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

Eighth Interim Report (1991 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 daleside, 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 bottom, 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 1990-91 SEASON

This was planned as a non-digging season, in which the main activity would be completion of mapping on Calverside and Harkerside (3 weeks' work in July) with further prospection in the enclosed land in April, and support for the work of Dr Elizabeth Livett, post-doctoral Fellow at the University of Sheffield, in her work on pollen analysis. The work sounds routine but in fact it led to some significant new insights.

In the spring of 1991, it was not possible to carry out the full three weeks' fieldwork planned, owing to non-availability of a vehicle; but ten days' work by AF produced some interesting results. The strategy was simply to walk around in the fields, sketching the positions of field-banks, settlement sites, robbed cairns, etc. onto a copy of the 1: 2500 map. The results were very encouraging; it proved possible to pick up much more of the pattern of ancient fields than we had expected.

Our main three-week season in July involved two survey teams; we completed the 1: 2000 plan of Calverside, with field notes, and the plan of Harkerside, apart from the small area near Grinton masked by bracken. A major discovery was that the boundaries of the Harkerside system extended further south than we had thought, in three areas. We also picked up some new droveways and major areas of clearance, with large cairns, in the western part of the Harkerside system, just east of Maiden Castle, as well as clarifying some of the boundaries to the west of Grinton Lodge Youth Hostel.

Elizabeth Livett, post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Sheffield, has been studying the pollen sequence from a deep core on

can take is to produce a map such as fig. 2 which reduces features to single lines, allowing one to think more easily about sequence and - this is the important bit - encouraging one to go back into the field and really sort out relationships between boundaries with sequence in mind. This map shows some long, curvilinear boundaries running roughly along the contour, at right angles to the direction taken by most of the longer boundaries, and apparently dividing the land up into major blocks. These boundaries seem to be old, in terms of their relationships with other boundaries, and some of them are so prominent that at first it is tempting to regard them as partially geological in origin. It may be that, in places, re-use of these boundary-banks coupled with ploughing in the Middle Ages has led to the impressive lynchetting. Interestingly, the general patterns on fig. 2 are reminiscent of those of the well-known ancient field system near Grassington, in Upper Wharfedale, not much more than 30km distant as the crow flies. Another feature of figs 1 and 2 is that there are boundaries which are clearly earlier than the dykes, which cut across them at various acute angles.

MAPPING ON THE MOORS

On Calverside we consolidated our previous work, picking up some new cairns and fragments of walling; one of the most interesting discoveries was a rock carved with seven cup-marks arranged in crescent pattern, probably dating from the later Neolithic (c. 2500 BC.) Apart from a roughly quadrilateral shape pecked onto a stone not very far away, this is our first find of 'cup-and-ring' carvings in Swaledale proper. Their apparent absence has always been puzzling, given their presence in other parts of the Pennines. Could it be that here they have usually been made on rather small stones - like the ones we have located - which are easily either buried in the peat or re-used in the cairns and walls found on the moors here?

On Harkerside we have discovered that the main boundary system extends further south than we thought a year ago. One boundary comes as far south as Ridley Hush, not far from the Grinton-Redmire road (SE 040 963 approx) and there are three more to the east, just south of the ruins of the Grinton Smelting Mill. Careful fieldwork also showed that the walls came as far south as Grovebeck Gill, one of them occurring to the south of the beck and apparently ending not far from the modern shooting box at Kay Hush (SE 028 967). We can now show that the Harker Mires earthwork is later than the boundary-walls here.

Good work by our Swedish team in the area to the SW of Deer Park completed our map of the western part of the Harkerside boundaries, which stop less than 200m from the long walled 'lane' leading out from Maiden Castle. This is a fascinating area (fig. 3), with groups of small cairns in cleared areas on the natural terraces here; an area with much larger cairns; boundaries on an axis which differs markedly from that further east; and three apparent 'droveways' (A, B and C) following the axis of the system and not very far apart. One is so close to the western edge of the system as to be apparently unnecessary! There are other odd routeways whose behaviour deserves further study. It seems clear that routes (droveways) leading from the dalesides through enclosed land onto what are now the moors were an essential part of the boundary systems here. This was also the case on the other side of the Swale, apparently, where various narrow hollow-ways and broader walled 'droveways' lead between both the Swale and Barney Beck and the higher ground, through the field systems. It is puzzling that on Harkerside we have not yet located 'droveways' further east. This may be due

than simply hedgerow pollards. In April AF discovered a group of very old holly trees similar to the 'holly garths' of the Lake District which were cut for winter fodder.

SINGLE SITES

Over the years we have noted the existence in Swaledale of stone rings of various character and dimensions. Some may be the footings of circular buildings, perhaps prehistoric houses; some may be small enclosures, ring-cairns or even robbed-out burial cairns. It is hard to be sure at present how homogenous they are, as a group; one of us (TL) is currently collecting a corpus of plans of them at the same scale, in the hope that we can make a judgement about this and publish them as appropriate.

FUTURE RESEARCH

In many respects next season's work is dictated by this year's results. In April 1992 it is proposed to complete prospection within the enclosed land in the research area (mostly in the Harkerside Place area and around Reeth) and to survey the small area on Harkerside which is bracken-covered and thus unavailable in the summer. After prospection has been completed it is hoped to go back to the sketch surveys, formulate interpretations of sequence, and push these as hard as possible in the field by re-examining critical junctions, thus refining the detail of the sketch plans. Also in April, we intend to produce plans of the ditched/enclosed sites in and near the study area (including the three 'Howe Hills' (near Grinton cemetery, below Harkerside, and at Low Whita). In July 1992 it is proposed to map the enclosed land of Harkerside, hopefully from Stubbin Farm to Grinton, and, if time permits, make a start on the enclosed land on the opposite bank of the Swale.. We can thus put moorland and daleside plans together, for Harkerside, and will hope to do the same for the Reeth-Healaugh zone in 1993. We will attempt to assess the potential of comparing pollen sequences derived from buried soil profiles with the 'master sequence' from Ellerton Moor, and if the situation looks promising, try to obtain funding for further work along these lines. We also need to obtain funding for C14 dates and processing seed samples from our site A at Healaugh.

THANKS

We wish to thank the following for help and support for the project during 1991:

The Yorkshire Dales National Park and the University of Sheffield (financial support); Mr R Harvey, Mr R. White and Mr L Barker of the Park staff; various Swaledale landowners and tenants including Nickerson Estates and Harkerside Estate, Mr R Sunter of Healaugh, Mr Porter of Riddings Farm, Mr Brown of Swale Hall, Mr J Kendall of Reeth, Mr M Barker of Ellerton Abbey Farm; Dave and Val Lowson and staff at Grinton Lodge Youth Hostel; Messrs Alderson and Coates (gamekeepers); Elizabeth Livett (pollen work); Mark Simmons and Colin Merrony (drawings) and this year's survey team - Bill Godfrey, Colin Merrony, Geoff Morris, Par Cornelid, Catharina Mascher, and Chris Fenton-Thomas. Apologies to anyone whom we have inadvertently omitted!

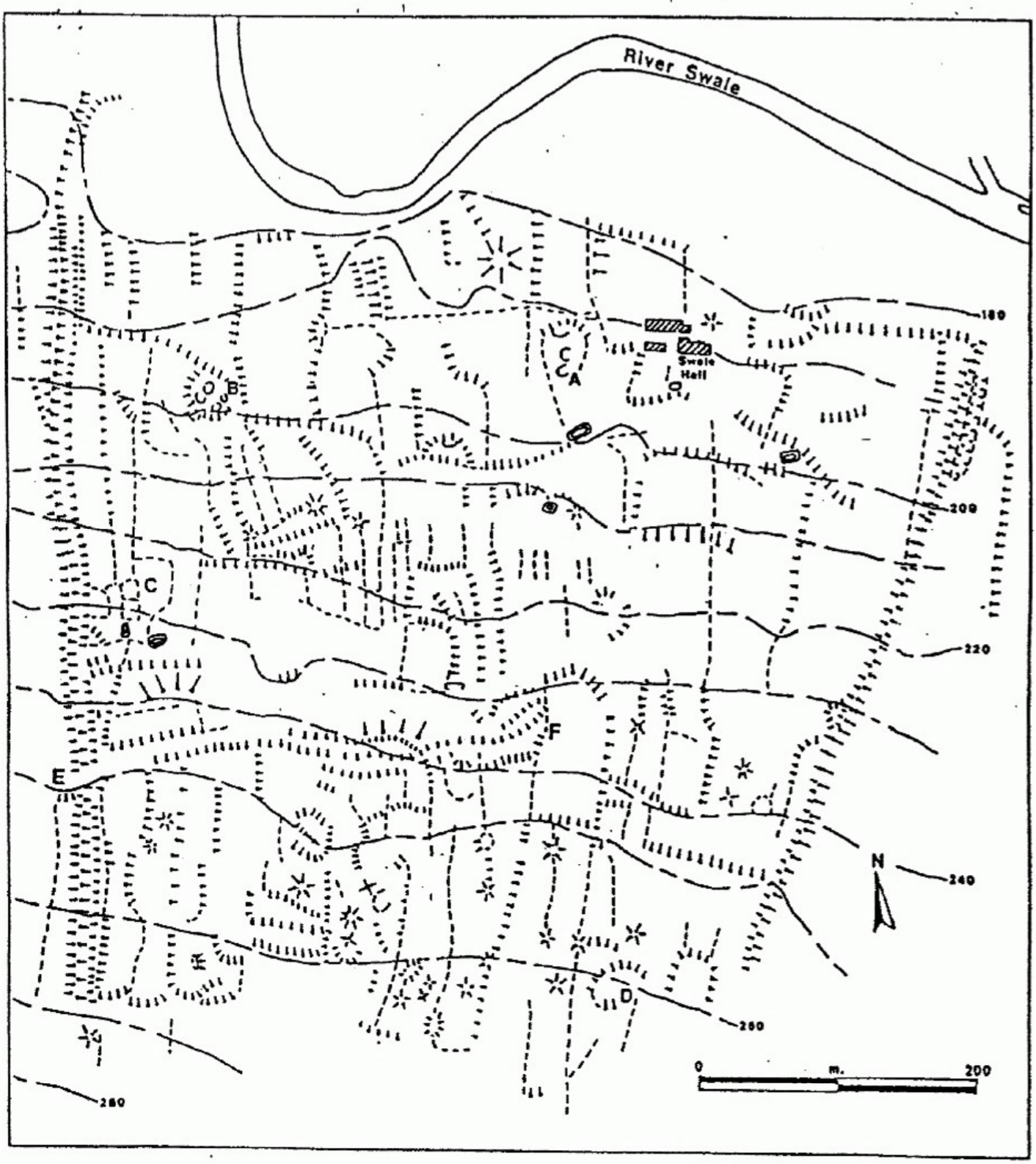

Fig. 1: Harkerside Inter-dyke zone — interim sketch.

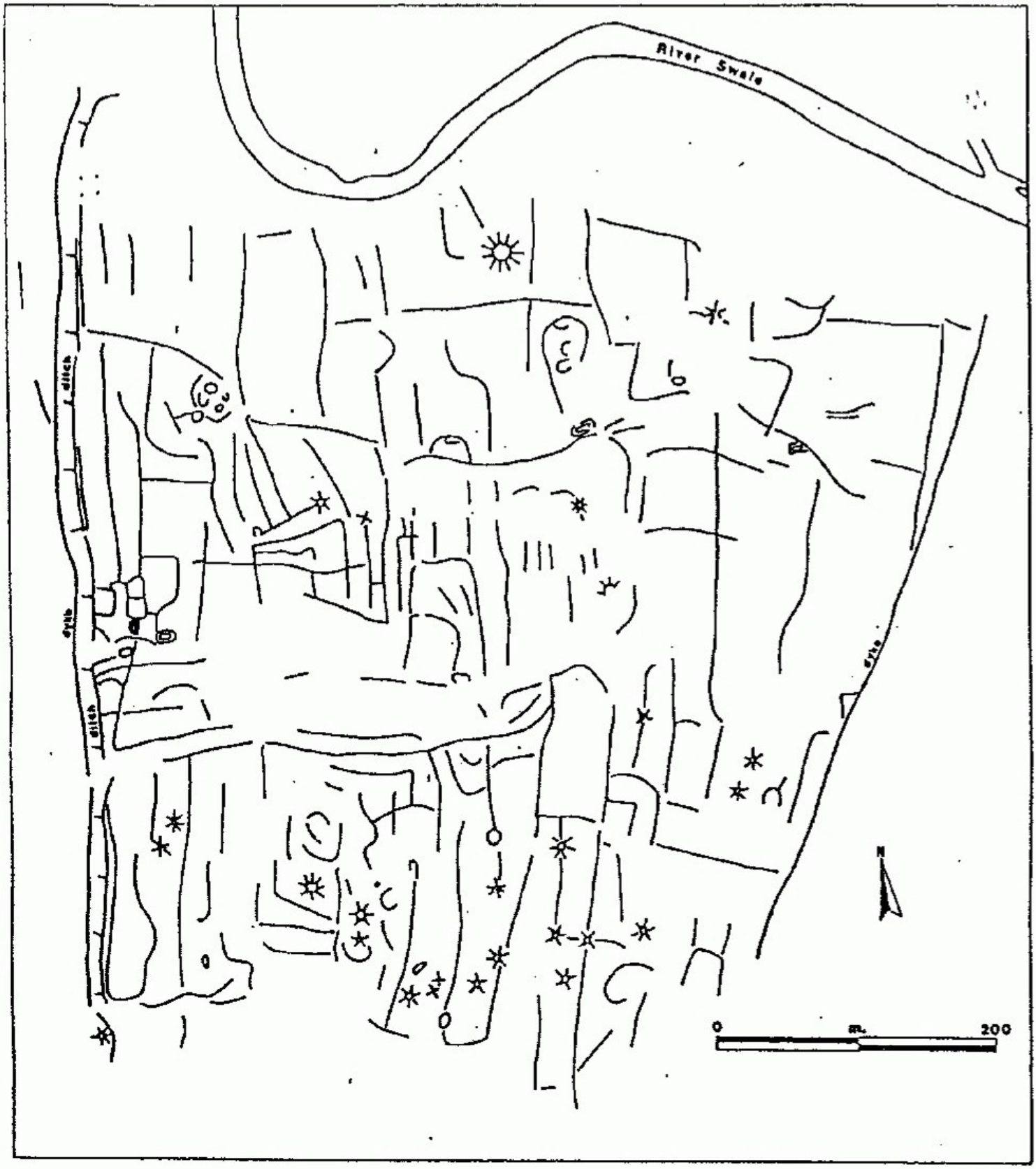

Fig. 2: Harkerside Inter-dyke zone — interim sketch.

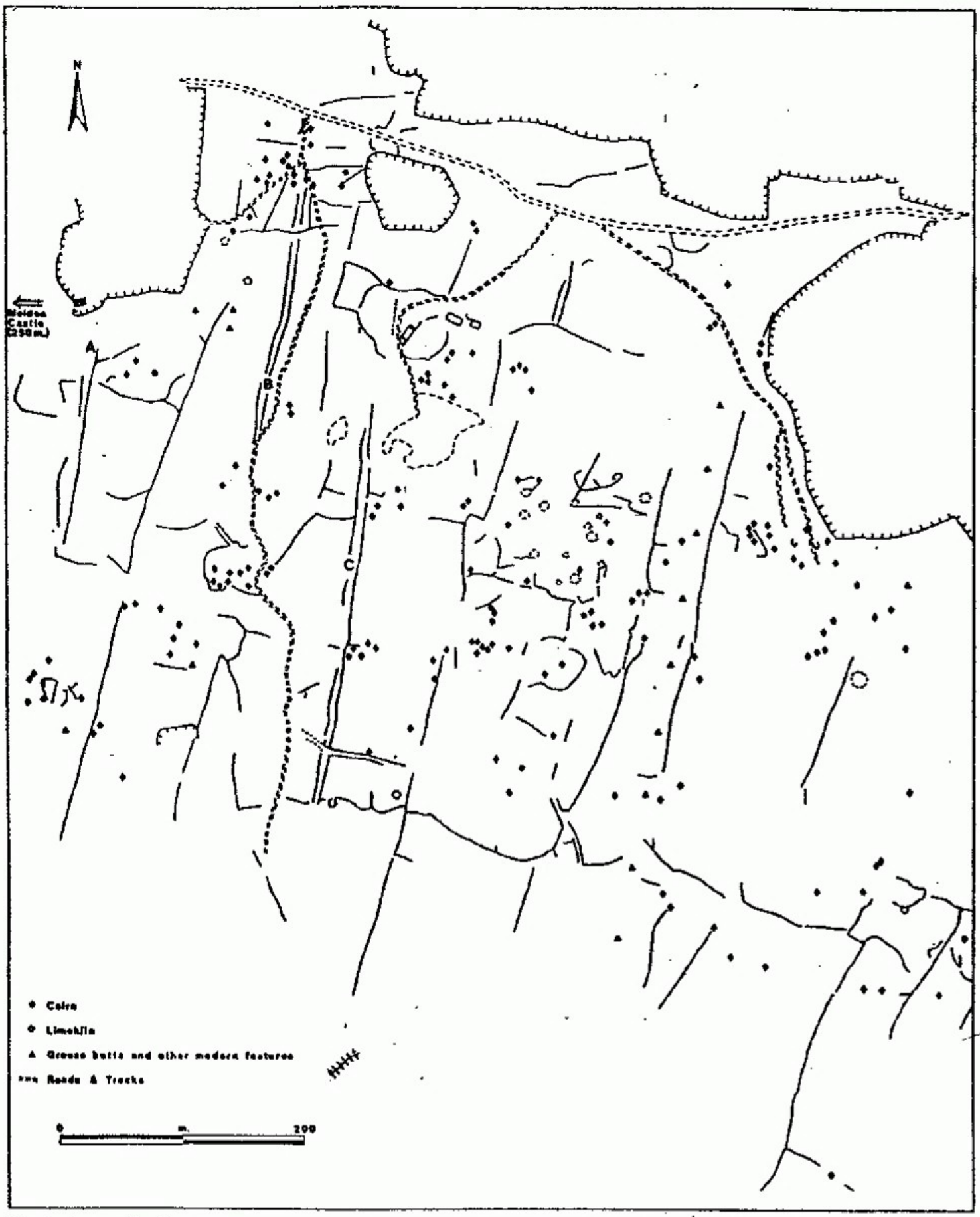

Fig. 3 Harkerside West