SWALEDALE ANCIENT LAND BOUNDARIES PROJECT

Seventh Interim Report (1990 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, but there are also long ruined walls marking out large-scale land divisions. On the dalesside, in present-day farmland, there are substantial remains of an older pattern of smaller 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 1989-90 SEASON

This year's work saw a number of notable advances. Both the funding applications mentioned in last year's report were successful. The University of Sheffield provided the sum of some £16, 500 for a post-doctoral fellow to work for a year on pollen analysis; Dr Elizabeth Livett has started work on a peat core some 2.2m deep from Cogden Moor. It is hoped that this will give us a long history of changes in Swaledale's vegetation cover over the past four or five thousand years, which can be tied into the sequence of settlement and land boundaries. We also hope that she will be able to repeat the success of her doctoral thesis, where she showed how heavy metal analysis could reveal the effects of lead-smelting at various past time-horizons; and that she will be able to use the technique of X-raying peat cores, pioneered at Sheffield, to reveal significant horizons of change.

Meanwhile a SERC studentship was obtained for Tom Gledhill to work for a doctorate (commencing in October 1990) on the history of woodland and tree management in North Yorkshire and Cumbria; Swaledale's elm pollards, hitherto studied rather casually as an off-shoot of the Land Boundary Project, will take their place within this study. Incidentally the survey carried out for the National Park at Marrick Priory in the spring of 1990 by a team led by David Hooley involved detailed consideration of the date of elm pollards evidently planted along the inner face of the precinct wall; it was possible to make a good case for their dating from pre-Dissolution times.

A major discovery by Tim Laurie during the winter was of a series of settlement sites and boundaries in a zone running between Downholme and White Scar, on the upper slopes of the hillside above Downholme Bridge.

In cold but photographically useful weather in early April, Andrew Fleming carried out ten days' fieldwork within our detailed study area, in the Harkerside/Grinton area and between Reeth and Healaugh. The objective was to have a closer look on the ground at features and relationships previously observed only briefly or from a distance; the results of this work are described below.

Our main field season was from July 4th-28th, during which we completed our excavation of the house-platform on site A, near Healaugh, and cut what turned out to be a very useful trench on the old field-bank running N-S immediately east of the house-platform. Despite the dry, hot weather conditions we were able to show that the earliest building on the house-platform had been a circular timber one, as suspected. The results from the other trench led us to reverse our provisional chronology, and to suggest that the houses on the site were placed in a pre-existing field - with the implication that the major field boundaries here are at least as old as the late Iron Age.

Once again we had a successful Open Day during the excavations. During the year we publicised our work; locally, with lectures and in TL's case through an extra-mural class; and more widely, AF addressing the annual conference of the Prehistoric Society in April and talking about the Swaledale project at the Institute of Human Geography in Stockholm and at the various Swedish archaeology departments in early May. Further collaboration with Swedish geographers was discussed during this visit; British and Swedish scholars dealing with field systems face similar theoretical and methodological problems, and have a good deal to discuss!

No work was carried out on the moors this year, funds being unavailable to bring our Swedish colleagues over to complete their Harkerside survey. We are determined to make this our priority for 1991, however. Owing to unexpected difficulty in recruiting volunteer diggers this year we were left with a relatively large temporary surplus, which has been used to pay the travel expenses of the Swedish team and thus secure their services for 1991.

The dalesides

Over the past few seasons the dalesides, particularly the study area between Reeth and Healaugh, have been photographed with a zoom lens, usually in special conditions - low sunlight, melting snow, vanishing hoar-frost, drought, etc to produce a series of studies of ancient sites which complement the excellent air photographs taken over this period by Robert White. These photographs were a vital ingredient in the fieldwork carried out in April 1990, when slides and a portable slide viewer were taken into the field. The basic idea was to study features previously observed and photographed in good light conditions, and especially relationships between features which appeared to indicate sequence and chronological depth - for example, there were cases where one field boundary met another one at an acute angle, suggesting that they must be of different dates. Provisional results were as follows:

1) There are **mounds** of varying sizes, presumably grass-covered burial cairns, on the dalesides; we have seen enough of them now to recognise them as a group of sites and to distinguish them from glacial features, recent

clearance-heaps, and flushes associated with springs. Their date cannot be established by surface inspection, although there does seem to be a distinction between quite small ones and rather large ones. Six are now known in our study area and a further two or three to the east of Fremington.

2) There have been minor **land-slips** on the dale-sides, presumably the result of broken-ground episodes associated with agriculture. In one area just west of the Reeth strip-lynchets two ancient settlement-sites have been partially buried by a land-slip which itself has ridge-and-furrow on it. Our excavation site at Healaugh is probably on a comparable land-slip. It seems likely that these local land-slips occurred a long time ago, probably during prehistoric or early historic times. That early agriculture caused earth movement is not particularly surprising - after all, we know that the soil-creep caused the lynchets, negative and positive, which help us to observe the field boundaries. The important point is that such localised land-slips can explain some of the puzzling topography of the dale-sides, especially perhaps to the north of Barney Beck, where distinguishing between geology, lynchetting and made terraces has not been easy. We aim to look for more dateable land-slips.

3) More cases of **house-platforms** unassociated with enclosures have been noted, for example in the Ivy House area of Harkerside; David Hooley's survey of Harrick Priory has also turned up a very good example. Many of these house-platforms are ovoid or long rather than circular. Our previous inclination was to see them as 'satellites' of the enclosure-platforms, but this view has become increasingly untenable, especially after our re-interpretation of Healaugh site A where we now think the settlement was probably unenclosed (see below). At this stage we can distinguish the ovoid 'enclosed platform' types of settlement site from the rarer examples with a grid-like configuration of several square or rectangular 'yards' (or 'gardens'?). As mentioned above, there are also 'unenclosed' platforms for individual houses, both circular and oval/rectangular; these occur both in groups, as on our excavation site near Healaugh, and in ones and twos. The groups of unenclosed house-platforms are not very common. To what extent these houses were placed in pre-existing fields, or fields in contemporary use, and how far they pre-date the field boundaries, are subjects for further investigation.

4) **Field boundaries**; despite the spectacular photographs which can be taken of individual boundaries or settlements, it is clear that medieval and post-medieval ploughing and re-seeding, and perhaps in some cases centuries of worm-casting on long-established pasture, have led to an incomplete record in many areas. The picture is complicated and only further fieldwork can sort it out. At present we appear to have the following elements:

a) Small roughly square fields marked by quite prominent lynchets running both along and across the contour. Most of them occur in ones and twos now and they are 'old-looking' in the sense that the lynchets are either low and quite abraded, or rather massive but so smoothly 'rounded' that they look geological at first sight.

b) narrow fields, forming quite small systems, with slightly meandering boundaries running across the contour, without much evidence for along-the-contour lynchetting. These fields may well have been ploughed, but it does not look as if the plough had much influence on the field form. The 'meandering' aspect may have been caused by stone-clearance onto the field-edges. These fields seem to be quite closely associated with enclosed settlement-sites. Long, 'meandering' boundaries can also occur in apparent

isolation; are they 'sole survivors' of field systems or were they boundaries marking out rather larger areas?

c) curving lynchets, often quite prominent and at the same time 'old-looking'; they tend to run up to, or be associated with, enclosed settlement-sites. They rarely define 'fields'. They tend to occur on the steeper slopes and may be comparable to some of the features which we have come across on the moors or the upper pastures, which seem to define irregular or 'incomplete' fields or cultivation areas. We may be dealing here with 'land enclosure' rather than 'land division'.

d) fairly long, straight boundaries running mostly across the contour, and apparently defining rather broader, larger fields. They may be of varying ages, in fact; the relatively straight, well-preserved, 'sharp-edged' ones may be post-medieval, but there are older-looking examples too.

e) 'ridge and furrow' of varying type. Its age is probably variable also. A certain amount of the ridge and furrow is very likely to be medieval, although in this part of Swaledale the 'reverse S' format seems to be rare, which is understandable since it is supposed to relate to the turning circle of large ox-teams! Ploughing in ridges may well have continued in more recent times, eventually in association with land-drains. Some ridge and furrow can be seen to post-date both land-slips and the square lynchetted fields described under a) above.

5) It seems clear from the field evidence that the two great linear earthworks, the Grinton-Fremington Dykes, which appear to cut off Upper Swaledale and Arkengarthdale from approach from the east, were built later than the 'ancient' field boundaries; if the latter were in use in the late Iron Age/Romano-British periods, which seems likely on current evidence, the earthworks probably date from the early medieval 'migration period', though to call them 'Anglian' would not be particularly useful or illuminating.

Where field boundaries survive - and the evidence is patchy - there is no great uniformity; the character of the boundaries and their relationship to settlement sites does vary from place to place. The current appearance of the old boundaries, of course, is partly because some of them have been modified or obliterated in later times owing to a variety of different cultural and natural processes. But this is not the full story. The general sequence, for instance, may be curvilinear boundaries followed by squareish fields followed by long rectangular fields followed by ridge-and-furrow with, and/or followed by, strip fields/strip lynchets. But from the evidence available at present it seems difficult to argue that this sequence has occurred in every part of the dale side. It seems much more likely that in the dale a rather patchy, piecemeal development of cultivation areas and perhaps settlement-platforms (originating sometime in the Bronze Age?) developed into a more stable occupation with 'field systems', probably in the later Bronze Age or Iron Age; the various old lynchets, land-slips and enclosures, which would have been difficult to eradicate in any case, were fitted into these systems somehow. Later still, in Romano-British times, as circular houses gave way to oval or perhaps long houses (see our evidence from Healaugh, below), and the population increased further, some new houses were built in former fields. Then, probably, comes a major dislocation of some sort, with the Grinton-Fremington dykes ignoring the previous field-pattern, and enough Swaledale place-names indicating 'clearance' to suggest some kind of recession at the end of the Roman period (though we will have to see whether the pollen record supports this idea!).

curve of the rear of the western half of the platform was made at this time. During phase I a hollow-way developed on the eastern part of the platform, running from the east side of the house area in a SE direction (see fig. 1). Then, also in phase I and probably when the circular house was standing, most of the eastern side of the platform was neatly metalled with small cobbles, including what had been the hollow-way. There was thus a 'yard' beside the house.

Then came a pause during which a pit was dug through the front edge of the house-platform and house-wall slot, presumably well after the house's abandonment. This evidence for intermittent occupation of a platform is interesting. The pause cannot have been too long, perhaps, since the plan was now to put a stone-walled circular house on virtually the same site as the phase I timber one. First the floor area was slabbed over, including the drain at the rear. Then there was a pause, during which substantial quantities of burnt material and shattered stone fell onto the slabs over the drain (from the house above?). Then the phase II house was built, followed by phase III, as recounted above.

The NE trench resulted in a radical change of view about the general sequence in the area. Fig 1., a sketch produced under time pressure, shows the basic situation. In 1989, we suggested that the sequence was a) circular houses in a curvilinear enclosure (the enclosure represented by the wall found in the West Trench), followed by b) oval houses accompanied by destruction of the enclosure wall and perhaps the building of the long field-wall down the eastern side of the site. The suggestion was that this was Iron Age enclosure followed by the pax Romana, Romano-British peace. This interpretation had to be revised, however, after the cutting of this year's NE trench, intended to pick up the assumed junction of the curvilinear enclosure with the long eastern field-bank, and/or study the character of this field-bank. There was no 'junction' or indeed any trace of 'enclosure wall'. Instead, it was clear that the long field bank had a negative lynchet on its western side, and that at the base of this negative lynchet a metalled surface had been laid, apparently that of a roadway which ran uphill beside the field boundary. Onto this surface had fallen, eventually, stone blocks from what must have been a substantial wall on the top of the field-bank. This kind of metalling, which is familiar within the gateways of Iron Age hillforts in other parts of England, is dated on the house site to the circular house period of phase I, where it was put into an existing hollow-way which approached the house from the east.

It now looks as if the wall on the western side of the site was perhaps a robbed-out fragment from an 'old' set of curvilinear field-banks (of which other elements survive in the area) perhaps to be associated with some land-slip in the area of the tree. The houses were approached from the south by a deep hollow-way, which followed the line of a field-bank, swerved to avoid house-platform B and another possible platform below it, and then was probably joined by a hollow-way, at some stage metalled, discovered by excavation this year leading from house-platform A. Then it probably swerved east to run a metalled course beside the field-boundary, heading past the upper-most houses where a hollow-way leading up onto the moor, even if deepened by some recent use, may well mark its course. It might be thought that the whole track was a much later road, threading its way through ancient platforms, but the fact that the wall on the field-bank has fallen onto the road's metalled surface makes this very unlikely. The excavation of the main house-platform confirms that there was enough 'traffic' in prehistoric times to create hollow-ways here. So the sequence is:

The moorlands

What of the lower moorlands? Some of our provisional findings have been presented in previous reports. Here we have some evidence that blanket peat and acid soils were late developments, so that in later prehistoric times the potential for grazing and growing crops here was greater than it would be today. There are certainly clearance cairns and cleared areas and rudimentary field-edges here, surviving better than they do on the dalesides (except in the Barney Beck area) and many of these - though not necessarily all - are probably early. There are also enclosures. At some stage (later Bronze Age/early Iron Age?) large-scale land division systems like the Reeth system and perhaps the comparable one on Harkerside were laid out on what were perhaps rather extensively-used upland commons. Then, arguably, follow the narrower coaxial systems such as the Healaugh system on Calverside (which we have proved stratigraphically to be later than the Reeth system), probably in the later Iron Age. The Healaugh system is like the field system near Healaugh site A, which is arguably mid/late Iron Age, and the radiocarbon dates obtained by us from a site SW of Calver Hill date fields of the same type and possibly of the same system.

This is just an explanatory sketch at present, but it is a sketch which fits in with what we know at present, and it will be interesting to see how it correlates with the pollen record.

Healaugh Site A

The excavation of the house platform previously opened up in 1988 and 1989 was concluded, and a small trench to the NE of it was opened. Regrettably, owing to the time-pressures under which this report was produced, there are no detailed illustrations.

At the end of the 1989 season it had become clear that there were two major identifiable phases on the house-platform site. Phase II, a circular house with a thick, well-built wall, and a paved floor, was converted in Phase III into an oval house, also with a paved floor. Its builders re-used the western part of the Phase II wall, plus the floor-slabs, but built a blocking-wall across the back of the house. Building new walls and inserting new paving-slabs as necessary, they extended in an easterly direction, where the entrance to the new building lay.

This year the search was on to find a hypothetical phase I building. The search proved very testing in the hot, dry weather which made the task of looking for textural and colour differences very difficult. Eventually it was recognised that a 'ring-groove', the lower part of a palisade-slot for a wooden wall, could be recognised, but only by noting the presence of occasional 'packing-stones' and by putting in sections designed to pick up subtle colour changes in profile. Elsewhere in this zone, the position of several packing-stones and a dark 'stain' suggested the possible existence of one or more roughly rectilinear buildings which would also have to fit into phase 1, and would presumably have been earlier than the timber building whose site and shape was taken up by the Phase II stone-walled house.

The sequence now looks as follows. In Phase I, a platform was 'cut and filled' into the hillside. On the western half of this platform, one or more structures, perhaps roughly rectilinear, may have been built, evidenced by packing-stones. Then came a circular or near-circular house whose wall was set in a 'ring-groove'. Arguably a neatly cut drainage channel, following the

1. curvilinear 'fields', some walled, in the area: some land-slipping

2. walled field system with long boundaries running across contour, associated with some lynchetting. Some robbery of older walls?

3. 6-7 platforms made, for houses/buildings, in former field. Early (timber) house on platform A approached by hollow-way, at some stage metalled. Settlement approached by hollow-way, becoming metalled track and running beside field-bank then further uphill.

4. platform A (and others?) see timber house converted to stone-based circular house, then conversion to oval house by paving over former metalled yard to east, by which time second century AD pottery in use.

Phases 1 and 2 in this scheme must surely be late prehistoric given that there has to be time for the field system in phase 2 to become lynchetted and then the field abandoned before houses and road-surface were installed, the metalling on the road surface probably belonging to an early phase in the settlement sequence. The latter ends in the early Roman period. That field systems with relatively narrow fields whose walls run across the contour are at least Late Iron Age is a useful piece of information. Here, in one of the the steepest, least attractive parts of the study area, it is tempting to suggest that fields would have been laid out late, and when other areas had been claimed; so this type of field system may have been already in existence elsewhere, where it might be considered to go back at least to the Middle Iron Age. This conclusion will need checking, but it seems a fair guess that much of the study area was enclosed by the Mid/Late Iron Age, and that modifications in the Romano-British period were limited and often made within an existing framework.

The future

After seven seasons it is fair to ask where the project is going. It now looks as if we should be able to write our results up at the end of the 1992 season, combining excavation evidence, C14 dates, the pollen sequence and a landscape sequence based on horizontal and vertical stratigraphy. This depends on the progress made with survey and mapping work over the next two seasons. At the end of this time, some features of the explanatory sketch which we will produce will be unsatisfactory; for example, some types of site will be undated or be assigned to a broad date bracket, and the 'early' material in particular will be most badly affected. Nevertheless, given the almost total lack of archaeological work in Swaledale before we arrived, and given the absence of any previous attempt to unravel the landscape history of any dale in the Yorkshire Pennines, we believe that what we will have achieved will have been well worth while.

Thanks

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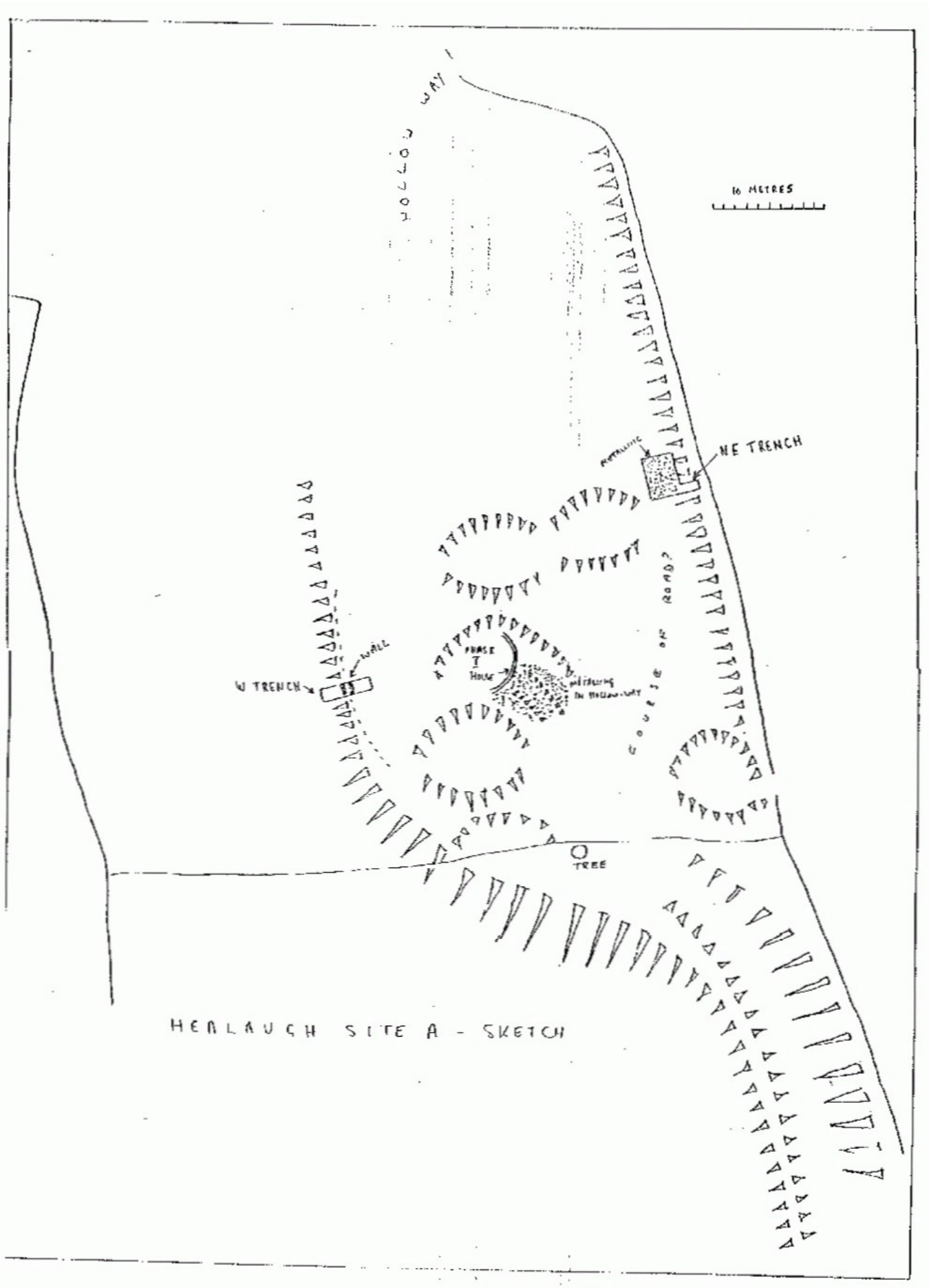

HERLAUGH SITE A - SKETCH