

EXCAVATION OF TWO BRONZE AGE ROUND BARROWS AT PANT Y BUTLER, LLANGOEDMOR, CEREDIGION, 2009



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For Cadw



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EXCAVATION OF TWO BRONZE AGE ROUND BARROWS AT PANT Y BUTLER, LLANGOEDMOR, CEREDIGION, 2009

Gan / By

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SUMMARY

Two round barrows were sample excavated in 2009, following geophysical survey in the previous year. Very little survived of the smaller of the two barrows, although a central grave was located and excavated. This contained a cremation burial with no grave goods. It is likely that this grave had disturbed an earlier burial as burnt bone, charcoal and sherds of a presumed Bronze Age urn were scattered in and over it. What little survived of this barrow suggests that it was a cairn rather than an earthen mound. The central grave of the larger barrow was not located. This barrow survived up to 0.5m high and 15-18m diameter and was built of earth, mainly turf, but with a little stone. A feature on the top of the surviving mound seemed to be burnt plank in a stone setting. A stone-filled pit close by is likely to be modern, and possibly represents an antiquarian excavation conducted when the barrow stood to a far greater height.

INTRODUCTION

Two round barrows were identified on land belonging to Dyffryn Farm, Llangoedmor, Ceredigion in 2004. Both were under an intensive arable regime, with annual ploughing/fertilising. In 2004, the barrows had been ploughed and were readily visible as spreads of stone on low circular mounds. In 2008, the fields in which the barrows were located were fertilised by deep ploughing waste milk products into the ground.

Because of this ongoing threat from agriculture to the barrows an application was made to Cadw for grant aid to assess their character and condition. This application was successful and a geophysical and topographic survey in 2008 was followed by an excavation in 2009. The excavation took place over two weeks in late September – early October.

Participation by members of the local community was planned as an important element of the project from the outset, and during the excavation two Dyfed Archaeological Trust staff members supervised approximately 20 volunteers.

The barrows lie on a rounded ridge at c. 130m above sea level (Fig. 1. National Grid Reference SN 2146 4670). The land falls steadily away to the east, south and west but rises to the north, reaching a ridge summit at 170m 1.5km away. Geology comprises Ordovician siltstone/mudstone (British Geological Survey 1994), with the bedding planes in vertical or near vertical formation. During excavation this shale varied from being hard and consolidated through to broken and shattered. In places pockets of silt overlay bedrock.

The northernmost of the barrows was the larger of the two (Primary Record Number on the Dyfed Historic Environment Record 55928) surviving prior to excavation as a sub circular mound c. 0.75m high, and c. 45m east-west by 36m north-south. The smaller barrow (PRN 55929) lay about 50m to the southwest. In 2009, it was almost unnoticeable, being less than 0.2m high, with the diameter difficult to judge, but approximately 20m. Both of these barrows had more stone on their surfaces than was present in the rest of the field. Both barrows have suffered considerable damage, as the smaller one was visibly lower in 2009 than it had been in 2004, and the landowner, Mr David George, stated that the larger

one stood considerably higher when he purchased the land in the 1960s, and that he has removed stone off it over the years.

On the geophysical survey (Figs. 2 & 3) a 'halo' around the northern barrow shows quite clearly (prior to excavation this was considered likely to be a ditch). This halo is 18m to 20m in diameter. Concentric to this is a second, fainter one 27.7m diameter. There are a number of anomalies associated with this barrow: there are two dark patches on the west side and a smaller one or two to the west, where there is a suggestion of a central dark ring c. 5m diameter.

The location of the smaller barrow can only just be distinguished on the geophysical survey. There may be a small central feature, lighter with a darker exterior, and two dark anomalies, but none of these is certain.

There are three possible ring ditches of 7m, 8m and 23m diameters to the northeast of the larger barrow showing on the geophysical survey. However, all of these may be geological anomalies or caused by modern agricultural vehicles or by ploughing. A trench was excavated across these anomalies (not shown on Fig. 4) confirming them to be of non-archaeological character.

THE EXCAVATION

Round Barrow 55929 (Figs. 5-8)

Description - Two 1.8m wide trenches at right angles to each other were machine excavated across this barrow, crossing at the estimated centre of the mound (Photo. 1). These were later extended by hand.

Topsoil (1) was a fairly stone-free silty-loam, but towards the centre of the barrow a c. 4m-diameter area contained a mass of angular stones (2), including numerous pieces of quartz. It was considered possible that this was the *in situ* remains of the barrow and so was not removed by machine. However, it quickly became apparent that these stones had been turned over by the plough and so were rapidly removed by hand. A few stones (3) towards the centre of the mound lay within more consolidated soil and *may* have been undisturbed mound. A possible rubbing stone (104) was found in layer 3. Beneath the disturbed and possible undisturbed stones (2, 3), towards the eastern side of the barrow, was a thin layer of smashed bedrock (4) covering an area c. 2m by 4m, and resting partly on a buried soil (5, 51) and partly over the upper fill (6) of a pit (7). The buried soil comprised what seemed to be an old turf (5) - a hard mottled dark brown/orange brown silty clay loam - over the main body of the soil (51), a soft orange brown silty clay loam. The turf (5) had a projected diameter of c. 9m and the soil (51) c. 15m. A patch of charcoal and burnt soil (505) in the turf was sampled for later analysis. Modern ploughing had scraped across the top of the buried turf, but not ripped it up; it is likely that one more year of cultivation would have destroyed it.

The large pit (7), 2.3m by 1.5m and 0.55m deep, cut through the buried turf, and seemed to be slightly off centre of the surviving mound. The pit was the source of the smashed bedrock (4), which had been used to partly backfill the pit. Most of the backfill, however, comprised stones and boulders (mostly of quartz) in a dark brown soil (6, 8 - Photos. 2, 3). A quantity of burnt bone (101, 103, 106) and a few body sherds of undecorated Bronze Age pottery (109, 110, 112) were scattered in the backfill (6, 8), in the disturbed material (02) overlying the pit and also in the re-deposited bedrock (4). A flint flake (107) was found in fill 6. A cremation (9, 54) lay at the bottom of the pit. A concentration of burnt bone (9, 54) c. 0.2m across placed between two stones at the base of the pit (Photo. 4) suggests deposition in a bag or other organic container. Further stones were

revealed after excavation of the cremation (Photo. 5). Some bone was recovered during excavation (108), but most was collected in bulk samples (513, 514).

Removal of the buried soil (5, 51) revealed that it sealed a small, shallow pit (52), 0.64m diameter and 0.2m deep, containing an upper soil fill (10) and a burnt stone and charcoal-rich (53) lower fill (Photo. 7). Adjacent to this pit was a patch of charcoal and burnt stone (19) resting in a shallow hollow (19). There was heat reddening around both these features (Photo. 6).

Interpretation – The stone (2) incorporated in the topsoil and the possible *in situ* material (03) indicates that this barrow was partly, if not wholly, constructed of stone. Its original diameter is unclear, but assuming it had protected the buried turf (5) from destruction, then it was at least 9m across, and if the full extent of the buried soil taken then it may have been up to 15m across. The smooth buried soil indicates that the pre-barrow environment may have been grassland. The barrow was constructed over a central burial pit (7) containing a cremation (9, 54). The presence of burnt bone and sherds of Bronze Age pottery suggests that an earlier cremation had been disturbed by the digging of the large pit (7) and incorporated into its fill during backfilling. It is possible that the pit 52 and hollow 19 were associated with this postulated early cremation. However, pit 7 was cut through the buried soil (5, 51) and pit 52 and hollow 19 sealed by it, suggesting a substantial time lapse between the two events. Certainly there was no mound marking pit 52, hollow 19 and the possible earlier cremation and therefore any surface marker, which must have existed for the later pit to be excavated in the exact same position, has either left no trace or lay beyond the excavated area.

Round Barrow 55928 (Figs. 9-12)

Description – Topsoil was removed by machine in two 1.8m wide trenches at right angles to each other, crossing at the estimated centre of the mound. The remainder of the excavation was then done by hand. The mound and associated deposits were fully excavated in the east-west trench, but only the central part of the north-south trench was excavated.

Topsoil was a silt-loam, fairly stone-free apart from on the mound crest where there was a considerable amount of stone. A small fragment (105) of burnt bone from the topsoil close to centre of the mound may be from a dispersed secondary burial. The mound of the barrow seems to have been constructed in one operation although it comprised several identifiable layers. The main layer (31, 32) consisted of mottled lenses of grey/orange-brown silty-clay with lines of iron panning, and probably represents layers of stacked turfs. A large, upright monolith (25) had been incorporated into the body of the mound to the east of its centre, to the west of which the mound was composed of loose soil (24), probably old topsoil scraped up to form the mound. A layer of stones (22), many of which were quartz, butted up against the east side of the monolith, forming a distinct layer within the mound (Photos. 8, 10, 11, 12). The mound survived to a maximum of 0.5m high and was c. 15m east-west and 18m north south, with the actual centre probably slightly to the southeast of the trench crossing point. This probable centre was marked by a pit (43) cut through the top of the mound and into underlying deposits. Only part of it lay within the trench. It was filled with loose stones, with many voids, and loose soil (Photo. 13).

Close to the centre of the mound lying on layer 31 and directly below topsoil was a rectangular area of charcoal (23), 1.5m long and 1.3m wide and seemingly composed of a single plank of burnt wood (Photo. 9). The charcoal area lay within a setting of stones embedded into layer 31. It is likely that this feature originally lay at the base of a pit, a feature that had been reduced by ploughing and which one more year of cultivation would have removed.

A band of soft, stone free, silt (21) lay around the edge of the barrow, representing material eroded off the mound. This layer is almost certainly responsible for creating the 'halos' visible on the geophysical survey.

The barrow mound sealed a very distinct buried soil. This consisted of a pale grey clay-loam with iron-panning (26) over the main body of the soil (41), a soft silty-clay loam. Pockets of dark soil (33, 34, 36), possibly containing charcoal, were sealed by the buried soil, as was a shallow pit (38), which was filled with material (37) identical to the buried soil. An amorphous hollow (40) filled with a charcoal rich soil (35), also sealed by the buried soil, is likely to have been an old root channel or tree bole.

Two gullies (28, 30) ran across the excavation trench to the east of the barrow. Gully 28 lay beneath the silt layer 21 and was cut into bedrock. A perforated stone object (111), possibly a loom weight, was found in the silty fill (27) of this gully. Gully 30 was narrower than 28 and was cut from at least midway through layer 21 –its fill (29) was similar to 21.

Interpretation – Layers 22, 24, 31, 32 represent the remains of what would originally have been a very substantial earthen round barrow, at least 15-18m diameter but of unknown height. This seems to have been constructed mainly of turf, with pockets of topsoil and layers of stone – presumably material that was readily available. The buried turf beneath the barrow indicates a grassland environment; palaeoenvironmental analysis should confirm this. The burnt 'plank' on the top of the mound and burnt bone fragment from the topsoil are indications of secondary use of the barrow. The primary grave was not located; it presumably lies outside the excavation trenches. The stone filled pit (43) cut through the top of the mound may represent a past attempt to investigate the central grave, perhaps when the mound stood considerably higher and was more obviously a round barrow. Alternatively, it may have been dug to dispose of stone that was littering the mound and hindering agriculture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Approximately 20 enthusiastic local volunteers undertook the excavation under the supervision of K Murphy, F Murphy and H Wilson of the Dyfed Archaeological Trust. Trust staff and the volunteers would like to express their gratitude to David and Lynette George of Dyffryn Farm for allowing the excavation on their land and for their assistance during the excavation.

REFERENCES

British Geological Survey. 1994. *Geological Map of Wales. 1:250000 Scale. 1st Edition Solid.*

REGISTER OF SMALL FINDS

No.	Context	Comment
101	2	Burnt bone scattered through layer 2, probably same as 103, 106
102	1	Modern glass bottle fragment
103	3	Burnt bone, probably same as 101, 106
104	3	Possible rubbing stone
105	20	Fragment of burnt bone
106	6	Burnt bone, probably same as 101, 103
107	6	Flint flake
108	9	Burnt bone
109	2	Bronze Age? pottery, same vessel? as 110, 112
110	2	Bronze Age? pottery, same vessel? as 109, 112
111	27	Perforated stone artefact, loom weight?
112	6	Bronze Age? Pottery, same vessel? as 109, 110

REGISTER OF SAMPLES

No.	Context	Comment
501	6	Charcoal from upper fill of pit 7
502	9	Bulk sample following removal of bone
503	23	Bulk sample from burnt 'plank'
504	6	Charcoal sample upper fill of pit 7
505	5	Small 'bulk' sample from charcoal layer buried soil 5.
506	6	Charcoal from upper fill of pit 7
507	35	Bulk sample
508	31	Piece of roundwood charcoal from make up of mound - taken from area of bulk sample 509
509	31	Bulk sample from make up of mound
510	31	Charcoal from make up of mound taken from area of bulk sample 509
511	31	Bulk sample from base of 31, central area of mound
512	31	Charcoal sample within 31
513	10, 53	Bulk sample of cremation - contains burnt bone
514	54	Bulk sample below cremation - contains burnt bone
515	55	Bulk sample
516	26,39, 41,32	Column sample A
517	31,26,39,41	Column sample B

RESULTS OF THE VOLUNTEERS ASSESSMENT

Twenty forms were sent out to volunteers who participated on the excavation, of which 11 were returned, requesting information and opinions on the dig. The results are summarised below.

Demography of Volunteers

0-18	19-30	31-40	41-50	51-65	66+
	2	1		4	5

From the above table, which is representative of the volunteer group as a whole not just those that responded, two main groupings can be made out, those over 51, mainly retired people, and those under 30, who are students.

Quality and satisfaction

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
I have learnt something new about archaeology.	11		
I have gained new skills.	9	2	
I will use what I learnt in the future.	7	3	1
I have enjoyed myself.	11		
I'm inspired to find out more.	11		
The excavation met my expectations.	7	3	1

The above table shows that the majority of volunteers were satisfied with their time on the excavation.

Sources of information

The Web	Phone Call	Radio	Word of Mouth	Printed Material
1			8	2

It is of interest to note that most people learnt about the excavation by word of mouth. This was mainly through KM giving talks to local societies prior to the excavation taking place.

Other comments

As seen from the quotations below from volunteers on the excavation, most people's experience was very positive. The comment that some time should be devoted to briefing the team on recent findings on a regular basis is of interest, and will be acted upon in future projects.

'A wonderful, educational experience. It was rewarding and inspirational to experience tangible links with the past. As a lay-person, it was also rewarding to play an active part in an archaeological dig without being marginalised or patronised. Thank you for the opportunity.'

'DAT staff were magnificent, enthusiastic and inspiring.'

'There was a good mix of skills – Trust professionals, students and local volunteers; also a good mix of ages. It was possible to learn something from each other. Thanks for a good experience. The only thing I would question is whether the dig director could report to the team as a whole at regular intervals during a dig – not daily, but every so often – on findings

and interpretations. No matter that these will change over the course of a dig – that adds to the interest and fun – but otherwise people, particularly the uninitiated volunteer loses out on the big picture, and may gain little idea of what's going on apart from their own little bit of ground. Communication so important: so difficult.'

'The two weeks spent at the Pant y Butler site more than lived up to my hopes and expectations and gave me the chance to fulfil a long-term ambition. Everyone was friendly and willing to share knowledge and information, and to give me the opportunity to feel really involved. I learnt so much and am hoping to use this by participating in other such events given the chance.'

'I thoroughly enjoyed my experience. DAT staff were fantastic in explaining methods on my first 'proper' dig. My only regret is me not being able to fully commit my time.'

FIGURES

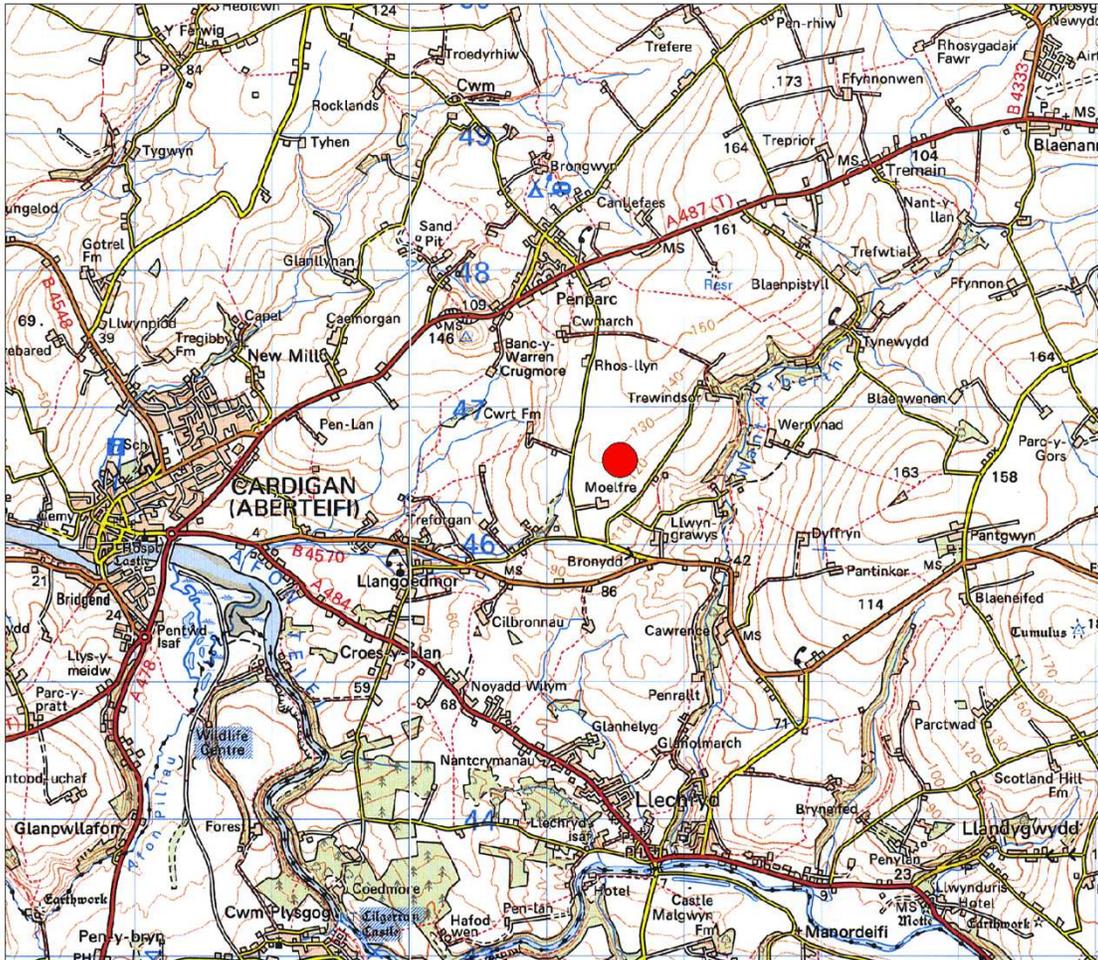


Figure 1. Location of the Pant y Butler excavation. Scale 1:50,000.

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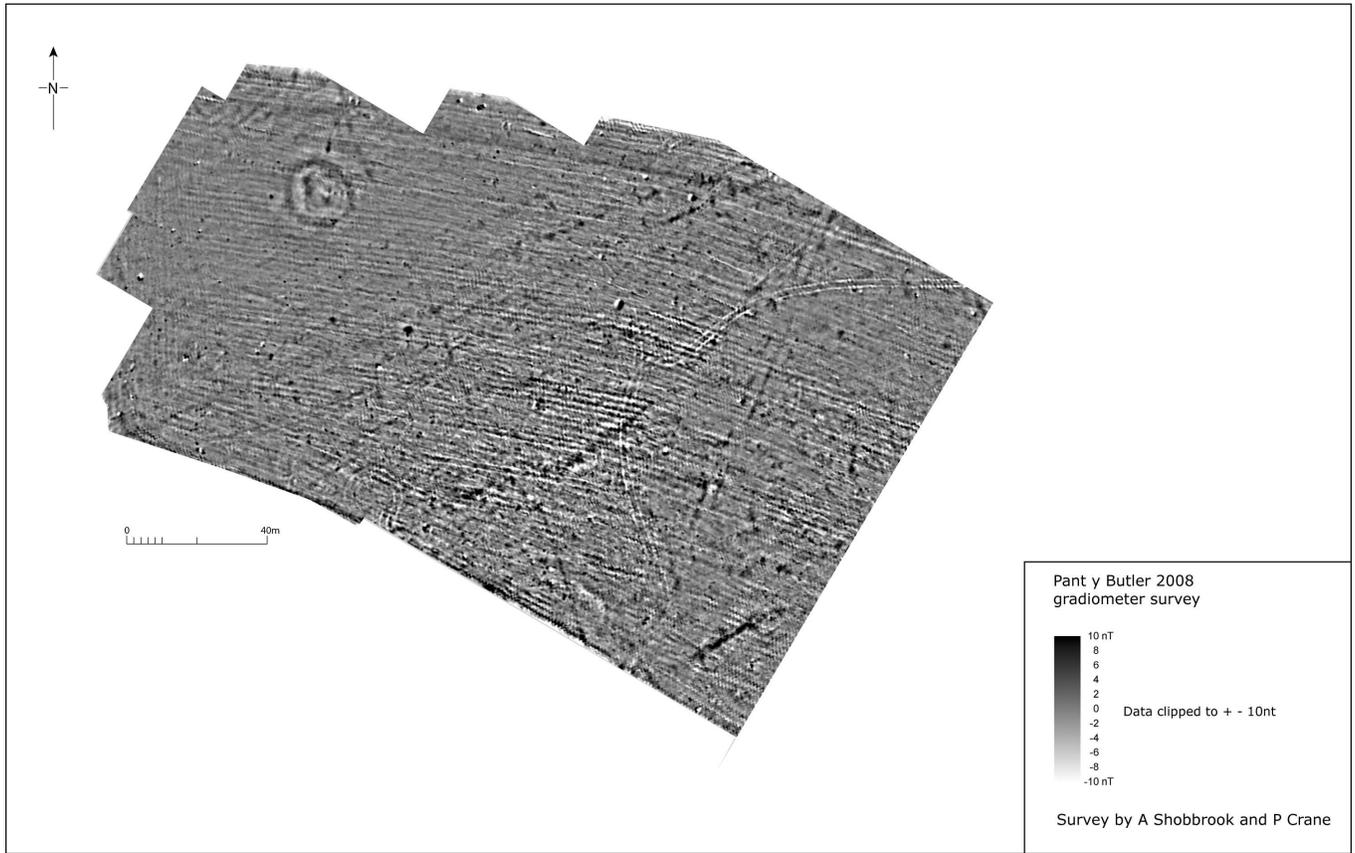


Figure 2. The geophysical survey.

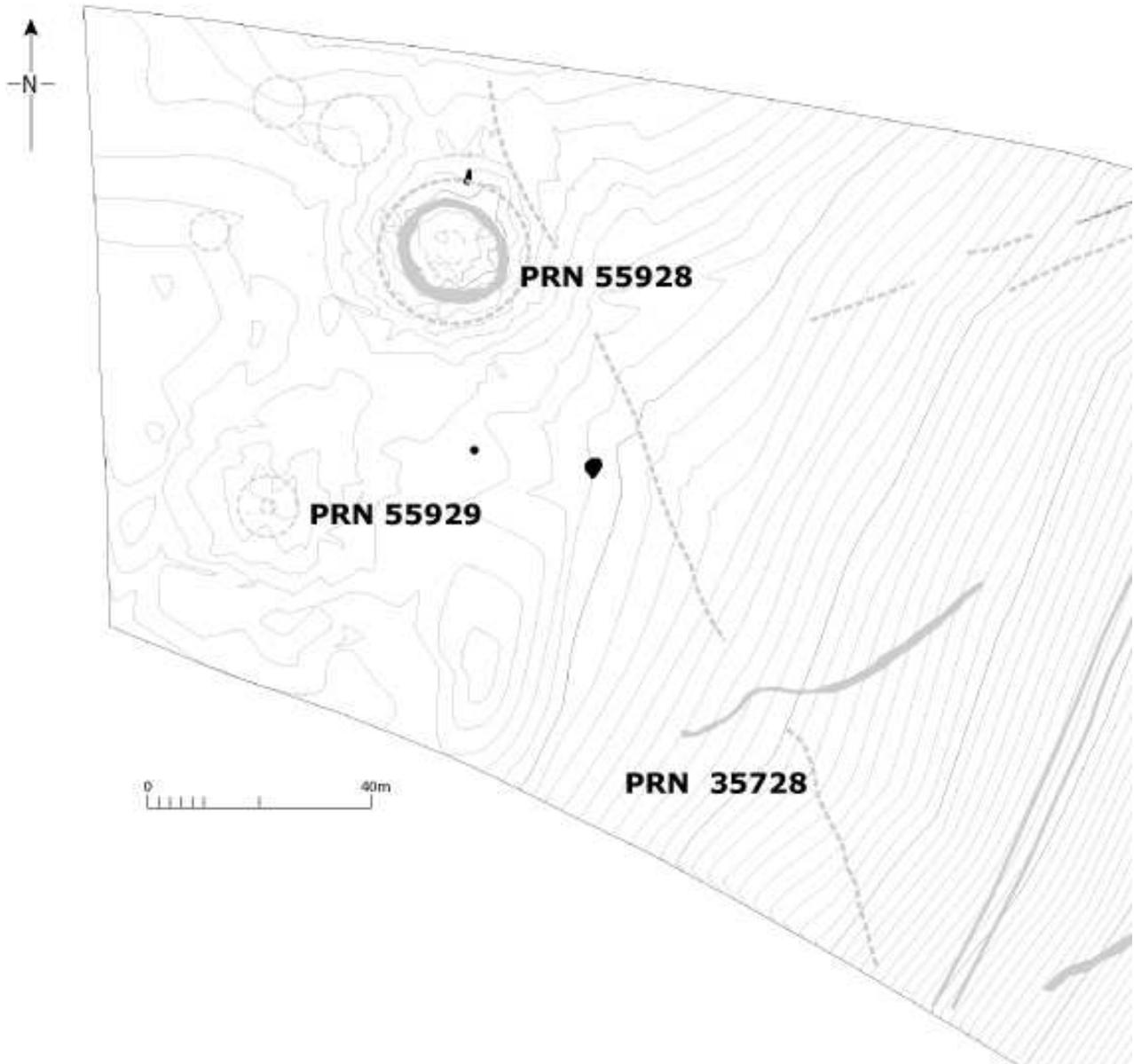


Figure 3. Location of the two round barrows 55928-9 showing schematic interpretation of the geophysical survey. Contours at 1m and 0.1m intervals. Site no. 35728 was recorded as a prehistoric enclosure, but the geophysical survey showed it to be a natural feature.

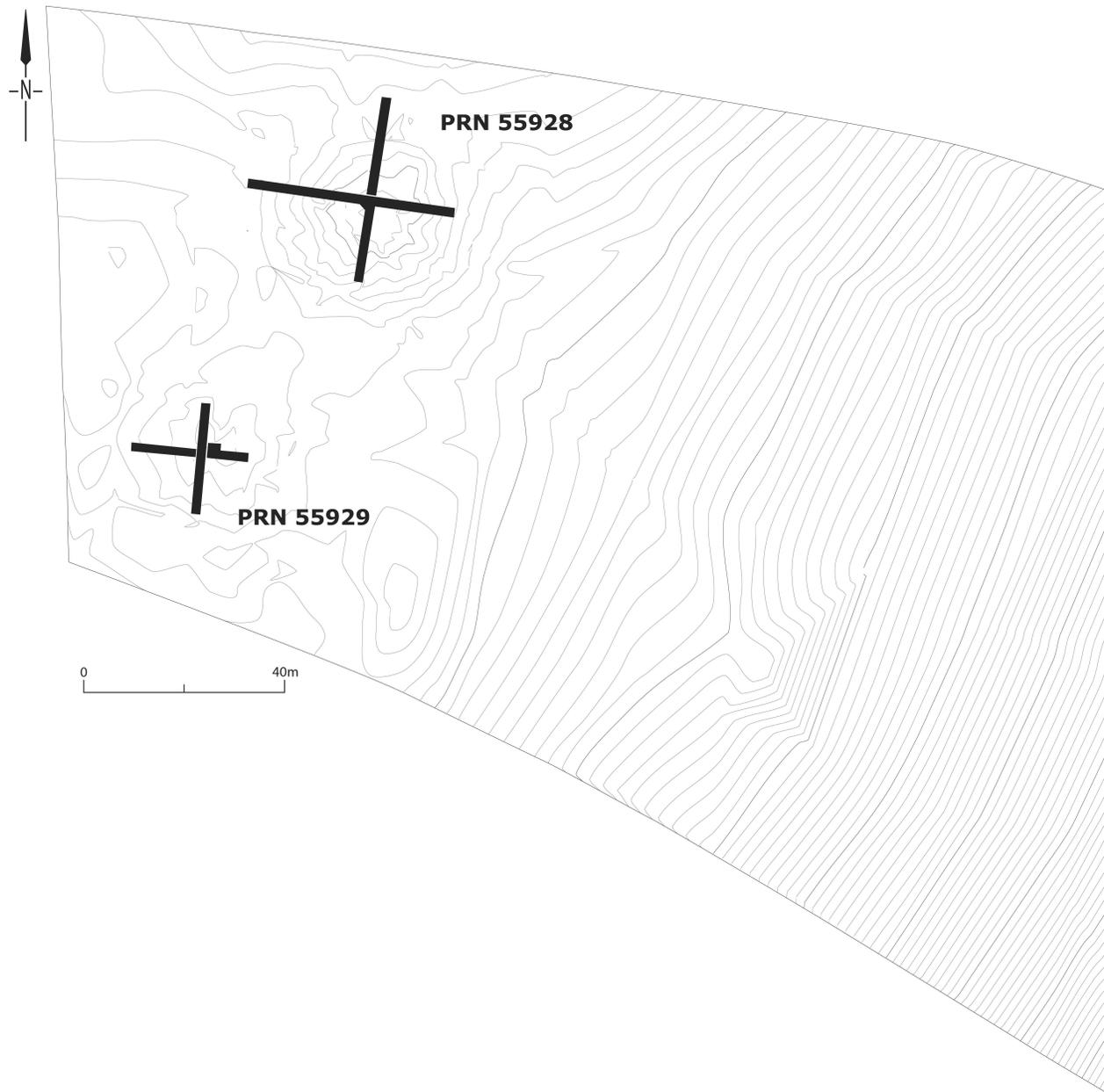


Figure 4. Location of excavation trenches in relation to contour survey. Contours at 1m and 0.1m intervals

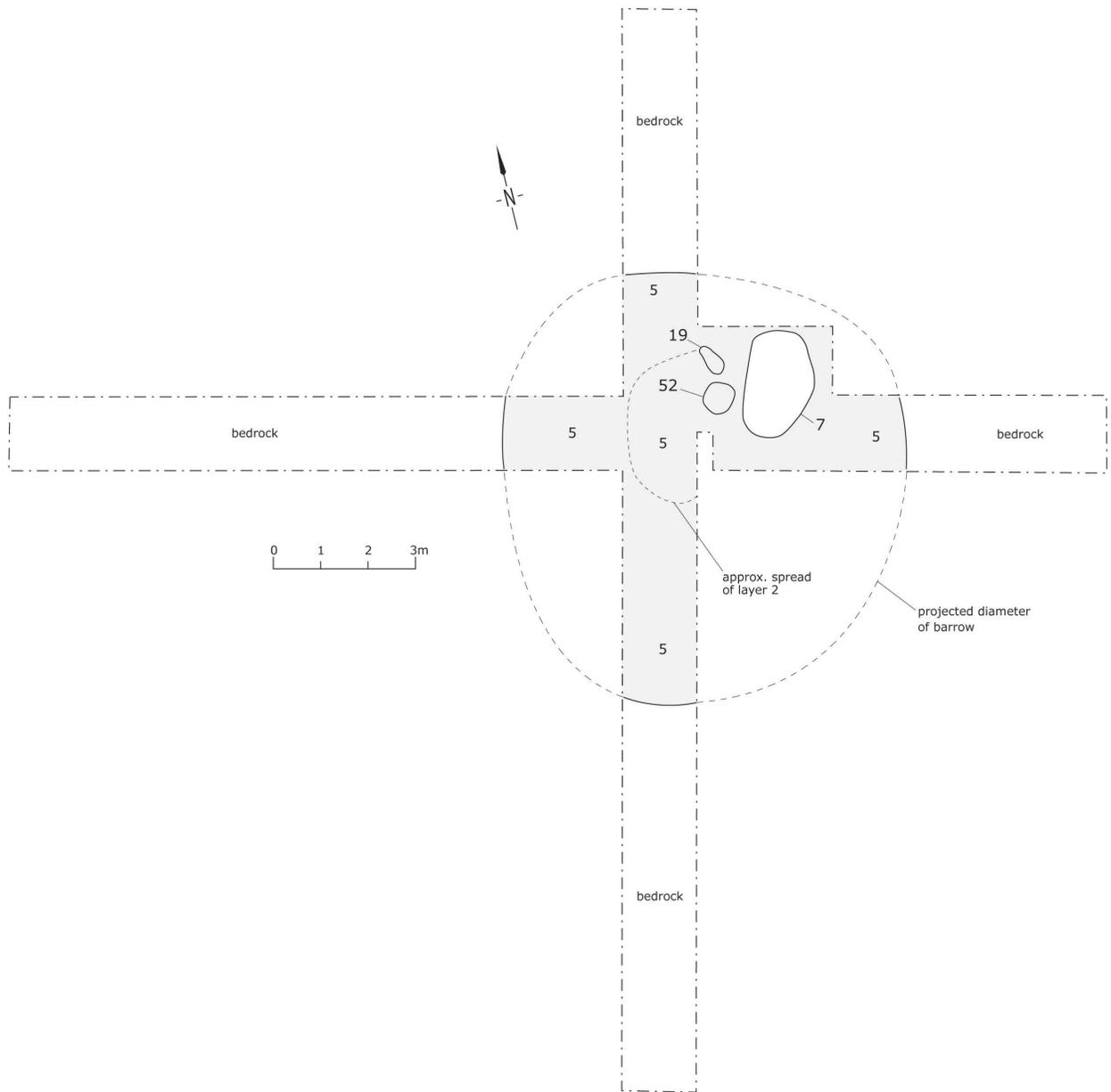


Figure 5. Plan of excavation trench of barrow 55929.

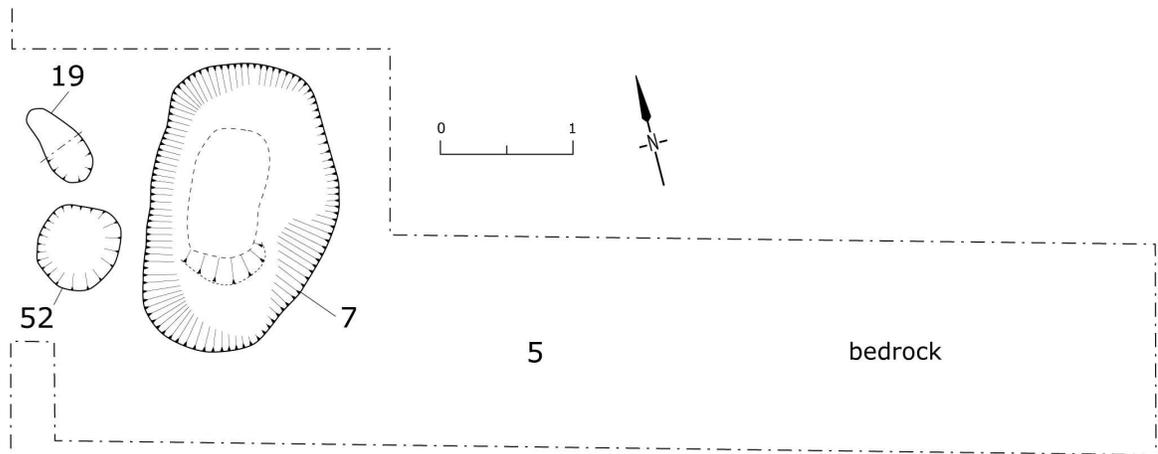


Figure 6. Detail of central area of *barrow 55929*.

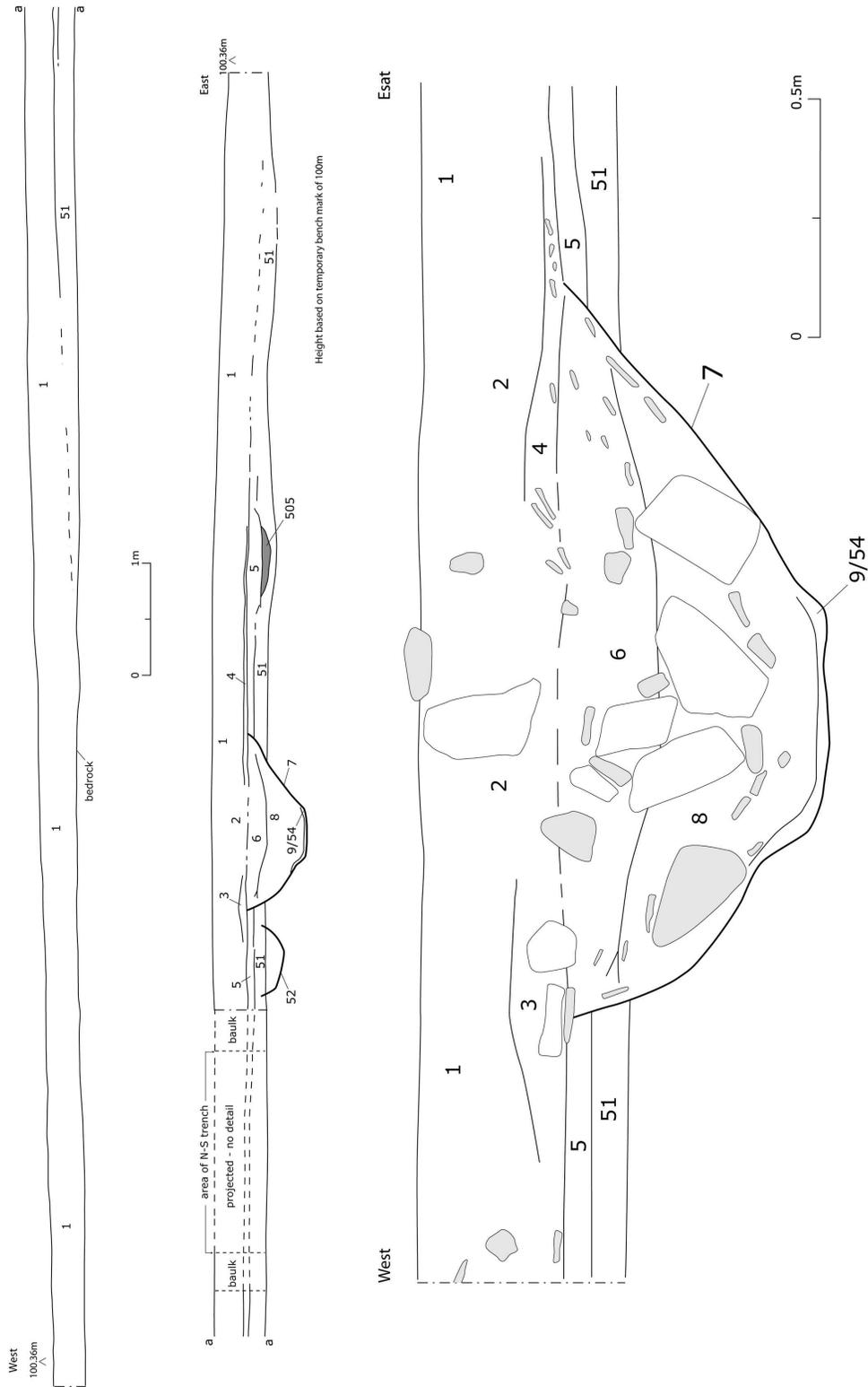


Figure 7. East – west section of barrow 55929.

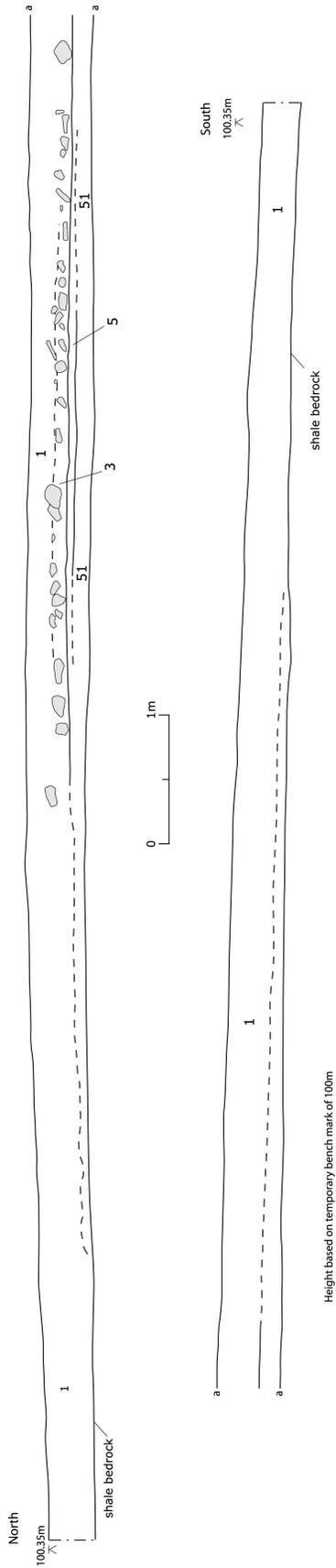


Figure 8. North - south section of barrow 55929.

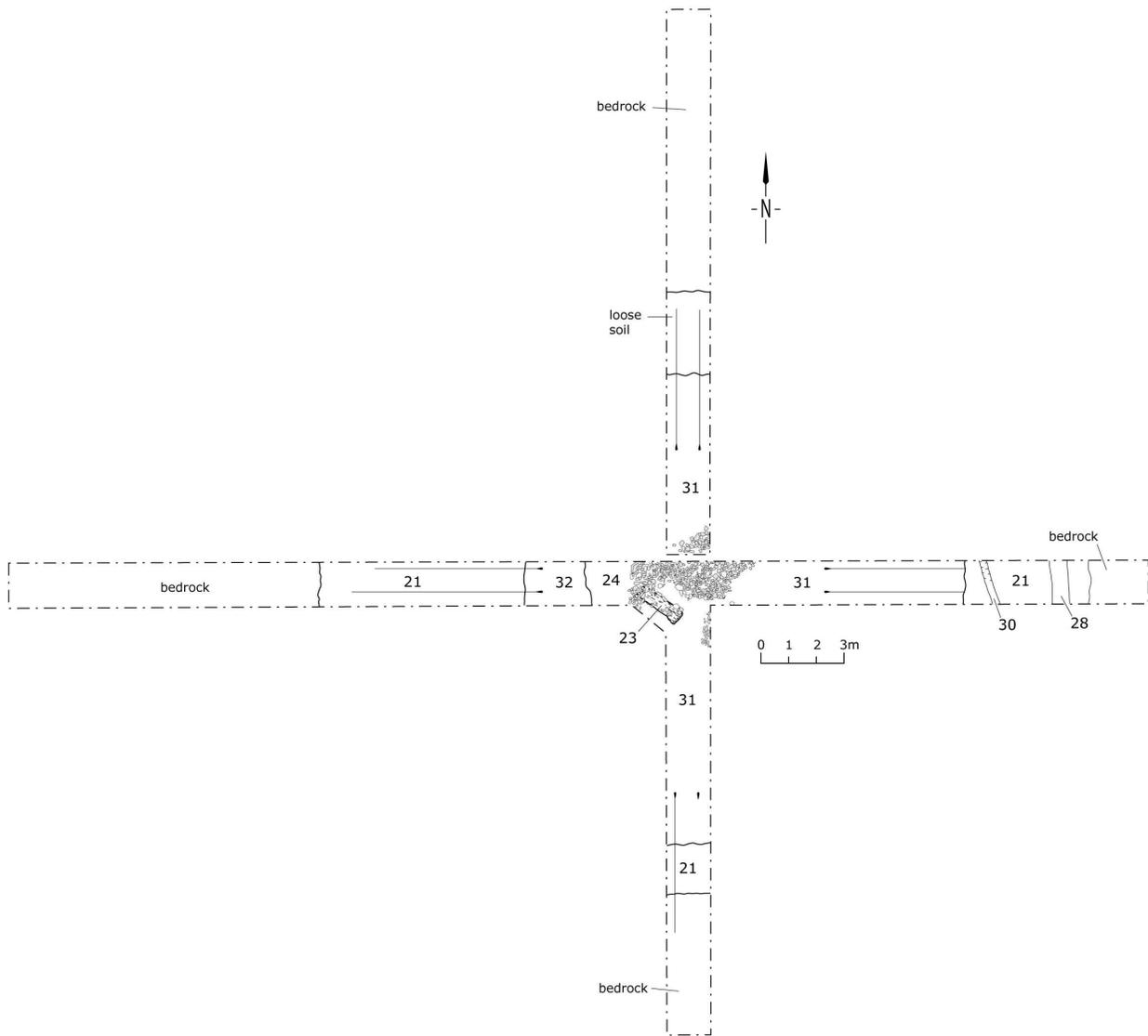


Figure 9. Plan of excavation trench of barrow 55928.

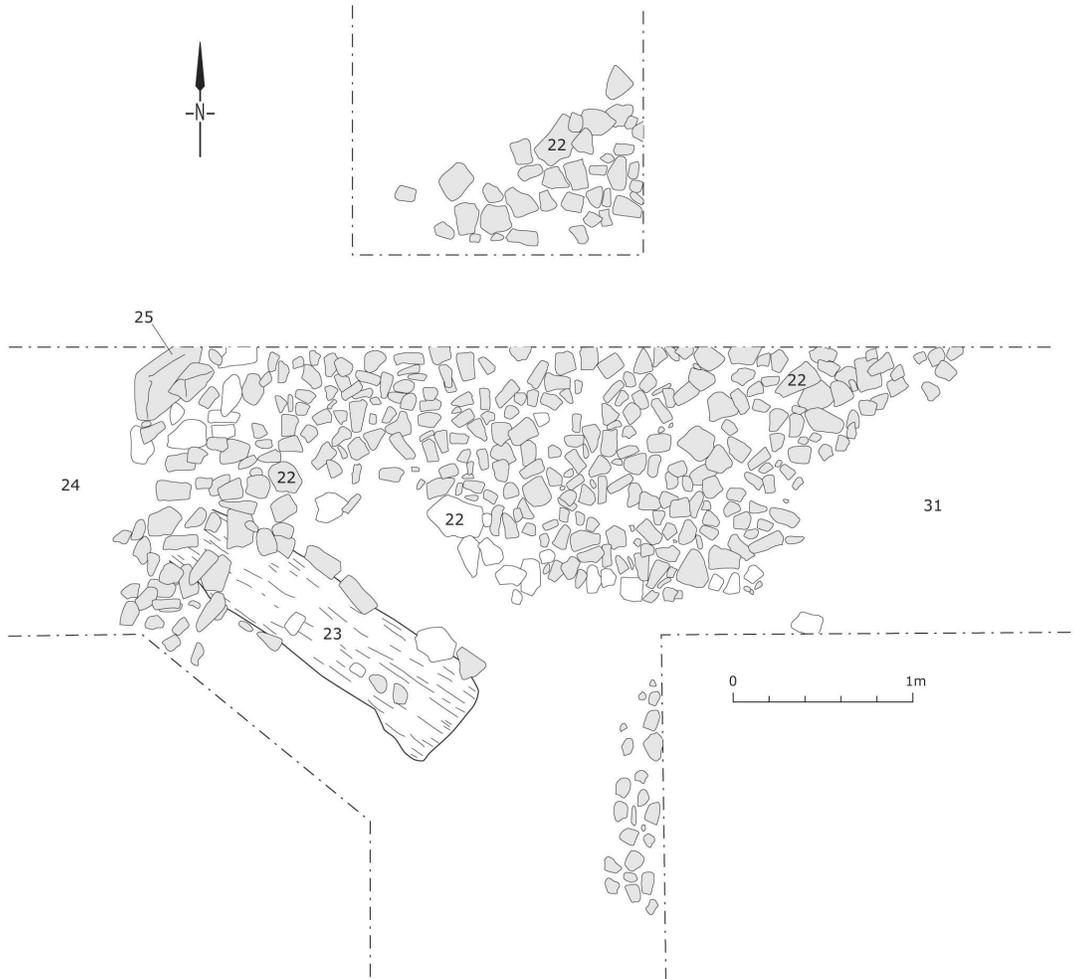


Figure 10. Plan of central area of barrow 55928.

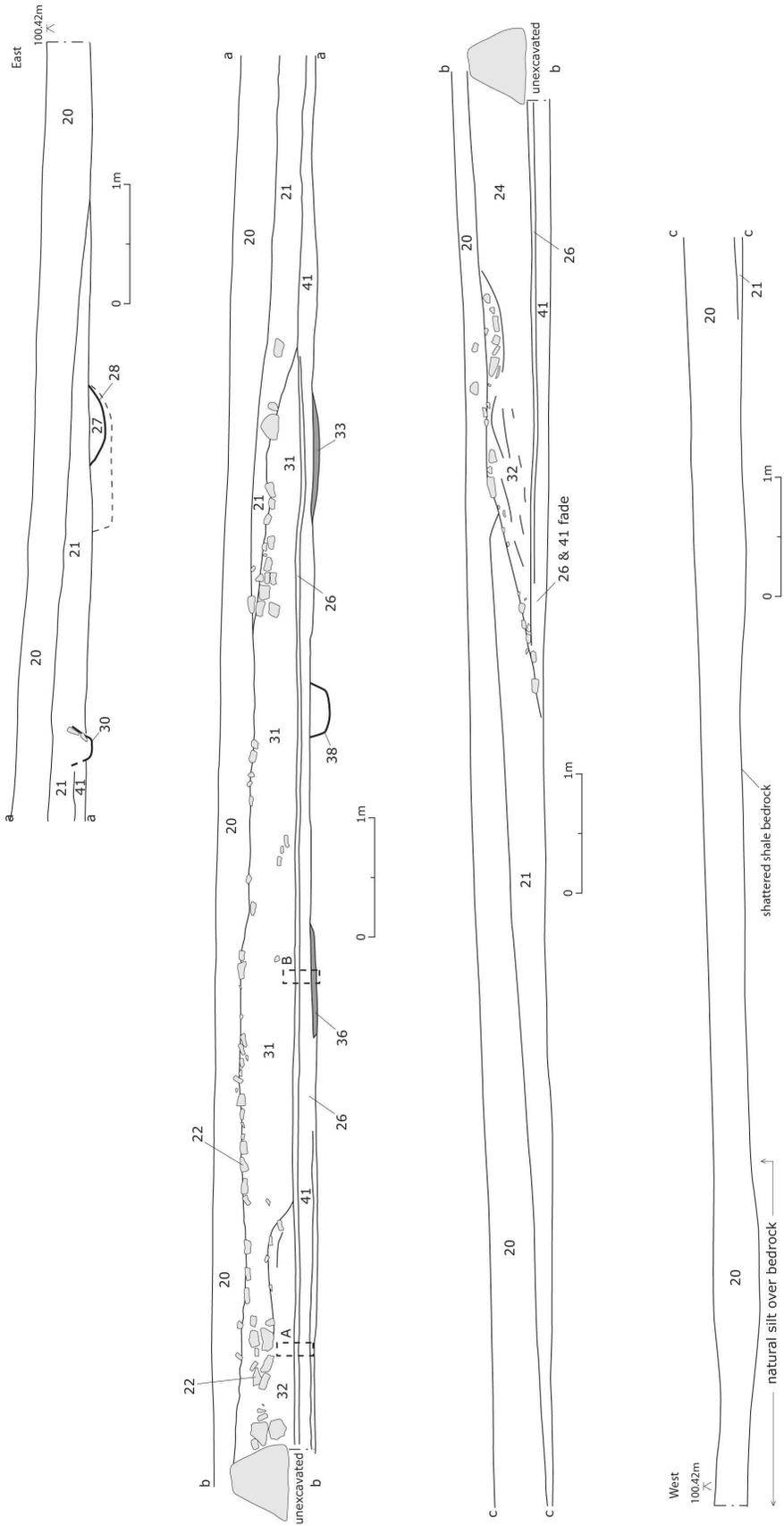


Figure 11. East - west section of barrow 55928.

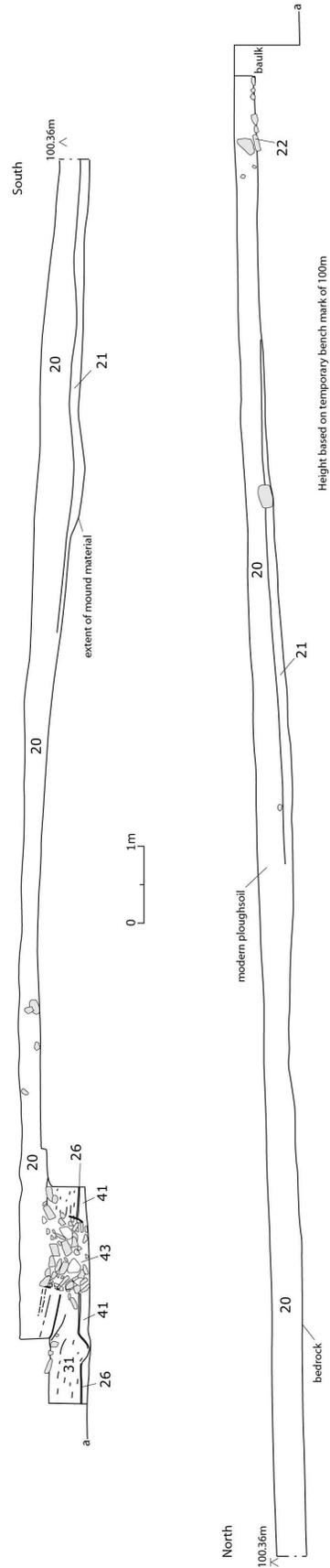


Figure 12. North – south section of barrow 55928.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Photo 1, above. Starting excavation on the smaller barrow, 55229, looking north.

Photo 2, right. The partially excavated grave 7. Scale 1m.

Photo 3, below. Section through grave 7. Scale 1m.





Photo 4, above. The cremation (9, 54) in pit 7. Scale 0.5m.

Photo 5, right. Pit 7 showing the arrangement of stones around the cremation. Scales 1m and 0.5m.



Photo 6, below. Pit 7 in foreground with pit 52 and hollow 19 showing as soil marks.





Photo 7, top. Section of pit 52. Scale 0.5m.

Photo 8, above. Initial excavation of the larger barrow 55928 showing the stone layer 22.

Photo 9, left. Feature 23 on the top of the barrow 55928.



Photo 10, above. Excavation of the larger barrow 55928 showing the edge of the barrow mound. Looking east.

Photo 11, right. Excavating barrow 55928 showing the monolith (25) incorporated into the mound.





Photo 12, above. Section through the barrow mound 55928 showing monolith 25 and the two column samples. Scales, 2m, 1m and 0.5m.

Photo 13, below. Section through barrow mound 55928 showing pit 43. Scales 2m and 1m.



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Paratowyd yr adroddiad hwn gan / This report has been prepared by K Murphy

Swydd / Position: Trust Director

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

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

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

Swydd / Position:

Llofnod / Signature Dyddiad / Date

Yn unol â'n nôd i roddi gwasanaeth o ansawdd uchel, croesawn unrhyw sylwadau
sydd gennych ar gynnwys neu strwythur yr adroddiad hwn

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comments you may have on the content or presentation of this report



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