

EXCAVATION AT CRUGIAU CEMMAES 2012: INTERIM REPORT



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EXCAVATION AT CRUGIAU CEMMAES 2012: INTERIM REPORT

Gan / By

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SUMMARY

Following geophysical surveys in 2009 and 2010 four trenches were excavated across ditches of two large enclosures detected during the surveys adjacent to Crugiau Cemmaes scheduled round barrows. The ditches were found to be substantial features, up to 4.5m wide and 2.7m deep, indicating a probable defensive function. They were cut through fluvio-glacial sands and gravels. As the ditch fills comprised clean, soft layers of re-deposited sands and gravels with very little charcoal or other occupation material it is likely that these ditches were not long-lived features in the landscape. Evidence for banks alongside the ditches was present in just one trench. A hollow, possibly a hut platform lay alongside this possible bank. Artefacts were few, and apart from a Mesolithic flint microlith from the top of the natural sands and gravels, consisted of two un-diagnostic flint flakes. It was clear during the excavation that ploughing had cut into the soft geological deposits; this could account for the absence of any definite small archaeological features such as postholes. The excavation therefore demonstrated the substantial nature of the ditches detected in the geophysical surveys, but not their date and function.

INTRODUCTION

A round barrow cemetery known as Crugiau Cemmaes lies on two local summits (scheduled as PE197). Currently the scheduled area is split into four areas tight around the four barrows. In 2009, a geophysical survey of c. 8ha was undertaken on the two fields to the southwest, on either side of the southern two barrows. This survey (DAT report 2009/36) revealed a large ditched enclosures within the western field (already observed on aerial photographs). In the field to the east there was an oval enclosure with internal features, probably representing roundhouses and rectangular structures. The survey was extended to the north and northeast in 2010 including the two other scheduled barrows and other round barrows (DAT report 2010/22). This survey revealed evidence for some of these barrows, as well as extending the boundaries of the previous recorded enclosures (Fig. 1).

This combination of round barrows and large enclosures is unique in Pembrokeshire and possibly in Wales, and is potentially of great significance. The barrows are probably of Bronze Age date; elements of the enclosures have similarities with later prehistoric enclosed/defended settlements, but they could be of an entirely different character and date.

In early 2012, a project design for grant-aid to undertake evaluation excavation was accepted by Cadw. The Cadw grant was supplemented by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority making their archaeologist available for the excavation. The design was for three to four trenches spread across key elements of the unscheduled parts of the site with the intention of characterising the archaeological remains and potentially leading to extending the current limited scheduled area. Owing to access problems and re-seeding of a field, the excavation was confined to the western field of the complex.

METHODOLOGY

A mechanical excavator removed topsoil from four trenches. Following which excavation was undertaken using hand tools. Deep ditches were encountered in each of the four trenches. Owing to the depth of the ditches the sections across them had to be stepped in, resulting in a very narrow excavation trench at the base of the ditches. Recording was done using DAT's recording manual. Volunteers excavated the site under the supervision of experienced Trust and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority staff.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Two Bronze Age round barrows (PRNs 1142 & 1231) occupy a local summit, with a further four identified round barrows (PRNs 1143, 1144, 1234 & 99278) occupying a second local summit to the north (Fig. 1). Further round barrows (PRNs 1232, 1233 & 48326) have been previously recorded on lower ground to the east and west but were not detected in the 2009-11 geophysical surveys. See Photographs 1-4 for general views of the site.

The southern summit possibly lies within a large enclosure (PRN 1237) represented on its west side by two widely-spaced ditches. The line of the inner ditch (and possibly bank) runs close to the round barrows on the summit, the outer line a further c.50m to the west, at the top of a significant break of slope with an in-turned entranceway. There is no clear relationship with these ditches features east of the summit so the full extent of this enclosure (if indeed it is an enclosure) remains speculative.

An oval enclosure (PRN 99386) lies to the east of the southern summit. Its size and its ditched entranceway are typical of Iron Age enclosures of the region. Within it are square and circular anomalies possibly representing structures.

A complex of enclosures is visible surrounding the northern summit. A large ditched-enclosure (PRN 99385) c.290m across surrounds some of the known round barrows and extends further west, incorporating a field boundary. It is double-ditched on the north, west and south sides. There is a suggestion of smaller interior enclosures surrounding some of the round barrows, and an entranceway to the east fed by possible trackways. A large area to the northwest remains to be surveyed within this enclosure.

To the north of this enclosure (PRN 99385) is an unusual arrangement of further Bronze Age round barrows (PRNs 1144, 1234 & 99278), still occupying high ground and apparently associated with a further complex of features.

The geology of the site is fluvio-glacial sands and gravels. A quarry 500m to the north exploits these deposits.

EXCAVATION RESULTS

Trench 1 (enclosure PRN 99385)

Trench 1, 15m x 2m, was located over the eastern (inner) of two concentric linear anomalies, presumed to be ditches, visible on the geophysical survey (Fig. 2; Photos. 4-5, and 10). Removal of the 0.35m – 0.5m thick topsoil/ploughsoil (1101, 1103) revealed the surface of the geological sand deposit (1113) through which was cut the ditch (1104) visible on the geophysical survey. Roots and burrows had penetrated the geological deposit and its surface was scarred by plough marks (Photos. 6-7). Two or three small possible postholes were visible on the surface of the sand deposit. On excavation their characters proved inconclusive, but are more likely to be the result of disturbances rather than structural. A Mesolithic microlith (1602) was found in this geological sand deposit.

The ditch (1104) was c.3.2m wide and c.1m deep with an open V-shaped profile. Its fills comprised successive layers of slightly different coloured sand (1121, 1109, 1119) with the primary sand layer (1120) containing some rounded stones up to 120mm diameter, including a flint nodule. Other than these stones the ditch fills contained few inclusions such as charcoal flecks. They are probably the result of natural infilling rather than deliberate backfill.

Trench 2 (enclosure PRN 99385)

Trench 2, 15m x 2m, was located over a strong geophysical linear anomaly, presumed to be a ditch with a bank to the north. The ditch here runs east/west (Fig. 3; Photos. 8 and 11-12). To the west it curves round to the north and runs concentrically to the ditch examined in Trench 2. Geological deposits in this trench comprised sand with bands of fine gravel.

The ditch (2204) visible on the geophysical survey was c.4.5m wide and c.1.8m wide, with an open V-shaped profile, and was filled with several layers of different coloured sand/gravel (2205, 2214, 2215, 2212, 2217, 2218, 2222) probably representing natural accumulation of material.

Owing to the soft character of the sand and gravels, root penetration and animal burrows, deposits to the north of the ditch are not easy to interpret. However, it would seem that a bank composed of material (2202, 2213) up-cast from digging the ditch lay immediately to the north. At the ditch lip it overlay probable geological deposits (2220), but at its northern end it may have rested on an old ground surface/buried soil (2236), but this was not investigated. Layers of sand/gravel (2207, 2209, 2237, 2216) eroded from the bank lay to the north. It would seem that these layers had eroded into a hollow (possibly a hut platform) or second ditch, defined on its northern side by natural sands and gravels (2224, 2225). The lower deposits of this possible hollow/ditch were not excavated. A small posthole (2227) cut through the uppermost (2224) of these deposits. Several stake-holes may have been associated with this posthole, but these were not distinct features.

Trench 3 (enclosure PRN 1237)

Trench 3, 15m x 2m, was positioned to investigate a distinct north/south geophysical anomaly, almost certainly a ditch running below and immediately to the west of Crugiau Cemmaes round barrows.

The ditch (3311) lay directly below the 0.3m thick topsoil/ploughsoil and was cut through geological deposits of sand, silty-sand and gravel (3303), although due to root and animal disturbance the upper edges of the ditch were not clearly defined (Fig. 4; Photo. 13). It had a steep-sided, V-shaped profile, c.3.7m wide and 2.7m deep. The upper ditch fills (3306, 3312) had a high humic content; lower fills comprised almost pure sand and silty-sand with a few stones (3316, 3317, 3318, 3319, 3325, 3324, 3321, 3322, 3323). Outside the confines of the ditch, deep plough marks scored the surface of the geological deposits.

Trench 4 (enclosure PRN 1237)

Trench 4, 15m x 2m, was located across a north/south linear geophysical anomaly, probably a ditch, immediately to the north of a gap in through the ditch. The terminals of the ditch at the gap have an easterly in-turn, suggesting a formal entrance. Geological deposits consisted of sand, sandy-silt, gravel and pebbles.

The ditch (4410) was located below the 0.3m thick topsoil/ploughsoil (4401). It was c.5.5m across and c.2m deep (Fig. 5; Photo. 14). The lower half of the ditch had a steep-sided V-shaped profile. At c.1m from the bottom the ditch edges flared out to produce the very wide profile of this feature. The upper edges of the ditch were not obvious, particularly on the eastern side, but became clear with depth. The upper ditch fills (4403, 4409) had a humic element, which decreased with depth. Lower fills (4414, 4415, 4416, 4417, 4418, 4419) were comprised almost entirely of unmodified sands, silts and gravel, with virtually no charcoal flecks or other inclusions. An exception was a thin charcoal-rich layer (4411; Photo. 9). Outside the confines of the ditch, deep plough marks scored the surface of the geological deposits. Two struck flint flakes were found in the topsoil (4401).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The excavation was directed by P Crane (Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority) with support from H Wilson, M Bell and E Davies of Dyfed Archaeological Trust. The Trust would like to thank the numerous volunteers for their hard work during the excavation. The Trust is also indebted to Robert Davies for allowing the excavation on his land. The report was written by K Murphy.

ARTEFACTS

A number of artefacts retained during the excavation were either modern from topsoil or natural stones; these were all disposed of after examination in the office. Most of the natural stone was flint, and it is assumed that this must occur in the geological sand and gravel deposits. The following artefacts have been retained:

Small find 1602, Trench 1, context 1113. Mesolithic microlith in pale, almost white flint.

Small find 1, Trench 4, context 4401. Small flint flake.

Small find 4, Trench 4, context 4001. Small flint flake.

CHARCOAL SAMPLES

Sample 1702, Trench 1, context 1115. Fragments of charcoal (2 bags).

Sample 2702, Trench 2, context 2217. Fragments of charcoal.

Sample 2703, Trench 2, context 2219. Fragments of charcoal.

Sample 2704, Trench 2, context 2219. Fragments of charcoal.

Sample 3702, Trench 3, context 3324. Fragments of charcoal.

Trench 3, context 2209. Fragments of charcoal.

Sample 4701, Trench 4, context 4411. Fragments of charcoal.

Sample 4702, Trench 4, context 4411. Fragments of charcoal.

BULK SAMPLES

Sample 4701, Trench 4, context 4411

Sample 4702, Trench 4, context 4411

Sample 4703, Trench 4, charcoal sample

Sample 4704, Trench 4, charcoal sample

FIGURES

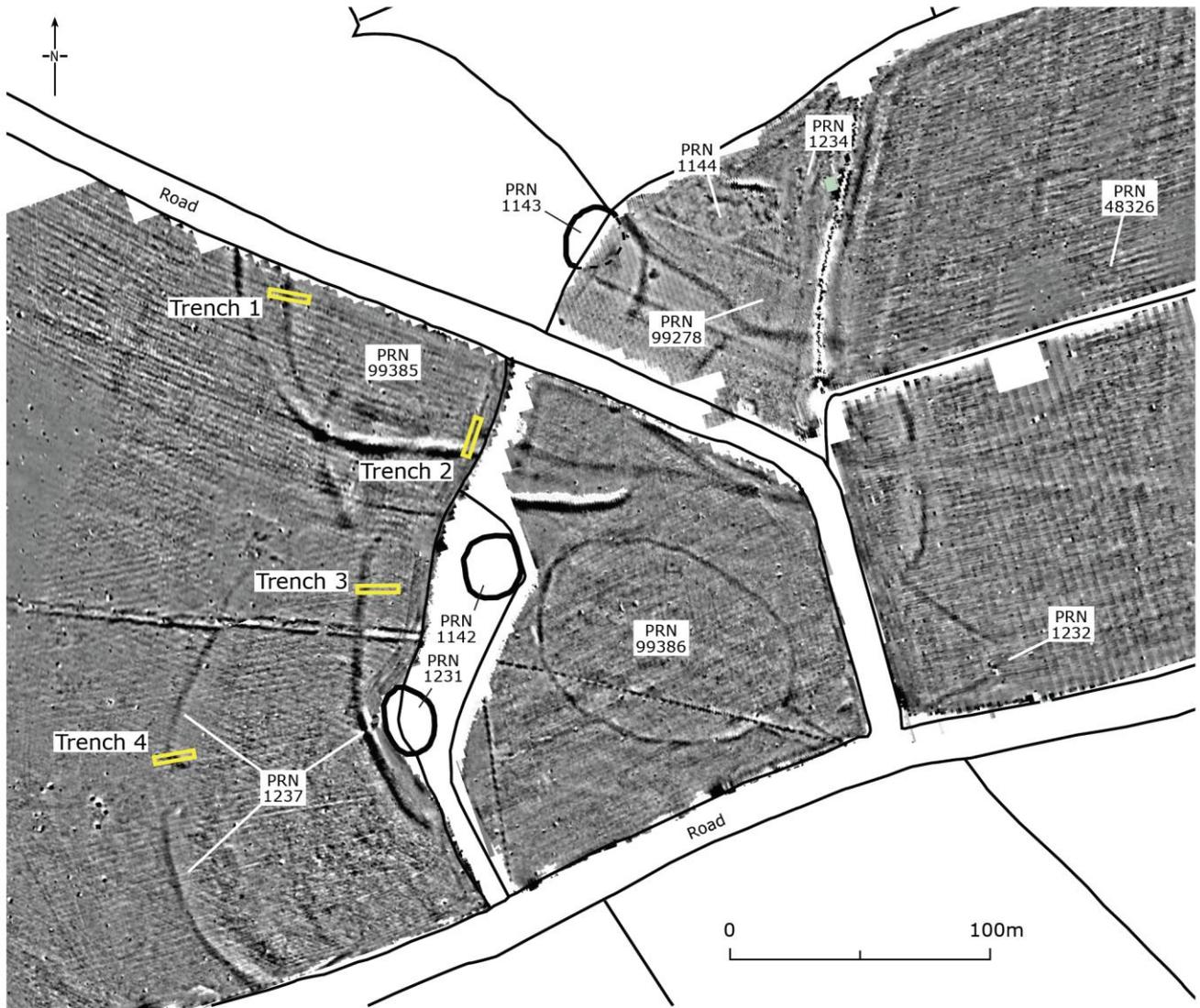


Figure 1: The geophysical survey showing the location of the excavation trenches.

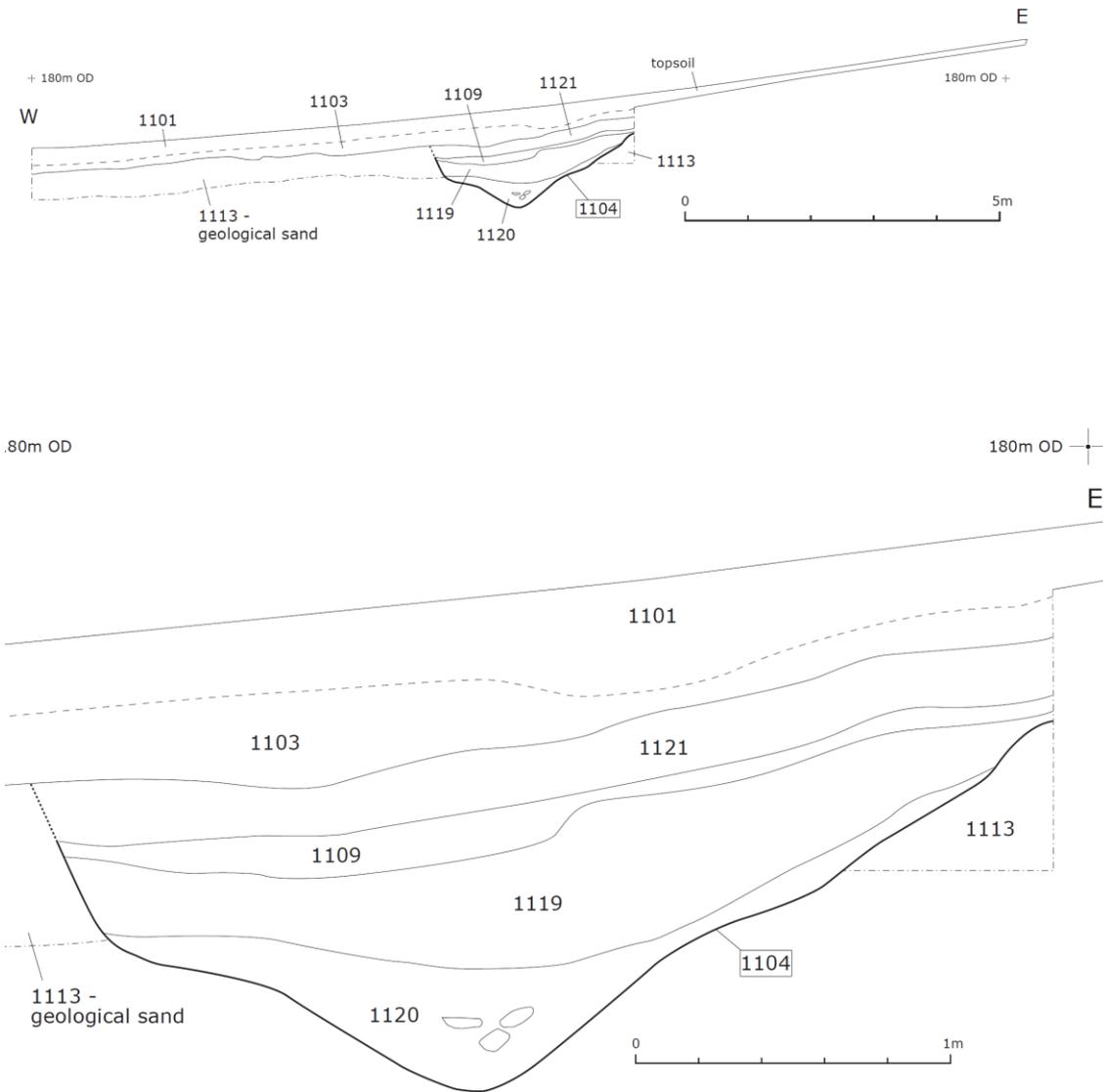


Figure 2: Section of Trench 1.

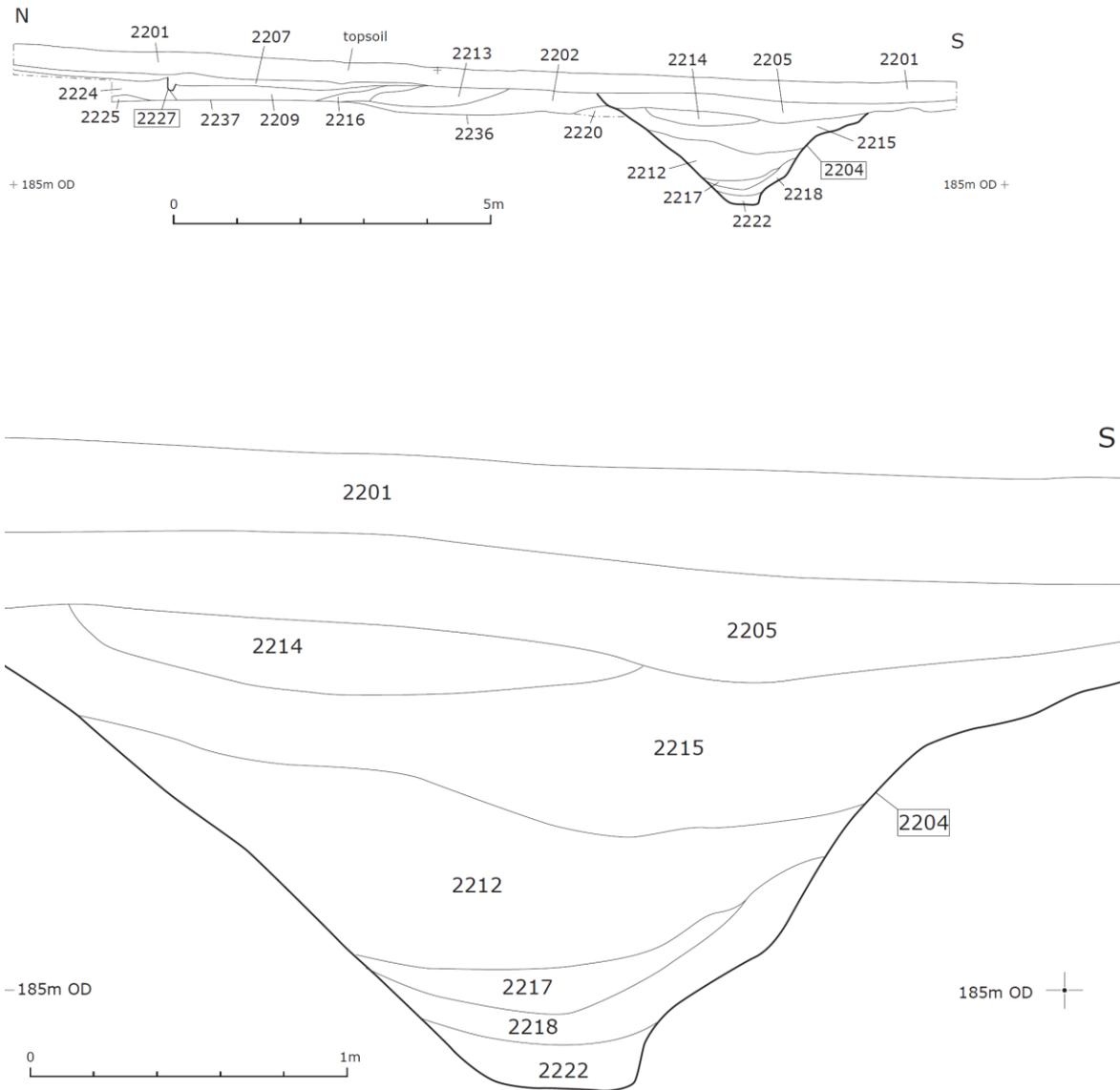


Figure 3: Section of Trench 2.

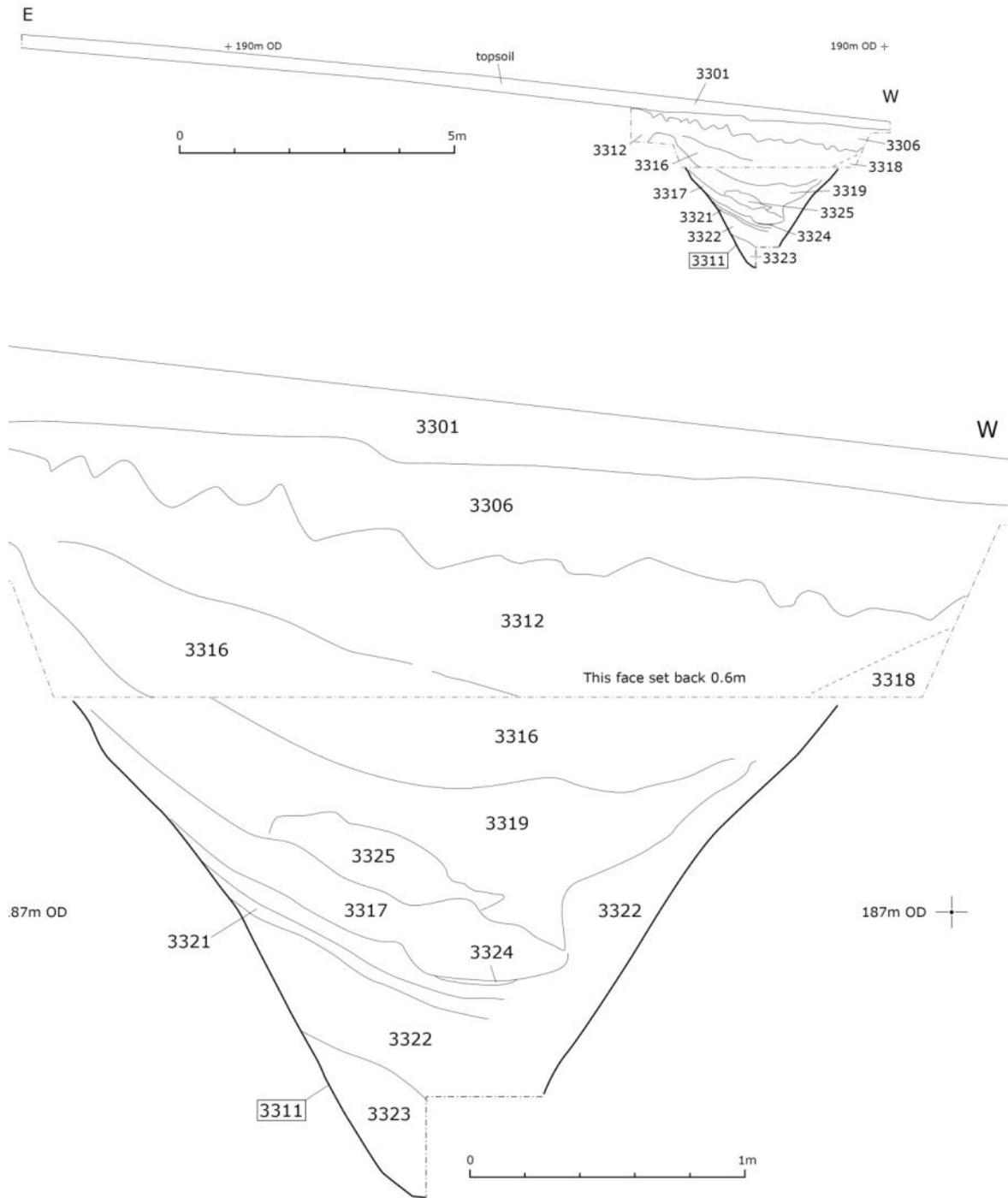


Figure 4: Section of Trench 3.

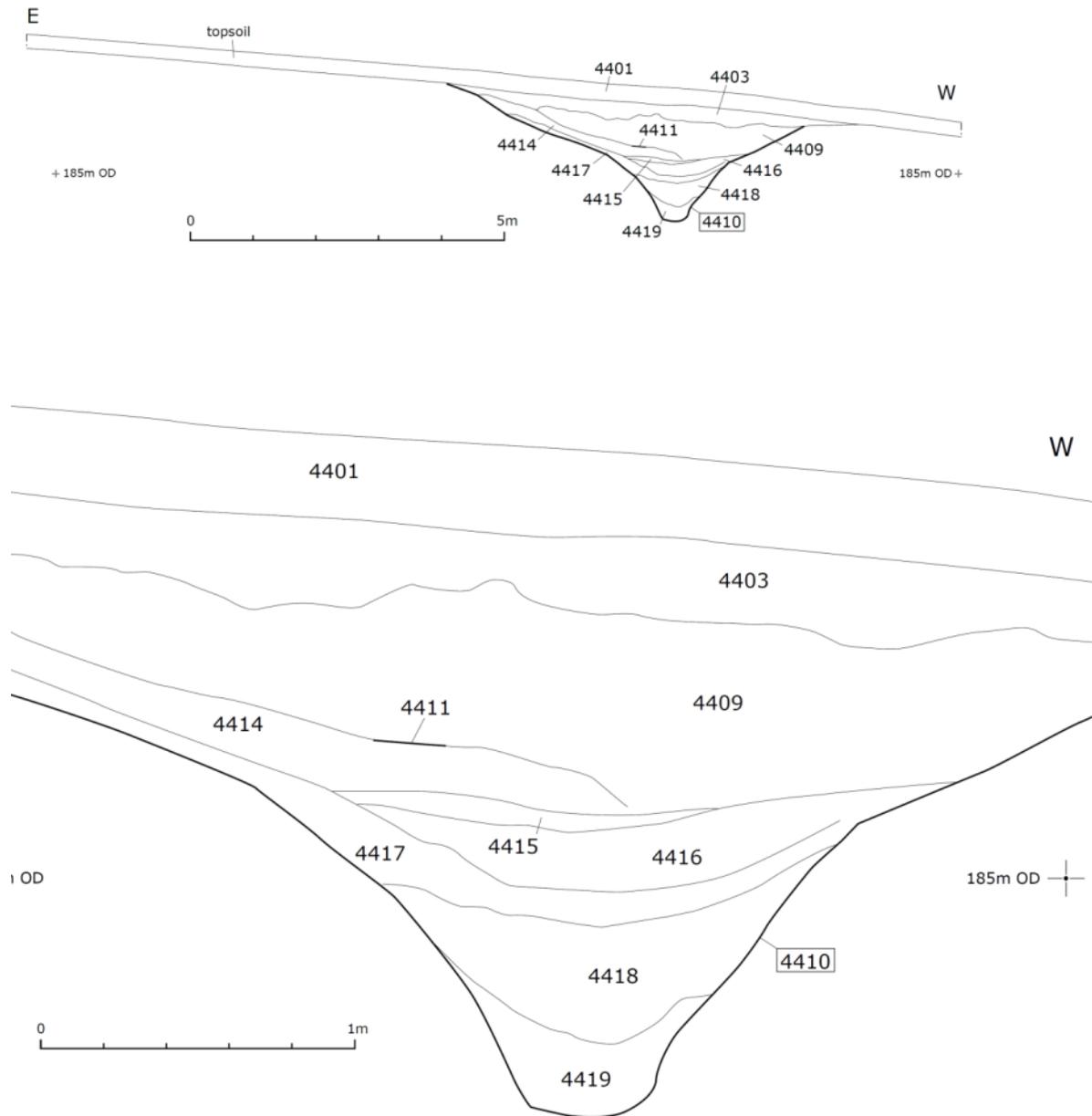


Figure 5: Section of Trench 4.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Photograph 1: General view of site looking east towards Trench 3 with the Crugiau Cemmaes barrows on the skyline.



Photograph 2: Looking north-west over Trench 1.



Photograph 3: Looking south towards Trench 4 with the Preseli Mountains in the background.



Photograph 4: Showing Trusts staff and volunteers engaged on the early stages of excavating Trench 1.



Photograph 5: Showing Trusts staff and volunteers engaged on the early stages of excavating Trench 1.



Photograph 6: Showing the plough-marks cut into the soft geological deposits of Trench 1.



Photograph 7: Showing the plough-marks cut into the soft geological deposits of Trench 4.



Photograph 8: The early stages of the excavation of Trench 2 with the surface of ditch 2204 clearly visible as a dark line of soil running across the Trench.



Photograph 9: The charcoal-rich deposit (4411) in ditch 4410 of Trench 4.



Photograph 10: Section of the completely excavated ditch 1104 in Trench 1. Scale 2m long, looking north.



Photograph 11: Section of the completely excavated ditch 2204 in Trench 2. Scales 1m long. Looking east.



Photograph 12: View of the excavated ditch 2204 in Trench 2. Scales 2m and 1m, looking north-west.



Photograph 13: Section of the excavated ditch 3311 in Trench 3.
Scale 2m, looking north.



Photograph 14: Ditch 4410 in Trench 4. Scales 2m long looking south-west.

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Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date 14.12.2012

Mae'r adroddiad hwn wedi ei gael yn gywir a derbyn sêl bendith
This report has been checked and approved by J Meek

ar ran Ymddiriedolaeth Archaeolegol Dyfed Cyf.
on behalf of Dyfed Archaeological Trust Ltd.

Swydd / Position: Head of Field Services

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date 14.12.2012

Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau
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