

Prehistoric rock-art at Ecclesall Woods, South Yorkshire

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1. Summary

A walkover survey was undertaken by Bolsterstone Archaeology and Heritage Group at Ecclesall Woods, Sheffield, South Yorkshire to systematically map and record surviving examples of possible prehistoric rock-art. Nine panels were recorded on small or very small boulders of Crawshaw sandstone. The distribution indicates that most panels are probably at or close to where they were originally placed or situated when marked. They represent a rare survival of earthfast boulders and portable rock-art in its original context. It can be argued that they were distributed in proximity to routeways leading to a sheltered wedge of Millstone Grit protruding into the Coal Measures Sandstones where they overlook river valleys meeting the Don Valley. This place, a scene of activity at least since the Late Mesolithic, was monumentalised during the Late Neolithic with a henge monument, indicative of the importance of the locale as a focus for social discourse and activities.

Additionally, a small hitherto unexplored part of the woodland outside of the historic Woods was subjected to a general walkover survey. This resulted in the recording of features of possible medieval or post medieval industrial character, along with several possible prehistoric cairns.

2. Location, geology, topography and current use

Ecclesall Woods (SK 324 825 centred) is located on the lower slopes of the southeast facing side of Sheaf Valley, approximately 5km from the centre of Sheffield (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The location of Ecclesall Wood (red). © Crown Copyright/database right 2024 An Ordnance Survey supplied service.

The geological formations on the lower slopes of the valley, where the study area is located, are Pennine Lower Coal Measures Sandstone variants, alternating with bands of Mudstone and Siltstone. These are overlooked to the northeast by the higher slopes and ridges consisting of variants of Namurian (Millstone Grit) Sandstones (Figure 2).

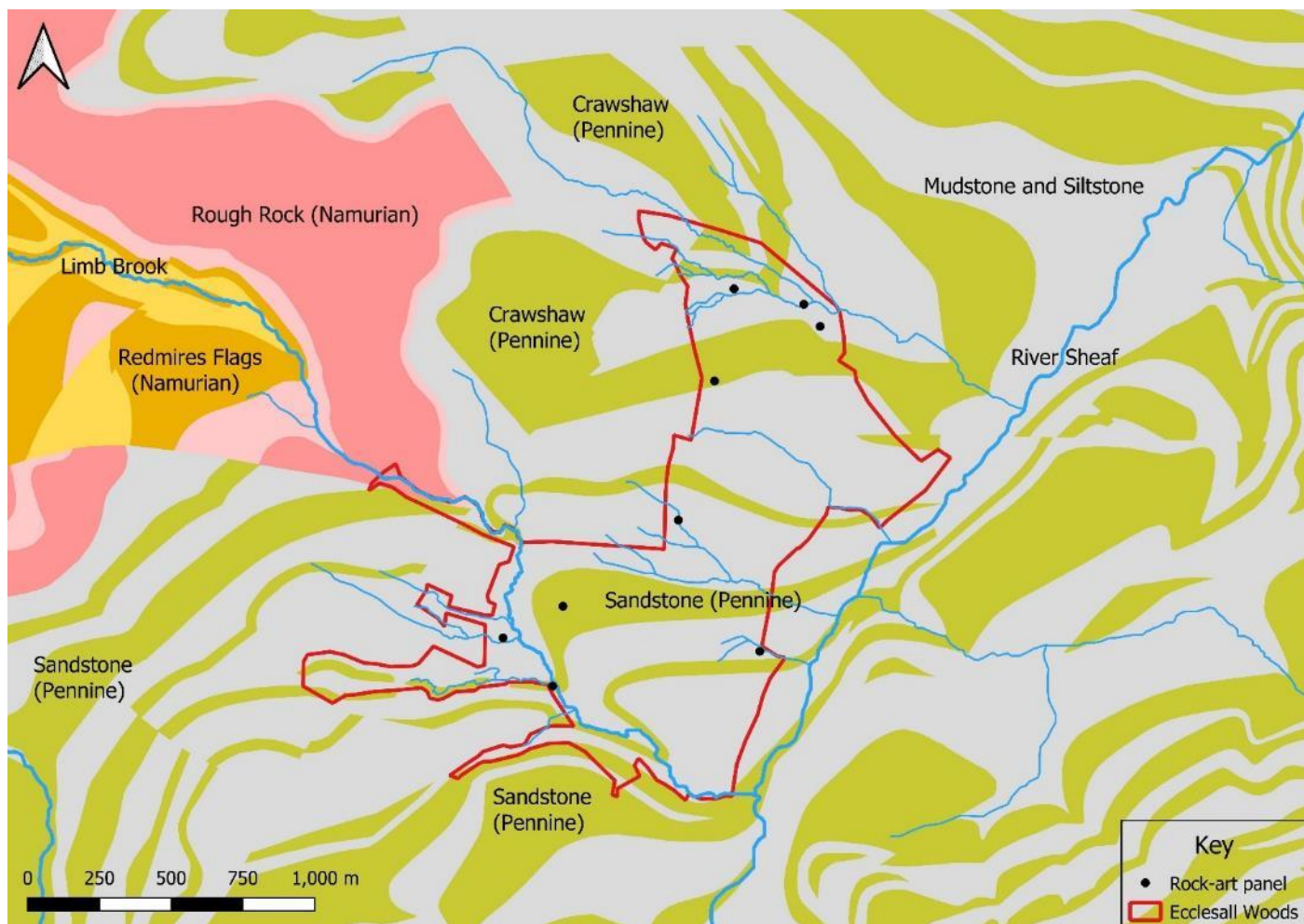


Figure 2: Geological formations. Contains British Geological Survey materials copyright NERC 2023.

Many springs flow down the valley side through the Woods, feeding into the River Sheaf. The sources of these are not all discernible due to masking by the contemporary suburbs of Whirlow and Bents Green but they are likely to rise in the vicinity of the Gritstone (Namurian) ridge tops. At least two demonstrably rise there and notably the Limb Brook (Figure 2). These larger streams carve localised valleys which in the case of the Limb Brook and some of its tributaries are precipitously sided in places and distinctly gorge-like. The lowest areas of the woodland occupy part of the floodplain of the river and are flat or have only very shallow slopes. Here, where minor unmapped springs, artificial drains and the larger brooks are close to their confluences with the Sheaf the woodland is very wet and boggy in places (personal observation).

Ecclesall Wood Is designated as a Lower Spatial Priority Woodland Priority Habitat, with High Priority for woodland improvement (MAGIC 2023). It is a broadleaved deciduous woodland and a designated Ancient Woodland (MAGIC 2023). The western parts of the woods, approximately to the west of the Discovery Centre, falls within a great swathe comprising the entire Pennine Landscape to the south of Penistone which

is designated by Natural England as a priority habitat for various bird species (Woodland Bird Assemblage). The entire woodland is a designated Local Nature Reserve. Such reserves “are places with wildlife or geological features that are of special interest locally. They offer people opportunities to study or learn about nature or simply to enjoy it” (MAGIC 2023). It should be noted that they are also home to a wide range of archaeological features worthy of appreciation that are equally valued by the public.

Ecclesall Woods has been under the stewardship of Sheffield City Council ever since the woodland was purchased for the city with the aid of J.G. Graves in 1927. It is currently managed for its wildlife and as an amenity for the general public.

3. Historical and archaeological background

The etymology of the name *Ecclesall* is contentious, but it has been suggested that the second part of the name derives from the old English *halh* “a land in the angle of a parish or county” (Hey 1979: 28; Parker 1985: 17), with the parish in question perhaps being the very early (and unusually large) parish of Ecclesfield (Hey 1979: 29). Thus Ecclesall, bordered by the River Sheaf on its southeastern side and the Limb Brook on its western side, probably formed the southwestern corner of this parish. The present woodland occupies the corner between these streams. Predating the parishes of Bradfield and Sheffield, the church at Ecclesfield appears to have served the spiritual needs of the entire district of Hallamshire originally (Hey 2001: 9), the southwestern border of which was probably identical to that of the parish. This border formed by the confluence of streams is also thought to have formed part of the border between the early medieval kingdoms of Mercia and Northumbria (Parker 1985: 17) and is reputed to have been the place where the defeated Northumbrians accepted the overlordship of Egbert of Wessex in 828 (Hey 2001: 11).

Domesday records that “Hallam”, comprised at the end of the 11th century 16 *berewicks*, or estates (Parker 1985: 11) including Attercliffe and Sheffield (Folio320). Ecclesfield formed part of these lands (Folio319) and Ecclesall too, neighbouring Dore (Folio278). Ecclesall seems to have passed into the ownership of the Ekilsale family in 1296 (Sheppy 2011: 11). In 1317 Robert De Ecclesall was granted a license to impark, and Ecclesall Woods seems to have been a part of the new park (Hart 1993: 55). The De Ecclesalls continued as lords of the manor until 1343 at which point it passed to Henry de la Scrope. In 1517 the estate passed into the ownership of Elizabeth Fitzrandal who then married Sir Nicolas Strelley who became lord of the manor (Sheppy 2011: 12). Until then, what became Ecclesall Woods functioned as a deer park (Jones 1988: 49; Hart 1990: 10; 1993: 55), which it continued to function as until late in the 16th century (Jones 2021: 19-21). However, during the 16th century the park began conversion into a springwood (Hart 1990: 13; Hey 2001: 18). A lease of 1649 to John Bright shows that the woodland was still in part managed for woodland fodder at that time but was also being compartmentalised for coppice management into its various “woods” (Hart 1990: 13; 1993: 56). In 1752, Mary Bright married the 2nd Marquis of Rockingham (Jones 1988: 49) into whose ownership it passed. Between the 16th and the end of the 19th century Ecclesall Woods was the scene of intensive management for charcoal and white coal production (Jones 1988: 39-41; Hart 1990: 16; 1993: 57-63). This activity, evidence of the burgeoning industries in lead and steel production, is accompanied along the Limb Brook by Whirlow Wheel at Rycroft Glen, which might have been active since 1586 and Rycroft Mill, that was smelting lead from at least 1674 (Sainty 2011: 30). Most of the woodland was later converted into “high forest”, as a timber plantation during the Victorian period, transitioning approximately between 1820-1850 by which time coppicing for fuel was less valuable (Hey 2001: 18; Jones 1988: 21-22; Jones and Walker 1997:13-14). The wood remained part of the Wentworth Woodhouse estate until 1927 when it was

sold to Sheffield City Council (Jones 1988: 49). Under its new status as a public amenity, the bird sanctuary was first established in 1929 (Hart 1990: 20).

The earliest archaeological research at the locale consists of the recording as stray finds of two stone implements. One is a perforated unfinished quartz adze, probably relating to the Neolithic, found during the construction of Whirlowdale road in 1922 (Armstrong 1922: 251; Hart 1990: 5) and a Group XVIII Macehead of the Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age found approximately to the southeast of the present bird sanctuary (Philips *et al* 1988: 212). The presence of flintwork in the general area has also been noted (Hart 1990: 6). In the early 1980s the first example of prehistoric rock-art at Ecclesall Wood was recorded by archaeologists (Barnatt and Frith 1983) and it was noted at the time that this was also the first example to be recorded in the gritstone uplands on the western side of Sheffield. However, the stone has been known to members of the public since long before attention was drawn to it by archaeologists, known as “the poodle stone” (T. Howard, pers. comm.). The Poodle Stone is a scheduled ancient monument (list entry 1018265).

Paul Ardron is understood to have gathered important information about the woodlands in unpublished work during the last decades of the 20th century (I. Rotherham, pers. comm.) but more formal surveying in the woods was first undertaken during the 1980s by Clive Hart, who first characterised its history and archaeological features on a systematic basis, including the presence of the ditches, streams and low earthwork embankments that formed its post medieval compartmentalisation, extensive quarrying activity to the south of the bird sanctuary, and its plethora of Q-Pits (Hart 1990: 18).

More recent studies have been more focussed on investigations of specific classes of archaeological features, including charcoal burning platforms and especially the Q-pits, but also including detailed earthwork surveys. These were all undertaken as part of a grant funded community volunteer project led by professional archaeologists (Anon. 2002; 2003; Gowans and Pouncett 2006; 2006b; 2006c). Earlier phases of the work included a topographical survey of the hilltop enclosure where the bird sanctuary is located and associated field systems overlooking Limb Brook, on the west side of Ecclesall Woods (Anon. 2002) and a walkover survey to record Q-Pits in detail (Anon.2003). The Hilltop enclosure, interpreted on morphological grounds to be Iron Age or Roman period, were partly overlain by the field systems. These, in turn, were disturbed by evidence for post-medieval charcoal burning and white coal production. The walkover survey resulted in detailed recording of 67 Q-Pits that were able to be differentiated by complexity of design. Later phases of the work included further surveying of field systems in the vicinity of the hilltop enclosure (Gowans and Pouncett 2006b), as well as a topographical survey of similar enclosures in the eastern part of the woodland, north of Whirlowdale Road (Gowans and Pouncett 2006). These newly recorded field systems were assumed to be broadly contemporaneous with their earlier surveyed counterparts and included evidence for clearance. Post medieval features were also recorded, including a Holloway. The last phase of this work, undertaken in the summers of 2005 and 2006, consisted of the excavation of “simple” and “complex” Q-Pits (Gowans and Pouncett 2006c).

Other evidence for possible industrial activity exists along the north facing slope overlooking the spring that rises to the immediate northeast of the hilltop enclosure and bird sanctuary (J. Barnatt, personal communication). A line of pits and mounds are situated there which might be indicative of mining for coal or ironstone.

A footbridge across the Limb Brook at Rycroft Glen dating to the mid 18th century is designated as a grade II listed building (list entry 1247149).

4. Aims and objectives

The present survey was prompted by anecdotal reports of the presence of possible rock-art in Ecclesall Woods additional to the Poodle Stone. Therefore, the main archaeological aim of the study was to ascertain the extent and character of rock-art in the woodland in furtherance of understanding the prehistory of the locale. The main social aim was to provide an experience in archaeological recording to community volunteers and promote positive engagement by local people with the historic environment and in outdoor activity beneficial for physical and mental wellbeing. Secondary archaeological aims included interpreting the purpose and significance of the rock-art. The objectives were to sample the landscape and prepare detailed records of all examples of possible rock-art detected, as well as relocate and record all anecdotally reported examples.

5. Methodology

Terminology

The term “rock art” is problematic, because one of the few things we can be certain of about such enigmatic markings is that they were almost certainly not “art”, a concept that owes its existence to a Cartesian world view, ideas of the post-medieval enlightenment, and concomitant aesthetics. Unfortunately, the term has become ubiquitous. Alternatives in use include “petroglyphs” and, where cup-marks are in question, “cupules”. Such terms, though less problematic in some ways, come with their own problems. Therefore, the term used here is “rock-art”, with the hyphen serving to mitigate in part for its unfortunate modern meaning. The term “cup-marks” is utilised on the same basis. A “panel” is defined as any boulder, sheet or other chunk of bedrock outcropping upon which are inscribed rock-art motifs. Other terms used are derived from the published guidance of Scotland’s Rock Art Project (ScRAP).

Recording

Volunteers drawn from Bolsterstone Archaeology and Heritage Group as well as from the local area formed the team investigating Ecclesall Woods. The study area was searched by walking in transects, with each volunteer covering an approximately ten metre wide transect.

The record made in the present study included recording the location of panels by means of pace surveying with the aid of a compass from known points on appropriately scaled map sheets. This method achieves a similar level of accuracy to that utilising hand-held GPS devices. GPS devices are not usually reliable within woodland settings and were not used, except for Panel 9. Panel 9 was recorded in a small open glade overlooked by trees that were free of a leaf canopy at that time of year (January 2024), in an area that was particularly challenging to navigate due to the density of undergrowth. Three handheld gps devices were used to record its location, the readings from which were highly consistent.

All panels were then recorded by photograph. Written details were prepared on pro-forma recording sheets, informed by the suggested recording criteria of Robert Bednarik (2008), with additional guidance derived from Scotland’s Rock Art Project (ScRAP). Panels were also drawn at an appropriate scale where that was

deemed practical. Additional photography was undertaken with a view to the preparation of Structure From Motion 3D models utilising photogrammetric software (Agisoft Metashape).

Drawing conventions

Drawings were prepared at an appropriate scale by offset measurement. Dot density was used on the final drawings to indicate depth, with greater densities indicating greater depth. Distinct lines of dots also indicate breaks of slope. A continuous dashed line indicates the edge of vegetation or maximum visible extent of a panel.

6. The panels

Summary

A total of 58 motifs were fully recorded (with additional motifs recognized and depicted later) across 9 panels (Table 1; Figure 5; Figure 7). Detailed illustrations and data are provided in Appendix 1. The following descriptions summarise the details recorded on the record sheets, not taking into account further information noted on scale drawings or structure from motion 3d models.

The motifs consisted of a total of 48 circular or sub-circular cup marks. Additionally, a “dumbbell” motif (Panel 1), two Arc motifs (Panels 1 and 3), three linear motifs, and two cruciform motifs (Panel 1) were also recorded. Panel 9 includes a penannular motif. All panels were of simple cup-marked type with the exception of Panel one, the “Poodle Stone”, first recorded by John Barnatt (Barnatt and Frith 1983) and Panel nine. In addition, three small panels (Figure 8; Figure 9; Figure 10), two with cup-marks and one with an arc motif, noted in earlier walks were unable to be relocated and recorded.

Panel one (Figures 7 and 12-14; Table 2) was well known as the “Poodle Stone” in the local community long before it drew the attention of archaeologists (T. Howard, personal communication). The panel is located low on the valley side on an imperceptibly shallow slope between a drain or spring and its confluence with the major spring rising at Castle Dyke to the northwest. It includes at least 14 individual shallow circular cup-marks that have been pecked or produced with hammerstones. However, two of these are conjoined to form a “dumbbell” motif and four more are similarly conjoined. There is also a cruciform motif and an “arc” motif present. Perhaps its most distinguishing feature though are the numerous curvilinear grooves, some of which are deeply incised, which bound the locations of the cup-marks. These, it was noted by Barnatt and Frith (1983: 41), bear comparison with similarly engraved panels on Ilkley Moor to the northwest of Leeds and Bradford. Similarly “zoned” panels occur elsewhere in Britain, at Gayles Moor in County Durham for example (Beckensall 1999: 20) and at Dod Law in Northumberland (Beckensall 1999: 21). These types of grooves are sometimes referred to as “enclosures”. The panel is an earthfast boulder, almost flush with the ground, with its markings on its upper horizontal face.

Panel two (Figures 7 and 15-17; Table 3) is located upstream from the Poodle Stone (cover photo) and is a similar sized boulder which stands slightly higher above ground level. It has a single well defined circular cup-mark (Figure 3) two smaller examples and a number of other possible small cup-marks that are almost indistinguishable to the naked eye, but which are hinted at in Structure From Motion 3d modelling (Figure 16).



Figure 3: The single well defined cup-mark on Panel 2. Source: author.

Panel three (Figures 7 and 18-20; Table 4) is located upstream of Panel two (Figure 4) and is a small, well rounded, earthfast boulder eroding out of a narrow footpath of convenience. It is poised between springs that feed the major spring rising at Castle Dyke (hereafter referred to as Castle Dyke Brook) adjacent to a break of slope overlooking its valley. It has two very distinct cup-marks plus several more markings that might also be rock-art motifs. One of these is another cup-mark that appears to be more damaged or eroded than the others, but which has more clear definition in SFM modelling (Figure 19). The three cup-marks form a line, with the larger of the three in the middle and the other two being approximately the same size. Another marking appears to be a small arc motif.



Figure 4: Panel 3. Source: author.

Panel four (Figures 7 and 21-23; Table 5) is not *in-situ*. It is a small eroded boulder that forms part of a collapsed field boundary (Figure 5). It has a single small cup-mark and possible additional small cup-mark. The field boundary forms part of a cluster of surviving enclosure boundaries to the north of Whirlodale Road overlooking the small valley cut by Castle Dyke Brook along which Panels 1-3 are located, and which conform to a morphology of enclosure features that are generally assumed to date to the Iron Age or Roman Periods (Chadwick 2008), exemplified by the cropmark landscape centring on the Magnesian Limestone ridge in the east of the region (Roberts, Deegan and Berg 2010). These enclosures commonly survive as upstanding features in Ancient Woodlands and can be seen in LiDAR images in most of them across South Yorkshire (personal observation). More such enclosures are well known to exist in the vicinity of the Hilltop enclosure (which they cut), west of the present Discovery centre at Ecclesall Wood (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Distribution of rock-art panels in relation to Ecclesall Woods (red) and springs. Subtle topographical details present in this LiDAR image draw out the forms of many earthworks and enclosures that are probably Iron Age or older. Contains ordnance survey data © crown copyright database 2023.

Panel five (Figures 7 and 24-26; Table 6) is situated next to the line of another of the streams emanating from upslope of Ecclesall Woods and which is tributary to the River Sheaf. The panel is another earthfast boulder, very similar in size and shape to panels one, two and nine, which has cup-marks engraved on the upper horizontal surface of the boulder, which is almost flush with the ground level. Panel five is the most difficult feature to interpret since there are a number of natural erosional hollows present of kinds which are common on the local sandstone formations. Possible cup-marks are mostly situated along a naturally eroded linear bedding plane at its centre and orientated on the long axis of the panel (Figure 25; Figure 26). Not all of these were recognised on-site (a regular occurrence in rock-art research, where markings are often too eroded to be easily recognised apart from in exceptionally good light and humidity), and some smaller features that were recorded seem of questionable validity upon closer scrutiny, although this might be due to their poor preservation. Despite these problems, the panel is not of the local geological formation (Mudstones and Siltstones) but is of Sandstones geology and therefore must have been brought to its present location either by human agency or periglacial action. The markings interpreted as cup-marks conform to the well documented morphology of cup-marks that have a hemispherical profile and uninterrupted circular circumference. There are four possible cup-marks along the central linear erosional gully (including No.1, Table 6). Five more smaller markings are located along another bedding plane on the south side of the panel that are almost identical in size and general morphology (including No.'s 2,3 and 5, Table 6).

Panel six (Figures 6 and 7 and 27-29; Table 7) is located only a few metres from the west bank of Limb Brook. It is a small earthfast boulder with 7 small cup-marks engraved on the upper horizontal surface. Three of these are eroded and poorly defined but a cluster of four are unusually well defined and “fresh” looking. A sequence is clearly implied by this difference, and it is possible that the panel became buried shortly after the latest cup-marks were made. Horizontal panels are often flush or almost flush with the ground level, but in the case of Panel six, despite being exposed, actually lies marginally below ground level (Figure 6). It has almost certainly been exposed recently due to footfall, at a location marked by a recently refurbished footpath and newly constructed bridge across the Limb Brook.



Figure 6: An oblique view of Panel six facing south, showing how it is partly overlain by soil and roots on its south side. Source: author.

As with most of the panels at the locale, Panel seven (Figures 7 and 30-33; Table 8) is located very close to the line of a stream, in this case rising in springs located north-west, near to large scale post medieval quarrying areas below the well known prehistoric field systems and hilltop enclosure. It is located very close to the floodplain of the Sheaf, downslope and to the immediate east of a break of slope overlooking it. The small sub-triangular boulder has a large and well defined cup-mark, with another smaller probable cup-mark immediately below (Figure 7). These are adjacent to another possible large cup-mark, of the conjoined “pear” shaped variety noted at Spout House Hill and Bent Hills in previous surveys (Cockrell 2021b). However, the full extent and character of the cup-mark cannot be understood at the present time since it extends below ground level (Figures 30-33). Yet more cup-marks might have been damaged beyond recovery due to a significant blow to the stone that has split it in two and caused considerable damage to its surface.

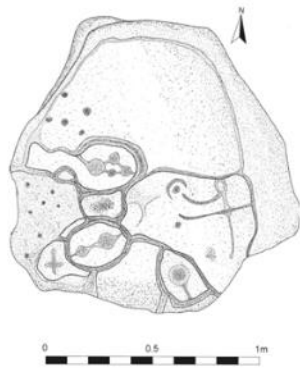
Panel eight (Figures 7 and 33-35; Table 9), like panel four, is not *in situ*. Again, it is situated very close to streams including Limb Brook and a minor tributary, close to their confluence. However, it was noted that the panel appears to be part of a small cluster possibly defining a feature. The small sub-rectangular panel has an unusually large but well defined cup-mark on its south facing vertical face (Figure 7). It is flanked by two similar, but less well defined sub-circular possible cup-marks that might continue below ground level. The cluster of boulders flanks the line of a causey, or pack horse route which forms the present footpath alongside the Limb Brook on its west side and it was realised that more boulders, earthfast and spread in an arc, can be observed on the other side of the causey at this point. A distinct bulge in the causey is also apparent here. The cup-marked panel itself bears a striking resemblance to one that forms part of the kerb of a small cairn situated within a Bronze Age stone circle at Cullerlie, near Aberdeen (Canmore entry 18458; Burl 1976: 188; 290). Also sub-rectangular, that panel also has a large circular cup-mark flanked by smaller

cup-marks on a vertical face. The reuse of cup-marked stones within cairns of the Early Bronze Age is well documented (Barnatt and Reeder 1982; Barnatt 2003) and feature prominently in the kerbs of the cairns of Balnuaran of Clava for example (Burl 1976: 163). A probable cairn cemetery exists in close proximity to the location of Panel seven (see appendix two), including kerbed cairns, and it is possible that the causey cuts and masks the remains of an outlying cairn belonging to that group, of which Panel seven formed part of the kerb.

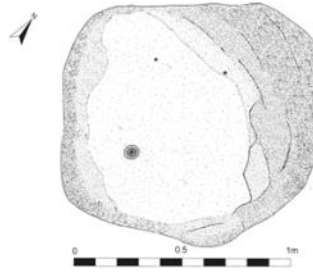
Panel nine ((Figures 7 and 36-38; Table 10) is an earthfast boulder, very similar in morphology and scale to panels one and five and of identical Coal Measures Sandstones geology. It is located on the east facing slopes of the prominent hill that the hilltop enclosure lies at the apex of, precipitously overlooking Limb Brook. Late prehistoric field boundaries and earthworks are immediately adjacent to the panel (Figure 5) although the exact stratigraphic relationship, if any, is difficult to establish. However, it is highly likely, *prima facie*, that the panel's existence would have been known to the builders of the field boundaries. Panel nine has eight circular and sub-circular cup-marks, four enclosure grooves and one penannular (Figure 7; Figures 36-38).

Panel	Circular/sub-circular	cruciform	Linear	Dumbbell	Penannular	Arc	Enclosure
1	14	2	1	1		1	5
2	3						
3	2		2			1	
4	1						
5	3						
6	7						
7	2						
8	3						
9	8				1		4
Total	43	2	3	1	1	2	9

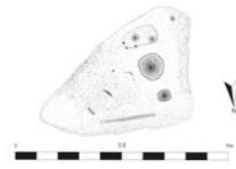
Table 1: Distribution of motifs by panel.



1



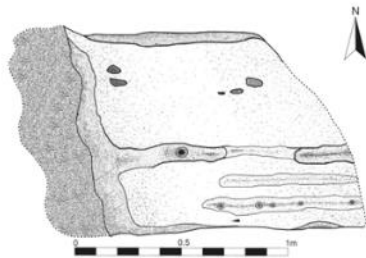
2



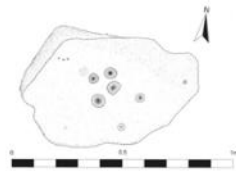
3



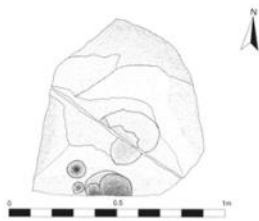
4



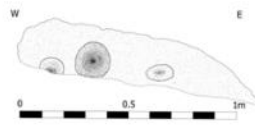
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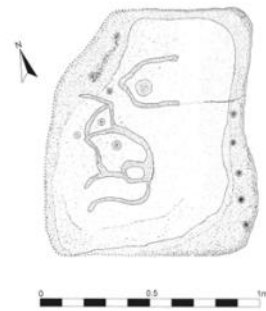
6



7



8



9

Figure 7: Recorded Panels at Ecclesall Woods. Source: author.

7. Unrecorded panels not relocated

Several of the panels above were first noted anecdotally by visitors to the area. This includes Panel two, first noted in this way by the present author during the course of doctoral research. It also includes Panel three, first encountered by chance by Lynne Harling and Panel six, first noted by Camilla Priede and her daughter. Three other such panels, all three of which were small enough to be carried easily were similarly noted but were not able to be relocated during the survey.

The small panels illustrated below (Figure 8; Figure 9) were both found by chance in walking by the author to the south of the Discovery centre by footpaths. Both stones were of sandstone and of similar size, approximately 0.5m in length and located within a few metres of each other.



Figure 8: Small earthfast stone approximately 200m south of the Discovery Centre in Ecclesall Woods. Source: author.



Figure 9: Small earthfast stone approximately 200m south of the Discovery centre in Ecclesall Woods. Source: author.

The first of the stones above bares a marking, an “arc” motif, which is almost identical to that recorded on a panel at Bent Hills recently (Cockrell 2021) and which is of a type which is well attested to in rock-art research as a variant of linear grooves (Beckensall 1999: 13; Barnett *et al* 2021: 13). The second consists of small cup-marks. It is to be hoped that these stones might still be relocated at some time in the future, but their size and obvious portability must leave open the sad possibility that they have been stolen. That fate has almost certainly been suffered by the remaining stone to be noted, that was discovered by Liz Emm adjacent to the bridge across Castle Dyke Brook that is very close to the entrance path connecting Millhouses to the woods (Figure 10). The stone was loose and therefore certainly not *in situ*. It could easily be man-handled. Nevertheless, it was sufficiently close to the locations of Panels one and two to almost certainly have originally been part of the group, like Panel four (also not *in situ*), that was deliberately located along the line of the brook. It was marked by a single well preserved possible cup-mark, indicating that it had been protected from the elements until quite recently.



Figure 10: Portable stone with single possible cup-mark. Source: Liz Emm.

8. Discussion and conclusion

The small assemblage of dispersed panels of largely unremarkable character described here is noteworthy in a number of respects. Firstly, none of the motifs are marked on outcroppings of bedrock but instead are marked on earthfast boulders or very small boulders with a limited number of cup-marks. Secondly, they are distributed either demonstrably or arguably in very close proximity to streams that rise in springs upslope on the east facing valley side (Figure 11). This patterning supports the possibility that they are situated at or very close to their original locations. Thirdly, all panels are of geological formations that are rarely if ever associated with prehistoric rock-art in this region, consisting of as they do of Coal Measures Sandstones geological formations of one variant or another. The implication of the foregoing is that significant effort was engaged in to place relatively small stones to be marked, or utilise existing earthfast boulders to be marked at a particular locale lacking suitable outcropping bedrock, utilising raw materials that would not normally be used.

More than half of the panels are distributed either along Limb Brook or a spring that rises at Castle Dyke, close to the end of a ridge forming a spur of Rough Rock (Millstone Grit) that protrudes north-east towards the Don Valley and separates the Sheaf Valley from Mayfield Valley and the Porter Brook (Figure 11). This geological spur approximates very closely to the topographical prominence of the place between Limb Brook and Castle Dyke Brook. Limb Brook is directly overlooked by the precipitously sided west facing escarpment edge of the Rough Rock, which then descends in a more gradual dip-slope in a northeasterly direction until there is another distinct break of slope at its north-east facing edge. The eminence of the heights above the Limb Brook end of the spur therefore serves to give some protection from the prevailing westerly winds at the locale, which has a plateau-like character particularly at its north-east end, at a location overlooking the point in the Don Valley where that river has its confluences with the Porter Brook and the Sheaf, and fine views extending along the Don Valley.

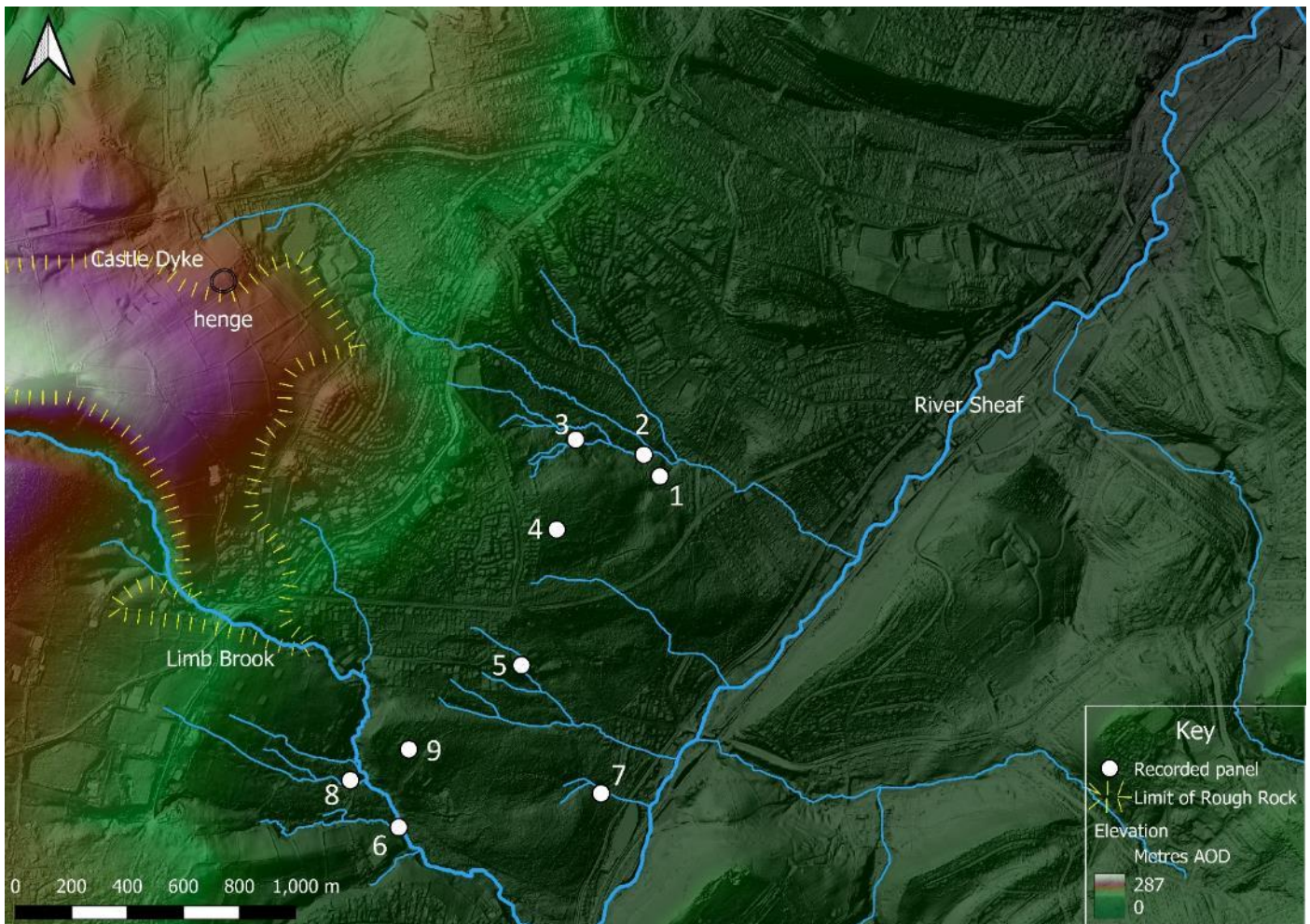


Figure 11: The environmental context of the Ecclesall Woods panels, in relation to the henge monument at Whirlow Hall Farm. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright Database 2023.

The sheltered landscape described above, framed by the aforementioned streams and elevated above the Sheaf Valley at the point where the present Ecclesall Woods exists, has been subjected to much archaeological investigation in recent years. Archaeological Research Services supervised a programme of fieldwalking, geophysical surveys and excavation between 2011 and 2016 for the Time Travellers community archaeology group. Quantities of flintwork were recovered from across the locale indicative of a significant Mesolithic presence, and a concentration in Grass Field, on the edge of the Rough Rock escarpment edge directly above the source of Castle Dyke Brook that was indicative of a Neolithic presence (Waddington 2016). Excavations subsequently undertaken in the lee of the ridge at the other end of the spur, close to Limb Brook, revealed a sequence of Iron Age and Roman period settlement (Waddington *et al* 2017). A renewed programme of fieldwork during 2017-18 including the University of Sheffield resulted in the recording of a hearth in Grass Field radiocarbon dated to 5000BC (Halton *et al* 2018), and a disturbed assemblage of Late Mesolithic chipped stone at the source of Castle Dyke Brook. Overlooking this, at the east end of Grass Field, a large circular enclosure was recorded which was interpreted as a Late Neolithic ceremonial monument, or henge (Cockrell, Priede and Merrony 2019).

The plateau-like spur bounded by the Limb Brook and Castle Dyke Brook was clearly a place of some importance to communities from at least the Late Mesolithic, and then either continuously or repeatedly so throughout later prehistory. Its significance was sufficiently important for it to have been graced with the

construction of a large ceremonial enclosure during the Late Neolithic, arguably because or in recognition of the status of the locale as a destination where people gathered at times. This is likely to have been during approximately the same time period when panels of sandstone were being embellished with cup-marks along the same springs that bounded the place and rose from it, and which led down to the River Sheaf.

Many of those marked boulders bare close comparison with similarly marked small stones recorded in secondary contexts from the Early to Middle Bronze Age in the Peak District (Barnatt and Robinson 2003: 10; 17), including for example Barbrook II (Barnatt 1990: 57) and Park Gate (Barnatt 1990: 64). Similar inclusions of very small panels of rock-art in cairns with only one or two cup-marks have been recorded in West Yorkshire (Brown *et al* 2012: 42; Boughey 2022: 131-133) and have been recorded much further afield (Carlton 2022: 99-109; Beckensall 1999: 117; 144-148). Sometimes these simple cup-marked stones have appeared in much later contexts such at the cup-marked stone discovered at Holymoorside, Derbyshire (Barnatt 2003: 22). Similarly disturbed cup-marked stones have been found closer to Ecclesall Woods at Hallam Moors (Barnatt and Reeder 1982; Barnatt 2003: 22), and Wilkin Wood, Ewden Valley (Cockrell *et al* 2017 (2020)).

The Ecclesall Woods examples are unusual in occurring in the open, like their counterparts on bedrock outcropping, but based on the foregoing it could be argued that the practice was far more widespread than currently apparent. This is likely to be due to the way the locale has been managed historically. They are distributed in a landscape in which due to its historic management benefits from having suffered relatively modest disturbance over the centuries, along with many other small features including upstanding field boundaries and other enclosures dating from later prehistory. This includes a number of probable Bronze Age cairns (see appendix 2). The panels appear to be at or very close to where they were originally placed along the lines of streams rising at or slightly below a place of repeated activity between valleys. It was a place that was eventually monumentalised by a henge overlooking the confluence of the Sheaf and the Don. The archaeological importance of the assemblage is that in this ancient woodland, panels that in other locales would almost certainly have been cleared away or relocated completely have, at least partially, survived in their original context, and with their likely wider context recoverable.

It has been argued by Richard Bradley (1997; 2023) and others that, amongst other possible reasons, journeys are implied by the presence of rock-art along natural routeways such as river valleys. They frequently face the arc of the rising and setting sun. The assemblage in Ecclesall Woods is consistent with that. The “journeys” might be local forays but might alternatively be long journeys between east and west, or a stage on a journey to and from a place of special meaning and value to successive communities accessing it, such as the henge monument at Castle Dyke. The simplicity of the markings, the diminutive size of their panels and their lack of visible prominence indicates that the important thing was not the markings themselves, *per se*, but the act of marking and the place at which they were marked.

Acknowledgements

Terry Howard, as is so often the case, is warmly thanked for drawing my attention to Ecclesall Woods, a location not at first thought to necessitate another walkover survey in the light of earlier work. John Gilpin of Sheffield Parks and Gardens is thanked for permitting access to the bird sanctuary. John Baker’s informative insights are much appreciated. Camilla Priede and her daughter Ros are thanked for sharing information about Panel 6, discovered by Ros. Ian Rotherham drew my attention to the unrecorded features

in the vicinity of Ran Wood and shared many useful and fascinating insights into the ecology of the area. Paul Ardron's observations of features in the vicinity of Ran Wood were invaluable and his company on site one day much appreciated. The undertaking of the survey and preparation of this report was made possible with the generous support of the Sheffield Town Trust and the Sheffield Southwest Local Area Committee.

John Barnatt was kind enough to read and comment upon an earlier draft of this report. He corrected several errors and omissions and shared insights that have considerably improved the text. Nevertheless, the contents remain the responsibility of the author, including any remaining errors.

This survey would have been impossible to undertake without the dedication, hard work and good humour of the members of Bolsterstone Archaeology and Heritage Group and local volunteers who gave up their time and comfort to take part, sometimes in atrocious weather. In no particular order, they were Andrew Tissington, Alleluia Tyas, Liz Emm, Elinor Harman, Steve Hollings, David Willis, Steve Anwyll, Ruth Morgan, Chris Cumberpatch, Lynne Harling, Mathew Love, Nick Peck, Vince Boulter and Steve Jackson. Finally, I would like to express special gratitude to our dear friend, the late Linda Jackson. Linda's keen eye for detail, enthusiasm, sense of fun and general good company along with her invaluable insights and thoughts concerning geology were greatly appreciated in our survey and will be sorely missed going forward.

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Appendix 1: Illustrations and tabulated data

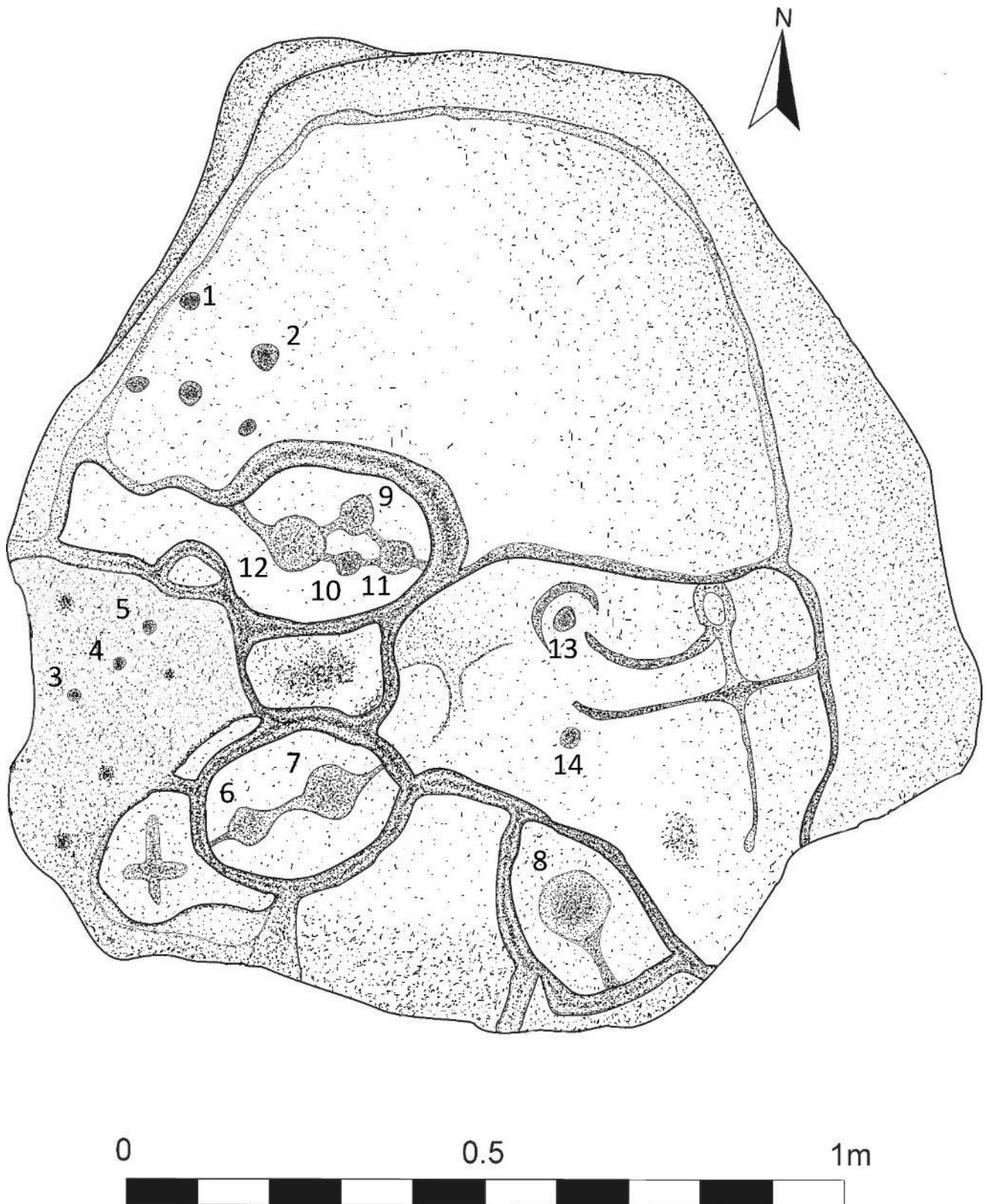


Figure 12: Plan of Panel 1.



Figure 13: Occlusion image derived from 3d modelling.



Figure 14: Panel 1 NGR 432643, 383132. Source: author.

Motif No.	Shape: Plan	Shape: Profile	Diameter	Length	Width	Depth	Comments
1	circular	concave	15			6	
2	circular	concave	30			6	
3	circular	concave	20			7	
4	circular	concave	30			6	
5	circular	shallow concave	20			8	
6	circular	shallow concave	60			5	
7	circular	shallow concave	75			5	
8	circular	shallow concave	70			9	
9	circular	shallow concave	50			3	
10	circular	shallow concave	35			8	

11	circular	shallow concave	35			7	
12	circular	shallow concave	80			15	
13	circular	concave	25			8	
14	circular	concave	30			4	
Un-numbered motifs		"u" shaped (linear grooves)					No data, Except that linear grooves are 5mm deep approx..

Table 2: Data from Panel 1.

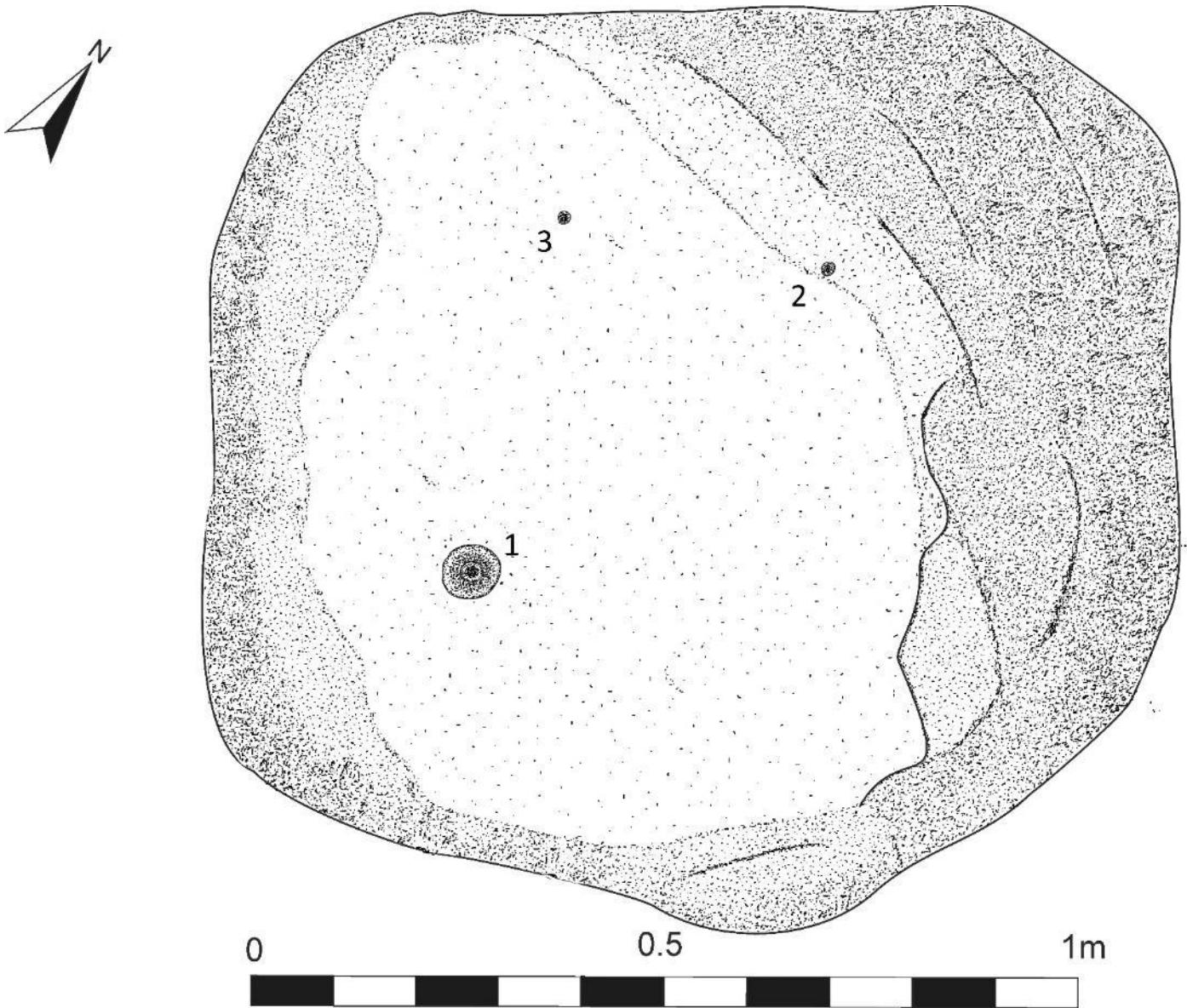


Figure 15: Plan of Panel 2.



Figure 16: Occlusion image derived from 3d modelling of Panel 2.



Figure 17: Panel 2 NGR 432586, 383209: Source: author.

Motif No.	Shape: Plan	Shape: Profile	Diameter	Length	Width	Depth	comment
1	circular	concave	50			21	
2	circular	concave	14			7	
3	circular	concave	16			6	

Table 3: Data from Panel 2.

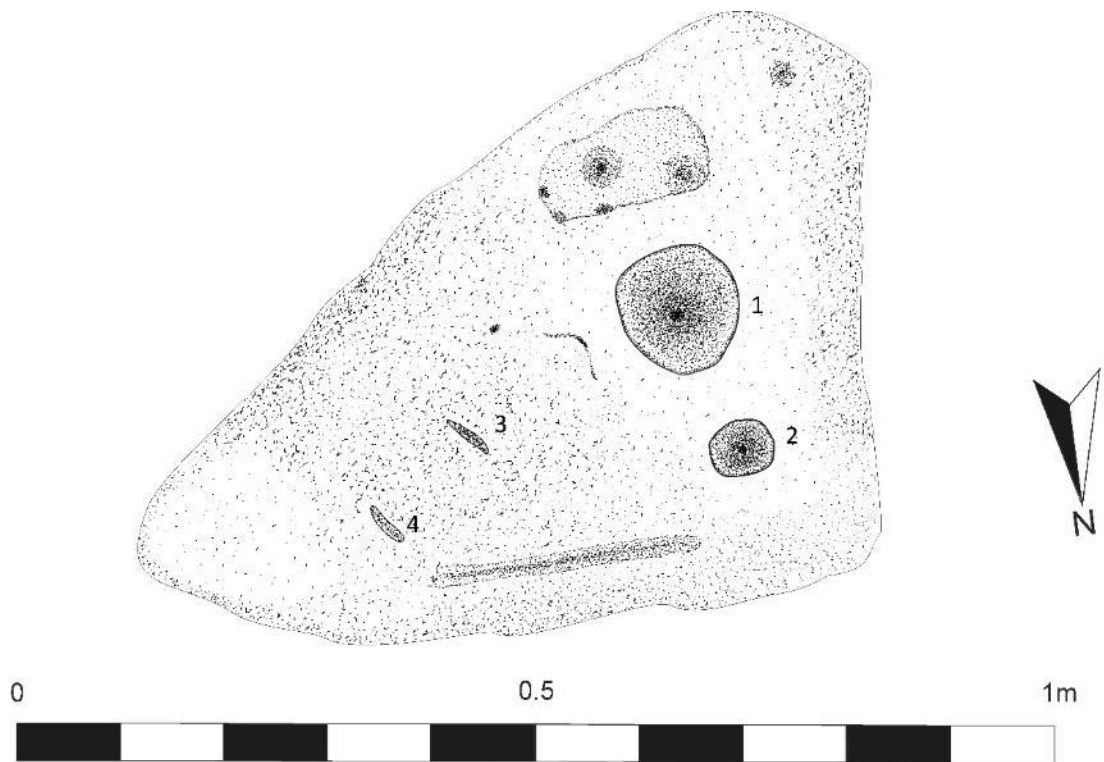


Figure 18: Plan of Panel 3.



Figure 19: Occlusion image derived from 3d modelling of Panel 3.



Figure 20: Panel 3 NGR 432343, 383263. Note the very different geological character of the adjacent stone. Source: author.

Motif No.	Shape: plan	Shape: profile	Diameter	Length	Width	Depth	Comment
1	circular	concave	120			35	
2	circular	concave	70			13	
3	linear	"v" shaped		40	8	8	
4	linear	"v" shaped		50	12	12	

Table 4: Data from Panel 3.



Figure 21: Plan of Panel 4.

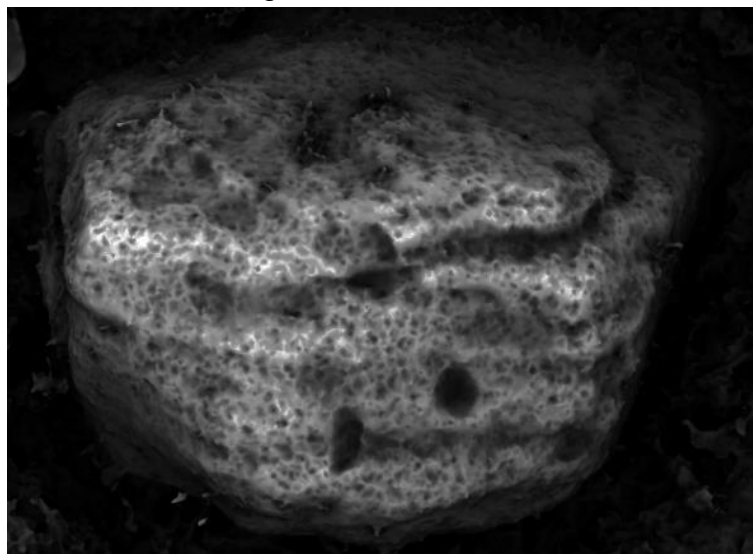


Figure 22: Occlusion model image of Panel 4.



Figure 23: Panel 4 432271, 382945. Source: author.

Motif No.	Shape: plan	Shape: profile	Diameter	Length	Width	Depth	Comment
1	circular	concave	16			7	Poss. use of bedding plane as radial groove.

Table 5: Data from Panel 4.

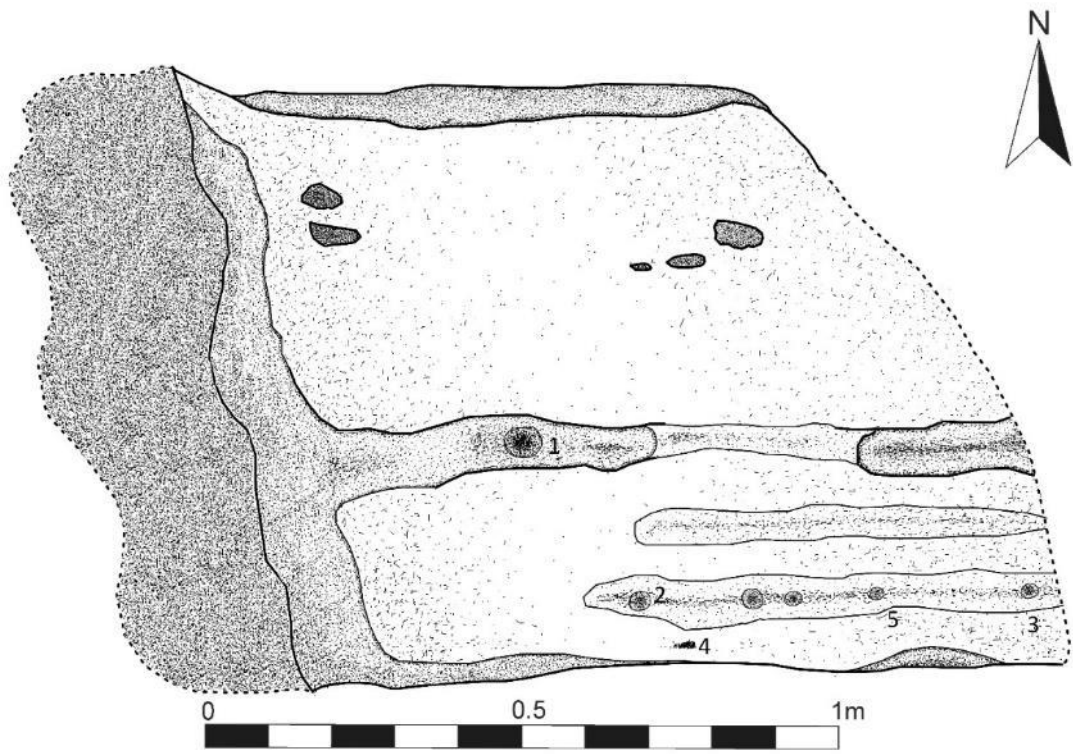


Figure 24: Plan of Panel 5.



Figure 25: Occlusion model image of Panel 5.



Figure 26: Panel 5 NGR 432149, 382458. Source: author.

Motif No.	Shape: plan	Shape: profile	Diameter	Length	Width	Depth	comment
1	circular	concave	40			20	
2	circular	concave	15			11	
3	circular	Concave	15			10	
4	linear	ovoid		30	20	6	natural
5	circular	concave	12			4	

Table 6: Data from Panel 5.

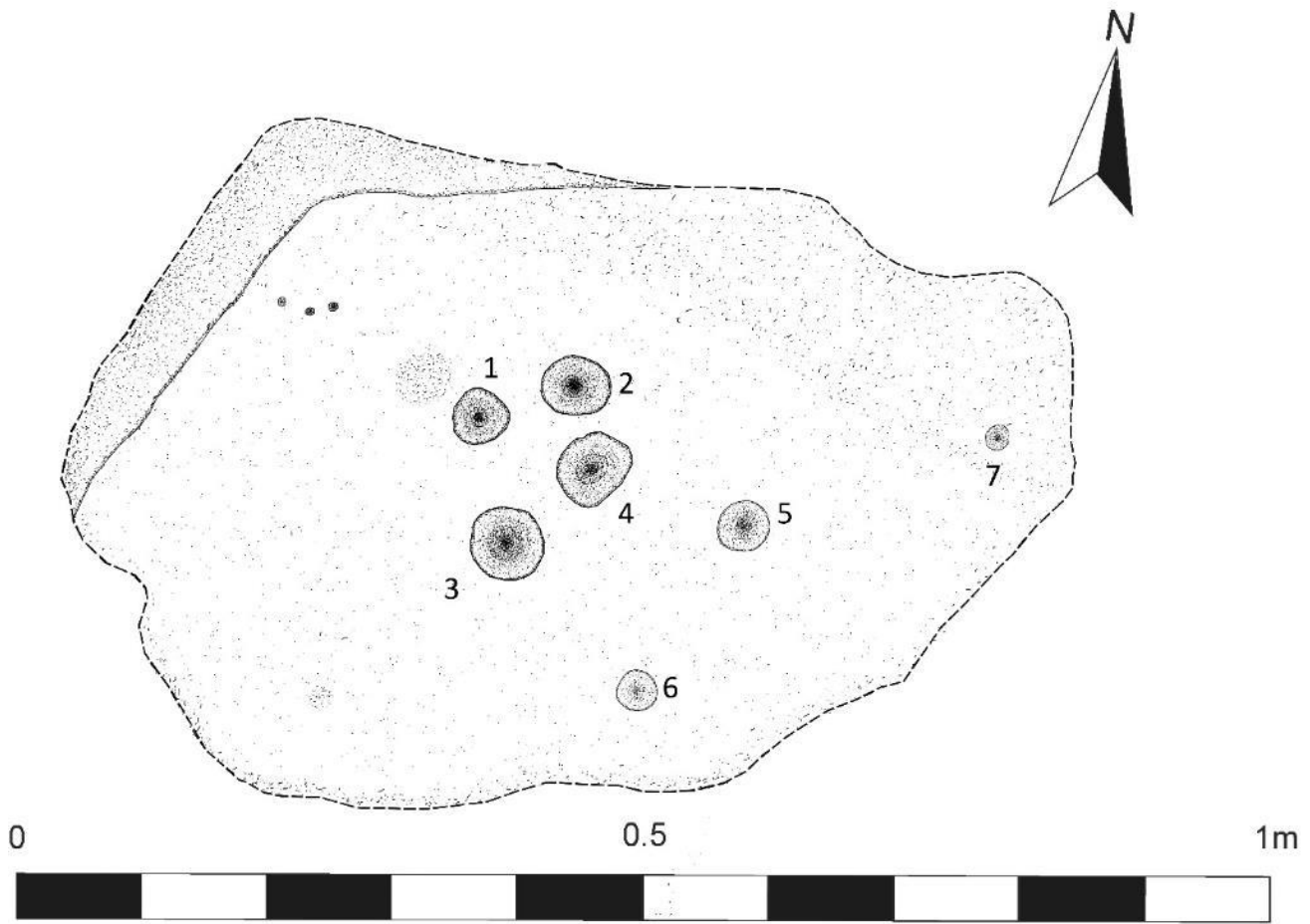


Figure 27: Plan of Panel 6.

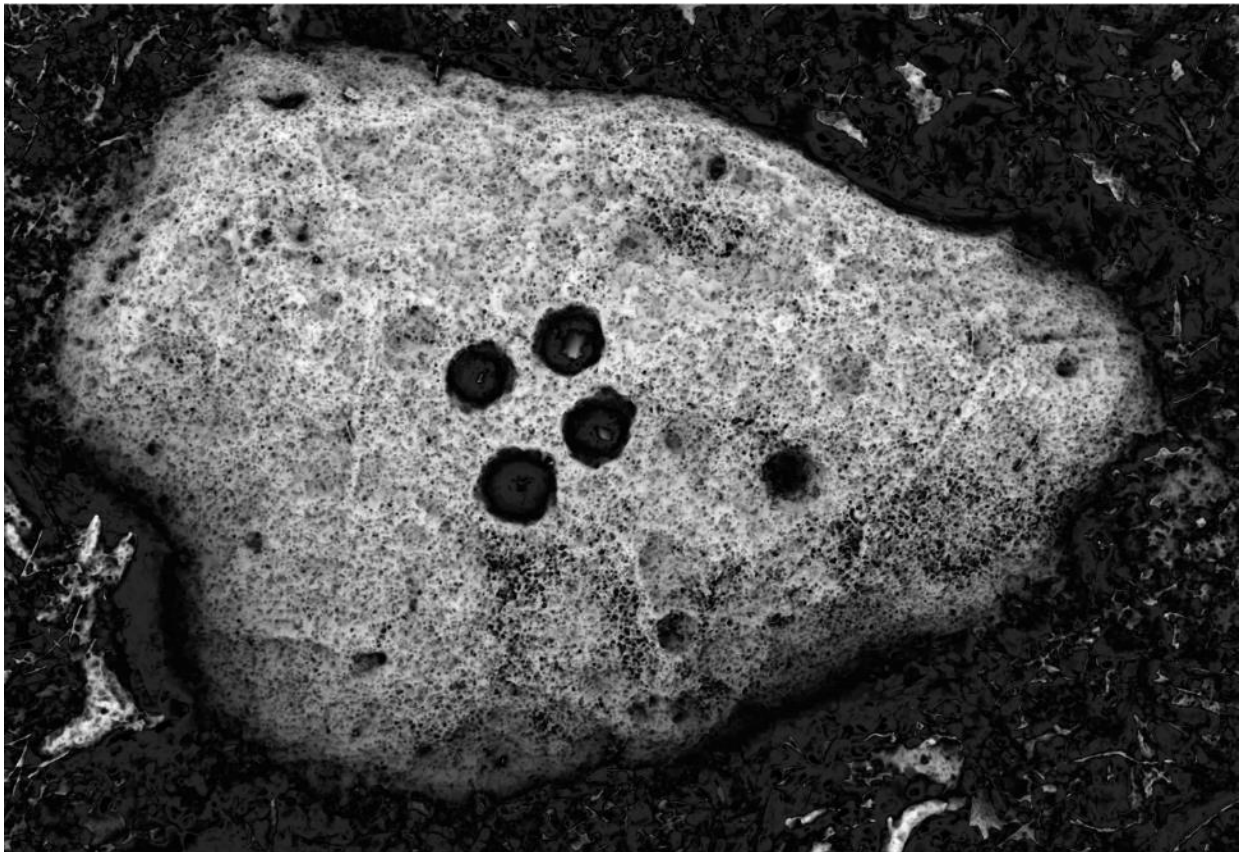


Figure 28: Occlusion image of Panel 6 derived from 3d modelling.



Figure 29: Panel 6 NGR 431711, 381880. Source: author.

Motif No.	Shape: plan	Shape: profile	Diameter	Length	Width	Depth	Comment
1	circular	"u" shaped	50			15	
2	circular	"u" shaped	50			16	
3	circular	"u" shaped	60			21	
4	ovoid	"v" shaped		60	50	13	
5	circular	concave	40			9	
6	circular	Shallow concave	35			3	
7	circular	Shallow concave	10			3	
Un-numbered motifs	circular						No data

Table 7: Data from Panel 6.

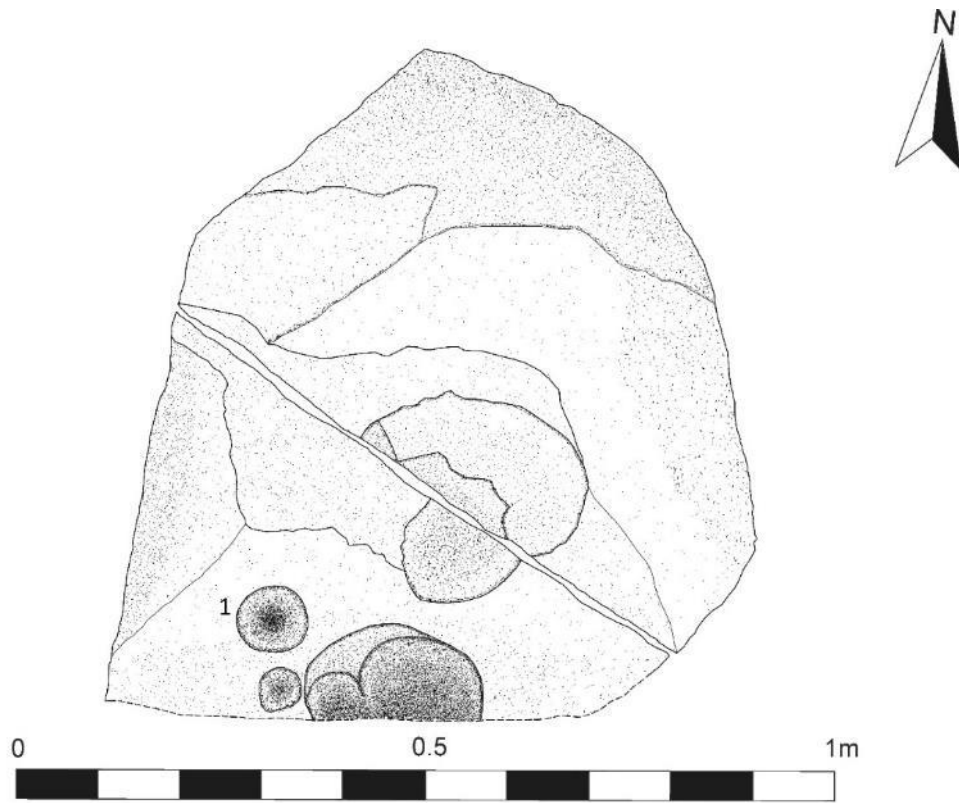


Figure 30: Plan of Panel 7.



Figure 31: Occlusion image of Panel 7 derived from 3d modelling.



Figure 32: Panel 7 NGR 432433, 382001. Source: author.

Motif No.	Shape: plan	Shape: profile	Diameter	Length	Width	Depth	Comment
1	circular	concave	90			15	
Un-numbered motifs							No data

Table 8: Data from Panel 7.

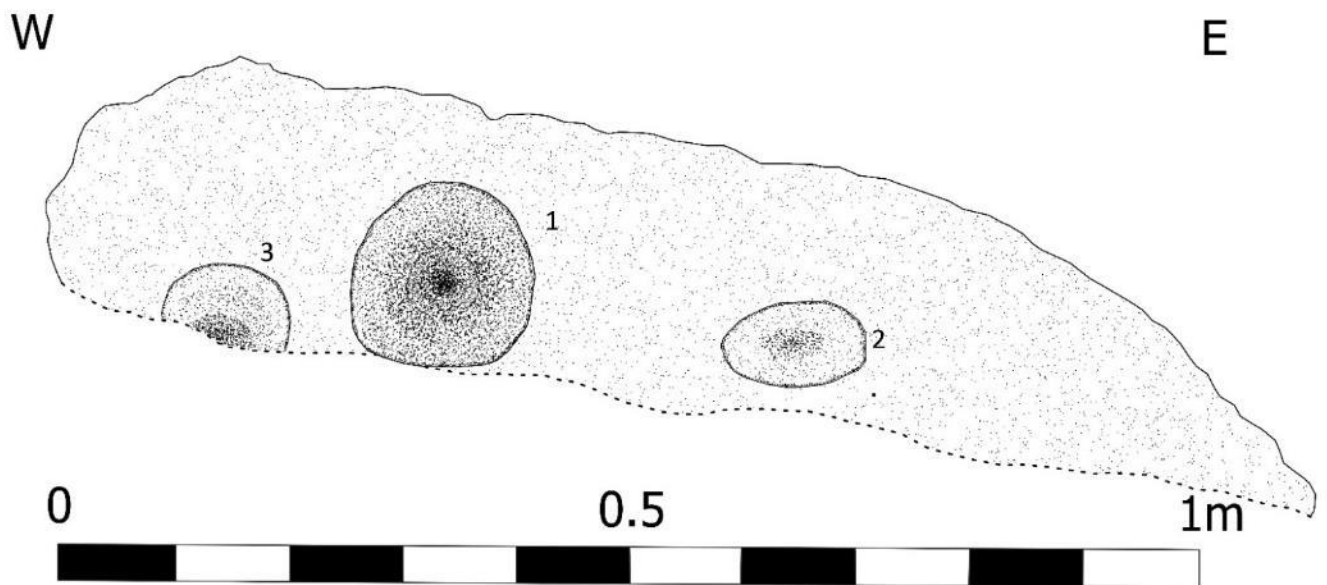


Figure 33: South facing elevation of Panel 8.



Figure 34: Occlusion image of panel 8 derived from 3d modelling.



Figure 35: Panel 8. NGR 431538, 382048. Source: author.

Motiff No.	Shape: plan	Shape: profile	Diameter	Length	Width	Depth	Comment
1	circular	concave	150			40	
2	Ovoid	Shallow concave		100	80	18	
3	circular	Shallow concave	70			8	Data extrapolated from maximum visible extent

Table 9: Data from panel 8.

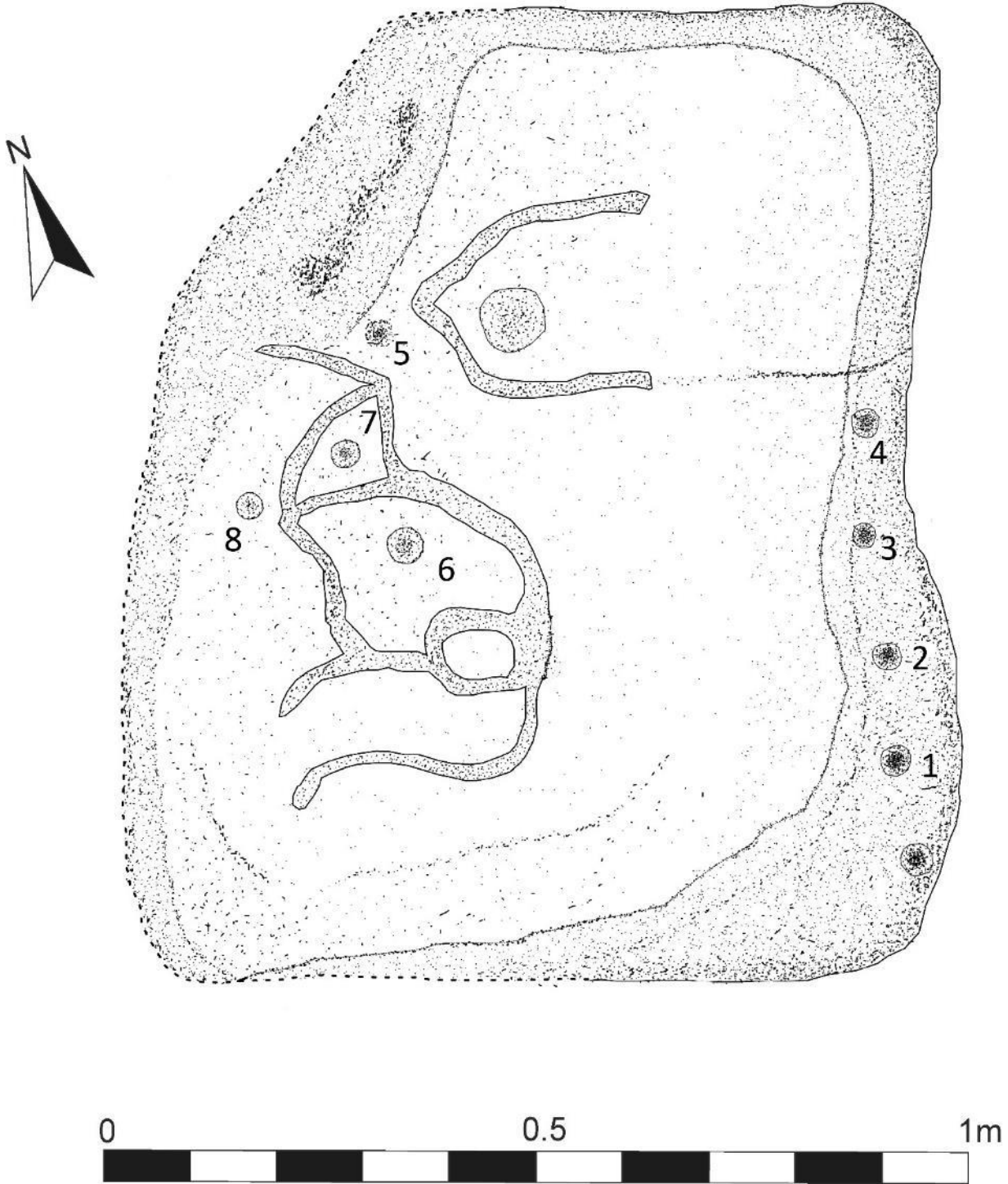


Figure 36: Plan of Panel 9.



Figure 37: Occlusion image of Panel 9.



Figure 38: Panel 9. NGR 431747, 382158. Source: author.

Motiff No.	Shape: plan	Shape: profile	Diameter	Length	Width	Depth	Comment
1	circular	concave	60			13	
2	circular	concave	60			20	
3	ovoid	concave		62	55	6	
4	ovoid	concave		44	40	10	
5	ovoid	concave		47	60	17	
6	ovoid	concave		35	40	8	
7	circular	concave	40			8	
8	circular	concave	50			9	

Table 10: Data from Panel 9.

Appendix 2: The Square Plantation and Ran Wood

Introduction

One of the last areas to be investigated in the search for rock-art was the Square Plantation, and the narrow corridor defined by field boundaries enclosing a spring that leads from it east to Limb Brook and the vicinity of Ran Wood (Figure 39). A sub-rectangular boulder leaning against a mature deciduous tree was noted that had sub-circular indentations in it on the side facing the trunk. The indentations were very difficult to observe but appeared more likely to be erosional features due to their irregular morphology. No panels that could plausibly be interpreted as rock-art were observed, but several archaeological features including substantial cairns of rounded worn cobbles and larger boulders were noted. These, it was assumed, must have been recorded in earlier surveys.

Shortly after this late stage of the survey the author and Ken Smith were, separately, contacted by Professor Ian Rotherham in connection with the Square Plantation. He had noted the presence of the same features and requested archaeological opinions on them. We were both of the opinion that the features were substantial archaeological features which it transpired appeared not to have been recorded in earlier surveys. The reason why they had not been previously recorded seems to be because earlier survey areas were defined by the historic boundary of Ecclesall Woods, bounded on their west edge by the Limb Brook (Paul Ardron, pers.comm.; Hart 1993: 52; Sainty 2011: 29). Since the uninvestigated area was small, and our group was still actively engaged in the vicinity, it was decided to revert to our usual protocol of preparing a record of previously unmapped features in addition to possible rock-art. This would normally be a very simple record, but due to the modest size of the area and limited number of features it was decided to record more detailed information on pro-forma sheets and prepare detailed scale plans of some of the more obvious and manageable features if possible as well as recording their locations and taking photographs.

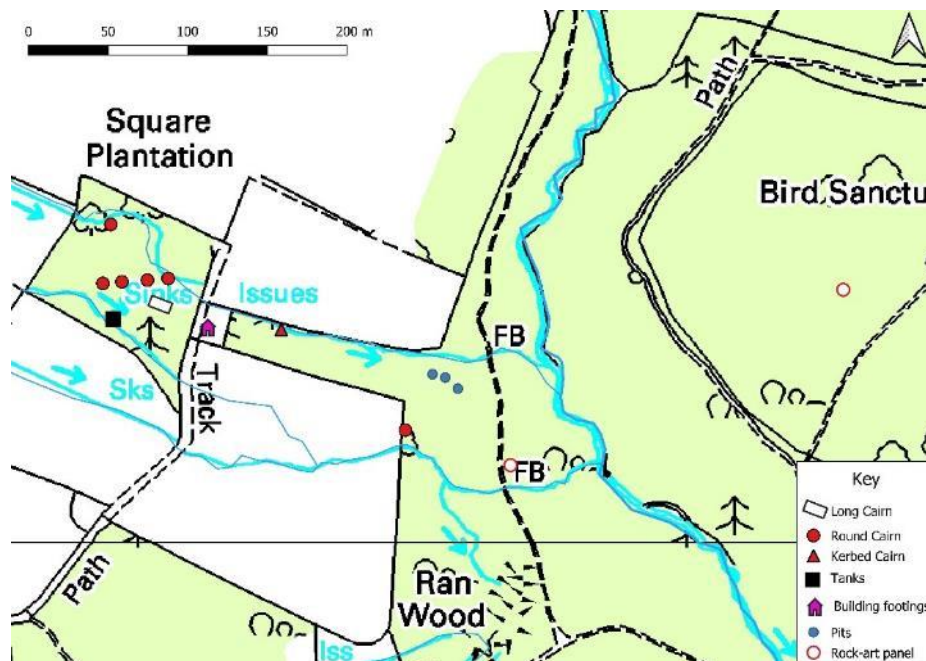


Figure 39: Distribution of archaeological features Between the Square Plantation and Ran Wood. Contains ordnance survey data © crown copyright database 2023.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork was undertaken on the 19th of April and 13th of May 2023. Conditions were excellent on both visits, although by the second visit, undergrowth made the photography of features more difficult. A total of 13 features were recorded that can probably be related to two broad chronological phases, although their interpretations should be regarded as provisional. These are described below by feature class and summarised in Table 2.

Cairns

A total of seven round cairns and a possible long cairn were recorded (Figure 39; Table 10). The putative long cairn, Feature 7, is approximately 34m long by 10m wide, with an orientation of southwest to northeast. It has a concave profile across its short axis at its northeast end that is pronounced but which becomes increasingly indistinct and difficult to define towards the opposite end, in the vicinity of Feature 4. Apart from its morphology, the feature is defined by scatters of large well rounded and worn sub-circular cobbles of sandstone and larger sub-circular and sub rectangular boulders of sandstone. These are particularly prominent at its northeast end, where the feature is best defined (Figure 40; Figure 41). Trees are present in the feature and Holly partly obscures it. Due to its relatively poor definition, a possible interpretation is that the feature is natural bedrock outcropping, eroded to both sides by localised fluvial action exposing the bedrock. The layers of sandstone that are located within the Coal Measures formations sandstones do outcrop in linear bands that are often orientated approximately east-west. However, no bands of sandstone are known at the locale, with the entire area between Rycroft Glen, to the north, and the similarly defined valley at Ran Wood, south, consisting of mudstones and siltstones (Figure 2). The presence of scatters of substantial cobbles and boulders of sandstone therefore must be the result of anthropogenic action. The observed morphology of the feature, corroborated in LiDAR data (Figure 40) is consistent with that of a Long Cairn of the Early Neolithic.

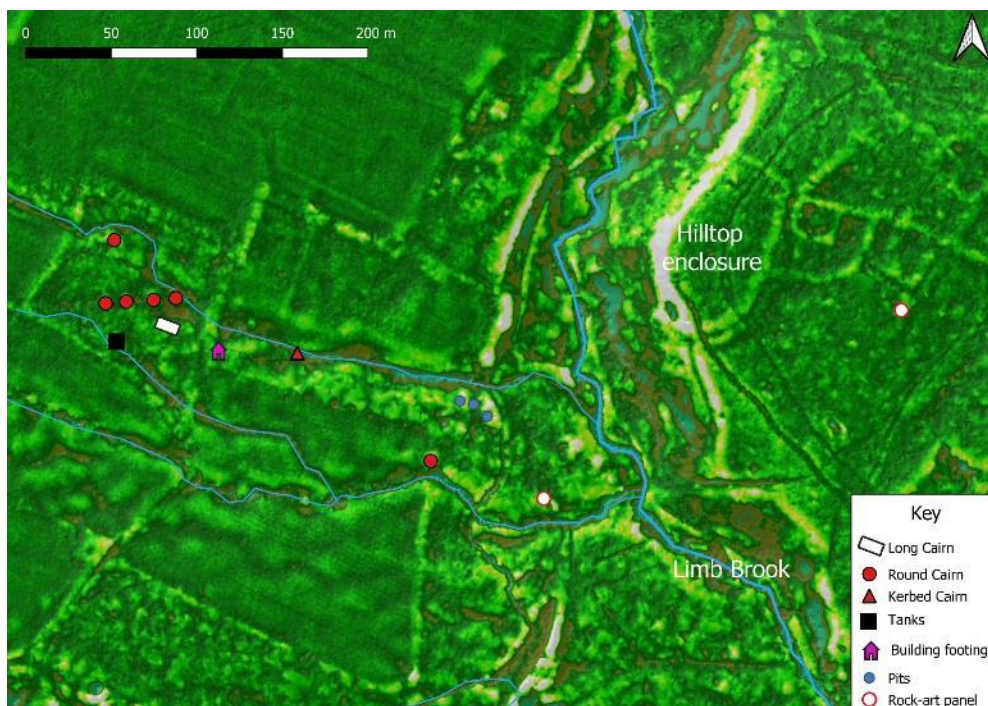


Figure 40: Digital Terrain Model of the study area utilising 50cm resolution LiDAR data. Contains ordnance survey data © crown copyright database 2023.

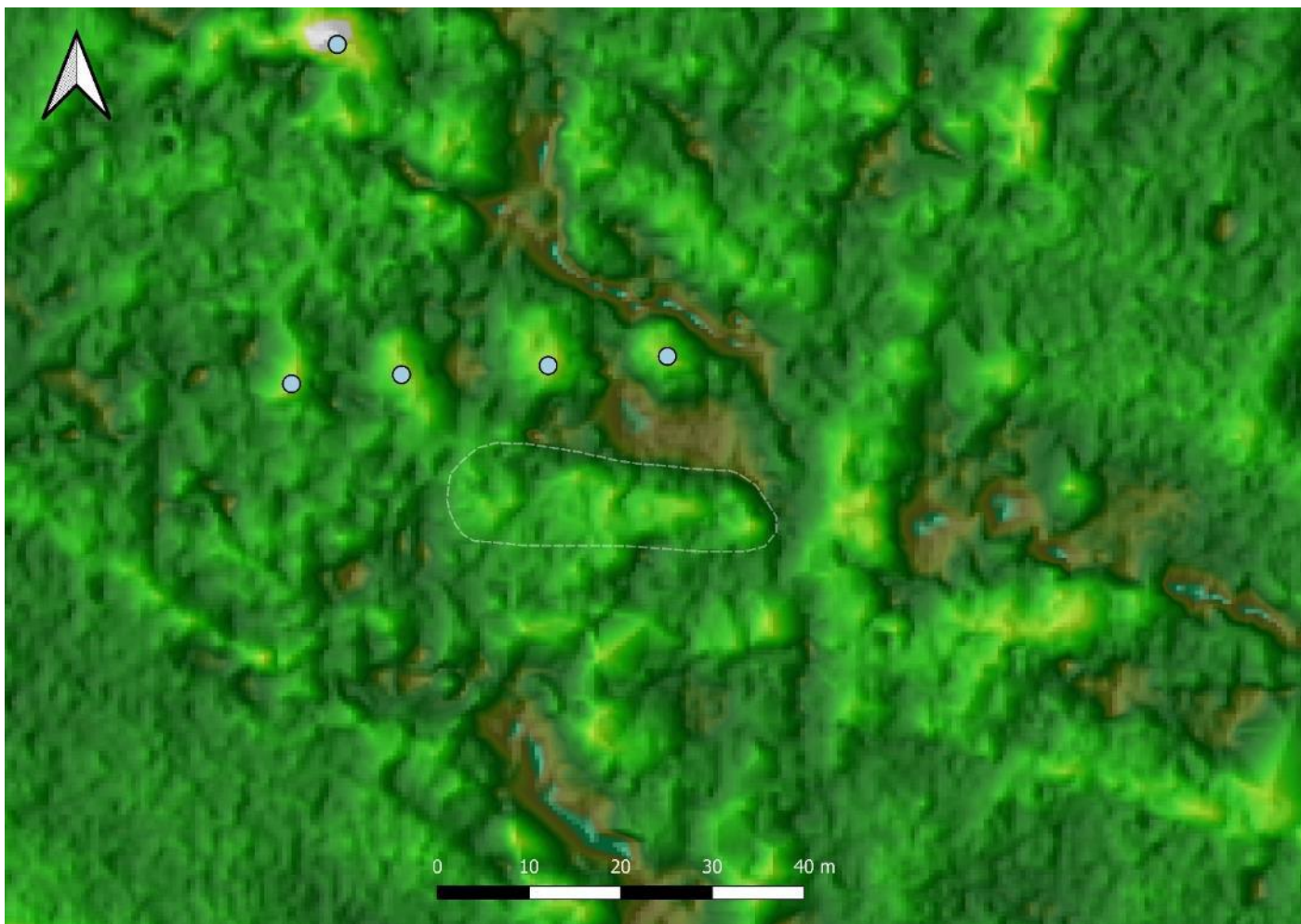


Figure 41: The possible Long Cairn in the Square Plantation with interpretation (dashed line) and locations of the larger round cairns (blue). Contains ordnance survey data © crown copyright database 2023.



Figure 42: The northeast end of Feature 7, facing southwest. Source: author.

Of the seven round cairns (Features 1-5, Feature 9 and Feature 13), six are significantly larger than the sixth (Feature 9) and differ in other important respects as well. Features 1-5 are sub-circular in form rather than circular, but this might be apparent rather than real as all the cairns are at least partly obscured by vegetation, including dense brambles and trees, are also partly obscured by build-ups of soil, trees, and are clearly disturbed by later activity. The largest is Feature 1, at approximately 20m by 15m in size (Figure 43).



Figure 43: Feature 1, facing southwest. Source: author.

Features 2-5 and 13 are smaller but of similar dimensions to each other (Table 10). Features 2-5, moreover, are arranged in a roughly equidistant line. Feature two has a tree growing from its centre and is small enough to be plausibly interpreted as a large root ball, particularly as it is bounded by natural channels including the course of the spring that flows through the plantation. However, it is not only strewn with sandstone boulders like the other cairns present, but the edge bounded by the spring has more of the structure of the cairn exposed, revealing tightly packed rounded cobbles (Figure 44).



Figure 44: Feature 2 (with the northeast facing side of Feature 7 in the background), and its exposed north facing side (to right of the information board), showing some of the cobbles of the structure. Source: author.

Feature 9 is the best defined of the cairns and, at 2.5m in diameter, is significantly smaller than the others. It is also the cairn that has the best evidence for a kerb. The feature consists of a tightly packed mass of worn well rounded small to medium sized sandstone cobbles partly bounded by a ring of larger earthfast cobbles and boulders (Figure 45; Figure 46). At its centre three of the visible cobbles display evidence of burning. The probable reason for its better definition is its location, directly in the middle of the path through the wood.



Figure 45: Feature 9. Source: author.

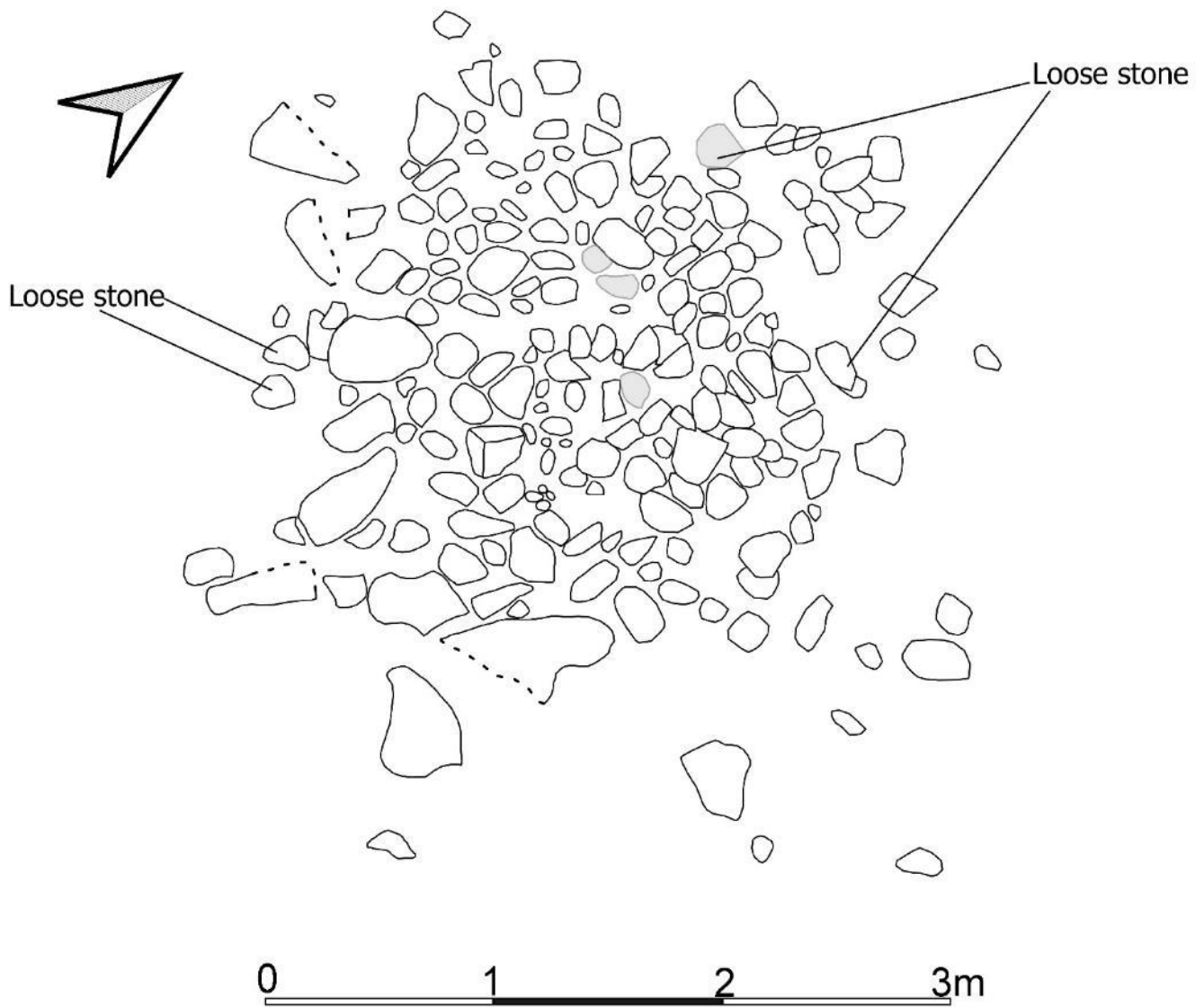


Figure 46: Plan of Feature 9. Shaded stones are heat affected.

Feature 13 is similar in character and size to Features 2-5 but has a much more clearly defined profile (Figure 47). It is overlain on its west side by the line of a field boundary and no longer exists as an upstanding feature beyond in the neighbouring field of pasture.



Figure 47: The east facing flank of Feature 13. Source: Author.

The dating of round cairns can be problematic, but all of the cairns are made from worn cobbles and boulders, many of which are earthfast and (with the exception of Feature 9), are in some cases deeply embedded in a build up of soil. The lack of soil over Feature 9 can easily be explained by its location in the middle of a contemporary footpath. Moreover, the attention of Ian Rotherham to the features was drawn partly by the presence of woodland plant species that are associated with ancient woodland, many examples of which are to be found growing over the cairns (I. Rotherham, pers.comm.). To be established in this way the cairns must predate their presence. “Ancient” of course in the context of woodland is defined as a landscape that is at least 400 years old and does not prove that the cairns are older, or significantly older, than the post medieval period. It is possible that the features are upcast from mineworkings (J. Barnatt, pers. comm.). This is partly based on the nearby presence of pit-like depressions, some of which are visible on LiDAR (Figure 41). However, their general morphology, condition and the presence of the probable kerb around Feature 9 is consistent with Bronze Age features.

Water tanks

The most curious features recorded consist of a pair of stone lined rectangular tanks connected by channels. The tanks measure approximately 8m long by 2.5m wide and are orientated northeast-southwest. They are filled with water and heavily obscured with vegetation (Figure 48).

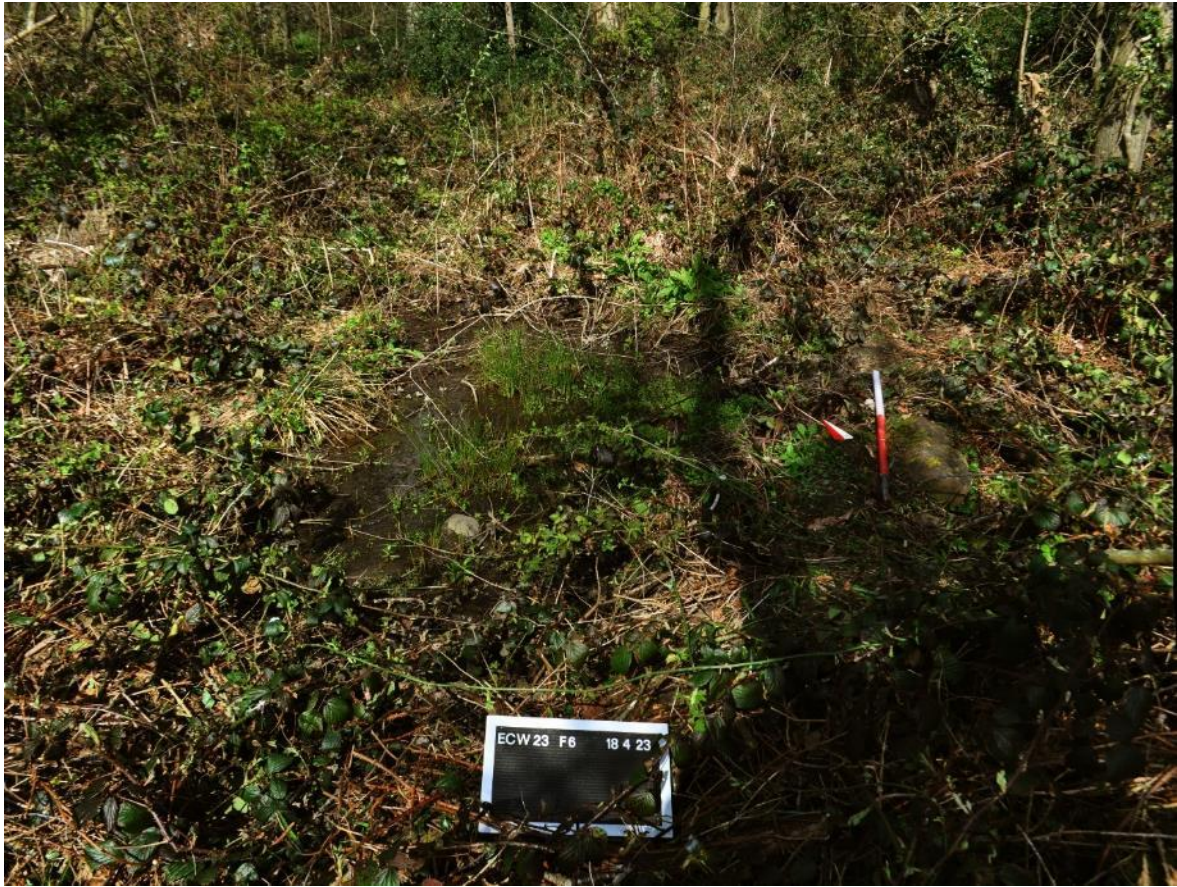


Figure 48: The southwest end of the tanks. Source: author.

Close examination of the feature shows that it is filled by water flowing in via two channels that are fed by a nearby spring, to the northwest. The water then exits via another channel on the southeast side of the southwest tank (to the right of the ranging rod in Figure 48 and Figure 49).



Figure 49: Close up of the southwest tank (left), and the drop down to the channel taking water out of it (right of ranging rod). Source: author.

The channel exiting the feature descends southeast in the direction of a pond located at the southwest corner of the Square Plantation. Between, a similar installation completely silted up and obscured by dense vegetation is in evidence. The function and date of these installations is not self-evident but given their morphology and condition are likely to relate to recent centuries, perhaps Post Medieval or Early Modern. Similar features observed in Gleadless Valley Woods have been suggested to relate to small scale processing of bark and coppiced branches utilised in basketry, almost unknown from documentation (I. Rotherham, personal communication).

Building foundations

The foundations of a small sub-rectangular structure made from crudely dressed sub-rectangular and sub-triangular sandstone blocks was recorded to the immediate southwest of the Square Plantation, between the substantial field boundaries defining the narrow corridor to either side of the spring descending there into Limb Brook (Figure 39; Figure 50). The structure measures 4m by 3m. The blocks are dressed along one side, presented as the outer face in double skinned walls that are infilled with smaller undressed cobbles. The plan of the structure includes parts that are differently aligned, indicating a stratified sequence of construction and/or modification.



Figure 50: Feature 8, facing northeast. Source: author.

Nothing definite can be added to its assessment in terms of date or function, although its general morphology and the character of its constituent parts are consistent with construction methods falling between the Late Medieval and Early Modern periods.

Pits

The final group of features (Features 10-12) to be recorded cluster together adjacent to the line of part of the Headrace of the old Corn Mill in Ran Wood, to the west of Limb Brook (Figure 39). These are sub-circular pits between 0.5 and 1m deep and between 3-4m in diameter (Figure 51). Large spoil heaps are in evidence in their immediate vicinity. Superficially, the features resemble Q-Pits, but do not have the distinctive channels cutting the circumference of Q-Pits that are their defining characteristic. It is possible that the features represent shallow coal or ironstone workings (J. Barnatt, pers. comm.).

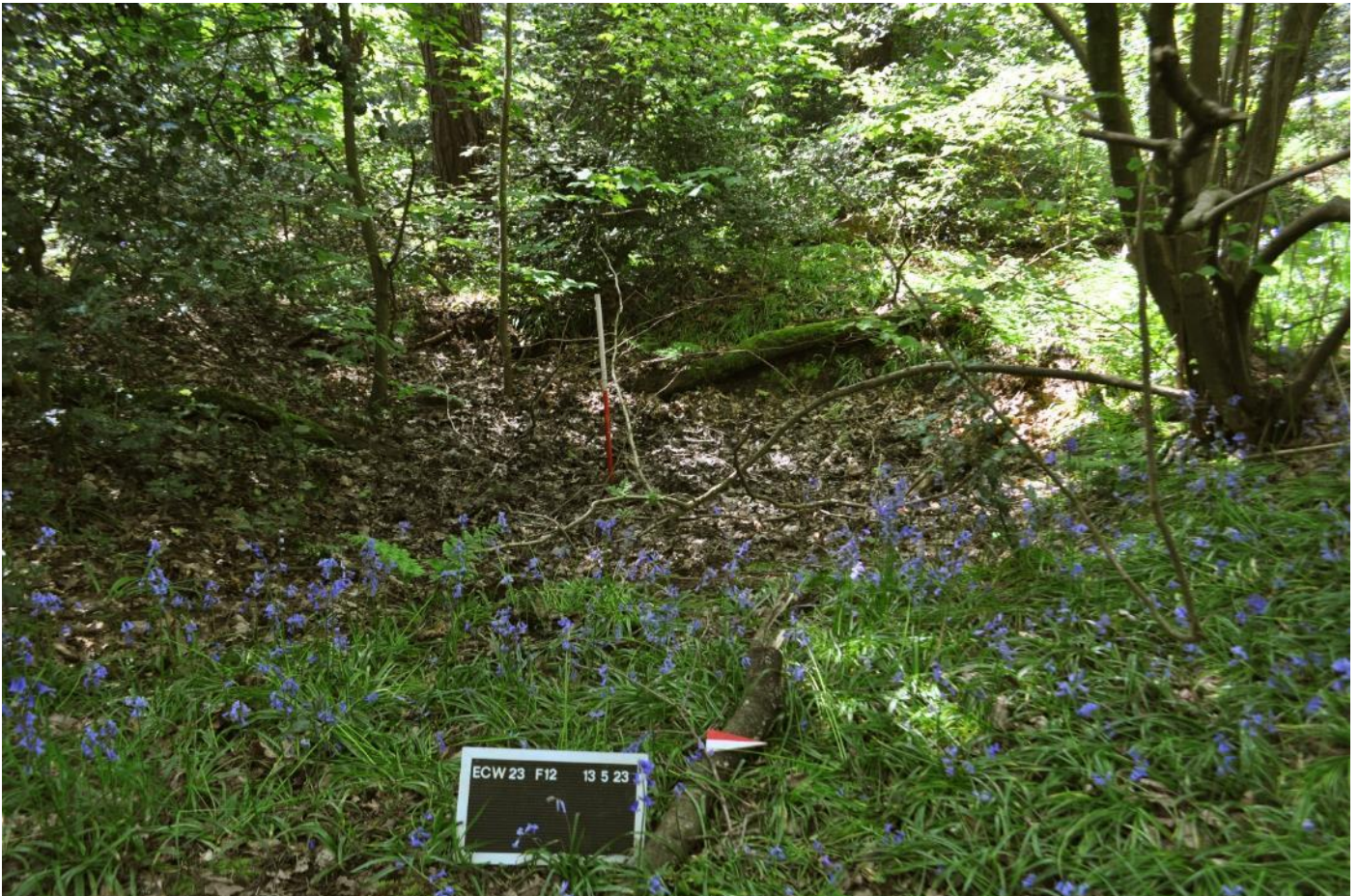


Figure 51: Feature 12, a possible iron working pit. Source: author.

easting	northing	No.	Type	Specific	Period	Comments	H/L	W	Form
431287	382199	1	cairn	funerary	EBA	cobbles, boulders, disturbed	19	13	sub circ.
431323	382165	2	cairn	funerary	EBA	cobbles, boulders, disturbed	10	8	sub circ.
431310	382164	3	cairn	funerary	EBA	cobbles, boulders, disturbed	12	8	sub circ.
431294	382163	4	cairn	funerary	EBA	cobbles, boulders, disturbed	6	3	sub circ.
431282	382162	5	cairn	funerary	EBA	cobbles, boulders, disturbed	9	8	sub circ.
431289	382141	6	tank	water	post med.	stone, earth	2.8	3	sub rect.

431317	382148	7	cairn	funerary	E.Neo.	stone, earth	34	18	sub rect.
431348	382135	8	foundations	building	post med.	dressed stone	8	3	sub rect.
431394	3821333	9	cairn	funerary	EBA	cobbles, boulders, disturbed	2.5	3	sub circ.
431489	382105	10	pit	bell	post med.		3.5	4	circ.
431497	382103	11	pit	bell	post med.		3	3	circ.
431505	382096	12	pit	bell	post med.		4	4	circ.
431472	382070	13	cairn	funerary	EBA	truncated.	12	12	circ.

Table 11. Catalogue of features.

Appendix 3: Additional Photographs



Figure 52: recording Panel 1, the “poodle stone”.



Figure 53: Recording of Panel 6. Source: author.



Figure 54: Preparing to walk a transect near Limb Brook. Source: author.



Figure 55: Recording Feature 9. Source: author.



Figure 56: Linda Jackson (centre) discussing strategy with Steve Anwyl (left) and Vince Boulter (right). Source: author.

