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ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECTS GLASGOW

MILTON of LEYS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Department of Archaeology
The University
GLASGOW G12 8QQ

TRIAD Architects · Planners
2/4 Pembridge Mews
LONDON W11 3EQ

MILTON OF LEYS
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

by

Dr. Stephen T. Driscoll

ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECTS GLASGOW
Department of Archaeology
The University
Glasgow G12 8QQ

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This survey of the archaeological monuments at the farm of Milton of Leys (NH 696418) was commissioned by Triad Architects Planners as a preliminary to developing the site for housing and recreation at the request of the Highland Regional Council Archaeologist. The survey was co-ordinated with the topographical survey made by W S Atkins and Partners and the drawings in this report are intended for use with that survey. The archaeological survey involved a thorough examination of those areas of the farm where archaeological sites were known to have survived, principally in the moorland area known as Bogbain Wood. Scale plans were made of selected archaeological monuments within the survey area. In addition the aerial photographs and Ordnance Survey record cards held in the National Monument Record were consulted to augment the field survey.

This report describes the archaeological remains within the development area in detail and evaluates their significance, making specific recommendations about how best to incorporate the monuments within the development and how to minimise their destruction.

The most significant part of the development area in archaeological terms is Bogbain Wood (fig. 1). Despite modern land use, including 19th Century forestry, good evidence of prehistoric settlement and agriculture survive across most of the moorland which forms the upper (southern) field of the farm. Immediately around the farm of Milton of Leys there remains a series of structures relating to post-medieval agriculture and settlement, including a fishpond, evidence of pre-Improvement settlement and of the corn mill with its pond (from which the farm takes its name). Apart from the ponds and water courses these more recent remains do not survive in particularly good condition. In the arable fields adjacent and north of the farm buildings there are no visible remains, however the discovery of sites through aerial reconnaissance in the fields between Milton of Leys and the Inverness town suggests that archaeological sites are to be expected here.

1. SURVEY RESULTS

BOGBAIN WOOD

The conditions for survey were quite variable and to some extent this is reflected in the results of the survey. In the eastern area the heather was low and visibility was good, allowing fairly slight remains to be identified. Elsewhere particularly in the northwest corner where a series of small streams run, it was very boggy and the overgrowth of shrubs was so dense as to prevent any possibility of identifying sites. Similarly in the southwest corner (south of the grassed area or improved pasture) the heather was very high (0.5 m) and the gorse was quite thick in places. Only previously known sites or ones identified from aerial photographs could be located. In this area the results of the survey must be regarded as incomplete: the burning of heather and the removal of scrub will almost certainly

allow for the identification of further archaeological features as well as any drainage which causes the peat cover to diminish.

Thus evidence of prehistoric settlement and agriculture was recorded in almost all of the areas of Bogbain which are not overgrown or boggy. Primarily they consist of two types of field monuments: hut circles and clearance cairns. Hut circles are low stony banks between 2 - 3 m wide which represent the foundations of circular stone and timber houses. Generally the circles range between 8 and 12 m in diameter and here they rarely stand higher than 1.0 m. In well preserved examples the entrance of the house may survive as a gap in the ring. Clearance cairns are small mounds of stone usually about 4 m in diameter and no more than 1 metre high. These mounds are the result of preparing the ground for cultivation either by spade or primitive ploughs, implements that do not require the regular open spaces necessary for ploughing in parallel furrows. The mounds represent the location of improved ground, the fields. Occasionally the clearance cairns are associated with very slight remains of field banks and terracing, but no field boundaries as such survive: the boundaries may well have been perishable wooden fences or alternatively the fields may have simply extended up to the edge of the forest.

Other monuments besides hut circles and clearance cairns were located in Bogbain Wood. Several of the clearance cairns are large enough to suggest that they may have been burial mounds (it is impossible to tell without excavation). Several others are of a particular crescentic plan which may indicate that they are burnt mounds. Burnt mounds are heaps of fire-cracked stones, charcoal and food debris which accumulate at the sites of wood-lined cooking troughs. They are usually found near ready supplies of water (such as the springs or streams). Again excavation is necessary to confirm this interpretation. A single banked enclosure (see below, Settlement 9) probably indicates the site of a small village. Finally a series of peculiar linear stony banks, now much overgrown with gorse, are indicated on the plan but they correspond to no known archaeological monument.

The locations of the various sites described below are indicated in figure 1 and individual plans (at 1:500) are provided for each settlement site. The hut circles and clearance cairns were first recorded by the Ordnance Survey (OS) during a map revision survey in the early 1970's. The OS defined two areas of settlement in Bogbain Wood: one in the eastern corner adjacent to the A9 and the other in the southwestern corner adjacent to Wade's road (National Monument Record (NMR) numbers NH74SW13 and NH74SW15). This survey confirms that basic distribution but adds considerable refinement. The two areas of clearance cairns, which correspond roughly to the areas defined by the OS are labelled here as the East and West Cairnfield. The hut circles tend to occur in small groups of two or three on the edges of the cairnfields. In this survey these small groups of hut circles are designated Settlements 1 - 8. Settlement 9 designates the possible enclosed village. The grid references and the sheet numbers given below are from the grid of the Atkins survey.

1.1 CAIRNFIELDS Figure 2, Sheet 15

Together the East and West Cairnfields contain between 300 - 500 clearance cairns. It was not felt worthwhile to map the location of each cairn, rather a plan was made of the densest part of the East Cairnfield (figure 2). This shows clearly the random nature of the distribution of the cairns and the range of sizes of cairn. Figure 2 also illustrates that the edges of the Cairnfields are not clearly delineated. The other figures illustrate that there is no clear break between the settlements and cairnfields; rather the cairns are scattered around the settlement structures. In the SW corner of the planned area the cairns get smaller and peter out without forming a definite edge. The edges of the cairnfields are defined either by the cairns fading out or by topographical features like streams.

1.2 SETTLEMENTS

The hut circles have been grouped into settlements for convenience of description and location. However, it is impossible on the basis of field survey alone to say whether the huts in a particular group were occupied at the same time. The hut circles survive as grass or heather covered stony banks of building material which have collapsed into a spread of between 2 - 3 m. This spread makes it difficult to give precise dimensions, for this report the diameters of hut circles are given as though they were perfect circles measured from midpoint to midpoint of their banks. Only rarely are structural details such as the position of the entrance or wall cavities preserved. Finer structural details such as wall facing stones or portal stones were never observed.

Settlement 1 (NH70834171) Figure 3, Sheet 15

One certain and one possible hut circle which nearly touch one another near the NE edge of the East Cairnfield. Of the two, the northerly is the better preserved. It has a diameter of 9.5 m and a possible entrance indicated by a 1.0 m wide gap in the N arc. The possible hut circle is preserved as a level area with a slight, irregular enclosing bank about 8.5 m in diameter. No entry could be seen.

Settlement 2 (NH70734133, NMR NH74SW15) Figure 5, Sheet 14/15

Located at the SW extent of the East Cairnfield, this settlement focuses on the well preserved hut circle situated on a level area created by two small terracing walls (lynchets) and traces of other hut sites. The principal hut measures 10.5 m in diameter, a gap of 1.0 m in the SE quadrant indicating the entrance. The walls are spread to 2.5 m and stand at least 0.5 m high. 10 m to the E stands a prominent oval cairn, 30 m to the W are the traces of a possible small hut 4.5 m in diameter. 75 m SW of the central hut circle are the faint remains of another hut circle about 10 m in diameter, which is partially obscured by trees.

Settlement 3 (NH70004135, NMR NH74SW13B&C) Figure 6 Sheet 10/11

Three hut circles occupy the low hills at the NW edge of the West Cairnfield. All are reasonably well preserved. The eastern hut (13C) measures 9.5 m in diameter. It has an entrance 2.0 m wide in the NE arc and in the SW arc survive traces of the wall cavity (a hollow between the inner and outer wall faces). The central hut (13B) occupies the crest of a slight eminence. It is 12.5 m in diameter and has a 2.0 m wide entrance. 25 m north of the hut is a mound 10 m in diameter, which sits on the edge of the hill. It may be either a platform or a burial mound. The third hut is located on a gradual N facing slope of the ridge and is set into the slope. The hut is 10.5 m in diameter with a 3.0 m wide north facing entrance. The walls on the N (down hill) side stand over 1.0 m high, while to the south they merge into the slope. To the east of the entrance is an apparent platform attached to the wall.

Settlement 4 (NH70214119, NMR NH74SW13D) Figure 7, Sheet 11

One hut circle within the West Cairnfield with associated agricultural features. The hut circle measures 9.0 m and despite the lack of an entrance it is fairly well preserved. Traces of wall cavities are to be seen in both the E and W arcs. Also appended to the W side is a platform or cairn 4.0 m in diameter. A short stretch of walling extends 7.0 m straight N from the circle. 10 m to the SW and 30 m to the W are large cairns which could be burial mounds. 15 m S of the hut is a stretch of curving bank which may belong to another hut circle, but it was too overgrown to survey completely. Traces of low terracing walls are to be seen to the N and E of the hut circle. Possibly contemporary with the settlement is a sunken trackway which snakes across the survey area from SE to NW. A clearance cairn lies in the hollow created by the trackway, suggesting that the trackway is an early feature.

Settlement 5 (NH69944117, NMR NH74SW13A) Figure 7, Sheet 10

A single hut circle occupying a low ridge on the W edge of the West Cairnfield. Its walls stand 1.0 m high although spread up to 3.0 m. The hut measures 10.5 m in diameter with a gap 3.0 m in its SE arc marking the entrance. With the exception of two small clearance cairns the hut is isolated.

Settlement 6 (NH70154074, NMR NH74SW13F) Figure 8, Sheet 13

The certain and one possible hut circle occupying the slight ridges S of the West Cairnfield. The certain hut (13F) is 9.0 m in diameter and according to the OS no entrance survives. Two cairns E of the hut seem to mark the S edge of the West Cairnfield. On the ridge N of the hut circle an arc of walling may indicate the site of another hut. Both ridges were obscured by the heavy overgrowth of gorse.

SETTLEMENT 7 (NH69994081, NMR NH74SW13E) Figure 9, Sheet 13/10

One certain hut circle and traces of up to three more at the SW edge of the West Cairnfield. The best preserved (13E)

occupies the crest of a prominent ridge. It measures 10.0 m in diameter, no entrance was visible. Numerous clearance cairns are scattered around the lower ground to the N and E of the hut. At the foot of the ridge 35 m NE of hut 13E is a possible fourth hut site. The remains suggest a hut 8.0 m in diameter, but are very disturbed and may simply be a cluster of clearance cairns. The traces of two further huts 7.0 m and 8.0 m in diameter lie 100 m NW of hut 13E.

SETTLEMENT 8 (NH70074106) Figure 10, Sheet 13

A single hut circle 11.0 m in diameter with a 2.0 m wide entry gap in the SE arc. The hut occupies a level area on the N edge of the West Cairnfield between clearance cairns and a slight bluff overlooking a boggy area. A crescentic stony bank 50 m NW of the hut within the boggy ground may be the site of another hut or a burnt mound (cooking place).

SETTLEMENT 9 (NH70204066) Figure 11, Sheet 13

A large oval enclosure in the slight hollow in the extreme S corner of Bogbain. A simple bank standing 0.5 m high and 2.5 m wide defines an area 75 m E to W and at least 45 - 50 m N to S. At least a third and perhaps half of the enclosure lay beyond the S dyke in Daviot Wood where no trace of it was seen. Because of the height of the heather (0.5 m) no internal features could be positively identified. (The site was in fact only discovered by aerial reconnaissance - HRC Sortie 286/1, and identified on the ground with difficulty.) Two gaps in the bank in the NW arc (1.5 m wide) and in the NE arc (3.0 m wide) may mark the positions of entrances. Four roughly circular level areas may mark the positions of hut circles. This probably represents an enclosed settlement, but a simple livestock corral cannot be ruled out.

1.3 LINEAR FEATURES (NH70104080) Figure 8, Sheet 13

In addition to those features which can confidently be identified as evidence of prehistoric settlement or agriculture, there are a series of features for which no interpretation is offered. These features were also discovered by aerial survey and consist of two sets of parallel banks and/or ditches on two adjacent ridges in the SE corner of Bogbain. The lines are not oriented for drainage nor do they seem to form part of any familiar defensive enclosure. The features survive as differential growth in vegetation, mostly gorse which made them difficult to examine. Where the gorse has not grown there appear to be slight banks of stone with a consistent width either 2.5 m or 6.0 m. There is a suggestion that the lines of heavy gorse growth occupy slight ditches, but this could not be verified without clearing the undergrowth.

2. FARM AREA

Aside from the upstanding buildings of Milton of Leys farm the most obvious architectural features relate to water management. The Mill Burn is fed by the springs in Bogbain Wood and to the south of Welltown of Easter Leys, and has obviously

been canalised for much of its run. The two major ponds are linked into the burn by channels which formerly were sluice controlled. The larger pond (180 x 30 m) lies in the NW corner of Bogbain Wood and is fed by water diverted from the springs along the northern edge of Bogbain. In its present form it is an artificial pond contained by the well-built stone dam. It was evidently used for raising fish.

The smaller pond controlled the water which powered the corn mill. It is located across the burn from the farm buildings about 250 m E (upstream) of the site of the ruined mill. This pond too is retained by a stone dam. The feeder stream, the overflow channel, and the mill lade are all still open. The lade begins at the N end of the pond and runs W buried in a stone capped and lined conduit, which has collapsed in places. It emerges from the underground channel at the site of the corn mill.

Only one corner of the mill building survives as an upstanding structure, while a heap of rubble occupies its former position, N of the lade. Traces of the foundations of an associated rectangular building also survive on the E side of the mill. None of these features was recorded in the archaeological survey.

Badly disturbed remains of enclosures made of earth and stone are still to be seen in the small triangular field N of the large pond. These presumably mark the site of the farmstead which preceded the existing set of farm buildings. Modern drainage and road building activities have seriously disturbed these features and they were not recorded archaeologically. Also in this field is a crescentic gravel pit of no great antiquity.

A final point of interest in the immediate area of the farm buildings is in the tiny field between the farm house and the mill pond, which was the stack yard. Here there are a series of low circular stone platforms upon which hay ricks were formerly built.

3. EVALUATION OF PREHISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY

The hut circles and fields of clearance cairns which survive are the remnants of farms and fields thousands of years old, possibly dating back to the Bronze Age (around 3000 - 700 BC). Taken as a group, the archaeological remains in Bogbain Wood represent a relic landscape which is remarkably intact. Remarkable not so much for its rarity as for its survival in a location so close to a major population centre and in an area of vigorous farming. It represents the last surviving pocket in the Inverness area of archaeology attesting to the colonisation and settlement of the upper reaches of arable land.

These types of landscapes - hut circles and fields of clearance cairns lacking distinct boundaries - tend to survive best at the margins of arable land. Generally such complete prehistoric landscapes are only preserved in the most remote areas where agriculture has been less intensive and there has

been little development. These landscapes are fragile and intensive cultivation causes serious damage, as is shown by the absence of visible remains in the fields of Bogbain Farm, in Daviot Wood or indeed in the arable fields of Milton of Leys. So it is the survival here of upstanding archaeological ruins that is noteworthy.

Although similar landscapes have been investigated archaeologically in Scotland and elsewhere in Britain, not enough is known about them to date the features in Bogbain with any precision. The most likely estimate is that they date to the climactic optimum in the Bronze Age (around 1200 - 1000 BC) when conditions for exploiting a 200 m high, north-facing slope would have been most favourable. These settlements and fields are part of a larger prehistoric landscape most of which has been destroyed. The most prominent monuments have however survived: the Glen Druidh stone circle and chambered tomb (NMR NH64SE23) dates to the Bronze Age, the hillfort of Caisteal Rollach (NMR H64SE34) in Daviot Wood is, broadly speaking, Iron Age in date, while the fine Pictish symbol Stone - the Boar Stone of Knocknagal - takes us into the historic era. Equally relevant for any regional consideration of these monuments are the invisible sites and sites of earlier discoveries and excavations. A number of archaeological features have been recorded as cropmarks by aerial photography in the fields on the east side of Inverness. The most notable are the two timber halls in the field at the mouth of Glen Druidh (NMR NH64SE38) which may be as early as the Neolithic (3000 - 4000 BC). The most spectacular excavation was the Beaker burial at Culduthel (NMR NH64SE36). All of these attest to the continuity of settlement and land use on this side of Inverness for millennia, and enhance the importance of the Bogbain settlements.

Beyond questions of dating, one of the most interesting issues raised by these sites is why they were abandoned as farm land and never reused. Although there are suggestions that these settlements were occupied for some generations they seem to represent a relatively short period of use in comparison to the millennia of occupation attested to by the archaeology immediately nearby. The evidence for time depth is circumstantial: the scattering of settlement locations could indicate the shifting of settlement as the ground was cleared and the differences in preservation of the various hut circles could be due to the salvaging and reuse of building materials. The presence of the enclosed settlement (number 9) indicates a complete change in settlement type probably indicative of a different episode of settlement. None of these indications would support an argument for a long period of occupation. Against that may be put the condition of the fields themselves. The edges of the cairnfields remained ragged, and the distinction between cultivated and uncultivated ground remained ambiguous. Definite field boundaries, associated with the agriculture of later prehistory, were never introduced here. The overall impression is that the farms were abandoned after a short time (some centuries?) and the landscape fossilised at that point.

The main interest in these archaeological monuments

therefore stems from the chance survival of an entire built landscape and is enhanced by the fact that it has remained virtually undisturbed over several millennia. Once this is appreciated the faint remains of these houses and fields take on a powerful meaning. They are testimony to a forgotten society and a lost way of life.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are offered within the general context of the construction of a major golf course and housing estate with the intention of indicating how to minimise damage to these monuments and how to maximise their potential to contribute to the amenities of the development. Obviously more specific recommendations can be made in response to the detailed designs. In the discussion below attention is focused on archaeological remains in Bogbain Wood which are the primary asset of the site. Although there is every possibility that archaeological sites exist in the arable fields of the farm, without firm evidence from aerial reconnaissance or speculative excavations only very general recommendations are possible. Similarly, there are no recommendations concerning the farm buildings, since it is the architects who are best qualified to assess the potential of the architectural and water features associated with the farm.

The recommendations below do not constitute a programme of archaeological investigation and presentation; rather they should be seen as the guidelines for constructing such a programme.

4.1 The most sensitive areas are those which have been mapped in figures 3 - 11. The best preserved, isolated hut circles are settlements 3 and 5. The best hut circles with associated agricultural features are settlements 2, 4, 7 and 8. (It is particularly easy to appreciate this at settlements 7 and 8 which are in an area of grass pasture and easily visible.) Settlement 9 is unique within the survey area but the quality of its preservation is impossible to judge in its overgrown state.

Ideally the best hut circles, the enclosure and a selection of the agricultural features should be preserved in park land. Serious consideration should be given to preserving some of these in areas specifically set aside for their protection, while others might be protected by placing them in the rough of the golf course (see 4.5 below). The golf course may provide suitable opportunities as long as the archaeological features are not used for siting tees, bunkers or greens. Care should also be taken to locate drainage ditches and major landscaping features away from archaeological features.

4.2 For those monuments which must be disturbed by landscaping or construction, provision should be made for archaeological investigation. In the case of sensitive features, like hut circles, full scale excavation by professional archaeologists should be programmed into the development scheme. For the more widespread agricultural features a representative sample should be excavated.

4.3 Because much of the archaeological interest in these

sites concerns the relationship between agriculture and settlement, any programme of excavation should be accompanied by a complimentary paleobotanical investigation based on the analysis of pollen deposits in the peat and on seeds and other plant remains recovered during excavation.

4.4 In the fields north of the farm which are being cultivated, the archaeological potential can only be assessed by a systematic programme of trial excavation. This is a process of excavating a number of small pits to test for the presence of archaeological features and to define the limits of any buried deposits. Provision could then be made to investigate or avoid any features which might be discovered.

4.5 This development provides a unique opportunity to integrate a portion of an interesting prehistoric landscape within a modern designed landscape, thereby transforming the archaeological remains from an inconvenience into an attraction. It is well recognised that the visible evidence of the past is one of Scotland's great assets, but such unfamiliar and subtle monuments as prehistoric settlements and fields require careful presentation. Certainly if the hut circles were under grass instead of heather and gorse they would be much more visible and thus more interesting to the layman. However to reap the full benefit of the archaeology, it needs to be interpreted in a dynamic way. This could be achieved by integrating explanatory display boards within a short trail linking the various archaeological features. Such a display should include at least one of the hut circles with some associated clearance cairns to give an impression of the prehistoric landscape.

A display programme would provide the opportunity to publicise the results of this survey and any excavation work that is done and a trail would provide the opportunity to showcase any reconstruction or consolidation of excavated sites. It would also draw attention to what is certainly one of the most remarkable aspects of Milton of Leys.

Stephen T. Driscoll
April 1989

Acknowledgments

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5. FIGURES The grid references used in the figures corresponds to the approximation of National Grid on the Atkins' survey.

- Fig 1. Location Map of Survey Area (precedes text)
- Fig 2. Portion of East Cairnfield, 1:500
- Fig 3. Settlement 1, 1:500
- Fig 4. Settlement 5, 1:500
- Fig 5. Settlement 2 and portion of East Cairnfield, 1:500
- Fig 6. Settlement 3, 1:500
- Fig 7. Settlement 4 and portion of West Cairnfield, 1:500
- Fig 8. Settlement 6 and Linear Features, 1:500
- Fig 9. Settlement 7 and portion of West Cairnfield, 1:500
- Fig 10. Settlement 8 and portion of West Cairnfield, 1:500
- Fig 11. Enclosed Settlement 9, 1:500

Key to Figures



Clearance Cairn



Large Clearance Cairn
or Burial Mound



Hut Circle



Partial Hut Circle
or Burnt Mound

||||| Lynchet

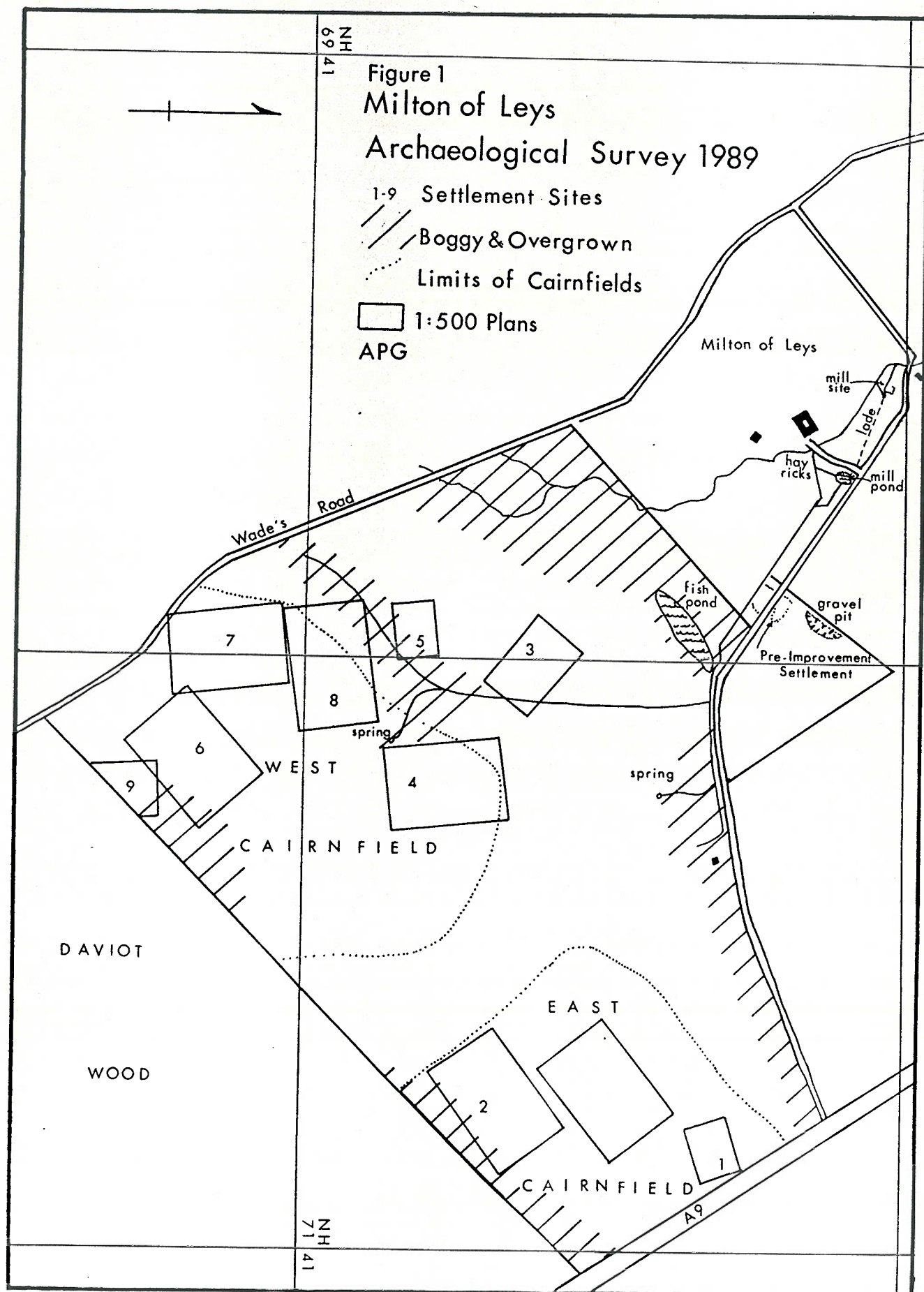
||||| Field Bank



Electricity Pole



Survey Point



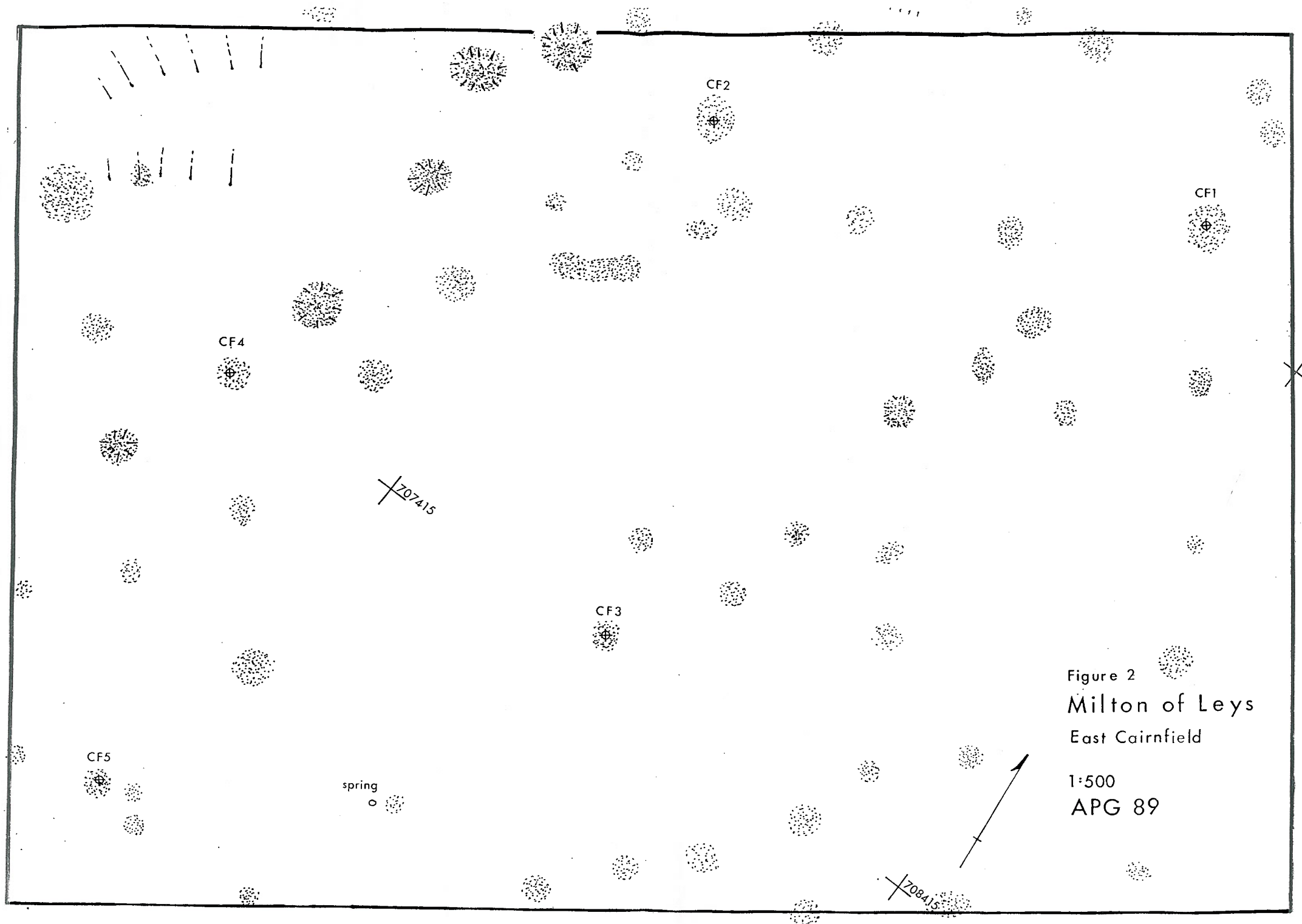


Figure 2
Milton of Leys
East Cairnfield
1:500
APG 89

Figure 3

Milton of Leys

Settlement 1

1:500

APG 89

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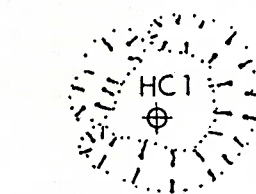


Figure 4

Milton of Leys

Settlement 5

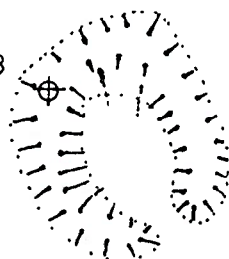
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APG 89

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HC 8



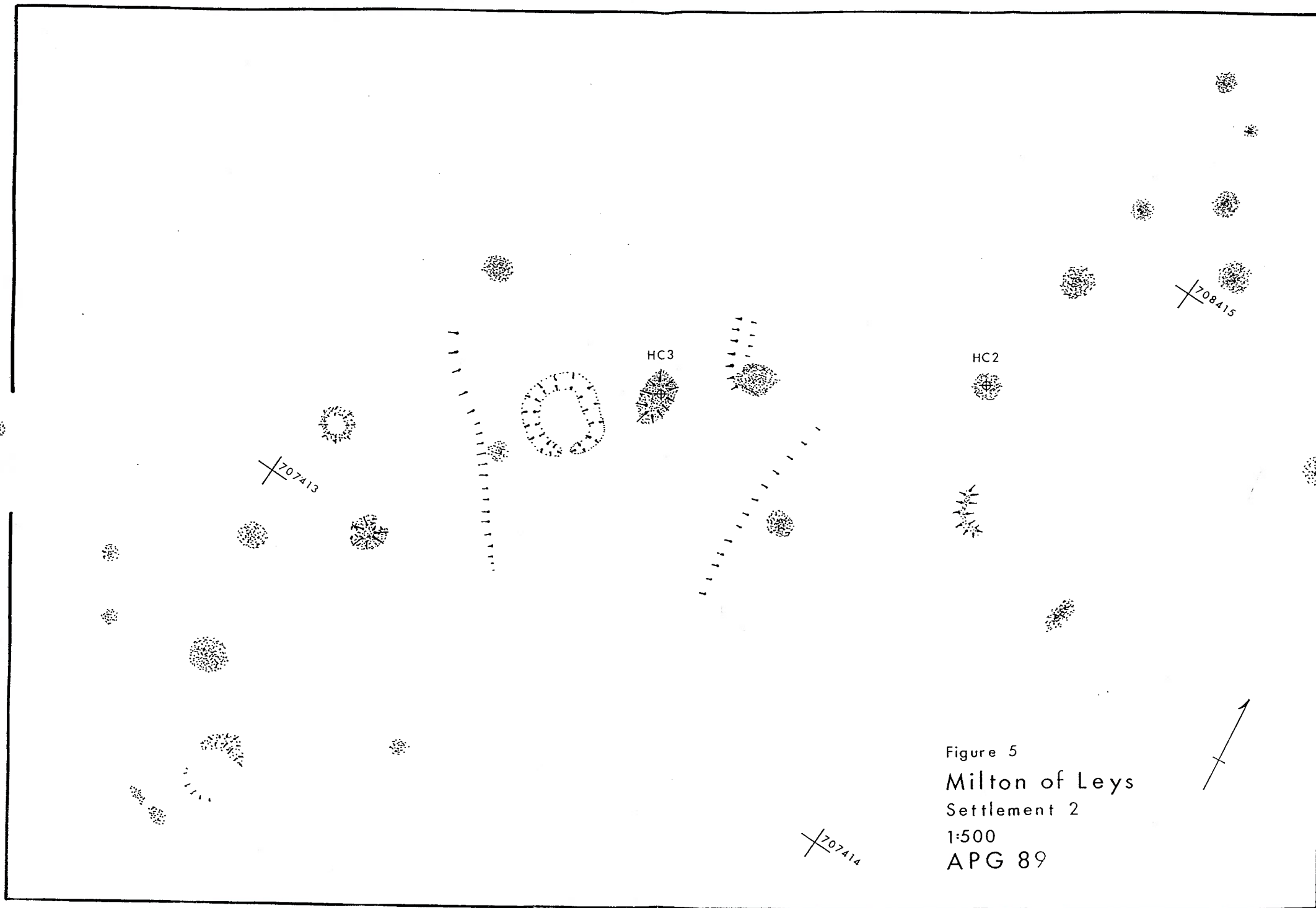


Figure 5
Milton of Leys
Settlement 2
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APG 89

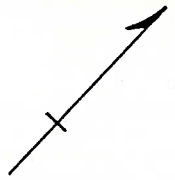
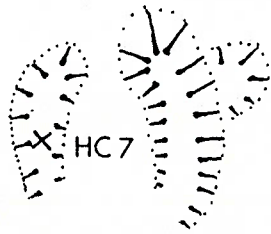
Figure 6

Milton of Leys

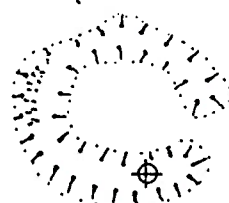
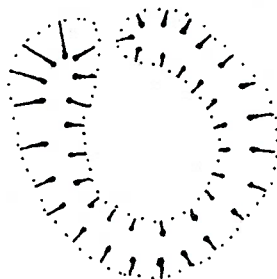
Settlement 3

1:500

APG 89



HC6



HC5

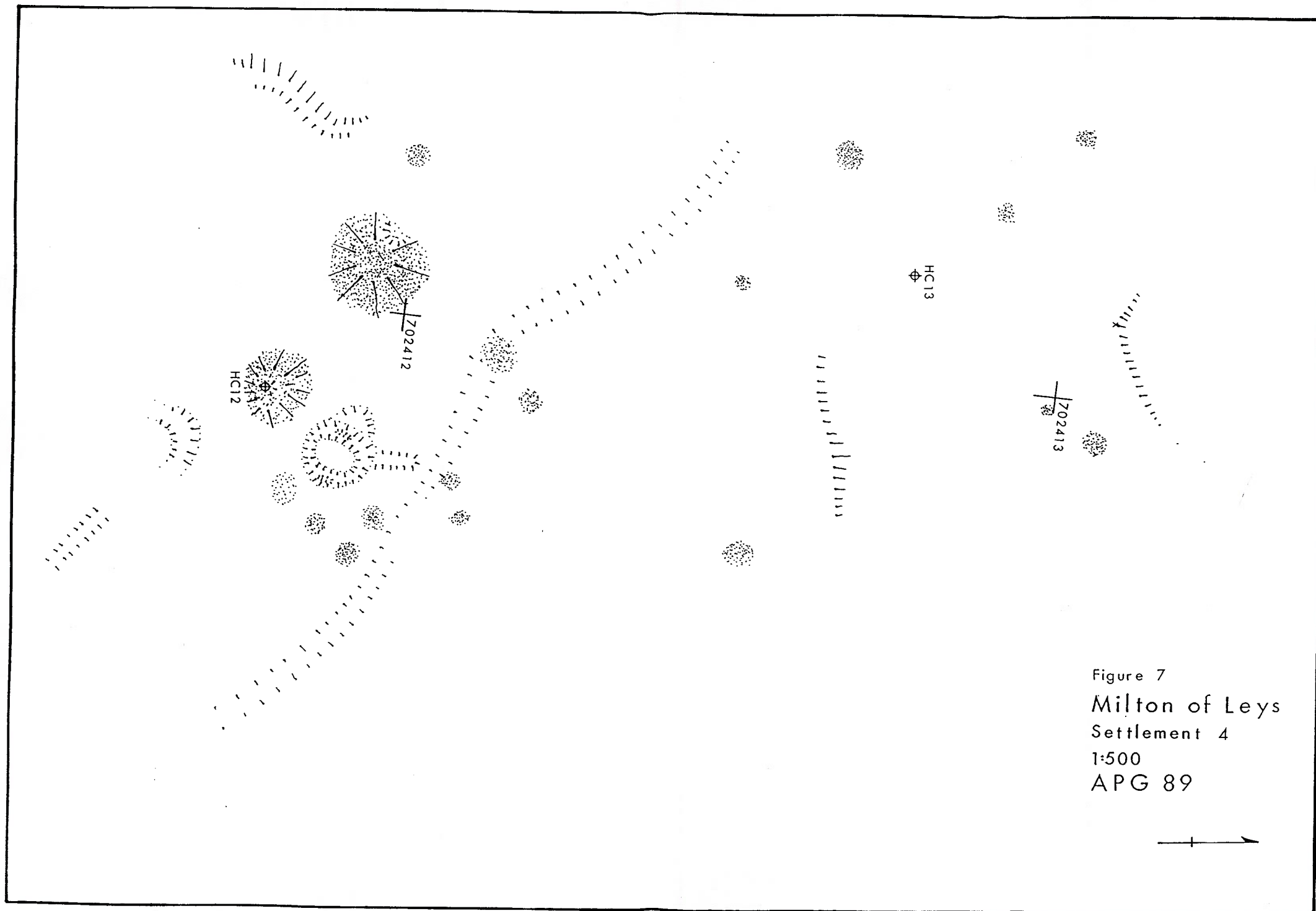
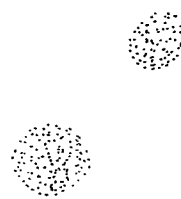
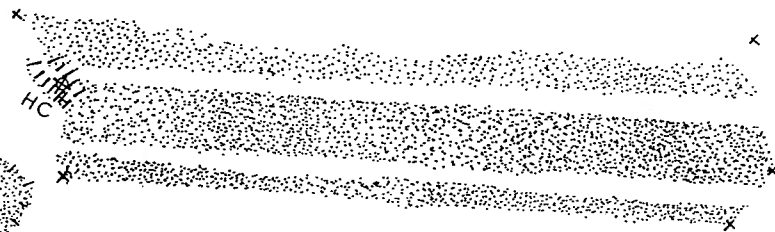


Figure 7
Milton of Leys
Settlement 4
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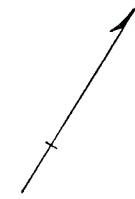
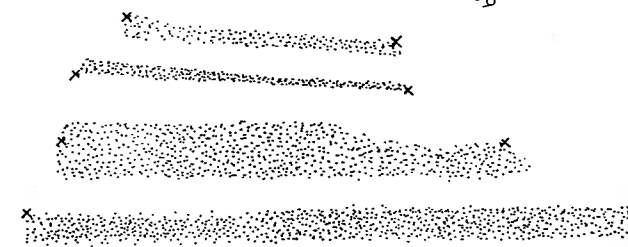


Figure 8
Milton of Leys
Settlement 6
Linear Features
1:500
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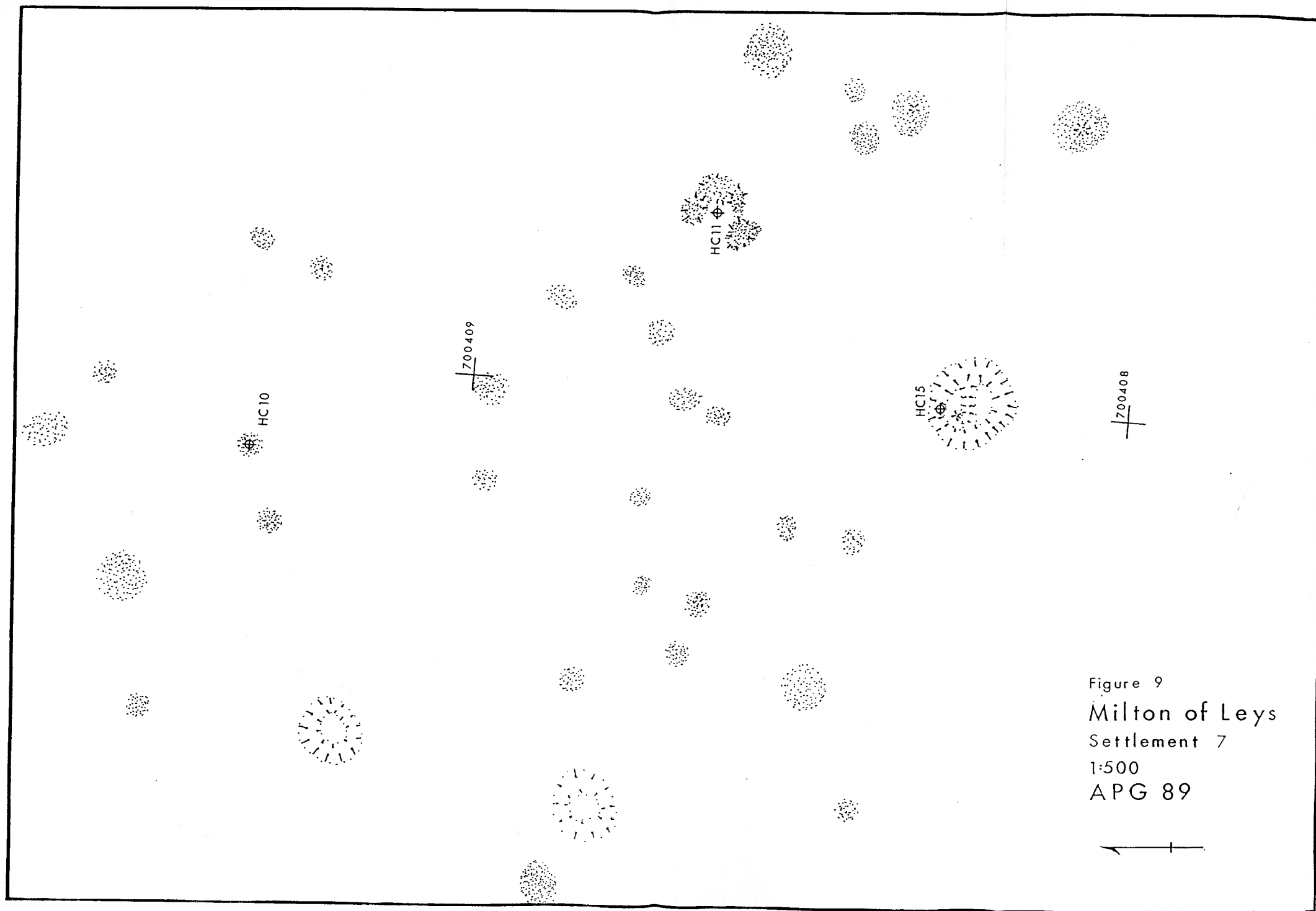
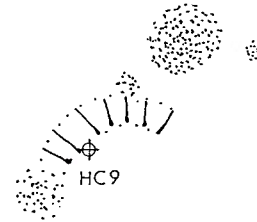


Figure 9
Milton of Leys
Settlement 7
1:500
APG 89

Figure 10
Milton of Leys
Settlement 8
1:500
APG 89



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701411



700410

701410

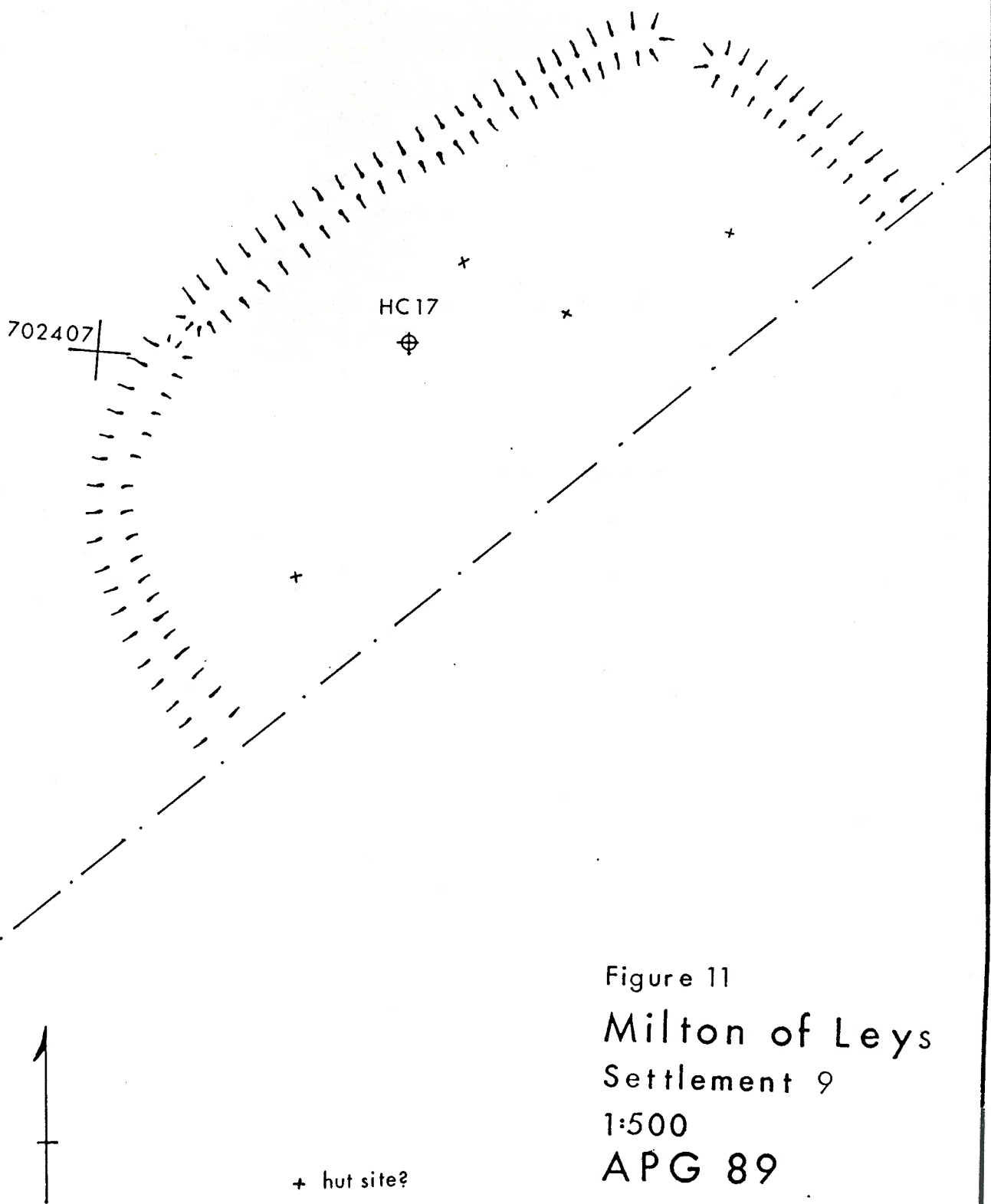


Figure 11

Milton of Leys
Settlement 9

1:500

APG 89