

**Stratigraphic Report of Phase 2 Excavations,
A1/N1 Newry-Dundalk Link Road,
Area 14 Site 115**

Townland: Plaster
Parish: Ballymascanlon
County: Louth
Country: Republic of Ireland
Chainage: 13060 to 13200
NGR: 306728E/311504N
Director: Sinclair J. Turrell
Submitted: October 2006

Contents

Figures	2
Plates	2
<i>Abstract</i>	3
1 Description of the Site and Location	4
1.1 Introduction	4
1.2 Site description	4
1.2.1 Topography.....	4
1.2.2 Geology	5
1.2.3 Archaeological and historical background	5
2 A Description of the Works Carried Out.....	15
2.1 Reason for the excavation.....	15
2.2 Excavation methods.....	15
2.2.1 Phasing	15
2.2.2 Desk top study	15
2.2.3 Phase 1 archaeological testing.....	15
2.2.4 Phase 2 archaeological excavations.....	16
2.2.5 Health and safety documents.....	17
2.2.6 Staff involved	18
3 Excavation Records-Phase 2	19
3.1 Results of the excavation.....	19
3.3.1 Cutting 115a	19
3.3.2 Cutting 115b	19
3.3.3 Cutting 115c	19
3.2 Summary	20
4 Discussion and Conclusion.....	21
5 Recommendation.....	22
5.1 Finds	22
5.2 Samples	22
5.2.1 Macrobotanical and Microbotanical analyses.	22
5.2.3 Radiocarbon analysis.....	22
6 Quantification of the Materials and Records	23
6.1 Quantity of the record.....	23
6.1.1 Context sheets.....	23
6.1.2 Miscellaneous written records.....	23
7 References	24
Appendices	26

Appendix I Context log	26
Appendix II Finds list.....	28
Appendix III Sample list	29
Appendix IV Photographic logs	30

Tables

Table 1 Samples for radiocarbon analysis.....	22
Table 2 Records Inventory	23

Figures

Fig. 1 Location of site.	
Fig. 2 Extract of RMP Map of Louth, Sheet 4.	
Fig. 3 Location of Area 14 on RMP Map of Louth, Sheet 4.	
Fig. 4 Plan showing cuttings 115a, b & c.	
Fig. 5. Plan of Cutting A.	
Fig. 6. Plan of Cutting B.	
Fig. 7. Plan of Cutting C.	
Fig. 8a. Southwest facing section of stone socket 016.	
Fig. 8b. West facing section of cut 030.	
Fig. 8c. Southwest facing section of cut 032.	

Plates

Plate 1. Cutting A, from east.	
Plate 2. Cutting B from south.	
Plate 3. Cutting C from north.	
Plate 4. Stone Socket 016, showing decayed granite crust.	
Plate 5. Pit 030 from west.	
Plate 6. Pit 032 from southwest.	

Abstract

Louth County Council, the Roads Service NI (Department for Regional Development) and the National Roads Authority are currently proposing a Road Scheme, the A1/NI Newry-Dundalk Road. The route consists of 14.2km of 2-lane dual carriageway with 5.7km of associated link roads from Cloghoge roundabout, south of Newry to the Ballymascanlan interchange north of Dundalk. As part of the road development, a number of archaeological and historic sites were within the construction zone of the road scheme and were determined eligible for excavation before the construction began.

In Plaster townland three cuttings were opened up in order to investigate features found during Phase 1 testing. The majority of these features were either modern or natural in origin. Two pits in Cutting C, to north of the site were, however, of archaeological interest, at least one of them being of probable prehistoric date.

1 Description of the Site and Location

1.1 Introduction

The National Roads Authority (NRA) for the Republic of Ireland and Department for Regional Development (DRD) for Northern Ireland are the authorities in charge of the proposal to construct a new road between Newry and Dundalk. As part of the road works, Archaeological Development Services Ltd (ADS) was commissioned to perform an archaeological assessment along the proposed Link Road and to mitigate the impacts of any construction on archaeological resources. The following report details the results of the fieldwork at Site 115 that followed the recommendations of McConway and Dawkes (2005).

The proposed scheme involves a 14 km route with 5.7 km of associated link roads (Figs 1-6). Upgrading the key transport corridors and associated trunk road links will provide a strategic framework for infrastructure investment, improvement of public transport, future urban and economic development especially for large-scale sites to accommodate industry and commerce and assisting tourist travel around the region.

This report describes the results of excavations carried out at Site 115 from 30 August to 7 September 2005 in advance of groundwork. Staff of ADS carried out archaeological work on behalf of the developers under the direction of Sinclair J. Turrell. This section of the project occurs in Plaster Townland, Ballymascanlon Parish, Co. Louth, Republic of Ireland at National Grid Reference 306728.25E, 311503.71N (centre point), Ordnance Datum (OD) of approximately 28m and road scheme chainage 13060 -13200.

1.2 Site description

1.2.1 Topography

The existing landscape character of the study area is a result of previous glacial, geological and human impacts (Figs 1, 2 and 3)¹. The study area is contained within a mountainous backdrop known as the Ring of Gullion. Slieve Gullion defines the western extent of the study area and lies at the centre of the Ring of Gullion. To the north lies Camlough Mountain and Fathom Mountain. The eastern boundary is defined by the western edge of the Carlingford Mountains and specifically Black Mountain. The southern edge of the Ring of Gullion is contained within the study area and includes

¹ This information has been taken directly from the A1/N1 Newry-Dundalk Link Road Environmental Statement/Environmental Impact Statement Non-Technical Summary prepared by RPS Ireland Environmental Sciences

Feede Mountain and Slievenabolea. Between the mountains of the Ring lies a broad gently undulating agricultural landscape. South of Feede Mountain the study area levels off gently undulating to Dundalk Bay. This site was situated on a slight south facing slope. Cutting A was situated at the base of this slope and Cuttings B and C at its top, where the ground had flattened out (Figs 1-4).

1.2.2 Geology

Vaughan in Buckley and Sweetman (1991, 8-10) indicates that the bedrock geology of the site area is composed of Silurian Greywacke. Silurian rocks were deposited in deep water in active tectonic zones. Each layer in the Silurian strata represents materials displaced and then redeposited by earthquakes, which would cause sediments to slump from the off shore slopes of the continental shelf that would then be deposited as a future greywacke bed.

1.2.3 Archaeological and historical background

The road follows a natural route way through mountainous terrain that may have been in use from the prehistoric period. There are numerous monuments (following) recorded near the route date from the Neolithic period to the 11th Century AD (Buckley and Sweetman 1991).

Previously known sites within 1km of the current site. A search of the “Archaeological Survey of County Louth” (Buckley and Sweetman 1991) and of the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) shows that there are 12 known prehistoric and historic sites in the area. These include the following sites listed by their RMP number, the Buckley and Sweetman reference number (1991), location and their description (Fig. 3).

RMP: LH007-015 (Buckley and Sweetman 1991: Survey No. 242)
Townland: Faughart Lower
Parish: Ballymascanlan
Barony: Lower Dundalk
County: Louth
Country: Republic of Ireland
NGR: 305630E, 310510N
Description: *Fulacht fiadh* (possible). Small, low mound situated beside stream.

RMP: LH004-039 (Buckley and Sweetman 1991: Survey No. 632)
Townland: Faughart Upper
Parish: Ballymascanlan
Barony: Lower Dundalk
County: Louth
Country: Republic of Ireland
NGR: 306490E, 312230N
Description: Ringfort situated beside a stream in a low-lying hollow. An artificially raised circular earth and stone platform (diam. 20m) enclosed at base by fosse (W 6.1m, D 0.7m)

with slight traces of an external bank. Causeway (W 3m) across fosse at SE. Along the upper edge of the platform are the remains of a stonewall now partly collapsed downslope. In the NE quadrant of the interior is an oval depression (L 5.5m, W 2.5m, D 0.4m) of unknown significance.

RMP: LH004-041 (Buckley and Sweetman 1991: Survey No. 41)
Townland: Aghnaskeagh
Parish: Ballymascanlan
Barony: Lower Dundalk
County: Louth
Country: Republic of Ireland
NGR: 307490E, 312470N
Description: Possible wedge tomb described as a Megalithic tomb. This tomb is very ruined. The remains consist of two orthostats, 2.4m apart and aligned WSW-ENE, with a large, horizontally laid stone set beside and perpendicular to one of the orthostats; the two latter stones are incorporated in a roadside fence. The OS field trace records that there was formerly 'a large flat stone resting on 2 others'.

RMP: LH004-042 (Buckley and Sweetman 1991: Survey No. 179)
Townland: Aghnaskeagh
Parish: Ballymascanlan
Barony: Lower Dundalk
County: Louth
Country: Republic of Ireland
NGR: 307540E, 312450N
Description: Standing stone: Formerly located a short distance SE of megalithic tomb (LH002-041).

RMP: LH004-064 (Buckley and Sweetman 1991: Survey No. 860)
Townland: Whitemill
Parish: Ballymascanlan
Barony: Lower Dundalk
County: Louth
Country: Republic of Ireland
NGR: 305300E, 311790N
Description: Earthwork: earth and stone bank may represent NE part of an enclosure. Marked as 'fort' on 1835 edition of OS 6" sheet.

RMP: LH004-065 (Buckley and Sweetman 1991: Survey No. 628)
Townland: Faughart Lower
Parish: Ballymascanlan
Barony: Lower Dundalk
County: Louth
Country: Republic of Ireland
NGR: 305600E, 311730N
Description: Ringfort D-shaped area (int. dims. 28.5m NNE-SSW, 26m WNW-ESE) enclosed by much-degraded earth and stone bank (W 3.5m, H 0.7m internally, 1.4m externally) with straight side at SE. This bank is now almost completely gone on the ENE and SSE. Traces of internal and external drystone facings to bank on all sides (CUCAP, AYM 46).

- RMP:** LH004-068 (01) (02) (Buckley and Sweetman 1991: (01) Survey No. 971; (02) Survey No. 155)
Townland: Proleek
Parish: Ballymascanlan
Barony: Lower Dundalk
County: Louth
Country: Republic of Ireland
NGR: 307380E, 311870N
Description: (01) Ecclesiastical enclosure, early medieval circular area (max. diam 76.5m) bounded by modern field fence. Probable ancient entrance at west. Two long cists [(02) below] discovered in interior (*CLAJ* 1933, 100).
NGR: 307380E, 311870N
Description: (02) Long cists, two stone lined long cists, aligned E-W, one containing a skull, the other fragments of unidentified human bones. Discovered in the interior of a large enclosure [(01) above] (*CLAJ* 1933, 100).
- RMP:** LH004-069 (Buckley and Sweetman 1991: Survey No. Not Listed)
Townland: Aghaboys
Parish: Ballymascanlan
Barony: Lower Dundalk
County: Louth
Country: Republic of Ireland
NGR: 306770E, 311410N
Description: Enclosures no further information.
- RMP:** LH004-072 (Buckley and Sweetman 1991: Survey No. 376)
Townland: Navan
Parish: Ballymascanlan
Barony: Lower Dundalk
County: Louth
Country: Republic of Ireland
NGR: 306230E, 310580N
Description: Souterrain lintels displaced by ploughing, no further information.
- RMP:** LH004-073 (Buckley and Sweetman 1991: Survey No. 718)
Townland: Culfore/Ballymascanlan
Parish: Ballymascanlan
Barony: Lower Dundalk
County: Louth
Country: Republic of Ireland
NGR: 307540E, 310940N
Description: Enclosure subcircular (max. dims. 40m N-S, 35.5 E-W) bounded by the remains of an earthen bank. Widening of the bank forms a mound at W.
- RMP:** LH004-118 (Buckley and Sweetman 1991: Survey No. 770)
Townland: Faughart Lower
Parish: Ballymascanlan
Barony: Lower Dundalk
County: Louth
Country: Republic of Ireland
NGR: 305580E, 311250N
Description: Enclosure, 'Fort' shown on 1835 edition of OS 6" sheet. No visible surface trace.

RMP: LH004-122 (Buckley and Sweetman 1991: Survey No. Not Listed)
Townland: Aghaboys
Parish: Ballymascanlan
Barony: Lower Dundalk
County: Louth
Country: Republic of Ireland
NGR: 307130E, 310650N
Description: Enclosure (possible), no further information.

Sites known from the current project. Current work has identified 7 archaeological sites within 1km of this location (Figs 2 and 3). Positive results of trial pits excavations along the route were reported in 2005 (McConway and Dawkes, 2005a, 2005b).

Site 113. This site was identified as “an extensive spread of charcoal-enriched black silt and burnt stone”. This measured up to 33m (north to south) and 15m (east to west) and was interpreted as “evidence for a large fulacht fiadh, or burnt mound with evidence for additional or satellite burnt mounds within Field 9”. Recent excavations have revealed that although burnt mound material was present at the site, along with associated pits and a possible well, only secondary traces of burnt mounds remained. This was probably due to later agricultural activity in the 19th Century when the ground was levelled, drained and ploughed. This probably occurred at a time when land pressure increased.

No troughs or hearths, feature types often associated with burnt mounds, were found during the course of the excavation, however a subcircular unlined well dug to a natural spring would attest to the possibility that the burnt mound material found on the site are the remains of fulacht fiadh. It is thought that the burnt mound material found at the site may be the truncated remains, with material continuing under the western baulk towards the Ballymascanlan Stream, of three burnt mounds, probably dating to the Bronze Age.

It is hoped that charcoal samples taken from the burnt mound material will firmly establish the date of the archaeological activity found on the site.

Site 114. Two areas of archaeological deposits were uncovered near Thistle Cross during Phase 1 testing along the route of the A1/N1 Newry-Dundalk Link Road. The first area was identified as a number of charcoal-rich deposits and the second, 40m northwest of this, consisted of two sub rectangular features and two irregular spreads. Two cuttings each measuring 20 by 20m were opened up by mechanical excavator. Cutting A was later extended to 30m by 33m and two sondages, each 12.5m by 2m, excavated to the west of the site in order to explore its limits here. Cutting B, was extended by 3m by 20m to the south and 10m by 15m to the west.

Cutting 114A

The site was located on well-drained soil and situated on a small plateau on a gentle, east-facing slope of a low hill. The main features here were a cluster of three rectangular structures, together with a variety of pits and small miscellaneous features. The site had been disturbed by recent agricultural activity, mainly in the form of cultivation furrows.

Structure 1, probably a dwelling house, was orientated east to west, measured 8m by 7m and was defined by two narrow slot trenches running parallel, some 6m apart, with three pairs of large, regularly spaced, external postholes. There were no slot trenches associated with the gable ends of this structure, that to the east being represented by a number of smaller postholes. The gable end was less well defined to the west but may have been represented by a line of stones. There were two large postholes in the interior aligned with the central pair of external posts and it may be that the structure was partitioned here. Two small postholes in the southwest corner of the structure may be doorjamb, showing that there was an entrance here. The slot trench was narrow and several stake holes were found within it, indicating that the walls were probably of wattle construction. The fill of the slot trench contained much charcoal and the sides of the trench appeared oxidised in places, suggesting that the structure may have been destroyed by fire. The southeast corner of this structure had been disturbed by the test trench and an engineer's test pit had been cut into the centre of the structure.

Structure 2, also probably a house, was orientated north to south, measured 8.5m by 6.5m and was situated 3m north of Structure 1. It was defined on three sides by a slot trench, up to 0.6m wide, filled with a packing of redeposited natural subsoil and stones. Several depressions in base of the packing indicated the former presence of posts and it is likely that this structure had walls of upright planks. There was no slot trench on the northern side of the structure, which was defined by two large corner postholes and some smaller central ones. There were some postholes more or less orientated on the centre line of the structure, suggesting a row of supporting posts here. There was no evidence for an entrance but, since there is a continuous and well-defined slot trench on the other three sides, this is likely to have been to the north.

Structure 3, measuring 6m by 4m, was situated 1.5 west of Structure 1, on virtually the same alignment. It was defined on three sides by a slight slot trench with postholes in the corners. There appeared to be a central partition, represented by a posthole at the midpoint of the long side connected to another posthole by a short length of perpendicular slot trench, with a further posthole an equal distance beyond this. There was no slot trench on the northern side of this structure. This structure, perhaps contemporary with Structure 1, may have been a shed or byre, with an internal partition dividing it into two stalls.

There was a group of pits to the west of these structures, including two circular pits with a charcoal-rich fill, which may have been cooking pits. Just north of these were two large, deep pits, with a homogenous silty fill, perhaps storage pits. There were a number of small pits, stake holes and short lengths of slot trench between Structures 1 and 2, probably indicating some sort of domestic activity in this area. A third group of pits was situated to the south and southeast of Structure 1. Some of these may relate to prehistoric activity, although others may be connected with modern cultivation.

There were a series of parallel cultivation furrows criss-crossing the site. The main band of furrows ran north to south, although east to west furrows were also noted. These furrows were quite variable in width and depth and this, together with the presence of some large boulders embedded in the subsoil, suggested lazy bed cultivation rather than ploughing. In addition to these furrows, the two sondages also contained several irregular, loamy spreads, the result of tree root activity.

Finds included several sherds of prehistoric pottery together with some flints flakes, including a possible thumbnail scraper, and the bulk of the features here are likely to be Neolithic in date. It is not possible at present to reconstruct the particular phases of activity, although it may be that Structures 1 and 3, at least, are contemporary.

Cutting 114B

This site was located to the west of Site 114A, situated on gently sloping ground at the foot of a slope. There was a linear ditch running east to west between the two baulks for 33.5m, with two cultivation furrows running parallel to the west. Around halfway along the length of this ditch was another, perpendicular to the first, running for 7m into the southern baulk. East of the angle formed by these two ditches was a smaller linear feature running parallel to the main ditch. There was a faint, right-angled return west of this feature, which seemed to indicate some small structure, within the angle of the larger ditches. A corresponding return was not present to the east of the feature, however, although the test trench here had cut into the subsoil and may have removed any remaining traces. Both the larger and smaller east to west ditches appeared to cut through a stone spread to the east of the cutting. Subsequent excavation of the larger ditches produced post-medieval pottery and a flat, metal knife blade.

North of these ditches were a series of oval or circular features, in a range of sizes, some with stony, silty fills, with some of the smaller ones having charcoal-rich fills. Excavation showed that some of these are probably natural features, while others seem to be stone sockets resulting from former field clearance, the furrows indicating that cultivation had formerly been attempted here. Some of the smaller features seem to have been deliberately cut, perhaps as postholes, and a small fragment of

coarse pottery indicated that these may be archaeological in nature. However, no structure could be inferred from them.

An hourglass-shaped feature in the northeastern corner of the cutting proved to be some sort of oven, or grain dryer, the deeper, northern, chamber containing much charcoal, with the surrounding subsoil displaying signs of oxidation. It is not clear at present exactly what activity was being carried on here, although examination of the soil sample taken from this feature may provide some indication.

It seems, then, that the ditches are post-medieval field boundaries, possibly with a light structure, such as a shed or a byre, in the corner of one of these fields. The date of the oven/dryer is uncertain, these simple structures being in use throughout the medieval period and beyond. Some of the smaller pits here may indicate that some, earlier, possibly prehistoric, activity also took place here.

Site 116. This site is located on a small natural rise in the underlying bedrock, which slopes in all directions, but, more steeply to the west and northwest where a small stream is located at the base of a large slope. Site 117, originally identified during testing as a separate site, was eventually amalgamated into Site 116 when the extent of topsoil removal around Site 116 was increased and was, therefore, excavated as part of Site 116. Sites 118 and 119 were located to the west of Site 116; both were excavated.

It is probable, though not yet definite, that the site would have originally been a bi-vallate ringfort which was enlarged and altered over time. The first phase comprises of inner ditch (018) and outer ditch (430) which were subsequently re-cut by ditches (313) and (025) respectively during the second phase. During the third phase the site was enlarged with two new ditches (729) and (024) forming a single large enclosure, although it is possible that the inner ditch (313) may have been extant in some form at this time. This larger enclosure was then altered with a large stone faced, rubble cored wall, (2107), built upon the partially infilled ditch (729). At this time the inner ditch was definitely infilled as a souterrain (027), the entrance of which was built into wall (2107) was dug through both infilled ditches (313) and (025).

The various phases on the site were formed by five individual enclosures, the smallest of which consisted of a small ditch (018) which encircled the top of the natural rise enclosing an oval shaped area with a maximum diameter of 29m north to south (incomplete). A small 5m wide entrance gap was excavated at the north, but no corresponding feature could be located to the south as this area of the site was beyond the limit of the excavation. This ditch had been allowed to silt up and was then re-cut [ditch (313)] with the inner edge being lined with stones to act as a revetment for a bank which ran along the inner edge of the ditch.

Enclosing the inner ditch and sited 5m from it was ditch **(430)**. This ditch enclosed an area approximately 40m in diameter and had been dug into the natural bedrock or subsoil to a depth of 1.4m and had a maximum width of 3m. There was no evidence for an entrance, although as this ditch extended beyond the limits of the CPO to the south it is likely to be sited there. The edges of this ditch were steeply sloped, almost vertical in places. On the western side the ditch appears to have filled more rapidly, possibly as a result of slippage of the accompanying bank which would have rested upon a much greater slope at this point. On the east side of the site this ditch was filled from its outer edge, the fills being a series of tip lines of re-deposited subsoils and gravels. These are most likely the result of the construction of another large ditch **(025)**, which for most of its length runs along the same line as ditch **(430)** (and cut into the fills of the earlier ditch **(430)**), except for the east side of the site. Rather than follow the line of the earlier ditch **(430)** the site was extended to the east by 5m with the excavated material from ditch **(025)** used to fill the still open ditch **(430)**.

Ditch **(025)** enclosed an area measuring 45m (east to west) in diameter and was up to 3m in width and a depth of 1.2m. There was no entrance evident in the ditch; however, the southern edge extended beyond the limits of the CPO. A small, probable iron smelting furnace was found dug into the basal fill of the ditch located on the southeast side of the site, while sometime after back filling there were several large pits, two souterrains and a well, all dug through the fills.

The final ditches, **(729)** and **(024)** enclosed an area measuring 55m across east to west, with an entrance located at the northwest and a second probable entrance at the southwest. These two ditches formed a single enclosure. Ditch **(729)** was the larger of the two ditches, sited on the western edge of the site, measuring up to 2.5m in width and dug into the subsoil to a maximum depth of 1.3m. One definite terminal was found in the northwest, with a second in the southeast, although it is possible that this was due to a rise in the natural bedrock, which may have proved to difficult to dig through. The second ditch that formed this enclosing phase on the site, **(024)**, was much smaller in size than ditch **(729)**, with a maximum depth of .5m and a width of 1.2m. A single terminal was found at the northwest extent of this ditch forming a 5m wide entrance with the terminal of ditch **(729)**, while the southeast extent of the ditch ran beyond the limits of the excavation.

The final enclosing feature on the site was a large, rubble cored, stone faced wall **(2107)** which was only extant on the western edge of the site, measuring 2.5m in width and surviving to a maximum of 4 courses. This had been built upon the fills of the partially infilled ditch **(729)**. It began at the terminal of this ditch and ran from northwest, through to west and then beyond the limits of the excavation in the southwest. There was no trace of this wall found on the north or east of the site.

Built into this large stone bank was the entrance to an earth cut souterrain **(027)**, with a second entrance located within the main portion of the site. This souterrain comprised a single stone lined passageway, which ran for 16m eastwards from the stone bank before turning sharply and running 15m southwards to the second entrance. There was no chamber within the souterrain. There were no capstones still *in-situ* and only one possible capstone was discovered within the backfilled passageway. Resting on the floor of the souterrain was a large iron plough coulter and plough sock, while within the fills were several millstone fragments, a small clay crucible, several pins and a quantity of pot sherds.

A total of 772 burials were excavated from the site, in addition to a large amount of disarticulated human remains. These appear to include all range groups, male and female, and a concentration of babies, which suggests that the site may have served as a cillin. A preliminary estimate breaks the burial down to 528 adults, 151 juveniles and 93 infants although this is likely to change once the consultant osteoarchaeologist examines the bones in post-excavation analysis. Of this the vast majority, 643 were in simple earth cut graves, 81 were in stone lined graves, 32 in long cists, a further 8 which re-used a already occupied cist and 8 which used a natural crevice in the bedrock. The burials were mainly concentrated at the northeast quadrant of the site, with others found sparsely across the rest of the site. In general, the burials were laid east to west but in some case they were north to south but this may have been due to space restrictions and the nature of the underlying bedrock preventing a true east to west burial.

Several initial radiocarbon dates have been obtained for a number of skeletons on the site. The earliest of these dated to AD 390 – 550 while the latest in the range dated to AD 790 – 1000. These suggest that the cemetery was very long lived, and as the skeletons appeared on site to post date the earlier enclosing phases it is possible that the original foundation may date to the Later Iron Age with settlement and occupation continuing into the early medieval period. However given that there is up to a 200 years date range for each skeleton then it is entirely possible that the cemetery could have had a much shorter life span.

The finds from the site ranged from numerous sherds of pottery, metal pins (iron and bronze/copper) blue glass beads, spindle whorls, bone combs and pins, iron knives, a lead ingot, several millstone fragments, a small clay crucible and iron slag.

Site 117. A subcircular pit F3/009 that measured 3m in diameter and was filled with fills of charcoal-enriched silt F3/008, orange clay F3/007 and dark brown sandy silt F3/006.

Site 118. The site comprised of an area measuring 21m north to south by 18.30m east to west. The site was situated in a low-lying area at the bottom of a large slope, which lies further to the north. Therefore, the site was very water logged. The area of archaeological interest was located at the north end of the site. Three field boundaries or ditches and two pits were found. None of the features could be deemed definitely archaeological. They all appear to be post medieval/modern constructions. Sherds of post medieval pottery were found in the upper fills of two of the field boundaries/ditches.

The lack of artefacts retrieved from the site hinders close preliminary dating of the features investigated. The three ditches or field boundaries are not stratigraphically linked. The two pits are discreet features from each other but there is a stratigraphic link between the pits and two of the ditches. One pit cuts one of the ditches and the other pit is cut by the north most ditch.

All the features on this site appear to be because of agricultural practices possibly associated with the nearby old farmhouse.

Site 119. Alluvial deposits identified in Fields 1 & 2 relate to the changing depositional history of the small watercourse running in-between the fields. These deposits have the potential for surviving environmental remains, for example organics and pollen. It was proposed that an appropriate sampling scheme, such as bulk and column sampling is taken from the alluvial clays located in Fields 1 & 2. This sampling may provide a profile of the alluvium and enable the identification and recording of any environmental deposits.

Site 121. The features here seem to relate to modern agricultural activity with field clearance prior to cultivation. Two pits and two possible oven/dryers are of uncertain date but C¹⁴ dating of charcoal samples taken from them should resolve this question. With the excavation of the site all archaeological issues can be considered resolved.

2 A Description of the Works Carried Out

2.1 Reason for the excavation

The principal objectives of the Roads Service in implementing the scheme are to improve the conditions for road users by reducing journey times between the major commercial centres, together with an improvement in road safety. The specific objectives are:

- To contribute to the improvement of the Regional Strategic Transport Network and major transport links with Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland;
- To reduce vehicle operating times and costs;
- To facilitate freight transport;
- To improve road safety and improve pedestrian and cycle access and safety.

2.2 Excavation methods

2.2.1 Phasing

The road works have been divided into 2 phases: Phase 1 included (a) the archaeological evaluation of known sites, possible sites and areas of archaeological potential and (b) the recording and evaluation of standing buildings/structures at identified locations. Phase 2, reported here, includes the resolution of any sites identified by the works.

2.2.2 Desk top study

A desktop study of archaeological and cultural heritage sites was reported in the Environmental Impact Statement for the project (RPS 2002a, 236; 2002b). A particular emphasis was paid to sites with 1km of what was then the proposed route alignment.

2.2.3 Phase 1 archaeological testing

Area 14 is in a zone of fertile soils within an archaeologically sensitive landscape in close vicinity to a number of known archaeological sites (Figs 2 and 3; Section 1.2.3). This area was considered to have high archaeological potential and was investigated and evaluated under Phase 1 of the Contract by means of test excavation.

The Phase 1 report discusses the archaeological findings within Area 14, at Plaster townland, between road scheme chainages 12800-13200 carried out the testing under project sub number A002/005 between 18th -22nd of November 2004 (McConway and Dawkes 2005b).

The purpose for and the methodology employed in the Phase I testing included:

- To fully expose, investigate, record and resolve archaeological deposits uncovered in and all deposits associated with these.
- Resolution of the archaeological features described above was carried out by a licenced director, a supervisor, two assistants and four general operatives.
- A 100 by 40m area was appropriately opened over the features under archaeological supervision to the latest archaeological horizon or to the upper surface of natural geology, whichever occurs first. The area will be manually cleaned and examined for further archaeological deposits.
- All archaeological deposits were surveyed in to a site grid and in relation to their position on the road.
- All deposits were recorded and investigated by methods appropriate to their nature and complexity using best archaeological practice.
- Methods used included sectioning, planning and photographing the deposits, investigating the stratigraphic relationship with other deposits if appropriate, compiling a written record of the deposits via a context sheets

As it was determined likely that additional subsurface archaeological deposits would be associated with the known features it was also recommended that an appropriate area around each feature be topsoil stripped. All features exposed from the stripping were to be fully investigated. If it became apparent that these features form part of a more extensive archaeological landscape then it was recommended that an appropriate area be opened up on plan in order to fully investigate and record any discovered features.

2.2.4 Phase 2 archaeological excavations

Recording strategy. Recording was by means of ‘best archaeological practise’. The primary records of these excavations consist of written and drawn records, photographs, survey data, finds and samples. The stratigraphic record was primarily made on context record sheets, of the standard type used by ADS. These are supplemented by information from the site diary and notebooks. Field surveying equipment consisted of an Ashtech DGPS surveying suite, which allowed real-time data collection with horizontal accuracy of 0.005m +1ppm and vertical accuracy of 0.010m +2ppm.

All Phase 2 archaeological excavations were carried out in accordance with the Specification for Archaeological Rescue Excavation on Known Sites document (ADS 2005). Field methods included:

- An appropriately sized area around each of the deposits was fenced off and access to these areas by machinery and personnel denied until they have been resolved.

- The removal of topsoil was by judicious use of a machine fitted with a toothless bucket under the constant supervision of a suitably qualified archaeologist.
- All trenches were excavated to the latest archaeological horizon or to the upper surface of natural geology, whichever occurred first. If archaeological features were revealed these deposits were in the first instance, cordoned off using high visibility tape and access to these areas by machinery denied.
- All deposits were hand investigated using methods appropriate to their composition, nature and date and time was allowed for the archaeologist to undertake the appropriate level of recording.
- The level of recording depended on the nature and extent of the archaeological remains encountered. All deposits were recorded on plan (in relation to the site grid), photographed and if appropriate, their location surveyed in advance of hand excavation.
- Excavation of deposits was carried out by sectioning using methods appropriate to their composition and nature.
- Contexts were sampled for palaeobotanical material, radiocarbon dating, soil micromorphology, petrology, wood identification, etc.
- All sections and cut features were photographed and drawn.
- The position of all finds and samples were recorded in three-dimensions (when practicable) in relation to the site grid.
- Sampling strategies depended upon the dimensions, make up and complexity of the archaeological remains encountered.
- A day book was maintained where all archaeological features were recorded in writing utilizing ADS context sheets, scaled field illustrations and by both slide and digital photography.
- All finds were logged according to context, bagged and catalogued.
- A contract conservator was on call if necessary.
- All finds are stored in our post excavation unit at Kells, Co. Meath and will ultimately be stored in whatever facility the State will provide.
- Excavation or preservation by record was carried out on archaeological deposits that will be impacted on by the construction of the road scheme.

2.2.5 Health and safety documents

It is the policy of ADS to comply with the Health & Safety at Work Acts and the Construction Safety, Health & Welfare Regulations and to ensure so far as reasonably practicable the safety, health and welfare of all employees whilst at work, and to provide such information, training and supervision needed for this purpose. To comply with these acts and regulations the works were

conducted following the procedures and principles laid out in the company health and safety document (ADS 2003). Special attention to health and safety was paid in areas close to rivers, streams, woodland, marshy ground and overhead power lines. ADS can confirm that the excavation crews all held a valid safe pass certificate.

2.2.6 Staff involved

The director (Sinclair Turrell) would like to acknowledge the work of site supervisor Rupert Flood, site assistants Peadar Quine, Andrew Smith, Michael Seiler and Carles Plana, as well as general operatives Emmet Connolly and Claire Nugent.

3 Excavation Records-Phase 2

Testing in Area 14 was carried out under number A002/005. One area of archaeological potential was identified (Figs 4-8; Plates 1-6). At this location, the test excavations revealed five features that required further investigation (McConway and Dawkes 2005b). These were as follows:

- A linear pit 6/(002) filled with grey silty clay 6/(002).
- A sub-circular pit 6/(003) filled with charcoal-rich black silt 6/(004).
- A sub-circular pit 6/(005) filled with charcoal-rich black silt 6/(006).
- A sub-circular pit 6/(007) filled with charcoal-flecked grey silt 6/(008).
- A sub-circular pit 6/(009) filled with stony, charcoal-rich black silt 6/(010).

3.1 Results of the excavation

3.3.1 Cutting 115a

Only one small, shallow feature (007) was found here, in the centre of the cutting, near the junction of the two original test trenches (Figs 4 and 5; Plate 1). It was roughly oval in plan, measuring 1.13 by 0.59m, with gently sloping sides and a flattish, irregular base. It was filled with loose, charcoal-rich, dark brown silt (008), which contained some small stones. This feature appeared to be the remains of a small fire of modern origin.

3.3.2 Cutting 115b

Two small, shallow pits were found in this cutting (Figs 4 and 6; Plate 2). One (003) was oval, 0.5 by 0.4m and 0.15m deep, with sloping sides and a rounded base. It was filled by friable, grey-brown silty clay (004) with a few small stones and charcoal fragments. The other pit (005) was also oval, 1.34 by 0.59m and 0.2m deep, with steep sides and a rounded base, filled by friable, dark brown sandy silt (006) containing occasional small stones and charcoal fragments. It is likely that these two features were modern in origin.

3.3.3 Cutting 115c

After cleaning several circular or oval features (009), (013), (016), (018), (020), (022), (024), (026) and (028) mostly with a rounded profile, were revealed (Figs 4, 7 and 8; Plates 3-6; Appendix I). Most of these features, which are detailed in the list of contexts, were characterised by loose, loamy fills (010), (014), (015), (017), (019), (021), (023), (025) and (027). The fill of one of these features (025) contained a small fragment of glass. These can all be interpreted as stone sockets, the result of large stones being either cleared prior to ploughing or displaced during ploughing, the void subsequently being filled with ploughsoil. This can be most clearly illustrated by feature (016), where

the base and sides of the feature were lined with decayed granite, left behind by the removal of the stone (Figs 7 and 8a; Plate 4). An irregular pit **(011)**, 0.72 by 0.52m and 0.22m deep, filled with a loose dark brown charcoal-rich loam **(012)**, probably represents a tree hole.

On the southern boundary of the site three small pits were noted, different in character to these others. Pit **(030)** was oval in plan and measured 0.6 by 0.5m. It was 0.17m deep with sloping sides and a flat base (Figs 7 and 8b; Plate 5). It was filled by a loose, black, charcoal-rich silty loam **(029)**, which, in addition to some medium-sized stones and lumps of marl, contained several sherds of thin-walled, unglazed pottery of a coarse, micaceous fabric, probably prehistoric in date, together with two struck flint flakes. This feature appeared cut an adjacent pit **(034)**, an ill-defined, oval feature, around 0.8 by 0.5m in plan and 0.5m deep, with sloping sides and rounded base, filled with compact, brown silty clay **(033)** and containing some rounded stones and a few small charcoal flecks. North of these was the shallow remnant of a small, circular, steep-sided, flat-based pit **(032)**, 0.3m in diameter and 0.07m deep with a friable, dark brown, charcoal-rich fill **(031)**, dominated by medium-sized stones (Figs 7 and 8c; Plate 6). These features may be largely contemporary and may also have served as small postholes, although no particular structure can be inferred from them.

3.2 Summary

The majority of the features here are of modern or natural origin. Three features **(030)**, **(032)** and **(034)** in Cutting 115c are of archaeological interest, perhaps prehistoric in origin, but form no coherent pattern or structure. They are close to the edge of the site and may be part of some activity that was occurring to the east, beyond the site limits.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

With the excavation of this site, all the archaeological issues here can be considered to have been resolved.

5 Recommendation

The excavated features do not form part of a more extensive archaeological landscape nor are they significant by themselves. No further field work is recommended at Site 115, although post-excavation work should consider the charcoal sample from Pit 030, which merits C¹⁴ dating.

5.1 Finds

Some poorly-preserved sherds of possibly prehistoric pottery were recovered from the excavations (Appendix II). These artefacts will be analysed by the appropriate specialist. Should additional artefacts be recovered from the processed samples they will be analysed by the appropriate specialists.

5.2 Samples

5.2.1 Macrobotanical and Microbotanical analyses.

The charcoal from the sample listed below should be sent for species analysis before it is run. No other samples are proposed for macro or microbotanical analyses.

5.2.3 Radiocarbon analysis

Pit (030) is probably prehistoric in date. It may be possible to date this pit from the small fragments of pottery that were recovered from it but, should this prove not to be the case, the site director proposes that the sample listed in Table 1 be sent for radiocarbon analysis, in order that an idea of the date of the pit be obtained..

Table 1 Samples for radiocarbon analysis.

Context	Sample No.	Feature	Reason for sample
029	<1>	030	Charcoal. Fill of possible prehistoric pit

6 Quantification of the Materials and Records

6.1 Quantity of the record

The site archive comprises those items listed in Table 2:

Table 2 Records Inventory

Form	Number (after voids)
Context Sheets	34
Photographs (Rolls)	2 print, 2 slide
Sections and Plans	16 sections, 4 plans
Finds	3
Samples	1

6.1.1 Context sheets

34 context sheets are archived at the ADS Dublin facility and are in queue for entry into the project database.

6.1.2 Miscellaneous written records

Site Diary/ Daybook. Miscellaneous administrative notes and correspondence.

6.1.3 Drawings

None.

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Appendices

Appendix I Context log

Cntx.	Type	Tr.	Description/Finds	L by W by D (m.)	Fill of	Fill by	Interpretation
001	Dep.	All	Friable, brown, silty loam, freq. Small stones, occ. charcoal flecks.	0.2-0.3m depth			Topsoil
002	Dep.	All	Friable, orange-brown sandy silt, freq. small-med stones. Patches of compact, beige, sandy silt. Patches of stones.				Natural subsoil
003	Cut	b	Oval, sloping sides, rounded base.	0.5 by 0.4 by 0.15		004	Small pit
004	Dep.	b	Friable, grey-brown silty clay, occ. small stones, charcoal.	0.34 by 0.24 by 0.15	003		Fill of small pit
005	Cut	b	Oval, steep sides, sloping base.	1.13 by 0.59 by 0.20		006	Small pit
006	Dep.	b	Friable, dark brown sandy silt, occ. small stones, charcoal.	1.13 by 0.59 by 0.20	005		Fill of small pit
007	Cut	a	Irregular oval, gentle sides and base.	0.54 by 0.43 by 0.07		008	Modern hearth
008	Dep.	a	Loose, dark brown silt, mod small stones, freq. charcoal.	0.54 by 0.43 by 0.07	007		Fill of modern hearth
009	Cut	c	Rectangular, steep sides, flat base.	0.66 by 0.48 by 0.12		010	Stone socket
010	Dep.	c	Loose, dark brown silty loam.	0.66 by 0.48 by 0.12	009		Fill of stone socket
011	Cut	c	Irregular, steep-sloping sides, flat, sloping base.	0.72 by 0.52 by 0.22		012	Poss. tree bole
012	Dep.	c	Loose, dark brown, charcoal-rich loam.	0.72 by 0.52 by 0.22	011		Fill of tree bole
013	Cut	c	Sub-rectangular, sloping sides, narrow base.	0.5 by 0.3 by 0.12		014	Stone socket
014	Dep.	c	Loose, black-brown, silty loam.	0.4 by 0.3 by 0.12	013		Fill of stone socket
015	Dep.	c	Loose, dark brown loam, granite fragments.	0.4 by 0.3 by 0.2	016		Fill of stone socket
016	Cut	c	Oval, steep sides, gently rounded base.	0.4 by 0.3 by 0.2		015	Stone socket
017	Dep.	c	Loose, dark brown, sandy silty loam.	0.75 by 0.63 by 0.21	018		Fill of stone socket
018	Cut	c	Oval, steep sides, gently rounded base.	0.75 by 0.63 by 0.21		017	Stone socket
019	Dep.	c	Loose, dark brown loam.	0.5 by 0.45 by 0.11	020		Fill of stone socket

Cntx.	Type	Tr.	Description/Finds	L by W by D (m.)	Fill of	Fill by	Interpretation
020	Cut	c	Circular, shallow, gentle sides and base.	0.5 by 0.45 by 0.11		019	Stone socket
021	Dep.	c	Loose, dark brown, sandy, silty loam.	0.8 by 0.63 by 0.22	022		Fill of stone socket
022	Cut	c	Circular, steep sides, gently rounded base.	0.8 by 0.63 by 0.22		021	Stone socket
023	Dep.	c	Loose, dark brown, silty loam, occ. small stones & charcoal.	0.67 by 0.62 by 0.10	024		Fill of stone socket
024	Cut	c	Oval, steep sides, gently rounded base.	0.67 by 0.62 by 0.10		023	Stone socket
025	Dep.	c	Loose, grey-brown, silty loam. Glass.	0.43 by 0.34 by 0.12	026		Fill of stone socket
026	Cut	c	Oval, steep sides, rounded base.	0.43 by 0.34 by 0.12		025	Stone socket
027	Dep.	c	Loose, dark brown, silty loam.	0.54 by 0.51 by 0.12	028		Fill of stone socket
028	Cut	c	Sub-circular, steep sides, rounded base.	0.54 by 0.51 by 0.12		027	Stone socket
029	Dep.	c	Loose, black, charcoal-rich silty loam, some small-med. stones. Pottery, flint.	0.6 by 0.5 by 0.17	030		Fill of small pit
030	Cut	c	Sub-circular, steep sides, flat base. Cuts 033.	0.6 by 0.5 by 0.17		029	Small pit
031	Dep.	c	Friable, dark brown-grey, charcoal-rich silty loam, freq. small stones.	0.3 by 0.3 by 0.07	032		Fill of small pit
032	Cut	c	Circular, steep sides, flat base.	0.3 by 0.3 by 0.07		031	Small pit
033	Dep.	c	Compact, mid-brown, silty clay, freq. small-med. stones, some charcoal. Cut by 030.	0.5 by 0.8 by 0.2	034		Fill of small pit
034	Cut	c	Oval, gently sloping, sides and base. Cut by 030.	0.5 by 0.8 by 0.2		033	Pit

Appendix II Finds list

Context	Cutting	Description	Find No.
029	115c	Pottery, possibly prehistoric	1
029	115c	Flint, 2 pieces	2
025	115c	Glass	3

Appendix III Sample list

Sample	Context	Type	Bags	Reason for Sample
1	025	Charcoal	1	C14 dating of charcoal in poss. prehistoric pit

Appendix IV Photographic logs

Colour Print 1		
No.	Description	Plan (-Section) no.
1	Pre-excavation: 115a from SE (west)	1
2	Pre-excavation: 115a from SE (west)	1
3	Pre-excavation: 115a from SE (east)	1
4	Pre-excavation: 115b from SE (west)	2
5	Pre-excavation: 115b from SE (east)	2
6	Pre-excavation: 115b from SE (centre)	2
7	Pre-excavation: 115c from NW (1)	3
8	Pre-excavation: 115c from NW (2)	3
9	Pre-excavation: 115c from NW (3)	3
10	Pre-excavation: 115c from NW (4)	3
11	Pre-excavation: 115c from NW (5)	3
12	Pre-excavation: 115c from NW (6)	3
13	Pre-excavation: 115c from NW (7)	3
14	Pre-excavation: 115c from NE (1)	3
15	Pre-excavation: 115c from NE (2)	3
16	Pre-excavation: 115c from NE (3)	3
17	Pre-excavation: 115c from NE (4)	3
18	Pre-excavation: 115c from WSW (1)	3
19	Pre-excavation: 115c from WSW (2)	3
20	Section: 003, 004	5-1
21	Section: 005, 006	5-2
22	Section: 007, 008	5-3
23	Section: 011, 012	5-4
24	Section: 009, 010	5-5
25	Section: 013, 014	5-6
26	Section: 015, 016	5-8
27	Section: 017, 018	5-7
28	Section: 019, 020	5-9
29	Section: 021, 022	6-10
30	Section: 023, 024	6-12
31	Section: 025, 026	6-11
32	Section: 029, 030	6-13
33	Section: 029, 030	6-13
34	Section: 027, 028	6-14
35	Post-excavation: 030	4
36	Post-excavation: 030	4
Colour Print 2		
No.	Description	Plan (-Section) no.
1	Post-excavation: 115a from SE	1
2	Post-excavation: 115a from NE	1
3	Section: 033, 034	6-16
4	Section: 033, 034	6-16
5	Post-excavation: 115c from SW (south)	4
6	Post-excavation: 115c from S (extension)	4
7	Post-excavation: 115c from NNW (northwest)	4
8	Post-excavation: 115c from NNW (northeast)	4

9	Post-excavation: 115c from SSE (southeast)	4
10	Post-excavation: 115c from NE (south)	4
11	Post-excavation: 115c from NE (south)	4
12	Post-excavation: 034	4
13	Post-excavation: 034	4
Colour Slide 1		
No.	Description	Plan (-Section) no.
1	None	1
2	Pre-excavation: 115a from SE (west)	1
3	Pre-excavation: 115a from SE (east)	2
4	Pre-excavation: 115b from SE (west)	2
5	Pre-excavation: 115b from SE (east)	2
6	Pre-excavation: 115b from SE (centre)	3
7	Pre-excavation: 115c from NW (1)	3
8	Pre-excavation: 115c from NW (2)	3
9	Pre-excavation: 115c from NW (3)	3
10	Pre-excavation: 115c from NW (4)	3
11	Pre-excavation: 115c from NW (5)	3
12	Pre-excavation: 115c from NW (6)	3
13	Pre-excavation: 115c from NW (7)	3
14	Pre-excavation: 115c from SE (1)	3
15	Pre-excavation: 115c from SE (2)	3
16	Pre-excavation: 115c from SE (3)	3
17	Pre-excavation: 115c from SE (4)	3
18	Pre-excavation: 115c from WSW (1)	3
19	Pre-excavation: 115c from WSW (2)	3
20	Section: 003, 004	5-1
21	Section: 005, 006	5-2
22	Section: 007, 008	5-3
23	Section: 011, 012	5-4
24	Section: 009, 010	5-5
25	Section: 013, 014	5-6
26	Section: 015, 016	5-8
27	Section: 017, 018	5-7
28	Section: 019, 020	5-9
29	Section: 021, 022	6-10
30	Section: 023, 024	6-12
31	Section: 025, 026	6-11
32	Section: 029, 030	6-13
33	Section: 029, 030	6-13
34	Section: 027, 028	6-14
35	Section: 031, 032	6-15
36	Post-excavation: 030	4
Colour Slide 2		
No.	Description	Plan (-Section) no.
1	Post-excavation: 115a from SE	1
2	Post-excavation: 115a from NE	1
3	Section: 033, 034	6-16
4	Section: 033, 034	6-16
5	Post-excavation: 115c from SW (south)	4
6	Post-excavation: 115c from S (extension)	4

7	Post-excavation: 115c from NNW (northwest)	4
8	Post-excavation: 115c from NNW (northeast)	4
9	Post-excavation: 115c from SSE (southeast)	4
10	Post-excavation: 115c from NE (south)	4
11	Post-excavation: 115c from NE (south)	4
12	Post-excavation: 034	4
13	Post-excavation: 034	4

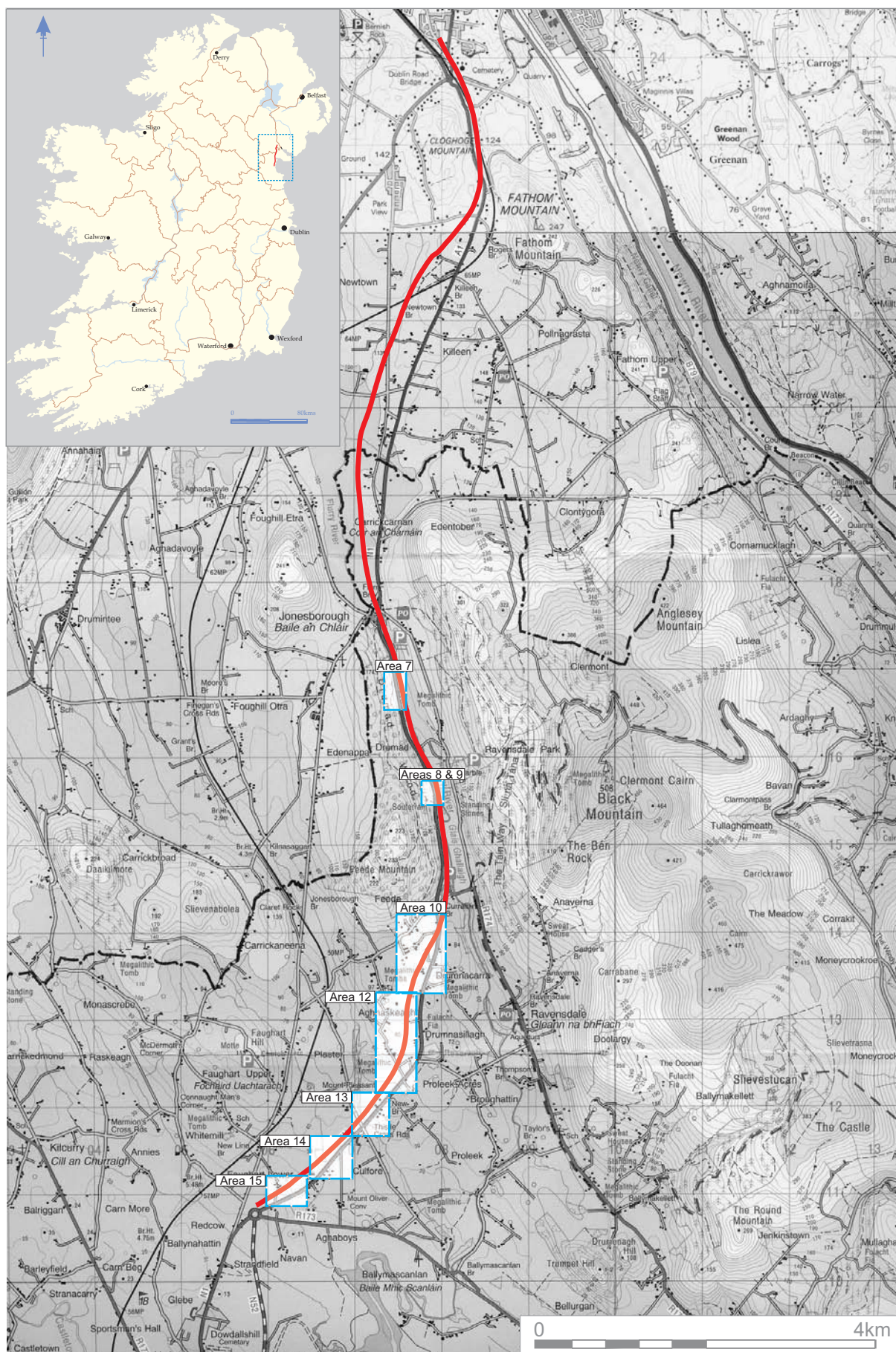
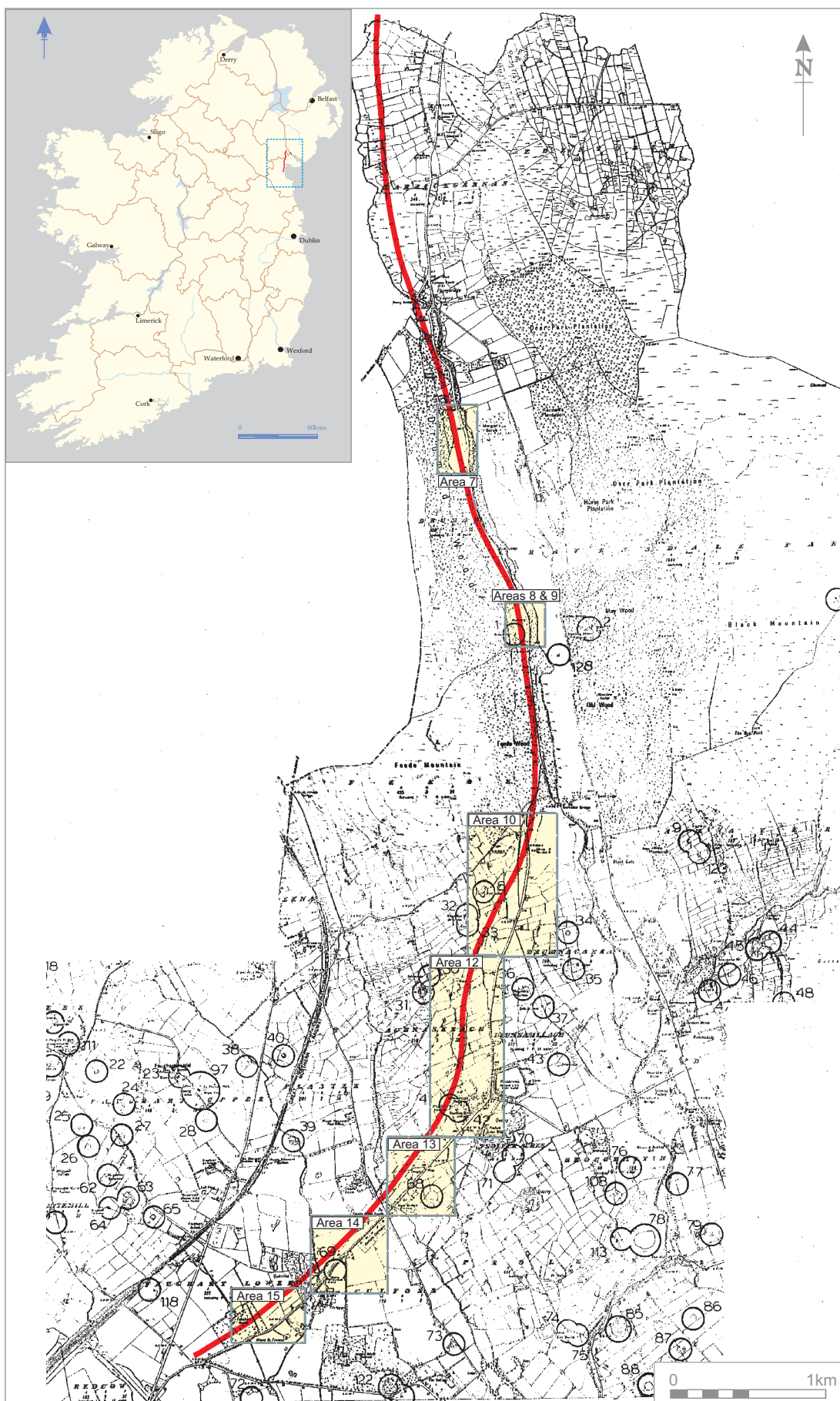


Fig. 1 Location plan for A1/N1.



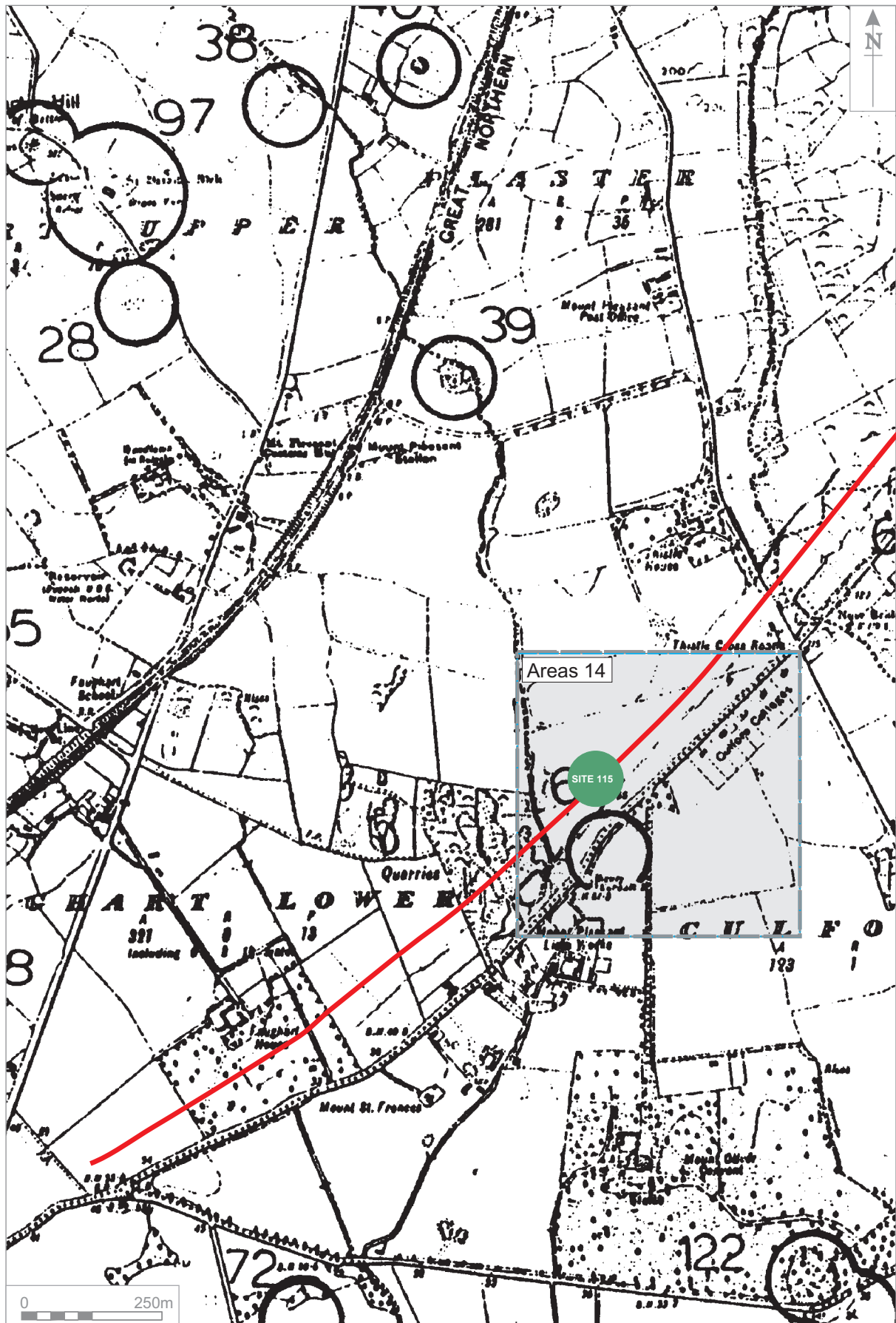


Fig. 3 Location of Area 14 and Site 115 on RMP Maps of Louth, Sheet 4. A1/N1 in red. Scale 1:10,000.

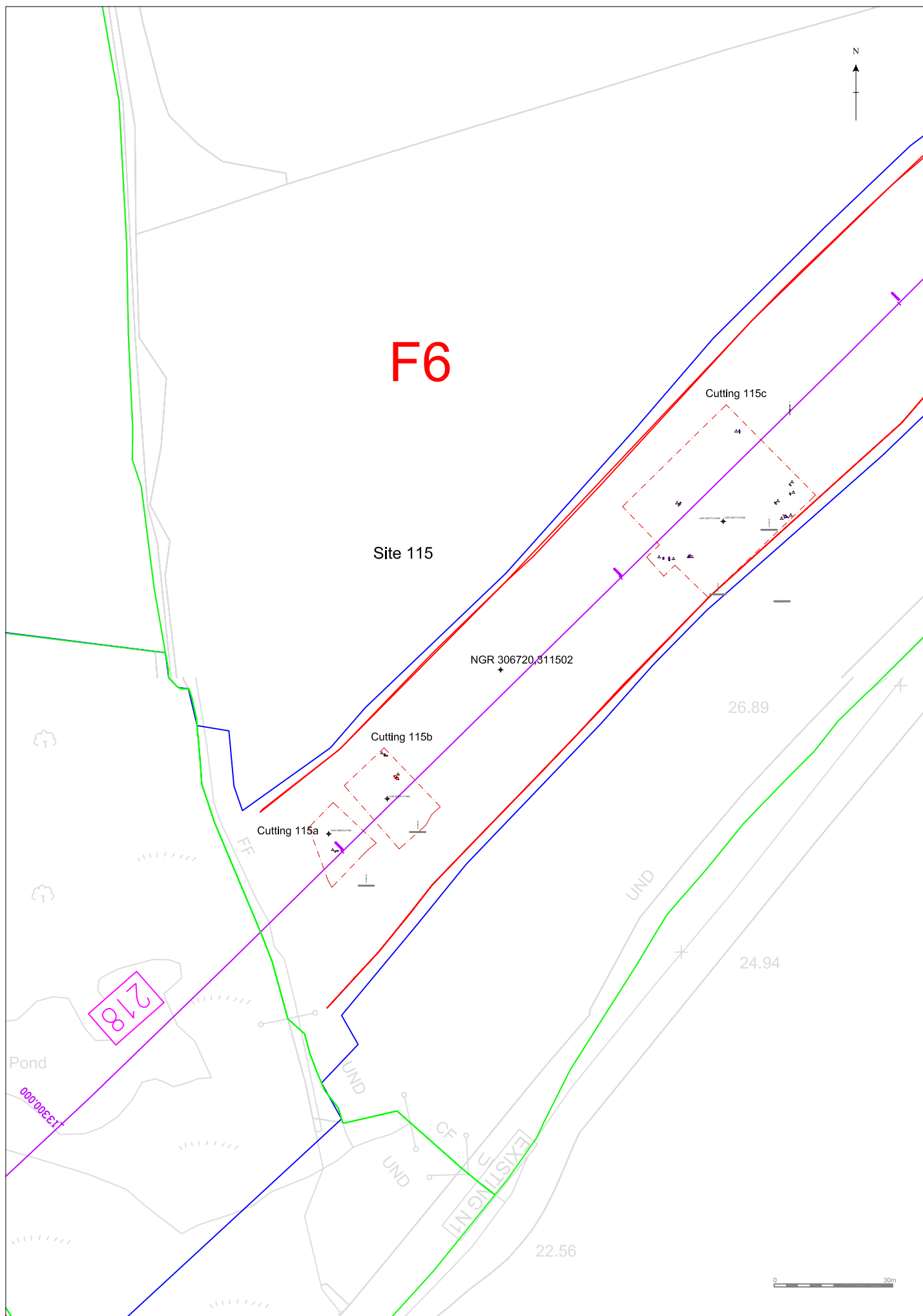


Fig. 4 Plan showing location of Cuttings 115a, b & c. Scale 1:1250.

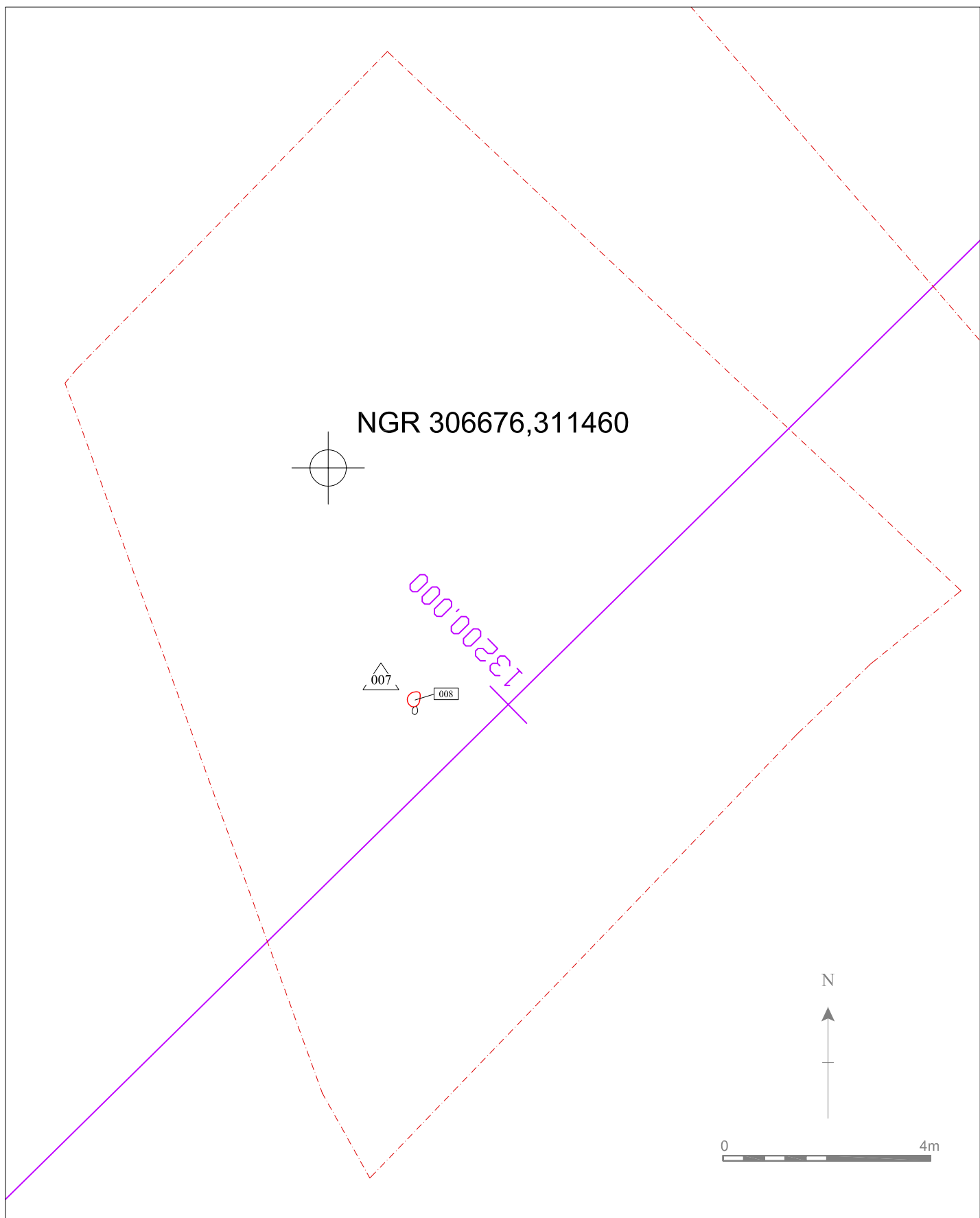


Fig. 5 Plan showing location of cutting 115a. Scale 1:100.

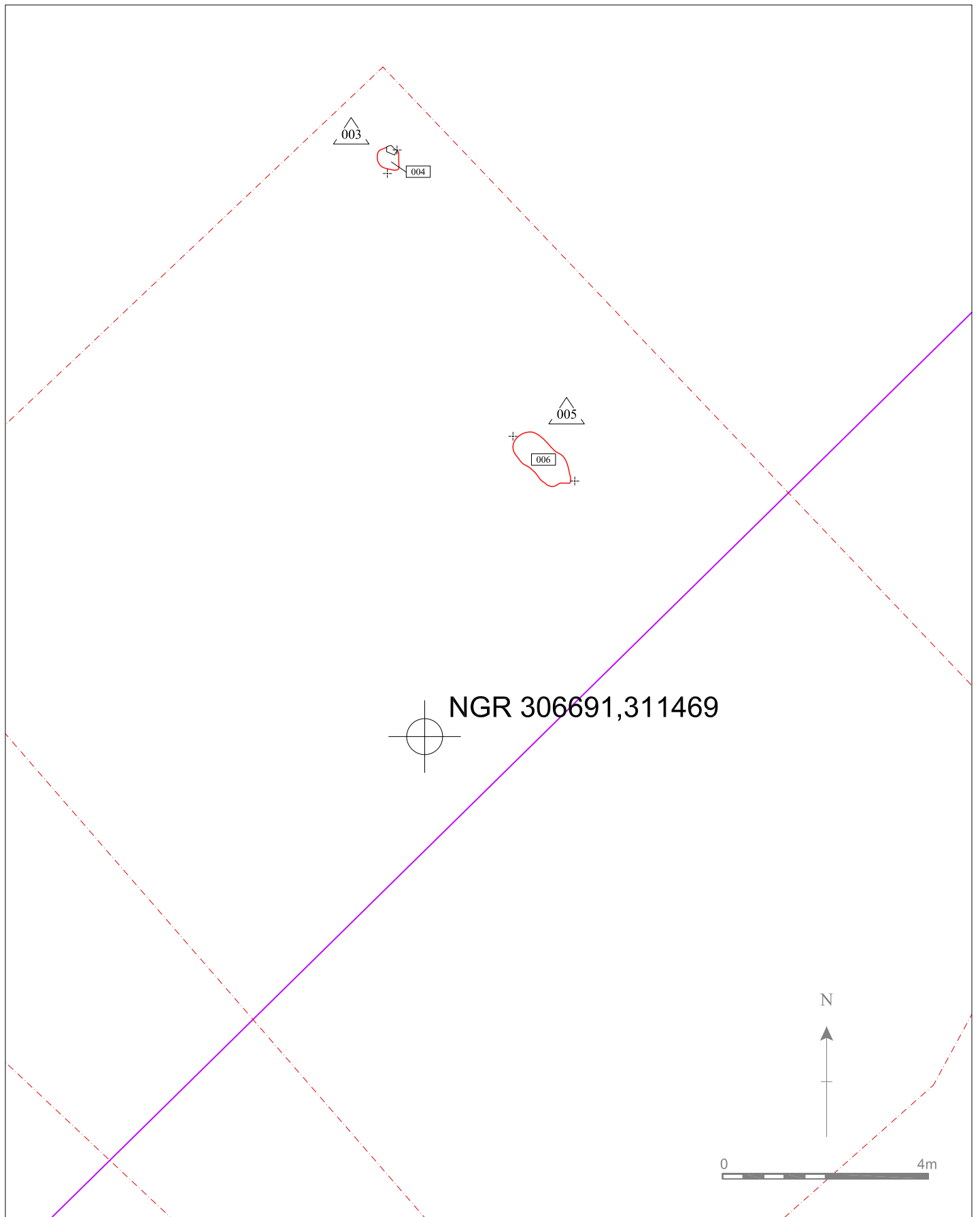


Fig. 6 Plan showing location of cutting 115b. Scale 1:100.

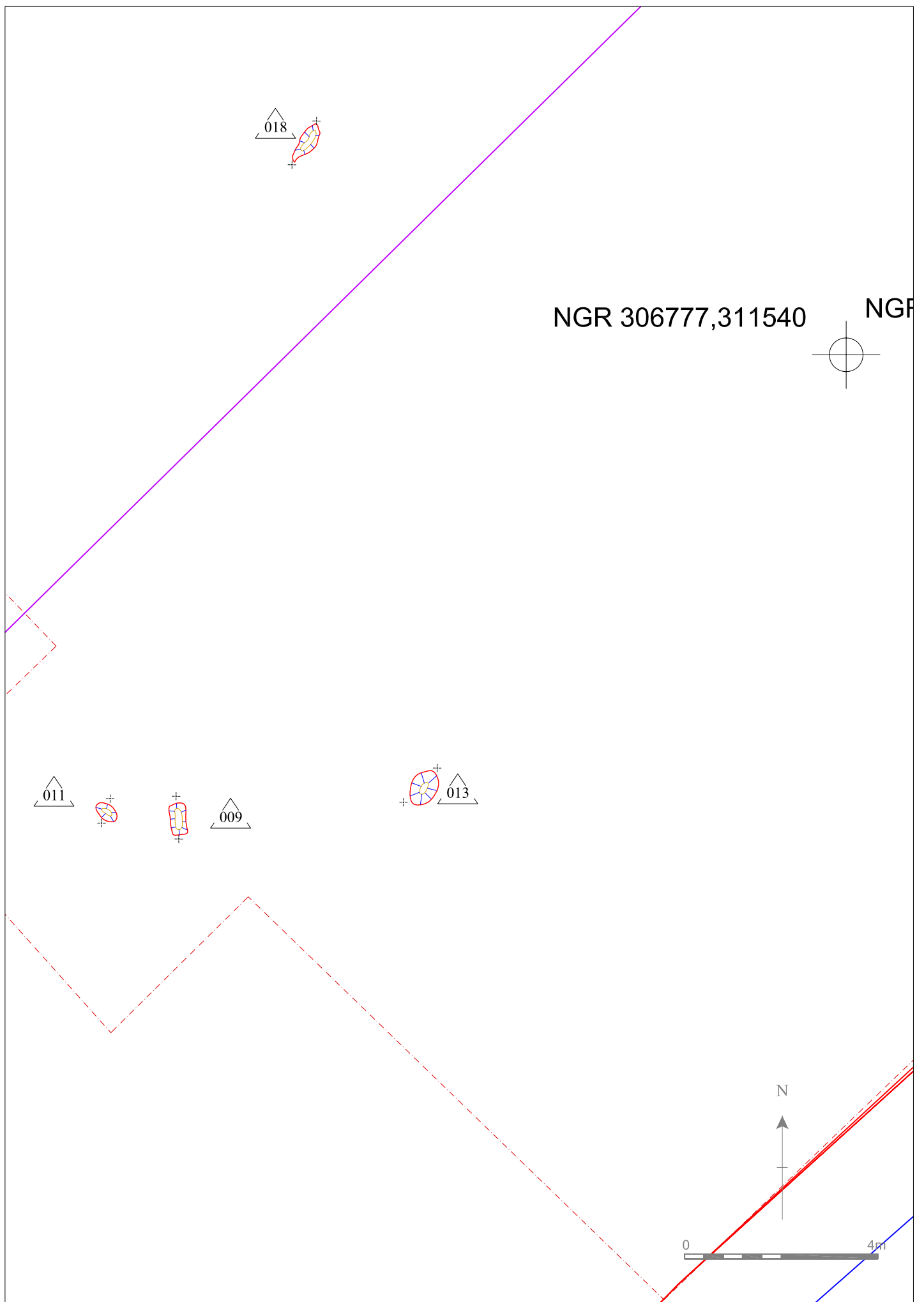


Fig. 7a Plan showing location of cutting 115c. Scale 1:100.

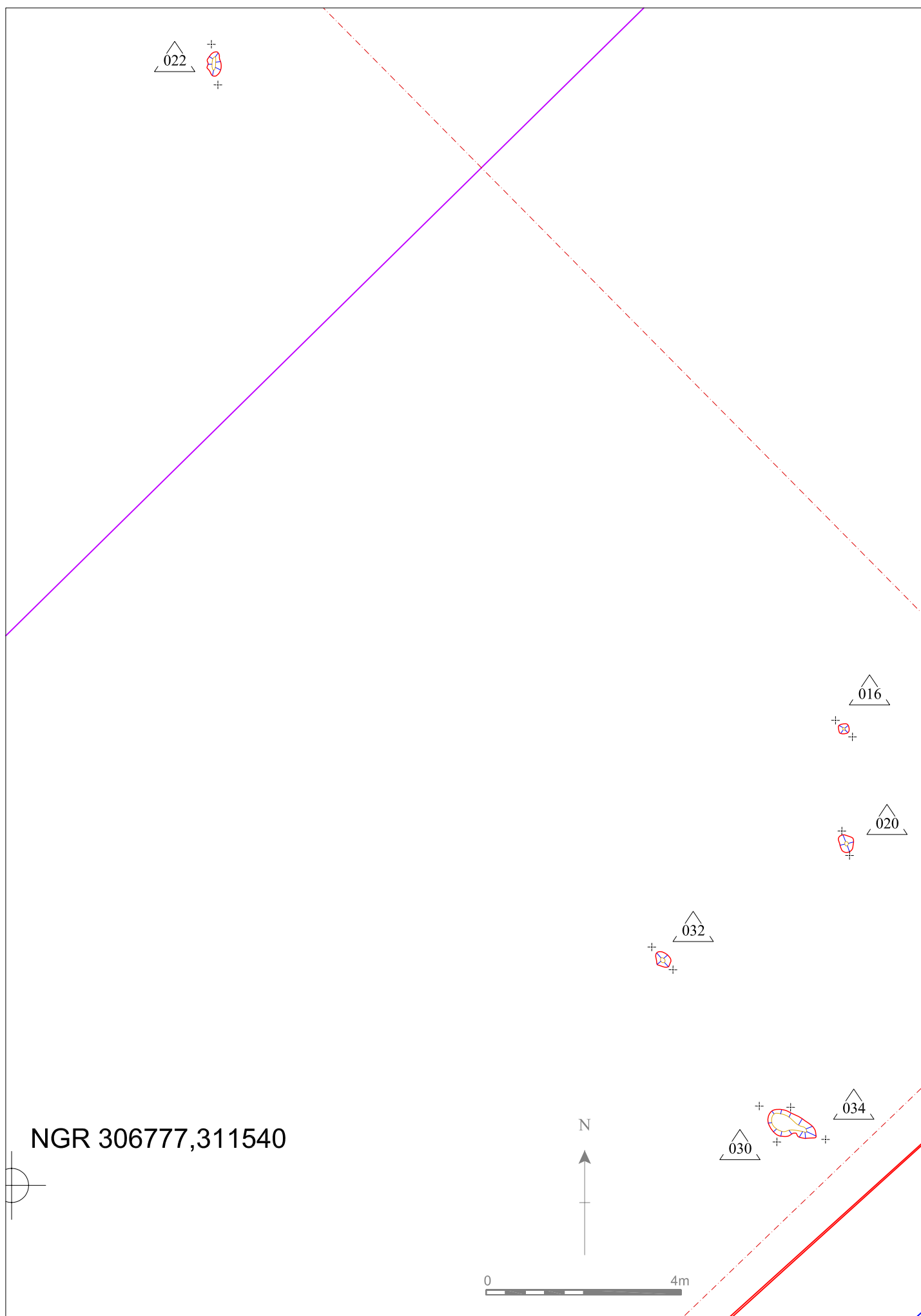


Fig. 7b Plan showing location of cutting 115c. Scale 1:100.

Fig. 8a Area 14, Southwest facing section of stone socket 016.

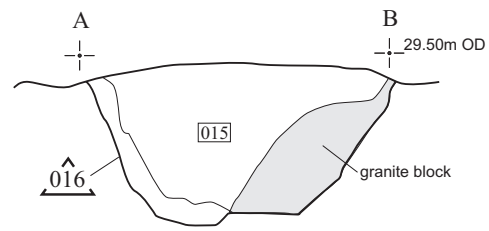


Fig. 8b Area 14, West facing section of cut 030.

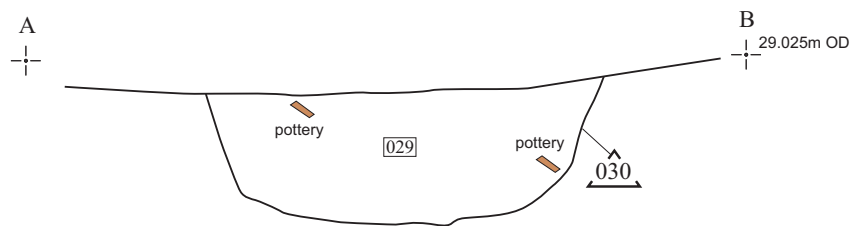


Fig. 8c Area 14, Southwest facing section of cut 032.

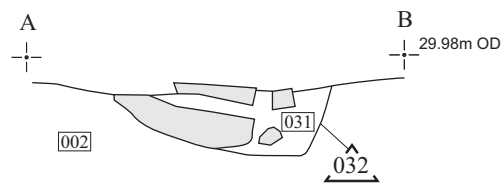




Plate 1 Cutting A from east.



Plate 2 Cutting B from south.



Plate 3 Cutting C from north.



Plate 4 Stone socket 016, showing decayed granite crust.



Plate 5 Pit 030 from west.



Plate 6 Pit 032 from southwest.