

Report No 159 , on survey

Measured and Photographic survey of Archaeological features to be affected by the proposed Hydro-Electric Scheme at Abhainn Cuileig, Braemore, Wester Ross.

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Measured and Photographic survey of Archaeological features to be affected by the proposed Hydro-Electric Scheme at Abhainn Cuileig, Braemore, Wester Ross.

Introduction

In March 1999, the author carried out an archaeological survey of the area to be affected by the proposed hydro-electric scheme at Abhainn Cuileig, Braemore, Wester Ross, covering the locations of the water intake, penstock route, access track and turbine house. The survey identified all archaeological features within this area, and assessed the potential impact of the project on these features. Three areas were identified where the project would have an impact on the archaeological record, and it was agreed with the Senior Archaeologist in charge of the project at Highland Council that this impact was acceptable, with the condition that these features to be affected were recorded by photographic and measured plans prior to work beginning. This recording was commissioned by Miller Civil Engineering and carried out on 10.6.00.

Archaeological and Historical Background

The original archaeological survey concluded that all the identified features dated either to the development of the Braemore Estate by the eminent Victorian engineer, Sir John Fowler, after 1865, or to the period immediately predating the recorded clearance of the original tenants in the 1840-50s. With the exception of the drystone dyke which encloses the Strone area, all the features to be adversely affected by the hydro-electric scheme would appear to date to this earlier period of land use, and represent land division, stock enclosures and field cultivation by the inhabitants of the original farmstead at Strone. The drystone dyke itself is of the same style as the other drystone dykes erected to enclose land during the improvements of either Fowler or his predecessor, Davidson of Tulloch.

The Measured and Photographic Survey

The sites to be affected are numbered as follows in the original survey:

Site no. 4 at NH 1924 7862 Enclosure

Site no. 5. at NH 1940 7875 Strone Boundary dyke

Site no. 17 at NH 1924 7889 Area of cairns and possible structures

All other features were considered to be unlikely to be unaffected by the project.

Area no. 1. Site No. 4, Enclosure.

Further investigation revealed that the enclosure is attached to a turf and stone dyke which runs from within the forestry towards the gateway in the Strone boundary dyke.

The Dyke

This feature was followed into the forestry, which it obviously predates, where it continues westwards for an unspecified distance. As the dyke emerges from the forestry, it runs generally NE, only 2-3 metres below a natural bank. The ground here is very wet, and the dyke frequently disappears into the bog. It passes several natural platforms and rockfaces, some of which appear to have been utilised for livestock management. A small section of dyke, Point 6, connects the main dyke to the rockface which forms a natural barrier, and a similar section running west from the enclosure suggests that the pattern of dykes was more complex before the area was ditched and afforested after 1865. The stone lintel of a culvert is visible at Point 4. North of the enclosure, the dyke becomes more indistinct, and cannot be traced as far as the drystone dyke. A possible further turf dyke extends eastwards, but appears to have been obliterated by the later construction of the track up the hillside.

The Enclosure

This feature has suffered badly from ditching, tree planting and later clear felling, leaving it difficult to interpret. There appears to have been an enclosure constructed within the elbow of the turf dyke, with further features within this. The clearest feature is a line of single stone footings (Points 10-12) running ENE-WSW but turning sharply where a ditch runs NW. It is not clear whether these two are contemporary. The other features are low turf banks, which have been interpreted as dykes, although in many sections they are unclear and may be confused with material excavated in the digging of the ditches. At this point, the main dyke is not traceable, but may have been making use of the course of the small stream, which runs through seemingly natural raised banks (Point 14) before dissipating in a boggy area. At Point 13, a stone appears to have been placed on edge, but its purpose is unclear.

These features are recorded on photographs Nos. 1-24

Note: The route of the penstock follows almost exactly the turf dyke from the forestry to the drystone dyke, as the natural route down the uneven terrain of the hill slope. The permanent access track passes to the north and west of this. It is also proposed that a small quarry be opened at the point where the dyke/penstock emerge from the forestry. It is therefore unlikely that much of the turf dyke and enclosure will be preserved.

Site no. 5, Strone Boundary Dyke.

This is a very visible standing feature. It was agreed that it could be broken through by the penstock, on condition that it be rebuilt to as near as possible the original style. This feature was recorded in photographs no. 25-28.

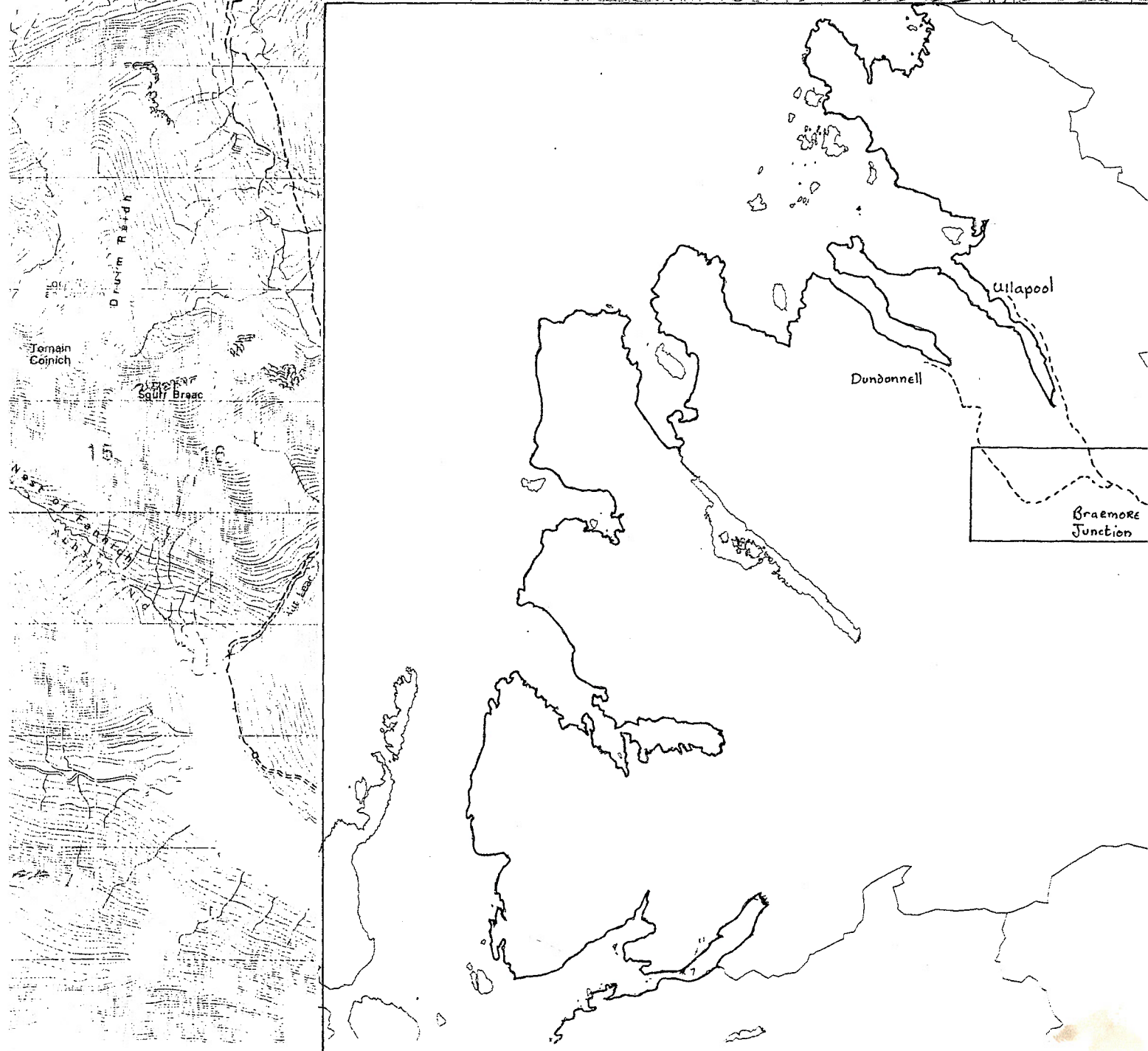
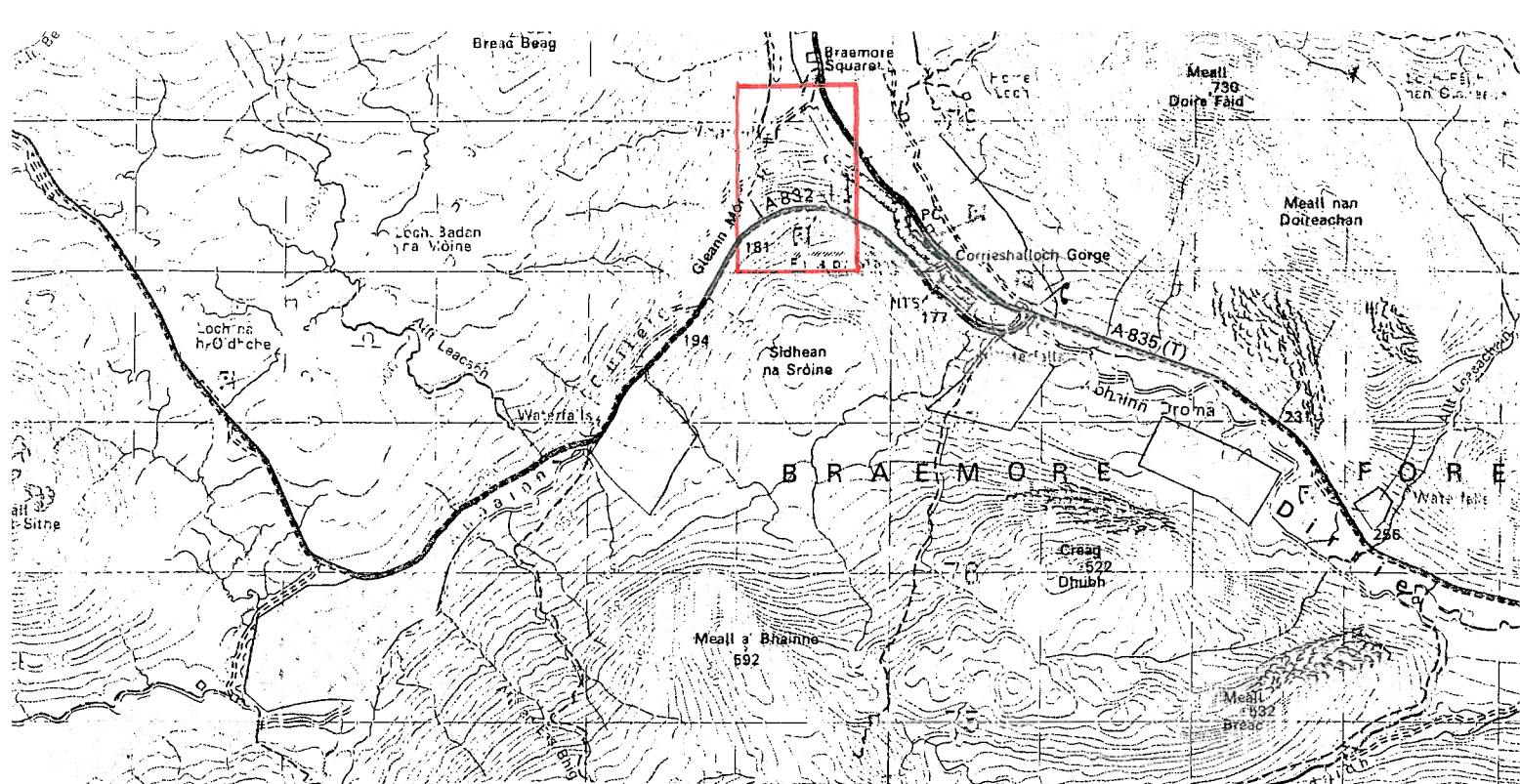
Area no. 2. Site no. 17, area of cairns and possible features.

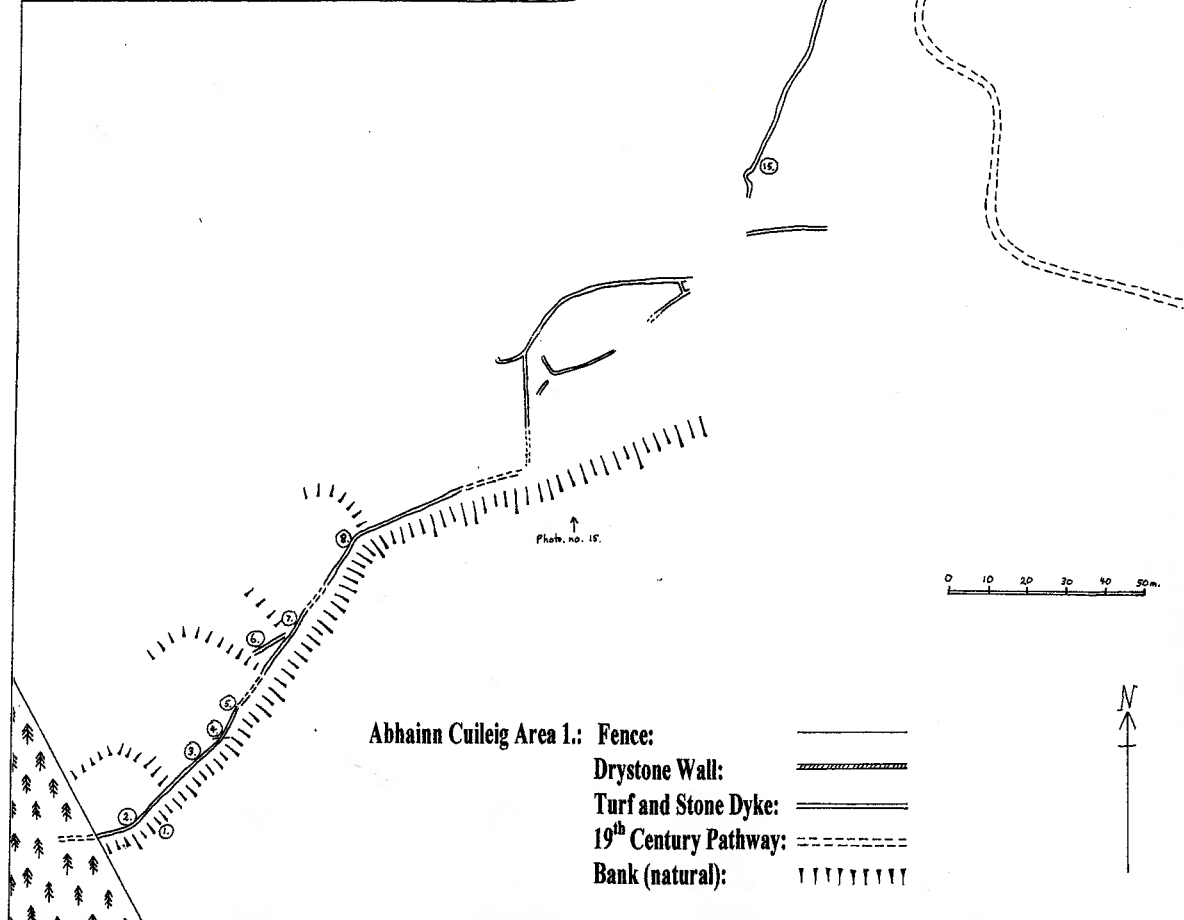
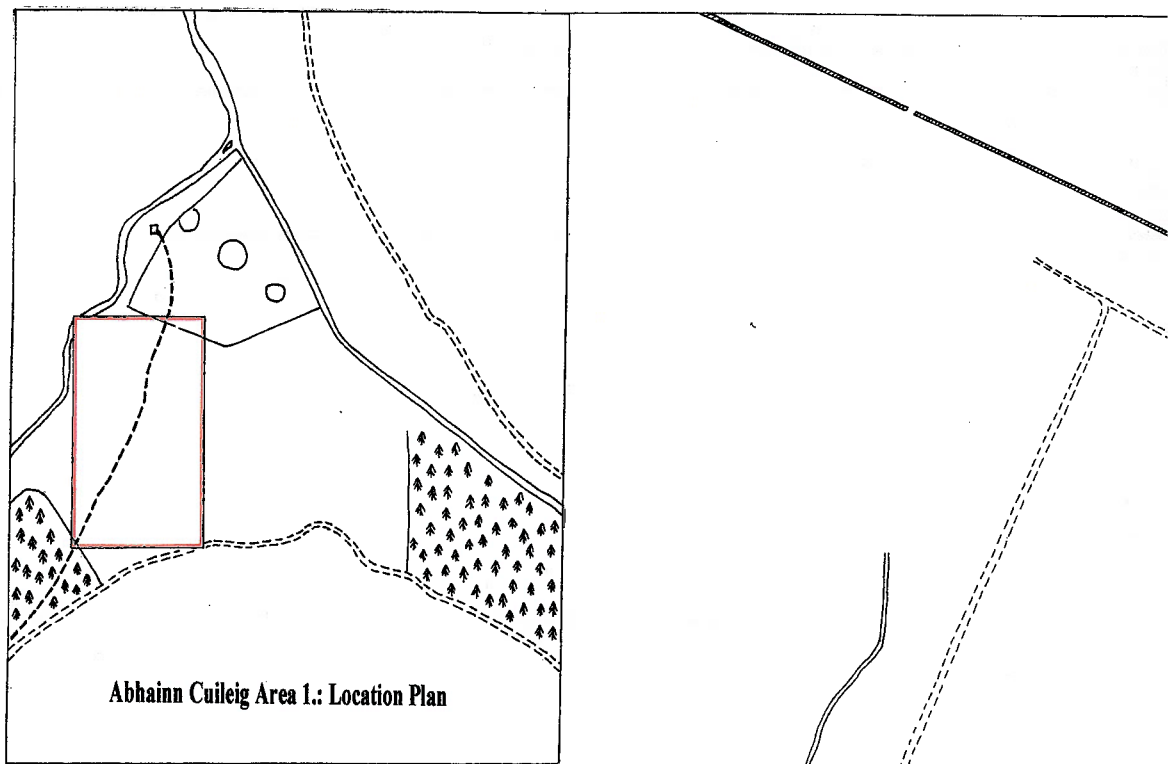
A second investigation identified ten cairns of varying sizes and shapes. It was concluded that the eastern cairns which are more rectangular in shape are after all more likely to be field clearance cairns than structures as originally thought. However, the area is a curious location for cultivation, being mostly part of a broad curved stony bank running from north of the head dyke to the east of the gateway to the east bank of the Abhainn Cuileig, and a superficial clearing of surface stones would be unlikely to have enabled this bank to have been cultivated with any efficiency. If this was incorporated into the cultivated lands of the Strone farmstead, it must have reflected a severe shortage of more suitable land. There is a slight east-west variation in the cairns. As mentioned before, the eastern cairns, which happen to be on the less stony ground, are of a more elongated shape and are generally low and grass-covered. The western cairns, on the stony bank, are generally more circular and higher, the bare stones being visible above the surrounding bracken.

These features are recorded in Photographs Nos. 16-23

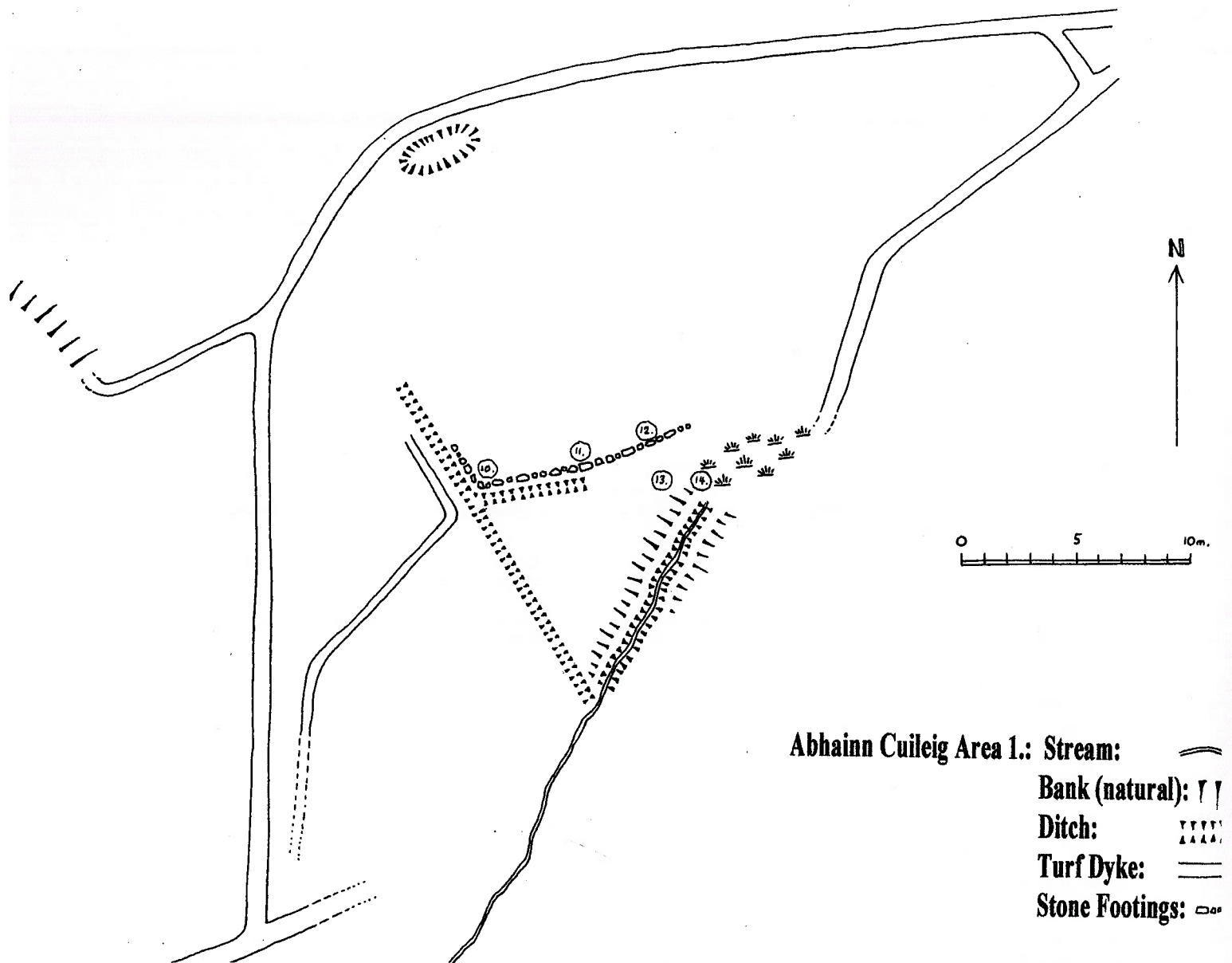
Note: the route of the penstock passes through this area of cairns, but only one, No. 10, lies directly within the 20m. wayleave, so it is likely that the rest of the cairns will be unaffected by the project.

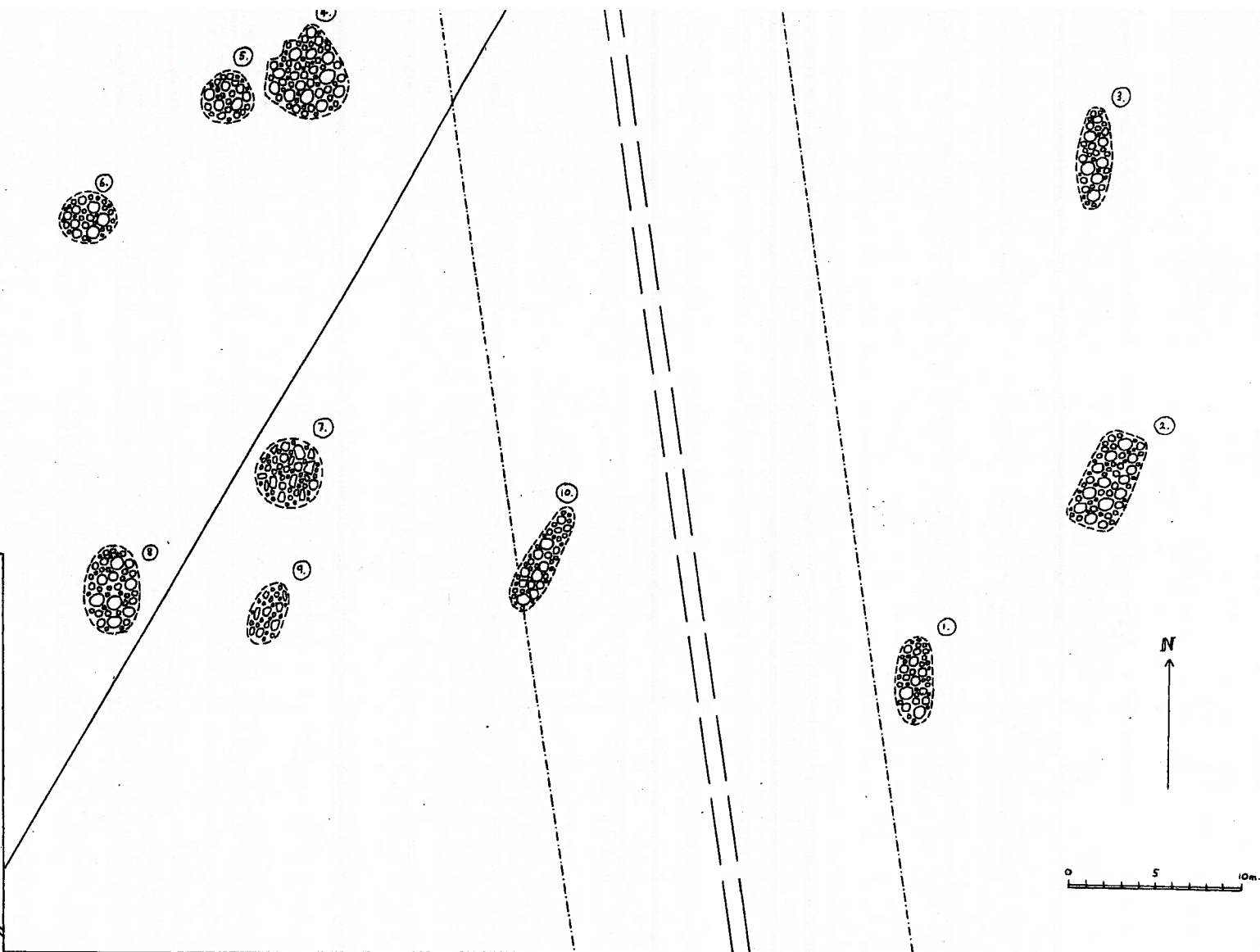
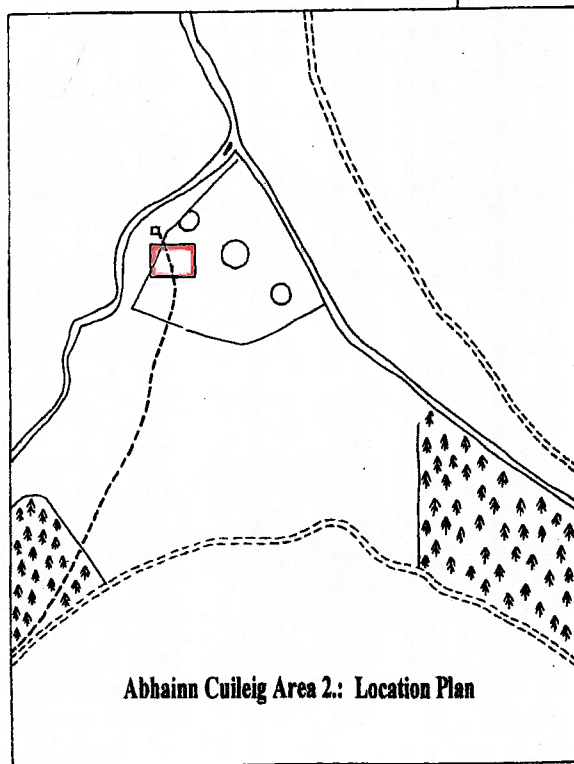
**Catherine Dagg
12.11.00**





Abhainn Cuileig Area 1.: Enlargement



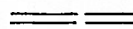
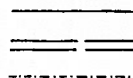


Abhainn Cuileig Area 2: Cairn:

Fence:

Probable Pipeline Route:

20m. Wayleave:



0 5 10m.

N

4. View NE from point 2.



5. View West from point 3.



6. Culvert, view NW from point 4.



7. Culvert, view SE at point 4.



8. View NE from point 5.



9. View of point 6. from S.



10. View of point 6. from NE



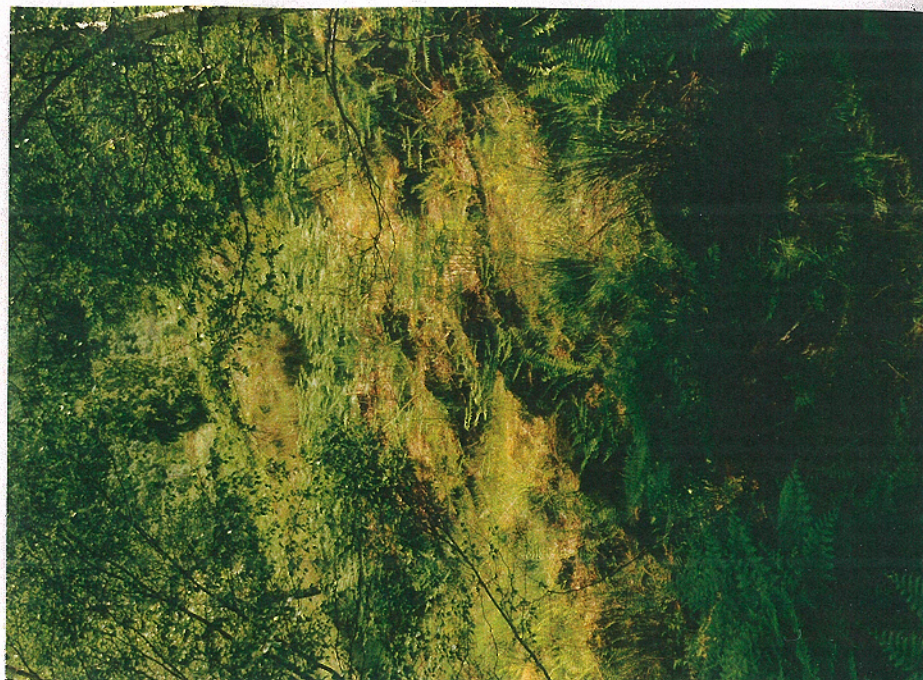
11. View SW from point 7.



12. View NE from point 7.



13. View ENE from point 8.



14. View WSW from point 8.



15. General view from S.



16. View N from point 9.



17. View E from point 10.



18. View ENE from point 11.



19. View N from point 12.



20. View W from point 12.



21. View S from point 13.



22. View E from point 13.



23. View SW from point 14.



24. View NW from point 15.



25. View of dyke from south



26. View of dyke from north.



27. Dyke, view from E.



28. Dyke, view from SE.



29. Cairn 1.



30. Cairn 2.



31. Cairn 3..



32. Cairn 4.



33. Cairn 5.



34. Cairn 6.



35. Cairn 7.



36. Cairn 8.



37. Cairn 9.



38. Cairn 10.



1. View west from point 1.



2. View NW from point 1.



3. View West from point 2.

