



Highland Archaeology Services Ltd

Bringing the Past and Future Together

Controlled Topsoil Strip



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Site Code	HAS-CCG13
Client	Eddie Geddes Drafting Services
Planning Ref	12/04118/FUL
OS Grid Ref	NC 5795 0435
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Author	Lachlan Mckeggie

Summary

This report covers work undertaken at Cashel Croft, Gruids, Sutherland on 28th March 2013. This included a desk-based assessment, and a controlled topsoil strip of part of the development footprint, in order to meet a planning condition on the development of a house and garage.

Three features were recorded: two field drains and a pit.

The whole footprint of the development has not yet been stripped: the access drive, service areas, septic tank and soakaway have still to be done.

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Acknowledgements

Fieldwork was undertaken by Lachlan Mckeggie. Project management overall was by John Wood, who also edited this report. Background mapping has been reproduced by permission of the Ordnance Survey under Licence 100043217. Historic mapping is courtesy of the National Library of Scotland.

The proposed development is located on the B864, on the west bank of the River Shin, centred at approximate grid reference NC 5795 0435, East of Gruids, Sutherland, at about 82m above sea level.



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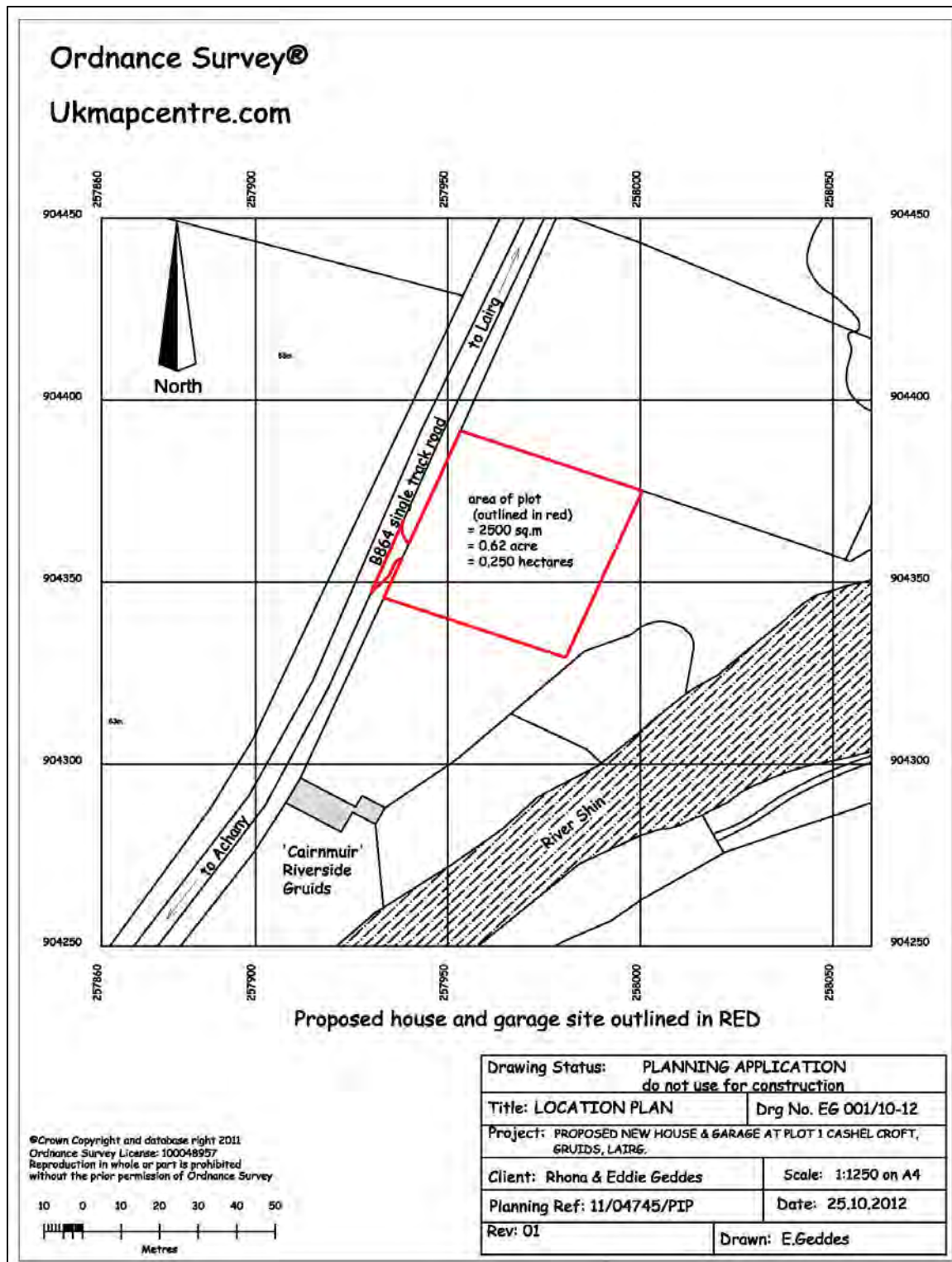


Figure 2 Site location (detail)

Courtesy of client

Aims and objectives

- 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 national and local policies and standards.

Legislation and Policy

The common principles underlying international conventions, national legislation and local authority planning policies are that cultural heritage assets should be identified in advance of development and safeguarded where practicable; if disturbance is unavoidable appropriate recording of features and recovery of portable artefacts should take place. These have been set out in international and European Union agreements, and UK and Scottish legislation, as well as national and local planning policies¹.

Professional standards during the present project will be secured by adherence to the *Codes of Conduct and Approved Practice and Standards* of the Institute for Archaeologists² and the Highland Council's *Standards for Archaeological Work*.

Archaeology background

The proposed development is a house and associated works at Cashel Croft, Gruids, Sutherland. No features of archaeological significance have previously been found within the site, but archaeological fieldwork was requested in this case because significant archaeological features have been found in the

¹ International policy includes the *European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage* (the Valletta Convention), ratified by the UK government in 2000; European Directives incorporated into UK legislation include the *Environmental Impact Assessment (Scotland) Regulations* 2011

Key UK legislation includes The *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act* 1979 which covers any monument 'of national importance' and requires Historic Scotland's consent for any works affecting it. The *Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act* 1997 and the *Planning etc (Scotland) Act* 2006 confirm that the historic environment (whether covered by statutory protection or not) is a material consideration in the planning process.

Planning policy includes the Scottish Government's *Scottish Planning Policy* (SPP 2010). This defines the 'historic environment' and indicates that where preservation is not possible, planning authorities should ensure that procedures are in place in order that appropriate excavation, recording, analysis, publication and archiving is undertaken before and/or during development and that the developer has made appropriate provision for this. Historic Scotland's policies and guidance are set out in *Scottish Historic Environment Policy* (SHEP) 2009, and *Managing Change in the Historic Environment* series (2010).

The Highland Council's *Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP)* (2010, adopted 2012) encourages appropriate developments while protecting archaeology and built heritage

surrounding area. Across the road from this site, for example, fieldwork carried out by AOC Archaeology in connection with the installation of a water main in 1993 identified 50 previously unrecorded sites³.

Method

The method was designed to meet the requirements of a condition placed on the planning permission for this development by the Highland Council. Evaluation of a minimum 15% of the site was requested, to be followed by further work as necessary. However as this could not guarantee that archaeological artefacts or features may not be discovered during site clearance, it was decided to conduct the clearance as a whole under controlled conditions so as to ensure that any archaeology affected by the development was recorded. However when on site only the area for house and garage were marked out so only these were stripped (Figures 3 & 4). Therefore to date two trenches have been opened, corresponding to the house site and garage, totalling 372 sq. m. These represent a sample size of 14.53% of the site as a whole (Figure 4).

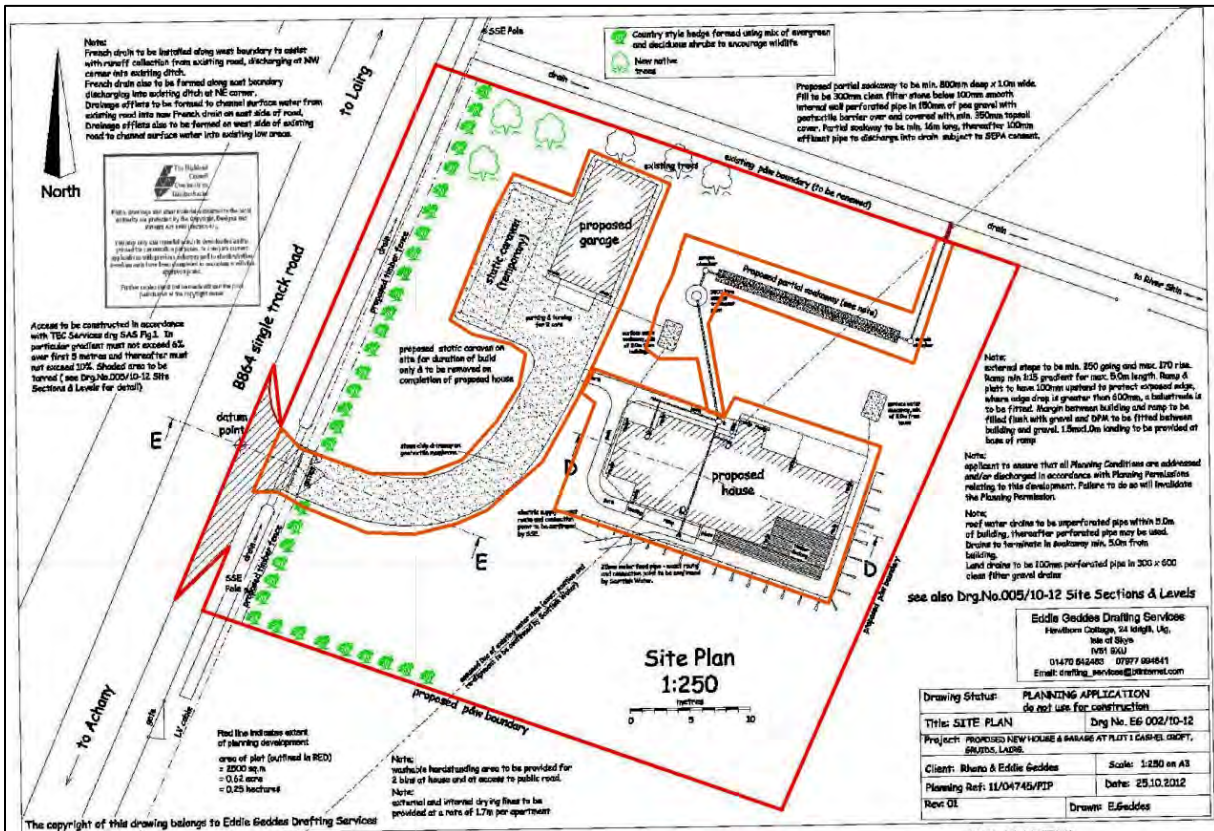


Figure 3 Proposed development footprint with area proposed to be stripped outlined in orange (indicative)
Courtesy of client

³HHER EH137

Desk Based Assessment and Initial Recording

Relevant archaeological / historical records, maps and aerial photographs were checked as proposed, and photographs were taken to record the site as found (Figure 15).



Figure 4 Plan of site showing actual area excavated in green and areas still to be stripped.

Controlled Topsoil strip

The work on site was undertaken on 28th March 2013. The conditions were cold and overcast with occasional snow flurries in the morning, clearing to bright sunshine in the afternoon.

Topsoil was stripped from the footprint of the house and garage as shown in Figure 4. However no excavation was undertaken in other areas, and (as discussed with the client on site) a further visit is recommended to observe the topsoil removal in these.

The method adopted was as outlined in the proposal previously circulated and agreed⁴.

⁴Wood J 2013 *Cashel Croft Gruids, Project Design, Risk Assessment and Method Statement*, Highland Archaeology Services report HAS130303, Cromarty

Results

The two trenches revealed three archaeological features cut into the subsoil. These were a single pit (Feature 1), and two field drains (Features 2 and 3)

The subsoil was found to be a relatively dry yellow to red brown sand on the higher (SE) side of the house trench, changing to a wet, clay-rich grey-brown material in the NW and garage trench. All areas were stony, with crumbling hard metamorphic rock and iron rich stone. The garage trench contained some very large boulders.

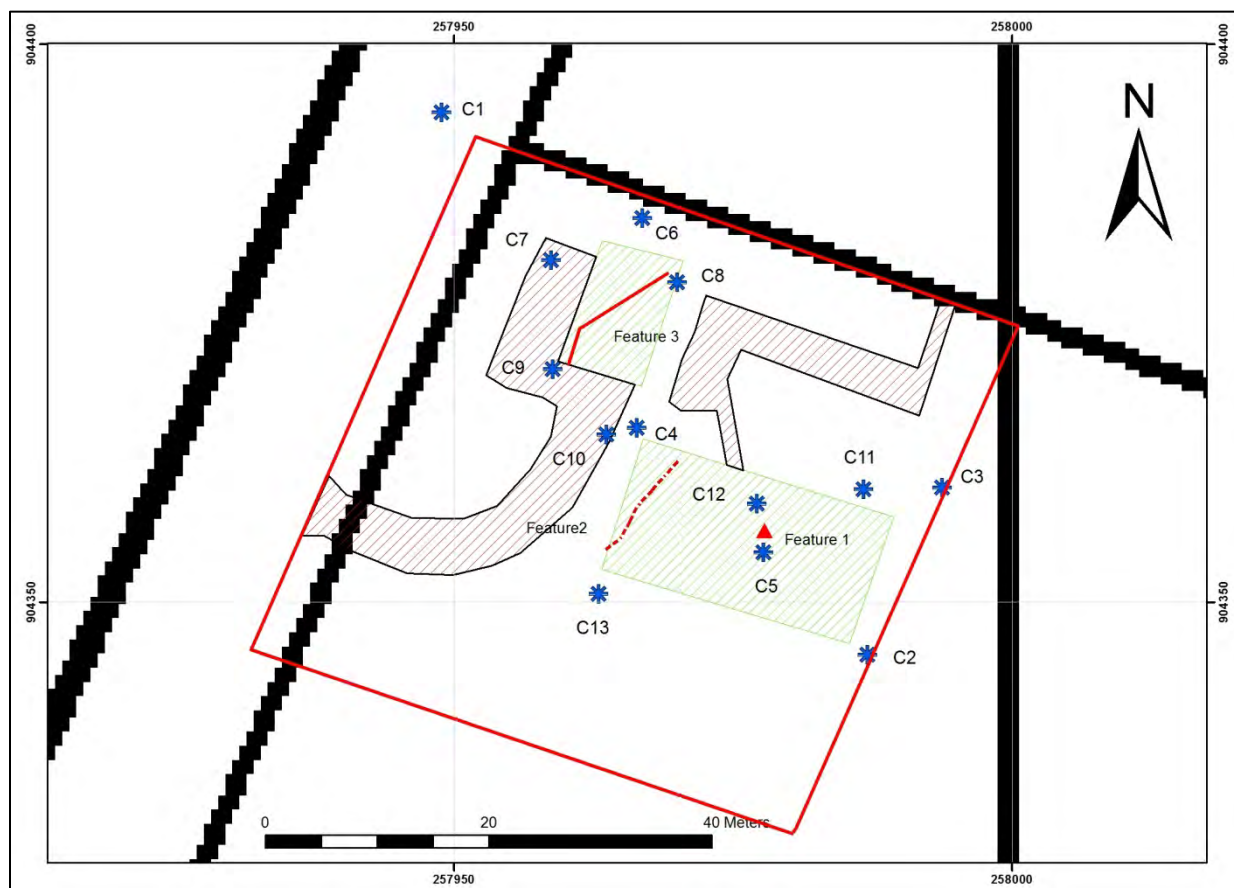


Figure 5 Site detail showing trenches camera points and archaeological features.

Feature F1

Feature F1 was a shallow circular pit, c.1m in diameter and 0.12m deep, with two distinct fills. It was encountered near the centre of the house trench (Figure 5). The upper fill (context 005) consisted of a slightly mixed brown topsoil with much darker black charcoal rich material. This contained large lumps and many flecks, with burned matted vegetation that peeled off and crumbled when excavated. Beneath this layer was a lower fill (006), formed of a pale mixed yellow-brown soil similar to the surrounding subsoil. This also contained small stones, some of which were iron rich. Find 2 (narrow gauge iron pipe) was found within this context. These fills were contained within a cut [context 001], shallow but distinct on the uphill (SE) side but less clear on the downhill (NW) side (see Drawings 3-5, Figures 11-13).

This was interpreted as a shallow pit excavated into the subsoil and partially filled with mixed topsoil, subsoil and rubbish (Find 2). A fire was then set in the pit burning wood and also peat leaving behind deposit (005). The nature of Find 2 from the earlier fill suggests this was of no earlier date than 19th century. The fire appears from the staining to have been raked out (Figure 6)



Figure 6 Feature F1, mid-excitation

Feature F2

This was a very ephemeral feature, encountered in the SW corner of the house trench. It appeared to run in a NE direction across the trench but was very hard to make out in the clay rich deposits and had totally disappeared before it reached the other side of the trench. Before proper excavation could take place the area had flooded with water so no further work was possible. A section of clay water pipe was recovered from the SW end (Figure 7, find 4).

The clay drain pipe indicates this was a drain, probably for surface water, although no excavation was possible. The drain was probably formed with similar pipe sections laid end to end and may have been a very superficial feature running out of a wet area. It has probably silted up with surrounding clay making it very difficult to see.



Figure 7 Section of clay water pipe recovered from feature F2 (find 4)



Figure 8 Feature F3



Figure 9 Feature F3: section.

Feature F3

This was a long narrow linear feature running right across the garage trench (Figure 5). It was defined by a flat bottomed, steep sided cut [003] into the very clay rich subsoil strewn with large stones. The cut was 0.25m into the subsoil and was 0.6m across at the top, narrowing to 0.4m across the base, although it was not absolutely consistent across its length. The feature ran for 10.5m across the trench from close to the NE corner with a dog leg at 8.5m chainage (Figure 8). It was filled mainly with large stones and a dark

peat-rich soil very similar to the topsoil in this area (004). Find 1 was also recovered from this fill: a small shard of white glazed ceramic. (Figures 8, 9)

This is clearly a stone-filled field drain, dug to try and dry out this very wet area of the field, which has silted up. The small piece of fine, white glazed porcelain or similar has presumably washed in, so is not in a secure, datable context, but the feature as a whole is not likely to predate the 18th century, and is probably even later.

Conclusions and Recommendations

After a section had been taken through the pit (F1), the feature was completely excavated and found to contain narrow gauge iron pipe – probably from agricultural machinery.

Although feature F2 could not be excavated because of flooding its position has been recorded and its nature clarified owing to the recovery of the clay drain pipe.

A section was cut through the other field drain (F3), which is probably a minor feature of 19th or 20th century date.

No other features were identified in the areas excavated and it seems likely that any other activity would have taken place on the higher, drier ground to the SE of the present site.

The areas already excavated and highlighted in green in Figure 4 require no more archaeological work.

Although the results have not produced significant archaeological finds or features, we recommend that an archaeologist is present when the other areas are stripped, in line with the project design previously agreed.

Tables

Features

Feature no.	Trench	Contexts	Description and interpretation
F1	House	001,005,006	A shallow circular pit, c.1m in diameter and 0.12m deep, with two distinct fills.
F2	House	002, 007	Ephemeral drain feature, flooded before excavation, containing fired clay drainage pipe
F3	Garage	003, 004	Stone-filled field drain

Contexts

Context no.	Trench	Feature	Type	Description and interpretation	Stratigraphy:		
					Above	Equal to	Below
001	House	1	Cut	Round cut of feature 1.	009		008
002	House	2	Cut	Cut of linear feature 2	009		008
003	Garage	3	Cut	Cut of linear feature 2	009		008
004	Garage	3	Deposit (fill)	Large stone and mixed silt fill of field drain [F3]	003		008
005	House	1	Deposit (fill)	Very charcoal rich mixed top fill of feature 1	006		008
006	House	1	Deposit (fill)	Yellow brown muddy bottom fill of feature 1	001		005
007	House	2	Deposit (fill)		002		008
008	Both	-	Deposit	Topsoil	004, 005, 007, 008		-
009	Both	-	Deposit	Natural subsoil	-		001, 002, 003, 008

Photos

Photo no.	Facing	Camera point	Subject
1-3	E to S	1	House site from road side north corner
4-6	NW to NE	2	House site from SE (top) corner
7-10	SW to NW	3	House site from NE (top) corner
11	SE	-	Opening up house trench from SW corner
12-14	NW	4	Garage plot from its SE corner
15	-	5	Pre-excavation of feature F1
16	S	6	Garage plot from north side
17-19	NE-SE	7	Garage plot from west side
20	SW	8	Feature F3 drain
21	NE	9	Feature F3 drain
22	NW	10	General post excavation of garage trench.
23	SE	10	General post excavation view of house trench
24	WNW	11	General post excavation of house trench
25-27	E	12	Pre-excavation of feature F1
28	NE	13	Feature F2 flooded drain
29-31	W	-	Post-excavation section through feature 3 drain
32-33	-	-	Ceramic drain from feature F2
34-36	E	12	Mid-excavation of feature F2 with context 005 removed
37-39	E	12	Post-excavation of feature F1 with section
40-42	E	12	Post-excavation of feature F1 all removed
43	NE	-	Field gate

Finds

Find no.	Context	Trench	Find
1	004	Garage	Small fragment of white glazed ceramic
2	006	House	Pieces of small gauge iron pipe
3	006	House	Small pieces of small gauge iron pipe from close to cut [001]
4	007	House	Clay water pipe 0.4m long with oval opening c.0.14m across.

Drawings

Drawing no.	Type	Trench	Showing
1	Plan	Garage	Feature 3 running across whole trench (1:100)
2	Section	Garage	East facing section of slot through F3
3	Plan	House	Pre-excavation plan of F1
4	Section	House	Post-excavation of F1
5	Plan	House	Post-excavation plan of F1

Drawings

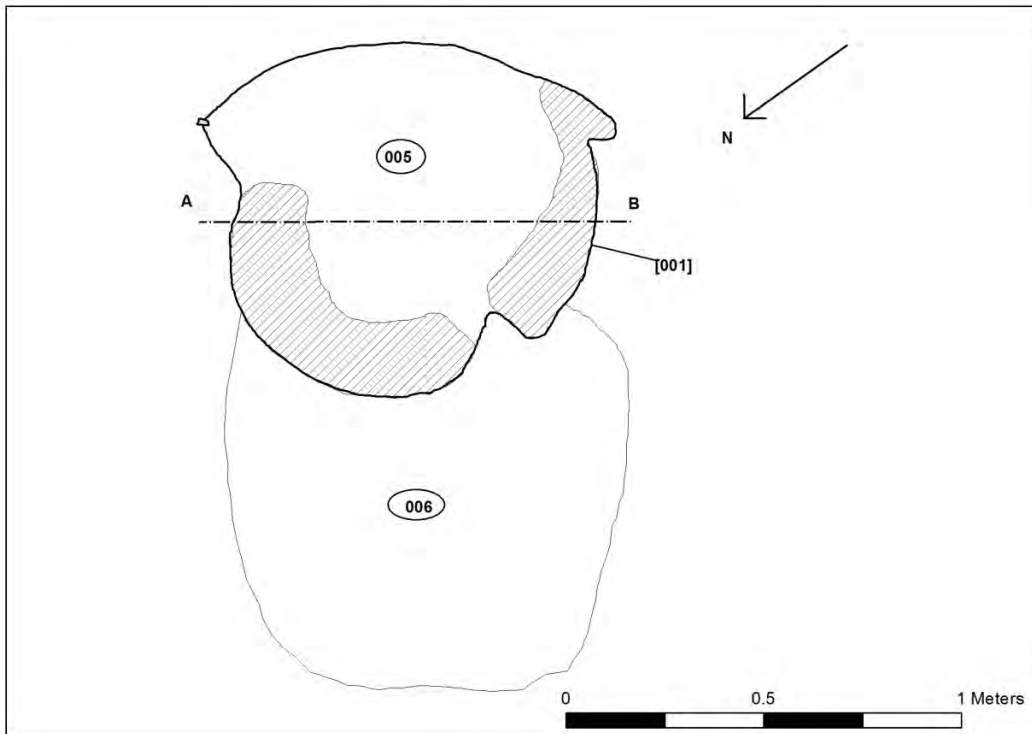


Figure 10 Pre-excitation plan: Feature F1 (Drawing 3)

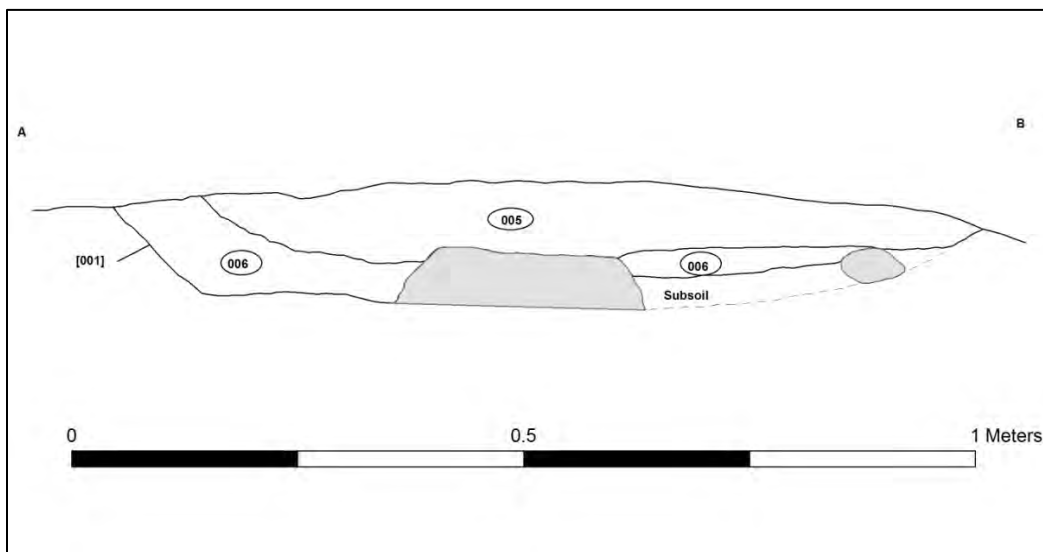


Figure 11 Section through feature F1 (Drawing 4)

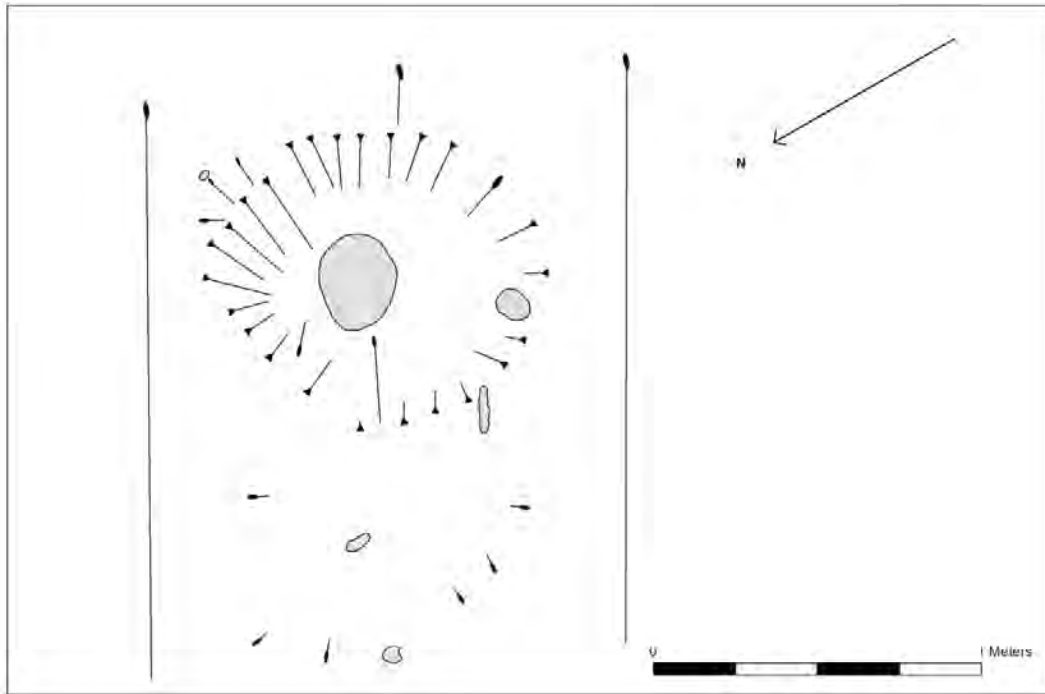


Figure 12 Post-excavation plan of feature F1 (Drawing 5)

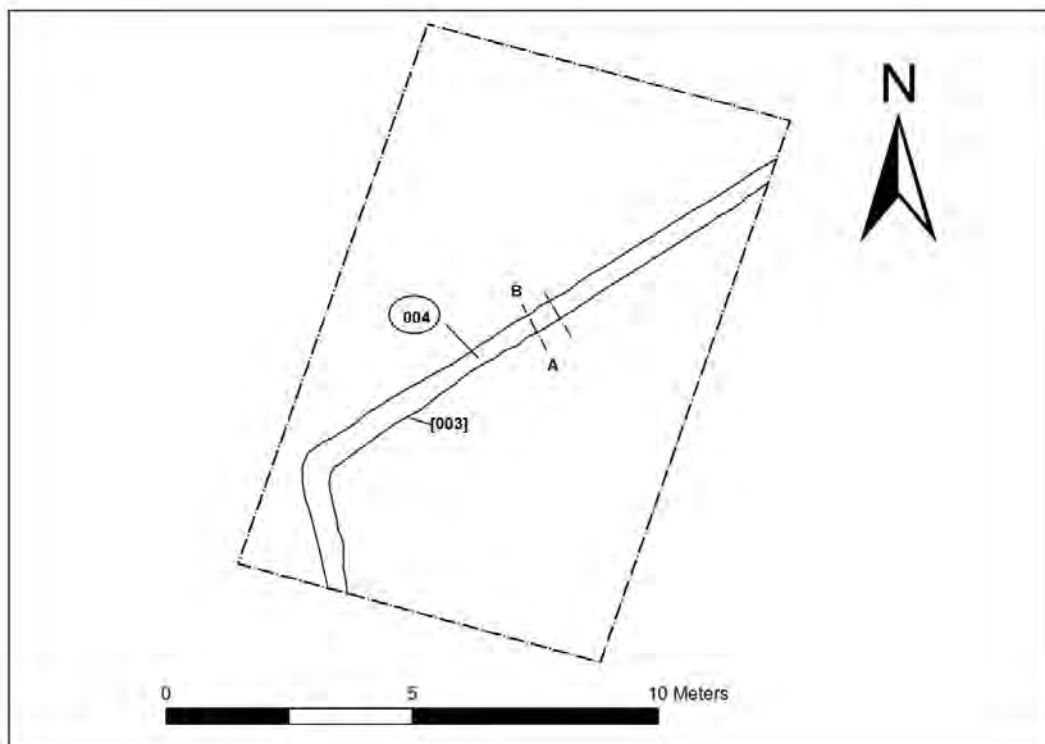


Figure 13 Garage Trench, showing feature F3 (Drawing 1)

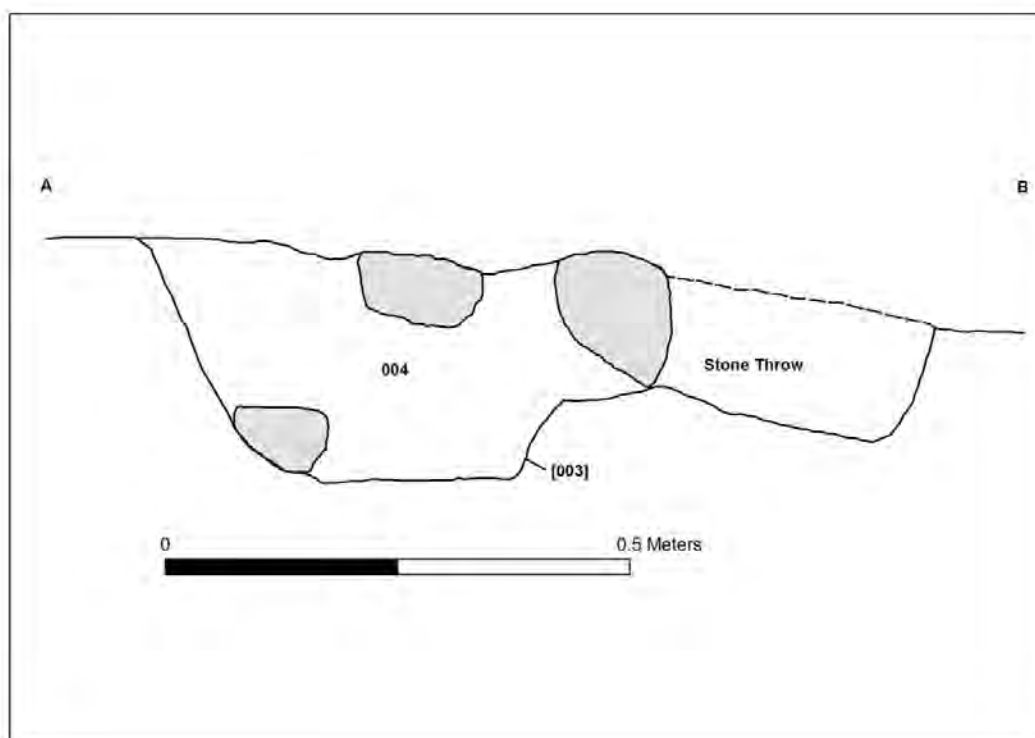


Figure 14 Section through feature F3 (Drawing 2)



Figure 15 General view of site pre excavation from NW corner.