between the circular motif and the earthworks. Although the motif is simple the quality of the carving is good. The cup and ring design is paralleled on Anglesey only by the (not *in situ*) stone at Llwydiarth Esgob (Lynch 1991, 350-1) and contrasts with the spiral motifs found at the chambered tombs of both Bryn Celli Ddu and Barclodiad y Gawres. However, the design has many parallels in those areas such as North Yorkshire, Humberside and south-west Scotland where rock-art is more frequent.

Discussion

The type of rock art represented by cup marks and cup and ring marks, found mainly on natural boulders or rock outcrops, as opposed to the complex designs found in and on the passage graves of Ireland has caused much speculation and been the subject of many theories. A wide-ranging

and in depth study by Bradley (1997, 151) admitted, after all, that such rock art occurs in different types of topographic location in the various regions of Britain and either had different types of meaning or was used in different ways. In some areas rock art panels are intervisible, in others they occur close to routes, in others close to groups of other monuments, sometimes in poor upland, sometimes close to areas of prehistoric settlement. One general observation is that simple cup marks occur mainly on boulders while more complex art occurs on outcrops. Another observation is that rock art most often occurs in places with wide open views rather than in prominent positions, such as hill tops (Morris, 1977, 12). Bradley's research (1997, 83-4) confirms this, showing that where a number of suitable rocks are available it is the ones with the widest viewpoints that are chosen for art.

It may be that such natural features were regarded as significant apart from and prior to their use for art and the idea that such features were regarded as 'animate' objects in themselves forms the basis of a recent major study (Jones 2011). The simplest effect of creating rock art, simple or complex, was to make a permanent mark if only a symbol, not a personal signature. Whatever that meant it provided an identifier on the land, in Bradley's view 'socializing' the landscape (Bradley 1997, 152) and possibly helping to define a territory, especially as rock art is quite often found at passes between valleys. However, Bradley also points to ethnographic parallels showing that rock art can have different layers of meaning and can refer to mythology and to memory of past events rather than to a practical contemporary use of the landscape (ibid, 131).

The Llyn Du cup and ring mark is in an isolated location and not in a readily visible position. Although close to a mountain pass route it seems not to have been marking the route and could be better seen as a kind of good luck symbol, much as modern climbers add stones to cairns.

Similarly, the Treferwydd cup and ring mark is small and difficult to find. It seems more like a personal statement than part of communal activity. It has wide ranging views over an area of much Neolithic activity and this provides a probable explanation for its creation. On the other hand there are three separate occurrences of single cup marks on boulders alongside the lines of

identifiable routes around the wider upland area around the Camarnaint stone (beyond the area shown in Fig. 4) and these could have been simply 'road signs'. This was plainly not the case with the Camarnaint stone itself, which does not lie on an obvious route and of which a wide viewpoint seems to be its main feature. Of relevance to this is the fact that the Neolithic environment here was oak/hazel/alder woodland, not the open upland seen today (Caseldine, forthcoming), so that few places would have provided distant views or easily identifiable landmarks and navigation through the woodland would have been somewhat problematic. The open and upland positions of much rock art has suggested an association with itinerant populations of hunters or herders and this accords with the presence of deer motifs, possibly associated with hunting trails, alongside other abstract motifs in some rock art in Galicia, north-western Spain (Bradley 1997, 214-5). Some rock art in Argyll, Scotland, however appears in a close relationship with areas of Neolithic settlement, agriculture and constructed monuments (Jones, et al, 2011, xviii) The Camarnaint stone provides a natural platform and this can be paralleled by rocks used for human excarnation in Tibet, another possible use for such locations and another explanation for the unusual multiplicity of cup-marks, suggesting a long period of use. Cup marks and cup and ring marks occur occasionally as secondary additions on Neolithic monuments, for instance there are cup-marks on the cap-stones of chambered tombs at Bach Wen, Gwynedd and Ty Newydd, Anglesey. Their significance seems to have had a long appreciation because in a few cases slabs with such motifs were re-used as cist slabs, occasionally with the addition of representations of Early Bronze Age metal weapons such as daggers and axes (Jones 2011, 256). Slabs with such art were also re-used in some Early Bronze Age burial cists within barrows in Cornwall and more rarely they appear in houses of the same period, also perhaps as re-used objects (Bradley 1997, 146-8). They also occur on the standing stones of some stone circles, usually marking important astronomical alignments (Beckensall 2002, 117-130). One cup and ring-marked stone was found to have been used or re-used as a packing stone for a standing stone at Llanfechell, Anglesey (Smith, 2010 and forthcoming). The earliest use of cup-

marks and cup and ring marks is convincingly shown by their presence as part of more complex designs in primary contexts at New Grange, Ireland c. 3000 Cal BC (O'Kelly 1982, 146, 153). More recently, excavation of two rock art sites in the Kilmartin Valley, Argyll has produced some dating evidence that suggests the rock art there was created in the Later Neolithic, with two radiocarbon dates between 2900-2800 Cal BC and 2500-2400 Cal BC and with further later activity nearby suggested by other dates between 1300-100 Cal BC and 550-400 Cal BC (Jones 2011). However, even in this case the link between the rock art and any nearby activity is tentative, while the interpretation of the art itself remains as open to debate as ever.

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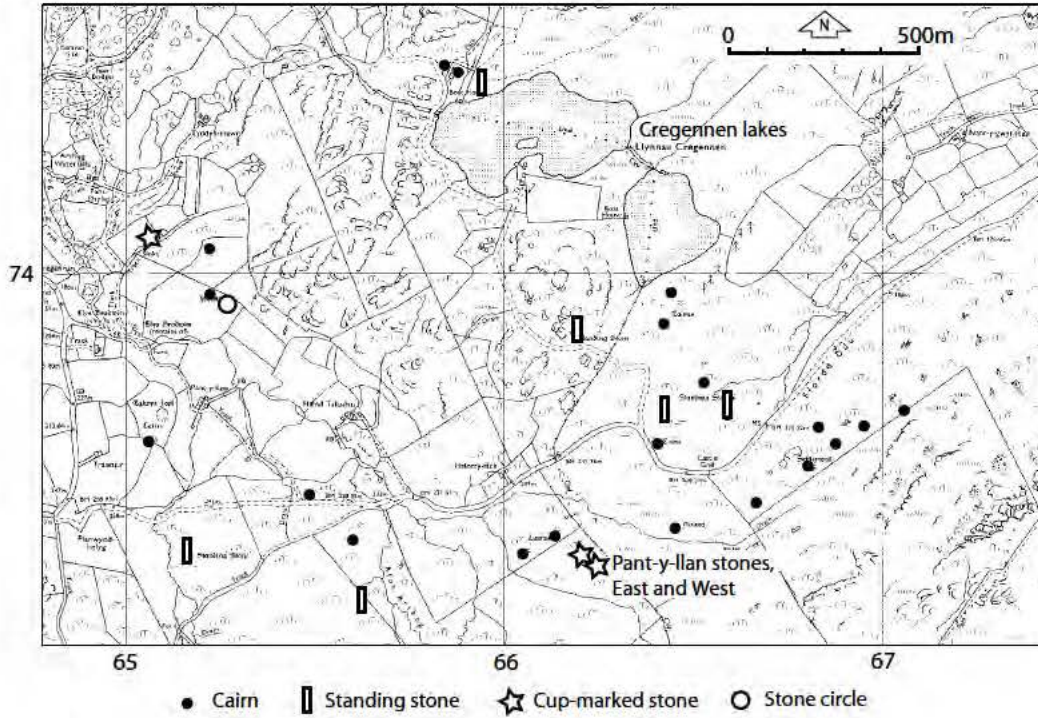


FIG 1

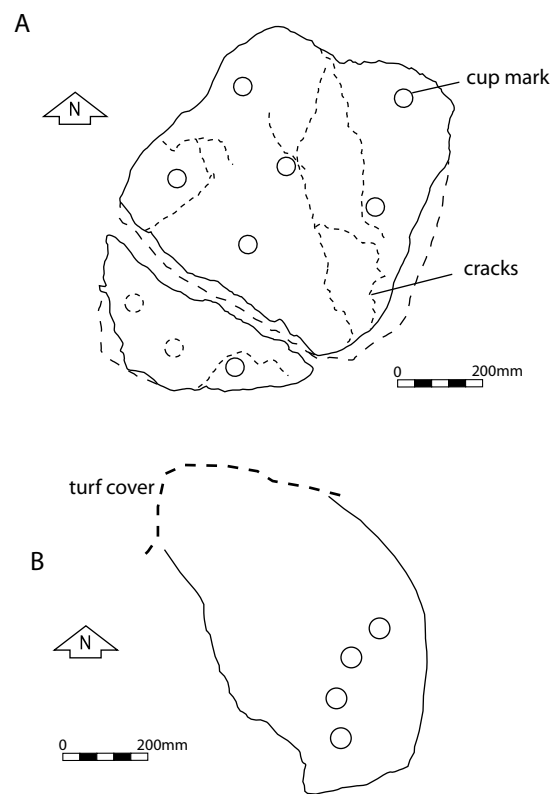


FIG 2

Pant-y-Ilan stones A West B East



A



B

FIG 3

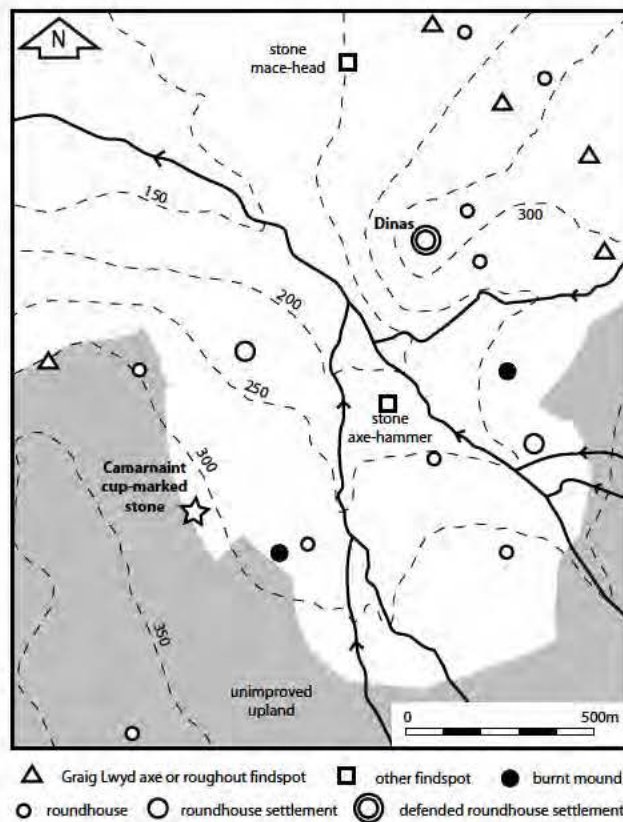


FIG 4

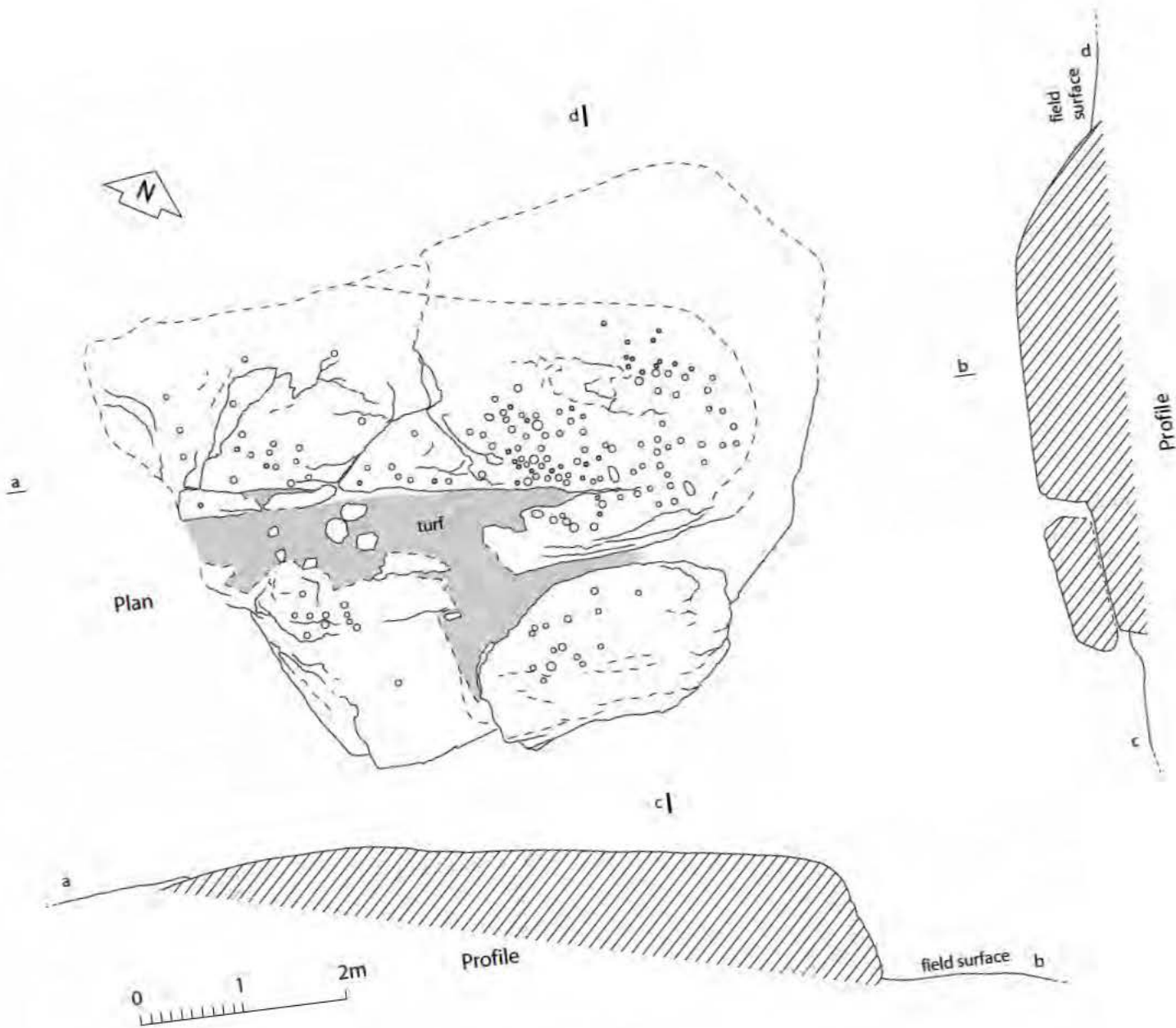


FIG 5

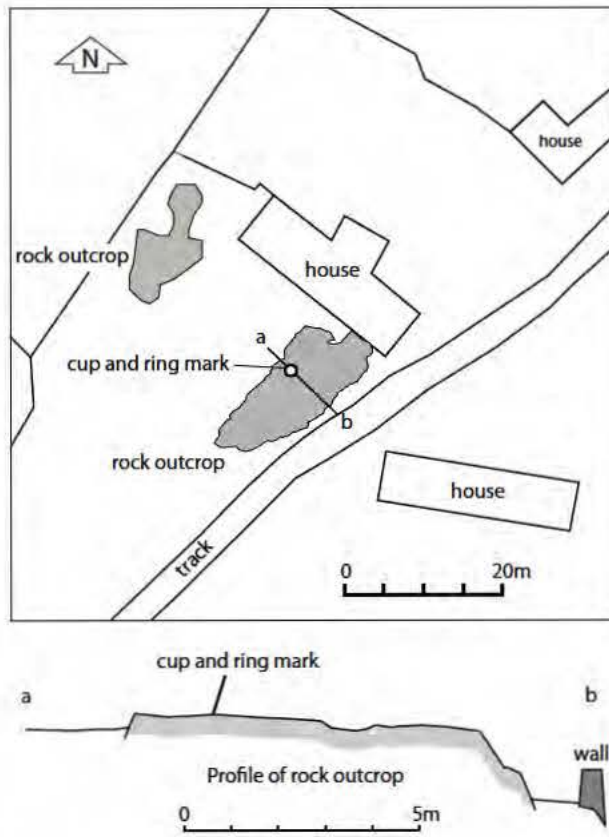


FIG 6

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