



Highland Archaeology Services Ltd

Bringing the past and future together

Archaeological Excavation:



Castle Stuart Golf Course Inverness

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Castle Stuart Golf Course Inverness

Site Code:	HAS/CST07
Grid Reference:	NH 7401 5005
Client:	Castle Stuart Golf
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Summary

An archaeological excavation was conducted during August and September 2007 to investigate and record the nature and extent of any archaeology likely to be affected by construction of a compound at Castle Stuart Golf Course, Inverness . A substantial wattle-lined underground storage pit was discovered. A large number of other pits was investigated, but virtually all of these proved to be of natural origin, probably formed by tree roots. There were no recommendations for follow-up work.

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Location

The site lies at Ordnance Survey Grid Reference NH 7401 5005 at approximately 20m above mean sea level.



Figure 1 Site Location

Introduction

An archaeological excavation was conducted by Highland Archaeology Services at Castle Stuart Golf Course, Inverness in August and September 2007 on behalf of Castle Stuart Golf to fulfil a planning requirement

This took place in advance of construction of a maintenance compound and its associated access road, following evaluation and watching brief work by CFA Archaeology which had identified a number of archaeological features. This report describes the work and summarises the results. An enclosed CDROM contains an archive of more detailed information.

Site details and archaeological background

The archaeological fieldwork described here was undertaken in advance of the construction of a golf course. The object of the present work was to identify and record all features already exposed by topsoil stripping in the area shown in Fig 2 below. This is close to Old Petty and Castle Stuart itself, which have been a focus for settlement since at least the late medieval period.

Castle Stuart¹ is a large tower-house built by the Earl of Moray in about 1625. It has been restored and is currently occupied. Close by to the west is the old parish church², with its graveyard and associated structures. This was built in 1839 on the site of a previous church of 1769, and no doubt earlier predecessors. It adjoins the motte of a medieval castle³ which is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as of national importance. Although Old Petty today consists mainly of the Castle Mains Farm and the former parish church manse, there seems likely to have been a settlement around the castle and church from the medieval period onwards.

More generally the wider area is of potential interest archaeologically as crop-marks suggestive of prehistoric settlement have been noted from the fragmentary survival of burial cairns as well as extensive crop-marks recorded from the air on the gravels around Inverness Airport.

CFA Archaeology carried out a watching brief at this site in May 2007⁴ in preparation for the building of a maintenance compound and its associated access road. This followed an extensive programme of archaeological evaluation of the proposed golf course, also carried out by CFA Archaeology Ltd in June 2006⁵ and September 2006⁶. The first of these opened 101 trial trenches. They found a large number of pits appearing in the surface of the subsoil, many of them naturally formed by trees and burrowing animals, over the whole area. The first evaluation discovered Neolithic pottery in one of these pits.

¹ Highland HER MHG2893; NMRS NH74NW21

² Highland HER MHG25211; NH74NW55.0

³ Highland HER MHG437; NMRS NH74NW3

⁴ Curtis A and O'Connell C 2007 Castle Stuart Golf Course, Inverness: Archaeological Watching Brief CFA Report 1328

⁵ Johnson, M 2006 Castle Stuart, Castle Stuart Golf Links, Old Petty, Inverness, Archaeological Evaluation. CFA Report 1177

⁶ O'Connell, C 2006 Castle Stuart Golf Links, Old Petty, Inverness, Archaeological Evaluation. CFA Report 1237

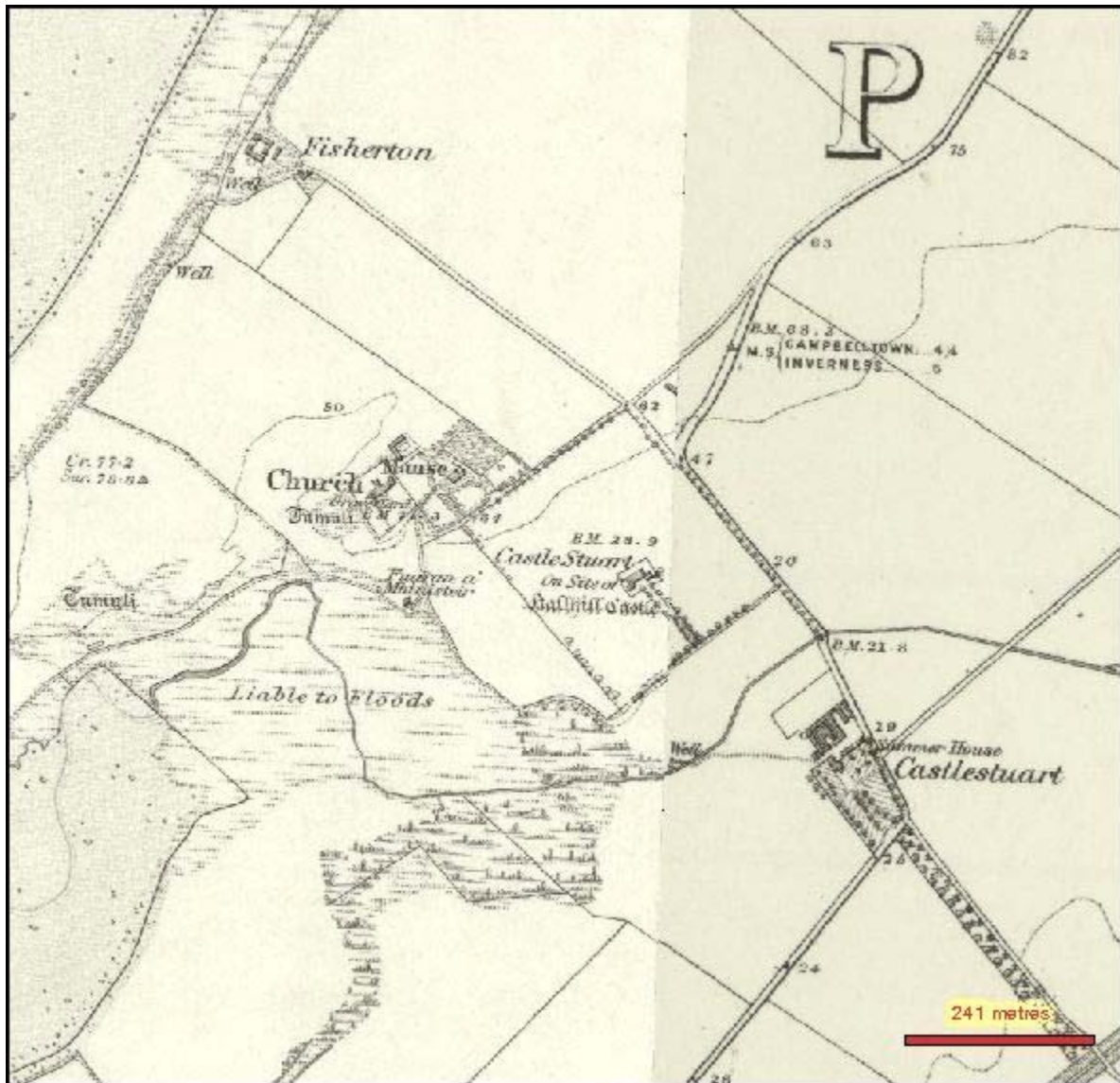


Figure 2 OS 1:10560 map surveyed 1869-1870

Compilation map, not to original scale, derived from digital data courtesy of National Library of Scotland.

The watching brief focussed on an area to the north of Castle Stuart that had previously been used as a grass nursery. CFA subdivided the site into four areas, of which they hand-cleaned one. In this area, c. 80 pits were discovered during the watching brief and another 60 similar features were identified during hand cleaning. Within the rest of the site, 87 pits were noted during the watching brief and the excavators predicted that a further 150 features might be present. All these were observed after removal of 1.0 -1.8m overburden and topsoil, cut into underlying sands and gravels.

17 pits were half-sectioned by CFA. They were all isolated round or oval pits or groups of double pits, truncated by ploughing and varying in size from 0.32m x 0.25m x 0.2m deep to 0.8m x 0.79m x 0.2m. One (CFA Feature F85) contained Bronze Age pottery sherds and fragments of burnt bone. No evidence for structures was seen.

Outwith the cleaned area, CFA noted two putative roundhouses, defined by pits, within one of which was a possible occupation layer containing burnt wood and ash; a 6m by 1.5m linear gully with associated post-holes flanking its edges; a 5m wide hollow containing manganese staining which was suspected of masking possible further archaeological features (small test excavations revealed charcoal within this); one large pit of circa 4m diameter; and a wide scatter of isolated pits - some of which contained marine mollusc shells, and one containing fire cracked stone. Two of them were apparently linked by a curvilinear gully. Overall, their preliminary analysis suggested that there might be two roundhouses, five linear features, and a great number of pits varying in size and distributed across the site.

Aims and objectives

To continue and complete the work begun by CFA Archaeology, and clean, investigate and record all remaining features within the site extent shown in Fig 2 above so as to eliminate as far as possible the risk of finds or features of interest being discovered and damaged during site works.

To minimise any possible delay or cost to the development by anticipating archaeological requirements as far as possible, timetabling and integrating archaeological recording work with the project, and dealing with any issues arising quickly and efficiently.

To determine as far as possible the character, extent, condition, date and significance of any archaeologically significant remains; and to record these where necessary in line with the Highland Council's Structure Plan, NPPG 5 and PAN 42.

To ensure that any artefacts or human remains are dealt with in accordance with legal requirements and current policy guidance.

Programme and method

A project proposal (a 'Written Scheme of Investigation') was prepared, submitted to and approved by the Highland Council's Archaeology Unit⁷. This was designed to meet the requirements of the Highland Council Archaeology Unit as set out in the brief supplied by them.

A rapid desk-based assessment was then carried out prior to fieldwork to ensure that full account was taken of previous work in the area. All accessible records were checked for archaeological information, but no additional evidence was discovered.

An initial site inspection, walkover survey and risk assessment were carried out on 25 May 2007.

Fieldwork on site began on 6 August and continued through September. The weather ranged from heavy rain to sun and high winds.

⁷ Wood, J, 2007 Castle Stuart Golf Course WSI (Report no. HAS070712)

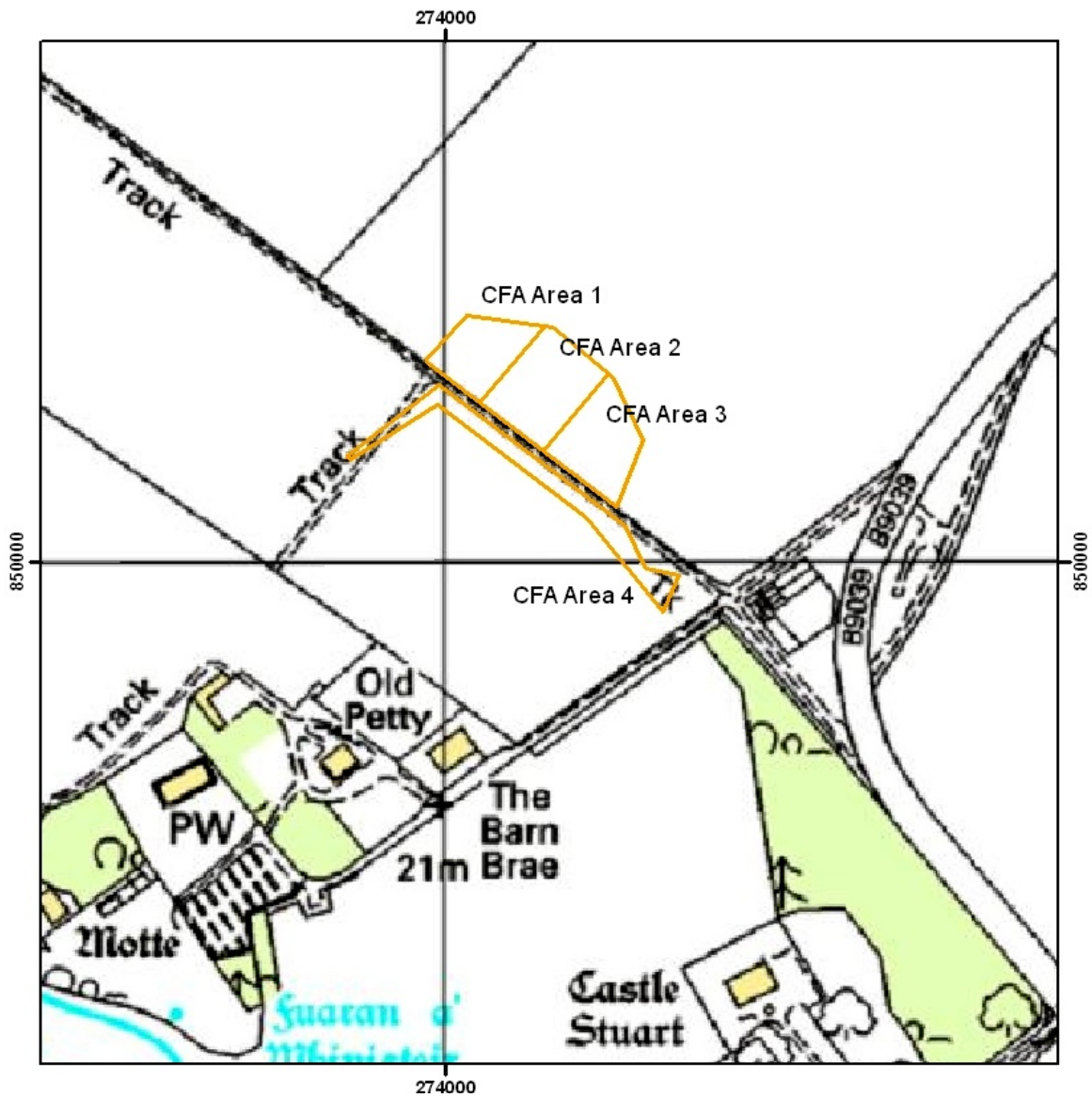


Figure 3 Trench location

Due to the exposed nature of the site, and its coastal location, uncovering and recording the archaeological material on-site was vulnerable to eroding affects of wind and blown sand. The site was divided into 5m square grids, running from 1-23 on the west – east axis and A – I on the south – north axis. This fragmentation of the site allowed the archaeologists to investigate the site more efficiently irrespective of the negative effects of the elements.



Plate 1 Wet weather made conditions difficult and large areas of the site flooded.

On arrival, a large area in the centre of the site was flooded, but this was later drained and dried. The grid areas were manually cleaned and all potentially archaeological pits were half-sectioned. A 10% sample was taken of all linear features. Where these proved on investigation to be natural they were then abandoned; but any that were possibly man-made were drawn and recorded. Selected features, including any containing artefacts or dating evidence, were then fully excavated.

Following investigation of the main site (CFA Areas 1-3) a further area was cleaned and checked for possible archaeological features (CFA Area 4). This was the line of a proposed new access road. Unfortunately this was already in use by heavy plant before the fieldwork in this area could begin. Although this use was suspended during investigations, it had already been severely affected by wheel-slip and compaction, especially in the southern part of this area where vehicles and plant had been parking and turning.

The site was excavated and recorded stratigraphically, and digital records in the form of photographs, ESRI GIS data, Excel spreadsheets and text are included on the accompanying CDROM. All archaeological features were photographed and recorded in plan and section. Artefact assemblages were recovered in order to assist the dating of stratigraphic sequences. Conservation and storage arrangements followed the standard guidance set out in Watkinson D and Neal V, First Aid for Finds 2001 (Rescue, UKIC, and MOLAS)

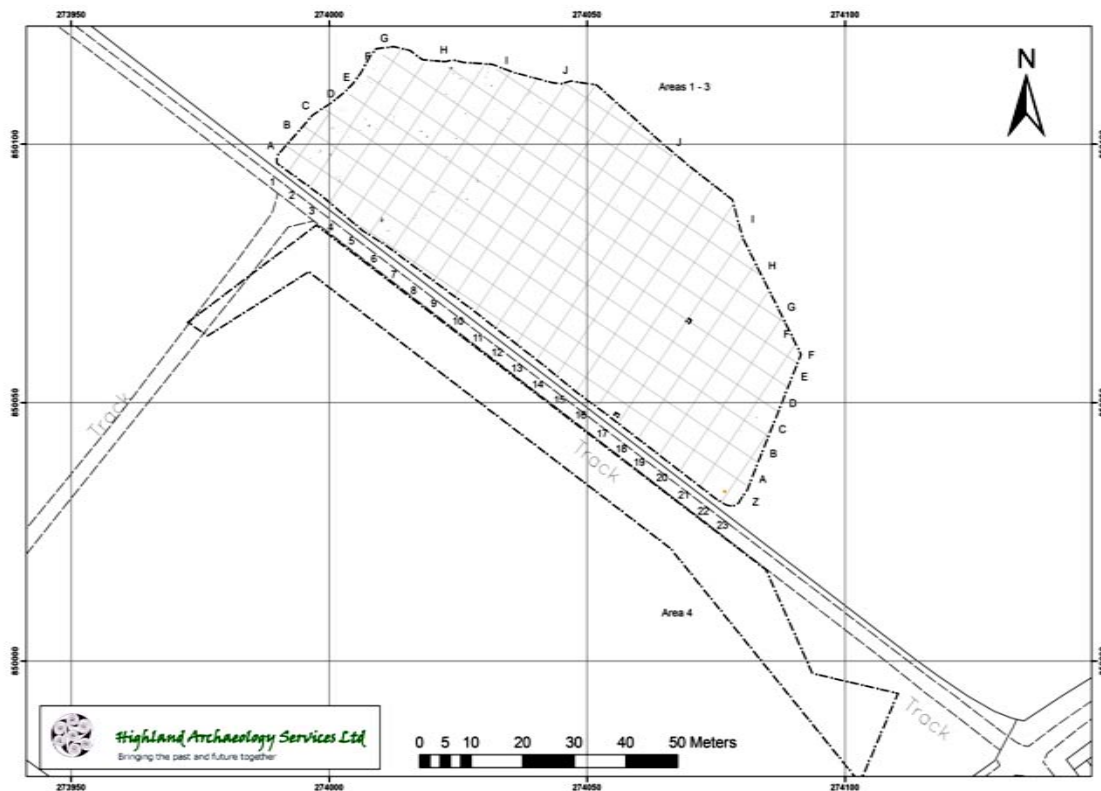


Figure 4 Trenches and site grid

Trench layouts and other larger scale plans were made using the company's Sokkia SET Total Station linked to a Penmap field computer, combined with survey grade Magellan DGPS equipment. Levels were taken and are presented as absolute levels OMSL.

A digital photographic record was made, and photographs with an index are included with this report.

Results

This report summarises the results and presents a typical range of features only. The archive should be consulted for full details of individual finds and features.

The watching brief carried out by CFA Archaeology was able to investigate only 7.5% of the features uncovered, and this appears to have produced a misleading impression of the archaeological potential of the site. The subsoil within the area uncovered ranged from pale grey to orangey yellow sand, with grey decomposing stone mottling and bands of natural iron panning, sterile in patches, containing frequent pebble and small stone inclusions in others. The compaction of the subsoil also varied from soft to firm.

These differences in subsoil, together with the presence of natural hollows and fact that the area had previously been wooded, created the impression of a mass of oval and sub-circular pit-like features that

were, when investigated, found to be tree-bowls and natural depressions created by weathering and the affects of glaciation. (See plate 2 above; also photos 7334, 7375, 7395, 7400 and 7406). The heavy rain that preceded and accompanied the early stages of fieldwork also washed silts into natural hollows.

Again and again, potential features were defined by the initial cleaning, then found on investigation to be of apparently natural origin(see for example photograph 7424). Photograph 7416 demonstrates the deceiving qualities of differential machining leaving topsoil residues, natural staining, and shallow spreads on the surface of the site, and also shows the extensive evidence of animal (mainly rabbit) burrowing activity that was noted across the whole site.



Plate 2 Most features proved to be of natural origin

Table 1: Synopsis of archaeological features present

Feature Type	Number Present
Pit	34
Fire-pit	4
Post hole	2
Stake-hole	20 (19 treated as 1 feature)
Other	9

Nevertheless some features were clearly archaeological. Tables 1 and 2 provide a breakdown of these by type and content. No overall patterning of features was apparent however (see Fig 5).

Table 2: Analysis of pits with finds

Pit context number (cut)	Pottery present?	Flint present?	Section no.	Find no.	Photo
c.05	yes	no	5	1	
c.14	yes	yes	10	4,5,9	
c.16	yes	no	10	8	7251
c.21	yes	no	9	2	
c.34	yes	yes	14	15,16,18	
c.38	yes	no	8	12	7257
c.40	yes	yes	7	10,11	7258
c.42	yes	no	11	17	
c.106	yes	no	17	21	7332, 7333, 7336
c.140	yes	yes	39	26,27	7485, 7486, 7487, 7488, 7489
c.147	no	yes	25	28,30,31	7505
c.157	yes	no	32	32	7528

Finds 22 – 25 were from the surface of the general subsoil and unstratified.

Within the above pits the artefacts seem to have been deliberately placed within the cut. They are similar in shape and fill deposition and the repeated occurrence of flint and/or Bronze Age pottery within them suggests a premeditated function.

Pits c14 and c16 formed a double feature (see Fig 6 above) and contained pottery and lithics.

Four fire pits were recorded, c.20, c.116, c.187 and c.193, the latter recut within c.122 and only evident in section 19. These were all sub-circular in shape and between 0.5-1.0m in diameter, and contained fire-cracked stones and other evidence of burning. They were however of uncertain date and contained no finds.

c.187 is featured below.

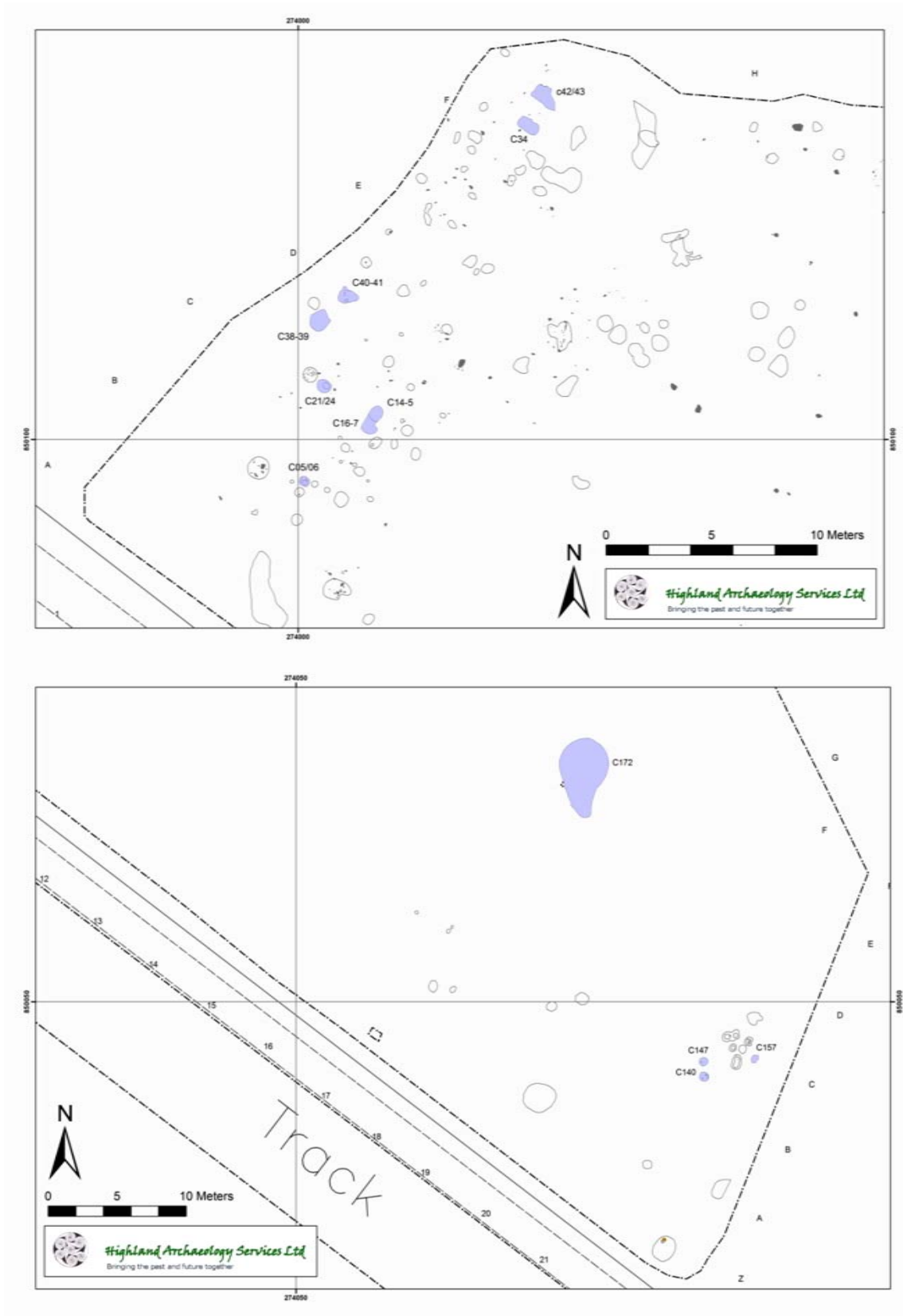


Figure 5 Features recorded with finds

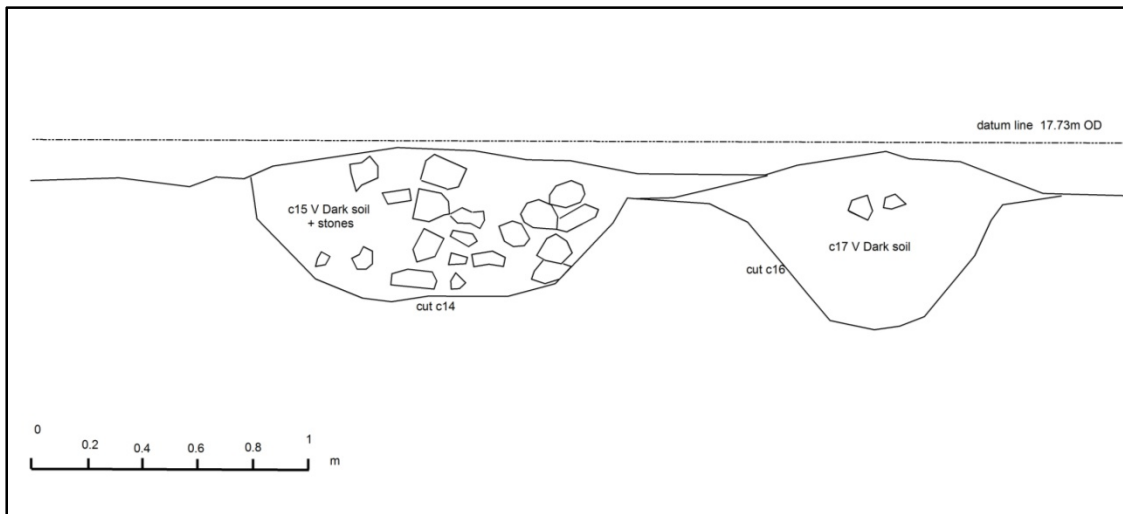
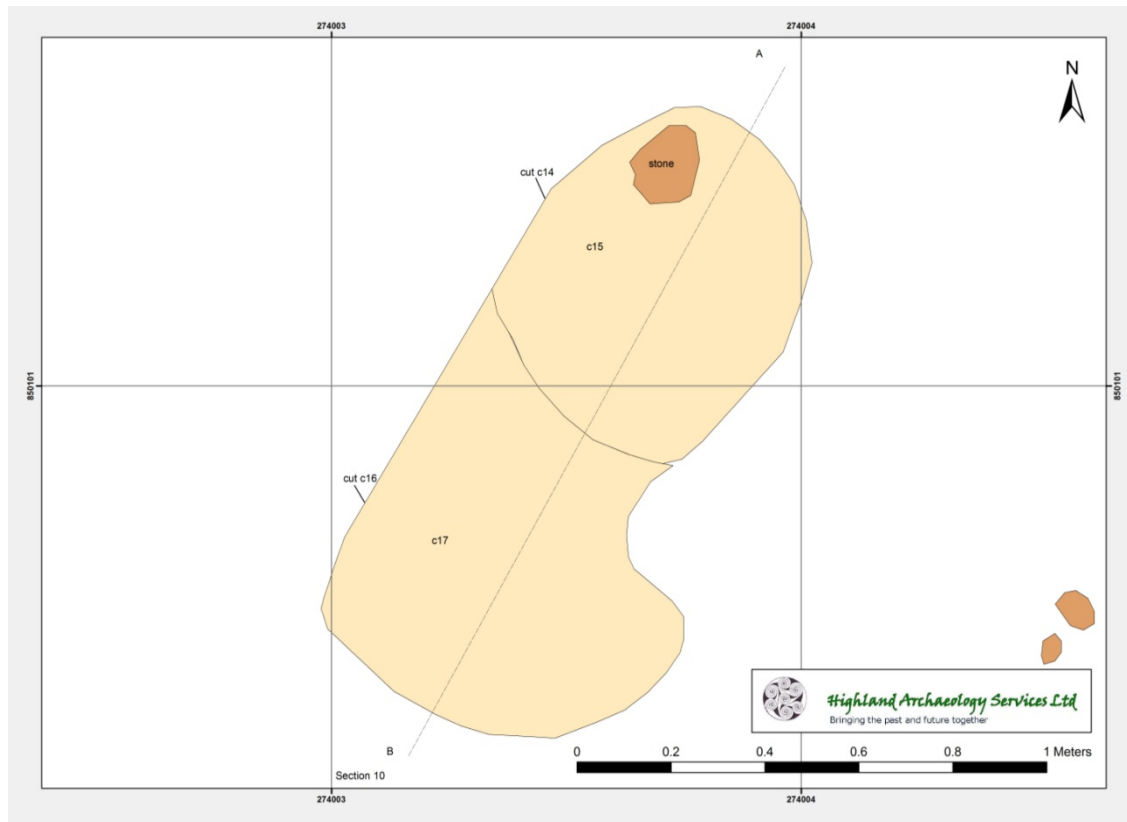


Figure 6 Double feature c14/15; c16/17



Plate 3 Burnt deposit within pit C.11



Plate 4 Fire pit in Area 4: c187

Area 4

This separate area had been opened to create an access road and car parking area, and it had already been in use for both purposes at the time of arrival. Heavy plant had used the southern end in particular for turning. It was also found to be cut by modern drain and electricity trenches. It was however cleaned as far as possible and a single feature of archaeological interest, fire pit c187, was found (see Figs 7 and 8 below; and plate 4 above). This feature, like the other fire pits discovered, contained no dating evidence.

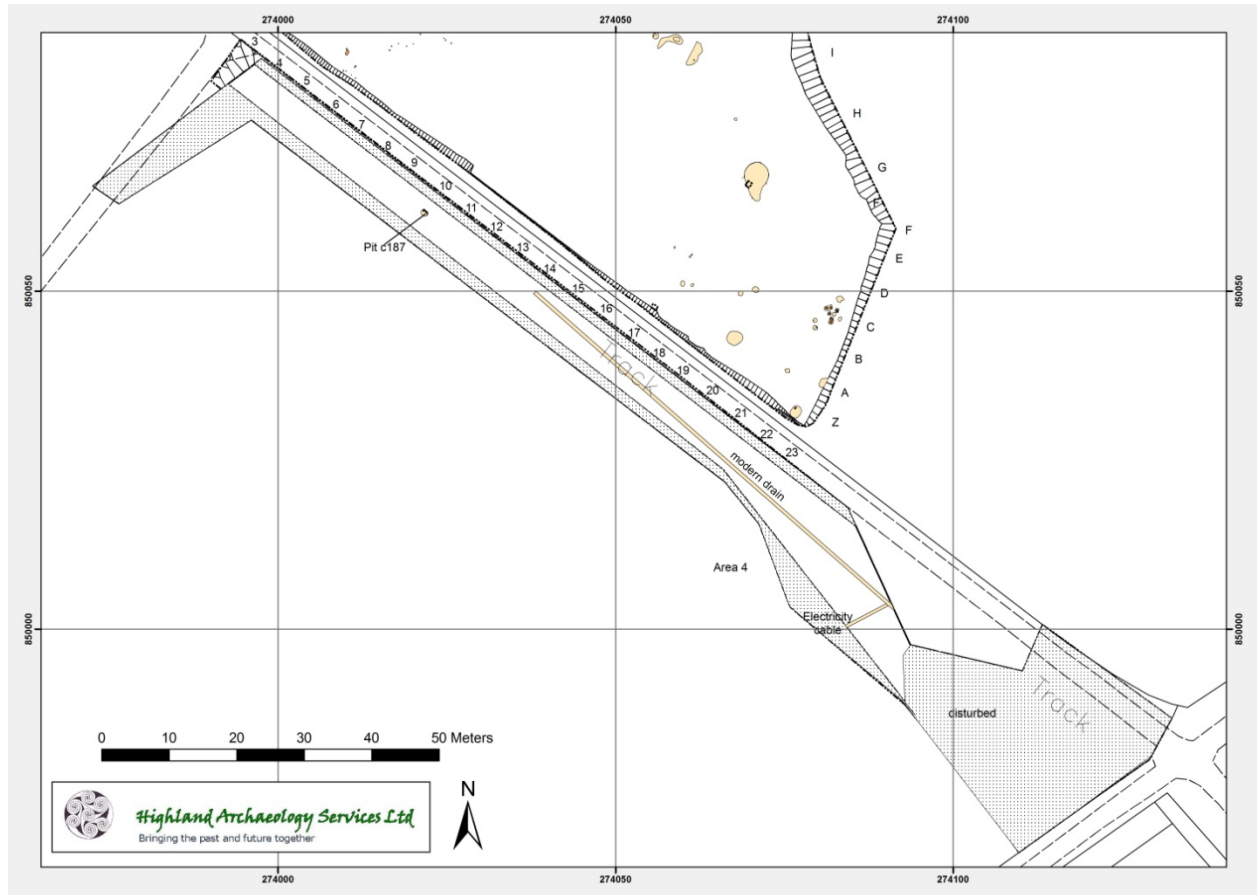


Figure 7 Area 4

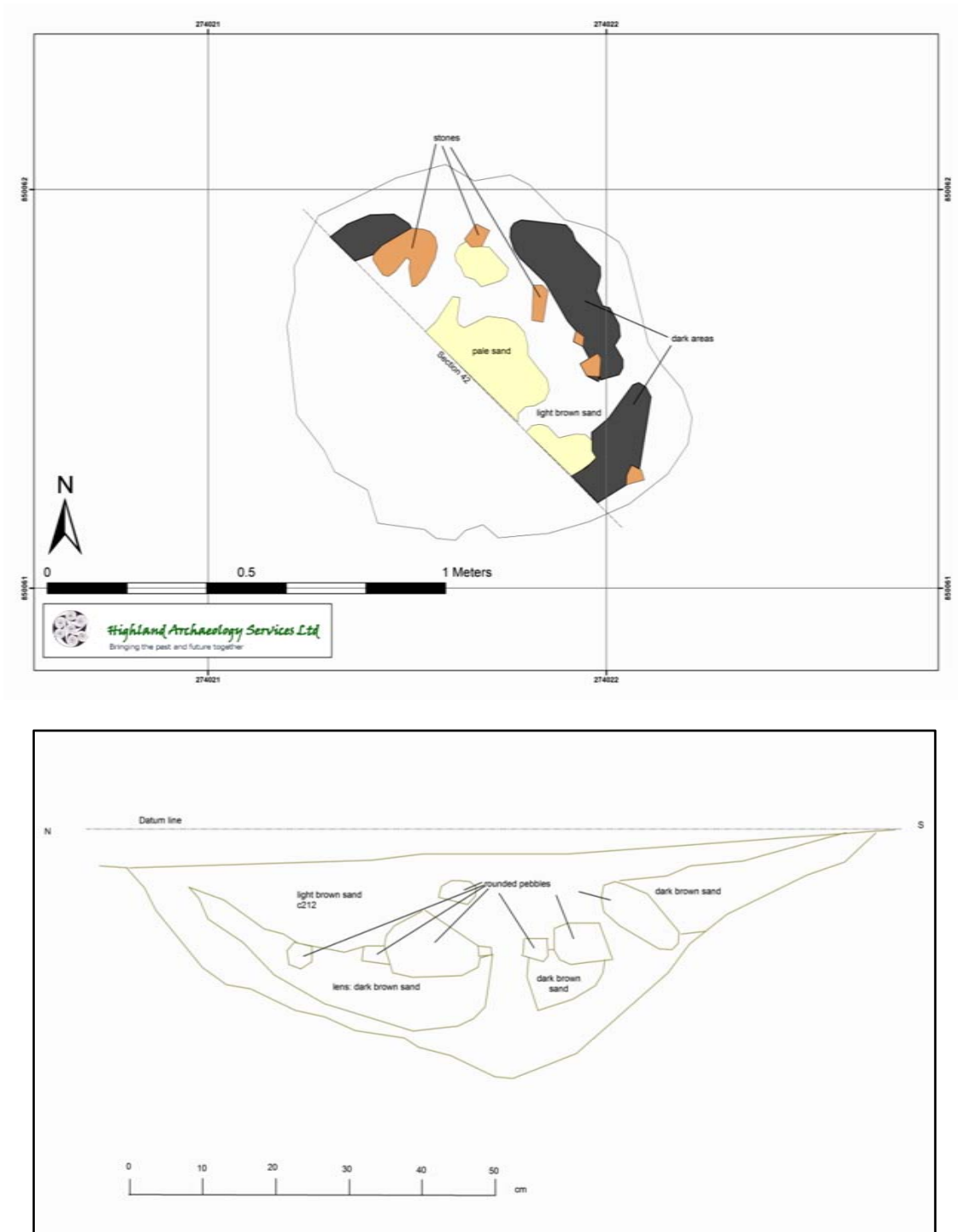


Figure 8 Pit in Area 4: c187

Wattle-lined pit

The most interesting feature excavated (c.172) was a large circular pit, found within grid squares E17, E18, & D18, (see Fig 10 and plate 5 below). It measured 3.55m x 3.50m, with sloping sides and a flat base at a maximum depth of 1.40m. The base was encircled by a series of stake-holes (c.173a – s) which was driven through a hard 'floor' surface (c.175 c.207 & c.209). Above this surface, the original deposits within c.172 were no longer present, due to truncation by a later feature (c.184), a large sub-oval extension which completely removed the southern extremity of c.172. From the surface, before excavation, the original pit and extension were impossible to distinguish, and the western edge of c.184 was very unclear. An initial section was cut across what appeared to be centre of the feature (fig 3). Once the two-phase nature of the feature was established, a second section was cut at right angles to the first through the extension.

Impressions of vertical stakes lying against the sloping walls have been interpreted as representing a wattle lining. The base was very firmly compacted and showed signs of oxidation, suggesting the possible presence of fire or heat. No associated archaeological features were found nearby to provide a context.

This appears to be a storage pit, although no evidence of possible contents was found. It has also been suggested that it could have been used for curing meat or fish (see fig 4). It had been extended southwards (c.184) to give an overall pear-shape (Fig 3). This may have been for access.



Plate 5 Wattle-lined pit (C.172) with extension c.184 half-sectioned.

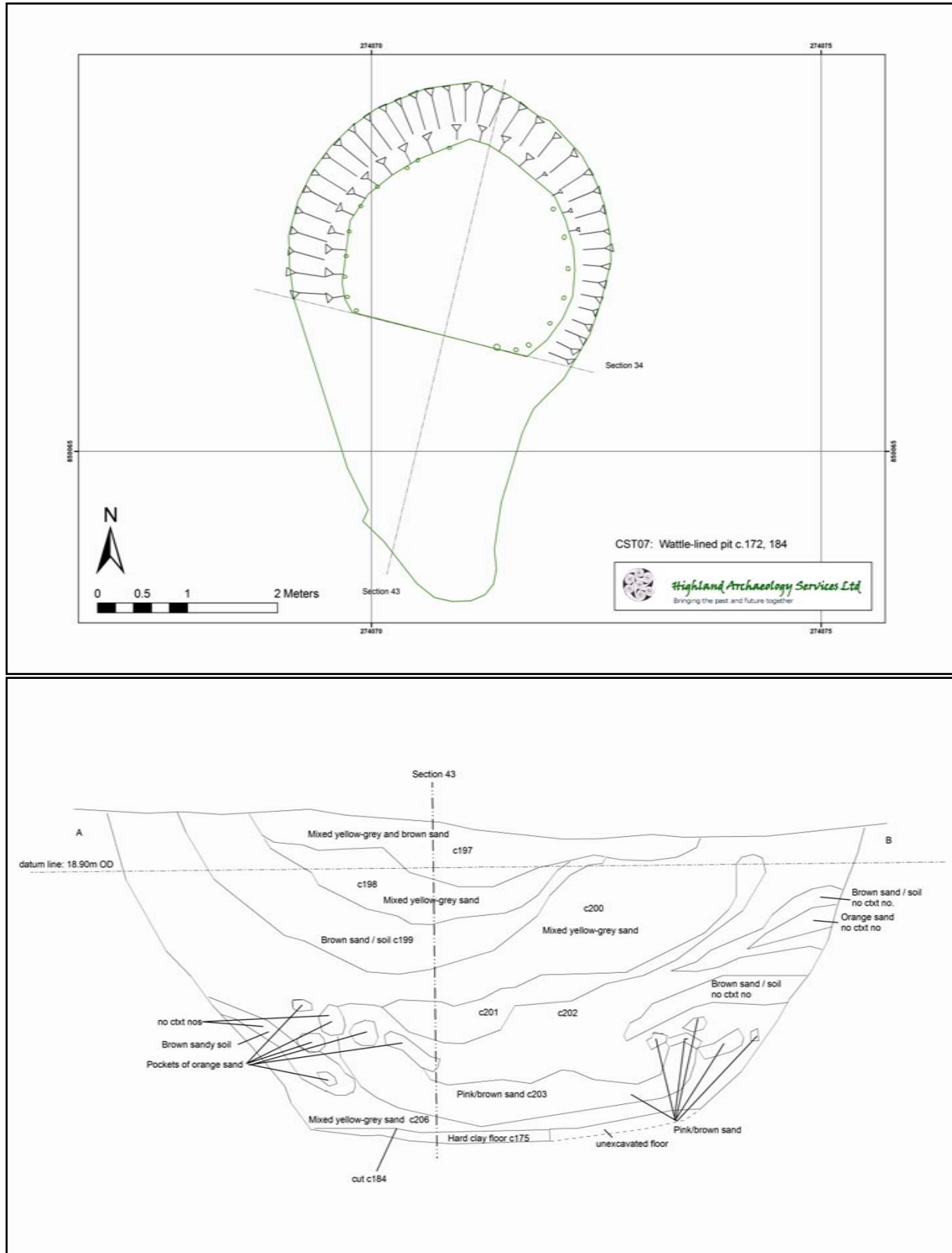


Figure 9: wattle-lined pit c.172. Plan and initial section

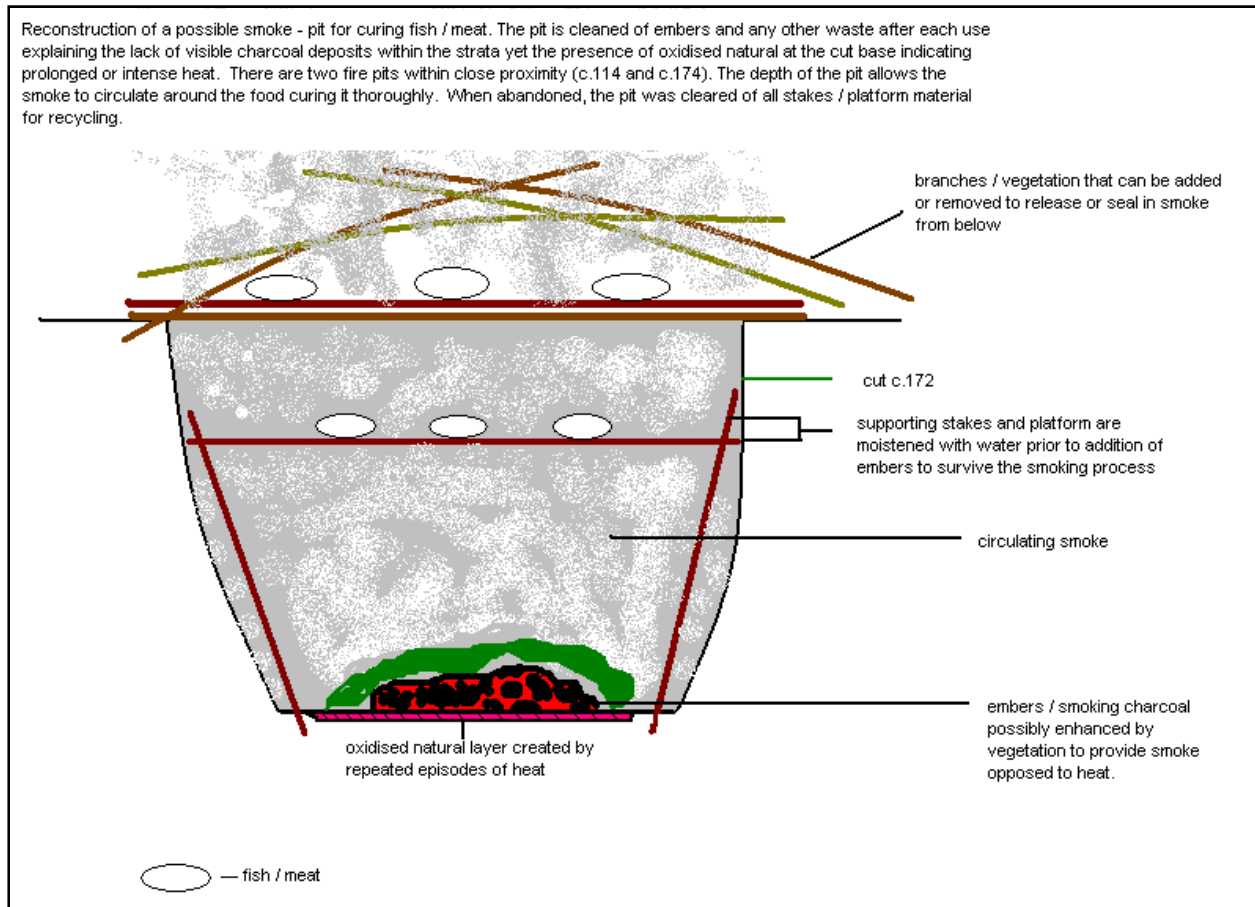


Figure 10 Possible reconstruction of c.172 as smoke pit

Discussion

This archaeological investigation attempted to continue and complete recording begun by CFA Archaeology during a watching brief on site clearance. A dense scatter of features was recorded but the great majority of these were found to be of natural origin. Bronze Age pottery fragments and lithics indicate occupation in the period 4,400 – 2,500 years ago. The area was later wooded and most of the apparent pits were clearly formed by tree roots and burrowing animals.

The additional area examined (Area 4) was found to be heavily disturbed by service trenches and vehicle movements. One fire-pit was identified in this area.

These results are very similar to other investigations on the gravels in the Inverness area, such as those in advance of the Southern Distributor Road, the Retail and Business Park, and the housing developments south of Inverness. Occasional, sometimes major Bronze or Iron Age discoveries occur among large numbers of undifferentiated, mostly natural, features. Subsequent land-use, especially medieval ploughing, has generally destroyed most of the dating evidence leaving very fragmentary remains which can be difficult to interpret. In this case, the site appears to have been wooded, leaving many tree-root holes.

Finds



CST 2007
Find number 20
Decorated rim sherd
Bronze Age

Plate 6: Rim fragment of Bronze Age pottery (Find 20 from c.105)
10mm grid

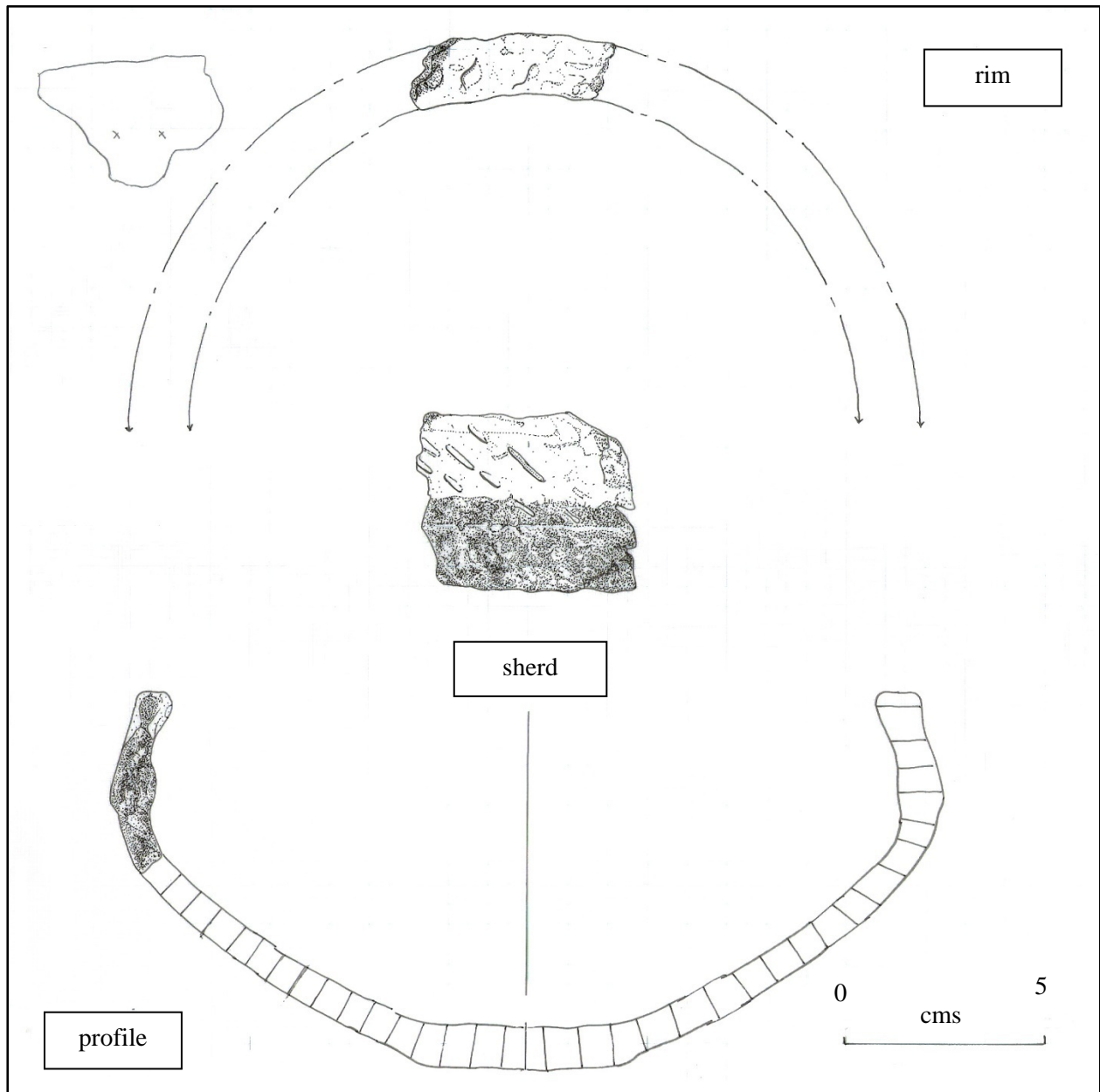


Figure 11 Find 20



Plate 7: Flint implements: L-R: Nos 27, 28, 33, 31

Bronze Age pottery and flints in some pits suggested deliberate burial.

These results are in line with those of similar investigations in the Inverness area.

Conclusions and Recommendations

No further archaeological fieldwork is proposed within the area investigated. However, since some Bronze Age artefacts were present, and in view of the wattle lined pit c.172, watching briefs are recommended on any excavations in the adjoining fields for further facilities if and when these go ahead.