

# SWALEDALE ANCIENT LAND BOUNDARIES PROJECT

Ninth Interim Report (1992 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 1991-2 SEASON

There were two main periods of field activity. In late March/early April we did two weeks' work, supported in part by a grant from the Prehistoric Society, producing plans of two important prehistoric 'defended' enclosures whose history must be relevant to that of our study area. In July we did a further three weeks' work, recording surface earthworks in the southern part of our research area, the daleside between Grinton and Harkerside Place.

As usual, there was intermittent prospection and photographic work, as time and opportunity permitted. One very important discovery was made by Tim Laurie on army range land to the W and SW of Stainton - on Stainton Moor and immediately west of Bail Hill. Here, on south-facing slopes now moorland, are extensive walls which are not coaxial in type, although they are built in much the same way as the coaxial ones further west. They seem to represent the most unaltered and extensive pre-coaxial 'fields' to be found in the area, and are probably Bronze Age. They need recording and studying in their own right, and also because they should help us to understand the more fragmentary irregular enclosures to be found among the coaxial walls in our study area. Tim Laurie has also been studying and mapping various small walled enclosures, and we hope to be able to analyse them as a group. They may well be prehistoric domestic enclosures, or houses, or badly-robbed ring-cairns. Whatever they are, they present a contrast, which may be instructive, to the coaxial boundaries.

At the time of writing, we are still awaiting the radiocarbon dates for the Ellerton Moor pollen diagram, produced by Dr Elizabeth Livett. We are assured that they will very soon be available. We are grateful to the Dales National Park for providing funds for the study of soil samples from the Healaugh A site by Dr Marijke van der Veen of the University of Leicester, and we hope to include her findings, and those from Ellerton Moor, in a short further report relating to the two grants made by the Yorkshire Dales National Park for the C14 dates and the soil sample analysis.

## PUBLICATION AND PUBLICITY

We hope soon to move towards publication of our work in various scholarly journals. But it is just as important to disseminate the results of our work to a wider public. Andrew Fleming and Robert White, of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, have been doing detailed planning for a book of photographs, a combination of air views and ground shots, which will illustrate many aspects of Swaledale's archaeology, including the land boundaries and early settlement sites which the project is studying. We are currently negotiating with a publisher. We hope this will be a good way of conveying something of the richness and diversity of Swaledale's archaeology, for inhabitants and visitors alike.

Andrew Fleming made a good deal of progress during the year in understanding the medieval occupation of Swaledale (hence the rail fares to Northallerton noted in the expenditure account), and five articles are now in preparation dealing with various aspects of this work. These include the consequences of recognising (see below) that the Grinton-Fremington earthworks are 'Anglian' rather than 'Brigantian' (that is, early post-Roman rather than final Iron Age). They also concern the pattern of medieval wood pasture in Swaledale. These are 'spin-off' results of the Ancient Land Boundaries Project, and obviously understanding of medieval and later patterns of land use will have a significant effect on our understanding of the earlier material. It's a commonplace of landscape archaeology that it's impossible to isolate one time-period for study; sooner or later an impact on another time period or type of archaeological feature is inevitable.

Part of a recently-published article by Andrew Fleming dealt with some aspects of our work. This was 'landscape archaeology in the British uplands: opportunities and problems'. pp. 67-88 in Bernardi, M. (ed.) *Archeologia del Paesaggio*. Firenze: Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche: Università degli Studi di Siena.

In 1992 Andrew Fleming spoke at Lichfield, Ilkley and Nottingham, as well as at the Theoretical Archaeology Group Conference at the University of Southampton (which gets a wide national and even international audience). More locally, Tim Laurie has been able to base a course of extra-mural lectures and field excursions partly on our work.

In May 1993 Andrew Fleming will visit Sweden, attending a seminar sponsored by the Institute of Human Geography at the University of Stockholm, where he will explain our work and comment on that done in western Sweden by Catharina Mascher - one of our Swedish team - and others. This is the result of a generous grant from the British Council which has enabled this Anglo-Swedish collaboration to continue.

We hope to contribute in due course to whatever display is arranged at the National Park's planned Visitor Centre at Reeth; and to the visit to be

made to Swaledale by members of the Prehistoric Society (the leading national body concerned with prehistory) in late July '93.

#### SPRING '92: EMBANKED ENCLOSURES

We made plans of two sites, each apparently surrounded by a single bank and ditch. They are both at places called How Hill (after the early English name *hoh*, meaning a hill, usually one with one steep side and one gentler side). One is at How Hill, Low Whita (fig. 3). Some of the features on the plan probably post-date the defensive earthwork around the crown of the hill; these include the rectangular building, perhaps an old cow-house or 'lathie', the hollow-way which approaches the site from the south, and the large scooped out feature just S of the west entrance. The original main entrance was on the west side; our best efforts failed to locate any house-platforms on the site.

The second is at How Hill (on some maps, Ox Hill), on a knoll above the Swale, about 400m east of Grinton village. This site (fig. 4) has been damaged, probably by the makers of the late 19th/early 20th century golf course in this area. It may have been on this occasion that the 'rampart' was levelled, so that only a trace of it remains, on the northern side, though the ditch is very well marked. The interior is smooth now. The entrance was not on the most level approach to the site, on the south, but to the east, and there seems to have been a hollow-way leading in from this entrance, with a slightly expanded end which might relate to the golf course arrangements.

We are seeking parallels for these sites in the archaeological literature.

#### SUMMER '92: THE ENCLOSED LAND FROM GRINTON TO HARKERSIDE PLACE

Our three week July season involved two mapping teams, concerned mainly with producing a 1: 2000 plan of the daleside area of Harkerside - that is, the enclosed land within the zone between Grinton and Browna Gill, to the west of Stubbin Farm.

One team produced a 1: 2000 plan of the field-banks and settlement sites further west, stopping about halfway between Harkerside Place and Ivy House. It was originally intended to complete the plan by working further west. However, in what turned out to be an inspired change of plan, it was decided to concentrate on producing a more detailed plan of a complex and rewarding site just east of Plaintree Farm, a set of ruined buildings some 300 m east of Harkerside Place. (fig. 1). Several phases of settlement are represented here.

The most recent is medieval and perhaps also post-medieval. Hecay (Harkerside) was a settlement laid out along the contour (and spring-line), with an axial routeway linking the houses and running through an informal green. Harkerside Place lies further west, below the bottom of the plan; there are two rectangular platforms for medieval or post-medieval buildings (not shown on fig. 1) on the green between Plaintree Farm and Harkerside Place. The ruins of another probable medieval building are indicated at (a) (Field A), while Plaintree Farm itself must have been part of the medieval settlement. East of field B, the medieval route leading out through the fields, and perhaps to further buildings now marked by rectangular platforms

or more recent hay-barns, has been perpetuated by the line of gateways (and in one place also a blocked man-gate). Platform (b) in field B may be medieval (it is immediately beside the axial route) but it could also be Romano-British. Probably the relatively good preservation of the earlier phases (see below) is because the features were partly on this long 'green' (which compares in length to the one in Feetham and Low Row), and partly above the land under the plough in the Middle Ages.

The oldest settlement is almost certainly the one in fields A and B, marked by curvilinear banks and house-platforms (c, d, e and f, though there may well have been others). The main enclosure is bisected by the wall between fields A and B, and its northern edge cannot now be seen. The settlement area was apparently approached from the north-west, with a road which formed a short hollow-way at one point (see plan). The irregular boundaries are similar to those in the now-enclosed land on the north bank of Barney Beck - of which we have made a plan - and they are also rather like some of those on the moorlands. They indicate 'garden-plot' agriculture, probably carried on without a plough, and are likely to be prehistoric, perhaps Bronze Age, in date. The 'settlement' marked on the plan may well be later than the curvilinear plots within which it is set.

Next door, the long 'tongue' of land forming the NW part of field C is because the present wall follows a much older field boundary. In the eastern and southern parts of the field are small 'paddocks' of Romano-British type, and house-platforms (g, h, i, and perhaps j, although the latter might be medieval). There may have been others, perhaps especially in the small separate enclosure marked k on the plan. From outside modern field C, to the south, a hollow-way came down into the settlement past house-platform (g). What is most interesting about this settlement, which is of very different character from the one in fields A and B, is that the paddocks and platforms have apparently been set into the upper ends of narrow fields, whose banks have been preserved here, although in the field to the north (field D on the plan) they have been destroyed by medieval and later ploughing. Is this a late Roman site, set into earlier Roman or Iron Age fields, or an earlier Roman site set into Iron Age fields?

At the moment we have no way of dating this sequence precisely, but we can make comparisons, for example with site A at Healaugh, where rectangular buildings of earlier Roman date (possibly with late prehistoric predecessors) were set into earlier, rather curvilinear 'fields' and above the larger rectangular fields with which they must have been associated (although the latter could have been pre-Roman and reused. It may be that in this part of Swaledale the best surviving sequences of settlement and fields are to be found on the high shoulders of the dale, just below the point where the land rises more steeply towards what is now moorland, and just above the most valuable land, where, on a long time scale, the plough and associated land clearance were agencies of destruction. This would also have been the spring-line zone, with some recent settlements (as at Harkerside) and the presence of fairly rough permanent 'home' pastures may also have led to better local preservation of ancient sites. From this point of view, it looks as if the ancient settlement zone on the north side of the Swale, around the ruined site of Riddings Farm (SE 024995) will be well worth investigating; we already know that it is complex.

The second team - Catharina Mascher and Par Cornelid from Stockholm - completed almost all of the zone between Grinton and the westernmost of the Grinton-Fremington dykes. A sample of their work is shown as fig. 2. This is a fascinating area, which is now ready for systematic analysis. This inter-dyke zone was not apparently within the arable land of the medieval townships at Harkerside and Grinton, although there is ridge and furrow of

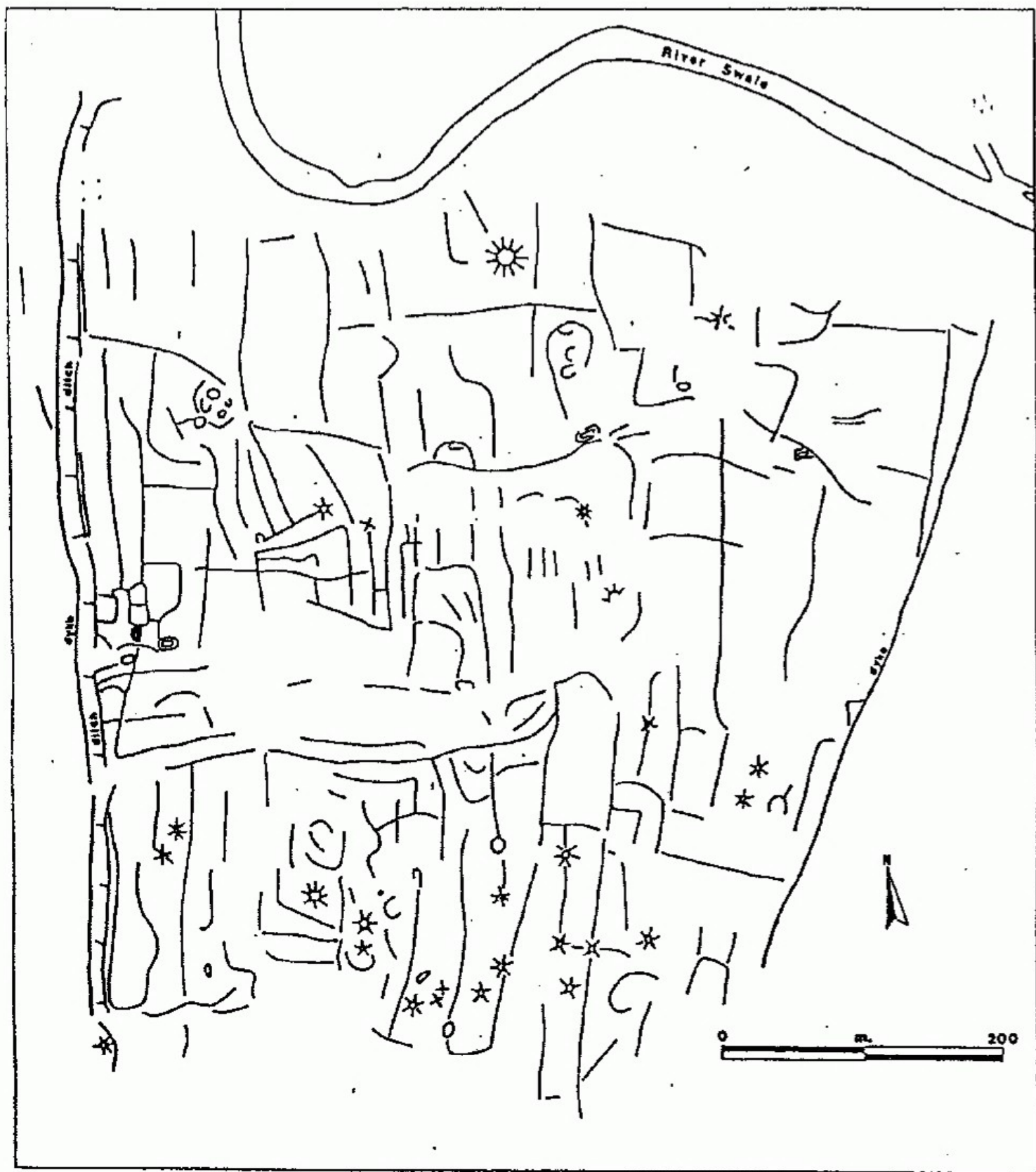


Fig. 2: Harkerside Inter-dyke zone — interim sketch.

zone in the Ivy House/Stubbins Farm area, and moving on to the western part of the Reeth-Healaugh zone, though we will have to be selective in the eastern part of this area since the extensive medieval fields associated with Reeth have made study of the ancient fields here quite problematic in some areas. We also plan to do some detailed work on the settlement zones, to try to pick up as much local sequence as possible in the way we were able to do this year at Plaintree Farm.

If we can obtain funding and permission, we also plan two weeks' work just before Easter, planning the important extensive early field-walls on Stainton Moor (see above) and, at a larger scale, the critical Dykehouse Close settlement discussed above.

## THANKS

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

The Yorkshire Dales National Park, the British Council, the Prehistoric Society 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 Harkerside Estates, Mr Brown of Swale Hall, Mr Harker of Stubbings, Mr J Kendall of Reeth, Mr M Barker of Ellerton Abbey Farm; Dave and Val Lawson and staff at Grinton Lodge Youth Hostel; Messrs Alderson and Coates (gamekeepers); Elizabeth Livett (pollen work); Anna Badcock (drawings) and Colin Merrony (survey advice, computing); Tom Gladhill; and this year's survey team - Bill Bevan, Mickey Sargent, Keith Sherwood, Bill Godfrey, Chris Fenton-Thomas, Catharina Mascher and Par Cornelid; also Ros Nichol. Apologies to anyone whom we have inadvertently omitted!

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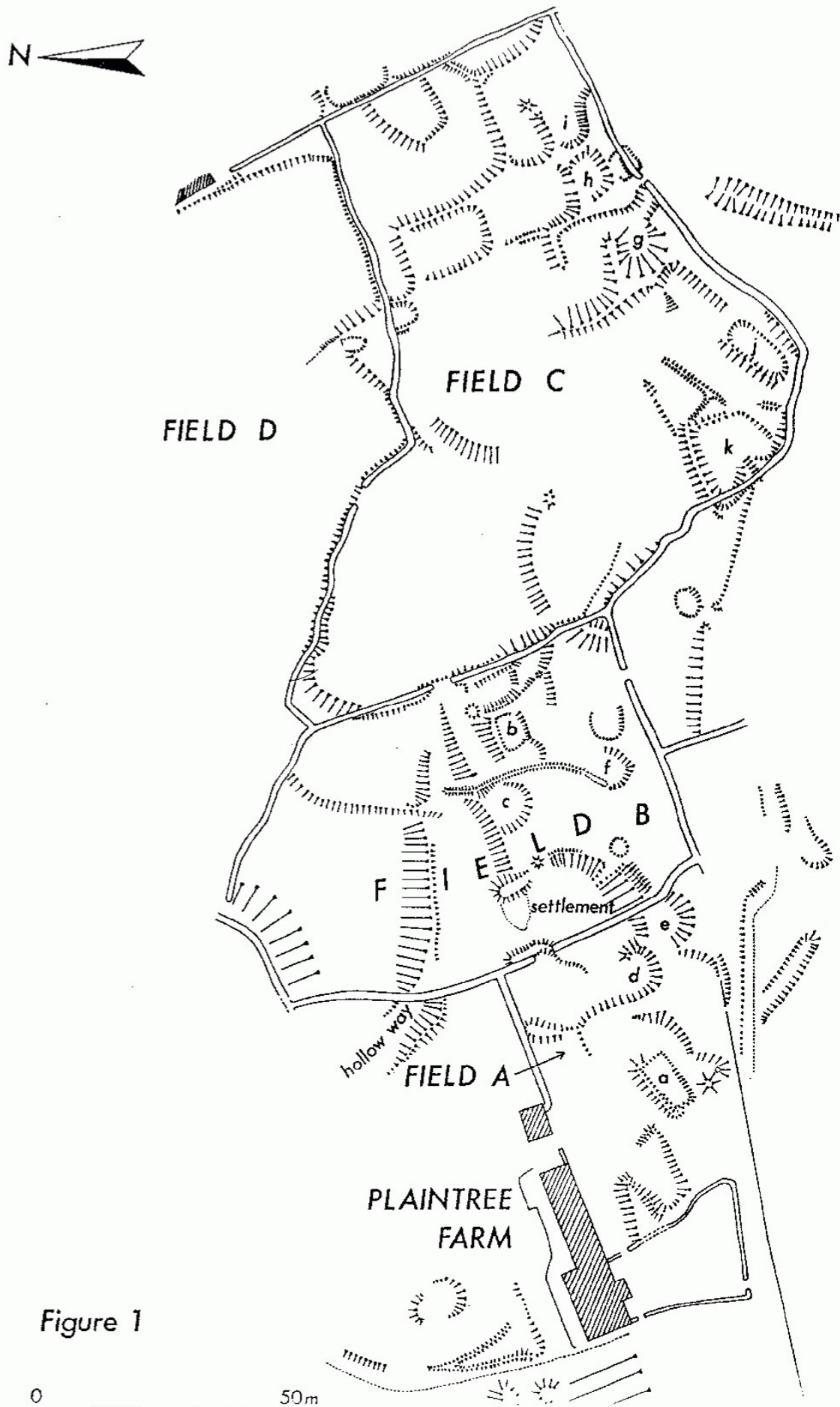
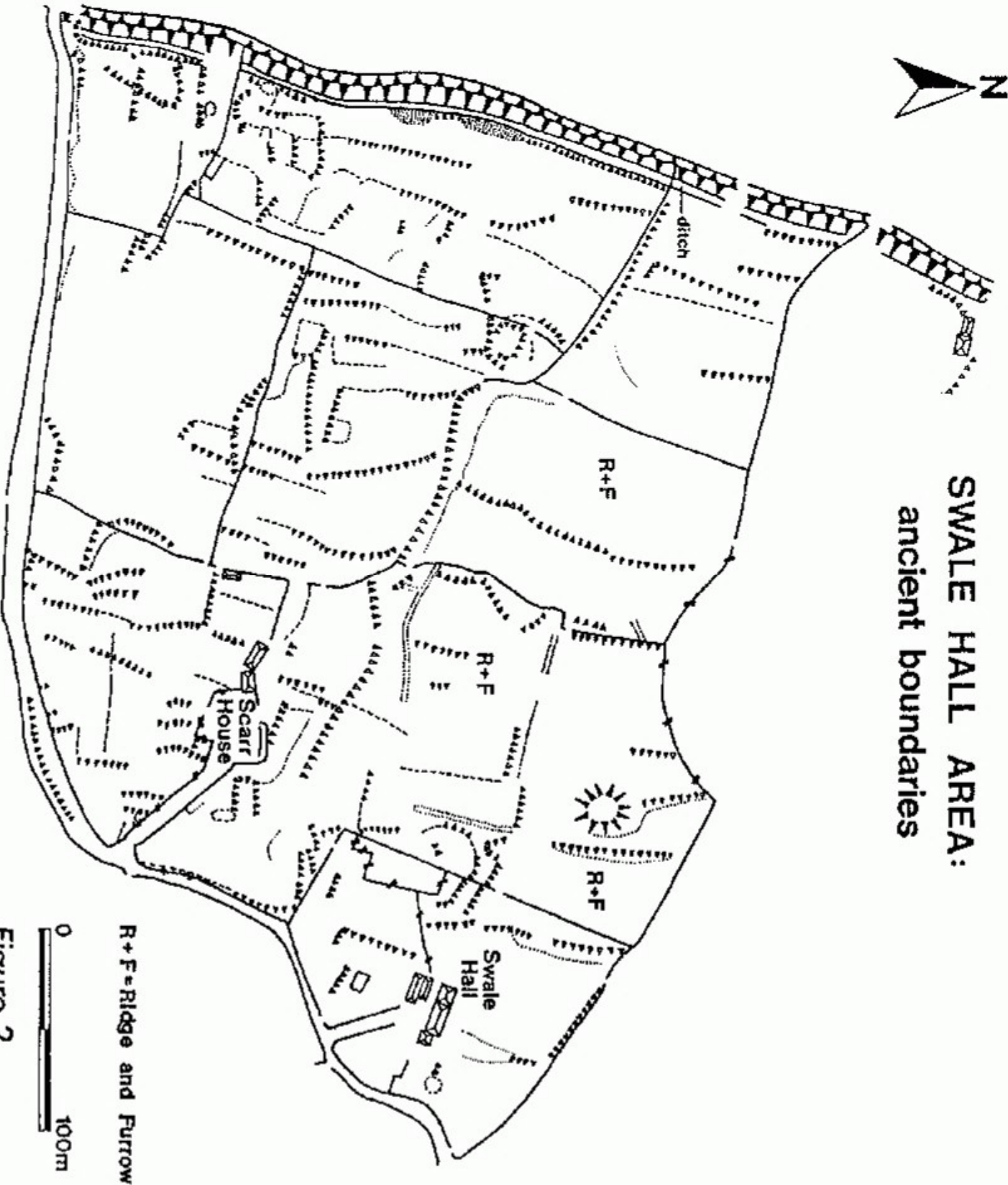


Figure 1

0 \_\_\_\_\_ 50m



**SWALE HALL AREA:  
ancient boundaries**



R+F=Ridge and Furrow

0 100m

Figure 2

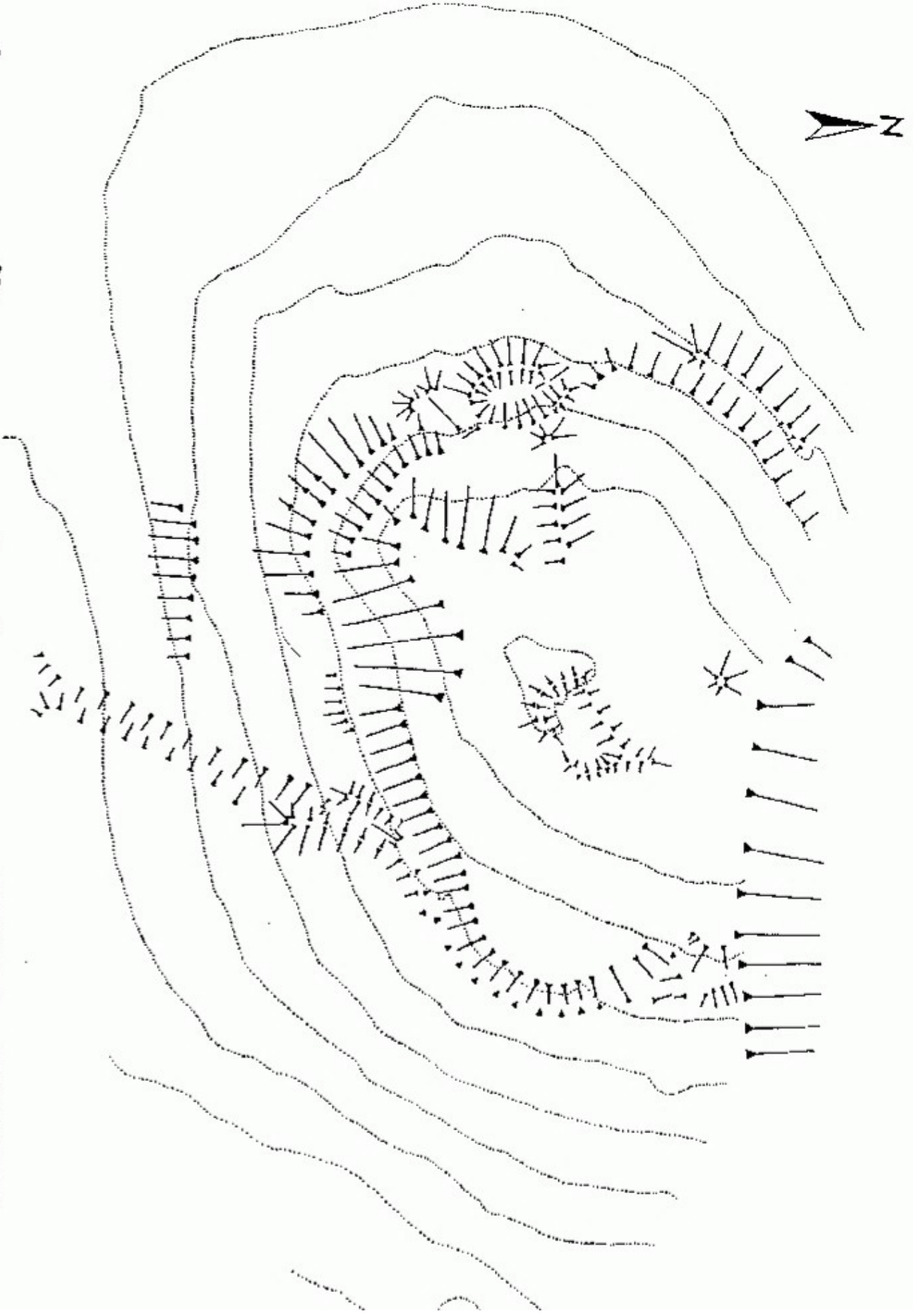


Figure 3

HOW HILL - LOW WHITA

# HOW HILL - GRINTON

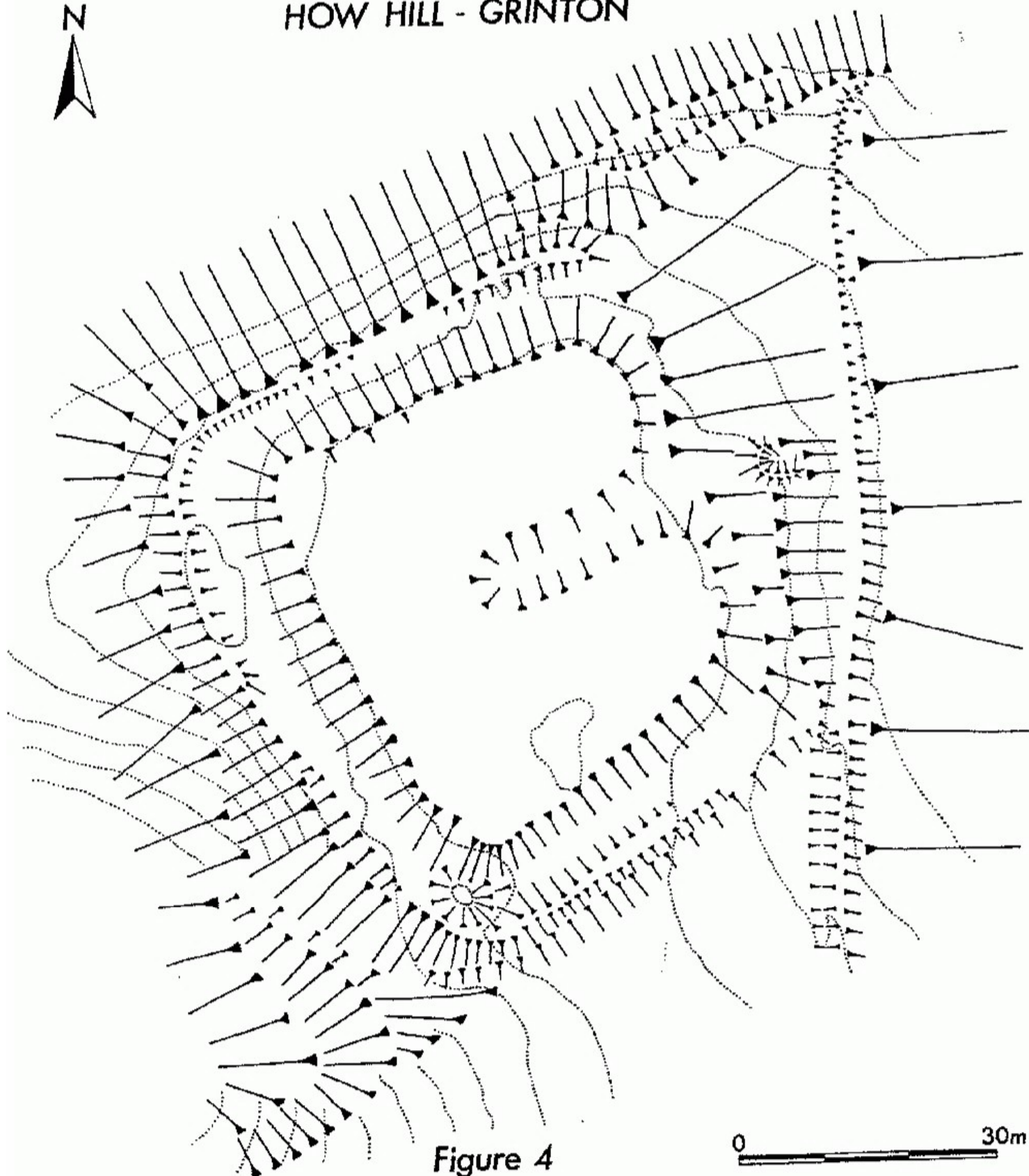


Figure 4

0 30m