S W A L E D A L E A N C I E N T
L A N D B O U N D A R I E S P R O J E C T

Tenth Interim Report (1993 season)

INTRODUCTION

The archaeological richness of Swaledale has only come to be recognised in recent years, as a result of the air photographs taken by Robert White of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, and the work of the Swaledale Ancient Land Boundaries Project. This project has been studying the numerous ancient land boundaries visible on the moors and dalesides. On the moors, there are small cairns and short stretches of walling of a type familiar in other moorland areas of northern England. There are also long ruined walls marking out large-scale land divisions (the 'coaxial' systems referred to in this report, so called because the main boundaries are parallel to one another). On the daleside, in present-day farmland, there are substantial remains of a pattern of small fields, many of them roughly rectilinear, and numerous associated settlement sites. Most of these are oval platforms cut back into the hillside, on which may be seen the sites of one or more buildings - 'house-platforms'. Our work, which has mainly involved attempting to date these features, has mostly been concentrated on the dalesides and moors of the zone between Reeth and Healaugh, on both banks of the Swale.

THE 1992-3 SEASON

For logistical reasons we had to abandon plans for a field team in April (which accounts for this year's surplus of c.£580, which is available for an attempt in April '94). Our main fieldwork period was once again during three weeks in July 1993, when, with two survey teams, we carried out detailed surveys of settlement sites and zones in enclosed land within our research area, between Reeth and Healaugh and in the corresponding area south of the river, between Grinton and Low Whita. We made a a detailed (1:200) plan of the settlement site at Dykehouse Close (SE 036982); we completed a 1: 200 plan of a settlement site just east of the marlpit at Whitbecks (SE 035985): and we also carried out a survey of the complex settlement zone around Riddings, halfway between Reeth and Healaugh (SE 024993). We also continued the 1: 2000 planning of the zone between Harkerside and Stubbin Farm and in the Reeth-Healaugh zone, but were unable to complete this, partly because of time but also because the hay crop in some fields had not been lifted in time.

As a result of the work of Dr Roy Switsur at the Godwin Laboratory in the University of Cambridge, we now have six radiocarbon dates to go with Dr Elizabeth Livett's pollen diagram for Ellerton Moor. We now have a well-dated vegetation sequence for the period spanning the later Bronze

Age(sometime in the first millennium BC) to the later Middle Ages. Thanks go to the Yorkshire Dales National Park for a separate grant for this work.

Over the past few years Tim Laurie has discovered several roughly circular enclosures in Swaledale and Arkengarthdale, defined by rough rings of stone, and often 'old-looking'. We have been uncertain whether to regard them as the remains of circular houses, domestic enclosures, ring-cairns, or robbed burial cairns. This year we visited most of them in a couple of days, and came to the conclusion that they have a good deal in common, and are best interpreted as ring-cairns. It is hoped to publish them in due course, perhaps in conjunction with an account of ring-cairns in neighbouring Wensleydale, where Tim Laurie and Robin Minnitt are also carrying out prospection.

The work of the Ancient Land Boundaries Project has also resulted in a new approach to the landscape history of the medieval period in Swaledale. Most importantly, the Grinton-Fremington Dykes have been re-interpreted as early post-Roman in date. This has important consequences for our understanding of the history of Swaledale in the 'Dark Ages', on which Andrew Fleming has completed an article for submission to the journal Landscape History. He has also written an article about the reconstruction of areas of former wood pasture in Swaledale. More details are given below.

We also attempted to publicise our work locally and nationally. Tim Laurie's local adult education classes have been much concerned with the landscape history of Swaledale and neighbouring areas; Andrew Fleming has lectured on Swaledale at the Universities of Nottingham and York, at the Theoretical Archaeology Group Annual conference held in the University of Southampton, to the Yorkshire Dales Society (meeting at Muker) and to the Ilkley Archaeological Society. In July we showed aspects of Swaledale's prehistory to members of the (national) Prehistoric Society on their summer excursion conference, and wrote up the sites visited in the excursion guide. Unfortunately the weather was awful! More recently, the creation of a discussion group, the Yorkshire Landscape Workshop, will allow us to compare and contrast our work with other projects going on in Yorkshire. We hope that our work will be featured in the Visitor Centre planned for Reeth.

Currently Andrew Fleming and Robert White's plan for a book of photographs illustrating the landscape history of Swaledale is under consideration by a publisher. It is also intended to write a series of articles for Dalesman to publicise aspects of the Swaledale work.

FIELD SURVEY 1993

Dykehouse Close (SE 036982). The excellent survey produced by our Swedish team members, Catharina Mascher and Par Connelid, is reproduced as fig. 1. The site slopes downhill from south to north, with the western of the Grinton-Fremington Dykes running north-south along the left-hand edge of the plan, its ditch to the east. The site history is complex. There are two rectangular building platforms, A and B, and the grassed-over ruins of a further rectangular building at C. The latter is medieval or later; A and B are probably medieval. We have come to recognise this year that the medieval linear hamlet recognised last year, running between Harkerside

Place and Plaintree Farm, can be extended further east. There is a trail of standing buildings, and some rectangular platforms and ruined rectangular walled buildings, which runs from Harkerside Place all the way to Dykehouse Close. This can be reconstructed as the medieval hamlet of Hercay or Herthay ('the deer enclosure'), whose farms would have lain along the spring-line and above their best land, some of it laid out in strips for arable. The name is commemorated in 'Harkerside Place' today, and in the surname Harker. The present-day footpath from Harkerside Place to Swale Hall perpetuates the medieval route from Hercay to Grinton; many Swaledale footpaths can be shown to be of similar ancestry. Here, the dyke has been broken through at D on the site plan, and the path runs east-west, past the positions of the suggested medieval buildings (the old stile is marked).

In the centre of the plan is a probable Romano-British farmstead, with small rectangular 'yards' and two narrow fields running off them to the north (E and F), which have well-defined positive lynchets further north. The western bank of Field E has been slighted by the ditch of the earthwork (not visible on the plan). The site is comparable to the one we surveyed last season near Plaintree Farm and to sites in Upper Wharfedale and in Westmorland, though the detailed documentation of such datings leaves a good deal to be desired. The western part of the site appears to have been slighted by the earthwork builders, though soil thrown out of the ditch during cleaning has probably obscured some of the detail of the farmstead's western side. The lack of clarity on the E and SE part of the site is probably due to the mud, broken ground, spread of midden material etc associated with the medieval buildings and routeway. This site is important because it does appear to demonstrate that the dyke is later than the Roman period. The other earthwork, further east, can also be shown to slight ancient fields.

Whitbecks (SE 035985). This is reproduced as fig. 2. This is a difficult site to interpret, but it does show some chronological depth. Basically there is a large rectangular field (ABCD on plan) which is probably late prehistoric in date; its lower edge (BC) is to the north, and it had a hollow-way running up its eastern side. Into the northern, lower end of this field was inserted a series of small yards and house-platforms (e. g. x and y), probably in late Roman times. Some of the lack of clarity on this site has probably been created by medieval ploughing and the disturbances associated with the building of post-medieval enclosure walls.

Riddings (SE 024923). Unfortunately, for logistical reasons it has not been possible to get the site plan of this area reproduced for this interim report, so comment has to be limited. It has been good to get this plan 'in the bag', since the area is in some ways the most important one within the enclosed land sector of our research area, being a relatively well-preserved settlement 'zone' as opposed to a single 'settlement site'. The zone contains a series of circular house-platforms, some within enclosures and some 'free-standing'; it is possible to observe the relationship between fields, particularly the upper edges of fields extending below the houses. We have also noted two ancient trackways running to and past the settlement sites. As further west, near Healaugh, it was noted that at least one of the settlements had been built on a land-slip, showing us

that prehistoric and Roman woodland clearance and cultivation on the steeper slopes of the daleside created not just soil erosion, building 'lynchets' at the lower sides of the fields, but also was probably responsible for several land-slip episodes.

THE ELLERTON MOOR POLLEN DIAGRAM

We have obtained some radiocarbon dates, and Dr Livett is now in the final stages of calibration work preparatory to publication. It is possible to summarise the pollen sequence, which comes from some 2.6m of peat in a glacial overflow channel (SE 057965), as follows:

In the lower part of the diagram, trees feature strongly, and the pollen rain is dominated first by hazel and birch, then mostly by birch. There is then a dramatic fall in tree pollen (Episode I), with a sharp decrease in the pollen of birch and smaller falls recorded for hazel, oak and alder; at the same time the pollen of grasses increases six-fold, and plantain increases sharply. We have two radiocarbon dates which roughly bracket this major phase of human interference(all dates quoted calibrated AD/BC to one standard deviation). The lower one is 510-380 BC, the upper one BC1-AD 80, so there was major clearance of trees, whether by fire, axe or browsing animals, in the Middle and Late Iron Age and possibly rather earlier in the Iron Age.

Then came a short-lived recovery of trees, with an increase in birch (perhaps a local effect?) and of hazel, oak and alder. This evidently happened sometime towards the very end of the Iron Age, or perhaps in the early Roman phase in the late first century AD; we have to remember the possible disruption to economic activity caused by the rebellion of Venutius against the Romans in the period AD 69-74. Then comes Episode II, in which birch falls again and plantain and other weeds rise in frequency. The inception of this phase is dated AD 115-200, and a date of AD 320-410 comes from the time when it was at its height. So most of the Roman period seems to have seen a major clearance episode, as one might expect, given the density of presumed Romano-British settlements in nearby Swaledale. Heather now becomes locally dominant and moorland is clearly here to stay from now on, though heather was also associated with the earlier, Iron Age clearance.

Then the trees start to recover again, at a level dated to AD 455 to 550 (post-Roman economic changes?) and they reach their maximum extent (though they never recover to pre-Iron Age levels) at a time dated between AD 745-865. If English-speaking colonists were arriving in this part of Swaledale in this period, as place-names suggest, they were not making much of an impact on the vegetation, in this area at least.

Then comes Episode III, another episode of clearance, with a choice of dates for the time when it commenced; AD 1095-1100 or (more likely) 1135-1245. This occurs not long after the onset of feudalism, with the establishment of the Manor of Healaugh, the nunneries at Marrick and Ellerton, and perhaps also more vigourous developments in lead-production in the Grinton and Marrick areas. There is then a slight recovery in tree pollen, before Episode IV - a great increase in weeds and cereal pollen which starts around AD 1370-1435, and continues to the top of the diagram.

Incidentally cereal pollen is present in small amounts all the way through the diagram.

So this pollen diagram, like others from the Pennines as far south as Derbyshire, shows that the second half of the Iron Age was a period of major tree clearance, though whether fire, the axe or browsing animals were involved will require further analysis. Nick Higham has suggested that this was a time of rather drier climate, in which farming conditions in the Pennine dales might have improved. The date for Episode I would agree roughly with the dates which we obtained for charcoal beneath and beside an ancient wall on Calverside in 1986, and it may be suggested provisionally that the major land division systems were laid out in the mid Iron Age, in an open landscape produced by clearance carried out perhaps not very much earlier. It is worth noting that the Ellerton Moor site is very near, and probably within, a coaxial land division system of ruined walls similar to the others in the area; ruined walls are visible to N and NE of Black Hill. It is likely that at least some of the land on Harkerside had already been cleared in the middle Bronze Age, as is shown by the horizon of ring cairns and probably by the cairns and irregular 'fields' and enclosures on the moorlands.

WORK ON MEDIEVAL SWALEDALE

This is essentially a 'spin-off' from the work of the Ancient Land Boundaries Project, and we cannot go into too many details here. However, the suggestion that the Grinton-Fremington dykes are early post-Roman has led one of us (AF) to a re-appraisal of their role in Swaledale's history. Briefly, the suggestion is that these dykes (probably including the one near Marrick Priory) were commenced when Upper Swaledale was a small British polity or 'kingdom', defending itself against potential and actual aggression from Anglians further east. Upper Swaledale may then have been called Erechwydd (if we follow a suggestion made by a commentator on the early Welsh poems) and it may have been part of the larger realm of Rheged, defended by the legendary Urien against the Anglians, until the British defeat at the battle of Catraeth (Catterick, or somewhere in the region named from Catterick) sometime before 600. From that time onwards, probably, 'Anglians' were able to colonise Upper Swaledale; possibly they were responsible for some phases of the earthworks, or re-utilised them to some extent. Although much of Upper Swaledale later received Scandinavian place-names, a few English names have survived, some of them apparently quite early.

It is likely that, as in other parts of England, the early English speakers named themselves and their land after the river, something like 'Swar', and that when the Norse speakers arrived they called it 'Swardal', thus eventually Swaledale. It is quite clear from the documentary record that after the Norman Conquest 'Swaledale' was a 'political' label, like Elmet, not a rough geographical indicator. Swardal was the distinct territory west of the earthworks; it was an alternative and older name for, on the one hand, the Manor of Healaugh, and, on the other, the parish of Grinton. Both these entities were based on the old, historic Swaledale - which was Upper Swaledale.

It has also been possible to take the old Swaledale townships seriously as land-sharing communities. In particular it is noticeable that within the old common cow-pastures, themselves subject to varying amounts of clearance and enclosure in the medieval and post-medieval periods, it is still possible to work out where wood pasture, the natural concomitant of areas with large amounts of common land, survived longest. Occasionally it is still with us, as at Rowleth Wood, the wood pasture zone of Low Row. Sometimes the wood pasture has become a deer park, as has Feetham's (Healaugh Park). Sometimes its former presence is betrayed by zones of irregular field boundaries, where the fields have obviously been cut out of woodland; or there may be diagnostic names, such as 'Wood Plain', surviving on 18th century maps. It's also the case that zones of elm pollards tend to occur outside 'core zones' of arable land, as if they belong in open cow pastures which were once more wooded. The best example is to the west of Healaugh, where some very old elm pollards occur in what must once have been Thirns Wood. It is hoped to publish work on these questions soon.

FUTURE WORK

One of us (AF) is changing jobs this summer, moving to the University of Wales Lampeter, but with undiminished commitment to the landscape history of Swaledale! However, in the circumstances it is not a good time for taking up three summer weeks with fieldwork, and there is plenty of writing and drawing to do and organise in connection with the project's work so far. It is proposed therefore to carry out two weeks' fieldwork in late April, if possible mainly on the early field systems on Stainton Moor. If this does not prove possible or does not take up the full amount of our time, there are jobs to be done in the enclosed land, in places where the growth of hay prevented work this year. We intend to apply for a grant for drawing office work (for May), and to complete the survey work in 1995.

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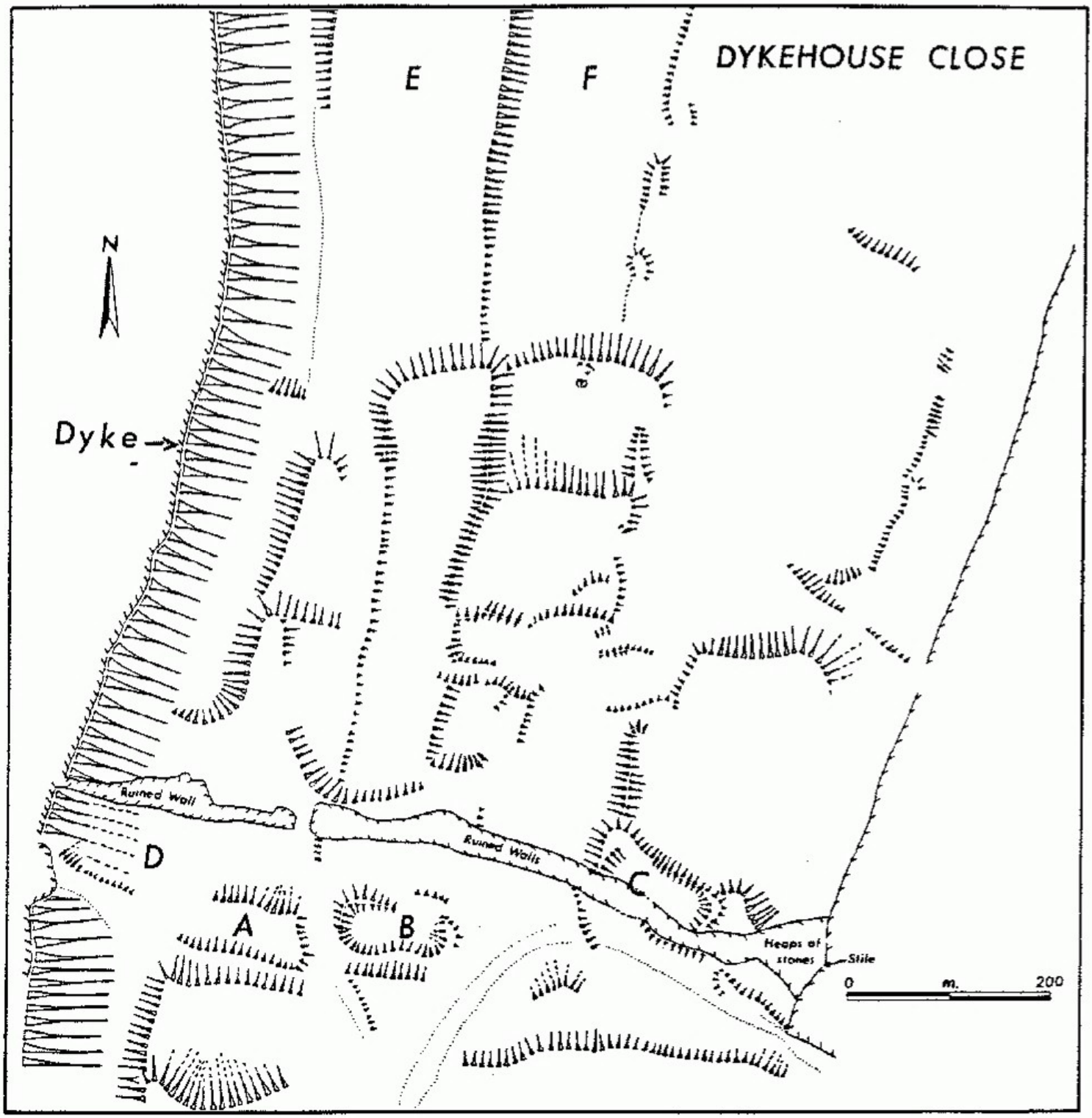
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Figure 1

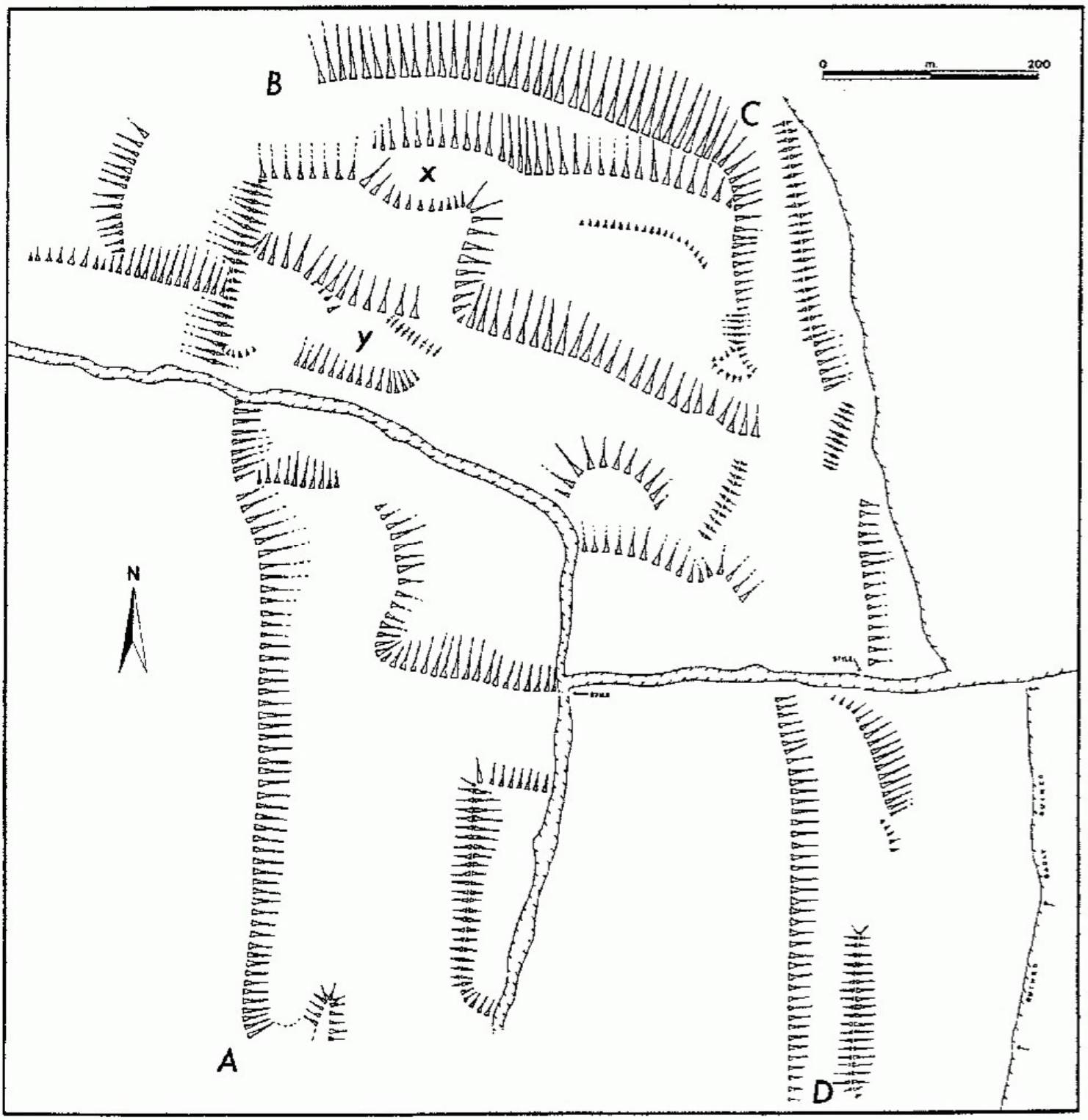

Figure 2