

A470(T) CANCOED TO MINFFORDD
IMPROVEMENT
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING (G1336)

REPORT NO. 172

Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Gwynedd
Gwynedd Archaeological Trust

A470(T) CANCOED TO MINFFORDD IMPROVEMENT

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING (G1336)

prepared for Welsh Office Highways Directorate

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1. INTRODUCTION

As part of its scheme to upgrade the A470(T) north of Blaenau Ffestiniog, the Welsh Office is proposing improvements to the stretch between Cancoed and Minffordd. Gwynedd Archaeological Trust were contracted to undertake the recording of specific archaeological features in advance of the improvements.

2. BACKGROUND

An archaeological assessment of the proposed improvements was carried out in 1992 and the results incorporated in the environmental statement prepared for the Welsh Office Highways Directorate (A470(T) BLAENAU FFESTINIOG TO BETWS-Y-COED ROAD IMPROVEMENT - ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT APPENDIX B - HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION, April 1993). Five of the sites described within that report were identified for archaeological recording as recommended within the assessment report. The sites identified were:

47. Small quarry SH70815030

A small roadside quarry.

48. Rectangular depression SH70945064

A rectangular depression in flat, wet land beside the road; the area to the north seems raised and drier.

49. Agricultural building SH71585125

Originally a gabled stone building apparently of some antiquity, this has been modified by having the eaves raised and an extension added to the rear.

51. Old stone wall SH71655132

Old wall enclosing small area, ground surface higher within.

55. Mill race and buildings SH72185185

Well below the road on the east side, the old mill race can still be seen, with two buildings either or both of which could have been mills. The north is an inhabited house, the south is empty but the land is still in use.

3. THE PROJECT DESIGN

In consultation with the curator, the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust Contracts Section prepared a project design to address the archaeological implications of the improvements. The site specific recommendations were as follows:

47. Small quarry: provide a photographic record and a written description of the principle features.

48. Rectangular depression: provide a photographic record and an annotated Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map. It is also recommended that the site is investigated as part of a watching brief once work is started on the road improvements.

49. **Agricultural building:** provide a photographic record and a written description, to include a sketch plan noting relevant dimensions.

51. **Old stone wall:** provide a photographic record and a written description.

55. **Mill race and buildings:** the remaining features are to be recorded by a written description and a photographic record, with sketch plans where appropriate.

4. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

4.1 The photographic record All photographs were taken on black and white film (Kodak Tmax 400 ASA). General views were taken to place the feature/structure within its setting. Where appropriate all external elevations were taken as close to a 90 degree angle to each elevation as possible. Detailed views were taken of features where appropriate; all detailed views contain a scale. The location and direction of all views have been marked on a 1:2500 scale map, and a catalogue of the photographs is appended to this report. Selected views have also been taken on slide film (Kodachrome ASA 200).

4.2 The written record Written descriptions were made of the site or feature concerned, giving an overall concise and objective description, with measurements and sketch plans where appropriate.

5. RESULTS

5.1 SITE DESCRIPTIONS

Site 47 Small quarry

A small roadside quarry within an area of slate belonging to the Carneddau group. The quarry is depicted on the OS 1:2500 map of 1914, and probably related to small scale repair work carried out to the road some time during the latter half of the 19th century.

The quarry lies on the east side of the main road between Dolwyddelan and Blaenau Ffestiniog, south of a bend in the road. The site is surrounded by a forestry plantation on 3 of its sides and its interior is predominantly turfed over with bracken, heather and reed growth. It has been excavated into the slope of the hill, and is approximately rectangular in shape with its main axis orientated southwest - northeast. The rock strata appears to dip to the north-west. The quarry measures some 11m in length, by 4.5m wide (maximum). The junction of the quarry and the road is marked by a low wall of boulders, one course high, which extends right across the mouth of the quarry. A drilled charge-hole, for blasting, located on the north-west side of the quarry approximately half way along, illustrates the means employed to extract the rock.

Site 48 Rectangular depression

This site is visible as an amorphous shaped depression, nearly rectangular, measuring, at the top, 6.9 m long and 3.9 m wide and between 0.5 and 0.7 m deep. A curving channel enters the depression from the west. The details of the site are shown in fig. 2b. The area is extremely boggy and it is likely that the rectangular feature forms part of a relatively recent drainage system. A number of inter-connecting drainage ditches are located in the area. Adjacent to the south and west are the remains of a raised causeway with evidence of stone metalling, also visible are a number of scoops (the largest c. 17 m across) probably associated with the construction of the causeway. This appears to be a redundant length of road connecting the main road with the trackway which leads north-west to the early 19th century route between Blaenau Ffestiniog and Pont Sarn-ddu, via the farm of Hen Gorddian.

5.1.3 Site 49 Agricultural building

Situated in the north-east corner of an irregularly shaped field is a 2 storey stone and corrugated iron agricultural building. The north-west portion of the building comprises a corrugated iron extension built against the elevation of the earlier stone building, the whole is under a single pitch corrugated iron roof.

The stone-built structure at the core of the present building is a substantially altered 18th or 19th century field barn or cowshed. It is rectangular in plan, 10.15m long by 5.7m (max) in width with its main axis running southwest - northeast; the original structure would probably have been single storey, with a pitched roof and possibly a hay loft.

The building is constructed of local rubble and is lightly mortared, the gable angles have large narrow quoins. The top of the original wall is visible at a height of 1.55 m; the walls are on average 1.10m thick. The building's original entrance appears to have been in the north-east gable elevation, which was 1.15m high by 1.51m wide; this is now a window (0.93m tall). This entrance had splayed internal jambs, and an external projecting slate lintel, acting as a drip slab. The south-east elevation now contains the main entrance: this is rectangular with a slate lintel and external outwardly splayed jambs, it measures 1.75m high by 1.05m wide (max) and contains a recent glass and wood panelled door.

The south-east elevation and the adjoining returned sides of both gables have been built up with mortared cut slate blocks to accommodate the later single pitch corrugated roof. The north-west rake of both gables have also been built up, and drystone material is used to bring the walls to their present roof height.

The rear or north-west elevation is now encased within the later extension. The north-west wall of the original part of the structure has been raised using re-claimed windows to bridge the gap between the original wall plate and the new roof. A further doorway and window have been inserted in this elevation, to allow internal access to the rear corrugated extension.

All internal timbers, including the joists of the first floor, are soft wood and are contemporary with the later corrugated extension. Nothing of interest was noted inside the building.

5.1.4 Site 51 Old stone wall

A roughly "L" shaped length of walling running north from the A470(T) south-west of the railway bridge and west of Bertheos. The wall is constructed of a mixture of quarried local stone and field clearance material. It stands to a height of c. 1.5m and retains an upright capping along most of its length. This drystone field boundary is typical of local work of the 18th and early 19th century.

The irregular shaped field, largely obscured by bracken, rises to the east in the direction of the road. The field boundary pre-dates the construction of the railway, which cuts through its northern half. It is also likely to pre-date the main road, which dates in this area from no earlier than the mid 19th century; the original route lay to the west of Roman Bridge station, crossing the Afon Lledr at Pont Sarn-Ddu.

No archaeological remains of any particular age or interest were noted in the immediate area. The rise in ground level mentioned in the initial assessment report is now considered to be the natural foot of the hill side where it rises from the river terrace.

5.1.5 Site 55 Mill race and buildings

The site is situated east of the A470(T) at Minffordd. The area contains the partially destroyed mill race; a small stone structure; the dwelling known as Bod unig; a series of rectangular

ponds; and the woollen factory, now a dwelling and not affected by the present scheme.

The mill race runs north from the Afon Lledr, where water originally entered via a sluice gate, passing just west of the small stone structure and the house of Bod unig, then curving round to the north-east, where it would have driven a wheel situated against the south elevation of the woollen factory. The original race has been partially destroyed towards its south end, by infilling and re-cutting, but sufficient remains to allow its construction to be examined. The feature varies in width, but is between 2.0 and 2.0m wide and up to 1.0m in depth.

South of Bod unig and just to the east of the mill race lies a small structure 4.3 long by 3.97m wide, walls 0.5m thick. It is roughly rectangular in plan with a curved south-east corner. Its main axis runs northeast - southwest. A small compound is situated adjacent to the west of the structure; open along its north side, its west and south sides are delineated by a drystone wall which abuts the curved south east-corner of the building. The mill race continues diagonally through the compound, passing under the southern enclosure wall. The wall is carried over the mill race, supported by a lintel set on rough boulder piers.

The small structure is constructed largely of drystone masonry. Evidence of 2 phases of construction was noted: the height and length of the original structure had been increased, while the positions of the gable walls were left un-altered. In its final phase, the originally single pitched roofed building gained a concrete floor, and a slate roof with red ceramic ridge tiles, mainly pitched as before towards the east, though now, in addition, a slight pitch towards the west. There are window openings in the north-west and north-east walls, the entrance lies at the east end of the south-east elevation and measures 0.95 X 1.84 (to the base of its softwood lintel). A wall stub remains against the north end of the north-east elevation, the remains of an enclosure which once lay to the north-east of the building. The exact use of the building is unknown, but it may originally have been a duck house, and more latterly a storeshed.

Neither the above structure nor the dwelling, known as Bod unig, are shown on the Tithe map of 1841, or on the earlier first edition 1" Ordnance Survey map. It is highly likely that these buildings and the nearby woollen mill date from the latter half of the 19th century at the earliest.

The main building at Bod unig comprises a linearly arranged 2 storey dwelling with an outbuilding at the south end, all under pitched slate roofs. The group has undergone much alteration and few original features survive, the exterior is now hidden under hard modern cement render. A large boulder projecting on the west side could represent the northern extent of a boulder plinth which underlies the original building, and suggests that those parts of the building further to the north are later additions. The outbuilding retains an original entrance, with wooden lintel, in its east elevation. The west side elevation of the outbuilding has 3 rectangular recesses and indicates that the structure was originally open to that side. The mill race is culverted as it passes to the west of Bod unig.

To the north-east of Bod unig is a connected group of three large and two smaller ponds. The group is fed from the mill race via a sluice and pre-fabricated concrete channel. All the ponds are rectangular in shape, the larger are divided internally in two by earth and boulder banks. In each case concrete and wood sluices were used to regulate the flow of water between the two compartments. These features probably represent the remains of an abandoned commercial venture, which utilised the already existing water system. The nature of the venture is not known, but fish farming is a possibility.

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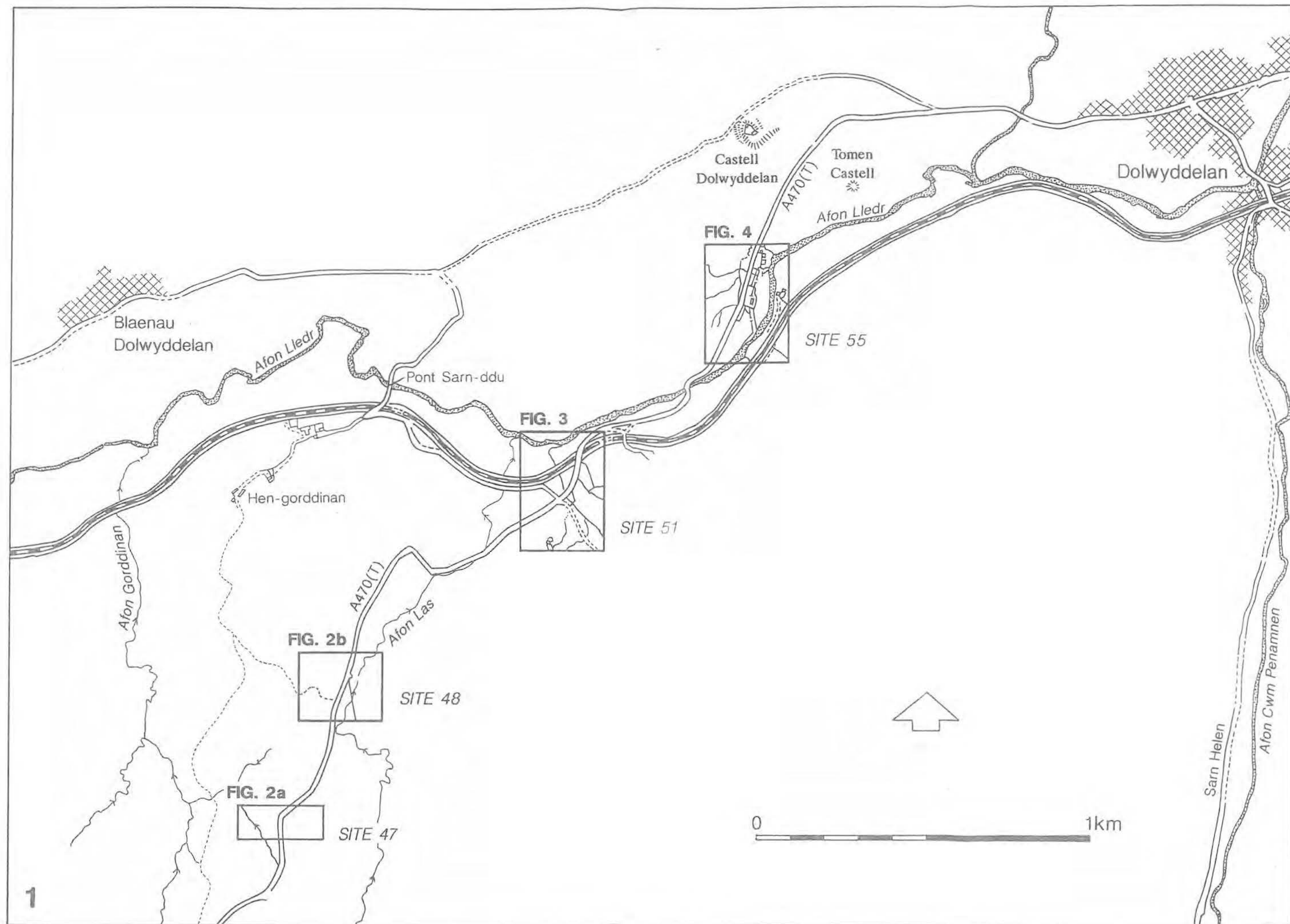
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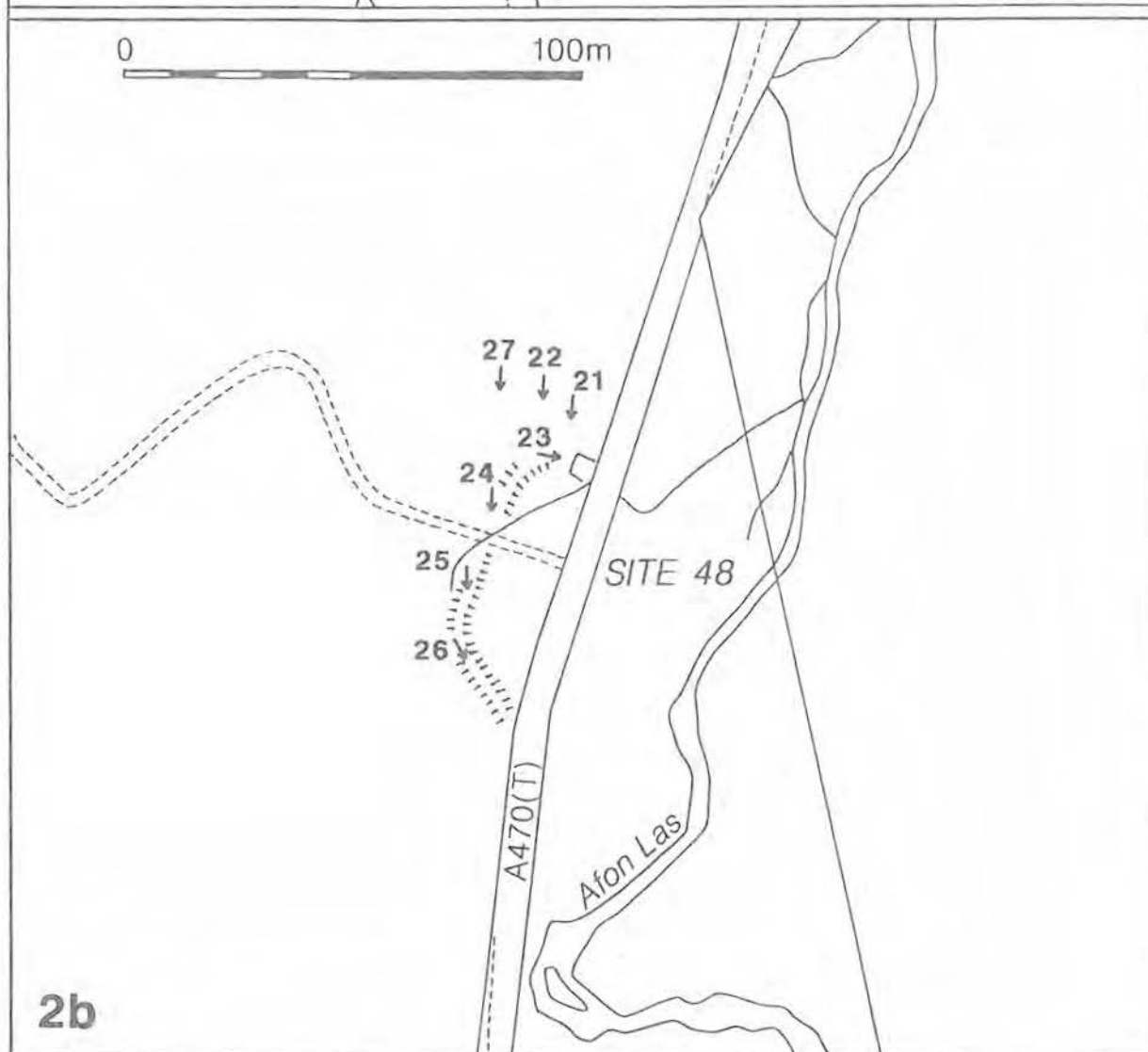
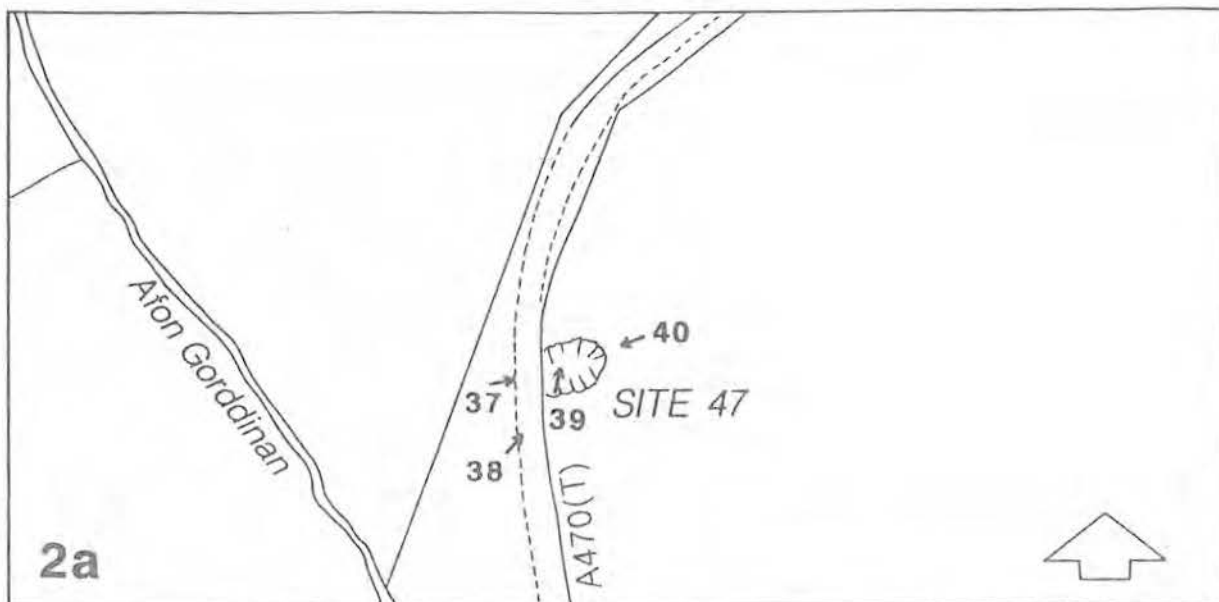
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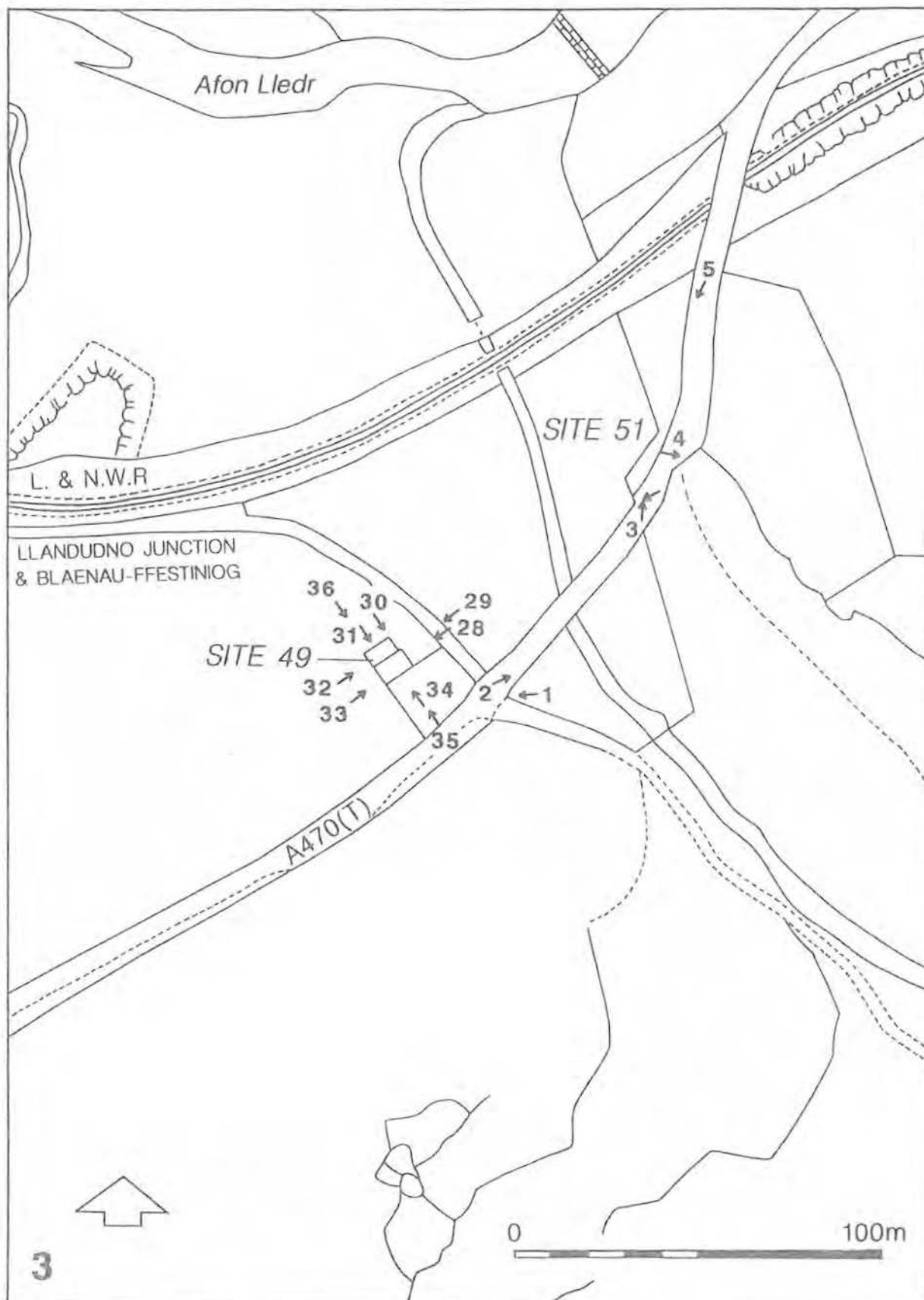
APPENDIX I

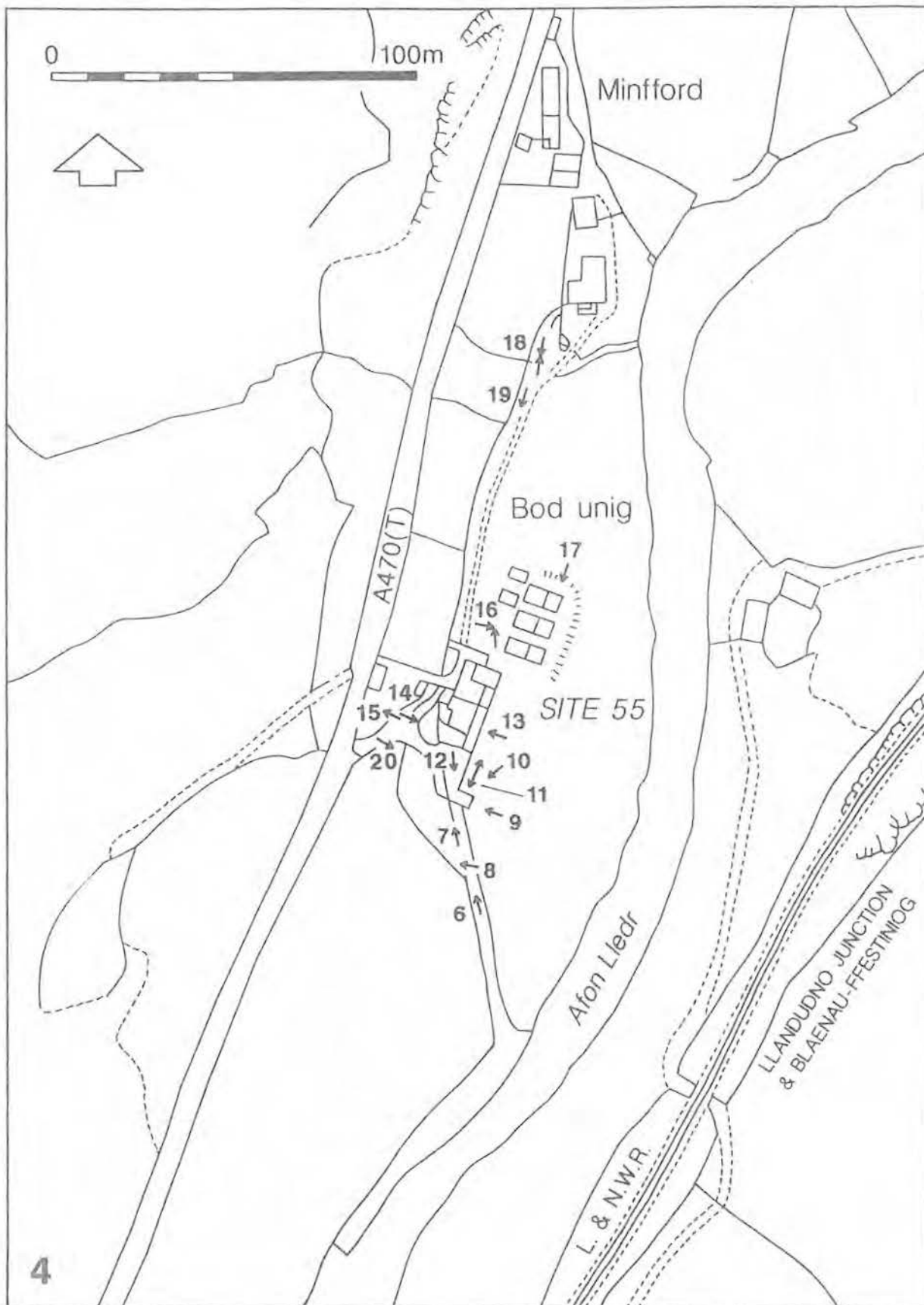
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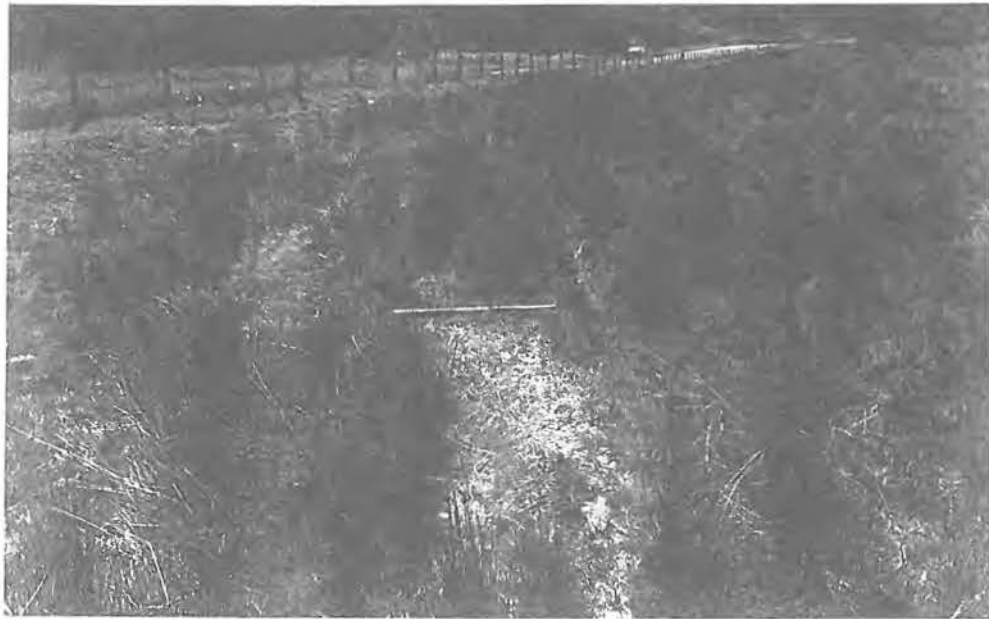


Plate 1 - Site 48: Causeway, view from NW (G1336/1/24)



Plate 2 - Site 48: Depression, view from W (G1336/1/21)

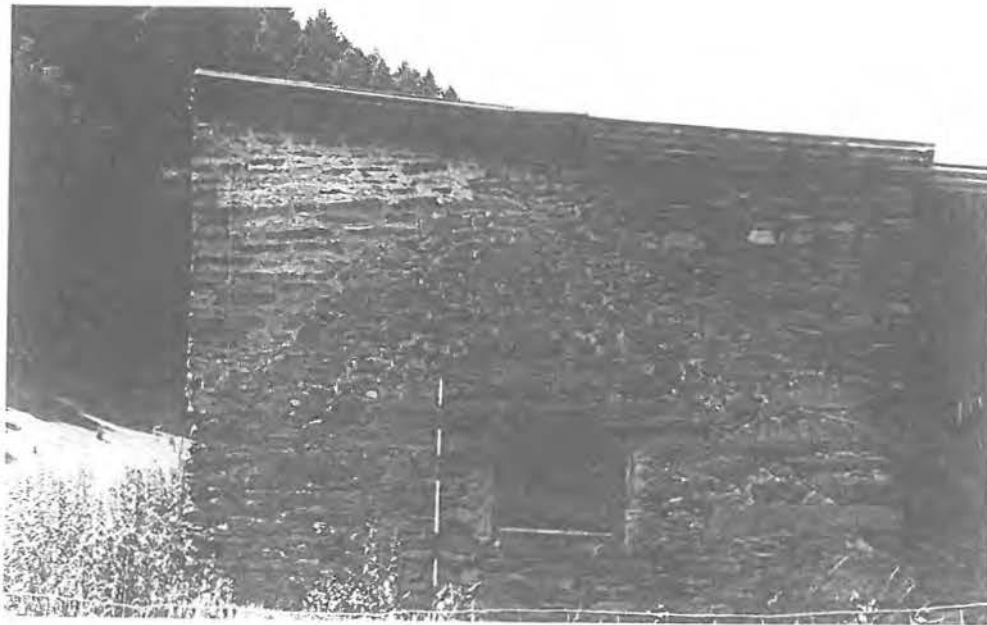


Plate 3 - Site 49: NE elevation (G1336/1/27)

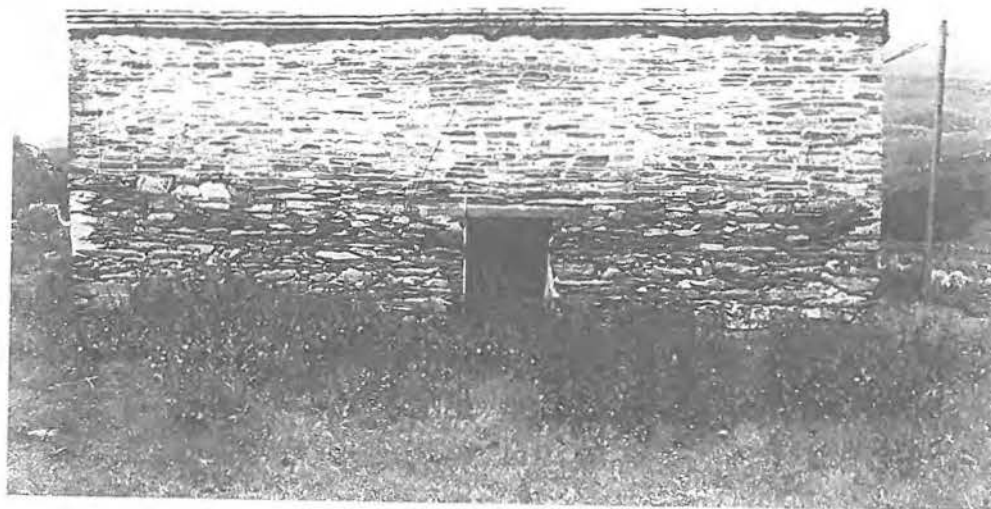


Plate 4 - Site 49: SE elevation (G1336/1/35)



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