

**Forestry Survey: Ledmore & Migdale, Spinningdale,
Sutherland**

Stephen Carter & Jonathan Wordsworth

5th February 1997

Headland Archaeology Ltd
Albion Business Centre
78 Albion Road
EDINBURGH EH7 5QZ

INTRODUCTION

The Ledmore & Migdale WGS survey area covers roughly 7.5 km² of land on the north side of the Dornoch Firth to the west of Spinningdale (OS 1:10,000 sheets NH 68 NE, NH 69 SW and NH 69 SE). The extent of the survey area is indicated in Figure 1. The area was largely occupied by softwood plantations up until the Second World War when most mature timber was clear-felled. The pinewood around Migdale Rock and the oakwood on the shore of the Dornoch Firth survived this felling. Since 1945 much of the southern part of the survey area has been re-planted with spruce, larch and pine but the remainder has been left and, with only light grazing, is now covered in naturally regenerating birchwood, gorse, rank heather and bracken.

This area has already been covered by the RCAHMS Ordnance Survey 1st Edition Map Project, therefore there are many NMRS sites identified within the survey area, based only on map evidence, and not yet visited by archaeologists. Systematic archaeological field investigations by RCAHMS took place at the beginning of the century for the preparation of the Sutherland Inventory. Most of the survey area was covered by maturing plantation at this time and therefore was not amenable to the discovery of sites. These factors, combined with the current difficulties with vegetation, have directed the methods used for this present survey (see below).

METHODS

DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

The following sources contain information relevant to this survey:

NMRS Sites

NH68NE 2	Chambered Cairn
NH68NE 18	Field Clearance Cairns
NH68NE 39	Cairn (Possible)
NH68NE 67	Building
NH68NE 68	Township
NH68NE 69	Farmstead
NH69SE 1	Cairn
NH69SE 2	Cairn (possible)
NH69SE 3	Chambered Cairn
NH69SE 7	Chambered Cairn
NH69SE 31	Township
NH69SE 32	Farmstead
NH69SE 33	Township
NH69SE 34	Farmstead
NH69SE 35	Mill, Building
NH69SE 36	Farmstead
NH69SE 37	Building
NH69SE 38	Farmstead
NH69SE 39	Township

Maps (National Map Library)

Roy, W 1747-55 *Military Survey of Scotland* (Sheet 35/5)

Forbes, W 1820 *Sutherlandshire*

Thomson, J 1823 *Sutherlandshire*

Burnett, G & Scott, W 1853 *Map of the county of Sutherland*

Ordnance Survey 1879 *Sutherland 1:10,560 sheets CXI & CXII* (surveyed 1874)

Ordnance Survey 1907 *Sutherland 1:10,560 sheet CXI & CXII* (revised 1904-5)

Aerial photographs (Air Photo Unit RCAHMS)

106G/SCOT/166 23/8/46

CPE/SCOT/297 18/9/47

58/RAF/3262 15/10/52

FIELD SURVEY

The majority of the Ledmore & Migdale survey area is obscured by softwood plantation, regenerating birchwood, gorse, bracken or deep heather. Good ground visibility only occurred in the north-east limit of the survey area, where heather cover is short and in the vicinity of Rivra, where grazing pressure has been high. It was decided that total coverage by systematic survey was not possible in areas with poor visibility within the constraints of this contract. Therefore fieldwork was primarily designed to examine known sites to check their extent, nature and condition (most having been recorded from OS 1st Edition map evidence only, rather than fieldwork). All areas were covered, at least in a superficial manner and any previously un-noted sites that were encountered were recorded. Site location and extent was recorded at a scale of 1:10,000 only.

RESULTS

A total of 28 features or groups of features of archaeological interest were recorded; their locations are given in Figure 1 at a scale of 1:10,000. Details of all of these features are given in the gazetteer at the end of this report. The majority of sites are existing NMRS records (19 out of 28) including 12 OS 1st edition settlement sites (buildings, farmsteads, townships) and 7 earlier records (RCAHMS Sutherland Inventory) of chambered and other large stone cairns. New records (9 sites) include 6 additional sites recorded on the OS 1st edition map, but not included by RCAHMS in their work, and only 3 previously unrecorded sites (No.5, 20 and 24). This low proportion of new sites reflects, in part, the difficulties of field survey in woodland and scrub vegetation.

DISCUSSION

PREHISTORIC SITES

The survey area and its immediate environs contain a notable concentration of chambered cairns: Kyleoag (No.4; Plate 1), Achaidh (No.12), Ledmore Wood (No.18) and Bailenacuile (just out of area), and at least one other large cairn (No.11). These form the only group of sites of definite prehistoric date in the survey area so it is noteworthy that the only additional

prehistoric site recorded by this survey is another chambered cairn at Kyleoag (No.5), only 250 m south-east of No.4). This new site is heavily robbed but appears to be of a similar size and chamber type to the other examples in the area. No prehistoric settlement sites were identified in the survey area. The previously recorded hut circles at Rivra (NMRS NH69SE 4) were visited and it was noted that they are distinctly polygonal rather than circular. The original designation of these structures as enclosures seems to be more appropriate and therefore their age is in doubt.

It seems highly likely that the area was settled in prehistory and therefore it has to be assumed that later activity has erased any surface evidence of it. This may be the case at the upper edge of Ledmore Wood where there is a recent farmstead (No.21 and 23) set among small areas of clearance cairns (No.21, 22 and 24). The enclosed farmstead and fields are clearly recent but the unenclosed cairnfields could result from prehistoric cultivation. These favoured areas were then partially re-used in the 18th or 19th centuries.

POST-MEDIEVAL SITES

The distribution of post-medieval sites on the ground closely matches that recorded by the Ordnance Survey in 1874, by which date most buildings were un-roofed. This correspondence suggests that a population maximum, and subsequent de-population, occurred shortly before the survey. Therefore the majority of structures are of late 18th or early to mid 19th century date. Early mapping is generally un-helpful in elucidating this recent history. Roy (1747-55) indicates a string of settlements up the Spinningdale Burn but none are named and they cannot be tied to specific sites on the ground. Early 19th century maps are of too small a scale to be of use in this context. Ledmore Wood is mapped by Roy but softwood plantations are first recorded by Burnett & Scott (1853) and correspond to enclosure banks recorded as Sites No.13 and 16. Extensive planting occurred soon after this date and it appears that deserted settlements were mapped by the Ordnance Survey in the 1870s in new plantations before they grew too tall for survey work. De-population and tree planting may be two manifestations of the same estate policy at this time.

The field evidence suggests that three types of sites may be defined. There are extensive, relatively complex townships at Kyleoag (No.3), Torroy/Rivra (No.10 and 14), Tacherinroad (No.15, largely out of area) and Creag na Sroine (No.27). These have more than one cluster of houses/enclosures surrounded by numerous well defined arable fields. They contrast with a number of small isolated farmsteads (No.1, 2, 6, 8 and 21/23) which consist of a few buildings set in a small area of fields. Finally there are some isolated buildings of varying function: a watermill (No.7; Plate 2) and four other single buildings (No.9, 19, 20 and 26).

There is only limited evidence for chronological depth in the sites examined. Most buildings are built of random rubble, presumably of late 18th or 19th century date. Low turf and stone footings, some with one stone gable, may be relatively early (18th century?). A few coursed rubble buildings (for example No.9 and the mill No.7) are probably 19th century structures and the farmhouse at Torroy (No.10a) with its mortared walls and dressed stone is certainly one.

Since the mid-19th century the survey area has been dominated by forestry-related activity. This has left few positive remains, other than the early plantation banks, but it has had an impact on pre-existing sites. The numerous permanent tracks and temporary haul roads used during felling have damaged a number of sites (see individual gazetteer entries). Much of this disturbance appears to have occurred during the extensive felling operations of the Second World War, undertaken by the Canadian Forestry Corps.



Plate 1. Ledmore & Migdale WGS. Site 4. Kyleoag chambered cairn from north-west showing deer fence and field wall in foreground with young trees in tubes around cairn.



Plate 2. Ledmore & Migdale WGS. Site 7. Gable end of mill building with leat behind figure. From south.

GAZETTEER

Site No.1 (NMRS NH69SE 32) ✓ +SMR

Grid ref: NH 6500 9163

Location: Allt Coire nan Caorach ✓

Class: Farmstead

Land use: Rough grazing

Description: Recorded by OS in 1874 as two rectangular buildings on the northern edge of a large squared enclosure. The enclosure dyke remains as a prominent turf and stone bank but the buildings have been largely destroyed, probably during tree-felling operations.

Condition: The buildings have been levelled and there are steel hawsers and other metal debris partially buried in the remains.

Site No.2 NH69SE 0041

Grid ref: NH 6546 9164

Location: Creag a'Bhealaich ← needs added

Class: Farmstead

Land use: Rough grazing

Description: Recorded by OS in 1874 as one roofed rectangular building with an adjacent enclosure beside a field among trees. The enclosure survives but the building has been almost totally destroyed by a forest track. A second building, mapped first by the OS in 1904-5 when it was roofless, survives as a 11 x 4 m rectangular footing to the south of the destroyed building. A third unmapped rectangular footing, 7 x 3 m was noted to the west. Clearance cairns were noted in the field.

Condition: One building has been destroyed through the creation of a turning area on a forest track.

Site No.3 (NMRS NH69SE 33)

Grid ref: NH 662 911 (Centre) ✓

Location: Kyleoag

Class: Township

Land use: Rough grazing/birchwood

Description: An extensive area of settlement and field remains, largely as mapped by the OS in 1874. The settlement is named *Coillemuadh* by the OS (1874), *Coilleoag* by Burnett & Scott (1853) and *Kyleoag* by Forbes (1820). The fields are marked by substantial rubble walls and there are circular enclosures in two places attached to boundaries. Buildings were noted in four areas:

- a. A single long rectangular building cut through at its east end by a forest track.
- b. A single rectangular stone wall footing, 7 x 3 m in dense birchwood.
- c. Six rectangular structures on either side of a small stream. Two on the west side, 7 x 3 m and 19 x 4 m with an attached enclosure. On the east side there is a possible kiln barn, 9.5 x 4 m, with the kiln bowl filled with field clearance stones. To the east of this are three buildings, 9 x 4 m, 14 x 4 m and 19 x 4 m with an adjacent enclosure.
- d. A cluster of structures around the edges of the chambered cairn (Site No.5). On the east side of the cairn there is an 18 x 4 m rectangular building with an enclosure attached to the north. To the south there is an 8 x 4 m building with an enclosure on its east side. On the west side of the cairn are three small rectangular buildings dug into the cairn stones.

Condition: Other than the building (a.) none of the structures show evidence of recent

disturbance. Most of this township is obscured by dense birch, bracken and tall heather.

Site No.4 (NMRS NH69SE 3)

Grid ref: NH 6628 9112

Location: Kyleoag

Class: Chambered cairn

Land use: Rough grazing/birchwood

Description: A large mound of stones with a central chamber, as described in previous records.

Condition: This cairn currently lies within the corner of a fenced enclosure for a wooden chalet and is excluded from the WGS application area. Various changes have apparently affected this site in recent years (Plate 1). The fence has been erected close to its north and east sides; birch trees have been felled within the chamber and the logs stacked beside the cairn; a way marker has been erected beside the cairn as a part of a Heritage Trail; trees have been planted close up to the south and west sides of the cairn.

Site No.5 NH 69SE0042

Grid ref: NH 6652 9104

Location: Kyleoag

Class: Chambered cairn

Land use: Birchwood

Description: This cairn lies within the ruins of a recent settlement described as Site No.3d. It is a roughly circular cairn of stones, 20 m in diameter and possibly 1.5 m high. At its centre there is an irregular oval setting of at least six large set stones (some fallen), 4 x 3 m. This is interpreted as the remains of a chamber. A possible outer face or entrance portal was noted on the south-east limit of the cairn.

Condition: The cairn has been extensively robbed to provide stone for the surrounding settlement. This has exposed the megalithic sides of a central chamber and some of these stones have been disturbed. The west end of a building cuts deeply into the cairn on its east side and three small rectangular buildings have been built into the cairn on its west side. The corner of an enclosure overlies the cairn to the north-east.

Site No.6 (NMRS NH69SE 36)

Grid ref: NH 661 908

Location: Kyleoag

Class: Farmstead

Land use: Birch/Pinewood

Description: Recorded by OS in 1874 as an unroofed building and two enclosures. The enclosures are more extensive in the field than shown on the map but the building is as mapped, albeit damaged.

Condition: The building is largely destroyed. This damage probably occurred in 1940-45 when a logging camp/sawmill was established here by the Canadian Forestry Corps (Mr Mackay, Bailenacuile, pers. comm.).

Site No.7 (NMRS NH69SE 35)

Grid ref: NH 6567 9055

Location: Spinningdale Burn

Class: Mill; Building

Land use: Pine/Birchwood

Description: Recorded by OS as a roofed mill beside the burn with an unroofed building above it. In the field, the mill survives as a 7 x 4 m rectangular rubble building with one gable wall standing up to 1.7 m high (Plate 2). This well preserved north end is adjacent to the pit for a small overshot or breastshot vertical wheel which was supplied with water from a stone leat. The inner wall faces of the mill building retain slots for timber fittings. A well graded track runs up from the mill to a building consisting of low rubble footings, 6 x 3.5 m, and then continues westwards in the direction of Site No.8.

Condition: Much of the mill remains upstanding but in an unstable condition. The second building is reduced to stable footings.

Site No.8 (NMRS NH69SE 34)

Grid ref: NH 6535 9060

Location: Migdale Rock

Class: Farmstead, Field-system

Land use: Pine/Birchwood

Description: Recorded by the OS in 1874 as two roofless buildings with adjacent fields. The buildings have been destroyed by a forest track but the fields are marked by low rubble banks.

Condition: A recent forest track has cut through the farmstead and destroyed the mapped buildings.

Site No.9 (NMRS NH69SE 37)

Grid ref: NH 6642 9058

Location: Spinningdale Burn

Class: Building

Land use: Birchwood

Description: Recorded as a roofless building by OS in 1874, it is a rectangular building of coursed rubble, 12 x 4 m, with a single internal division. The walls survive up to 1.2 m high. It lies immediately outside a plantation bank where a stream is led through a culvert under the bank. This is channelled down beside the west gable of the building.

Condition: The surviving walls are stable but partially obscured by trees growing close to the walls.

Site No.10 (NMRS NH69SE 38)

Grid ref: NH 6680 9080 (Centre)

Location: Rivra

Class: Farmstead

Land use: Rough grazing

Description: The farmstead of Torroy, recorded by OS in 1874 with four buildings and three enclosures with fields. These structures and one additional building were noted in the field:

- a. Three buildings. The western is the recent farmhouse comprising a 10 x 4.5 m house with 14 x 3.5 m byre attached to the east end. The walls are of mortared rubble and stand to eaves height. The windows and doors are finished in dressed stone and there is a gable hearth and flue. To the east there is a 11 x 4 m rectangular turf and stone footing overlain by a 5 x 2 m rubble building. Further east is an 8 x 4 m rectangular

rubble building up to 1.5 m high.

- b. A single rectangular rubble footing, 6 x 3 m.
- c. A rounded rectangular turf and stone footing, 11 x 4.5 m with a 7 x 3.5 stone extension at its east end. There is also a 5 x 4 m rectangular structure to the west of this building.

Condition: The recent farmstead is well preserved except for the east end of the byre which is not mortared, unstable and partially collapsed. The buildings lie in rough grassland or areas of dense bracken with few trees.

Site No.11 (NMRS NH69SE 1)

Grid ref: NH 6713 9114

Location: Rivra

Class: Cairn

Land use: Rough grazing

Description: A substantial stone cairn, as described in NMRS. Assumed by earlier investigators to be a burial cairn.

Condition: The site is currently in an area of deep heather and shows no signs of recent disturbance

Site No.12 (NMRS NH69SE 7)

Grid ref: NH 6715 9116

Location: Achaidh

Class: Chambered cairn

Land use: Rough grazing/birchwood

Description: A substantial stone cairn with a central polygonal chamber, as described in NMRS.

Condition: Considerable disturbance has been caused by stone robbing and excavation but none of this appears to be recent.

Site No.13 NH69SE0043.

Grid ref: NH 676 905 (Centre)

Location: Coille Baile na Cuile

Class: Plantation banks

Land use: Rough grazing/birchwood

Description: A series of substantial turf and stone banks, recorded by OS in 1874, form a group of enclosures up to 700 x 600 m in size. These are assumed to be plantation enclosures and they correspond with areas of woodland mapped by Burnett & Scott (1853), pre-dating the more general period of tree planting which occurred c.1870.

Condition: Only short sections were observed in the field where the banks were found to be well-preserved and stable.

Site No.14 (NMRS NH69SE 39)

Grid ref: 6730 9055

Location: Rivra

Class: Township

Land use: Permanent pasture field

Description: The township of Rivra, recorded by the OS in 1874, lies mostly outside of the survey area. One small field and a rectangular building, 10 x 4.5 m, with walls of coursed rubble up to 1 m high, were recorded in the survey area.

Condition: The building lies within a field that is still grazed, its walls appear to be stable.

Site No.15 (NMRS site NH69SE⁰⁶_{A31})

Grid ref: 6815 9015

Location: Spinningdale Wood

Class: Township

Land use: Dense gorse scrub

Description: The extensive township of Tacherinroad, recorded by the OS in 1874, just extends into the eastern margin of the survey area. According to map evidence four buildings and associated enclosures and fields should be present but dense gorse covers this area and nothing could be seen. These structures are therefore only assumed to survive.

Condition: Not seen.

Site No.16 NH68NE0085

Grid ref: NH 6530 8958 to 6651 8928

Location: Ledmore Wood

Class: Plantation bank

Land use: Rough grazing

Description: A substantial earth and stone bank forms an eastern extension to a series of banked enclosures outside of the survey area. These are mapped by the OS in 1874 and are assumed to be plantation enclosures similar to Site No.15. The east end of the bank turns to the south and reaches the head of the *Allt an Fhuarain* which appears to serve as a property boundary, also utilised by the boundary stones (Site No.25).

Condition: The bank is well preserved and stable over its whole length.

Site No.17 (NMRS NH68NE⁰⁵_{A39})

Grid ref: NH 6533 8945

Location: Ledmore Wood

Class: Cairn (possible)

Land use: Rough grazing

Description: A low knoll with a central hollow, as described in the NMRS, is unlikely to be a man-made feature.

Condition: A stable, well vegetated knoll.

Site No.18 (NMRS NH68NE⁰⁰_{A2})

Grid ref: NH 6537 8944

Location: Ledmore Wood

Class: Chambered Cairn

Land use: Rough grazing

Description: A substantial stone cairn with a central chamber, as described in NMRS.

Condition: No evidence of recent disturbance.

Site No.19 NH 68NE0086

Grid ref: NH 6520 8927

Location: Ledmore Wood

Class: Building

Land use: Scrub

Description: A single roofed building recorded by the OS in 1874 survives as a low rectangular wall footing, 8 x 4 m, on a platform cut into the steep slope.

Condition: The walls are stable and grass-covered.

Site No.20 NH68NE0067

Grid ref: NH 6529 8919

Location: Ledmore Wood

Class: Building

Land use: Scrub

Description: A single building consisting of low wall footings, 10 x 3 m, with a substantial collapsed stone gable at the up-slope end.

Condition: The walls are either vegetated or stable rubble mounds.

Site No.21 NH68NE0088

Grid ref: NH 6575 8920

Location: Ledmore Wood

Class: Platform, fields, clearance cairns

Land use: Oakwood

Description: Two adjacent clearings in Ledmore Wood, recorded by OS in 1874, correspond with an area of fields defined by stone banks and clearance heaps. A single platform, 8 x 6 m was noted in the centre of the western field and a small enclosure at the eastern limit. To the west there is an area of unenclosed clearance cairns. It is still apparent that oak trees do not occur within the fields although they are present among the cairns.

Condition: The banks and cairns are stable with no evidence of recent disturbance. This area is almost totally covered by dense bracken.

Site No.22 (NMRS NH68NE 18)

Grid ref: NH 659 893

Location: Ledmore Wood

Class: Clearance cairns

Land use: Oakwood

Description: An area of clearance cairns, as described in NMRS.

Condition: The cairns are stable and show no evidence of recent disturbance

Site No.23 (NMRS NH68NE 69)

Grid ref: NH 6618 8935

Location: Ledmore Wood

Class: Farmstead

Land use: Oakwood

Description: A farmstead in a clearing in Ledmore Wood, recorded by OS in 1874. The extent of the buildings and field is similar to that shown by OS but clearance cairns extend c.75 m to the east:

- a. In the north-west corner there is a stone enclosure with a rectangular building attached, measuring 5 x 3 m. To the east of this there is a large rectangular building surviving as low stone and turf footings, 20 x 4 m. To the south is an oval structure, 5 x 4 m and to the east of this another rectangular structure, 8 x 4 m with one substantial stone gable.
- b. Outside the field bank and down a steep slope there is a rectangular rubble-built building measuring 5 x 2 m.

Condition: All walls are stable with no evidence of recent disturbance but the open field areas are covered in dense bracken.

Site No.24 NH 68NE0089.

Grid ref: NH 6650 8930

Location: Ledmore Wood

Class: Clearance cairns

Land use: Oakwood

Description: An area of stone clearance cairns on a relatively level terrace on the hillside at the upper edge of the oakwood.

Condition: The cairns are stable with no evidence of recent disturbance although this area is currently experiencing tree-throw.

Site No.25 NH 68NE0090 .

Grid ref: NH 665 896 (Centre)

Location: Creag na Sroine

Class: Boundary stones

Land use: Softwood plantation and rough grazing

Description: Four boundary marker stones were mapped by OS in 1874 (25a-d), in a narrow un-planted belt between two tree plantations. Two of these stones were located during the survey (25a and 25d). Both are dressed sandstone markers with a semi-circular top, 65 cm high, 30 cm wide and 12 cm thick. On the east faces there is a capital letter 'P' and on the west faces a 'C'. Both letters are 15 cm high. These stones are assumed to mark a property division that was still current in 1874.

Condition: Stones 25a and 25d are well preserved with no apparent damage. Stone 25c could not be found at its mapped position. Stone 25b was not checked.

Site No.26 (NMRS NH68NE⁶⁷)

Grid ref: NH 6663 8980

Location: Creag na Sroine

Class: Building

Land use: Softwood plantation

Description: A single unroofed building, recorded by OS in 1874, survives as a low rectangular rubble footing, 7 x 3 m, in a clearing in the plantation.

Condition: The walls are stable and moss covered.

Site No.27 (NMRS NH68NE⁶⁸)

Grid ref: NH 670 896

Location: Creag na Sroine

Class: Township

Land use: Softwood plantation

Description: A deserted township, recorded by OS in 1874, is currently covered in a dense softwood plantation. The limited observations that proved possible among the trees indicate that its current nature and extent are similar to the mapped version. An enclosing stone dyke was observed in two places. Building 27a was seen, two buildings were seen at 27b (three were mapped), 27c was not located but may be present.

Condition: Difficult to ascertain at present. Most structures appear to be present. One large rectangular building at 27b (15 x 3 m) has been totally robbed of its stone, leaving only the levelled platform. This ties in with information from Mr Mackay of Bailenacuile who remembers the stone from a house in this settlement being removed by a descendant of its former occupiers for use in a new house in Spinningdale.

Site No.28 (NMRS NH69SE⁰⁰⁰2)

Grid ref: NH 6626 9096

Location: Kyleoag

Class: Cairn (possible)

Land use: Birchwood

Description: According to NMRS records, this large cairn has not been positively identified since it was first noted by RCAHMS for the Sutherland Inventory in 1909. The nearby site subsequently identified by the OS was re-visited during this survey but no additional information about its true identity or location was forthcoming. The grid reference above refers to this second, OS location for the site.

Condition: Not seen.

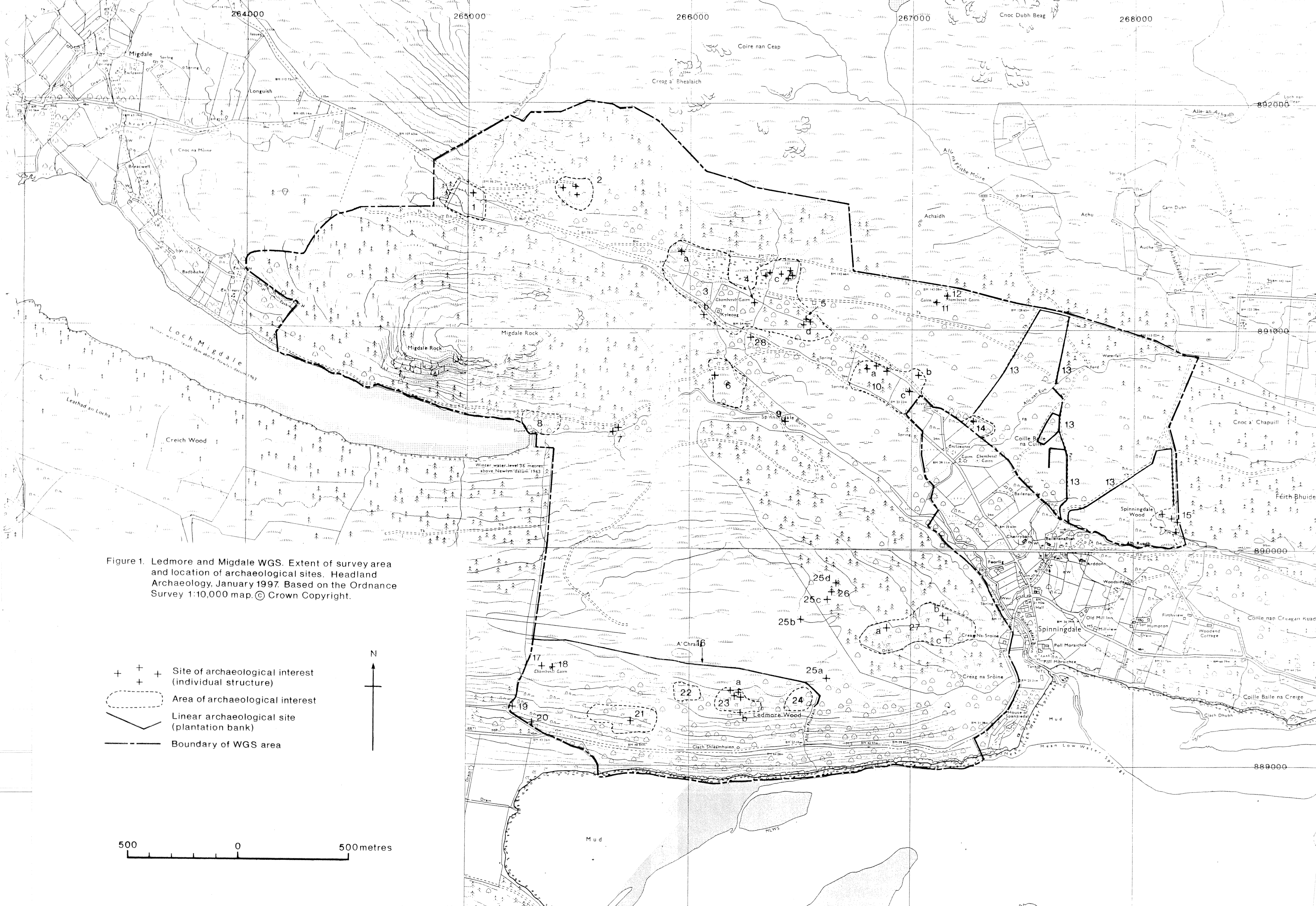






Figure 1. Ledmore and Migdale WGS. Extent of survey area and location of archaeological sites. Headland Archaeology, January 1997. Based on the Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 map. © Crown Copyright.

-  Site of archaeological interest (individual structure)
-  Area of archaeological interest
-  Linear archaeological site (plantation bank)
-  Boundary of WGS area



500 0 500metres