

Archaeological Evaluation and Recording



Construction of Access (Bellmouth)

Rowangarth, Spinningdale, Sutherland

August 2018

John Wood MA MCIfA

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Report No.	JW180901
Site Code	ROW18
Client	Jim Monaghan
Planning Ref	18/00440/FUL
OS Grid Ref	NH 6716 9046
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Author	John Wood

Summary

Archaeological fieldwork was carried out to evaluate and where necessary record any archaeological evidence arising from the construction of a site entrance at Rowangarth, Spinningdale, Sutherland. Clearance of the track line, the house site itself and other related works has not yet taken place and will be the subject of a separate proposal. This report covers only the formation of a junction with the existing drive.

A controlled topsoil strip was undertaken using a back acting digger under the direct supervision of the present writer. No archaeological features were found in the area investigated.

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Acknowledgements and Copyright

Background mapping has been reproduced by permission of the Ordnance Survey. Other figures are reproduced courtesy of the client.

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Location

The proposed development is located at Rowangarth, Spinningdale, Sutherland at (approximately) UK National Grid Reference NH 6716 9046. The site lies at about 27m above sea level.



Figure 1 Project location

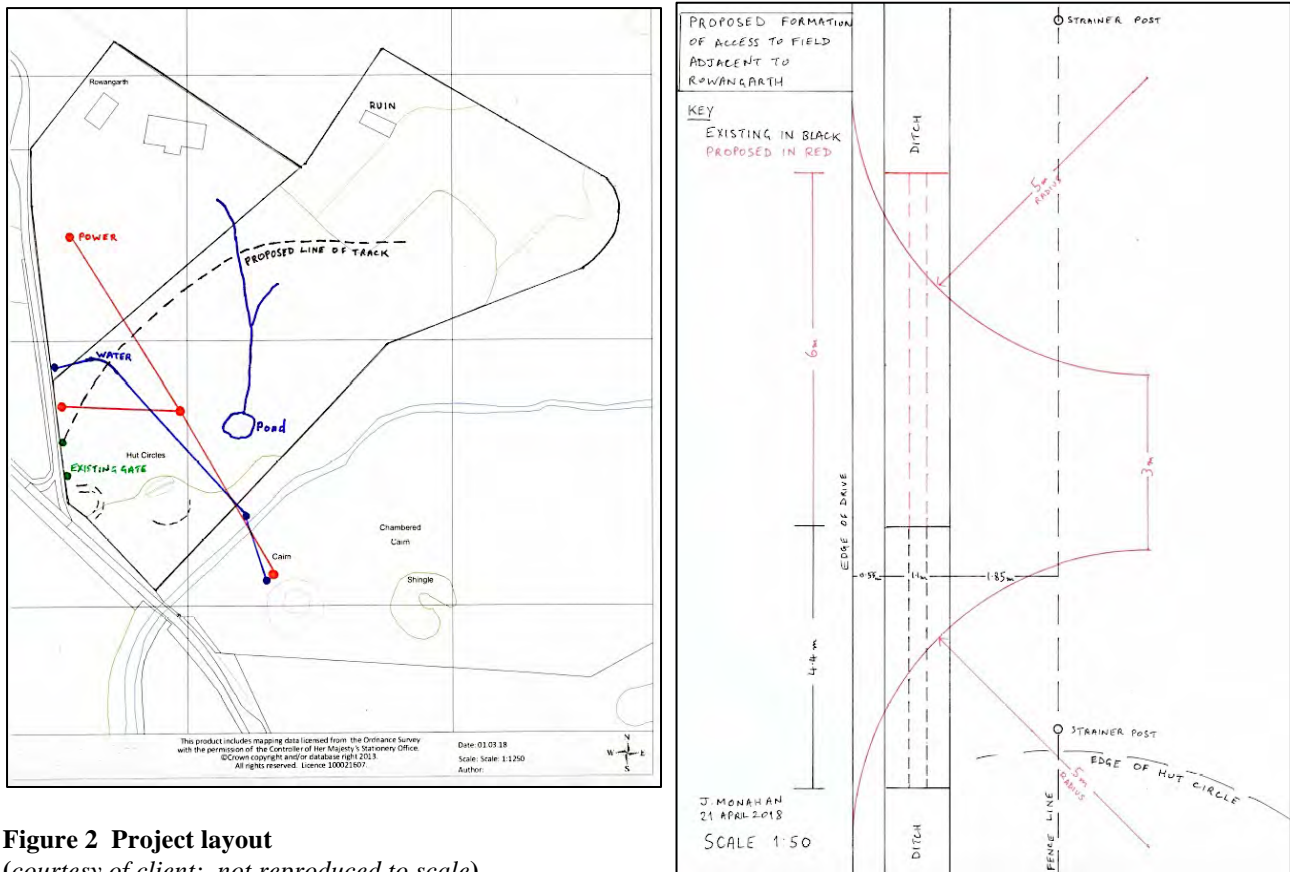


Figure 2 Project layout
(courtesy of client: not reproduced to scale)



Figure 3 Current OS Mapping (from Canmore: not to scale)

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 have been secured by adherence to the *Codes of Conduct* and *Approved Practice and Standards* of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists and the Highland Council's *Standards for Archaeological Work*.

Desk based assessment

A desk based assessment was carried out to establish the nature of known archaeology in the area, following the Highland Council's Guidelines.

This is within an area where significant archaeological sites have been recorded, demonstrating that it has been occupied from at least Neolithic period (approx. 6,000-4,400 years ago). Directly across the Allt nan Eun burn is a Neolithic chambered cairn. Post-medieval settlement evidence is visible nearby, apparently part of the township of Baile na Cuile which is depicted on the 1st edition OS 6 inch:1mile map (see fig 3).

One recorded site lies close to the proposed development: a pair of round features recorded by the RCAHMS in 1911. These are interpreted on both the Highland Historic Environment Record and the National Monuments Record for Scotland as either Bronze Age roundhouses or possibly later sheepfolds².

The same details, created by the Ordnance Survey, are found on both records as follows:

[NH69SE 4](#) 6716 9045 and 6719 9044.

(NH 6716 9045 and NH 6719 9044) Enclosures (NR)

OS 25" map, (1967)

On the edge of a field are the remains of two stone-walled huts, termed circular enclosures, probably folds, by the RCAHMS (1911).

The E hut, destroyed in the SW, measuring c.16.0m NW-SE between wall centres. Occasional inner and outer facing stones are visible, giving a wall thickness of 2.3m. No entrance is apparent.

The W hut, destroyed in the W by a road, measures 11.9m internally N-S. The inner face is visible intermittently but the only outer facing stone to be seen is in the S, where the wall is 2.0m thick. No entrance is apparent.

There is no trace of an associated field system in the area, which is under modern cultivation.

Surveyed at 1:2500.

RCAHMS 1911, visited 1909; Visited by OS (WDJ) 10 June 1963 and

(N K B) 11 November 1969.

No change

Revised at 1:10,000.

Visited by OS (N K B) 19 September 1980.

¹ A summary of relevant international, EU, UK and Scottish legislation and policies is available on request.

² HHER site ref MHG9427. Canmore 13990. Former OS / NMRS number HN69SE 4.



Figure 4 Ordnance Survey 1:10560 map: Sutherland, Sheet CXII, surveyed 1874
(not reproduced to scale)

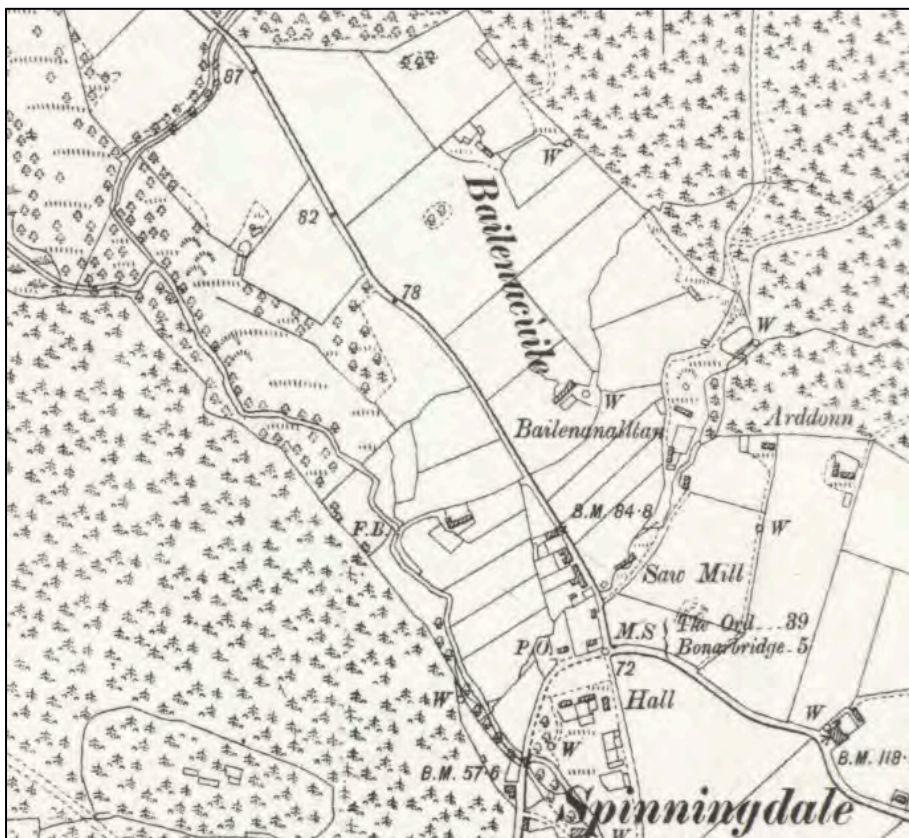


Figure 5 Ordnance Survey 1:10560 map: Sutherland, Sheet CXII, surveyed 1904
(not reproduced to scale)

The Statistical Accounts of Scotland of 1793 and 1845 were examined but no mention was found of antiquities in this area³. Likewise General Roy's map (1747-55) does not show any features here. On the first and second edition OS 6 inch maps, the site is within the township of Bailenacuile, which appears to refer to the settlement the back. This includes Rivra and may have once been more extensive. Many of its fields now seem to have largely become part of the Spinningdale Woods.

It is noted that when the Ordnance Survey visited in 1909 the western circle had already been partly destroyed by the road to Rivra. However this must have been a fairly recent event as this road is not shown on the Second Edition OS 6 inch map surveyed five years earlier.⁴

Previous Archaeological Fieldwork

A watching brief was carried out by Brendan Malone and Cait McCullagh for Highland Archaeology Services during renewal works on the water main serving Spinningdale in 2007⁵. This came close to the present area (Figure 6).

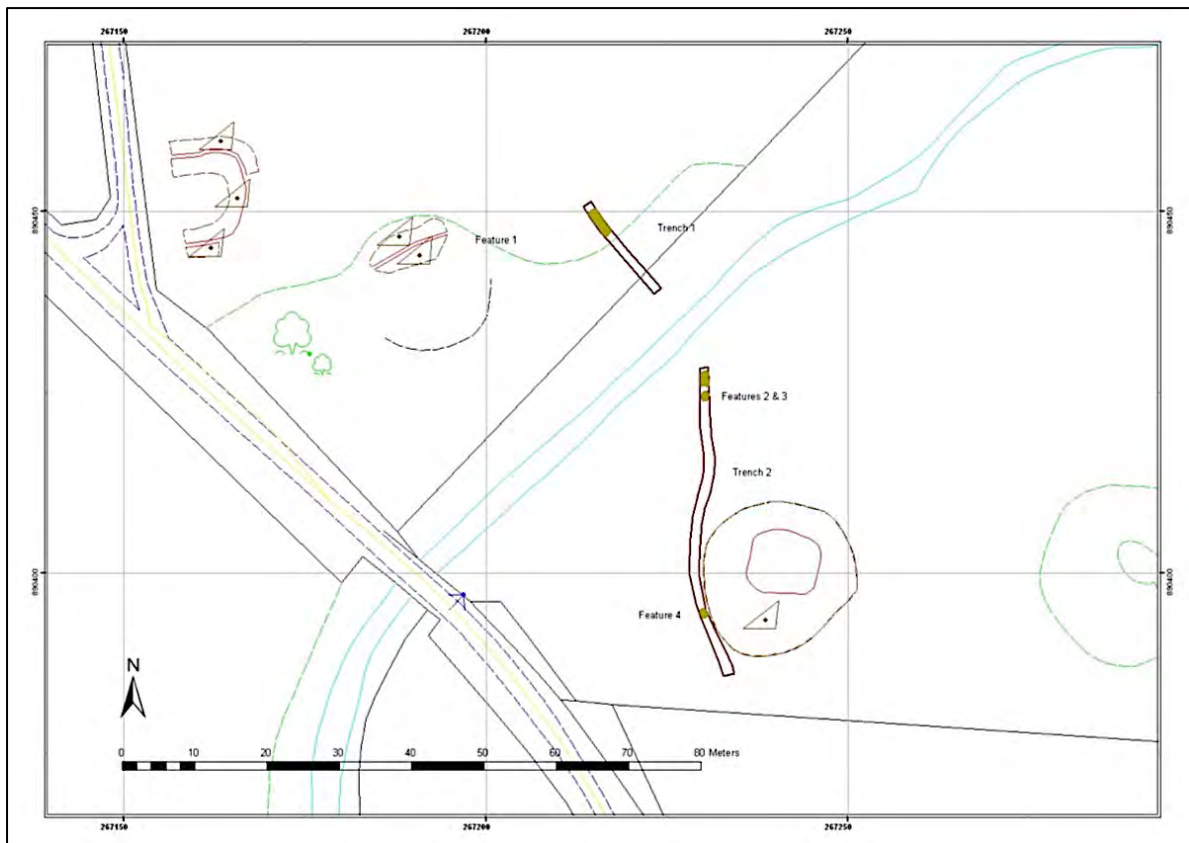


Figure 6 Spinningdale water main renewal 2007⁶

³ <http://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/static/statacc/dist/parish/Sutherland/Criech>

⁴ See Figure 5.

⁵ McCullough C and Wood J, 2008 *Watching Brief: Spinningdale Water Main Renewal* Highland Archaeology Services Report HAS 080104. Highland HER ref EH2754:

<http://her.hIGHLAND.gov.uk/hbsmrgatewayhighland/DataFiles/LibraryLinkFiles/56515.pdf>

⁶ Plan taken from McCullough and Wood 2008. The present site is at the top left of this plan.

The whole pipe trench was excavated under archaeological supervision using a back acting digger fitted with a straight edged bucket. The numbered trenches refer to areas where this trench was widened, cleaned by hand and examined in more detail to clarify any possible archaeological features. The area shown in Figure 3 above is described in the report as follows:

Much of the area on both the north and south sides of the Alt nan Eun appeared very disturbed. There is clear evidence for both cultivation and woodland planting on the north side of the stream, and a similar plantation with flourishing bracken on the south side.

There was a significant degree of variation on the subsoil level, as the result of geological differences, root action and decomposition, or animal burrowing. One ill-defined feature, Feature 3, was half-sectioned and this confirmed this interpretation ...

The subsoil in Trenches 3-4 (Firthview to Humpton) and 5-6 (West of Humpton) also proved to have been very disturbed and again showed many spreads of decomposed and deracinating black granite and red sandstone. These trenches crossed cultivated land, now largely given over to livestock grazing. Field drains were noted throughout this area, as well as the trench for the first water main, laid in the area in about 1957.

Feature 1 was a possible ploughed-out field dyke of turf and stone at OS Grid ref NH 6720 9043. It ran NNE – SSW, and extended towards the possible hut circles (HSMR/NMRS NH69SE004). Particular care was taken when excavating here, but no archaeological artefacts or datable materials were noted. It appeared as a dry, light grey-brown silt with intense large cobble and moderate boulder inclusions; including sandstone, and spread c. 4.7m across the width of Trench 1. Subsequent examination cast doubt on the initial interpretation – this may be a natural periglacial feature⁷.

Desk-Based Assessment: Summary

Desk-based assessment suggested that the circular features noted by the Ordnance Survey in 1909 and subsequently are likely to represent the remains of hut circles or round houses, dating perhaps to the period from approximately 3000 years ago to 1,500 years ago. These are commonly found in association with evidence of cultivation in the form of stone clearance heaps or sometimes more extensive field systems. The possibility was also recorded by the Ordnance Survey surveyors that they could represent later livestock enclosures (fanks), but the two interpretations are not exclusive.

The western of these features had apparently been damaged by the construction of the road to Rivra about 1905-9.

The present development was modified slightly to increase the distance between the outer edge of the new road and the nearest visible limit of the nearest feature as far as possible.

There were no other features visible on the surface of the ground that seemed likely to be affected by the development, but there was considered to be some potential for archaeological artefacts or structures to be present, given the proximity of these two features and also the chambered cairn across the burn. Archaeological investigation was clearly required as well as full recording of any features or objects discovered.

⁷ Ibid., 8

Fieldwork

A controlled topsoil strip of the area to form the new entrance was carried out to enable a full examination to be made of the area to be disturbed. All excavation work in this area was done under archaeological supervision and treated as an archaeological trench.

Topsoil and overburden was cleaned back with care by means of a back-acting digger fitted with a straight-edged, ditching bucket, as far as the first soil change. The conditions were good, and the resulting surface was fairly clear. It was then carefully inspected and cleaned using a draw hoe to check in more detail for evidence of possible archaeological activity. One area warranted closer investigation (marked A on the site plan) but this was found to be natural root disturbance.

Where necessary, the area was then deepened under supervision to the depth required for the development. The exposed surface over most of the area represented the natural periglacial sands, gravels and small boulders typical of many areas of Highland. On the south side of the trench, hill washed silts and soils had been deposited in a natural hollow against the possible round house.

The probable round houses themselves were not investigated, but it was noted that the nearest one to the track had clearly been very disturbed when the Rhivra drive was constructed in the early 20th c. The ground level of the interior was also very low and it is possible that this area was used as a quarry during drive construction.

Summary and Recommendations

No archaeological evidence was found. However, the excavation proceeded only as far as was necessary for the formation of the access track. It was noted that the lower area adjoining the apparent edge of the archaeological feature contained a depth of compact soil and silt hill-wash, and it is possible that archaeological features or artefacts could lie beneath this. As these will not be disturbed or compacted by the present track construction, excavation was not taken further, but if in future any deeper excavation is required here, it should be subject to archaeological supervision as a precaution.

It is important to note that this fieldwork covered only the area of the site entrance, which was the only area excavated at this stage. Excavations for the track itself, the house site itself and services will be undertaken at a later date and subject to a separate proposal.

John Wood
20 September 2018

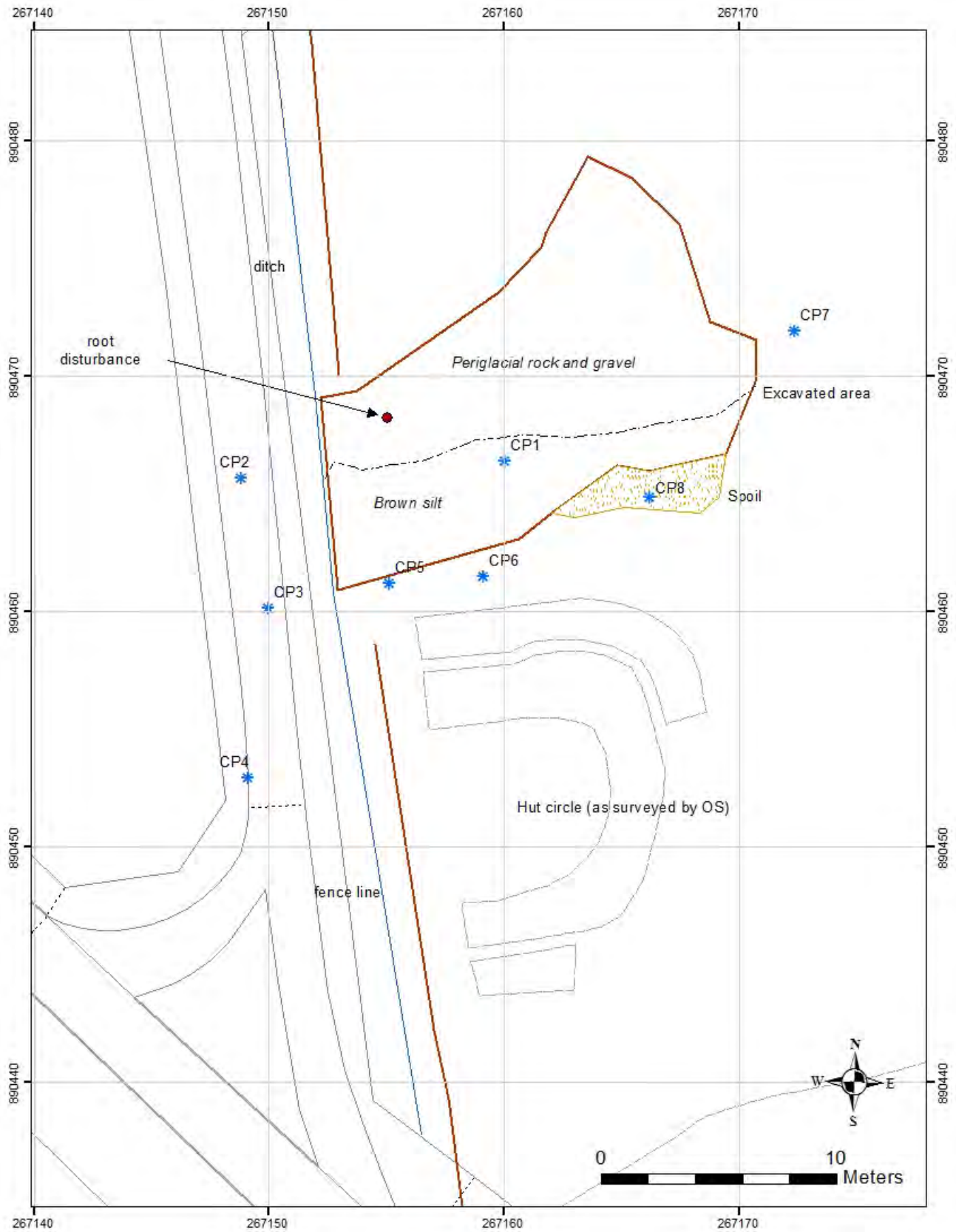


Figure 7 Site plan

Photographs

Table 1 Photographs

Photo ID	CP	Direction	Subject
IMG_1510	1	W	Pre-ex view
IMG_1511	1	SW	Pre-ex view
IMG_1512	2	ESE	Pre-ex view
IMG_1513	2	E	Pre-ex view
IMG_1514	2	ENE	Pre-ex view
IMG_1515	2	NE	Pre-ex view
IMG_1516	3	E	Pre-ex view
IMG_1517	3	ENE	Pre-ex view
IMG_1518	4	NE	Pre-ex view
IMG_1519	5	SE	View across hut circle
IMG_1520	3	NNE	Approx. location. Excavation started
IMG_1521	3	NNE	Approx. location. Excavation started
IMG_1522	2	E	Approx. location. Excavation started
IMG_1523	2	E	Approx. location. Digger operating
IMG_1524	2	NE	Approx. location. Digger operating
IMG_1525	5	NE	Approx. location. Digger operating
IMG_1526	3	E	Approx. location. Digger operating
IMG_1527	6	N	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1528	6	NNE	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1529	6	NNW	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1530	7	W	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1531	7	WNW	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1532	6	ENE	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1533	6	N	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1534	6	NNW	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1535	6	NW	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1536	3	E	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1537	3	ENE	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1538	3	NNE	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1539	8	W	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1540	8	NNW	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1541	8	NW	Approx. location. View across trench
IMG_1542	8	WNW	Approx. location. View across trench



Plate 1 Pre excavation (IMG_1511)



Plate 2 Pre excavation (IMG_1513)



Plate 3 Machining in progress (IMG_1523)



Plate 4 Trench cleaned and complete (IMG_1539)



Plate 5 Trench cleaned and complete (IMG_1540)