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ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS
AT
CASTLE HEATHER FARM,
BALLOAN, INVERNESS

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Introduction

Castle Heather Farm was being redeveloped as an 18-hole Golf Course and an application had also been lodged to develop part of the site for housing. As Highland Regional Council Archaeology Section had expressed strong interest in the archaeological value of this area the author was appointed to act as Archaeological Consultant for Mike Mackenzie of Castle Heather Farm. The specification was to carry out an assessment of the proposed housing area and to carry out a watching brief on construction work for the Tees and Greens. This work included an examination of the mound previously recorded as the site of *Castle Heather*, as this had been chosen as the site of one of the greens.

Background

The farm lies in an area of known archaeological importance with the stone circle at Druids Temple, the palisaded enclosure and associated settlement at Balloan and the important cist burial found at Culduthel all demonstrating prehistoric activity in this area. Aerial reconnaissance has identified several sites including the Scheduled Timber Hall at Parks and the Pit Circle at Balloan Cottages as well as two enclosures within the boundaries of the new golf course. The design of the golf course has allowed both these monuments to be protected (see Appendix B for a further description of all these sites).

In medieval times a castle named **Castle Lether** was built. Little is known of its history and it survived as a low ditched mound until the 1960s. It became used as a farm dump and any surviving structural remains were removed when the site was levelled. It remained unclear whether any deposits survived relating to the use of the site as a castle.

Method

The three areas of study, namely the proposed housing development on the West side of Castle Heather Farm, the putative site of Castle Heather and the Golf Course were all examined by means of 1m wide machine trenches cut to the level of the subsoil. Where significant deposits were revealed these were cleaned by hand and recorded by means of scaled drawings, photographs and written descriptions. The work was carried out between the 1st and 5th August and was handicapped by torrential rain on the 3rd August.

Proposed Housing Development to the West of Castle Heather Farm

17 houses were planned for this development, sited either side of the present access road to Castle Heather Farm. The archaeological specification restricted the examination to 5% of the total area available. 8 machine trenches were cut in the locations indicated on Fig. 2. The trenches were chosen at random, but with a bias towards more level ground where it was

anticipated settlement was more likely to occur.

No significant remains were uncovered.

Castle Heather Mound

The Ordnance Survey Investigators in 1962 (see Appendix A for full account) described a mound 40 metres square partly defined by a ditch and low banks. This was not evident when the site was currently examined. The South side of the mound had clearly been scarped by recent machine work to a depth of c0.75 metres. A total of eight trenches were cut and the main emphasis was to sections across possible ditch lines as it was hoped archaeological deposits might survive within the fill of these features. Two areas were cleaned by machine and hand on the north side of the mound. Unfortunately both of these suffered badly from the torrential rain of the 3rd August.

Trenches I & II Sited on the East side of the monument both trenches revealed a near-vertical cut over 2 metres deep filled with modern materials. It is likely that this side of the monument was scarped possibly as a gravel quarry or just as a bury hole. As a road line formerly skirted the mound to the East of this it is likely that the original profile of the monument had been lost for some time.

Trenches III & IV Sited on the North side of the monument no ditch was evident in either trench. As with the previous trenches a modern road line skirted the edge of the monument on this side and it is likely that here too the original profile has been worn away. There was a slight fall of ground towards the North which had allowed the preservation of one posthole within Trench III. Being largely eroded by the rain it was not excavated but preliminary examination showed it to have a fairly loamy-rich fill suggesting it was not a significant feature. The overburden was primarily modern rubble over a slightly reddish-brown loam, in total nowhere more than 120mm thick. The loam lay directly over the subsoil with no evidence for a developed 'B' horizon and so is likely to have formed fairly recently.

Trenches V & VI Sited on the West side of the monument these trenches both showed a slope in the subsoil. The primary fill was a loose reddish grey loam. No finds were recorded in Trench, though modern materials were found in Trench VI. No defences were noted by the OS investigators on this side as the ground falls away steeply towards the Skiach burn. The present profile is therefore likely to represent modern erosion along the burn side.

Trenches VII & VIII These trenches were opened up following the discovery of a probable posthole in Trench III. 2 further possible postholes were noted before torrential rain fouled the cleaned areas (as illustrated). No finds were made and the loamy fills suggested they may have been recent features. The ephemeral nature of these features and the damage caused by the rain led to the site being abandoned.

Conclusions No archaeological remains of the Castle were found. The original surface of the mound had been scarped and no trace of the ditches survived on the North and East sides. The possible postholes on the North side of the mound may perhaps, relate to the Castle. As they were undateable and severely truncated further work here was not justified.

The South side of the monument was not affected by the recent development work. The owner reported that considerable quantities of farm debris had been dumped into a hole here. It is probable that a similar scarping of the original ditch profile has occurred on this side. A bank running to the South East towards the burn may be a remnant of the original outer bank. This bank can be observed as a very rounded feature continuing eastwards and the northwards with the former road line marking the original position of the ditch. Though defining the monument, truncation by ploughing and vehicle erosion will have removed any archaeological levels. The location of the original mound and ditch is projected on the accompanying plan (Fig 3(ii)).

Golf Course

Work on this project had already started before archaeological supervision was provided. As excavation was only taken to the base of the ploughsoil, it is not thought major archaeological damage will have occurred. The 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 12th, 16th, 17th & 18th Tees and 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 13th, 16th, 17th & 18th Greens had material dumped over the exposed subsoil surfaces and were not examined. The remainder were examined by means of a bucket scrape cut lengthways down the cutting, except for the 9th & 14th Tees and 8th, 10th & 15th Greens which had not been already excavated and were examined by a transverse cutting.

10th Green A small pit 0.6m by 0.2m containing partially decomposed animal bone was revealed. The survival of the animal bone in the acid subsoil and the loamy fill with which it was associated suggested it was a recent deposit. It lay 0.75m to the South of a ditch 0.2m metres wide by 80 millimetres deep. This was clearly the remains of a former field boundary which could be recognised as a low terrace running East/West across the hill slope.

13th Tee A charcoal-rich pit fill was noted here within a recognisably degraded former loam-rich soil. An adjacent area was opened up and cleaned to reveal a group of similar pits and sherds of a dark coarse pottery of a prehistoric date. The author was instructed by the Regional Archaeologist to define the form of the feature represented by these possible posthole pits both by extending the area and by selective excavation. The extent exposed is shown below (Fig 5).

The pits were suggestive of a post-ring for a roundhouse, though this could not be fully confirmed. The torrential rain described above had caused some muddying of the interface between the base of the ploughsoil and the subsoil and it was concluded that opening additional areas would further damage the surviving remains. Only one pit was sectioned to reveal it as a possible posthole 150mm deep and more prehistoric pottery, including a rim sherd. A sample was taken for possible C14 dating. The site was then backfilled by hand.

Conclusions

Though only the one significant archaeological feature was recovered, the nature of the examination meant that only a small sample of the Golf Course and the proposed Housing Development could be seen. There is a large element of luck in the siting of trenches and undoubtedly other archaeological features may have been missed. Though scanty the remains confirm the importance of this area in the prehistoric period.

The failure to find convincing remains of Castle Heather was disappointing as the monument still survives as a truncated shell divested of its original form and deposits.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mike Mackenzie, Castle Heather Farm for making a machine and driver available to carry out excavation work at my convenience and GH Johnstone Associates for supplying survey maps and site plans on which the accompanying figures are based. I would also wish to thank Dorothy Low, HRC Archaeology Section for supplying information on Castle Heather and other archaeological sites in the vicinity. The computer plot of the archaeological site at NH 6780 4246 as illustrated on Fig 9 is copyright to the RCHAMS, John Sinclair House, 16, Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 9NX.

Appendix A - Castle Heather

HRC Archaeological Sites & Monuments Record HNH 64 SE 003

'The site of the castle is a levelled area situated on a gentle north facing slope. The site is a sub-rectangular platform measuring c40m along three sides and c30m, along the SE side. It is 1-2m high. Surrounding it on three sides is a broad ditch varying from 20m wide on the east side to c80m on the NW. The counterscarp of the ditch has been ploughed down at the north angle, and the turn is only just discernible. On the SW side is the natural slope to a burn. The site has been used as a dumping ground for field stones and is known locally as the site of Castle Heather.' (OS Field Investigator:JLO:27.3.1962)

Appendix B - Prehistoric enclosures at Castle Heather identified from the air

HRC Archaeological Sites & Monuments Record HNH 64 SE 041

'NH 678 424. Enclosure (site), Balloan; The crop-mark of a roughly circular enclosure measuring about 20m in diameter within a narrow ditch is visible on air photographs.' (RCHAMS:1977:Catalogue of Aerial Photographs:p14 IN 3111-2:1977)

HRC Archaeological Sites & Monuments Record HNH 64 SE 052

Archaeological Investigations at Castle Heather Farm, Balloan, Inverness

Location of Golf Course and proposed housing development

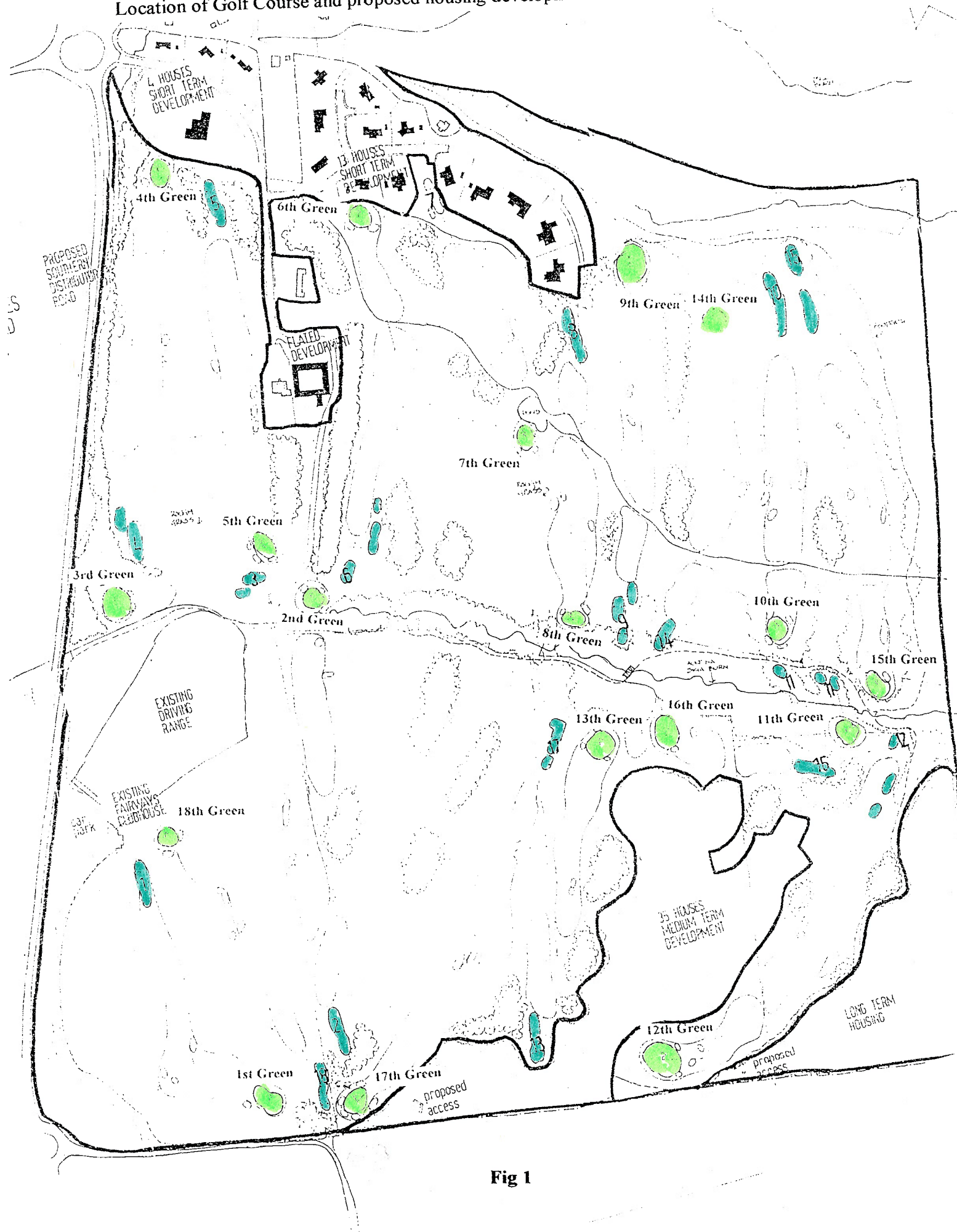
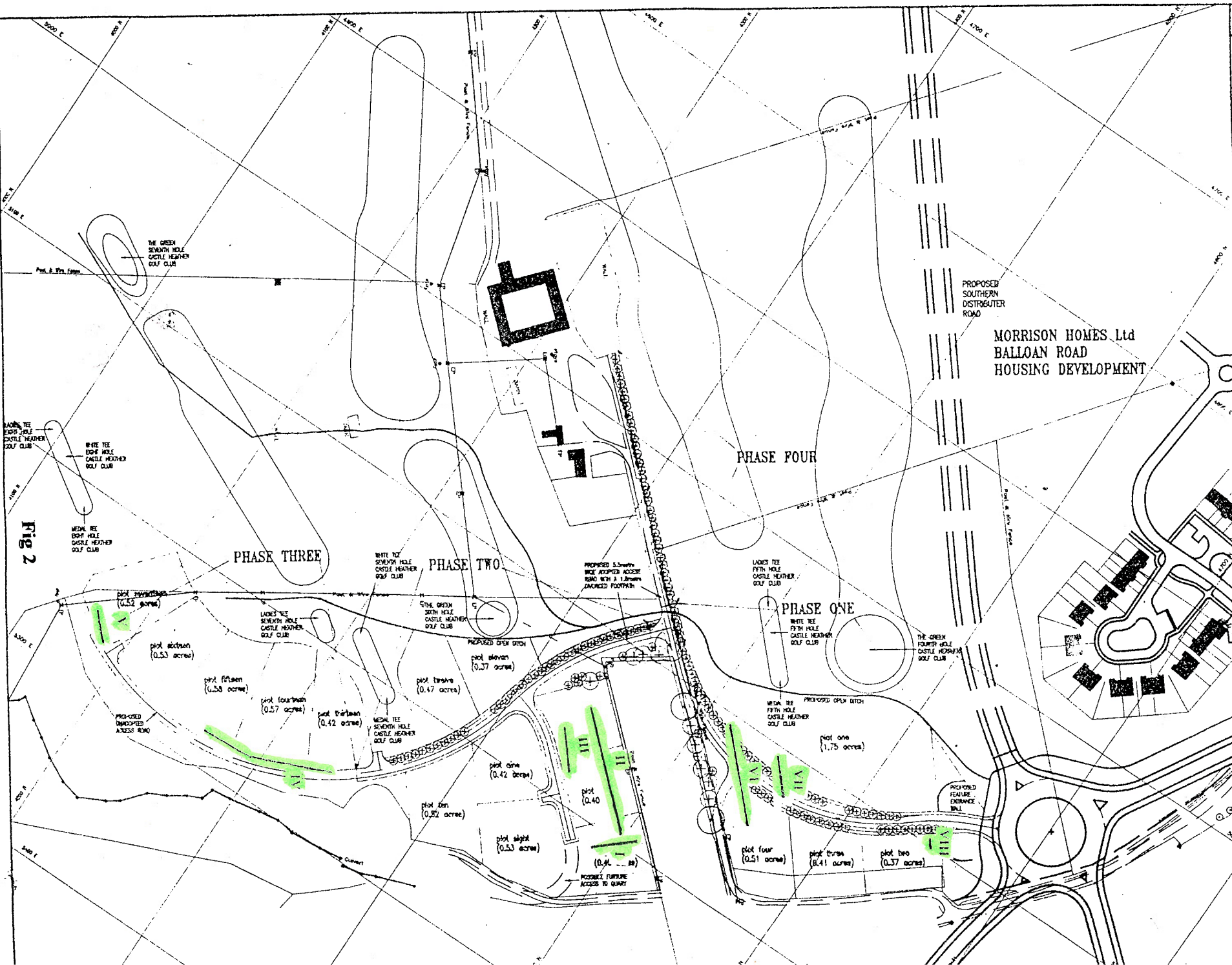


Fig 1

Archaeological Investigations at Castle Heather Farm, Balloan, Inverness

Location of Archaeological Trial Trenches within proposed housing development



M T MacKENZIE & Co Ltd

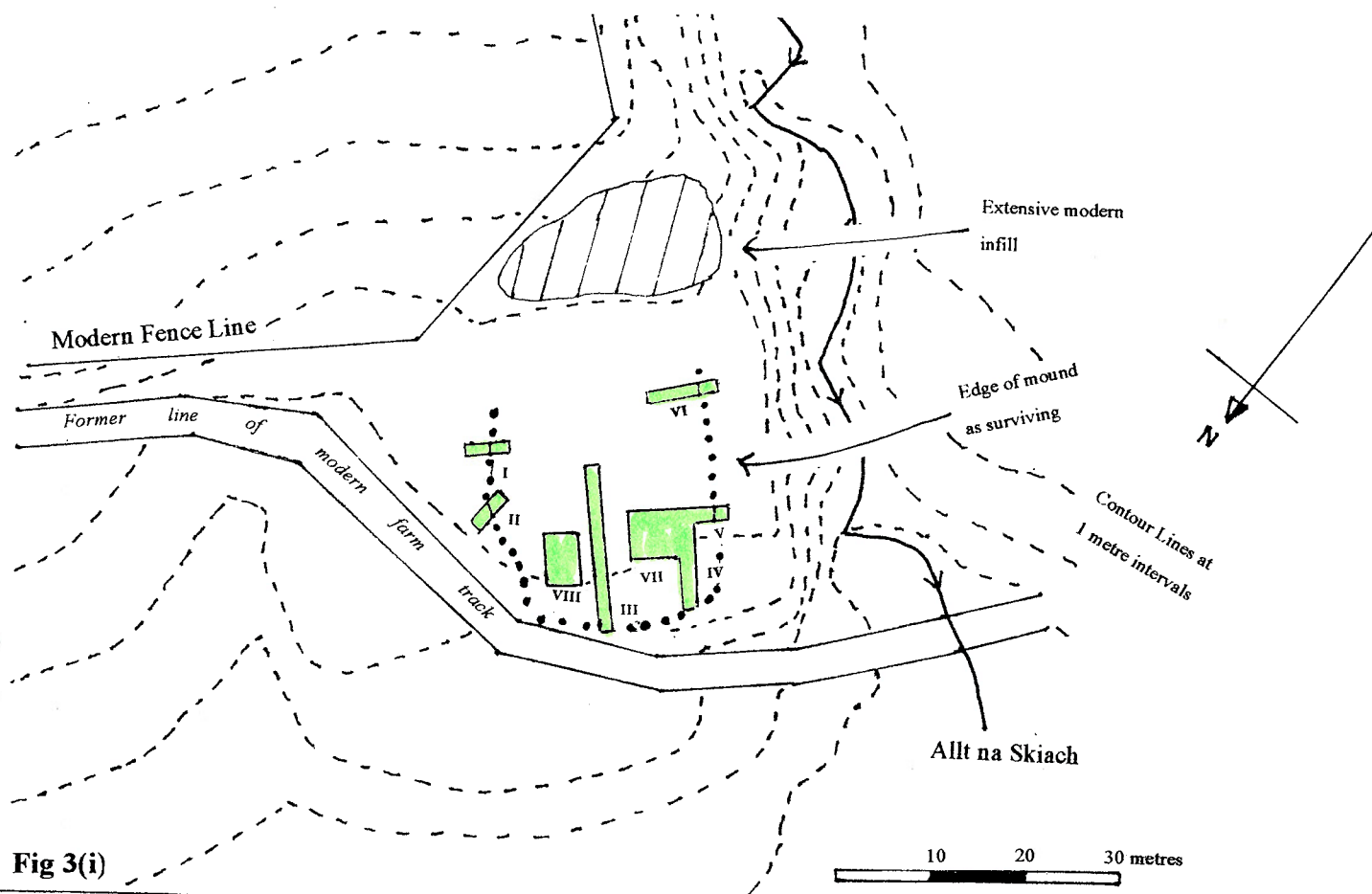
Project
proposed 17 houses at
Castle Heather
Inverness
Drawing
site layout

Scale 1:2000	Date June 94	Drawn by AMC
Project no D0925	Dwg no 100	Rev -

G.H. JOHNSTON
& Associates
BUILDING CONSULTANTS

61 CASTLE STREET TEL: 01463 820000
INVERNESS F11 1BUT INVERNESS

Location of Machine Trenches on Castle Heather Mound



Conjectured position of Castle Heather Mound
(Based on OS survey and existing topography)

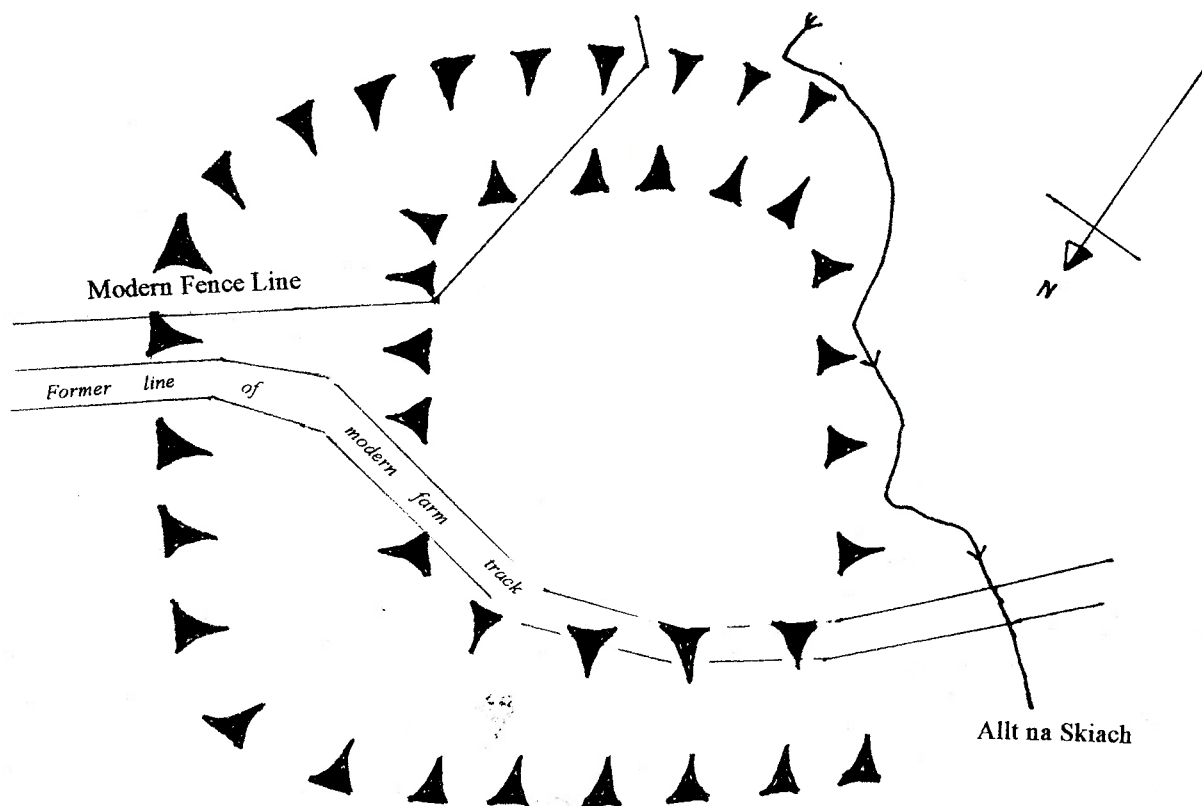


Fig 3(ii)

*'NH 6755 4242 'A ring ditched enclosure, identified by Jim Bone during flying.
A possible rectangular feature lies to the south east of the ring ditch.'*

The position of this monument cannot be accurately plotted because of the oblique angle from which the photograph was taken.

Appendix C

List of Archaeological Sites recorded in the vicinity of Castle Heather Farm

<u>No</u>	<u>NGR</u>	<u>Description</u>
3	see above	
17	NH 668 431	A cist was found at 'Altnaskiach' before 1881
23	NH 6851 4201	Druidtemple. The stone circle here has been identified as a Clava passage grave of a neolithic/bronze age date
24	NH 685 420	Druidtemple. In 1824 a late Bronze Age Gold Rod 18 inches long was found here.
26	NH 6619 4176	Culduthel. The remains of a stone circle survive here forming part of a cairn similar to that recorded at Druidtemple.
27	NH 6849 4205	Druidtemple. A small barrel-shaped urn of Bronze Age date was found in a burial cist here in 1881.
28	NH 68 41	Druidtemple? 2 urns were found in a stone cist 'in the Leys' prior to 1827.
30	NH 6639 4189	Culduthel. A stone cist opened here in 1928 revealed a crouched inhumation of a woman with a jet necklace now on display in the National Museum.
36	NH 664 420	Culduthel. A square stone cist was excavated here in 1975. It contained a crouched inhumation, a fine beaker pot, 8 flint arrowheads, a rare stone bracer & 4 large gold cups. Newspaper accounts mention another burial found here in 1971.
37	NH 670 424	Balloan Cottages. Aerial photography in 1977 revealed 2 prehistoric monuments, a pit-circle 7 metres in diameter and a ring-ditch 13 metres in diameter.
39	NH 680 432	Hilton. Aerial photography in 1976 & 1977 revealed a circular enclosure 14 metres in diameter. It was destroyed in 1978.
40	NH 683 436 to NH 683 434	Hilton. Aerial photography revealed 2 pit alignments. This site was excavated in advance of construction of the Southern Distributor Road.
41	see above	
42	NH 673 427	Balloan. Excavation has revealed an extensive area of prehistoric settlement has been to the SE of a circular enclosure 25m in diameter recorded from the air
49	NH662 417	Culduthel Mains. Fieldwalking has found flint tools including a leaf-shaped arrowhead, cores and scrapers
52	see above	

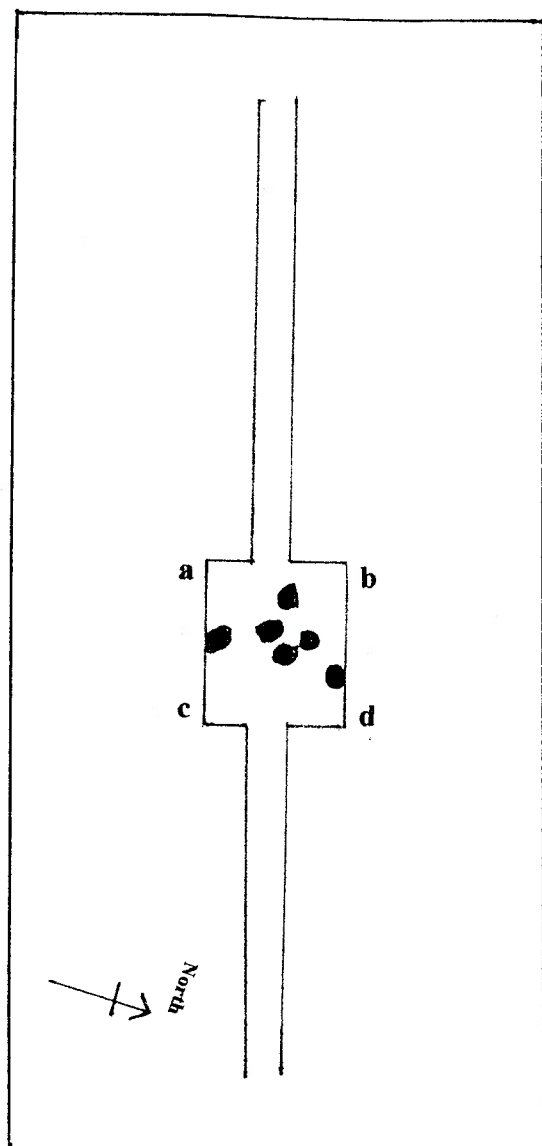


Fig 4(i) 13th Tee: Location of prehistoric pits and machine trench

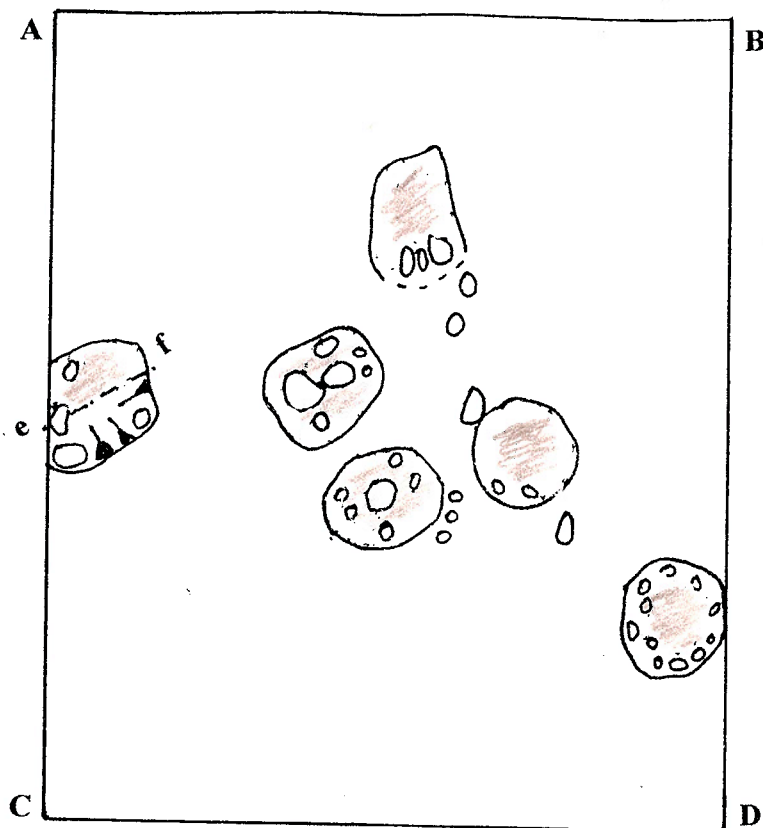
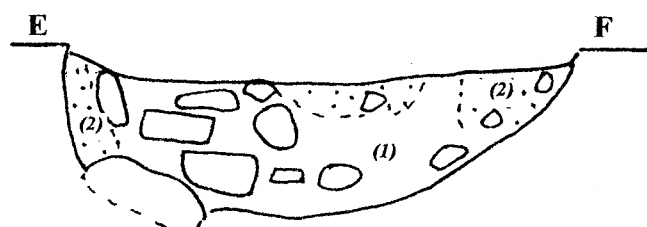


Fig 4(ii) 13th Tee: Detail plan of prehistoric pits



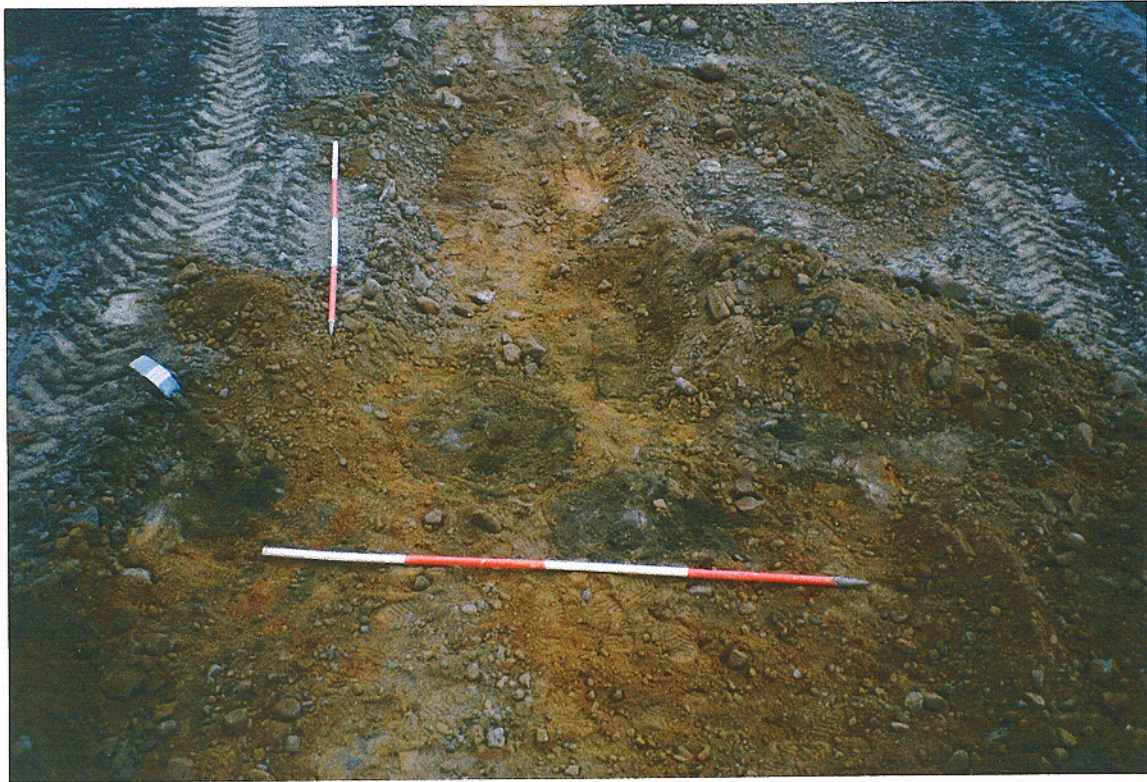
Soil Descriptions

- (1) Dark grey silty loam with c5% charcoal flecks and c30% compacted stones & occ. pottery
- (2) Pale fawn/brown loamy silt with v. occ. charcoal flecks

Fig 4(iii) 13th Tee: Section profile through prehistoric pit, facing North East.
Scale 1:10



Composite view of Castle Heather mound after infill of machine trenches
Looking West



Prehistoric pits on 13th Tee as first revealed
Looking West



Prehistoric pits on 13th Tee. Location in relation to Balloan & Fairways Complex
Looking North

Archaeological Investigations at Castle Heather Farm, Balloan, Inverness



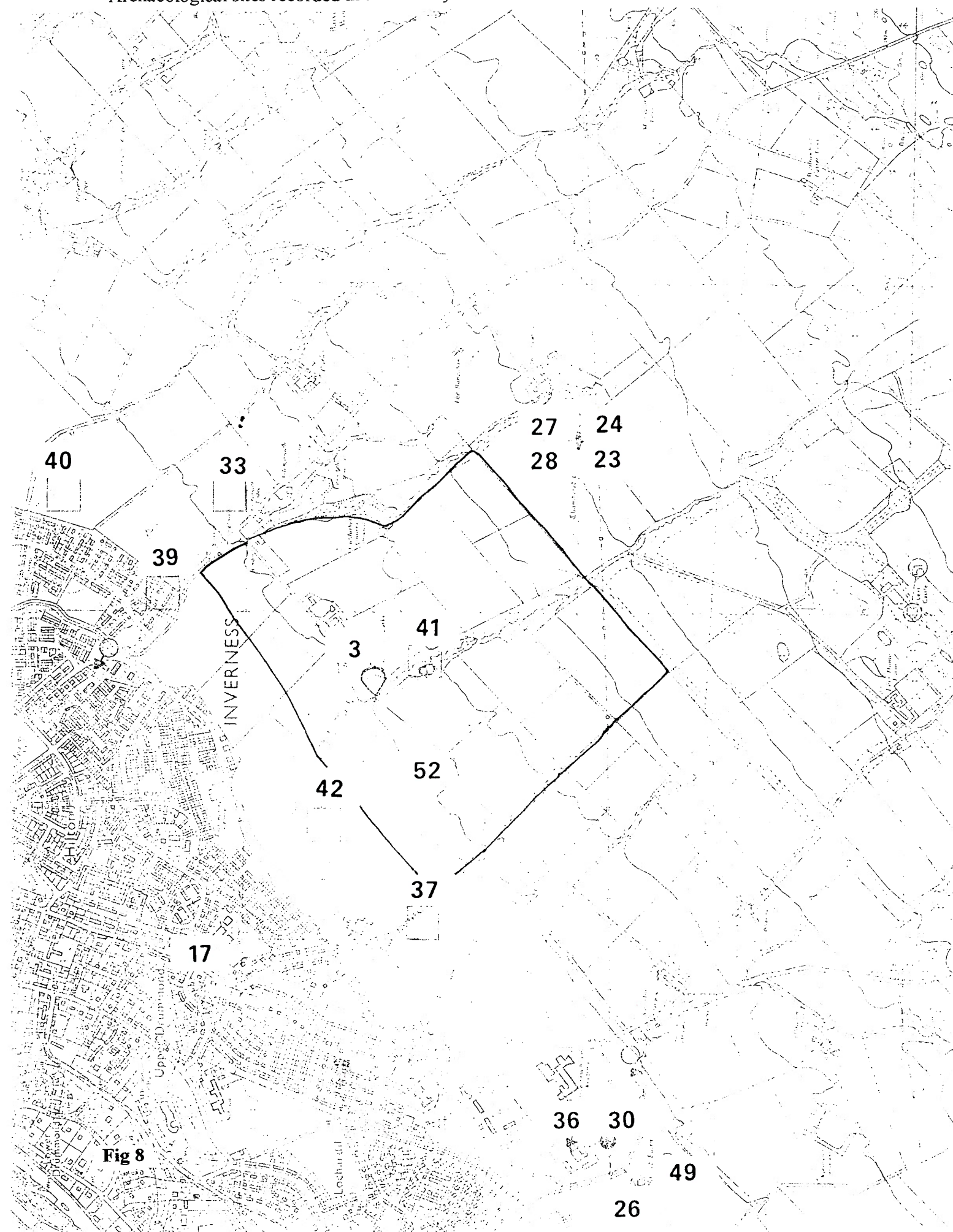
Prehistoric pits on 13th Tee as cleaned after heavy rain
(nb Pit on left part excavated.)
Looking West



Prehistoric pits on 13th Tee. Detail of part excavated pit.
(nb....Charcoal-rich fill and remains of pottery under stone centre left.)
Looking North

Archaeological Investigations at Castle Heather Farm, Balloan, Inverness

Archaeological sites recorded in the vicinity of Castle Heather Farm



Computer plot from aerial photographs.
Use only with CAUTION. © RCAHMS

Archaeological Investigations at Castle Heather Farm, Balloan, Inverness
Computer plot of Archaeological Site identified at NH 6780 4246

Site Centre
NH 6780
4246

NH 67500
42300

Fig 9

